ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely wish to thank my supervisors, Dr. V.D. Hoek and Dr. B.K. Tang, and also the staff of the National Library at the University of Indonesia, Kebangsaan Malaysia and the Fakultas Ilmu Hukum at Indonesia in Jakarta. Their generosity and the staff at both those institutions in opening their libraries to me was very much appreciated.

Brenda M. Fane

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts (Asian Studies) in the Faculty of Asian Studies at the Australian National University.

Student Number : 8701613

Canberra
16 September 1995
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely wish to thank my supervisors, Dr V.G. Hooker and Dr I. Proudfoot, for their patience and encouragement during the past two years. For the kreteks, coffee and kindness, thank you Shirl, Mitch, Lamb, Virginia, Barry and Blue.

I am grateful for the assistance provided to me by Dr Ding Choo Ming and the staff of the Tun Sri Lanang Library at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and the staff of the Pusat Dokumentasi, H.B. Jassin in Jakarta. The generosity of the staff at both these institutions in opening their libraries to me was very much appreciated.

I declare that this is my own work and that all sources have been acknowledged and correctly cited.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glossary</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Volume One</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter One</strong> A Story Which Really Happened...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge, Power and Discourse</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relations of Power</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Njais</em> as Property</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Limits of Tolerance - Who Was the <em>Njai</em>?</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis Boundaries</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of <em>Njai</em> Stories</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Two</strong> Herstory, History and Colonisation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Survival of Men - The Early Days of the VOC</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surviving Sex Becoming a <em>Njai</em></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Chinese in the VOC Indies</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Europeans</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wives and Mistresses Before the <em>Juffrouw</em> - Nineteenth Century Hindia</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Time of Darkness - Twentieth Century <em>Njais</em></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Experiences</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Three</strong> The Trade in Words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny Dreadful and Popular</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women as Consumers</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From <em>Hikajat</em> to <em>Tjerita</em></td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traders in Words</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Four</strong> <em>Soesa</em>(h) - Trouble and Woe in Hindia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic Commonalities in the <em>Njai</em></td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tjerita</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resisting Daughters - The Feminisation of <em>Soesa</em></td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shame and <em>Soesa</em></td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter  Five</td>
<td>Agency and Dependency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency - A Framework</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dependency of the <em>Iboe</em> in the <em>Njai</em> Tjerita</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living on the Edge - Agency and <em>Doekoens</em></td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women With Agency - The Faithful <em>Njais</em></td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependency - The Greedy <em>Njais</em></td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency vs Dependency - <em>Tjinta</em> vs <em>Birahi</em></td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter  Six</th>
<th>Love and Lust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My Approach</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature in Historical Context</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Questions</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Act of Writing</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Read This Way</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Produces This Reading</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporal Personal and Relational Conclusions</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Bibliography | 134 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume  Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table of Njai Stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tjerita Njai Dasima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tjerita Nji Paina</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tjerita Njai Alimah A-6
Tjerita Njai Isah A-18
Tjerita Njai Sida A-57
Boekoe Tjerita Maninten A-64
Harta Jang Terpendam A-66
Pertjintahan Jang Tida Kekal A-73
Kota Medan Penoe Denge Impian A-76
Kasopanan Timoer A-85
See-ke A-88
Andang Teroena A-90
Anak Haram A-93
Njai Warsih A-95
GLOSSARY

A Note on Spelling

While the spelling of words was far from uniform in this corpus of early twentieth century Indies literature, I have chosen to use the ‘original’ spelling for Malay words. The reader will note that the spelling of many words varies between texts and also within texts. To have ‘perfected’ the spelling by altering and homogenising seemed to be akin to colonising the texts.

Foreign words have been italicised in the text, except where they occur as part of a title, for example Njai Dasima.

Translations of the more commonly used Malay, Chinese and Dutch words are reproduced below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Malay, Chinese, Dutch</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>adat, adat istiadat</td>
<td>customs, habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agama/igama</td>
<td>customs and traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ajah</td>
<td>religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baboe</td>
<td>father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bangsa</td>
<td>maid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>berdjinhah, berzinah</td>
<td>race, tribe, people with the same customs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bijzit</td>
<td>illicit intercourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>birahi</td>
<td>concubine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boekoe</td>
<td>lust, passion, infatuated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bresih</td>
<td>book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>djalang</td>
<td>clean, pure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>djam, si djam</td>
<td>prostitute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dji-nge</td>
<td>prostitute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>djodo/djodoh</td>
<td>concubine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doekoen</td>
<td>match, fit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doerhaka</td>
<td>sorcerer, healer, treason, treachery, rebellion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gendak</td>
<td>prostitute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goendik</td>
<td>concubine, mistress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>haloes</td>
<td>polite, smooth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hawa napseo/nafsoe</td>
<td>base appetites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hikajat</td>
<td>tale, history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>huishounder</td>
<td>housekeeper (mistress)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iboe</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inlander</td>
<td>native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>isteri</td>
<td>wife</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
kafir
katemaha'an
korban
landraad
loepa
loerah
maloe
m'bok
meid
melanggar
m'mak
njai
njonja
oentoeng
passenstelsel
peranakan
pinda, pindah
prampoean, prampoewan
priboemi
prijaji, prijai
sadar
see-ie
sha-ngge
sinjo
soesa/soesah
soendal
tali		
tandil besar	
tjerita/tjeritera
tjinta
toean/toewan
totok
wijkenstelsel

non Muslim
greed
victim
native court
to forget
village headman
shame, shy, embarrassed
address for older Javanese
women of humble origin
maidservant, girl, wench
to transgress, offend
mother, term of address for
older woman
mistress, concubine
married woman, usually for
Dutch, Indo and peranakan
women
good fortune
pass system
mixed race, usually for Chinese
to move
female, woman
native, sons of the soil
aware, conscious
concubine
concubine
Indo man, sometimes also
Dutchman
trouble, difficulty, woe
prostitute
tie, string
head overseer
story, tale
love
Mr, Sir - address for foreigners
of pure blood, used in respect
of Dutch and Chinese
quarter system
CHAPTER ONE

A STORY WHICH REALLY HAPPENED...

Introduction

The dissertation explores how the *njai* was represented in Malay language literature of the Indies up to the outbreak of World War II. *Njais* were the native mistresses of foreigners, usually Europeans. They could be required to fulfil many duties: that of housekeepers, cooks, laundry maids, language teachers, financial consultants and mothers, but it is in the role of sexual partners or mistresses that *njais* are best known. There are many other facets to the meaning of *njai* that I shall explore more thoroughly later in this chapter.

The selection of the literature has been based on two criteria: what was reasonably available, and the need to include as many as possible of the better known “*njai* stories” (*tjerita njai*). A restriction was my ability to read only Malay and English. Novels on the *njai* theme written in Dutch were closed to me. My selection of stories is tabled at Annex A to this chapter and synopses are included as appendices in a separate volume.

This thesis will show, principally through literary sources, that by the close of the nineteenth century *njais* were experiencing a change in status. They were no longer the “cultural intermediaries”\(^1\) through which access to *priboemi*\(^2\) society was gained. Their previous visibility and de facto recognition waned as more Dutch women migrated to the Indies, making the keeping of native mistresses socially unacceptable. The figure of the *njai*,

\(^1\) Abeyasekere uses this term in referring to native women in 19th century Batavia whom she regards as facilitators between different ethnic groups and who were influential in the “cultural hybridisation” of Batavia. Susan Abeyasekere, “Women as Cultural Intermediaries in Nineteenth Century Batavia” pp15-28 in Lenore Manderson, (Ed), *Women’s Work and Women’s roles*. Canberra : ANU Press, 1983, pp15 and 23

\(^2\) Native, literally sons of the soil.
popularised by Pramoedya Ananta Toer as an influential and wealthy woman, controlling her toean’s finances, was only one woman amongst many. Representations of njais in the Indies Malay language fiction are of women from all walks of life, from ideal(ised) and virtuous “wives” to prostitutes and criminals. Some were misfits, welcome in neither their own community, nor in that of their partner-master. A few succeeded in remaining in touch with their family and community and fewer still were able to manage the transition to the new community of their masters.

Fictional stories written about njais were clearly meant to entertain in the new capitalist world of the twentieth century reader. The producers were profit driven and this meant that only those authors and publishers who could hold the attention of readers would survive. Some authors were very conscious of this, describing the entertainment value of their stories in subtitles. Oei, author of *Tjerita Njai Alimah (TNA)*, tries to attract readers with: “Jaitoe satoe tjerita jang amat endah dan loetjoe...”.

Entertainment was becoming more important in an economy in which money mattered. Working for wages, regular working hours and monetary rewards for diligence, produced the twins - spare time and spare money. The reading public was an elite with both money and leisure and there was competition from the emergent book industry for both. Leisure allowed the elite time for reading and produced a new feeling, that of boredom (iseng). Maier attributes the emphasis on needing to amuse readers to iseng.

---

3 In *Bumi Manusia* and *Anak Semua Bangsa*, Njai Ontosoroh is represented as a wealthy, confident woman. To a lesser extent, this image is also present in the early *tjerita*. For example, Njai Dasima was entrusted with all Mr W’s property and he gave her expensive jewellery and a substantial monthly allowance.

4 Mr or master, usually used for foreigners.

5 Oei Soei Tiong, *Tjerita Njai Alimah*, Solo : Sie Dhian Ho, 1904, 3 Volumes

6 “That is, a very interesting and entertaining story...”

Contemporary stories with a sense of being true to life attracted a new generation of authors and readers at the turn of the century. Although old Chinese stories and contemporary western novels in translation were popular and went through several editions, even a cursory look at Salmon’s bibliography of Chinese Malay literature reveals that the majority of stories in the first few decades of the twentieth century were “original” stories. They were original in the sense that the stories were written for publication and generally they were not copies in the manuscript tradition. Usually authorship was known, if only by pen name. Many were “...fictionalised documentaries...”. These stories laid claim to reality through subtitles which asserted that they were stories of real events which occurred not so long ago in real towns and cities. Among them, and forming a significant corpus, were the njai stories. These are romantic tales - many of them are real life stories of love and lust which cross communal and religious boundaries.

**Knowledge, Power and Discourse**

It is manifest that this dissertation is intimately concerned with social and gender relations in and between various communities which existed in the Indies from the late nineteenth century to pre-World War II. In using a restricted number of literary sources, it is obvious that I will not be able to fully reveal these complex relations, but these stories do allow for an insight into family and community networks and the ways in which the njai and her toean were (re)presented.

In recovering these njais of the past, I will draw on theories which can be loosely termed post structuralist. The term post structural does not have one fixed meaning but is applied to a range of theoretical positions that have been expressed by theorists such as Derrida through the use of grammar, Foucault in his history of discourses and Lacan using psychoanalysis. One of the important

9 Tineke Hellwig, *In The Shadow of Change*, Berkeley: University of California, 1994a, p2
ideas in post structuralism, so far as this dissertation is concerned, is the understanding that society is not a product of individual intentions, but that individual intentions are constructions within a social discourse.10

At its simplest, discourse can mean speaking and writing.11 I will use discourse to mean a set of related statements or conversations about "truth" and "knowledge". In this broader context, discourse means that certain commonalities of purpose, style and conceptualising are held by, or operate for, the members of particular communities, thus constituting a type of unity. The unity may be assumed, or momentarily posited, or it may be powerful and enduring like those discourses in society with an institutional base, for example, education.12 Foucault identified the basis of this unity as the relations of knowledge and power, both of which are inextricably linked: power is exercised and knowledge is produced at the same time.13 In this concept, knowledge is a "socially justified belief".14 Truth and knowledge only become so when they are acknowledged as justifiable in a "...continual process of ... intellectual negotiation..."15 by members of a community. Power is also a process, producing specific subjectivities and specific individuals. According to Foucault, it is never imposed but is invested in networks of relations and in material practices. He constantly asks what is power doing, not who has got it and he enjoins us to look to the family and the immediate environment to discover networks of power relations and points of resistance.16

---

12 Ibid, p35
15 Ibid, p185
16 Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures" in Colin Gordon, (Ed), Michel Foucault, Power and Knowledge, London : Harvester, 1980, pp96-100

---
In recovering representations of the *njai*, I will focus my analysis on gender relations by looking at the construction of the *njai* in community and family discourses. The unity of community discourses is signalled in the literature by the use of the word *bangsa*. I do not wish to debate all the possible meanings which could be woven into *bangsa*, but to use the word as it is given in the *njai* stories. In the context of these stories, *bangsa* is most often used to denote a group with common ethnic origins. *Bangsa* is almost always used in association with *adat* (custom or customary law) and *agama* (religion), so the meaning clearly includes common social and religious laws and practices. To these, language can also be added as a commonality. *Bangsa* also designates boundaries. Only those who agree at a conscious and sub-conscious level to subject themselves to the conventions of the various discourses which come under the umbrella of a *bangsa* can be regarded as its members.

In theorising about knowledge, power and discourse, I have used the word “community” in its singular form. Lest the reader be misled, the society of the Indies was a complex mix of a number of communities centring on the concept of *bangsa*. The unity to which I have referred is therefore not in any sense a national unity, but is localised and is based on ethnicity, custom, language and religion (*bangsa*).

Since this dissertation is text-based, the “truths” it deals with are in the fictional constructions of authors, and apart from one female author, male authors at that. However, the truths and the knowledge the texts impart have some basis in real life, since the authors were not divorced from social reality, furthermore, the stories explicitly make a claim to truth. So that even though the stories are likely to reinforce a particular view of the *njai* from a male perspective, it is possible to reveal how the meanings are being made to work to reinforce or undermine particular values, especially as far as they concern women and the colonial regime. My textual analysis examines regimes of power and knowledge as
expressed through the author’s use of characterisation, plot, themes and the language used to define/confine women.

Relations of Power

In addition to family and community networks of power, institutions, such as the education and legal systems and the administrative bureaucracy assert power. These colonial institutionalised discourses with their own regimes of truth and power played an important part in defining people and their membership of various discourses. Who could be Europeans, how the Chinese and other non-European foreigners would be treated, even the clothing appropriate to different racial groups was at the discretion of the Dutch government. The government was repressive in many of its dealings with the foreign orientals and native communities, but because its authority was enforced through imposed rules, regulations and (Dutch) institutions, it was only partial. Away from the major cities and the bureaucracy, this influence decreased, but in the major centres like Batavia, the Dutch were the dominating ‘race’ within the formal relations of power.

This domination extended into the ways other communities were represented to themselves and how they thought of each other. From very early days the VOC encouraged the “...uncommonly ingenious and industrious...”\textsuperscript{18} Chinese to fill mercantile positions and to manage agricultural estates\textsuperscript{19}. The Chinese were incorporated into the bureaucracy by the appointment of leaders who were granted military ranks. Ranks (lieutenant, captain and major) correlated with the size of the Chinese populations which the leaders were expected to control. They occupied an important “...intermediate position...(in)...a racial stratification

\textsuperscript{17} Non European foreigners, for example the Chinese and Arabs, were classified as foreign orientals (vreemde oosterlingen)
\textsuperscript{18} Valentijn writing in the 1720s, quoted in Susan Abeyasekere, \textit{Jakarta A History}, Singapore : Oxford University Press, 1989, p24
\textsuperscript{19} The Chinese were also a source of labour in mines and on plantations, especially in Sumatra. In Java, especially in Batavia, they were dominant in trade and in management of sugar estates.
system..."\textsuperscript{20} between the Dutch and priboemi populations. Later, when the Dutch government took over the reins from the VOC, a Dutch dominated bureaucracy comprehended the priboemi nobility within its power structure, though in a subordinate capacity. The hierarchy of formal power arrangements was firmly established by the beginning of the twentieth century, when these njai stories were written; but there was an air of change. Education, the press, nationalist fervour and better communications gave rise to a more critical apprehension of the nature of power by the educated elite in all communities.

Rather surprisingly, criticism of the colonial government is not strongly voiced in the njai stories. This point is supported by Maier who, in writing about Malay literature at the close of the nineteenth century, remarks that only the occasional text appeared which was political in tone and content.\textsuperscript{21} Even as late as 1938, Kwee Tek Hoaij in his foreword to \textit{Drama Di Boven Digoel},\textsuperscript{22} notes that it is "...satoe romans jang sama sekalih tida mengandoeng sifat politiek...".\textsuperscript{23} Literature written in Low Malay was associated with money, that is, stories with a ready and profitable market, rather than with political ideals.\textsuperscript{24}

Resentment between communities is more clearly expressed in these stories through characterisation of the different races. The Chinese are represented as money-hungry, the Dutch as arrogant and the natives as unreliable, lazy and stupid. The Indo\textsuperscript{25} and Peranakan\textsuperscript{26} Chinese authors appear to have little allegiance to

\begin{enumerate}
\item Maier, Op Cit, p153
\item Kwee Tek Hoaij, \textit{Drama Di Boven Digoel}, Vol 1, Tjitjoeroeg : Moestika, 1938
\item "...a novel which carries absolutely no political message...", Ibid, p1
\item Maier, Op Cit, p154
\item Indo commonly means a person of European and Native descent. Mestizo (Portuguese) and Eurasian (English) are other terms used to describe a person with European-native blood.
\item \textit{Peranakan} is usually associated with a person of Chinese and Native descent, but was also used to indicate a person racially mixed blood. For this thesis, \textit{peranakan}, means Chinese-native descent, except where indicated otherwise.
\end{enumerate}
their communities. *Peranakan* authors, like Oei and Dahlia for example, are just as likely as Indo or *priboemi* authors to cast Chinese characters as the villains, interested only in wealth, women and opium. It seems that there has been some sort of tacit agreement as to what counts as “real”. The Dutch, as the ruling class have endorsed a particular view through their print media and have had their view ratified by the printed word of others, that is by the Indo and *Peranakan* Chinese authors and publishing houses.27

The pervasiveness of formal power in the colonial situation permeated community and personal relationships, especially in cities like Batavia, but there was large and small scale resistance to this authority. Large scale resistance took the form of wars, early on in Java and later in Aceh. Such wars were running sores for the Dutch throughout their tenure of office and ‘pacification’ of the natives soaked up much of their profits. At a more localised level, the economic power of the Chinese was resisted through organisations like *Sarekat Dagang Islam* (Islamic Traders’ Union) which aimed to break the Chinese stranglehold over industry and small business. Riots against the economic dominance and perceived privilege of the Chinese were experienced in most cities in Java. These were public displays of resistance by the *priboemi*.

At the level of personal relations, resistance to the colonial authority was more subtle. Colonial officials regarded native use of the Dutch language as insulting because Dutch was too egalitarian and implied equality between native and colonial master. Javanese was preferred as it immediately established superiority and inferiority through the use of different levels of language, something the Dutch language could not readily convey. Regulations were also imposed by the colonial authority on the different ethnic communities regarding their style of dress. The wearing of Western-style dress by Asians was not looked upon

---

favourably, a point still emphasised in *Tjerita Njai Isah* (1904). These early efforts by the colonial authority were directed towards the ‘making’ of Europeans in a society which was quite different from Europe and one which could never be made to look the same. The restrictions on the immigration of women from Holland meant that men had to look towards Asia for female companionship. The incorporation of the *njai* in Dutch (and other) households and the resulting Indo population, more than anything else, precluded the establishment of a replica of European society.

**Njais as Property**

The term *njai* in the context of association with foreign men is usually translated into English as ‘concubine’ or ‘native mistress’. Commonly, the word was applied to a woman, usually a *prioemu*, who lived with a foreigner as if she was his wife, but outside a recognised marriage. The life of a *njai* was tenuous. She was legally without rights and was dependent on the whims of her male partner. In the literary sources, her body was represented as “the property of...”, using terms such as *istri/bini simpan*. At best, she was a child to be reared, as *bini pira* and *piarahan* indicate. These words were used synonymously with *njai* in the literature. Her treatment at the hands of a *toean* also denoted her status as property. A *njai* could be evicted from the *toean’s* home at any time for any reason. She could be treated as a chattel, abused and discarded when no longer of use.

The children of such a liaison were at the mercy of the father. If he decided to recognise them, he had complete mastery over them. Naming children, commonly using the man’s name spelt...
backwards, was a father’s right. He could consign them to an orphanage when he left the country. Even after the death of the father, the mother had no rights of guardianship, this was the prerogative of the Court of Justice. If the children were not recognised, then they had few prospects and could be abandoned, along with their mother, at any time. Children were a mother’s responsibility, as Hellwig notes. In the Dutch Calvinist discourse, illegitimate children signified immoral behaviour. Women were expected to take care of unwanted pregnancies. In the tjerita njai children are conspicuously absent. They do not play a significant part, except in Tjerita Njai Isah and Anak Haram.

There is evidence in the tjerita that most njais were well aware of their precarious position. The ways the ever present threat of abandonment were handled are part of the njai discourse. Who were the women prepared to face such risks? The literature (re)presents them as a variety of women with different skills and motivations. Njai Dasima is the first and the best known of the fictional njais. In the classic sense she was a njai - the native mistress of a foreigner, an Englishman named Toean Edward W. She was followed by others in the same mould - native mistresses of non priboemi men: Paina, Isah, Alimah, Sida and Marsina.

---

31 Hellwig, 1994b, Op Cit, p33  
32 Hellwig, 1994b, Op Cit, p33  
34 Hellwig, 1994b, Op Cit, p35  
35 Juvenile Kuo, Anak Haram atawa Harta Jang Terpendam, Batavia : Kwee Seng Tjoan, nd  
36 G. Francis, Tjerita Njai Dasima, Batavia, no publisher, 1896 (TND)  
37 Toean H. Kommer, Tjerita Njai Paina, Batavia : A. Veit & Co, 1900 (TNP)  
38 F. Wiggers, Tjerita Njai Isah, Batavia : Taman Sari, 1905, 5 volumes (TND)  
39 Mara Soetan and Soetan Besar, Njai Sida, Weltevreden : G. Kolff & Co, 1905 (NS)  
40 Probitas, Harta Jang Terpendam atawa Kadjahatannja Njai Marsina, Soerakarta : Solosch Bibliotheek, nd, 2 volumes (KNM)
Although native mistress is the most usual sense of the word *njai*, it is not the only meaning. From the stories upon which this thesis is based, it is evident that the word *njai*, and equivalent terms, were used in a wide variety of household situations. Some, like Isah, went willingly to her foreigner lover. Some, in repayment of a debt, were forced to become *njais*, and others were rescued from prostitution by their clients. There were *priboemi* women living with foreigners - Dutch, Indo, Arabian and Chinese men, and there were *peranakan* women in relationships with *peranakan* men. All of these women were called *njai*.

There seems little to bind these diverse relationships and women together except the perception, at least from the authors' points of view, that they were *njais* and their naming reflected their status as *njais*. To explore this perception further, we need to look at the ways in which the word "*njai*" is used and its connotations.

These stories usually represent the term "*njai*" in a negative sense. The *njai* was not held in high esteem within her own community, or in that of her *toean*-master. The lack of respect was usually attributed to, and perceived, in terms of differences in *bangsa*. In this corpus of literature, *bangsa* was the symbol for all the differences between racial groups and was represented as the impediment to relationships between *priboemis* and foreigners. Although *bangsa* was the usual way differences between *priboemi* and others were expressed, *bangsa* could be stated in a number of overlapping ways. As I have already noted, *bangsa* signified far more than a simple racial difference. It was attended by a variety of meanings, including religion, ethnic group, custom and customary law and physically through skin colour. *Bangsa* was a dilemma for mixed ‘race’ relationships because it involved offences against custom, customary law (*adat*) and religion (*agama/igama*).

**The Limits of Tolerance - Who was the *Njai*?**

This idea of offending or transgressing (*melanggar*) is common to most of the *njai* stories. In the stories, forbidden practices are
explicated and indicate where the boundaries of social and religious tolerance lie. The act of transgressing is never just a personal deed. It has consequences for the family and sometimes the community. A daughter who crosses the boundaries of decency and purity through a sexual liaison with a foreigner is obviously someone who does not “know” customs/customary law (tahoe adat). If she does not know, then the fault lies with her family, principally the father. According to Geertz, in reality mothers were the primary teachers, but in these stories it was fathers, as guardians, who were responsible for their daughters’ lack of knowledge. It was usually his burden when his daughter transgressed the boundaries of adat and agama through her relationship with a foreigner.

Everyday association with a foreigner within the working environment, while not a preferred situation, was not of itself a cause for concern to a community. If the working relationship extended to the bedroom, as was frequently the case with the baboe (housemaid), then the boundaries of tolerance were crossed as sexual relationships outside marriage and with outsiders are regarded as a sin against Islam. In AH, Idja’s initial employment as a maid in a Kemajoran guest house passes without comment. There is no note of censure when her relationship with the sinjo extends to joking and teasing (bertjanda dan memaen moeloet). It is when they become so filled with lust (birahi) and no longer fear the consequences, that the narrator firmly informs his readers that what they did was forbidden (marika telah lakoeken berboeatan jang terlarang).

In the tjerita njai, the breaching of the boundaries of bangsa by association with the “other” has some very powerful consequences. Families were shamed by their daughters’ associations with infidels. Associated with their shame (maloe) is

---

42 Sinjo is a form of address and is usually synonymous with Indo, however, it can also mean European.
43 AH, p9
44 AH, p9
the connotation of the daughter's desertion of *bangsa*, and concomitant with race, *agama* (Islam) in order to accommodate the relationship with a non-Muslim. For a *priboemi*, turning one's back on *bangsa, adat* and *agama* is a serious matter, both for the present and the hereafter. In its earthly guise, *bangsa* is social and religious discourse, support networks and community respect. The loss of community support and respect indicates that the *njai*’s transgressions mean loss of *bangsa*. Not only was a *njai* forced to formally abandon *bangsa*, *bangsa* also abandoned her. In *TND*, Njonja Hajati tells Dasima that while she is a *goendik* (mistress) to an *orang koelit poetih* (white man), she will never have the respect and honour she deserves.45

In death, loss of *bangsa* means loss of identity as a Muslim and being forever barred from Paradise. The consequences of a liaison with a *kafir* (infidel) are most clearly represented in *KNM*.46 Njai Gerintjil is compelled to forsake *agama* when she decides to live with a Dutchman after having sworn an oath never to marry a *kafir*. When she becomes pregnant, rather than compound her sin and give birth to a *kafir*, she ends her own life and that of her unborn child. On her death, her status as an outsider is manifest when she is buried in a Dutch (Christian) cemetery. She has no place in Islamic discourse and is barred from a Muslim grave and a Muslim heaven. Njai Gerintjil is forced to remain earth-bound, haunting the graveyard each night as a ghost.

Other stories represent the offence of having sexual relations with a foreigner in the same terms. Becoming a subject of gossip and ostracism are Iboe47 Goenardi’s concerns in *Andang Teroena*48 when she refuses to marry her employer, Toean van der Heyden. She gives three reasons for not entering into a marriage after his wife dies. First, she wants to retain his respect. Her second

---

45 *TND*, pp18-19
46 *KNM*, pp21-22
47 *Iboe* means mother, however, in this context she is “mother of” Goenardi.
48 Soetomo Djauhar Arifin, *Andang Teroena*, Jakarta : Balai Poestaka, nd (*AT*)
reason is that she feels it is best that his (Dutch) children have a mother of their own bangsa. To properly bring up children a mother must be able to educate children in the customs, traditions and habits of their bangsa. Iboe Goenardi feels she would be unable to fulfil this important aspect of mothering. It is probable that the duties of wife would be beyond her for the same reasons, hence her concern that she would lose van der Heyden’s respect. Her final reason is because she is “takoet kalau-kalau kaoem dan bangsanja sendiri tidak lagi soeka bergaoel dengan dia. ... Hendak bergaoel dengan bangsa Belanda tentoe tidak dapat, atau tidak akan disoekai oleh mereka.” 49 Iboe Goenardi agrees to become his mistress, but is very specific about keeping her liaison with Toean van der Heyden secret. If their relationship becomes public knowledge “...akoe dinamakan seorang jang........ ja, seorang djalang sekalipoen!” 50 Iboe Goenardi is well aware that she would be shamed and ostracised by her bangsa on the basis of an illicit liaison with a Dutchman.

In TNI and TNA the injunction that the daughter cannot retain membership of bangsa is repeated. In TNI, Isah’s cohabitation with Verkerk begins with the narrator informing his audience that she did not leave her parent’s house in accordance with Javanese custom; there was no celebration because Isah was like a daughter who was “...memperasingken dirinja dari bangsanja...". 51

Having been placed outside bangsa, Isah sets about acquiring a new set of customs. Verkerk buys her a book about Dutch cooking from which he teaches her to cook. The narrator notes that her initial attempts are unsatisfactory; the bread is not sliced evenly and the meat and cheese are cut too thickly. Not long after Isah moves in with Verkerk, his uncle and the plantation owner, toewan Jones, comes to visit. Toewan Jones is impressed with Isah’s management of the household and Verkerk informs him that he has instructed Isah every day from the very

49 “...afraid lest her own (social) circle and race would no longer wish to socialise with her. If she socialised with the Dutch and they would not accept or approve of this.”, AL, p10
50 “...I will be called.......yes, nothing more than a prostitute!”, AL, p11
51 “…alienating herself from her bangsa...” TNL, p154
beginning that "...adat Djawa itoe boewanglah...". In the only conversation Jones has with Isah, he asks whether she regrets having got rid of her bangsa. She says she has no such regrets.

In *TNA*, Alimah’s response to becoming a njai is almost identical to Isah. The loerah (village head) makes it clear that Alimah is no longer a Muslim. Nor is she part of her toean’s community. She is a village girl and is totally unfamiliar with Dutch ways. She has never seen cheese, butter and milk. The wine, she thinks, is soy sauce. With Lort’s help she begins to learn. She studies reading and writing and she learns to speak Dutch. In three months we are told she is well liked by the Dutch njonas because her Dutch is sweet sounding and she is well behaved - correct behaviour is equated to knowing Dutch customs and attitudes. In effect Alimah has become a brown Dutch woman, although she can not fully enter the Dutch-Indies society as she is a priboemi and a njai.

In contrast, *See-Le* is set wholly within the Chinese community. Since the daughter becomes the mistress of a man of the same bangsa, her problems are quite different from those of Isah, Alimah and Iboe Goenardi. *SL* tells of Liang Nio, the daughter of a coolie, who falls in love with and eventually goes to live with Anton, the son of a Chinese plantation owner. Even though the story is without the problems of bangsa, the relationship is forbidden by the parents. Enjim Kim Giok says that her daughter, Liang Nio, has destroyed their good name and has transgressed adat by: "...melanggar kita poenja adat-istiadat...". Her offences are against adat which holds that the daughter should be obedient to her father and she should not be living in a relationship outside the confines of marriage. It is not only her parents who believe she has transgressed. The exchange between Liang Nio’s friends indicates that to be called see-ie (njai) is a source of shame:

52 "...she must get rid of her Javanese ways...", *TNI*, Vol 1, p169
53 Mrs, lady of the house.
54 Even today Indonesians refer to njais of the past as “Belanda hitam”.
55 Chen Wen Zwan, *See-Le*, Malang : Tjerita Roman, 1938 (*SL*)
56 "...offended against our traditions and customs...", *SL*, p42
“Lelakon Anton dan Liang Nio bikin saja semangkin lama semangkin koerair. Saja pikir, Liang Nio achir-achirnya aken djadi goendik!”

Saja merandek.

“Eddy!” saja pegang tangannya itoe orang Ambon. “Kaoe djangan bitjara tida karoean, sobat. Kaoe taoe apa mengertinja goendik?” ...

...“Saja tjoekoe taoe apa artinja goendik. Nou, satoe njai di seboet goendik, tapi orang Tionghoa bilang see-ie, dji-nge, sha-nge enzoovoort, enzoovoort, boekan!”

“Apa kaoe maboek?”...

“Nee sobat”, Eddy berkata lagi... “Tapi lebih baek ikoet si miskin dari pada djadi see-ie orang!”.

In the two *tjerita* where the *njais* have already lost their virtue and their place within *bangsa*, it falls to the *toeans* to express anxiety about *bangsa*. Interestingly, it does not seem to make a difference whether the *toean* is Muslim or not, their concern is for propriety.

*Knjai Marsina (KNM)* is a former prostitute and member of *Komedie Bangsawan* (the name of a musical drama) who has taken up with Joesoef, an Arab and a Muslim of illustrious descent. As a prostitute, she has already abandoned her *bangsa* and presumably she has nothing more to lose. Joesoef has everything to lose and he keeps his Sundanese mistress well hidden from his *bangsa* for fear he will be cut off from respectable Arab society. As a Muslim, Joesoef is well aware of the transgressive nature of their...

---

57. “The affair between Anton and Liang Nio is making me more and more worried. I think Liang Nio will end up being a concubine.” I stopped.

“Eddy!” I grasped the hand of this Ambonese man. “Don’t speak so carelessly, friend. Do you know what concubine means?” ...

“I know the meaning of concubine. Now, a *njai* is called a concubine, but Chinese people say *see-ie, dji-nge, sha-nge*, etc, etc, OK?”

“Are you drunk?”...

“No friend,” Eddy added. “But better to be a poor man’s wife than to be someone’s concubine.”. 

58  *KNM*, p5
relationship and the consequences if his **bangsa** discovers he is keeping a mistress.

Ros Mina\(^{59}\) is also a former prostitute who was evicted from home (and **bangsa**) when her Muslim father discovered that she had been having a sexual relationship with a Chinese man. Having already abandoned her **bangsa**, Ros Mina turns to prostitution. She is bought out of prostitution by a **toean totok** who is careful not to be seen with her in public. They have travelled from her hotel to the railway station in separate carriages and during the train journey to Tebing Tinggi, they again travel separately. On their arrival the **Toean** doesn’t wish to go with Ros Mina in the same carriage because: “...ia masi merasa maloe djika ia poenja kenalan dapet liat padanja, bahoewa ia ada doedoek satoe sado sama satoe njai!”\(^{60}\)

The **toean totok** is a recently arrived Dutchman. He is also naive (**blon makan garem Betawi**)\(^{61}\) and, according to the narrator, has the usual failings of mankind (**kebiasaan menoesia**). In public he pretends to be well mannered and shy (**berlaga sopan dan maloe-maloe koetjing**), but away from prying eyes he is the opposite (**soeka ngoeng-ngoeng**).\(^{62}\) Like Joesoef (**KNM**), it is he who has everything to lose in transgressing his society’s boundaries of **adat** and **agama**.

Based on its occurrence in this sample of literature, the word “**njai**” has a multiplicity of meanings. It cannot solely be equated with concubine, native mistress or housekeeper. In part this is reflected in the names which are used for unmarried women who are perceived to be in illicit relationships. They were referred to as **njai** and **goendik** (mistress, housekeeper, concubine) as well as **djalang**, **soendal** and **gendak** (prostitute). In addition, the word **baboe** which means house maid, had a connotation of sexual

---

\(^{59}\) Author Unknown, *Kota Medan penoe dengen Impian atawa Njai Tertaboer dengen Mas*, Batavia : Kwee Seng Tjoan, nd (KMPDL)

\(^{60}\) “...he will be ashamed if his friends see him sitting in a carriage with a **njai**!”, KMPDL, p21

\(^{61}\) KMPDL, p20

\(^{62}\) KMPDL, p21
servant. Frequently young Chinese males who were not yet able to marry were encouraged to make use of the *baboe*. On plantations the term *baboe* was evidently well known as a substitute for *njai*, as Kasmina (*AH*) discovers on her first night when the overseer, having made her a *baboe*, expects to bed her. This point is supported by Stoler who indicates that when women arrived on plantations they were passed to male coolies or were kept by the European assistant to become his *njai*.

There were also a number of Dutch terms used to denote *njai*: *huishoudster* (housekeeper), *bijzit* (concubine), *menagere* (housekeeper) and *meid* (maidservant, girl, wench). Hellwig notes that all these terms, although seemingly innocuous, did mean *njai*.

To summarise, in literature written in Malay, *njai* has been used to refer to women in liaisons with men of a different *bangsa* and men of the same *bangsa*. There is no commonality in terms of a native mistress-foreigner relationship to assist in discovering a thread to link these women together in a discourse which was popular before World War II. It is therefore necessary to consider "*njai*" as something more than a native mistress. I propose to understand *njai* as a discourse. As a discourse "*njai*" involves a crossing of boundaries, usually associated with *bangsa*, *agama* and *adat*. Each *bangsa* has its own practices which reflect acceptable behaviour within its boundaries. The limits of tolerance are defined by what is regarded as an offence against racial, religious and customary norms or laws. These limits are never quite the same for each racial or religious group. Therefore the *njai* discourse is a fluid concept.

---


65 Hellwig, 1994b, Op Cit, p33

66 Hellwig, personal communication.
This fluidity seems to be, in part, indicative of the times during which these stories were written. Society in the Indies was facing a great many changes, both from within and without. Technology was shrinking the distance from Asia to Europe, as well as the distance between the rulers and the ruled. Education took the place of birth in matters of status and money consumed old loyalties.

As njai-toean relationships drew more opprobrium, it seems that what was regarded as ethical and legal narrowed. Women in relationships outside the boundaries of what was decent in their community appear to have attracted the term “njai”. For the njai, the danger in crossing boundaries is in losing her subject position in bangsa, agama and/or adat. For her family and community, trouble and woe seems to follow.

**Thesis Boundaries**

To understand more clearly the situations and conditions in which the tjerita njai were set and conceived, it is necessary to briefly examine the njai phenomena from the time of the first Dutch settlement. Colonial attitudes and government policies underwent dramatic changes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Advances in science and the humanities which took place in Europe affected life in the Indies. Dutch government policies changed direction several times, directly touching individual lives in the priboemi, Chinese, Indo and Dutch communities. Education was an important issue for both the priboemi and Chinese. Nationalist feelings were stirred for the first time and the printing presses rolled out reading matter for an increasing number of literate people. European women began to migrate to the Indies in ever increasing numbers, threatening the njai-toean partnership. Chapter Two deals with the issues essential to understanding the changes in the njai-toean relationship and the representations of njais in the early Indies novels.
However, this thesis is not an historical dissertation, as the meaning and diversity of njais cannot be recovered through historical sources alone. This is a study of the representation of the njai - of what the idea of njai meant. One of the ways in which this meaning can be revealed is through the fictional characters occurring in the Malay language tjerita, or story. In Chapter Three authors and their audiences are the focus and we look specifically at the status accorded literature written in Low Malay by critics and the language of the tjerita.

There are some common themes in the tjerita njai and emanating from these themes, a variety of representations within the literary context regarding the lives of the njais and their sexual/social world. The transition from daughters to njais was not an easy passage. As transgressors of their community discourses they were forced to relinquish membership in bangsa, adat and agama. Their offences against adat and agama brought shame in the form of trouble and woe, both to themselves, their families and their community. It is the representation of shame and retribution associated with the njais which is the focus of Chapter Four.

In transgressing boundaries of bangsa, njais resisted their positioning as dutiful daughters. They were removed from the authority of their fathers and were positioned in a new discourse associated with other sexual transgressors - the prostitutes and common women. In the texts, some became embroiled in prostitution, poisoning, theft and murder and were punished. Others were able to resist certain aspects of their positioning by retaining their adat and agama, ultimately earning respect. It was their transgression of the boundaries of their bangsa and resistance to positioning as a typical njai which made them unusual women. Their resistance is remarkable when we compare their experiences with those of Kartini who lived at approximately the same time some of these stories were written and who is regarded as a pioneer of women's rights in Indonesia. Kartini was secluded from the public world at the onset of puberty, as was usual with girls whose families could afford the
luxury of allowing potential rice winners to remain at home. She was an intelligent, well educated woman and a dutiful daughter. She had ideas about education for Java’s daughters, but was disempowered by her father and the edifice of Javanese culture. As a Raden Adjeng, Kartini was expected to maintain an appropriate standard of behaviour, including obedience to her father’s will. It was her father’s prerogative to select her husband and the right to keep her at home for 12 years (1891-1903) until her marriage. Kartini’s resistance was through the private medium of letters to her Dutch friends and magazine articles. On the other hand, the njais were women from the lowest levels of the social strata. Their resistance was active and public. In Chapter Five I compare the representations of daughter-njais with that of their mothers. It seems apparent that the njais’ active rejection of their role as a njai was closely linked to their enforced separation from their bangsa and replacement with a djodo.

Chapter Six forms my conclusion to which I have already pointed the way. The position of the njai, commonly represented as the fairly powerful intermediary between European and priboemi society, had waned by the twentieth century. In her place, there are a multitude of women who are represented in the literature as njais. Whether good or bad, all of them are transgressors of the discourses of bangsa, adat and agama. This leads people from all walks of life to assume the worst, typically that the njai is no better than a prostitute. It is against this apprehension that many of them struggle. However, it is as transgressors that particular problems, difficulties and woes beset both them and their communities.

67 Title for a single noblewoman.
68 J. Cote, Letters from Kartini, Clayton : Monash Asia Institute, 1992, pxiv
69 Djodo means match or fit, but according to Hildred Geertz it is more than liking each others company; it also indicates that the couple will prosper. Hildred Geertz, Op Cit, p143.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>AUTHOR</th>
<th>DATE PUBLISHED</th>
<th>PAGE NUMBER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tjerita Njai Dasima (TND)</td>
<td>G. Francis 1896</td>
<td>A-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tjerita Nji Paina (TNP)</td>
<td>Toean H. Kommer 1900</td>
<td>A-4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tjerita Njai Alimah (TNA)</td>
<td>Oei Soei Tiong 1904</td>
<td>A-6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tjerita Njai Isah (TNI)</td>
<td>F. Wiggers 1905</td>
<td>A-18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Njai Sida (NS)</td>
<td>Mara Soetan &amp; Soetan Besar 1905</td>
<td>A-57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boekoe Tjerita Maninten (BTM)</td>
<td>No author 1918</td>
<td>A-64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harta Jang Terpendam atawa Kadjahatan Njai Marsina (KNM)</td>
<td>Probitas nd, but library stamp is dated 9 Nov 1920</td>
<td>A-66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pertjintahan Jang Tida Kekal (PJTK)</td>
<td>Raja Waka Mega 1923</td>
<td>A-73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kota Medan Penoe dengan Impian (KMPDI)</td>
<td>No author nd, but library stamp is dated Jan 1924</td>
<td>A-76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasopanan Timoer (KT)</td>
<td>Dahlia 1932</td>
<td>A-85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See-Ie (SI)</td>
<td>Chen Wen Zwan 1938</td>
<td>A-88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andang Teroena (AT)</td>
<td>Soetomo nd</td>
<td>A-90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anak Haram (AH)</td>
<td>Djauhar Arifin nd</td>
<td>A-93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Njai Warsih (NW)</td>
<td>Thio Tjin Boen nd</td>
<td>A-95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER TWO

HERSTORY, HISTORY AND COLONISATION

One of the dilemmas confronting a feminist writer is the perception that history is ‘the story of his’. To the Indies colonial rulers, women, especially native women, were not individuals. Their position in society was dictated by their biology. Their importance as wives and mothers should not be trivialised. However my point is that in written history, women are excluded or at best generalised. Usually women are visible only as a single category; as “other” to men, thus they can be represented and recorded as a single entity. This “otherness” represents a double bind for native women. They are “other” twice removed. In the dominant colonial discourse the natives, foreign orientals and the Indos were “other” to the Dutch. It was this “other” which was important to the Dutch as it was through men, as officials, that the they sought to implement their policies. To a large extent, women’s silence in the history of the Indies is a result of a particularly chronic Dutch (Western) view of causality, power, interventions and conclusions. What was deemed worthy of recording was that which was important to the (male) colonisers in their maintenance of hegemony in the Indies.

It is the policies of the coloniser, insofar as they specifically impact upon the lives of women, which I wish to consider briefly as a type of multi-layered, 300 year old, weaving against which the njai stories were written and set. This does not mean that I consider history as setting some sort of authoritative standard for judging literature. I offer the view (after Derrida and Foucault) that literature is a form of and forms part of historical discourses. As “a form of” history, literature presents beliefs about humankind, society, power, sexuality and interpretations of the past and the present, expressed quite differently from that in historical discourse. Literature is also a part of history and has its own history with each story being informed by preceding stories and those contemporaneous to it.
Literature cannot be divorced from the historical discourses of which it is a part. Authors themselves are both a product of their history and producers of a particular type of history. A reader engaging with a text does so through meanings which take forms defined for her/him by historically specific discourses.\(^7\) The "history" with which I am engaging in this chapter is the story of women from the time of the arrival of the Dutch in the Indies, for it was largely because of the policies of the coloniser that njais became a part of the Indies landscape and were later camouflaged.

A history of the Dutch East Indies is clearly beyond the scope of this dissertation. My centre will be Java as this is where all but two of the tjerita are set and where all of the stories were published. I will also focus on colonial policies which affected native women and the authors and audiences of the tjerita njai.

**Sexual Survival of Men - The Early Days of the VOC**

Early life in the Indies for the Dutch was difficult. Lack of familiarity with climatic conditions, poor health after the long sea voyage from Holland and primitive living conditions endangered the lives of the soldiers, officials and early settlers. Enticing free settlers to remain in the colony, or inducing soldiers to re-engage was of great concern to Governor General Coen who saw part of the problem as a lack of women, without whom "...the male sex cannot survive...".\(^7\) Coen was opposed to co-habitation outside marriage which he regarded as debauchery.\(^7\) His interest was in the survival (reproduction) of a colony with a free, "respectable" burgher class, replete with Dutch wives. He repeatedly sent requests home for Dutch women to help establish the fledgling colony.

---


\(^7\) Hellwig, 1994b, Op Cit, p12
An initial small scale experiment of sending Dutch orphan girls and daughters of the very poor (Company daughters) to the Indiesmen as wives was not regarded as an economic success. Many of the marriages were barren. This problem was laid squarely on the shoulders of the immigrant women by the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC) Directors.\(^7\) The Seventeen illustrious Gentlemen contrasted the Company daughters' lack of success in producing children with that of native women who produced "...strong robust children...".\(^4\) The Gentlemen concluded, against the advice of Coen, that it was in their best economic interests to allow the purchase/persuasion of women in the region for the mothers of the next generation.

According to Taylor's data,\(^5\) probably something less than several hundred Dutch women were permitted passage to the Indies up until 1632 when the Directors ceased sponsorship of women to the Indies altogether. For the majority of men, their "wives" were slaves who were imported from around Southeast Asia, principally from Bali, and local women. This systematic "borrowing" of local women and slaves as mistresses and prostitutes was not unique to Southeast Asia; the practice was common to many colonised countries. In the case of the Indies, it was formally sanctioned by the VOC and began before the installation of a Colonial government.

Coen's aim of creating a stable European settlement in the Indies was furthered through strict leave and repatriation regulations. Since the regulations applied only to married men and their families, it is evident that they were more easily controlled and manipulated than single men. After female migration was halted, only higher ranking officials were permitted to be accompanied by their families to the Indies. The penalty was that an additional ten years service was added to the original contract. A man marrying a Dutch immigrant was required to serve for five

---

\(^7\) The Dutch East India Company Directors were known as the Heeren (Gentlemen) XVII. They managed the VOC from Holland.


\(^5\) Taylor, Op Cit, Chap 2
additional years. Widows and immigrant daughters were similarly required to give a five year return of service to the Company. Clearly there was an expectation that in this five year period widows would remarry a Dutchman who would similarly have his contract extended. Leave was also controlled for married men. No married man could take leave in Europe before the expiration of five years of service.

It is hardly surprising given these restrictions that men would show a preference for a less formal relationship, one from which they could more easily extract themselves when their contracts had expired.

In the legal discourse the only person who mattered was the Dutch male; wives, mistresses and children existed only in relation to him. It was prohibited for a white Christian man to marry a non-Christian. Hellwig notes that this ban was still mentioned as late as 1805. A locally born woman was not permitted to travel to Europe with her husband in his retirement, nor was she permitted on board a ship of any nation for the purpose of travel to Europe. This rule was later modified, but not for the purpose of permitting married couples to travel, but to allow the wealthy to retain their slaves and so live in Europe in the manner to which they had become accustomed in the Indies.

Although the taking of native mistresses was quite open, not all were well disposed towards unlawful "marriage". Coen was against concubinage and set about eradicating such relationships because, in his opinion, they resulted in abortion, infanticide and sometimes poisoning by jealous concubines. Illicit relationships were also of concern to the Dutch Reformed Church. In 1652, the Church set up an enquiry into the background of concubinage. The report shows that everyone (or could it have been every man?) had particular reasons for not legitimising relationships.

---

76 Ibid, p104
77 Ibid, p105
78 Hellwig, 1994b, Op Cit, p31
79 Blusse, Op Cit, p169
For Christians, the main reasons given were poverty and debt. Others, the free, the slaves and Muslims were apparently willing to marry but were unable to do so because of the law. At least this is the excuse which was used.

Of course there were local marriages. The Christian Mardijker women were particularly sought as brides. They were already Christians and from their Portuguese ancestry were somewhat more familiar with European habits and customs. Blusse describes these women as the “...female side of Dutch colonial society...”. The Indo community which resulted from these marriages became the upper class of VOC society. Daughters from these unions were particularly marriageable as they offered ties with established society and the bureaucracy.

It was considerably more difficult for others to enter into marriage since the law precluded marriage between Christian and non-Christian. Abeyasekere notes that incentives of cash payments and rice rations were offered to those willing to convert to Christianity, but without much success.

The problems encountered in mixed marriages were considerable. The husband found it more difficult to return to Holland and was forced to render additional service in the Indies. His Asian wife had to convert to Christianity, a religion in which she would have had little instruction because of the lack of pastors. For those in more remote areas, such as on plantations, visits by pastor were infrequent and probably meant that marriage only took place after a woman had spent some time as mistress. These factors must have predisposed both men and women towards illegitimacy in sexual and family relationships.

While illicit relationships had certain attractions, especially for the European male, the lack of legitimacy had far reaching

---

80 Ibid, p169
81 Ibid, p156
82 Taylor, Op Cit p225
consequences for the *njai*. She did not have control over her own body. She could be abandoned at any time and was often a part of the chattels turned over to her European master’s successor.

Abandonment of *njais* was a particular problem to which the law made a major contribution. The rules on repatriation discouraged men from marriage. It was very much in the European man’s favour to live with a *njai*. He was not bound to recognise his children and was free to leave his “family” at any time. Furthermore, the *njai-toean* relationship was reasonably well accepted in VOC society and was not restricted to men in the lower echelons of the company or the military.

**Surviving Sex - Becoming a *Njai***

We need to ask why women became *njais*, since this was clearly against the teachings of Islam and the values of *adat*. The question is rather more difficult to answer than the question of why men turned to native mistresses and prostitutes. There is little which has been documented from the perspective of the native or *Peranakan* woman. The only way in which I can begin to explain the appearance of *njais* from the point of view of the native and *Peranakan* women is to make some educated guesses based on a number of disparate sources.

Within native societies, there has always been strong societal and parental pressure on women to marry and fulfil their *dharma* (obligation/duty). A daughter has an obligation to honour her parents, reinforced by the belief that her parents will send *walat* (retribution) if she does not. Furthermore, a daughter who disobeys, in extreme cases, may be considered to have committed *doerhaka* (treachery, rebellion, sin). Mulder cites one case (from his fieldwork in 1979) of a daughter of an Islamic teacher who was repudiated by her family for disobedience. In *KMPDL*, (published before 1924) Ros Mina is evicted from the family home.

---

85 Ibid, pp31-32
by her father when he learns that she has prostituted herself with a Chinese. If these rather more modern sanctions can be considered a guide to the past, it seems highly unlikely that a woman would willingly place herself beyond her bangsa. Yet the literature certainly points to women who found their djodo in a foreigner and were willing to risk the consequences of a relationship with an infidel. Those who were djodos were predestined for each other, but for the others, life as a njai was often the better alternative to life as a prostitute.

Evidence indicates that prostitution was a lucrative business. Prostitutes earned a good profit for their masters. In 1631 the Head of the Mardijkers\(^8^6\) earned about half a riai a day from prostituting his female slaves.\(^8^7\) Furthermore, prostitution was sanctioned by a Dutch 17th century so-called “doctrine of necessary evil”.\(^8^8\) Men had natural drives and urges and these were thought to be increased by spicy food and the hot climate.\(^8^9\) Abstention was regarded as unnatural or effeminate,\(^9^0\) so a double moral standard for the benefit of European men was justified on medical and sociological grounds. Sexual fidelity was expected in Western Europe but sexual exploitation of native women was regarded as necessary in the Indies.

Not all prostitutes were priboemi of course. There were also the Mardijkers, Chinese and Japanese and by the latter part of the nineteenth century, European prostitutes were reported in Surabaya, Batavia, Semarang and other major cities\(^9^1\). For the many unaccompanied and single men, keeping a njai over whom they had sole sexual rights was preferable to visiting brothels.

\(^8^6\) The Mardijkers were Portuguese-speaking native Christians. They had assimilated to the Portuguese lifestyle and were preferred as spouses by the Dutch. Blusse, Op Cit, pp 156 and 165
\(^8^7\) Ibid, p168
\(^8^8\) Hesselink, Op Cit, p206
\(^8^9\) Ibid, p208
\(^9^0\) Ibid, p208
consequently Army barracks in garrison towns which were home to large numbers of concubines.

Even though prostitution was widespread in Batavia\textsuperscript{92} and in all major Javanese cities, this did not prevent the rape of women by the military. Ricklefs notes that during Governor General Speelman's regime Javanese women were assaulted in their homes by VOC soldiers.\textsuperscript{93} Although an agreement was struck which included leaving Banten women in peace, once the lengthy campaigns to subdue the Javanese began, it is likely that women were again at risk. How many of the women raped by soldiers were subsequently forced out of their homes and onto the streets by shamed parents, finally ending their days as prostitutes?

For poverty stricken families, selling or giving their daughters as njais was a safer, healthier option than prostitution, although the potential for abandonment was a problem for njais and prostitutes alike. But poverty was not the only motivation in eschewing a priboemi marriage. Love, lust, greed and (the father's) indebtedness also played their parts.

The Chinese in the VOC Indies

The role of native women in the assimilation of Chinese men in the Indies was also important. The European was not the only, or the first of the foreigners to take native women as bed partners and mothers of their children. Chinese and other traders were already established in Java before the arrival of the Portuguese or the Dutch. Their enforced stay waiting for favourable winds led to a situation where they frequently had two families, one with a wife in their homeland and another with a mistress in Java.\textsuperscript{94} In time, many of these Chinese became semi-permanent residents of Java and were no longer welcome in China.

\textsuperscript{92} Blusse, p168  
\textsuperscript{93} Ricklefs, Op Cit, p79  
\textsuperscript{94} Boxer quoted in Blusse, Op Cit, p173
These Chinese men became assimilated through association with native women and this was accelerated in the next generation as it was the mothers who had the responsibility for rearing children. However, the process of acculturation was never complete and the Chinese remained a racially distinct group. The distinction was accentuated by the colonial authority which segregated the Chinese in law and administration as foreign orientals. They were subject to the administrative discipline of their headmen, who were given Dutch military titles to denote their position. Their legal position was a running sore for the Chinese who resented being subject to the landraad, or native courts. On the other hand they were privileged in terms of trade, being granted licences to operate markets, gambling and opium dens.

Unlike the Indo community which grew from the Dutch and Mardijker-Native marriages and liaisons, the Chinese community in the main, remained aloof, despite generations of intermarriage. The Chinese remained identifiably Chinese. To a large extent, more complete integration was precluded by the Dutch laws. In addition to defining race through laws which privileged the Chinese over the priboemis, the Dutch dabbled in social engineering, prohibiting the cutting of queues and laying down dress requirements to distinguish one race from another.

Despite the differentiation from European and priboemi, the Chinese were not an homogenous group. The degree of assimilation varied quite sharply amongst Peranakan Chinese. Some, according to The Siauw Giap, like those in Makassar and in some rural parts of Java, were converted to Islam and completely disappeared through amalgamation with the locals. However, the majority did not assimilate to this extent. Skinner reports

---

95 The term 'foreign orientals' was also used in respect of other racially distinct groups, the Arabs and Indians, for example.
96 Lea Williams, Overseas Chinese Nationalism, Glencoe : The Free Press, 1960, p9
97 Abeyasekere, Op Cit, p27
“thousands” of Chinese who can still trace their descent in Java for twelve generations.\(^9\) **Peranakan** Chinese took on many indigenous cultural characteristics, principally through their mothers, as the Indo community did, but they were still identifiable as Chinese.

Of the women who facilitated assimilation of native culture, little is heard. Bocquet postulates that most of the Chinese immigrants were probably from the lower classes as leaving the graves of one’s ancestors was a serious breach of “filial piety” and thus would only be done because of poverty. She concludes that they probably married native women from the lower classes of indigenous society\(^10\) and this is supported by Sidharta who notes that the lower class Chinese immigrants married mostly slaves of Balinese, Makassarese and Javanese origin.\(^11\) Bocquet maintains that the **Peranakan** women were more Javanese than their husbands. A daughter’s education, unlike that of a son, was left up to the mother, thus she became more culturally Javanese. The women dressed as their Javanese ancestors had done, although the colours, patterns and lace of the sarong and kebaya were different from the Javanese. Their hair also was worn according to local custom in a bun. Cooking and many rituals (especially those concerned with childbirth and child rearing) were also in accordance with local custom.\(^12\) Chinese culture was most discernible where matters outside the home were concerned.

The Chinese man was less acculturated than his female counterpart. In dress Chinese men never adopted the Javanese style and they appear to have continued important cultural traditions. They did take those Javanese cultural customs which were of use to them, language, for example, or those aspects which were easily digested within “remembered” Chinese culture. Very few Chinese became Muslims. Skinner has offered a view that this was because it was not necessary to the conduct of their daily

\(^9\) Coppel, 1983, Op Cit, p13
\(^10\) Margaret Bocquet, Op Cit, p4
\(^12\) Bocquet, Op Cit, p5
lives since most of the Javanese with whom they dealt were not strict Muslims, there was no need to acquire religion.103.

The Europeans

Like Coen, Governor General Van Imhoff tried several measures to more firmly implant a “European culture”. He initiated steps to set up a seminary and a marine academy. Of the academy, Taylor notes that there was no precedent in Dutch or colonial society and entry was excluded to slaves, natives and sons of nyais.104 What sort of “European-ness” did Van Imhoff have in mind? The academy was peculiar to the Indies with the aim of training officers who would not be a “...disgrace to polite society.”105 However, Indies society was distinctive. In the eighteenth century only one of the Governors General had a Dutch born wife.106 Van Imhoff’s European society was already a “new construction”107 of European culture. The population mix precluded any representation of a Dutch culture. Although population statistics are difficult to gauge, Blusse has indicated that by 1750 the population mix in Batavia was such that the Dutch Europeans were outnumbered by the Chinese, Mardijkers and Eurasians.108 Batavia was also peopled with Asians from all around the region. Successive Governors also tried to separate the Eurasians from the Asians and make them more Dutch, principally through religion.

By the eighteenth century ‘European’ meant those born in Europe, those born in Asia with European parents (whom Taylor calls Creoles), wives of Europeans, legitimate children and children

103 Skinner, quoted in Coppel, 1983, Op Cit, pp11-12
104 Taylor, Op Cit, p241-22
105 Ibid, p241
106 Ibid, p193
108 Blusse shows the population figures for Batavia as approximately 1,500 Europeans, Chinese and Mardijkers and 800 “Mixtiezen”. p19. This is in a period when Chinese numbers were only just beginning to recover after the 1740 massacre and there had been a substantial movement out of Batavia to the healthier climate of Weltevreden.
acknowledged by European men. In this environment where the ‘Europeans’ were divided from the Chinese and the Inlander (native), primarily on the basis of religion, the Indo women became the ‘pillars’ of society. The society was neither Dutch, European nor native, like the Indos themselves.

Wives and Mistresses Before the Juffrouw - Nineteenth Century Hindia

It is difficult to visualise a society as heterogeneous as that of the Indies by 1800. Blusse gives a good indication of the type of society which already existed in VOC Batavia through the name of his outstanding book, Strange Company. From nineteenth century travel reports, Batavia was indeed strange to the European visitor. Not only were the traditional customs like chewing betel held to be disgusting, but the society of half breeds masquerading as upper class Europeans, was regarded with some distaste. The Chinese with queues, known as the “de verwijfde hoop” (the effeminate breed) mixed with the Javanese society through their women and in the market place with Dutch, priboemi, Arab, Indian and Indo. Communities were not only distinguished by their ethnicity but also on the degree of their assimilation into indigenous society. Recent arrivals (totoks), including women who had begun to migrate from China, maintained their distance from the Peranakan who had been born in the Indies, the progeny of locally born or Peranakan women. As Peranakan numbers increased, they tended to marry within their own circle and less

109 Taylor, Op Cit, p230
110 Blusse refers to the Batavian woman as the pillar, the caryatid of society, Chap VII and p173
111 Ibid, p10
112 For example, Thorn in 1815 noted European visitors were shocked by the adulteration of European society, quoted in Abeyasekere, 1983, Op Cit, p22. Couperus writes of “...the minor absurdities of the life of Europeans: the simjo accent with constant little exclamations...” Couperus, Louis, The Hidden Force, Trans Teixeira de Mattos, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1992, First published, L.J. Veen : Amsterdam, 1900
113 Blusse Op Cit, p1
with native women.\textsuperscript{114} Assimilation was incomplete and complex.

Superimposed\textsuperscript{115} on localised communication networks which met and sometimes merged through the auspices of women and trade, was administration and law as imposed by the Dutch government. Hierarchical in nature, powerful and superior, the administration imposed new colonial laws upon subordinate communities. However, the colonial authority should not be imagined as a seamless entity with wholly European values. Stoler suggests that colonial racism was the apparatus through which the colonial authority created a sense of unity amongst “we”, a diverse group of naturally superior Europeans, separate from “they”, the natives.\textsuperscript{116}

The Culture System illustrates this racism functioning at its peak. New labour requirements were imposed upon the natives. ‘Bengal Civilian’ comments upon the government’s right to one day’s labour per week, however, this frequently involved travelling time to build a certain facility and could entail a loss of two or three days per week.\textsuperscript{117} Van der Kolff appears to support this observation, noting that the period for forced labour was 66 days per year, but some worked 240 days.\textsuperscript{118} The rural (native) population was forced to grow crops for export and was able only to sell to the State. The native elite was incorporated into the bureaucratic structure, becoming the paid employees of the Dutch. Their positions were always subordinate to the Dutch and they were given the distasteful task of administering the much hated system of forced labour.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{114} Sidharta Op Cit, p59
\item \textsuperscript{115} Sartono refers to the Dutch administration as a superstructure. Sartono Kartodirdjo, \textit{Modern Indonesia Tradition and Transformation}, Yogyakarta : Gadjah Mada University Press, 1991, p114
\item \textsuperscript{116} Stoler, Op Cit, p138
\item \textsuperscript{117} ‘Bengal Civilian’, \textit{Rambles in Java and the Straits in 1852}, Simkin Marshall and Co, 1853, Republished, The Hague : w. van Hoeve Ltd, 1964, p110
\item \textsuperscript{118} G.H. Van der Kolff, “European Influence on Native Agriculture”, pp103-125, in B. Schrieke, (Ed) \textit{The Effect of Western Influence on Native Civilisations in the Malay Archipelago}, Batavia : G. Kolff & Co, 1929, p110
\end{itemize}
The previously self-contained villages were affected by the demand for land and labour and the use of money. Van Gelderen notes that the penetration of modern industry often had negative consequences with the failure of old social values and the unscrupulous behaviour of both native and European, motivated by a new dream of money-based wealth.\footnote{Van Gelderen, “Western Enterprises and the Density of Population in the Netherlands Indies”, pp 85-102 in Schrieke, Op Cit, p98}

Indies society was not only divided on the basis of ethnicity, but also on the basis of gender. Upper class Indo women and Dutch women had spent their lives in semi seclusion. Taylor notes that it was only during the British Interregnum (1811-16) that Creole and Indo wives gained any public freedom. Changes in the social role for women\footnote{The British administrators were much more accustomed to being accompanied by their wives. One of the important factors which led to a more relaxed attitude was the introduction of dancing in the European style which required close physical contact between the dancers. Taylor, Op Cit, p332} and the lifting of immigration generated quite a deal of excitement in the exclusive upper class Batavian society.

As the Dutch had done, the British also lived openly with native women. Openness extended as far as knowledge of who was bedding whom. It did not include entree to polite (European) society. This double standard continued into the early twentieth century. In \textit{Tjerita Njai Isah}, Isah as a lowly born native woman is only permitted to attend the cloak room during high society functions, listening to the sounds of her Indo son’s social success from afar.

Prostitution continued apace. There was a high incidence of venereal disease, evidenced by the establishment of the first syphilis hospital for prostitutes in Yogyakarta in 1811. In the Dutch Indies, regulations were enacted in 1852 to register and subject prostitutes to regular medical checks and in 1876 special hospitals for prostitutes were opened in Batavia, Pontianak, Tandjoeng Pinang and Bandjarmasin.
Warren has reported extensively on the conditions in brothels in Singapore in the 19th century. It appears from the njai stories\textsuperscript{121} that conditions in the Indies were not so very different from those in Singapore, and Hesselink notes from the \textit{Onderzoek Mindere Welvaart} (Welfare Report) of 1914 that women prostitutes went to Singapore to make money quickly.\textsuperscript{122} Warren speaks of prostitutes inexorably bound to their profession through ill health and indebtedness. This situation is also reflected in some of the \textit{tjerita njai}. In \textit{KMPDL}, we find that prostitutes were deliberately kept in debt. The hotel keeper persuades the women to buy gold by borrowing money from a money lender. She is not able to leave before the debt is repaid and this binds (iket kaki) the prostitute to her profession.\textsuperscript{123} A short working life, terminated by death (including suicide, homicide and abortion) through disease and pregnancy, or loss of a desirable body was all most had to look forward to. To escape was to be bought out by a client and this was not cheap. In addition to paying the brothel keeper for the prostitute’s original debt, there was money owing for the purchase of everyday items and compensation in respect of future earnings\textsuperscript{124}.

The latter half of the nineteenth century wrought many changes on the Indies communities. To a large extent these changes were part of a ripple effect of the technological, sociological and political advances and revisions experienced elsewhere in the world. As the demand to feed the machines of the West grew, the potential of the Indies to provide raw materials drew many a European to its shores seeking his fortune. The insular world of the Dutch Indies’ idyll was drawing to a close. Improved sea and land communications brought exotic and languorous lands closer to their colonial masters and to each other. Print and telegraphic communications provided better and more timely information to

\textsuperscript{121} In \textit{KMPDL}, Ros Mina is bought out of prostitution first by her husband who then sets her to work for him and later by a toean totok, an assistant plantation manager.

\textsuperscript{122} Hesselink, Op Cit, p212

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{KMPDL}, p50

an expanding, educated, middle class. Their participation in the
discourses of the humanities gathered momentum. Moods shifted
as the meaning of ‘human’ was expanded to include people of
colour, finally spelling the close of the slave trade. Concomitant
with this new humanity was the recognition of a great debt owed
by the Dutch to the Indies for past centuries of exploitation. In
this context, white (Dutch-European) supremacy was redefined,
with far reaching effects on the Indo and native communities of
the Indies into the twentieth century.

A change in the social attitudes towards the category ‘European’
began to become apparent. It was based much more on skin
colour. Wertheim suggests that although half castes were
counted as Europeans, their social position was determined on the
basis of colour and “…other characteristics reflecting the degree of
relationship to the white race.” Of particular note was the
aquiline nose, much admired in the *njai* literature. The degree of
skin colouration was evident in the use of expressions to
differentiate skin colour, such as: “...*koffie met melk* (coffee with
cream), *kwart over zes* (a quarter past six), *half zeven* (half past
six), *bijna zeven uur* (almost 7:00pm) and *zo zwart als mijn schoen*
(as black as my shoe)...”. ‘Europeans’, as the Indo and the
locally born Dutch, came to be distinguished from the Hollander
(Dutch). For example, in advertisements the requirement
“Hollander by birth” would often be shown, a clear indication the
neither the Creole nor Indo were acceptable in certain
instances. The compartmentalising of Dutch, Indos, Chinese
and Inlander gathered momentum through increased migration of
women to the Indies and the introduction of the ‘Ethical Policy’.

The Ethical Policy recognised that the Dutch owed a debt to the
Indies for centuries of exploitation. The new policy was aimed at
redressing past wrongs through the expansion of native industry.
Making room for the *priboomi* meant a necessary reduction in

125 Wertheim, Op Cit, p139
126 Van der Veur, “Cultural Aspects of the Eurasian Community in
Indonesian Colonial Society” pp38-53, in *Indonesia*, No 6 (October),
1968, p38-9
127 Taylor, Op Cit, p412
Chinese economic power. The *passenstelsel* (pass system) and *wijkenstelsel* (quarter system), which continued until 1910, made life difficult for the Chinese. They were confined to particular districts and travel outside these areas was at the discretion of local officials. The stamps required for passes and the fine for breaches was a source of government revenue and was directed exclusively at the foreign orientals. The end of revenue and opium farming not only cut off an important source of income, it brought even more stringent controls over the movement of the Chinese as one of their primary reasons for travel had been removed. It is hardly surprising that some businesses went bankrupt when applicants had to stand in queues all day to obtain a pass for the one hour journey from Batavia to Meester Cornelis. However, overall, the efforts of the colonial government to curb the economic power of the Chinese failed. According to Azra, Chinese revenue increased as they expanded into other areas, such as the batik industry, previously held by the natives.

Abeyasekere suggests that the nineteenth century saw fewer mixed marriages and a more marked tendency to keep a *njai*. There are two main reasons for the continued popularity of concubinage. The first was the change to the marriage laws in 1848. Religion was no longer an impediment to marriage. A European could marry anyone as long as they agreed to subject themselves to European legislation. Evidently the expense of this process was a deterrent and many men preferred to continue a relationship with a *njai*. The second reason was the increase in travellers to the East and their reports which attacked the habits of the Eurasians, particularly the women. ‘Bengal Civilian’ in his rambles in 1852 writes of the (un)dress of Batavian ladies, consisting of a pair of silk trousers, or a coloured Malay petticoat, with a shift and a pair of Chinese slippers into which “...her naked

---

128 Williams, Op Cit, p28
129 Ibid, pp27-30
131 Abeyasekere, Op Cit, p77
132 Hellwig, Op Cit, p33
feet are carelessly thrust...". Their hair was uncombed and floated down at their backs. He comments that these ladies indecently display themselves and disregard delicacy and propriety. While she was accepted in the Indies, a native or Indo woman was obviously not the wife a man’s parents looked forward to meeting in Holland.

A Time of Darkness - Twentieth Century Njais

Anderson quotes from *Serat Kala Tida* (Poem of a Time of Darkness) written by R. Ng. Ronggawarsita just before his death in 1873 to mark the Indies “time of darkness which will never end”. The poem is meant to exemplify the transition from a idealised (Javanese) world of cosmic balance to one in turmoil, as represented by Dutch hegemony and encroaching Western values and ideas. Although, as Anderson points out, the oscillation between a period of ordered life and disaster is a traditional theme, what is new is the idea that this period may never end. Such were Ronggawarsita’s perceptions and premonitions about Dutch rule. He had lived with the *cultuurstelsel* in excess of thirty years and had seen the alienation of the Javanese elite from the rakyat (people) and court and their transformation into the paid employees of the Dutch. However, Ronggawarsita appears to be foreshadowing even greater changes and a more insidious European influence in the Indies. In less than thirty years his premonitions were to be realised as the position of native rulers was eroded even further when education became necessary in dealings with the Dutch and the Western world.

Older ideas of position based on birth were being challenged around the world. In an era based on the ideals of egalitarianism, native rulers were humiliated at the hands of the Dutch who treated all natives (condescendingly) equally and bestowed titles without regard to *adat*. Ancestry was no longer the sole criterion

133 ‘Bengal Civilian’, Op Cit, pp137-8
135 Ibid, p220
and Djajadiningrat noted in a lecture given to the Indies Society that the son of a cook and a former slave had been made regents. In *TNL*, Lassimin, the son of a *njai*, succeeds the Regent after marrying his daughter. Although the Regent regards him as his son, thus continuing the family tradition, Lassimin is not of noble birth and in earlier times would have been regarded as an unsuitable match for the daughter of a Regent.

To return to Ronggawarsita, it may be that as a *poedjangga* (court poet), he had a greater investment in mourning the passing of the ‘perfect ruler’ and the court hierarchy and the transition to a more Western way of life. What in fact he may have seen or felt was his own demise in the literary, as well the physical, sense. It certainly spelt the demise of the *njai*.

The opening of the Suez Canal eased the arduous journey from Holland to the Indies. Expanding Western business opportunities and the accompanying growth of the bureaucracy, led to an increase in migration. In the years between 1890-1920 the migration of men increased by 200% and women by 300%. The increase in the numbers of the white man, but more particularly of white women, was an important trend which affected the lives of the *njais*.

With the increase in the migration of white Dutch women, the old Indo culture became much less acceptable. Indos came to be regarded with disdain. A Eurasian informant quoted by Paul van der Veur in 1953 writes of her life in the Indies, probably between 1923-39, that the yards where Dutch children played were forbidden to Indo children. She reports that Dutch parents feared Indo children would tell their children about “the facts of life”. She also recalls hearing that Indos were dirty and could not

---


137 Hellwig, 1994b, Op Cit, p37
be trusted.\textsuperscript{138} This attitude is certainly present in \textit{TNL}. The Dutch Abrams family forbid their daughter to play with si Doela after he rescues her from the river. Her clothes were wet; it was as though she had nothing on. Blood runs fast and Njonja Abrams tells Frederika (alias Marie, alias Poppie) that she may not play with si Doela again.\textsuperscript{139}

The reign of the Indo woman as a suitable marriage partner for Dutch men was over, although the Dutch man was still considered a highly desirable husband. Van der Veur’s informant writes that “...all sorts of means--be they good or bad--were employed...”\textsuperscript{140} (to catch a full blooded Dutchman). Skin colour and the ability to speak Dutch well mattered. She says she was enjoined as a child not to tan, so that she had a better chance for such a marriage and she learned to speak Dutch as purely as possible to help get a Dutch husband.\textsuperscript{141} She also writes of many disappointments in her endeavours to catch a husband. On many occasions she established contact by letter or telephone, only to face rejection when her skin colour was seen. The British were even worse and took care that no-one saw them with a “half blood”.\textsuperscript{142}

The fall from grace of the half blood meant that relationships with native women were even less acceptable. Van der Veur’s informant talks of a “great” social distance between the Indo and the Javanese. A Dutchman would not “…take a Javanese woman quickly when he could get an Indo.”\textsuperscript{143} While this was the perception of the Indo woman, in European society nothing outside a legal marriage, preferably with one’s own race, would really “do”. The religious doctrine of fidelity, marriage and white superiority had been imported, along with the liberals espousing the Ethical policy and with women from Holland.

\textsuperscript{139} TNI, Vol 2, p268
\textsuperscript{140} Van der Veur, 1969, pp70-1
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid, p71
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid, p75
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid, p73 and 78
Not only was concubinage opposed, but Government “sanctioned” prostitution became the subject of a concerted campaign by a number of Dutch associations, such as the Dutch Society Against Prostitution, the Society for the Furtherance of Public Morality in Dutch Overseas Colonies and the Dutch Women’s Association for the Promotion of Moral Conscience. A number of native societies - *Sarekat Islam* and the *Mimpitoe* society supported the abolitionists, but from the native woman’s perspective. They succeeded in having government recognition of prostitution withdrawn. In 1913 new acts abolished the 1852 legislation, closed hospitals and set up the *Regeeringsbureau ter bestrijding van den zoogenaamden handel in vrouwen en meisjes* (Government office to combat the [alleged] traffic in women and girls).

Abeyasekere reports that even in the Army the custom of taking a *njai* was discouraged. In 1904 officers received a confidential letter warning them of the dangers of concubinage and the possible damage to their careers. In the years 1888 to 1911 the numbers of European soldiers who married increased from one to ten percent. Salaries were raised in 1914 so that European officers could afford to marry European wives. However, concubinage was still popular in the armed services with a constant 22.5% of the men living with a *njai*. As Hesselink notes, concubinage was supported by Staff Headquarters for a long time. Non-commissioned officers below the rank of Sergeant Major needed permission to marry and rarely received it because of the additional expense of housing.

By 1900 there were half a million Chinese in the Indies, with over fifty percent in Java. Most were Indies born. Ease of travel

---

144 Hesselink, Op Cit, p206-7  
145 Ibid, pp207-8  
146 Ibid, p217  
147 Ibid, p216  
148 Abeyasekere, Op Cit, p115  
149 Hesselink, pp216-7  
150 Coppel, 1983, Op Cit, p2
had brought the Indies Chinese into closer contact with China. Organisations with a strong sense of Chinese nationalism flourished concomitant with increasing resentment towards the Dutch. The major causes of this resentment were the pass and quarter system and their legal status as foreign orientals. In addition, the Chinese were dissatisfied with the number of places provided in the government education system and their high rates of taxation.\textsuperscript{151}

Resentment was not solely the prerogative of the Chinese. They faced resentment from the native population because of their economic dominance and the perceived acquiescence by the Dutch to Chinese demands.\textsuperscript{152} Organisation such as \textit{Jami'at Khain} and \textit{Sarekat Dagang Islam} developed in response to Chinese economic power. Riots against the Chinese took place in Surakarta and Surabaya and were followed by disturbances in nearly every major city between 1912-1918, setting a pattern for the rest of the twentieth century.

The practice of taking a \textit{njai} persisted, though it was in decline, into the twentieth century. The increased numbers of Dutch and Chinese women in the Indies evidently provided a brake on the apparently insatiable sexual appetites of their men. Perhaps the prospect of providing for two families, one legitimate and one illegitimate, was a potential drain on resources. It would certainly arouse suspicion and condemnation. No doubt there were many wives and women who closed their eyes to that which they did not wish to see, or over which they had no control. It is difficult to imagine that wives and mothers did not realise that their \textit{baboes} (house maids) were house and sexual servants, particularly of their sons.\textsuperscript{153} If men enjoyed \textit{baboes}, \textit{njais} and prostitutes as objects of lust, then it is not difficult to understand why they became the subjects of stories.

\textsuperscript{151} Donald Wilmott, \textit{The Natural Status of the Chinese in Indonesia}, Ithaca: Modern Indonesia Project Interim Report Series, 1956, p34
\textsuperscript{152} Azra, Op Cit, p34
\textsuperscript{153} Bocquet notes that young Chinese men who were not married could satisfy their lust with women kept as \textit{baboes}. Op Cit, p9
Shared Experiences

Peranakan Chinese and Indos were to a large extent marginalised in Indies society. They were neither priboemi nor Dutch. As I have already shown, by the twentieth century the Chinese were resented for their economic prowess by the priboemi, and the Indo sinjo was regarded with disdain by the Dutch. The njai, as a mistress and mother, links these two ethnic groups, making their stories mutually intelligible. In a sense, the njai tales are origin stories without the foam, bamboo or sun. The authors, and possibly also their audiences, were in many cases the products of the liaison between a priboemi woman and a foreigner. The author was writing for an audience which was totally familiar with the njai, if not as mother, then as grandmother or some more distant mother. The story of the njai is a shared experience, linking the authors with their audience in a burgeoning trade in words.

154 Many of the older Malay hikajat use the sun, foam, bamboo etc as a symbol of the birth of a person of some future significance.
CHAPTER THREE

THE TRADE IN WORDS

The proliferation of the printed word in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was accompanied by and dependent upon the technologies of printing imported from Europe and the opening of educational opportunities in the Indies for the Chinese and priboemi communities. These two factors gave impetus to the traders in words: the audience, the authors and the publishers. As the literate public grew, the demand for printed matter rose, allowing new professions in journalism and publishing to flourish. Authorship, which had previously been the specialised province of the court scribes and the Dutch colonials, expanded to include members of the Indo and Peranakan communities who seized the opportunity and gained an early foothold in the mass print media.

The currency in words became an area of study by the Dutch and later by priboemi critics. Popular literature written in “Low Malay” or “Sino Malay” fared badly in the eyes of the critics in comparison with “High Malay” which was the preferred style of the powerful Commissie voor de Inlandsche School en Volkslectuur. In print, words and their meanings could be subjected to scrutiny by a wider audience, both then and now.

Penny Dreadful and Popular

In the present corpus of early Malay printed literature, which Pramoedya Ananta Toer refers to as sastra assimilatif or pra-

155 John Hoffman, The Malay Language as a Force For Unity and Nationality in the Indonesian Archipelago to About 1930, University of Melbourne : Unpublished PhD Thesis, 1976, pp135-9 Low Malay was a term coined by the Dutch to describe the Malay spoken in the market places and in the streets. It was regarded as clumsy because there was no “standardised” grammar or spelling. Malay, popularly spoken by merchants, servants and the Dutch, varied from one area to another and was often referred to as “gibberish Malay”.

156 Commission for Native School and Popular Reading established by the colonial administration to provide reading material for newly literate ‘natives’. 
Indonesia,\textsuperscript{157} most of the \textit{tjerita} have long since been forgotten, as have their authors. For many, the history of Malay (later Indonesian) fiction in the Indies begins with the 1908 founding of \textit{Volkslectuur (Balai Pustaka)}. Recognition and respect was paid only to fiction using the more formal language of “High” or Riau Malay, which was regarded as a standard for authors by \textit{Balai Pustaka} and many Dutch grammarians.\textsuperscript{158} Popular works written in the everyday language of the streets and market place had no place in the literary canon. The pioneering efforts of the authors of early Indies fiction were belittled at the time and have since largely been ignored by Indonesian writers.\textsuperscript{159}

Rosidi devotes one chapter of his book, \textit{Ichtisar Sedjarah Sastra Indonesia}, to the period 1900-1933. This is the zenith of Peranakan Chinese authorship and yet there is but one sentence devoted to their work. He tells us that books written in Malay were not (thought?) provoking, but were more for entertainment. Many of them were written and published by Chinese descendants in a low Malay known as Chinese Malay\textsuperscript{160} and this is the most damning indictment, as far as Rosidi is concerned. \textit{Bahasa Melaju Rendah} (Low Malay) was used in these stories which told of everyday events in everyday language and were enjoyed by \textit{lingkungan para pedagang, dan para buruh} (traders and labourers).\textsuperscript{161} The use of \textit{buruh} is a little puzzling given the low literacy rates, even among the Chinese. Presumably he means artisans, rather than labourers, and those who were self educated or had not had the opportunity to learn (High) Malay at

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{157} Pramoedya Ananta Toer, \textit{Tempo Doeloe}, Jakarta : Hastra Mitra, 1982, p14. His use of these terms indicates the period before the realisation of an “Indonesia”, pra-Indonesia. It was a period which found the \textit{priboem} in the lowest socio-economic group, after the immigrants. Pramoedya classifies these as stories of multi-racial contact between the \textit{priboem} and the newcomer or foreigner, hence “\textit{sastra assimlatif}.”
\item \textsuperscript{158} Hoffman, Op Cit, Chap 5
\item \textsuperscript{159} There are some notable exceptions: Pramoedya Ananta Toer and Nio Joe Lan. Established critics, such as Rosidi and Teeuw almost totally ignored popular works, commonly referred to as \textit{roman picisan} (penny dreadfuls) and \textit{werkjes} (little or insignificant works).
\item \textsuperscript{160} Rosidi, \textit{Ichtisar Sedjarah Sastra Indonesia}, Indonesia : Penerbit Binatjpta, 1969, p17
\item \textsuperscript{161} Ibid, p8
\end{itemize}
school. Inadvertently Rosidi has confirmed the status of the *roman picisan* (penny dreadfuls) as popular literature; they were entertaining and had a mass readership.

Fiction in non-standard Malay language (Low/Market Malay or Chinese Malay) was frequently published as serialised stories in newspapers. Newspapers were initially published primarily as advertising vehicles and items of fiction were introduced to boost circulation. Kwee remarks that a newspaper could suddenly become popular because its current serial was very exciting.\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^2\) Many of these stories were later published in book form by the largely Indo and *Peranakan* Chinese presses.\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^3\)

Fiction enjoyed a wide audience for the times. Salmon shows that before 1900 there were at least fifteen publishing firms, of which five were Chinese owned, and in the early twentieth century, Chinese printing works were established in all the large towns in Java.\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^4\) The numerous publishers were driven by the profit motive in the still developing internal capitalist economy of the Indies. The popularity of Low Malay fiction no doubt encouraged investors. However, it was a speculative venture, as books were expensive and beyond the reach of most.\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^5\) In the mid 1920s a volume of around 80 pages cost between f0.75-f1. Stories often came out in two or three volumes, so the full cost of the story probably averaged f2-3.\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^6\) Compared with an annual wage of around f300, the purchase of one volume was the equivalent of a day's wages.\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^7\) This was undoubtedly the cause of the short life

\[^1\)\(^6\)\(^3\] Rusli Amran suggests that the Indos controlled all mass media in Java and elsewhere. Rusli Amran, *Padang Riwayatmu Dulu*, Indonesia : C.V. Yasaguna, 1988, p60
\[^1\)\(^6\)\(^4\] Salmon, Op Cit pp95-100
\[^1\)\(^6\)\(^5\] In 1920 a *gantang* (eight litres) of middle (grade 2) rice was f1.78, so a person could eat for one week for the price of a book. Personal communication from Dr Wendy Mukherjee.
\[^1\)\(^6\)\(^6\] Nio Joe Lan, *Sastra Indonesia-Tionghoa*, Djakarta : Gunung Agung, 1962, p22
\[^1\)\(^6\)\(^7\] 80% of Javanese earned around f300 pa in 1929. Personal communication from Dr Wendy Mukherjee.
of many publications and the succession of newspapers and monthly magazines which appeared and disappeared on a regular basis. It was also the reason for the popularity of lending libraries.

It was far cheaper to publish stories as serials in a newspaper first, before going to a book form. The main advantage was that the story had already been through an editor before publication and the language/spelling had been “improved”. It is probable that the newspaper also had feedback through readers’ letters which indicated its prospective profitability as a book. It was not until 1925 with the publication of the monthly Penghidoepan and the introduction of magazine subscriptions that these publications became more stable. Subscriptions brought greater economic certainty, giving publishers more freedom to experiment with material submitted for publication. As a result, original stories gained ground over translations from Western or Chinese novels. Even with subscriptions, the publishing business remained volatile with only two such magazines, Penghidoepan and Tjerita Roman, remaining afloat at the time of the Japanese invasion.

Readership was not restricted only to those able to purchase books. The majority of the monthly magazines and books to which I had access came from Chinese owned commercial taman batjaan (lending libraries). Lending libraries had been an institution in China for some centuries, so the Chinese were familiar with hiring books and this played an important part in spreading the “...habit of reading...”. This observation is supported by Balai Pustaka’s own research conducted in 1936. The report on book borrowing from private companies showed that the most borrowed books were those from Chinese publishers. As commercial enterprises, publishing companies responded to the demand for popular books - the roman picisan.

168 Nio Joe Lan, Op Cit, p24
169 Kwee, Op Cit, p21
170 Salmon, Op Cit, p93
171 Personal communication with Wendy Soloman
What made these stories popular cannot be established in any statistical sense. They evidently satisfied the need for entertainment and were regarded as a profitable trade, even though publishing up until the mid 1920s was obviously a very risky enterprise.

Entertainment is intimately concerned with the reader/narrator/author triad. Unlike the traditional audiences of the wayang (shadow play) or penglipur lara (recreational performance) where emotions were on public display, there was for the first time a private reader/narrator/author relationship. The private reading audience allowed the author more flexibility to indulge in themes which may not have been considered suitable for a public mixed age/sex audience. In private the reader is not under the scrutiny of neighbours. The pleasure of the text is an individual and private reaction.

The very subject of the njai, with its multiplicities of meanings (native mistress, concubine, prostitute), must have attracted readers with the expectation of themes of illicit sexual relationships, love and lust. Many titles and sub titles of these novels were titivating. They tantalised and fashioned a desire for the sexually explicit and functioned as advertisements, designed to attract the attention of the reader. The title, Kota Medan penoe dengen Impian atawa Njai Tertaboer dengen Mas Samboengan dari Tjierita Korbannja Konde Litjin (KMPDI) sends a number of messages to the potential reader. As a njai story expectations are raised of an illicit love affair. The sense of titivation is heightened when the readers finds that the njai is bedecked with gold. It seems clear that the ostentatious display of wealth bodes ill. Had she came by her wealth through good deeds, she would be more discreet. So it is a story about a wicked njai living in Medan, the city which will fulfil every man's desire. Finally, if

172 "The City of Medan is Full of Dreams, or The Gold Bedecked Njai, A Continuation of the Story of the Victim of the Slippery Chignon"
the reader enjoyed the story about the victim of the slippery chignon\textsuperscript{173}, then he will also find pleasure in this story.

Unofficial censorship of the more sexually explicit material further privatised the material as a matter between the reader and the narrator/author. The publisher or owner of the book could restrict the audience, making the relationship even more closed. \textit{KMPDI} was one such book probably deemed to be suitable only for male adult readers. In the copy which I read, the owner of the lending library, \textit{Solosche Maleische Bibliotheek}, stamped across the front cover "Anak-anak jang blon dewasa dan orang prampean dilarang batja." (Women and children are forbidden to read this book). Whether or not this restriction was effective in limiting readership is not of concern. The aim in making an exclusive audience of men and the grouping of women and children in the same category of readership is of particular interest. It seems likely that \textit{KMPDI} would have been considered pornographic. Perhaps it was in a segregated part of the lending library to which only men had access. The sense of exclusivity is heightened in the copy of this book which I studied by a comment which had been hand written onto the page. It indicates that at least one reader probably thought that his fellow readers were men. The context and the comment, shown in brackets, is as follows: "Sesoedanja oetjapken itoe perkatahan, itoe tandil jang sedeng birahi laloe redjeng pada Ros Mina. [boeat dilontop toeroeknja saman...]\textsuperscript{174}" This piece of graffiti is notable not only for its sexual connotations, but also as the only reader's comment I found in any of the texts.

\textbf{Women as Consumers}

It is apparent that \textit{KMPDI} was written for an audience of men. The producer's point of view addresses men. In visual terms,

\textsuperscript{173} The konde was the trademark of women who married Peranakan men and a shrewd woman was referred to as 'si konde licin' (the slippery konde), Sidharta, Op Cit, p68.

\textsuperscript{174} After saying these words, the foreman who was feeling lascivious, forced himself into Ros Mina. [he shoved his cock into her cunt.], p88
women connote a “...to-be-looked-at-ness...”,175 and are positioned as the passive receptacle. Ros Mina, the njai, is denigrated and trivialised. She is the object of the male gaze, the merchandise bought by her toean, the goods being rented out by her husband and the object of the male tawkey’s (boss) performance. In the end, like property, she is discarded, falling back into poverty, prostitution and oblivion, while the tawkey’s son, Tjoekeng, who has sexual relations with Ros Mina as well as his stepmother and who also murdered Kasmin, learns his lesson, reforms, becomes the foreman in place of his father and marries a good woman.

If there were women consumers, they were left in a difficult position by the sexuality of the text. As women they were precluded from identification with both the male heroes (and villains) and the male gaze through which women were represented. The only avenue left open to them as readers was as “...a nominal transvestite...”.176 They were forced into temporarily assuming a male identity and to resist this construction or position would mean exclusion from the audience.

Women as consumers are positioned by the text, not only in terms of gender, but also by race, colour, education and patriarchy. For the most part the njai stories are concerned with these discourses. The acceptable priboemi women are pale skinned, educated and are, or become acculturated (and obedient) to their male (foreign) partners. This raises the question whether the male-produced spectacle of the njai had any appeal for women.

One possible indication of the wide appeal of tjerita njai is the popularity of Njai Dasima. The original version was reworked many times. A syair written by Lie Kim Hok (1897) was in its sixth reprinting by 1922.177 Apart from the many print versions of this story, it was also a stage play and a film. Tan’s Film company chose “...the immensely popular story of Njai Dasima...”

176 Pollock quoted in Lynne Pearce, Woman / Image / Text, Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1991, p18
177 Kwee, Op Cit, p71
as its first production and two sequels were made soon after in 1930.\textsuperscript{178} It would be difficult to imagine an audience made up wholly of men and in TNI, Isah and Verkerk are described going to see the Dasima play while on holiday. However, Isah refuses identification with Njai Dasima. She walks out at the point where Dasima tells Mr W that he may keep their daughter Nansi. Isah declares that a njai could not possibly abandon her toean and her child as Dasima does.

In a literary climate which relied heavily on re-creating stories from actual events,\textsuperscript{179} it is conceivable that in TNI Wiggers has interpreted a “real” reaction by women. The mother figure is an important one in Javanese (and Indonesian) culture, so the idea of abandoning a child was probably abhorrent to many women and difficult for them to conceptualise. Isah’s role for most of Wiggers’ lengthy tjerita is as a mother, providing a counter to Dasima’s behaviour.

Of course it is impossible to tell how a female audience may have responded to these stories, but I cannot think that the response would have been positive. The female reading audience was drawn from the comparatively better educated and Malay speaking Peranakan Chinese and Indo women, the very communities with the strongest ties to the njai. It seems likely from Van der Veur’s data\textsuperscript{180} that at least the Indo women were conscious of their origins. For their mothers to be represented in such generally negative ways cannot have endeared the tjerita to a female audience.

\textsuperscript{179} Many scholars have commented upon the tendency to re-present events from newspaper and court reports in fiction. C.W. Watson, “Some Preliminary Remarks on the Antecedents of Modern Indonesian Literature” in \textit{BKJ} No 127, 1977, p423. Watson lists translations and elaboration of actual events as the two main sources of reading matter at the turn of the century. The majority of the early njai stories are usually framed by “This is a story which really happened not long ago in ...”.
\textsuperscript{180} Chapter 2 deals with the feelings of racial inferiority of one of Van der Veur’s Indo informants.
From *Hikajat* to *Tjerita*

As an historical discourse, it is perplexing that more interest has not been taken in this early popular literature. Watson and Sykorsky and Kwee\(^1\) speak of literature in Low or Sino Malay only as an antecedent to modern Indonesian literature, but disregard the works as part of the transition from traditional forms of literature, such as the *hikajat*. This transition to more modern, individualistic works is apparent in the early *tjerita* and merits some attention.

The early Indies literary figures like Wiggers and Oei probably learnt their Malay from traditional literature as well as from association with Malay speakers. Their *tjerita* demonstrate at least an acquaintance with the traditions of the early literature. Salmon notes that until at least the beginning of the twentieth century a number of *Peranakan* Chinese could still read and write the Jawi script used for traditional literature.\(^2\) The experience of a past literary tradition combined with more modern writing and printing techniques associated with journalism, gave authors the tools and an audience which was ready for a break with traditional forms of literature. The "*tjerita*" appears to herald the beginnings of a new approach to written literature.

Although the verb "*tjeritakan*" (to tell a story) was common enough in manuscript literature, the noun "*tjerita*" does not appear to have been used in the titles of traditional literature and this is the distinction I make in the heading 'From *hikajat* to *tjerita*'. "*Tjerita*" as "the story of" begins to make its appearance in place of "*hikajat*" in the work of the *peranakan* Chinese in the late nineteenth century. The first translation of a Chinese novel was *Boekoe tjerita Tjioe Koan Tek anak Tjioe Boen Giok, terkarang oleh soeatoe orang Tjina*, a title regarded by Salmon as being quite un-Chinese,\(^3\) but one which Malay readers, if not familiar with, would not find strange.

---


\(^2\) Salmon, Op Cit, p16

\(^3\) Ibid, p21
“Tjerita” was used frequently in book titles throughout the late nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century. It was used extensively, although not exclusively, in association with fictionalised documentaries, that is stories based on real events. There does appear to be a correlation between the appearance of tjerita and stories which insist on their reality and veracity to achieve realism.

I have already referred to the use of subtitles in the tjerita as a means of asserting their truth, or realism. The subtitles are made up of four elements which seem to be pointing the way to characterising the tjerita as a genre in its own right. The elements are: “This is a story/which really happened/not long ago/in ...”, that is: story/actuality/contemporary/place.

In the first phrase the author establishes that it is a type of fiction, something which he composed (terkarang oleh/oleh ...). In the second phrase the author signifies the relationship of his story to reality. This is a significant break with the hikajat which made no such claim to reality, instead it is usually characterised by an “...illusory world of mythology and fantasy...”. The use of a recent time marker in the third phrase provides further “proof” of the realism for which the author strives. The last phrase, like the third phrase of time, is proof of place. I have heard Dr Coppel refer to these subtitles as indicators of a type of local history. This seems an apt description of the author’s intention to signify realism to his audience.

The life of the tjerita was fairly limited, as may be expected in what became a transitional genre. The use of tjerita in book titles decreases markedly during the second decade of this century as authors gain the confidence to move away from the more formal constraints associated with traditional literature. Titles become

---

185 Dr Coppel presented a paper at the “Women in Asia” conference held at Melbourne University in 1993
less stereotyped and more individual. By the 1930s I could count only some half dozen titles in Salmon's bibliography of Chinese Malay works which still used "tjerita...".

As a transitional genre we can detect some features of traditional Malay literature in the earlier tjerita and I believe that this is also a characteristic of the genre. Towards the end of the 1920s, like the term tjerita itself, these features decrease in frequency. Professor A. Wahab Ali has given a comprehensive listing of features of the hikajat.186 Some of these features occur in the tjerita. The most notable, through their absence, are characters of mythological descent and human characters associated with royal courts/descent. These have been replaced with heroes, heroines and villains who may have conceivably been the reader's neighbour.

The features from traditional literature which commonly occur are: set expressions, formulaic descriptions, sub-plots and overlapping plots using a large number of characters, and foreshadowing.187 I propose to use three of the earliest tjerita njai to show the occurrence of these features and then briefly contrast them with publications from the 1930s. The earliest tjerita I have chosen are: Tjerita Njai Dasima (TND) (G. Francis, 1896), Tjerita Njai Alimah (TNA) (Oei Soei Tiong, 1904) and Tjerita Njai Isah (TNI) (Wiggers, 1905).

Francis is an interesting author with whom to commence a discussion of traditional literature. He was English - the only Englishman in my sample. He was from a prominent Indies family, educated, a Malay speaker and he was an editor of various newspapers188 . Unfortunately little more is known about Francis, however, from the evidence in TND it appears that he was familiar with English literature and its conventions and probably had some knowledge of Malay traditional literature. He may

186 A. Wahab Ali, Op cit, Chap 2
187 Ibid, pp17-33
188 Harry Aveling, G. Francis: Njai Dasima, Monash University Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Working Paper No 46, 1988, p1
have read some Malay hikajats as part of his education in Malay, there being little else available at the time.

In my selection of stories, Francis is the only author to have used “hikajat” to describe his story. This occurs on the first page of the text where the title is repeated as _Hikajat Njai Dasima_. By the twentieth century this word in the title had all but vanished in original Malay literature of the Indies.

Francis also begins his hikajat in a very traditional way with:
"Alkaisah (sic) terseboet satoe perkataan..." (The story is told of...). This is indicative of the stylised and formulaic phrases associated with a literature read aloud, rather than read privately. Interestingly it is the only example of such phrases in _TND_. After the title and the opening phrase, Francis moves away from Malay literary traditions, demonstrating greater familiarity with his own English cultural heritage.

Oei is even more traditional than Francis and opens _TNA_ with:
"Sabermoela di tjeriterakan oleh jang ampoenja karangan ini..." (To begin, it is related by the owner of the story...). ‘The owner of the story’ does not turn out to be an unknown member of the elite or the literati, but a poor, unemployed (and presumably illiterate) peasant who is named Nasiman. Of the three stories, _TNA_ shows the greatest resemblance to older literature. Punctuation is largely confined to traditional markers, with maka most often used to indicate sentence and paragraph breaks. For example, the introductory sentence is forty lines long. Commas, Maka and Kendatipoen are the only signals for breaks in the text. In contrast, and despite its earlier date of publication, _TND_ is paragraphed in quite a modern way, suggestive of exposure to Western literature. Paragraphs are separated by double spacing and are indented and Francis does not use any of the traditional paragraph markers, such as hata and maka. Furthermore, his dialogue is constructed in a confident manner with full use of colons and inverted commas to open and close direct speech. Francis’ text is also straightforward. He does not digress from his topic and arranges his story in chronological sequence. The
comparative tightness in the structure of the plot is reflected in paragraphs and sentences, both of which are correspondingly short.

If we compare *TND* with Wiggers’ work, *TNI*, we find that Wiggers makes greater use of traditional punctuation markers, even though paragraphs are indented. The following words are sometimes used to show sentence and paragraph beginnings: *alketsah* (also *alkaesah*), *hata maka*, *maka*, *setelah soelah maka*, *arkian* and *sjahdan*. These markers occur throughout the five volumes at irregular intervals. There appears to be no particular method in Wiggers’ use of these words, except that most occur at the beginning of a paragraph or sentence.

In contrast to Francis, Wiggers is unsure of how to present his dialogue. Occasionally he uses inverted commas at the beginning of direct speech, sometimes at both the beginning and the end, but more often he uses no indication except *djawab(lah) katanja*, or *berkatalah*. Oei on the other hand indicates dialogue only with the use of a dash (-). It is often difficult to determine who is speaking as the dialogue can be amongst three or four characters with no indications other than context to guide the reader. Oei’s dialogue is often in Javanese, in contrast to the remainder of his story which is in Malay. His characters, realistically, spoke Javanese amongst themselves, using Malay only when the Dutch were present. It seems evident that at this time representing direct speech was quite a new technique, probably associated with the attempt at making stories realistic.

Descriptive schema are used in the early *njai* literature to represent people, their reactions and events. Sweeny notes that schematic descriptions were used in traditional oral and literary forms for a listening audience who had only one opportunity to hear and understand the story. This form of descriptive writing is continued into the early decades of the twentieth century. Of the three authors, Oei relies on formulae most

---

heavily for many of his descriptions. Although some of the words are new, his description of Alimah will be familiar to scholars of traditional literature: "...amat elok parasnja, seperti djoega satoe bidadari jang datang dari Kaijangan...bibirnja seperti bidji boeah ketjapi di belah doea.... toeboehnja langsing dan lendjang ...warna koelitnja poetih koening laksana koelit boeah langsep jang sedeng masaknja...".\textsuperscript{190}

Wiggers' portrayal of Isah uses a traditional format with more European ideas of beauty: "Orangnja langsing, pinggangnja lentik, moekanja sedeng tida pandjang dan tida boender, idoengnja bagoes tiroes, moeloetnja ketjil, bibirnja sedang dan merah, koelitnja poeti koening seperti beloedroe jang aloes, ramboetnja tebal, alisnja di gambar..." \textsuperscript{191} She is slim, her waist is curved, her face is just right, neither long nor round, no longer the fourteen day moon. Her nose is aquiline and her mouth and lips are rather smaller than the split pomegranate of traditional Malay beauty. Despite the individual differences in this description, the format closely follows that of traditional literature.

The description of Dasima is remarkable for its brevity and may be indicative of Francis' greater familiarity with English literary conventions. She is described only as beautiful, light skinned, long haired and with a willingness to learn all a woman's duties. What is common in all three descriptions is the lightness of skin and overall beauty. Whether this can be related to Dutch racial prejudice is difficult to say. A light skin was equally important in traditional literature as a sign of an elite woman, one who had not become tanned from working in the fields.

\textsuperscript{190} TNA, pp4-5. "...her face was very lovely, like a fairy from heaven...her mouth was like a lute split in two... she was of slim build and was tall...her skin was light like the skin of a ripe langsep (langsat)..."

\textsuperscript{191} TNL p13. "She was slim with a curved waistline, her face was just right, neither long nor round, her nose was nice and sharp, her mouth was small, her lips were not thick and red, her skin was pale like smooth velvet, her hair was thick, her eyebrows looked as though they had been painted on."
Like much of the traditional literature, two of the authors make extensive use of subplots which are interwoven into the main plot. This often involves the introduction of a completely new cast of characters who appear without explanation and sometimes within a short period of the ending. *TNI* is by far the longest work in this selection, consisting of some 1600 pages. It contains a large number of subplots, all of which are eventually linked to the main plot, much to the relief of the reader. The reader leaves one story and enters another without the least idea of the connection between the two. In *TNI*, we leave Volume 1 with Verkerk installed in a new position as an overseer on a sugar plantation. Volume 2 commences with the story of the Abrams family who are quite new to the reader. The relationship between the two volumes is apparent only after some 100 pages of text and it is evident that the Abrams story commenced probably at the same time as the story of Verkerk and Isah in Volume 1. Similarly, within 20 pages of the end of Volume 2 we begin the story of Oom Florimon and Beautij. His story concludes in Volume 3 and we return to the Abrams and Verkerk, eventually realising that Florimon is the *doekoen* who Nj Abrams uses to cure Verkerk. As suddenly as he appears, Florimon disappears, taking no further part in the story.

*TNA* likewise introduces new characters and stories without warning. After progressing through the story of Alimah for two volumes, a third of the way through volume 3 we suddenly become acquainted with Entjik Amat from Bandjar. He eventually makes the acquaintance of Njai Alimah and we realise his purpose is to tempt Alimah away from toean Lort. He doesn’t succeed and we then return to the main story, knowing that Amat will re-appear as the narrator has left him, trying to find a way to take Alimah back to Borneo. Half way through the third volume we unexpectedly meet Saidah and her son Kong Tjin Hong and learn of their life up to this point. Saidah is a masseuse and it is in this capacity that she meets Amat. Within the space of one page she has agreed to act as a go-between for Amat. In the last forty pages a cast of new characters appears, all of whom are involved in, or are the victims of, banditry. The purpose of this
new story about bandits is to effect closure of the story of Amat
and this allows Alimah and Lort to live in happiness.

Foreshadowing through the use of omens and dreams is used
extensively in all three of these early *tjerita*. According to A.
Wahab Ali, foreshadowing was used to generate suspense and
signpost future action. This would enable an audience to
anticipate the next episode of an oral performance. He also
indicates that signs and symbols (omens, dreams) were used to
reunite the main characters, allowing the story to continue.192

By the time these *tjerita* were published, a reading public, as
opposed to a listening audience, had been established. Thus
foreshadowing appears to have been used as a device to generate
suspense, rather than to signpost future action. Most of the
omens are frightening and concern disasters which are about to
happen. In *TND*, Mr W. dreams of a black snake which kills
Dasima, a clear indication of their impending separation. Isah
also dreams of a snake which causes her and Wimpie to fall into
the river, almost drowning. The meaning of this omen is very
clear in the light of Isah’s attempted suicide by drowning the very
next day. In *TNA*, Nasiman dreams he is in a boat which sails in a
large forest, then suddenly it is in the middle of the ocean and
then it flies into the sky. The narrator tells his readers that the
omen is clearly very bad and three days later Nasiman dies as a
result of a *doekoen*’s sorcery.

*TNI* in particular makes great use of omens, both good and bad.
The reader is usually alerted to impending doom, although its
exact nature is never revealed until the actual moment of the
disaster. There are mystical balls of violet light193 rolling
through villages signifying an epidemic, a turtledove which
portends the arrival of Isah’s *djodo* (love match) and dreams of
lost rings, and rings which burn and bring sickness.

192 A. Wahab Ali, Op Cit, p23
193 The narrator explains that the old people say it is a *pulung*, something
which takes souls and brings bad tidings, *TNI*, Vol 5, p198
Like punctuation markers, the occurrence of supernatural omens and lengthy sub-plots seems to decline as the century progresses. In comparing these three early *tjerita* with two stories published some twenty years later, we find that not only has *tjerita* disappeared from the titles, but also traditional literary devices are absent. In *Pertjintahan Jang Tida Kekal (PJTK)* (Radja Waka Mega, 1923) there is only one instance of *sjahdan* and by 1932 in Dahlia’s *Kasopanan Timoer (KT)* (1932), there are no traditional punctuation words.

Descriptive passages in these more recent *tjerita* bear no resemblance to traditional formulae. Reference is to modern ideas. For example, women can be described as having a shape like a guitar. There also appears to be a difference arising from the gender of the author. Dahlia (Nj Oen Hong Seng Tan) has a completely different set of criteria to describe her women. Beauty is secondary to other qualities and conditions. Her heroine, Kiok Nio, has a face which “...*tida bisa di bilang djelek...*” (cannot be said to be ugly). Her body is “*montok*” (plump), her face “*segar*” (fresh) and “...*ada menoendjoek njata bahoea itoe gadis ada berbadan sehat.*” (it is obvious that this girl is healthy).

Research into this complex area is incomplete, however, the indications are that in this transitional literature of the *tjerita* we can detect the movement away from traditional ways with words. Of course, not all the traditions were derived from Malay literature. Kwee reveals that the use of poems within the text follows the pattern of Chinese novels. In *TNA* Oei makes extensive use of *sairs* to make moral points for the reader and in one case an advertisement for a bookshop is interwoven into the *sair*.

Also in the Chinese literary tradition is the use of letters between lovers. Interestingly, the only letters to appear in my selection of texts is in *PJTK* by an author calling him/herself Radja

---

194 *PJTK*, p4
195 Kwee Op Cit, p237a
196 Kwee, Op Cit, p237a
Waka Mega. Radja Waka Mega could be either a Peranakan or priboemi author. The evidence pointing to his/her origins as a Peranakan is based on peranakan publication and bookshop connections. The book was published by a Peranakan publisher ("Probitas") and the copy I have was purchased from the Lie Tiong Goan Bookshop in Batavia and subsequently found its way to a Chinese lending library, Dhu Su Kwan in Surakarta. However, the story deals with a Sumatran-Dutch relationship where the priboemi man returns to the family and Islamic fold. The author's sympathies may lead one to conclude that he/she was a priboemi.

**Traders in Words**

In these complex relationships between literature-history-society-politics (and the network does not end here) where is the author? Is s/he dead, as Barthes\(^{197}\) would have us believe, disappearing between the texts? Or does it matter who is speaking if, as Foucault suggests, the questions should relate to the reader's appropriation of the text, rather than the author's, whose function can only limit the proliferation of meaning\(^{198}\). I suggest that as one of the producers, the author is intimately involved with the construction of the relative reality of the text. The space from which the author writes is not, as Haraway remarks, some unmarked space\(^{199}\) but is characterised by such things as gender, age, race, class and sexuality as well as social conditions and history. While a text's meaning is located in the discourses and events surrounding its historical production,\(^{200}\) this should not be interpreted as an attempt to privilege the author, but to indicate that her/his own biography is one amongst many which affects the language of the text. Thus, the author is not dead. While the weight of her/his authority is no longer seen

---

200 Pearce, Op Cit, p24
to bear down and foreclose opportunities for the reader's own understandings, the author is present, albeit unobtrusively.

The trade in words was the province of both the educated through the print media and the illiterate through performance. The link between these groups was their ability to understand Malay. Like the traders or producers, they were drawn mainly from the non-priboemi population, as they were the largest group of Malay speakers. They were also the subject of the Chinese or Low Malay literature. A major part of the literature concerning njais was authored by men who were the progeny of a priboemi/foreigner relationship and who could conceivably have been in a priboemi/other relationship themselves. If they did not have first hand knowledge about njais, then no doubt there would have been stories handed down to them. Many of these authors were living the lives of at least some of the people about whom they wrote.

Almost all the authors of tjerita njai were men. They wrote, as I have pointed out earlier, from a gendered viewpoint. They wrote about and for the njais. Most of the works, as "The Story of...", are biographical. It is the story as heard by the author and owned by the narrator. As Indo or peranakan authors they also wrote as members of a distinct social group or race. They were subject to the discriminatory policies of the Dutch colonial government and had their own culturally inspired stereotypes of other races. The reader will therefore find her/himself positioned in different ways: at times against the dominant ideology or colonial power, against the priboemi, against the foreign oriental and sometimes against the njai. Readers may find themselves simultaneously in two or more positions and these positions will not be the same for each reader (or listener).

Even though this positioning implies the superiority of the authorial voice, the reader does not necessarily have to take up these positions, or to take them up in the same way as other

---

201 My use of Chinese Malay indicates the informal language of this literature, rather than the ethnic origins of the authors. Indos also wrote in Low or Chinese Malay.
readers. The reader also comes with individual cultural understandings and values, thus the producer of words is not necessarily the producer of meanings. The trade between the author and the audience varies in accordance with their desires and needs. The values which are attached to particular words are individual. Meaning is therefore a tenuous and unstable commodity, the value of which constantly changes to suit the market. Meanings to Western late twentieth century readers are obviously going to be different from meanings for those for whom the work was woven. Neither will meaning be a stable commodity between you, my reader, and me.
CHAPTER FOUR

SOESA(H) - TROUBLE AND WOE IN HINDIA

Thematic Commonalities in the Tjerita Njai

There are some themes which are common in the plots of the tjerita njai. In this chapter I intend to explore some of the more significant themes in my general endeavour to uncover the representations of the njai.

The narratives of the tjerita njai centre on relations between foreign men and priboemi and Peranakan Chinese women from the turn of the century until the outbreak of World War II, a period of considerable social change. Like many other stories of this period, the tjerita njai highlight the tension between the value systems of traditional Javanese and Chinese cultures and modern, Western ways. The tjerita become vehicles for the authors’ particular views on subjects such as education, arranged marriages and in a few cases, the hegemony of the Dutch colonisers. However, it is the theme of racially mixed relationships and romantic love - the djodo factor, which is the most significant in all the tjerita. The playing out of these conflicts within the tjerita provides the narrator with the opportunity to advise the reader about acceptable moral behaviour and the consequences of transgressing societal norms and the law.

Although the tjerita njai are about illicit sexual relations which cross boundaries of bangsa, at the same time they are concerned with morality and justice. According to Quinn, in the Javanese novel morality is concerned with harmonious order in social life.202 He makes the point that in the Javanese romances, closure is effected when harmony is restored. This occurs after a couple mutually recognise their djodo in each other. A period of ambivalence is followed by separation and then reunion.203

---

202 Quinn, Op Cit, p46
203 Ibid, p56
the *tjerita njai*, rather than the initial ambivalence of the Javanese novels, there are difficulties due to the differences of *bangsa*. As I have indicated in Chapter One, this difference can never be fully resolved. It means that any union will involve violation of moral and religious order. How this is handled in the *tjerita njai* narratives depends upon expressions of love (*tjinta*) and lust (*nafsoe*/*napsoe*, *birahi*). Transgression of boundaries can ultimately be forgiven (although not in the religious sense), provided there is true love between the *njai* and her *toean*. Where lust predominates, the relationship is transitory and the transgressions of the *njai* and any others involved in the relationship must be punished. All the *tjerita* end with rewards for the virtuous and punishment for those considered to be immoral and unwilling to change their demonstrably evil ways.

Between the "just" ending of the *tjerita* and the initial meeting between the *njai* and *toean*, there is trouble, difficulty and woe, commonly represented in the *tjerita* by the term *soesa*(*h)*. *Soesa* is intimately connected with the transgression of the boundaries of *bangsa*, *adat* and *agama* by the *njai*.

**Resisting Daughters - The Feminisation of Soesa**

*Soesa* is used to describe conditions of despair, difficulty, danger, need and tension. In the *tjerita njai*, *soesa* centres on relations of power in a social world where Western values challenge traditional ways of thinking. In choosing romantic love with a foreigner, even though as his *djodo* it is pre-destined, the daughter subverts the customary moral and religious order of her *bangsa*. She resists her father's authority to select her future husband, bringing into question the traditional system of arranged marriages. The father is publicly disempowered by his daughter's refusal to accept her arranged suitor. The daughter's action places her beyond her father's authority and this is confirmed by fathers who subsequently refuse to acknowledge their daughters as their own. In *KMPDL*, Ros Mina's father, we are told, "...*tida maoe kenal sebagi anak lagi...*"204 and in *SI*, Entjm

---

204 "...no longer acknowledges her as his daughter...", *KMPDL*, p8
Giok Nio says of her husband: “Ia tida maoe denger lagi itoe nama dan ia pandang Liang Nio boekan iapoenja anak.”205 The daughters have upset the established order by transgressing the boundaries of adat and/or agama. They both reject and are rejected by their bangsa.

As the harbingers of disorder, njais become both the recipients and the intermediaries for soesa. The narrator attributes the misfortunes which befall the njai and those around her, to her actions or omissions, the very act of being who she is. Women who disregard societal norms become transgressive symbols with the potential to cause soesa.

While all njais in the tjerita bring some form of soesa to their family and/or community, the nature of the trouble, its resolution and whether or not the njai can be regarded as subversive very much depends upon the individual njai’s character. In the tjerita njai, her nature relates to the quality of her relationship with the toean. Those whose relationship is predestined as djodos remain faithful and are finally relieved of their burden of soesa. Order is restored, although it is not the order of Javanese cosmology, but rather the order of a Western-style happy marriage, even though the couple may not be legally husband and wife. In the two tjerita (TNI and TNA) where the njais remain faithful, they find their eventual happiness by leaving their bangsa completely and going to live in Europe with their toean.

Njais who enter a relationship based on lust, whether it be of a sexual or material nature, remain troubled. They are the victims of their own greed and lust. They are not subversive as their transgressions merely serve to highlight the underlying traditional social values, thus maintaining the status quo.206

It is obvious that there are at least two points of view about relationships which are being expressed through the tjerita njai.

205 “He no longer wishes to hear her name and he doesn’t recognise Liang Nio as his daughter.”, SL p42
On one hand there are authors who champion the cause of romantic love as a basis for relationships/marriage. I have used both words because it is clear that the two priboemi women, Isah (TNI) and Alimah (TNA), who find their djodo in a Dutchman, are not legally married. They do go through a ritual to mark their new status as njais, however, the ceremony is neither Christian nor Muslim. Nevertheless both women regard themselves as wives. On the other hand there are authors who appear to be strongly against racially mixed relationships. The njais in their stories are either evil women, like Marsina (KNM) and Ros Mina (KMPDI), whose toeans eventually return to their own bangsa, or are like Njai Sida who embraces Islam and marries the Muslim, priboemi hero.

In all cases the narrators’ use of the term soesa signals the transgression of boundaries and is an important device through which he/she imposes interpretations of morally correct behaviour.

The njai-toean relationship is not one which parents seek for their daughters as it is not considered to bring good fortune. The narrator of SL predicts the outcome of the njai-toean relationship: “Saja rasa jang ini perhoeboengan tida aken mengasih keberoentoengan...”.207 Good fortune (entoeng) stands in opposition to soesa. There is general apprehension about future good fortune once daughters’ decisions to abandon their bangsa, adat and agama become public, as evidenced in TNI. Andja sends three envoys to inform the loerah of Isah’s broken engagement. On the way they discuss the loerah’s reaction, fearing that he will not only be angry with Andja and his family, but also with those who bring the news. They are concerned that if the loerah becomes their enemy, he will find ways to avenge himself. Relations of power clearly favour the loerah and there is a real possibility that he will take revenge and cause soesa for all those involved.208 This possibility of the powerful taking

207 “I don’t think this relationship will bring good fortune..”, SL, p24
208 The envoys say they fear the loerah will “boewat bondong.” TNL, p139. This means "pekerjaan orang kaya hendak ditiru oleh orang
revenge is realised in *TNA* when the *loerah*, having failed in his attempt to stop the union between Alimah and toean Lort, takes his revenge on the father, Nasiman.

**Soesa and Shame**

The condition of *soesa* functions as retribution for the transgression of the customary norms of *bangsa*. It is the daughters who are represented pursuing the relationship with a *toean*, thus it is they who are seen as the transgressors and the cause of *soesa*. It is their decision and there is a price to be paid, however, it is invariably the father who initially bears the brunt of shame (*maloe*) and the resulting *soesa*. It is his name and his family who are shamed by his daughter's rejection of *adat*, *bangsa* and *agama*, a pre-condition for her association with the *toean*.

Shame is very significant in Malay society. A loss of face, or pride, is often cause for revenge. It is a common theme in traditional Malay literature and often there is only one form of retribution - the death of the perpetrator. In *Hikajat Hang Tuah*, Hang Jebat pays with his life for shaming the Sultan of Melaka. Even Hang Jebat's son is not safe with the King ordering that he be thrown into the sea. Shaming of the father figure in the *tjerita njai* also has serious consequences.

In *SL*, the *soesa* for Kim Giok begins when his daughter, Liang Nio, becomes a *see-ie* (*njai*) to Anton. Anton is the son of the evil plantation owner Boe Tat Hin, who is also Kim Giok's employer. Liang Nio and Anton do not obey the wishes of their parents to end their affair, even though Liang is conscious of both her "duty" to her father and the potential for *soesa*. Narrator and friend, Chen Wen Zwan counsels her: "*Ia ada hak aken minta ini dari anaknya, sedeng ia hadepken kesoesahan begito e besar jang*

---


disebabken lantaran ajahnja Anton poenja perboeatan.."210 The soesa falls upon the family very quickly, "Seperti siang dan malem berobah...".211 One day they were on cloud nine, "... tapi besok nasib bisa banting kita di atas batoe karang jang keras."212

Liang’s rejection of her duty of obedience signals the defeat of her father. She moves in with Anton, bringing shame to her family and even greater misery (sengsara). In the eyes of her father she is the transgressor and the cause of their difficulties because she has shamed the family by "... bikin roesak namanja kitapoenja toeroenan dan melanggar kita poenja adat-istiadat...".213 Kim Giok suffers retribution from Anton’s father for his lack of authority over Liang Nio. Boe Tat Hin blames Kim Giok for Liang Nio’s transgressions. He fires Kim Giok and refuses to pay his pension. The family becomes poverty stricken and is forced to move to a dilapidated hut.

Si Min (KMPDI) is more naive than Liang Nio when she begins her life as a njai. She is 14 when she starts work as a seamstress. This brings her into public (male) view. All the womanisers (hidoeng poetih) try to bed her, without success. The narrator tells us that she is an "... anak prampoean jang koerang pikir ..." (a stupid daughter).214 She is seduced with help (djembatan) from Hadji Doelah, who uses magic to assist the Baba hartawan215 have his way with her (dapetken maksoednja). Min becomes his bini moeda,216 thus she becomes the cause of the family disgrace. Her strict Muslim father (orang toea ada anoet Agama Islam dengen

---

210 He [her father] has the right to ask this of his child, yet he faces great suffering because of Anton’s father’s deeds. SL p36
211. “Like day turning into night...”, SL p31
212. "...but the next day our fate flung us onto a hard coral reef." SL p31
213. "...brought disgrace upon the family name (or ruined our ancestral name) and transgressed our customs and traditions...", SL p42
214 KMPDI p7
215 Wealthy Chinese man
216 Usually bini moeda means a second wife, however, in this case, Ros Mina was his mistress and therefore was easily turned out in favour of a new lover.
setia) is furious (sanget moerka) and is greatly shamed (sanget maloe) by her behaviour.217

‘Good women’, like Njai Isah and Njai Alimah, enter into relationships with Dutch men out of ‘pure love’. Although they cause their families shame which results in trouble and woe, they are the “heroines” of their tjerita and, unlike the njais whose intentions are dishonourable, their destiny is one of good fortune.

The stories of Isah and Alimah have a number of striking similarities: both Isah and Alimah are only children,218 both daughters are promised initially to a relative of the loerah and later find their djodo (and oentoeng) in a well placed Dutchman who is their father’s employer. The toeans are “in love” with their Javanese njais and, sorcery notwithstanding, both the njai and toean remain faithful to each other. Not unexpectedly, both tjerita have happy endings for the njai. However in both cases, Isah and Alimah enter into the relationship at a cost to both themselves and their families.

Like the previous stories, the soesa in these two tjerita results from the dishonour which is brought to the families as a result of the transgression of the boundaries of bangsa. In TNI, Isah’s father forthrightly tells Verkerk, his employer, that he is of a different bangsa, so that if he gives Isah to him, she will be a gundik (concubine) because he will not marry her, furthermore he is not permitted by his religion to give his daughter to a toean.219 It is clear from Andja’s reaction that he is aware of the consequences of such a relationship and he has no intention of transgressing Islamic customs and law.

In TNA, it is the Dutchman Lort who raises the problem of bangsa with Alimah. He is concerned that her parents will not give

217 KMPDL, p7
218 Only children are unusual in Indonesian society. Quinn has commented upon this phenomena in Javanese novels, explaining that it may be a literary convention or a tradition. Stories are elegantly simple with a small family. Quinn, Op Cit, p97
219 Literally Mr for foreigners, but with the connotation of a non-Muslim, an infidel.
permission for their marriage "...sebab lain bangsa..." and because Alimah is an only child. The questions of religion and bangsa which usually plague parents are not aired by Nasiman or Mbok. Alimah as they are totally unaware of their daughter's feelings until it is too late and she has already spent the night with Lort. The circumstances which culminate in Alimah becoming a njai are unusual and too lengthy to reproduce here. Alimah is kidnapped by a prijaji, Mas Midi and rescued by a pirate. She tells the pirate that "... sesoenggoehnja hamba njainja toean Lort..." and asks him to take her home to toean Lort in Djapanan. At this point she has never visited his house and she is not his njai, except in her thoughts. She spends the night with Lort, placing her father, Nasiman, in a dilemma. He had previously promised that Alimah could marry bangsa apa (any race) as long as she recovered from her illness. He must now balance this promise with his consent to the engagement between Alimah and the loerah's son.

The objections to this union which are left unvoiced by Nasiman, are conveyed through the loerah, Singoredjo. In choosing to become a Dutchman's njai, Alimah has brought shame to her future father-in-law and he refers to her as si soendal (a prostitute). Nasiman sees no way out of his difficulties: "Akoe ini serba soesa, sana sala, sini sala, minggat sekali nanti soeda abis prakara." His dilemma represents the difficulties of living in a transitional society and the tension between Javanese traditional values and Western modernity. He is no longer sure of his authority, or indeed of where his loyalties should lie - with his traditional village headman, or with his new found employer - the Dutchman Lort.

Nasiman is in trouble, no matter which way he turns. He does not wish to renege on his promise for fear of offending his employer,

220 "...because of difference in race...", TNA, p37
221 Mbok is a form of address for older Javanese women of humble origin. Echols and Shadily, Op Cit, p242
222 "...in fact I am toean Lort's Njai...", TNA, p122
223 "I am in all sorts of trouble, this way is wrong, that way is wrong, the only way out is to flee", TNA, p135
Lort. On the other hand, Singoredjo is “... memang terlaloe djadi orang marah marah bikin maloe orang...”. Nasiman also fears retribution from this quarter. In reality the decision is no longer his to make as Alimah has pre-empted her father’s authority. Alimah is secure with her djodo who, as a Dutchman and symbol of colonial authority, is above reproach from the loerah. Nasiman is the weak link. He has been divested of his authority as a father and because he refuses to publicly acknowledge any shame, he is left to bear the brunt of the loerah’s anger. The loerah tells Mbok Alimah that Nasiman is: “... bodoh, dan tiada menaroek maloe.” It is the loerah, as the senior male and father of the fiance, Kasdrim, who is shamed by Alimah’s actions and takes steps to re-assert his authority.

In a similar vein, Njai Isah chooses the life of a njai in preference to marriage to the loerah’s nephew. In these two tjerita, both fathers had already contracted illustrious Javanese marriages for their daughters and later reneged on these agreements. As was the case in SI and KMPDI, it is father figures who are offended and are shamed by the loss of their authority and standing in their communities.

Revenge, Soesa and Allah

The origin of soesa is the daughters’ refusals to acquiesce to their parents’ wishes and to conform to the customs and beliefs of their communities. The shame which the family has to bear is a direct result of this decision. Shame is represented as a dangerous state in Javanese (and Malay) society, turning normally decent, law abiding men and women away from Allah and allowing them to give full rein to their hawa napsoe. Shaming one’s family and community brings retribution, however, this is not the province of man or woman. Retribution rightfully belongs to Allah. To interfere in this process through personally seeking revenge can only result in more soesa.

\[224 \quad \text{“... a person who is easily angered will cause others to be shamed....”, TNA, p134}\]
\[225 \quad \text{“...stupid and knows no shame.”, TNA, p134}\]
In *TNA*, the *loerah*’s family is shamed by Alimah’s decision to reject the marriage arranged with his son, Kasdrim. Kasdrim is represented from the outset as hedonistic and quick to resort to nefarious means to achieve his goal. However, the *loerah* himself was above reproach until the day he saw Alimah lying in Lort’s arms. He is shamed when he learns that Alimah has rejected his son in favour of becoming Lort’s *njai*. From that time the *loerah* becomes a vengeful man.

The degree and extent of *soesa* is directly proportional to the *haloes/hawa napsoe* binary oppositions. In *TNI* the apprehension expressed by Andja’s envoys, to which I have already referred, is not realised because of the good character of Isah, Andja and the *loerah*. They all are found to be *haloes* and act in accordance with *adat* and *agama*.

Conversely, revenge is in the heart of the spurned Tjarik Ranoe, the *loerah*’s nephew. He plans to kill Isah and Verkerk at a celebration arranged to celebrate Isah’s seventh month of pregnancy. At the last moment he is talked out of revenge by his uncle, Loerah Wongso Pawiro. Wongso Pawiro is particularly concerned that he would be dismissed as *loerah*, a position which his family had held for generations. The *loerah* dissuades Ranoe from his plan by reminding him of the shame which will be visited upon his family and by appealing to him as a Muslim:

“...*segala apa jang telah di takdirkan Allah tida dapet di tolak...*”

Ranoe avoids further *soesa* by turning away from his path of revenge and towards Allah.

In contrast, Loerah Singoredja (*TNA*) plunges his family into greater difficulties through “...*nafsoenja jang djahat, laloe moekanja merah dan menggigit giginja.*” After endeavouring to stop the wedding of Alimah and Lort through disrupting

---

226 Gentle, refined, polite, cultured/base appetites, uncontrolled passion
227 “...everything which has been predestined by Allah cannot be put asunder...”, *TNI* p204
228 “evil passions, then his face became red and he clenched his teeth.”, *TNA*, p171
Alimah’s departure and the attempted murder of an official, he is dismissed as loerah. This provides him with even greater motivation for revenge. The loerah attributes all their misfortunes to Alimah’s (and by association Nasiman’s) rejection of Islam.

Alimah has “...soedah meninggalkan igamanja islam dan toeroet igama kristen...” and in consenting to Alimah’s illicit relationship, the narrator represents Nasiman as a man who has also rejected his bangsa. Furthermore, Nasiman does nothing to dispel the loerah’s anger, insulting Loerah Singoredjo by likening his manners to those of a dog. Nasiman gets drunk at Alimah’s “wedding” and frequently drinks alcohol when he visits Lort’s house. The loerah describes Nasiman as someone who “... soedah morthat dalam fikiranja, pendek ia pandang sama lain bangsa tida maoe pandang sama bangsanja sendiri.”

Undoubtedly soesa had its origins in Alimah’s decision to follow her own inclinations. She is seen to be the originator of the soesa. She is no longer a Muslim and has dragged her uneducated and peasant father down with her. Nasiman’s refusal to be shamed has resulted in his slimpang (deviation from the right path).

It is the loerah who is shamed. Instead of waiting for Allah’s retribution, he seeks revenge, thus bringing about his own demise. Singoredjo engineers Nasiman’s death through the use of sorcery and Kasdrim attempts to kill Lort and is arrested, jailed and dies. The loerah goes mad with grief and he is confined to an asylum. The narrator’s rather lengthy homily to the reader shows that retribution belongs to Allah and he will ensure that punishment is appropriate: “... dalam kitabpon ada bilang: “gigi ganti gigi.”

When the narrator sympathises with Kasdrim, we are reminded that soesa was caused by a woman:

---

229 “...left Islam and become a Christian...”, TNA, p172
230 “has forsaken his religion in his thoughts, in short he thinks like a different race, he doesn’t want to think like his own race.”, TNA, p172
231 “...in the Koran is the saying: “a tooth for a tooth.”, TNA, p215
Families, particularly fathers, are made to suffer when daughters become njais as it is a father's responsibility to ensure his daughter is firmly entrenched in the discourses of adat and agama of his bangsa. However, the njai herself does not escape and must also experience soesa as a test of her love.

The Test of Love - Sickness and Soesa

For the njai who is haloes, soesa is usually a test of love and faithfulness. True love entails recognition of one's djodo and is sometimes referred to in the texts as tali tjinta (ties of love). Tjinta has a greater chance of withstanding soesa because it is pre-ordained and proves to be an appropriate relationship. Isah's love for Verkerk (TNI) does not falter, despite their separation of some twenty years. In contrast, relationships involving sexual appetite (birahi) have no place in the moral discourse of any bangsa.

Soesa for the njai is commonly expressed through illness. Daughters must first undergo a test of true love which is represented in the literature by a discourse of parental opposition. The three tjerita concerning women who want to be njais are TNI, TNA and SI. In the first two tjerita, the njais make their own decisions about a relationship with a foreign toean and inevitably

232 “Alas! poor Kasdrim to see him like this, it is true when we remember he tried with all his might to force himself on Alimah, he could have been said to be a robber of young girls (rapist?), however, it was because of his desire to have a beautiful wife, because he is a male, moreover a youth, he can be said to have been in the wrong, but there was a little right too.”, TNA, p187
go through a period of soesa which is resolved by the foreigner-hero. As I have noted previously, the tjeritas of Isah and Alimah are similar. In both tjerita a relationship with a Dutchman is opposed by their parents in favour of a prestigious marriage with a well connected priboemi man. The conflict between obedience to her father and the recognition of her djodo causes soesa in the form of illness which afflicts the njai. She does not wish to cause her parents any difficulty, but as she has already given her love to a toean, she sees no way out of her dilemma. No-one is able to cure her illness, except her toean because he is her djodo and is therefore the only person who is aware of the true cause of her problem. His reward is the guardianship of the daughter.

This competition which causes illness can be represented by a number of opposing discourses - religious, legal, and traditional. In an overall sense it is a clash of bangsas - Javanese traditions and customs opposed to Western modernity. Daughters wish to remain obedient to their parents but are unable to do so once they have met their djodo.

As a loyal and faithful see-ie, Liang Nio’s (SL) response to soesa is similar to that of Isah and Alimah. She becomes gravely ill when it is evident that Anton will marry Mary, who is Boe Tat Hin’s choice of bride for his son. Anton is weak. He doesn’t stand up to his father and he is easily swayed by others. Liang Nio is aware of this. She tells her friend Chen Wen Zwan that Anton is “...sebagi anak-anak, ia poenja hati ada lemah. Ia aken loepaken pada saja, djikaloe saja tida selaloe ada di dampingnja.”233 As the day of the marriage approaches Liang Nio’s ill health worsens. She is aware that Anton will discard (sia-siaken) her and she extracts a promise from Mary that she will look after her child when she dies. As a faithful and loyal see-ie Liang Nio is presented with only one acceptable way out of her trouble and that is through her death. With her death comes final relief from soesa and her sin (Saja ada seorang berdosa) of destroying her

233 “...like a child, he is easily swayed. He will forget all about me if I am not constantly by his side.” SL p40
parents good fortune (saja bikin roesak keberoentoengannja orang toea.)

Sickness is represented as a culturally acceptable way for women to deal with soesa. In TNI and TNA, recovery from sickness signals those women who will become loyal and faithful njais. Daughters appear to gain the necessary strength from this trial to allow them to resist the considerable authority of the father which is reinforced by the pillars of adat and agama.

Sickness, as a form of resistance, is represented in a slightly different way in TNP. Paina’s sickness is a weapon which is used rather more consciously than in the previous three tjerita. Paina is the one woman who reluctantly obeys the wishes of her father in entering into an association with Toean Briot. Her sacrifice actually prevents the shaming her father who would have been tried as a thief had she not agreed to become Briot’s njai. Paina’s only socially acceptable weapon is sickness. By infecting herself with smallpox, she is able to resist Briot and becomes the instrument of (Allah’s) retribution in causing his death.

Nji Paina is a faithful daughter, rather than a willing njai, but the results are similar. Her sickness finally allows her to triumph and she is rewarded with marriage to a Javanese. Order is restored. Although the type of order which is restored differs in the four tjerita I have discussed, it is nonetheless represented as harmony in the particular contexts of three very different stories. In TNI and TNA the Dutch coloniser wins, or is won by the faithful njai. SI presents a different view with order restored in a Chinese setting. Liang Nio is forgiven by her parents on her death bed and Anton follows his father’s wishes in marrying Mary, whom the reader knows is a decent and kind Chinese woman. In TNP, it is Javanese order which is restored, rather than that of the colonial toean.

234 SL p104
Bridge of Sorrows - Soesa and Sorcery

Sorcery is another test of love, endurance and loyalty for the true djodo. The njai must pass this test in order to obtain (again) her oentoeng and a happy ending. The njai and her partner are often blinded to the possibility of soesa, but not so the reader. As a literary device soesa creates suspense for the reader who is conscious of forthcoming trouble. The privileged positions of narrator and reader allow each to see the origin of trouble and they are able to recognise the first signs of woe as they occur. The njai and toean do not realise that love has blinded them to the machinations of others. They become confused, believing that their love was not as strong at first thought. In PJTK this love which blinds the lovers to their future soesa is described as:

"...ljinta itoe boeta, maka bener sekali pepatah ini boeta pemandangan, boeta fikiran, dan boeta sekalian keadaan..."235

In the tjerita others frequently try to separate the njai from her toean. Often this does not have to be engineered since the foreigner’s habit of leaving his njai when he wishes to return to Europe is well established. This particular characteristic of the toean and the general lack of legitimacy of the njai-toean relationship, leads others to regard the relationship as impermanent and makes the njai vulnerable to sorcery. Both njai and toean are represented as able to be separated through sorcery, regardless of bangsa and whether the toean actually believes in the power of doekoens. It is the loyalty of the njai which holds the relationship together.

A doekoen’s power lies in creating bridges236 between people where none previously existed. In some cases the bridge will

235 "...love is blind, the saying is really true blind to what is before one’s eyes, blind to rationality and blind to everything...", PJTK, p28 In BTM, pp29-30, we find the same injunction: "Liefde is blind, a Dutch saying which means that love clouds reason, making people blind to the road ahead, they grope their way, not knowing where they are going."

236 The assistance of a doekoen is described as “Dengan pake djembatan (pertoeloengan) Hadji Doela...” (Using Hadji Doela as a bridge),
cause a type of love to flourish where earlier there was no affection, in others the bridge is established between the *doekoen* and the recipient by which he may visit all manner of afflictions upon the victim.

The *doekoen* rarely acts on her/his own initiative. The help of the *doekoen* is sought to make things happen which otherwise would not occur. In most instances this interference in the ordained order of things results in *soesa* not only for the victim, but also for the perpetrators.

In *TNI*, Verkerk becomes the casualty of the infamous Mah Miskin's love spell. Her potion makes him forget Isah and provides a conduit which opens him to Marie's influence. *Soesa* is the fate of both Verkerk, as the victim-recipient, and the Abrams family as the perpetrators of the sorcery.

The marriage between Verkerk and Marie (alias Poppie) Abrams, which is based on deception through sorcery, is obviously unhappy. Even on their honeymoon in Soekaboemi, Verkerk is aware that there is no love between them. The situation deteriorates rapidly. Marie is unfaithful to Verkerk with Carolie/Carolle, a *Peranakan Belanda* (Indo). Si Doela, Marie's former lover, is released from prison and they resume their affair after Si Doela murders Toean Abrams, whom he mistakes for Verkerk. Verkerk eventually divorces Marie, and gets a job in Soerabaja, but the narrator notes that he is always unhappy (*bersoesah hati*). Verkerk cannot forget his life with Isah which was a very fortunate (*beroentoeng*) one. His unhappiness (*hatinja sakit*) causes his hair to turn white. In succession he is implicated in the theft of money by an English *peranakan*, is cleared, goes to live in the mountains in a Javanese village and finally returns to Holland. His *soesa* continues until he is reunited with Isah and she agrees to return to Holland with him.

---

Juvenile Kuo, *Ros Mina Njai jang Manis*, Batavia: Kwee Seng Tjoan, nd, p14 (*RMNJM*)

237 *TNI* Vol 4, pp611-12

238 *TNI* Vol 4, pp150-1. In SI, Kim Giok's hair also turns white due to his troubles, p37
The perpetrators of the sorcery similarly do not escape their share of *soesa*. Marie is ostracised because of the gossip which implicates her in the murder of her father and becomes a *njai* to a Chinese brothel owner. Njonja Abrams, who was instrumental in seeking the services of Mah Miskin, loses her husband and her daughter and is forced to return to Holland because she cannot bear the shame (*maloe*) of her daughter’s *nafsoe.*

*Doekoen*s and women intermediaries are more commonly used in pursuit of the *njai*, rather than the *toean*. In the *tjerita*, apart from Verkerk (*TNI*), it is the *haloes* and faithful women who are represented as the targets of sorcery. It also seems certain from their ability to endure and finally overcome the flagitious ambitions of others, that her continued purity and loyalty is something which must be tested and is held to be much more important than that of her *toean*.

Verkerk succumbs and is married to another, and yet still survives to be reunited with his *djodo*. Perhaps his position of power, as the colonial master and Isah’s guardian, is sufficient for him to demand her faithfulness throughout the twenty years of their separation, while his faithfulness is not something Isah could question. Isah’s *haloes* nature saves her from being seduced by the Wedono or agreeing to become Laanhof’s *njai*. Had she acquiesced to either offer her fate would have been very different. But her *haloes* nature, as exemplified in her loyalty to Verkerk, is respected by Laanhof and appears to protect her from the Wedono’s lust (*birahi*). She is not deceived by his intermediary, M’bok Soemoleksono, and she discovers that the bunch of bananas she is given contain a love *obat*. It is important that Isah passes her test and the reader is aware that her triumph over the sorcery and lust of the Wedono will pave the way for the eventual return of her *djodo*.

Those involved in her attempted seduction are discovered and must bear the consequences. Wongso, the house servant who

---

239 *TNI* Vol 4, p684
gave her the bananas knowing them to contain \textit{obat}, is compelled to beg her forgiveness. M'bok Soemolekso is compelled to flee when she learns that Laanhof has threatened to bring the matter before the court. Den Beij, the Wedono, must bear his wife's distance and (probably) her distrust, as she was forced into accepting a \textit{selir} against her better judgement.

In \textit{TNA}, Alimah also becomes the object of unwanted attention when she is subjected to Kasdrim's scheming. Unaware that his parents have arranged his engagement to Alimah, he enlists the aid of a \textit{doekoen}, Kiaji Moestopoh. Moestopoh's sorcery is most efficacious and Alimah forgets Lort and daydreams about Kasdrim's caresses. She is unable to eat or sleep and spends most of her time crying. The narrator tells his readers that this is what people are like when they are bewitched. Kasdrim himself likens it to a form of madness. Eventually, when he is told of his forthcoming engagement, he wants Alimah released from the spell as he does not want a half mad wife. (\textit{istri setengah gila}).

Alimah regains consciousness and with it, her affection for Lort. Kasdrim loses Alimah and in turn becomes half mad from his own desire and foolishness.

Alimah's test continues when travelling salesman, Entjik Amat, believes he will be able to buy Alimah's body with jewellery. Alimah knows his intentions are to "..berkasih-kasih..." and she refuses his offer. Amat is full of lust for Alimah and engages the services of M'mak Saidah, a masseuse who was once a \textit{njai} to a Chinese man. She is to gain Alimah's confidence and to persuade her to run away with Amat. Saidah deceives Amat, takes his money and lies to him about Alimah's feelings towards him. The episode culminates in Amat's loss of a good portion of his wealth to a gang of thieves who rob and beat him. This beating seems to bring Amat to his senses and he goes home to his wife and family.

\textsuperscript{240} \textit{TNI}, Vol 4, p111
\textsuperscript{241} \textit{TNA}, p67
\textsuperscript{242} "...to make love...", \textit{TNA}, p199
Alimah and Isah reject all offers of sexual liaisons and have a remarkable gift for character analysis. They are not trapped by doekoens or intermediaries, although they are not aware of their intentions from the outset. The cloak of loyalty appears to protect them from the depravity of others and so their good characters are maintained. Both women are rewarded for their faithfulness and loyalty with a happy ending. For the perpetrators of the sorcery, there is unhappiness and retribution.

Soesa, Doerhaka dan Katemaha’an

Turning from the respectable njais like Alimah and Isah, I now wish to consider the representation of njais in the tjerita KMPDI, KNM and BTM. These are stories of treachery and greed. The njais in these three tjerita do not have a loving relationship with their toean. Their affections stem from hawa nafsoe and katemaha’an and inevitably end in the downfall of the njai through her betrayal of her toean. The njais are given no opportunity to redeem themselves, as men sometimes are. They remain evil. In all three tjerita the njais’ sins grow worse as the story progresses, presenting the narrator, in his guise as moral leader, with many opportunities to advise the reader. Unlike the rest of the corpus of tjerita njai, in these tjerita the law plays a significant role in finally determining who is at fault and the penalty to be paid.

All of the characters in KMPDI can be categorised as greedy. Lust for money, sex and/or opium rules their lives. The worst, like Kasmin, the opium addict, pimp and thief, and the sexually voracious tandil besar (head overseer) pay the supreme penalty with their lives. Tjoe Keng, son of the tandil besar, has the same appetites as his father. He has deceived his father and the toean totok by having sexual relations with Ros Mina as well as with one of his stepmothers. He deliberately shoots Kasmin, but is found not guilty of his murder as the judge accepts that he merely fired at a thief. Having escaped from legal retribution, Tjoe Keng becomes the unlikely hero. He is appointed to replace his father.
as the head overseer and marries a woman from a good family. After a few years of hard work he has again made his fortune, this time one which is *halal* (obtained by rightful means) and therefore will remain (*kekal*) in his hands. His happiness, unlikely as it is, is outlined in what is almost a postscript to the story. In the last three pages, the narrator arranges for him to be acquitted, change his nature, be given his father’s job and get married. All of which proves the narrator’s lesson in morality: “...jang bisa roba ia poenja perboeatan tersesat bisa dapat ampoen dari Toean Allah...”

If we compare Tjoe Keng with Ros Mina, it seems obvious that she is the scapegoat for the sins of men as well as her own. For a second time she has tried to leave behind her life as a prostitute, but her husband, Kasdrim, sees her as a *parit mas* (river of gold) and arranges for her to become a prostitute to the *tandil besar* and his son. She is not wholly innocent and acquiesces to Kasdrim’s plan, asking for large sums of money for her favours.

Ros Mina is also subject to the justice of the courts. She is tried by the court for illicit intercourse (*berdjina*) with the *tandil besar* and for stealing Tjoe Keng’s money. Like Tjoe Keng, she escapes punishment due to lack of evidence, but there the resemblance ends. She has been cheated out of her money and has nothing left. Her Chinese boyfriend has left and she is in debt to a money lender. The only way she knows to survive is to return to the Hotel Japan and her former profession as a prostitute. The narrator points out the justice at the end of the story: “*Semoea manoesia jang telah berboeat djahat telah dapat balesan dengen sampoerna.*” It seems that the sins of mankind are Ros Mina’s to bear as it is her continued *soesa* which is extracted as retribution. She is the victim of men’s lust and her own greed for money. She is no different from Tjoe Keng, but Ros Mina is given no respite or opportunity to see the error of her ways. Her fate is sealed from the outset as the evil, unrepentant *njai*. Although

---

244 “...those who can change their errant ways will be forgiven by Allah...”. *KMPDL* p106

245 “Everyone who does wrong receives their just desserts.”. *TNA* p106
she has been used mercilessly by Kasmin she, unlike Tjoe Keng, is not provided with any avenue for change.

Njai Marsina, like Ros Mina, is already a “fallen woman” when we meet her. She was rescued from prostitution by an Arab, Joesoef bin Alsagaf. Marsina is quickly shown to be greedy, interested only in the lifestyle that Joesoef’s wealth can provide. Marsina does not truly love Joesoef. She is bored when he is not around and has taken to gambling at a Chinese woman’s house. She has pawned his gifts to pay gambling debts and asks him for more jewellery. When she robs her poor but honest servant, Ali, of buried treasure worth f50,000, she drags Joesoef into the unhappy affair.

Marsina is represented as unrepentant, whereas Joesoef is penitent. Joesoef refers to her as *prampean temahah* (a greedy woman) and curses her (*terkoetoeklah kaoe Marsina*), asking her who will cleanse them of the sin. Marsina’s attitude is dismissive of sin. She tells Joesoef that people who are starving don’t worry about sin and she is starving, not for food, but for jewellery. Sarcastically, she agrees to give back the stolen treasure provided Joesoef buys the jewellery she wants from the van Arcken shop.

Joesoef is plagued by nightmares in which he hears money being counted, he thinks it is the Archangel Gabriel counting his sins. The reader is made aware that Joesoef is basically a good man, whereas Marsina stands condemned through her greed and treachery.

When Joesoef finally awakens from his madness (*kagilaan pada Marsina*) he tells Marsina that she is the cause of “*Banjak katjilakaan...lantaran kaoe tinggal di roemahkoe dengen hati jang temaha.*” He places the blame for all the grief upon Marsina: “...*tida terlaloe salahkan saja jang djadi boeta dengen katjantikannja prampean seperti Marsina dan ia poenja pande*  

---

246 Much misfortune ...because you lived in my house with a heart full of greed.”, *KNM*, p137
mengambil hati...". While she was certainly the instigator, Joesoef could have been regarded as her accomplice, but Joesoef repays Ali to escape prosecution. He repents and is saved.

During the course of the tjerita, Marsina’s evil nature leads her into further trouble, ending with her betrayal of four of the characters. She is finally arrested for trying to poison her servant and rival for the affections of Joesoef’s old school friend. Marsina shows no signs of remorse and is taken away to be tried by the Landraad (District Court).

The evil njais are represented as greedy and treacherous. They are interested only in money (mata doewiten) and Maninten (BTM) is no exception. She deliberately sets out to snare the young Dutchman, Maurits, in the hope that she will obtain a lot of money. Maurits has been warned of the dangers (not specified) of employing a woman servant, but is enticed by a pair of round beautiful breasts (kelapa gading) inside a tightly stretched blouse, and a backside which wobbles when she walks.

Maurits, like Joesoef, is represented as a decent young man who is led astray by a native woman. When Maurits meets and falls in love with a Dutch woman, Maninten is well aware of her future as a njai, saying to herself: "...saja misti hati-hati. Djangan kira jang Maninten dengen soeka hati maoe di lempar seperti tikar gombal sadja". She resorts to poisoning Maurits and then blackmails him into marriage by promising to provide an antidote for the poison.

Maurits openly acknowledges that he has made a dreadful mistake in acquiring a njai like Maninten. After discussing the matter with Toean Stuijfzande, his employer, they decide to wait for the right time to act. In essence they are leaving the matter to providence and they are not disappointed. Maninten is not

247 “don’t blame me too much because I was blinded by the beauty of a woman like Marsina who is clever winning hearts.”, KNM, p161
248 BTM, p29
249 "...I must be careful. Don’t think that I will go willingly, thrown out like an old mat”, BTM, p40
content with her new status and proves to be an unfaithful and
treacheryous wife. In the familiar pattern of bad njais her sins
mount until she is finally caught out and Maurits files for divorce.
Maurits repents his foolishness, while the money hungry
Maninten now loses everything through the court. Maurits is
granted his divorce, leaving him free to marry his Dutch
sweetheart.

Maninten, Marsina and Ros Mina prove to be untrustworthy and
greedy. Their relationships with their toeans are not rooted in
love, but in lust (birahi) and in greed (ketemaha'an) for wealth.
Their natures, as represented by birahi and ketemaha'an, lead
them to betray their toeans, and worse still, they are unrepentant.
Their soesa and that which they bring to those around them
concerns hawa nafsoe which is antithetical to the maintenance of
an ordered society. Periods of disorder caused by unfettered
appetites or behaviour inevitably bring soesa. Unlike the soesa
caused by sorcery or that which arises from the opposing
discourses of different bangsas, the soesa of greed and treachery
is represented by 'bad' njais. It appears from the tjerita that
calm and order can only be restored when sin is repented and evil
is punished.

A Priboemi Point of View of the Causes of Soesa

In this section I wish to examine differences in the representation
of njais and soesa by authors sensitive to the spectacle of the
priboemi. There are only two tjerita njai in this corpus which are
told from, or are sympathetic to the priboemi point of view - TNP
and NS. Another story, PJTK involves the elopement of a Dutch
woman with a priboemi man, thus is not strictly speaking a tjerita
njai. However I have included this story as it is sensitive to the
religious problems caused through interracial relationships and,
like NS and TNP, is sensitive to the priboemi point of view.

In the two tjerita which involve Muslim men, NS and PJTK, the
question of bangsa and agama (Islam) is treated quite differently
from other tjerita njai. Hamid (NS) and engkoe (sic) N (PJTK), the
Muslim men, both wish to incorporate their women in the Islamic discourse. They both perceive soesa in terms of being in a permanent state of sin through berzinah (illicit intercourse) and their solution is that Njai Sida and Nona M become good Muslims.

In PJTK, a Dutch woman, Nona M, lives happily with a Sumatran man, engkoe N, (bangsa Padang) for two years. N is very conscious that in the eyes of Islam they are committing a sin - illicit intercourse (berzinah). This proves to be an insurmountable difficulty (bersoesah pajah) for them because neither can be reconciled to the other's religion. N cannot renounce his bangsa and agama, as the njais are forced to do, and finally resolves his soesa by returning to Padang with his uncle.

Nona M likewise is not prepared to become a Muslim, nor is she prepared for N's resolution of their problems. Although she has not been incorporated within the Islamic discourse, it seems that she may have to give up any association with her own bangsa. When she discovers N's note informing her that he has left for Padang, she "...menangis jang tiada terhingga... Adapoen seboetan nona itoe lain tiada, O Gods, O Gods! alangkan sakinja." The reader is left in a state of uncertainty, unsure of whether she has any prospect of reconciliation with her parents or whether, through her elopement with N, she will remain, like some of the njais, unwelcome in her bangsa and in difficulty.

In TNP and NS, neither Njai Sida nor Nji Paina enter into a relationship with a toean willingly. Both the Dutch toeans are represented as colonial oppressors who try to force the women to become their njais. Njai Sida tries to resist toean K's advances, but becomes his victim (korban) and is always unhappy (soesah hati). He has her body and resorts to doekoens and intermediaries to obtain her love, but without success. Sida is finally rescued from her soesah by Hamid who is a good Muslim. She promises to embrace Islam in return for his protection. As I

250 "...sobbed uncontrollably... Her words were none other than "O God, O God! how sad she was."
251 NS, p41
have previously noted, Paina infects Briot with smallpox as her way out of difficulty. Both these priboemi women resist incorporation into the njai discourse and return to their bangsa.

In NS and PJTK, the Muslims emerge triumphant over the colonial Christians and in TNP, it is the Javanese villagers, as represented by Paina, who get the best of the evil, hard drinking and lustful Dutchman. The cause of soesa in these three tjerita is also in transgressing boundaries, however, none of the priboemi men and women are prepared to sacrifice their principles or their place within their bangsa for the love or the lust of a foreigner.

The treatment of priboemis in these stories appears to be strongly linked to the bangsa, and therefore the personal experiences of the author. While pseudonyms may hide the race of the authors, their disposition towards the priboemi appears to point towards their identity. Radja Waka Mega, the author of PJTK and Mara Soetan and Soetan Besar (NS) are probably priboemi authors and are the only probable priboemi authors in this corpus of tjerita njai. Kommer, the author of TNP, was an Indo author and journalist and, according to Hellwig, was married to a woman of Chinese descent. We can surmise that probably his own background made him sympathetic to the problems facing the priboemi.

**Escape from Soesa - Pindah, Loepa and Coincidence**

Escape from soesa can be temporary or permanent. Attempts by ordinary men and women to resolve their soesa are usually temporary in nature. Soesa may ease for a period, but returns manifold to haunt its victims, driving them towards a predestined end. Many of the characters in the tjerita njai endeavour to escape their unhappiness and there are a number of devices which are used to bring temporary relief from soesa. Characters may attempt to move away (pindah) from the source of their problem or they may try to forget (loepa) to bring a measure of relief.

---

252 Hellwig, 1994b, Op Cit, p47
Permanent relief from *soesa* is very different from temporary escape and signals closure of the story. Closure usually resolves the difficulties or the troubles of the main characters and ensures that the wrongdoers are punished. This resolution re-establishes order and leaves the reader in no doubt about the fate of the characters. Closure often depends on a number of fortuitous events where people are re-united or are brought together to explain the reasons for their actions. It is a time when disguised characters are unmasked and pseudonyms are revealed.

*Loepa - Forgetting*

In the *tjerita njai*, men have a tendency to 'forget' (*loepa*) wives, family and sometimes *njais* as a way of relieving *soesa*. It is not a permanent solution and the *soesa* can never finally be resolved until he becomes *sadar*\(^{253}\) and makes retribution. Often *loepa* is used in the context of the married man who finds it necessary to mentally block out his wife and family for the period of time he is with his *njai*. The condition appears to be a type of insanity. He is afflicted with a madness for the *njai* which temporarily blinds him to his other, legitimate, life.

Quinn has noted that in Javanese novels that male heroes can similarly be victims of *lali*,\(^{254}\) which helps to explain sudden "volte-face" in behaviour and moral colour. Quinn observes that lapses which occur while in this state are not held against a man and he is forgiven.\(^{255}\) This is paralleled in these stories by the treatment of *loepa* as a type of insanity. Once the man becomes *sadar*,\(^{256}\) his memory returns and he becomes his true self. Provided he is then repentant, sins committed while in a condition of *loepa* are not held against him.

---

\(^{253}\) The meaning of *sadar* in this context appears to be coming to one's senses and remembering.

\(^{254}\) According to Quinn, *lali* is to have something slip one's mind, to forget one's self, lose sight of and lose consciousness, Quinn, Op Cit, p113

\(^{255}\) Ibid, p112

\(^{256}\) Literally aware, but in this context, a return to one's sense is more appropriate. Other words which are also used are *melek* and *mendoesin* and *inget*.
From a feminist perspective the condition seems a convenient way to excuse the sexual promiscuity of married men. Their insanity or blindness is selective as it relates only to lust and women. They seem capable of functioning in other ways. Men can regain their sanity or consciousness with little to fear in the way of punishment. The sexual promiscuity of women, as I have already shown, cannot be forgiven.

In KNM, Joesoef is "...tergila-gila sama itoe prampoean Preanger..." such that he has "...loepaken istrei kawin dan anak-anaknja." 257 However, he has not 'forgotten' his bangsa and is careful to ensure his secret is not discovered - that he is living with a Malay woman who is an ex-prostitute from Bandoeng. He rents a house in a deserted neighbourhood and always drives his car inside the yard so that he will not be seen.

Joesoef regains his 'sanity' only when Marsina is arrested and the story of the stolen money comes out. Joesoef explains that "...ia poenja kagilaan pada Marsina, ia poenja kagelapan pikiran, ia poenja kahilapan boeat perkara jang kliroe...". 258 Now he feels remorse (penjeselan) and offers compensation (teboes) and he "...baroe dapet rasa begimana sedih istri saja dibikin sia-sia begitoe." 259 Joesoef goes on to explain at a further meeting that he had no-one to advise him not to go near prostitutes and no-one to guide him, so he slid onto the wrong path (soeroeng saja ka djalan jang kliroe). 260 Now he feels shame (maloe) because he "...mendoesin jang saja soeda langgar segala adat istiadat kaoem Moeslimin..." 261

257 "...crazy about the Preanger woman..." "forgotten his wife and children", KNM, p3
258 "he was crazy about Marsina, his mind was clouded, he was at fault in doing mistaken deeds", KNM, p 139
259 "...only just realises how unhappy I have made my wife, treating her as though she was nothing.", KNM, p162
260 KNM, p162
261 "I realise that I have offended all the customs and traditions of the Muslims", KNM, p162
Joesoef becomes friends (*bersobat*) with Ali after he has compensated everyone and the Raden Jaka tells Joesoef that as he "...soeda tobat tida maoe deketin lagi prampoean pelatjoeran, itoelah satoe penjeselan jang dihargaken oleh Allah." Marsina is not given the opportunity to repent. The reader is told that: "Allah brangkali tida bisa bri penjeselen padanja...", thus she must be subject to punishment (and presumably forgiveness after her jail sentence) by man.

In a *njai* related story, Njai Warsih, is forgotten by her fiance, Dr Soeparto, when he becomes enamoured of the prostitute Permas. He sits daydreaming about Permas while Warsih’s face “*djadi mingkin gelap...*” (becomes dim). Soeparto’s memory suddenly returns when he is confronted by Warsih’s adopted father who threatens to inform the Chief of the Medical Service of his liaison with a prostitute. Soeparto then realises the extent of his sins. He knows that his parents would be angry and shamed if he married a prostitute and a woman old enough to be his mother.

Doekoens also have the power to make both men and women forget. This is the only instance I could find of women ‘forgetting’, so it seems that it may only be through sorcery that women can be made to forget. As I have already shown, Alimah (*TNA*) forgets her *djodo* when under the influence of the doekoen’s sorcery. She cannot regain her consciousness until the spell is lifted. *Loepa*, as a masculine condition, is temporary. The reader is aware that eventually the man will return to his senses, thus restoring normality and order. The restoration of his memory is the precursor of the return of good fortune.

**Pindah - Moving and Death**

262 "has sworn never to go near prostitutes again, his repentance will be treasured by Allah," KNM, p162
263 "Probably Allah could not forgive her...", KNM, p163
264 Thio Tjin Boen, *Njai Warsih*, Batavia : Hoa Siang In Kiok, nd, (NW), p45
265 NW, p45
Pinda(h), or moving locations, is a commonly used mechanism to avoid soesa in the tjerita njai. It is a useful device because it is a convenient way to escape one's problems. A person could move without arousing the suspicions of one's protagonist as migration to and within Java was high. Batavia and other large cities attracted labourers from the countryside in search of their fortune, so relocation was seen as a viable option for a person overburdened with soesa. However, as a method of avoiding due punishment, relocation is doomed to failure. In the sense of moving abode, fleeing from soesa does not solve any problems and merely delays the moment of retribution.

In KNM the soesa is initiated by Marsina's greed and her theft of Ali's treasure. Marsina, disguised as Njai Gerintjil, fights with Ali in the graveyard late at night. Joesoef saves Marsina from Ali, but believes that he has killed him and that his ghost will come to torment him in retribution for his murder. Alone in his room, Joesoef imagines that Ali is before him, blood running down his body and a dagger in his hand ready to be plunged into Joesoef's heart. He can evidently cope with these troubling visions, but when Joesoef hears that Ali is alive, he is very worried that he may be identified and he decides they will move to Bogor (ambil poetoesan pinda ka Bogor), thus hoping to avoid detection and the law.

Ali's soesa has also reached a crisis. Ali and his family become poverty stricken as Ali is unable to work. Although his wounds are almost better, he is still considered to be a little crazy (otaknja masi miring). All his possessions have been sold and his wife, Saneah decides there is nothing left to do but to leave and go to stay with Ali's brother who lives in Bogor. Joesoef has not resolved his soesa and the reader is aware that in moving to Bogor, eventually the drama will be played out when the two couples meet.

Pindah is a temporary solution to soesa in the context of moving to another house, however, pindah can also be permanent. Death

266 KNM, p53
is the ultimate avoidance of *soesa* and *pindah* is commonly used to describe this final journey. Although it is considered sinful and has dire consequences for the hereafter, it is evidently considered preferable to a life of extreme *soesa* on earth.

Isah makes a final effort to resolve her *soesa* by committing the final act of *pindah*. It comes as no surprise to the reader as the signs of impending doom are prevalent. After Wim finds a poisonous snake in the house, Isah dreams that a bird stole her engagement ring. Isah then dreams of a snake with fiery coals in its mouth. The omens portend the worst for Isah and this is realised when Verkerk, who is enamoured of Marie, informs Isah that they wish to take her son with them. We are already aware from Isah’s reaction to the play “Njai Dasima”, that this is the worst thing which could happen to her. In a moving scene, we find that rather than give up her child, Isah decides it would be better to “...*pindah berdoewa anaknya ka negri jang bakka...*”.268

Her intention is to end her *soesa*, but it is obvious that Isah is aware that it is sinful, as she begs Allah’s forgiveness as she throws herself, together with Wim, into the swollen river. Although Isah is rescued, coincidentally by her former fiance, Tjarik Ranoe, her intentions were clearly to die rather than give up her son.

**Coincidence and Closure**

*Pindah* signals an impending collapse of the plot as the characters appear to disperse. Their reunion is imperative. The bringing of people and events together provides the means of closure in the *tjerita njai*. With people moving away from problematic situations, the author needs to find a way to ensure that, in the end, justice will prevail and will be seen to do so by the victims. This is often accomplished through a series of coincidences which provide some linking mechanism to bring the main players together.


268 “...leave with her child for the everlasting land (heaven)...”, *TNL*, p457
together. Only then are we all able to witness the downfall of the wicked, forgive the contrite and ensure justice and happiness for the loyal and haloes.

In the tjerita njai “the end”, or tammat implies a restoration of order and harmony to the community. Loose ends signify disorder, therefore the author is forced to consider the destiny of all and bring about a tidy end. Coincidence is the device by which the author brings his/her characters to the conference table. It is only in these final discussions that the links becomes clear, not only to the reader, but also to the characters themselves. They eventually reveal their true origins or what has befallen them on their route to the end.

Quinn proposes that coincidence in the Javanese novels is not to be understood as the western concept of a random occurrence, but rather as a phenomenon based on the Javanese idea of cosmic totality in which all elements are linked. In this view, coincidence actually discloses order; the more unlikely the coincidence, the more powerfully it reveals the totality of the system.269 For the tjerita njai this totality is in the hands of Allah, thus coincidence is, as Quinn has suggested, a part of the fabric of the society. It is Allah’s will which is complete and final and provides the restoration of order.

In TNL, a fortunate conjunction of circumstances brings Isah and Verkerk together after a lengthy separation of twenty years. The reunion occurs when Verkerk is sent out to the Indies from Holland to inspect sugar factories. By chance, the first inspection is in the Residency where his son, Lassimin, (Wim) is about to be appointed Regent. Isah is eventually persuaded to return to Holland with Verkerk and they take their grandchildren with them to be educated.

The coincidences which occur in KNM, to effect closure are many. They begin with both Ali and Joesoef moving to Bogor. Ali’s brother, Katma, is a builder and the house which Joesoef buys is

269 Quinn, Op Cit, p123-5
very run down. Joesoef organises for the repair and he goes to Katma. By this time Ali is recovered and has started to work for Katma. It is he who goes to Joesoef’s house, finds the empty treasure box and runs amok. He is arrested by the police and sent to an asylum. Ali decides that he needs a spy inside Joesoef’s household and persuades Saneah to obtain work there as a maid, even if it means that she works for nothing. It is she who, coincidentally, overhears Marsina scheming with the doekoen and raises the alarm.

By coincidence, one of Joesoef’s old school friends, Darmo, has been posted to Bogor. The greedy Marsina has designs upon him, but she is thwarted when her servant, Moerhaja falls in love with him. Jealousy and greed lead Marsina into further wrongdoing and she slowly poisons Moerhaja.

Coincidence builds upon coincidence. The climax is reached after Marsina is arrested for attempted murder and a discussion ensues between the main characters. They are slowly made aware of the circumstances which have flung them together. Moerhaja and her mother, Saleha the cook, are from a good family. They were forced to move (pindah) to find employment when her husband, Hadji Mansoer, died leaving them destitute. Darmo’s father, Raden Jaka Soedarmo, who is visiting his son recognises Saleha as the wife of his friend, Hadji Mansoer. He also knows a great deal more of the details surrounding Hadji Mansoer’s death. Mansoer died in the house formerly occupied by Ali. This comes as a great surprise to Saleha who had been told by a trusted friend, Hadji Salim, that Mansoer died while overseas.

We find that Mansoer used to live in Ali’s house and the kitab in which Ali found the will containing the location of the treasure belonged to him. Ali continues the story, culminating in his discovery of the treasure and its theft by Marsina. It is clear that the treasure rightfully belongs to Saleha and Moerhaja and the element linking all of the players is the harta jang terpendam (the buried treasure).
While it appears that order has been restored and justice has been done, there were, according to the audience of the day, still loose ends which required explanation. In a postscript to *KNM*, Probitas found it necessary to address his respected readers (*Pembatja jang terhormat*) in a letter at the end of the story, telling them that there had been many queries from his Muslim and Chinese readers about what happened afterwards. It is obvious that there was a sense of dissatisfaction since the readers did not know whether Ali and company lived happily, how heavy Marsina's punishment was and whether Hadji Salim had been dealt with justly. Probitas felt forced to continue the story so that the readers would be satisfied and content (*mendapet kapoeasan dan kasenangan*). He did so in a book *Si Djempoel Pendek*, to which I did not have access.270

The importance attached to the complete restoration of order is emphasised through Probitas’ letter to the reader. Quinn also makes the point that complete closure is critical to audience satisfaction. In some books the narrator goes to the extent of intervening in the story in fill in the gaps.271 In *KMPDI*, I have already noted that it is not until the last two pages that the narrator, seemingly in haste, wraps up the story by restoring Tjoe Keng’s good fortune and consigning Ros Mina to life as a prostitute in the Hotel Japan. The reader is thus left in no doubt as to the fate of the two main characters.

The resolution of *soesa* is something which is best left to divine intervention, or what may be called coincidence. The individual efforts of men and women to resolve their *soesa* will be, at best, temporary. The only permanent solution to *soesa* is that which is ordained by Allah. Once this is accepted, the story proceeds towards its closure wherein the wicked are punished and the loyal and just are avenged.

---

270 *KNM*, p177
271 Quinn, Op Cit, p125
Conclusion

The lives of all the characters in these *tjerita* are changed dramatically by the conduct of daughters. Through their association with men who are considered to be “outsiders”, daughters have the potential to create disorder. Usually these men are of a different *bangsa* and therefore outside native *adat* and *agama*. In order to continue the relationship, daughters must first pass a test of love, commonly manifested in illness. As only their *toean* is aware of the true origin of the illness, he is the only one who is able to cure her.

This act is significant as it places the father in a position of debt in relation to the *toean*, as we saw with Nasiman in *TNA*, and as a test it seems to give daughters the strength to resist the authority of fathers. Fathers are shamed by this outward display of disobedience to paternal authority and by their daughters’ apparent willingness to renounce their *bangsa* in order to remain with their *toean*. In transgressing *adat* in this manner, daughters bring disorder to the community and *soesa* to their families who often are regarded as complicit in their daughters’ (sinful) behaviour.

Within this framework, there are “good” and “bad” women. Good women continue to follow the precepts of Islam and their own *adat* and are loyal to their *toeans*. They will overcome their *soesa* and enjoy happiness with their *toeans*. Evil hearted *njais* will suffer continued *soesa*, often being subjected to the courts for their crimes.

There is no avenue for women to escape their just punishment. On the other hand, most men who go astray are represented as being either unable to resist the temptation of a *njai* or are bewitched by a *doekoen*. For them, there is an opportunity to show remorse, start afresh and be forgiven. This opportunity is not offered to women who reject Allah and sink further into sin.
As guardians and “husbands”, *toeans* were different from fathers. The *njai* had her own dominion. She was mistress not only to a *toean*, but to a household substantially more complex than that with which she was familiar. For a daughter, life as a *njai* was substantially different from her traditional role as wife and mother.

In shadeshade and being abandoned by *kangga*, *njais* are forced to confront and take up positions not commanded by other women. It is my conclusion that in this process of transgression and locational outside *kangga*, many of the *njais* disclose freedom not available to other women. Some become women with agency.

The concept of agency which I will use is that as defined by Davies within discursive practice theory. For Davies having agency means that the person understands it as an obligation to take themselves up as a knowable, recognisable identity who speaks for themselves who accepts responsibility for their actions... one who is recognisably separate from any particular collective and thus as one who can be said to have agency.

In the literature, agency is bestowed only on those *njais* considered to be *halers*, of whom there appear to be two categories. *Halers* *njais* include those who are willing partners of a *toean* and who relinquish their ethnic (Malay) ways in favour of Dutch customs. However, as I have already pointed out...
CHAPTER FIVE
AGENCY AND DEPENDENCY

Agency - A Framework

Resistance by njais to the established social norms brings difficulty, troubles and woes to both themselves and their kin. Priboemi beliefs and practices, especially concerning the subjection of daughters to fathers' authority, are constructed in this fiction as being immutable. Women are held in place by pervasive mainsprings of power in bangsa, adat and agama. However, their subjectivity is never fully guaranteed. It is dependent on daughters being defined by the intricate web of bangsa. To refuse this construction is to refuse bangsa and, as I have shown in the previous chapter, this refusal meant abandoning their community and the resultant visitation of soesa.

In abandoning and being abandoned by bangsa, njais are forced to confront and take up positions not countenanced by other women. It is my contention that in this process of transgression and location outside bangsa, many of the njais disclose freedoms not available to other women. Some become women with agency.

The concept of agency which I will use is that as defined by Davies within discursive practice theory. For Davies having agency means that the person understands "...an obligation to take themselves up as a knowable, recognisable identity who speaks for themselves who accepts responsibility for their actions ... one who is recognisably separate from any particular collective and thus as one who can be said to have agency."272

In the literature, agency is bestowed only on those njais considered to be haloes, of whom there appear to be two categories. Haloes njais include those who are willing partners of a toean and who relinquish their old (Javanese) ways in favour of Dutch customs. However, as I have already pointed out, in

practice they retain traditional *adat* for it is their polite (deferential) behaviour which makes them *haloes*. Other *njais* considered to be *haloes* are those who reject the discourse of the *toean* and remain, or who are re-incorporated, within their *bangsa* and *agama*. They did not take up a position as a *njai* and resisted the attempts of a *toean* to divorce them from their *bangsa*. Agency is manifested differently for these two contrasting social groups of *haloes njai*.

While these two groups may be contrasted on a variety of grounds, there is a point of similarity in these representations of the *haloes njai*. In both cases there is a message for the reader that women who are ‘good’ can successfully resist authority, whether it is that of the father or the colonial oppressor, and still lead happy lives. Of course the lifestyles differ and we return to the contrast which I highlighted in the previous chapter - that of traditional values versus modern, Western values, the dilemma of a society in transition.

Language is prominent in discursive practice theory, although Collins points out the dangers associated with a determinist interpretation of language as an explanation of culture, society and human life.\(^{273}\) Language includes any attempt to communicate meaning, whether through gesture, dance, movement or speaking. The use of the word “speak” is not confined to only oral communication, but includes any communicative action.

Davies suggests that it is through ‘speaking’ that each person gains access to what it means to be a person, or subject, within each discourse available to them.\(^{274}\) Within discourses there are speakers and listeners. Not everyone is agentic within every discourse. Those who have no other place other than an assigned one, no matter how actively taken up, assign agency to others. Through a textual analysis of the discursive practices of the *njais*,


\(^{274}\) Davies, 1990 Op cit, p342
we can recognise the personal and social implications of the practices in which *njai* are enmeshed, either as speakers or listeners.

The discursive practice paradigm, as used by Davies, is applied to finding meaning, especially in relation to gender. Davies explains that agency is possible when an individual has discursive resources and social resources. Discursive resources mean that although an individual is part of a group, he/she is able to assert behaviours that reflect independence from the group. To be able to do this, the person must be able to recognise, analyse and understand discourse variations within the group and subsequently, her/his discourse options. The individual is then able to choose either to position him/herself within the discourse (and sense ownership of the position) or to be able to refuse variations of the discourse without losing group membership.

Discursive resources of an individual rely on a desire to be agentic and the skills to achieve this. This means that a person chooses to accept moral responsibility for a discourse and has the capacity to mobilise the discourse. An agent is an individual who has choice, but with the acknowledgment that power relationships may limit choice and jeopardise agency.

In becoming *njais*, daughters found themselves outside *bangsa*, *adat* and *agama* and within the discourses of transgressors which included prostitutes and vulgar women. It was from within these discourses that *njais* had the opportunity to be agentic. Here, discursive practices were not as overarchingly constrained by the rules of *adat* and *agama*, giving women the opportunity to speak for themselves, rather than through a guardian. These new discourses in which *njais* were positioned were not only outside their own *bangsa* but also that of their *toean*.

New discourses do not simply replace the old. In a process which Davies refers to as “palimpsest”, new discourses only partially
overwrite and interrupt the old.275 Like the texts themselves echoing other texts, discourses are informed by other discourses in an overlapping, yet disjointed manner. Each njai brought her own experiences or traces with her and this affected her positioning within the moral order of the “njai discourse”. These accretions of personal “herstory” meant that positioning for each njai could never be exactly the same. The ways in which agency was expressed were varied; not all njais were agentic. Some merely accepted their positioning without any sense of being able to refuse aspects of the njai discourse. Positioning as a njai was often a source of tension, especially for those, hitherto, dutiful daughters and they made every effort to ensure that they were not regarded as the usual sort njai.

The njais are represented in the literature as a group distinguished not only by transgression through a sexual liaison with a toean, but also by their dress of a white kebaja (blouse). Only prostitutes and njonja sembarang (common, low class, wives) would associate with njais276. Throughout TNL, this community of njais is represented as idle, impolite and fond of gambling and gossiping. They are noticeably lacking in the qualities valued by both the Dutch and priboemi, that is, polite behaviour and diligence. Having turned their backs on bangsa and all that this stood for, societal expectations appeared to be that in taking up her position as a njai, the woman would degenerate into the opposite of the dutiful daughter.

As I have already noted, Loerah Singoredja (TNA) assumes that Alimah is no better than a prostitute when she becomes Lort’s njai. In TNL, Isah’s mother fears that her daughter may become like other Javanese women who are lazy and arrogant when they have a Dutch “husband”. She advises Isah to be kind, polite, clean and pure (bresih) so she will retain Verkerk’s affection.277 The implication is that men feel free to abandon njais because of what

275 Bronwyn Davies, Shards of Glass, Australia : Allen and Unwin, 1993, p11
276 TNL Vol 3 p688
277 TNL Vol 1 pp163-4
they become: lazy, untidy and uncaring. Isah must be more than a njai to keep her toean. Thus layers of contradictory meanings are inscribed on the body and the mind of the njai. While Isah is situated and spoken of as a njai she may not have access to the discourse of her bangsa, yet she is enjoined to refuse her positioning as a njai.

The problem with defining a njai has already been covered in Chapter One and confirms that positioning within this new discourse is never the same for all njais. Their relationships, their personal herstories, and the way they are signified vary considerably. However, the act of naming of a woman “Njai ...” immediately positions her within the njai discourse.

As I have previously emphasised, the texts reveal a multiplicity of subjects as njais. Both Isah and Ros Mina are named njai, but the positions they take up in the discourse, or their discursive practices, are vastly different.

I believe the key to the representation of the agentic njais is their positioning in a discourse which places them outside the control of their bangsa by virtue of a “marital” relationship with a foreigner. It is the conjunction of being represented as external to bangsa and the replacement of the father with the foreigner, which enables njais to take up positions not available to other women. In much the same way female doekoen are also external to bangsa and, like njais, take up positions which contrast with the restricted roles of mothers, daughters and wives as listeners in a public speaking world of men.

The Dependency of the Iboe in the Tjerita Njai

In the tjerita njai, women who remain within their bangsa have few opportunities to assume any identity other than that of anak (child), istri (wife) and iboe (mother). As daughters they are known as individual subjects, but as soon as they become wives their unique identity disappears and they emerge as ‘the wife and mother of...’. As a njai, the woman retains her own identity
through the use of her personal name. The woman subject is not subsumed by her *toean*, indeed, how could she be, since he is outside the *njai* discourse of female sexual transgressors?

The foregoing is not an attempt to devalue the *iboed* figure, since she is central to family life. Men may and do come and go, but she is always present. However, she is not visible outside the assigned parameters of wife and mother. Her concerns are rearing of children and care of the household. The work of women in supporting their families through work in the *sawah* (rice paddy) or in the market is well documented in anthropological studies, however, the representations of the *iboed* within these *tjerita* is surprisingly monotonal. Most of the *iboes* work within the home. The exceptions are few. In *TNA*, m'bok Alimah ekes out a living picking wild vegetables for sale in the market and m'mak Tjin Hong earns her living as a masseuse. *Iboes* are not represented as having any position outside the family and work circle/cycle. This identification with family is captured in the language of naming. In all but one case in this selection of *njai tjerita*, the identity of the *iboed* is given only as “the mother of...” or “the wife of...”. *Iboes* are a necessary part of social life, but their position is preordained. Refusal of the wife/mother subject is not a practice which is recognised by members of the discourse, so to reject an assigned position as *iboed* is to renounce the discourse of *bangsa*.

The *iboed’s* identity is relational and dependent upon (an)other. She does not have her own name. She is known only in her defined roles as wife and mother. She is a public listener, not a speaker. She has no access to choices which would allow her to take up a contrary position or to voice a divergent view from the norms of her *bangsa*. This means that her husband/protector/guardian usually speaks for her. Although not all wives and mothers take up their positioning in the same way,

---

278 The only instance of a woman being named occurs in *TNA*. We are told at the beginning of her story that she was called Saidah. She was the *njai* of a Chinese man, Kong Boe and is the mother of Kong Tjin Hong. All future references to her are in her role as mother of Tjin Hong (*emak*/ m’mak Tjin Hong). *TNA*, pp214-232
there are boundaries for an *iboe* within the discourse of *bangsa*. I intend to explore these so as to be able to show the ways *njais* are able to act in very different ways from their mothers.

The *iboe* is never identified beyond her mother/wife role. This gives the reader a very good indication of the importance of the woman as mother and wife within the *Priboemi bangsas*.

The activities of women are confined to the home and domestic matters. This view is also reinforced in literature published by Balai Poestaka. In a 1932 edition of *Pandji Poestaka*, an illustration shows clearly that women were not welcome in the political (public) arena, at least by some sectors of the community. 279 This edition of *Pandji Poestaka* was published after a PPII 280 congress in Solo. A portion of a speech is quoted enjoining women not to follow their husbands' lead in politics, if they have alternative views. Interposed in the middle of the quoted speech is the illustration which indicates that the editors obviously disagreed with the PPII as it is sarcastically headed "*Sorga Didalam Roemah?*" (Heaven in the Home?) and is subtitled "*(Soal Isteri dengan Politik)*" (The Problem with Women in Politics). Making his disagreement very clear, at the side of the illustration the artist has written: "*Akibat pidato itoe begini, kata toekang gamber ini.......*" 281 The picture is an attempt at gender role reversal. The woman is twice as tall as her husband and is about to hit him with a broom. He has been reading and is fending off her attack. The association of the broom with the woman and the book with the man suggests the intellectual superiority of the husband and the rightful position of the wife, at the end of a broom. Her only recourse in their (political) disagreement is to use this familiar female, domestic implement, rather than her intellect. The overall effect proposes that

---

280 *Perikatan Perkumpulan Isteri Indonesia* (Federated Association of Indonesian Wives)
281 "According to the artist, this is the result of the speech...", Jedamski, Op Cit, p41
allowing women into the political arena will bring disharmony. Wives clearly do not belong to political (public) discourse.

From the illustration, it seems that the masculine position of dominance, by virtue of his position as guardian and speaker, was considered to be under threat and, to at least the influential Balai Poestaka, this was unacceptable within the discourse of bangsa. Giving socially sanctioned access to a different positioning for a feminine voice was constructed in Pandji Poestaka as “trouble in the home” (Soesa Didalam Roemah!).

In the tjerita njai, mothers and wives, like children, are silenced in public life. This conflating of the wife/mother with the child is evident on the cover of tjerita KMPDI where a library stamp indicates that women and children were forbidden to read the book.

In TNI, marriage proposals by the loerah and Verkerk are made only to Andja. Again, when Andja’s envoys visit Loerah Wongso Pawiro to convey news of the broken engagement, both the loerah and his wife sit on the front verandah to receive them. She is identified only as m’bok loerah (the loerah’s wife). Despite the disturbing nature of the news, m’bok loerah speaks only once in her own right in eight pages of text and then only to suggest that their nephew be called so that he can hear the news. Her opinions and reactions are represented either as marika (they) or Maka katanja kang loerah sama m’bok loerah (The loerah and his wife said). But it is clear that it is the loerah who is speaking, not his wife. He speaks for his wife: “Adik, sampeikan pada mendor Andja dengen istrinja kita poenja salam dan doa...”

Like m’bok loerah, Andja’s wife is referred to only in her position as wife and mother as m’bok Andja and m’bok/embok Isah. It is principally to the mendor Andja, the responsible male, that the loerah expects his remarks to be conveyed.

282 TNI pp140-8
283 “Brother, please pass on our regards and our prayers to foreman Andja and his wife...”, TNI p147
In *TNA*, when Lort and the *toean Oezinder* visit *Loerah Singoredjo* to speak about buying some more land, the only ones to speak are the two Dutchmen and the *loerah*. *M'bok loerah* sits in complete silence while the men discuss the deal and Alimah, as a (prospective) daughter, serves the coffee, just as Isah (*TNI*) serves the betel when the *loerah* and his entourage come to make the engagement official. Isah’s concurrence is neither requested nor required, since her father is the owner of choice and has spoken for her. Her subsequent tears are misinterpreted as tears of joy since it was evidently inconceivable to the *loerah* and to Andja that Isah would not be pleased about the engagement.

The public announcement of important decisions is not the prerogative of mothers/wives. In *TNA*, the engagement between Alimah and Kasdrim is finally decided only between Nasiman and Loerah Singoredja, even though we already know that Nasiman has told his wife that while he is away seeking work, she may make the decisions regarding Alimah’s marriage. The transfer of authority clearly did not sit well with m’bok Alimah. She will not make a decision, preferring to await Nasiman’s homecoming. At this stage she has no idea where he is or how long he will be. In terms of agency, the reader feels that m’bok Alimah had no choice, as she was unable to actively take up a speaking (male) position. To have made a decision on Alimah’s marriage, would have been transgressing *adat* by usurping her husband’s authority. It did not seem to matter that the circumstances seemed to beg for a decision from her: Alimah was fast approaching the age where she would be no longer regarded as eligible. Nasiman was in such dire circumstances that he was forced to leave home to find work. The marriage to the *loerah’s* son was a very good one for a poor coolie family. Finally, m’bok Alimah herself was happy about the proposed engagement and she had the authority to assume the role of Alimah’s guardian.

While wives and children are silent in public, their opinions are often sought within the home. Within the domestic sphere there is much discussion which takes place between husband and wife.

---

284 *TNA*, pp6-7
and child and parents. This discussion is important as it attempts to resolve differences so that a united front is presented (by the husband) in public. It is not always the man’s *akal* which prevails, although when the decision or opinion is made public it appears as though the father has made the decision.

Andja and *m'bok* Isah (*TNI*) have a difference of opinion regarding the significance of an omen. Si Manis, their pet turtledove sings unusually loudly and sweetly whenever Verkerk is around. They discuss the meaning of the omen. Andja is disturbed and worried by si Manis’ song. M'bok Isah believes that it is a sign of good fortune and that Isah almost has her love match ("... *soedah ampir djodonja.*") - Verkerk. Although they are both concerned about the omen, M'bok Isah’s assessment is accepted by Andja so that by the time they visit Kiai Sentolo for his interpretation, Andja presents their agreed opinion of the omen.

Daughters are also persons with whom discussions are held, but decisions are still the public possession of fathers. It is Paina (*TNP*) who appears to resolve the problem of her father’s indebtedness by agreeing to become Briot’s *njai*. The narrator tells us that "*Kamoedian Nji Paina sendiri memoetoesken itoe perkara.*" However, he also implies that the decision was a foregone conclusion when he says that Paina stood in front of her father "...*seperti* (my emphasis) *satoe orang iang memoetoesken perkara*...". The qualification of "like" or "as though she was the person who..." seems to indicate that as a dutiful daughter, she had little choice in the matter. Her only other option is to refuse and this would have meant jail for her father. Like husbands, it is fathers who present the decision in public. Paina is only fully able to take up a position as a subject when she becomes a *njai* and is no longer bound by the *adat* of her *bangsa*.

---

285 *TNI* p15
286 "Afterwards it was Nji Paina herself who resolved the problem.", *TNP*, p327
287 "...like a person who had solved the problem...", *TNP*, p327
In their assigned roles as *iboe* and *anak*, wives and daughters have little choice other than to act in the positions socially acceptable to their *bangsa*. In public they are denied any positioning outside that of silent and dutiful family members. It is the men who negotiate and appear to be making the choices. While some decisions are discussed first and a family consensus obtained, it is clearly the father's choice to do so. Furthermore, fathers are the ones who possess knowledge. It is they who inform their wives what is happening. In the end the decisions rightfully belong to the father. M'bok Alimah cannot take a decision which is not rightfully hers. When Nasiman "discusses" giving Alimah to Lort, m'bok Alimah is reluctant to agree as the *loerah* is family and she believes it would be an advantageous marriage, but Nasiman prevails in this matter.\(^{288}\)

Within the literary discourse of *bangsa*, women as wives and mothers are not agentic. They do not have the choice to act in ways that are not socially sanctioned. To take up practices outside their assigned positioning would constitute rejection of their *bangsa*, in much the same way as the *njai*. This is exactly what happened to Poppie (Marie) as Verkerk's wife in *TNI*. She rejected the accepted standards of Dutch behaviour by taking a *priboemi* and a Chinese lover. In attempting to end her marriage to Verkerk, she was implicated in the murder of her father and quickly became the subject of gossip, forcing her shamed (widowed) mother to return to Holland. As a wife and mother Poppie was no longer able to sustain a place within Dutch society and became the confidante of *njais*, drug addicts, gamblers and pimps, finally becoming a *njai* herself.

*Iboes* are persons of influence. Most of the situations which I have discussed indicate that husbands rarely make arbitrary decisions. It appears that most significant matters are brought into the home for discussion before a decision is presented. There is some evidence in these stories for viewing *iboes* as 'the power behind the throne', but influence is not agency. *Iboes* are

\(^{288}\) *TNA*, pp134-6
not presented as having the power to speak publicly or to resist their (domestic) position as *iboe* within their *bangsa*.

**Living on the Edge - Agency and Doekoens**

Not all of the female characters in the *njai tjerita* are wives and mothers. There are also *doekoens* and intermediaries. While intermediaries are positioned within *bangsa* as go-betweens, *doekoens* appear to be on the fringes of *bangsa*, without being contained by it. *Doekoens* have powers beyond those of the ordinary person. Their access to/possession of *goena-goena* (magic, sorcery) positions them within a mystical, magical discourse. Their freedom of movement beyond the discourse of *bangsa* allows them, as women, to be agentic. They are never positioned as mothers or wives. Their families, unlike those of the *iboe*, are not mentioned, therefore are of little importance compared with their capacities to change the course of events and people’s characters.

As *doekoens* they cannot be chastised or ostracised as they appear to be immune from revenge or retribution. Mah Miskin causes Njai Isah’s relationship with Verkerk to fail. She is obviously immune to retribution as she continues to practice her craft. Indeed who could carry out revenge against a *doekoen*? Vredenbregt describes this difficulty in relation to a very powerful female *doekoen* in his novel, *As the End of the Day Draws Near*: “...most of the *dukuns* are even afraid of her. Nobody, no *dukun* is able to put a spell on her house. Her entire house is bolted (by magic) from within.”

Most *doekoens* are not punished for actions which prove to be evil in their intent. Unlike the ordinary people who can be assured of retribution for wrong doing, the *doekoen* is exempt. Perhaps part of the reason for this exemption is that they are never fully incorporated within *bangsa* and thus are not constrained by any

---

289 Vredenbregt, Jacob, *As the Day Draws to an End*, Jakarta, Penerbit Djambatan, 1990. Original Publisher: Nijgh & Van Ditmar, Amsterdam, no date of first publication, p157
moral order. *Doekoens* are also positioned in a discourse of *goena-goena*. The discourse of *goena-goena* is not entirely separate from *bangsa*, but overlaps at the margins, allowing the *doekoen* free passage between the two. She draws her clients and her prestige from within *bangsa*, but takes up a position within the spirit world to work her magic. The *doekoen* cannot be assigned any particular position within a discourse of *goena goena*, as the discourse itself has proven to be without moral order, at least as it is represented in the *tjerita*. The *doekoen* is able to take up a variety of positions in a number of discourses without fear of rejection or retribution. She is woman with agency, living on the edge of *bangsa*.

**Women With Agency - The Faithful *Njais***

Within the literary representations, *njais* are without the normal constraints of *adat* and *agama*. The dutiful daughters have been expected to throw away (*boeang*) *adat* and *agama* in order to be with their *toean*. They are positioned outside *bangsa* by the community, but like palimpsest, actually retain much of their *adat* and *agama*, so remain *haloes*. We note that Isah is expected to discard her old (Javanese) habits, however, it is only by retaining them that she becomes a “not like” *njai* within the *njai* discourse, as the narrator in *TNI* is fond of reminding his readers. Clearly she is a *njai* and is accepted as such, but she has rejected the stereotypic position of a *njai* as indolent and disloyal.

When the plantation which Verkerk manages is sold due to the a leaf disease, he is out of work for two months. Isah decides to become a petty trader because: “...saja orang Djawa, saja nanti taoe akal bagimana misti mentjari makan.”290 Isah is saying that although she is a *njai*, she is not lazy (like the others) and will go out to work like a Javanese woman should. It is at this point Isah rejects her positioning as a *njai*. She works to support her *toean* and their son and she discards the *njai* habit for the dress of village women. She tells Verkerk not to worry because when she goes to the villages she will not be identifiable as a *njai*, she will

---

290 “...I am a Javanese and know how to earn a living.” *TNI*, p223
look just like the other women: "...saja tida begitoe soeka berpakean seperti njai-njai jang lain, kaloe dia orang soedah biasa lepas badjoe koeroeng biroe, maloe dia orang pegi ka desa desa seperti bibi-bibi. Tetapi sekarang ... saja tida maloe pake badjoe koeroeng biroe seperti orang Djawa prampoewan jang laen-
aen...". Isah is never again noted wearing the njai’s distinctive white kebaja.

When Isah loses her toean, she continues to be regarded as a njai by the Dutch and priboemi alike. After being saved from the flooded river, Isah is interviewed by controleur (inspector) Laanhof for a position as his cook. During the interview Laanhof notes that njai Belanda (njais of Dutchmen) typically "...tida bekerdja serta poela si njai itoe soeka menanggoeng lelah dan tjape aken membantoe mentjari kahidoepan." It is this position which Isah constantly refuses, although resignation to the njai stereotype would have meant a much easier life for her.

When Isah becomes Laanhof’s cook, his friends tease him about her “other attractions”. As both the resident and the assistant resident have njais, there is a general expectation that Isah is just the same as the rest. The assistant resident’s wife and the other njonjas in Wonosobo treat Isah badly (haak renda pada si Isah), believing her to be Laanhof’s njai and a njai like all others. It is not until Isah proves to be loyal to the memory of Verkerk (confirming her njai status), diligent in her duties and honest that they realise Isah is "...begitoe besar bedahnja dari pada laen-laen perampoewan Djawa." There also seems to be an assertion that not only is Isah not like a njai, but she is not like a Javanese woman.

---

291 "...I am not very fond of dressing like other njais, if they have, as is usual, discarded the blue jacket, they become ashamed to go to villages (dressed) like aunts (that is, in the blue jacket). But now I am not ashamed to wear the blue jacket like other Javanese women..., TNL Vol 1, p223

292 "...don’t work and the njai like to laze around and are too lethargic to help in earning a living.

293 TNL p572

294 "...very different from other Javanese women", TNL p590
Isah continues to be called upon to prove that she is not a stereotypic njai. This becomes difficult as Laanhof is still unmarried. It is assumed that Isah is his njai and Lasimin is frequently mistaken for Laanhof’s son. At a farewell for Laanhof, who has been promoted to Resident, the prijais and loerahs discuss Lasimin’s origins. Everyday he looks more and more like a Dutch boy and they do not understand why he dresses as a Javanese when: “Soenggoe kaloe Lasimin berpakean seperti sinjo sinjo orang tentoe brani soempah jang dia anakja toean Laanhof”295. Enroute to Laanhof’s new posting in Kedoe, they stay overnight with the Resident of Poerworedjo. Everyone is convinced that Isah is Laanhof’s njai, not just his cook. “...tida ada satoe jang maoe pertjaja, ada satoe orang jang bilang: ach kaloe semoea pentjoeri menakoe nistjaja boei terlaloe ketjil.”296 Isah doesn’t care if she is called a njai, as long as she is not treated as a njai: “Isah tida perdoeli-in jang dia di seboet njai controlleur dia dapor makanan baik baik, tempat tidoernja poen baik...”297.

The Resident is the only one who believes that Isah is indeed a cook. He tells his wife that if she was a njai, he would not have permitted them to stay for one minute in his house, thus confirming the changing Dutch attitude towards njais. He tells his wife that it is obvious Isah is not a njai, her behaviour is not in the least like a njai, furthermore she doesn’t dress like a njai: “...adakah kau fiat njai njai jang tida berhias pake barang emas intan, malah dia orang seperti sengadja maoe tentonin dia poenja isi lemari emas intan boekan?”298 Nor does Isah look like a njai: she is clean, her blue kebaya is that of a Javanese village woman and she does not wear earrings, bracelets, necklaces or hair pins.

295 “Truly, if Lasimin dressed like Indo boys, people would be game to swear that he is Laanhof’s son.”, TNL, Vol 4, p4
296 “...no-one believes (that Isah is only a cook), someone said: “heavens, if all thieves confessed, the jail would certainly be too small.”, TNL, Vol 4, p7
297 “Isah doesn’t care if she is called the controller’s njai, she has very good food and somewhere comfortable to sleep...”, TNL, Vol 4, p7
298 “...have you ever seen njais who are not decked out in gold and diamonds? Don’t they, rather, go about as if they are showing off a wardrobe full of gold and diamonds?”, TNL, Vol 4, p10
Isah’s refusal of the trappings of a *njai* and persistence in positioning herself where she wants to be depicts her agency. She has chosen not to take up the easy and idle life of the *njai*. Clearly she is still a *njai* as she continues to be faithful to the memory of Verkerk, but she has rejected the *njai* lifestyle of comfort and ease, preferring to earn her living as Laanhof’s cook and housekeeper. She is a self made, honourable and faithful woman-*njai* within a literary discourse which represents the *njai* lifestyle as wealthy, indulgent and transient.

However, Isah is the only *njai* in these *tjerita* who is also an *iboe*. As both an *iboe* and a *njai*, Isah remains in the background on public occasions. Although her Indo son, now a doctor Djawa, is accepted into high society life, Isah is not. At Adele Laanhof’s birthday party, Lassimin socialises, sings and plays a duet with Adele, while Isah tends the cloak room.299 On public occasions she is a socially unacceptable *njai*. It is not until Lassimin’s elevation to Regent that Isah is accepted back into *prioemi* society. The narrator notes that for the ceremony, and for the very first time, Isah sat with the *njonja* and *isteri prijai* (the wives of the native officials). Njonja Laanhof had told her it was not appropriate for her to sit at the back.300 Her re-entry into society is, to a large extent, through her son’s endeavours, but his acceptance is due to Isah’s teachings and to her own *haloes* behaviour.

There is tension for Isah as a *njai*. She does not refuse the title or her social standing within the discourse, but she refuses all other aspects of the representation of a *njai*. She does not wear the traditional white kebaja, the outer and identifying symbol of the *njai*, dressing instead in the *badjoe koeroeng* of the villages. Nor does she cover herself with jewellery, in the manner of many of the *njais*, for example, Ros Mina (*KMPDI*). She continues to maintain many of the customs (*adat*) of her *bangsa*, while adopting/adapting to Dutch customs, for example, she cooks Dutch food and is familiar with alcohol.

299 *TNI*, Vol 5, p397
300 *TNL*, Vol 5, p540
The tension is represented by Isah’s dual roles as a *njai* and as an *iboe* and to some extent represents the transitional nature of the 1890s, the period in which the *tjerita* is set and was probably written. As an *iboe*, Isah encourages her son’s mental outlook as a Dutchman while dressing him as a Javanese. He is neither a *sinjo*, Javanese, nor a Dutchman and yet is all three and is accepted by all three ethnic groups. He, like his mother is a most unusual person. He speaks Dutch fluently and plays the violin.

A group gathers outside his home when he practices. The *Assistant Blandeng* and his wife don’t believe it can be Lasimin who is playing. His wife exclaims that even though the Javanese can play the music, they do not have the right feelings to play music such as that which they are hearing. Lasimin also socialises within Dutch circles. He is nominated and accepted as a member of the *sociteit* (club). *Nj griffier landraad* (the wife of the clerk of the court) says she doesn’t think Lasimin is really Javanese, he only wears Javanese clothes.

Isah must juggle with her roles as a native women, a *njai* and an *iboe*. Her son is a member of elite society, to which she has no access. She has been forced to give up her *bangsa*, but has access through her son who is an Indo but is accepted as a Javanese because he always dresses and behaves as a Javanese. As far as Dutch and *priboemi* society are concerned Isah is a *njai*; she cannot be anything else while she remains true to Verkerk and this is outlined in a conversation between the Regent’s daughter, Truda (later Lassimin’s wife) and her Dutch friend, Louise. Louise thinks that Isah is sad and goes on to speculate that the reason is because her *toean* left her. Truda is not convinced because usually Javanese women who are deserted are not sad. In two or three days they have another *toean*. Truda observes that it is the women who are in the wrong because they don’t love their *toean* and steal from him to guard against an uncertain future. Truda concludes that this is the reason the Dutch talk about Javanese

---

301 An unknown administrative position
302 *TNI* Vol 5, p289
303 *TNI* Vol 5, p330
women insultingly. Truda also says that Isah is not like other njais.\textsuperscript{304}

It is through the often repeated statement that Isah is not like a njai, that she attains her agency. She is her own person, within the cultural and colonial limitations of the late nineteenth century. Her positioning within the njai discourse is of her own choosing and, while it may be argued that she is only acting in accordance with adat, this is not the accepted (stereotypic) behaviour of a njai. There were many opportunities for Isah to forget Verkerk and find herself another toean, in what is represented in the literature as the njai tradition. Laanhof had asked her to become his njai and the Wedono proposed to make her his selir. Isah rejects these offers and remains true to herself and to Verkerk, unlike her njai contemporaries. She has the strength to withstand the implied criticism of her as a njai. She takes the position that it is only through her behaviour and her actions that she can be different from (and better than) other njais. She is accepted in this position - as a unique njai.

There are a number of similarities between Isah’s story and that of Idja (\textit{HJT}). She is similarly faithful to her sinjo, although he is less than honourable in his association with her. When Idja becomes pregnant he decides that he must get rid of her and gives her some money before putting her on the train to Tangerang.\textsuperscript{305} Idja gives birth to Amat, who like Lasimin, is not at all like a native, but resembles his father.\textsuperscript{306} Rather than adopt the usual practice of securing a replacement sinjo, Idja refuses all offers of marriage and as soon as Amat is fifteen years old, Idja leaves to find her sinjo. We do not rediscover Idja until the end of the story, some 10 years later, still faithful to her sinjo. There is no idea of Idja’s progress in this rather brief story, however, it is clear that she does not allow herself to fall prey to the attentions of other men. A chance reunion between Amat and his dying father reveals the latter’s undying love for Idja. Thus the theme

\textsuperscript{304} \textit{TNL}, Vol 5, pp277-8
\textsuperscript{305} \textit{HJT}, p10
\textsuperscript{306} \textit{HJT}, p12
of Isah's story - the faithful njai and her son is repeated in HIT. Like Isah, Idja's resistance to her construction of a njai is in her faithfulness to the memory of her sinjo. Both are empowered by their loyalty and their refusal of the approaches of other men, despite their poverty and youth.

Also in the mould of the dutiful-daughter-turned-njai is Alimah. As the subject of men's attention and at the mercy of their efforts to tempt her away from her toean, the dutiful daughters become faithful njais. In TNA, Alimah, like Isah, does not waver from her djodo, toean Lort. The narrator, like the TNI narrator, comments on this behaviour which is unusual for a njai. He considers Lort to be very fortunate because Alimah is industrious and well mannered. Alimah succeeds in becoming literate in Dutch. She also speaks Malay and she is able to converse with Lort, whereas her mother hides at the back of the house when Lort visits because she cannot speak Malay. Alimah is also a reader; the narrator notes that she has read “1001 Nights”. Literacy empowers Alimah and after only three months she is invited out by the Dutch women, because “... adat dan prangeinja tela menoeroet tjara Ollanda.” (she has taken up Dutch customs and attitudes).

Whereas Isah remains in awe of colonial and priboemi authority, Alimah becomes more independent. Not only is she independent of her bangsa, she also acts independently of her toean.

Alimah was in every respect a woman of great strength. From a poverty stricken family, she was given in marriage to the son of the loerah of Singoredjo. Usually this would have been considered something of a coup for Alimah and her family, but Alimah had already met her djodo and they had exchanged vows

307 TNA, p168
308 TNA, p85
309 TNA, p284
310 TNA, p169
in the garden. Alimah would have exchanged a great deal more had not the Dutchman refused her advances.

Once secure in her relationship with Lort, Alimah proves to be a woman of remarkable cunning and daring. Gangs of bandits have been terrorising the people and travellers for some time. The Wedono is suspected of being behind the unrest and when he throws a party, she attends unescorted with a plan to unmask the bandits. This plan has been formulated entirely by herself and without the knowledge of Lort. Alimah watches everyone, like a tiger inspecting lambs before eating, to determine the leader of the gang. She deliberately gets everyone drunk by constantly refilling their glasses.

Alimah deliberately flaunts herself at the leader of the thieves in order to find the location of his hideout and the stolen property. She pretends that she wishes to rejoin her own community and leave the Dutchman. That she would want to rejoin her bangsa is unquestioned. This leaves the reader with the perception that it was entirely understandable, from a priboemi point of view, that a njai would be grateful for the opportunity to abandon her toean and through a legitimate marriage return to her bangsa. This same priboemi point of view is also evident in TND. Dasima is enjoined to leave her toean and return to Islam (and her bangsa) to rediscover her self respect.

Alimah treads a very fine line and on two occasions is in danger of being raped by the robber leader, but she manages to talk her way out of compromising situations. Wiro, the leader of the bandits, is filled with lust and in trying to impress Alimah shows her where his wealth is hidden. Alimah carries the information back to her toean and the thieves are arrested. Alimah is praised for her part in capturing the thieves and she and Lort receive a reward from the government.

---

311 Gardens are the conventional locations for Javanese courtships, Quinn, Op Cit, p207-8.
312 TNA, p386
313 TNA, pp390-1
314 TNA, pp308-317
Alimah is clearly a woman with agency. Like Isah, she is not the usual type of njai. She seeks an education and is at least partially acceptable in the society of Dutch njonjas. Alimah is not selfish or greedy like Marsina, as she shows when she acts in the public interest by capturing the bandits, all without the consent or the knowledge of her toean-guardian.

The other haloes women, though not faithful njais, who refuse their construction and positioning as njais are Paina (TNP) and Sida (NS). These are the two tjerita to which I have already referred as being stories from the priboemi point of view. As would be expected they, unlike Isah and Alimah, refuse to become njais and retain their bangsa, adat and agama. In so doing they actively shun all efforts to include them in the njai discourse, although Sida is an abandoned njai when her story opens.

Sida may have been a njai, but she makes it clear through her resistance to toean K that she no longer wishes to be regarded as njai, or at least not his njai. Her resistance is in refusing to be charmed by his material possessions and she remains asam (sour) towards him. She does not acquiesce to his demands for her affection and must be considered agentic through her continued refusal to be drawn into the njai discourse.

Nji Paina also refuses to be categorised as a njai. She was also a dutiful daughter whose agency is also represented in her refusal of the njai role. Paina’s choice was life as Briot's njai, a fate worse than death, or death itself. She chose the latter, rejecting her construction as a njai, believing death was preferable to this fate.

The dutiful daughters became women with agency through their ability to refuse aspects of their positioning which they did not consider appropriate for them as individuals. They were able to reject those parts of the njai discourse which they deemed repugnant to them. But what of those women whose entry into the njai discourse was not as dutiful daughters?
Dependency - The Greedy Njais

The njais who are haloes are as frequently the subjects of these tjerita as those represented in rather disparaging terms as lazy, gossip mongering, greedy and treacherous. However, it must be noted that the polite, hard working njais are held to be exceptional among njais, thus the representation of njais as greedy and treacherous probably represented a commonly held view of njais at the turn of the century. They were regarded by many as little better than prostitutes and this is certainly borne out by most of these tjerita njai. Those njais, like Maninten, Ros Mina and Marsina are greedy for wealth and greedy for sex. In turn, they are sex objects, presented for the sexual pleasure of their toean and others, as well as the reader and they are, or become, the epitome of "bad" njais exemplifying the narrator's moral lessons.

The representation of the njais Marsina, Maninten and Ros Mina shows them to be women who are totally encapsulated within a discourse of sexual (and other) transgressions, which I believe is the njai discourse. They are without any sense of loyalty to their toean and appear to have no redeeming features. As women they are disempowered for two main reasons: they are dependent on their male partners for everything material and they are not motivated or enabled to move beyond the confines of "belonging" to others. None of these women are represented as workers, with the exception of Maninten who starts out in Maurit's household as a cook but quickly becomes enamoured of his status and wealth. As njais, they lack agency because they are represented as typical njais who are dependent on a toean; they are money hungry and lazy. All of these features demonstrate their lack of agency within the njai discourse. They have no means, or perhaps inclination, to refuse their positioning as typical njais.

315 An anti-prostitution movement - the Vereeniging tot Bevordering der Zedelijkheid notes that "...it is our task to... protest strongly against all cases of public violation of virtue... whether this violation takes the form of concubinage or other kinds of prostitution..." Quoted in Liesbeth Hesselink, "Prostitution: A Necessary Evil, Particularly in The Colonies" pp205-239 in Locher-Scholten and Niehok (Eds), Indonesian Women in Focus, Leiden, KITLV Press, 1992, p210
In all three *tjerita* the ‘bad’ *njais* take up their roles very actively, but they are given no choice about their position. Marsina plans a robbery; is this different from Alimah who plans a capture? On the face of it, the actions are very similar. My point is that Marsina only confirms our knowledge of *njais*, as represented in this literature. It is greed which motivates her actions, a characteristic of the ‘typical’ *njai* represented in this selection of literature. Her (active) involvement in robbery, seduction and poisoning substantiate the various narrators’ representations of *njais*.

**Tjinta and Birahi**

There are a number of differences between the *njais* represented as faithful partners and dutiful daughters and those who are plainly sinners. I contend that the basic difference is love (*tjinta*) as opposed to lust (*birahi*). In a relationship of love, the couple are represented as *djodos*. This ensures loyalty and faithfulness between the couple and their ultimate good fortune. The *njais* who are not in a relationship with their *djodo* have no hero/guardian who will remain true to them. They have entered the relationship through a lust for wealth and this ensures their dependency on the *toean*. Furthermore, they are disempowered in terms of being able to reject any aspect of their positioning as *njais*. They are not able to change, thus they are consigned to a future of misery. Ros Mina and Marsina never find a *djodo* and are always represented as the object of sexual lust and the initiators of lust for wealth.

Positioning outside the discourse of *bangsa* and removal from the authority of the father empowers daughters by allowing them the opportunity to be someone other than an *iboe*. However, it not by becoming a *njai* per se which gives them agency. It is only those who find their *djodo* and true love (*tjinta*) in the foreigner-guardian who have the courage and strength to resist an assigned position as a *njai*. In rejecting many of the practices of the *njai*,
as represented in these tjerita, they become truly agentic. The degree and manifestation of agency varies considerably.

There are a multiplicity of positions from which njais resist their construction in the (im)moral order of the njais. Some, like Isah and Alimah are haloes and, apart from their association with an infidel, are hardly distinguishable morally from a good Javanese Muslim woman. Idja is less fortunate as she has no toean and is not able to provide for her son in the same way as Isah, although she too is loyal to a memory of her sinjo and is known as a stall owner, rather than a njai. Both Isah and Alimah are still called njais, thus are part of the njai discourse. Despite her haloes nature, Alimah continues to be treated as a njai. This is evidenced by the bandit chief’s attitude to her, up until the time of her departure with Lort for his mother country. Of all the njais, Isah least resembles a njai and is less likely to be treated as a njai. This is surely the ultimate test of agency. Others, who are ruled by nafsoe, cannot resist at all and are bound in the web of sexual transgression. They are victims of their own lust and are treated as sexual commodities, thus confirming their lack of agency within the njai discourse.
CHAPTER SIX

LOVE AND LUST IN SUMMARY

My Approach

The major problem in a thesis which examines the literature of the “other” is to illustrate and explain lives without violating their reality by imposing an alien framework/interpretation which would dominate the texts themselves. I concluded that an approach through a post structural analysis of the discourses in which the njais are represented would give some idea of who they were without the dangers of colonising the texts. In addition, a post structuralist approach allows for a focus on the productivity of language in the construction of the njai. As my research is text-based, a theoretical line of enquiry which is located in language but which also enables a multiple of voices to be heard was important.

In discussing njai there was one other issue which obviously required consideration, that of gender. Gender is a basic organising principle in all societies and has become a central factor in the shaping of consciousness and in the distribution of power and privilege. As native women mistresses, njais are “other-other” to their male toeans316 (and to the authors) and I initially questioned how to handle a potentially distorted and partial account of social life about women. In the end, it was this problem that evoked my interest in the njai. At the centre of my analysis was a feminist consciousness which struggled with texts presenting the njai as the object of the “male gaze”. My anxieties in (re)presenting and reinforcing an almost totally male perspective of njais were mitigated by reading the texts in context; as a part of the social, sexual and historical world of the Indies.

316 See Chapter Two, p23
Literature in Historical Context

The period in which the *njai* novels were written could reasonably be described as unsettling. All around was change. The oppressive system of forced cultivation under which the authors and their fictional characters would have grown up, or knew intimately as the immediate past, was slowly coming to an end. The effect of policy changes and funding increases meant European-style "modernisation". Some attempts were made by the colonial officials to balance the traditional and the modern, but with the rapid population expansion, expediency prevailed over empathy and the interests of the powerful were served first.

The *njai-toean* relationship was affected by the increasing number of European and Chinese women who began to migrate to the Indies. As Schoffer notes, "A kind of social apartheid developed which had been less conspicuous in earlier days when a European had to "Indianise" in his dress and habits by taking an Indonesian woman concubine..."\(^{317}\) Now it seemed that not only were the natives socially unacceptable, but the Eurasians and Chinese also suffered discrimination. According to a 1912 article in the Medical Association's journal *Bulletin vanden Bond van Geneescheeren in Ned-Indie*, Eurasians and Chinese were "...totally unfit to serve as (doctors) because they were cared for by Indonesian servants who allowed them to develop an interest only in satisfying their personal lusts..."\(^{318}\)

This uncertainty and the changing social values are represented in the *tjerita njai*. In *TNA* Nasiman doesn't know to whom he should be loyal, the *loerah*, representing traditional values, or his employer Toean Lort, the face of modernity. Few of the *njais* are permitted entree into the society of their toean and in most cases the relationship is something to be hidden. As I have previously noted in Chapter Five, in *TNI* the Resident with whom Laanhof,


\(^{318}\) P.W. van der Veur, "E.F.E Douwes Dekker. Evangelist for Indonesian Political Nationalism", pp78-95 in Fasseur, Op Cit, p82
Isah and Lassimin stay overnight says that he would not have permitted them to stay if he thought that Isah was Laanhof’s njai. *TNI* was published in 1904, so from this *tjerita* it is possible to detect a change in social attitudes towards *njais* and those who kept them by the turn of the century.

Without the historical data which traces the development of colonial policies, especially as far as they related to women, it would have been difficult to make sense of some aspects of these *tjerita*. Literature and history, although founded on quite different comprehensions of ‘reality’, can provide understandings of each other’s truths. That which is important in one discourse is not necessarily viewed with the same significance in the other. Thus, although this dissertation is based in literature, historical information has provided valuable insights.

**Some Questions**

Before I commenced the research for this thesis the questions which were uppermost in my mind were: “Why am I reading these texts? What kinds of acts were the writing of them?” During the research the questions had become: “Why am I reading this way? What produces this reading?” I hoped that in considering these questions that I could come to a comprehension regarding the representation of *njais* from this small corpus of *tjerita njai*.

**The Act of Writing**

From the information available it could be postulated that, in part anyway, the acts of writing were commercially driven. This is not the same as saying that the stories had no “literary merit”, a view subscribed to by *Balai Poestaka* and some Indonesian critics, like Rosidi, who have dismissed writing in Low or Sino Malay by the Dutch word *werkje* (little, minor work). However, unlike *Balai Poestaka*, the private companies publishing work in Low Malay had to exist on their own merits in a competitive commercial world. They needed to be profit orientated. No
doubt sales figures indicated what type of stories appealed to the reading public and publishers probably made decisions accordingly. There is evidence from the numbers of extant *tjerita njai* that these stories were popular. The audience was probably fairly wide as their content could range from the blatantly sexual to the pure and moral. Perhaps their general popularity was, as I have already hypothesised, in the expectation of a story about slightly risque mixed-race relationships.

While profit may have limited the authors’ scope, it really says little about the act of writing or the writers. The majority of authors of this corpus of *tjerita njai* were journalists by profession. This may give some clues about the acts of writing. The most obvious is the claim that they were writing fictionalised documentaries, that is, “the stories which really happened...”. It is conceivable that the author may have had first-hand knowledge of the newspaper version which he/she put to use in representing the story in a fictionalised version. Many of the *tjerita* were first published as serialised stories in newspapers, a medium with which many of the authors were very familiar. Since fiction was introduced into newspapers to improve circulation\(^{319}\), the *tjerita* may been considered part of the author/journalists’ craft at that time. For others it was probably akin to a hobby, something which was done as a leisure activity.

**Why Read This Way?**

The ways of speaking and writing influence conceptual boundaries and create areas of silence. In the early Indies *njai* literature the silences are gendered and ageist. It is both mothers and children who are denied voices. As I have already noted in Chapter One, women and children were represented as though they were one entity when a decision was made to restrict *KMPDI* to a male adult audience. In the literature itself, women’s voices are rarely

\(^{319}\) According to Aeusrivongse, newspapers were originally a vehicle for advertising and serialised stories were introduced to make papers saleable. Nidhi Aeusrivongse, *Fiction As History: A Study of Pre-War Indonesian Novels and Novelists* (1920-1942), Unpub PhD Thesis; University of Michigan, 1976
represented as speaking in public. Although women's opinions may be taken into account during domestic discussions, it is men who talk and act publicly.

Women tend to be written into stories in purely domestic capacities as wives and daughters. None of these characters is seen outside the home, except Alimah's mother (TNA) who sells vegetables in the market. None of the iboes is anything but a wife and mother. They have defined subject positions within bangsa, adat and agama and the author leaves no impression that any of them may refuse her positioning within these discourses.

Why am I reading the texts this way? It may appear that by focusing on the oppositions of public and private, male and female, I am forcing a binary structure of subordination and domination upon the texts, thus defeating the purpose of allowing women's voices to be heard. However, it is only by first locating these binary oppositions, as the first stage of deconstructing the tjerita, that a process can be set in motion to destabilise values and provide some flexibility and fluidity within which certain women, in this case the njais, may be seen as agentic.

At this juncture I would like to examine the question: "What produces this reading?" concurrently with "Why read the texts this way?" as they are really two sides of the same inquiry within the context of a post structuralist approach. Both questions acknowledge that any conclusion reached is never final. A conclusion is contingent upon the historical moment of reading; it is both temporal and personal and therefore open to contestation.

The strategic contrast is between the position of the iboe in relation to her daughter, the njai. In contrast with the iboe who is always represented as being encapsulated within her bangsa, the njai has abandoned and been abandoned by bangsa. This separation is traumatic. As a transgressor of the boundaries of bangsa, adat and agama, the daughter shames her family, particularly her father who is deemed to be responsible for her correct upbringing. In most of the tjerita this shame (maloe) is
followed by periods of soesa. Soesa appears as retribution for transgression and where man (or woman) takes the matter of revenge into his/her own hands, their suffering may continue until death.

As a person who has turned her back on society and religion, the njai is represented as no better than other (women) transgressors, namely prostitutes. She becomes a subject within what I have called the njai discourse, as exemplified by stereotypes represented through characteristics, such as idleness, gossip, greed and lust. While these stereotypes are the central images of the njai discourse, there are other members who are able to make themselves marginal to the discourse. These are the njais who continue to maintain traditional haloes behaviour. They are neither iboes nor are they daughters and are no longer subject to the authority of their fathers. Because of their standards of correct and proper behaviour, they are not willing to be positioned with the other njais, although they do not reject the title of njai, thus remain within the njai discourse. In maintaining traditional morals these njai are not associated with the ‘typical’ njai and narrators go to some trouble to explain this difference. Through the example of their actions and behaviour the njais, characterised by haloes behaviour, reject those parts of the njai discourse which are not in accordance with their morals.

What is valued in the tjerita is a njai who accepts and adapts to her position as a njai, but without the attributes of greed and lust. This is only possible when there is true love (tjinta) between the njai and her toean. Tali tjinta is taken to mean that the pair are destined for each other (djodo) and this in turn ensures the loyalty and faithfulness of the njai and their eventual happiness.

What Produces This Reading?

In my reading and writing I have tried to let the texts speak for themselves, that is, the production of meaning is through the language of the tjerita. Soesa is common to all of the tjerita and begins when the njai recognises her djodo in a Dutchman. In the
stories about a couple who are djodo, the njai is always haloes and so the soesa is temporary. The unfortunate njais who are bought out of prostitution, presumably on the basis of beauty and sexual performance, are represented within the paradigm of greed, idleness and lust. They are unable to adapt to their new lifestyle and fall back into prostitution or into evil ways. They have no means of refusing their positioning as a njai and for them soesa is permanent.

Apart from these extremes of good, associated with haloes, tjinta and djodo and bad (ketemah'an, napsoe, birahi), there are other positions from which the njai has been represented. Njai Sida, for example, commences with Sida having been left by her toean. She was a njai of good character, without being his djodo. This is represented through a toean who, although having left his njai, continues to write and send money. The reader infers that she must have been loyal and faithful, despite the lack of a djodo-type relationship. Sida is inveigled into another njai-toean relationship from which she escapes to become a good Muslim wife.

In allowing the texts to speak in the language of the narrator and in examining the ways words are used, it has been possible to note similarities in representation, as well as to note differences and absences. Production of this reading has been a deliberate endeavour to establish some sort of sympathy and understanding with the narrator.

**Temporal Personal and Relational Conclusions**

It has been the aim of this thesis to recover a representation of the njai within an historical moment of considerable social and political change. I have shown that, despite the assertions of the narrators, the typical njai is not the only njai. In fact it is largely through these constructions of a stereotype against which their heroine is compared that we can hear a multiplicity of voices from the figures of njais. Therefore I have been unwilling to define or present the many njais in these tjerita as one commonly depicted
representation. I certainly did not find a Njai Ontosoroh, from whom many of our modern day images of a njai are derived, although there are indications that njais such as she probably existed. Dasima certainly managed her toean’s wealth and Alimah was strong willed, intelligent, politically astute and adventurous.

The early colonial acceptability of social-sexual relationships between Europeans and natives had begun to change. By the turn of the century, race, as represented through skin colour, began to matter, as did legally defined marriage. From the perspective of the native, probably there was little change: the relationship was never acceptable in native society because it transgressed customary and religious law. It is this perspective that I have used to describe the njai as a transgressor of the boundaries of bangsa, adat and agama. It is the only real ground that I have found in the texts to describe all of these women as njais. A njai was potentially any daughter who chose, or was forced, into a relationship with a foreigner. The term njai covered many women from different backgrounds who were considered to have transgressed the boundaries of bangsa through their sexual association with a foreigner, which perforce meant their rejection of adat and agama.

The ways of writing about njais were not the same for all of the authors. The ways of reading are not the same for all audiences. Thus there is no “final knowledge” and no “conclusion” since the object of our gaze is always contested, relational and temporal.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

‘Bengal Civilian’, *Rambles in the Java and the Straits in 1852*, The Hague: W. van Hoeve Ltd, 1964, First Published Simkin Marshal and Co, 1853

CHEN Wen Zwan, *See-Ie*, Tosari: *Tjerita* Roman, 1938


DAHLIA, *Kasopanan Timoer*, Soerabaia: *Tjerita* Roman, 1932

FRANCIS, G., *Tjerita Njai Dasima*, Batavia, 1896

JUVENILE Kuo, *Anak Haram*, Batavia: Kwee Seng Tjoan, nd

JUVENILE Kuo, *Ros Mina Njai Jang Manis*, Batavia: Kwee Seng Tjoan, nd


KWEE Tek Hoaij, *Drama Di Boven Digoel*, Tjitjoeroeg: Drukkerij "Moestika", 1938


OEI Soei Tiong, *Tjerita Njai Alimah*, Solo: Sie Dhian Ho, 1904


PROBITAS, *Harta Jang Terpendam atawa Kadjahatan Njai Marsina*, no publication details, nd

SOETOMO Djauhar Arifin, *Andang Teroena*, Djakarta : Balai Poestaka, nd

THIO Tjin Boen, *Njai Warsih*, Batavia : Hoa Siang In Kiok, nd


Unknown author, *Kota Medan Penoe Dengen Impian*, Batavia : Kwee Seng Tjoan, nd

Unknown author, *Boekoe Tjerita Maninten*, Malang : Kwee Khay Khee, 1918

**Secondary Sources**

**Books**


DAVIES, Bronwyn, Shards of Glass, Australia : Allen and Unwin, 1993

DEPARTEMEN Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia, Jakarta : Balai Pustaka


EAGLETON, Terry, Literary Theory, Oxford : Blackwell, 1983


HELLWIG, Tineke, In the Shadow of Change, Berkeley : University of California, 1994a

HELLWIG, Tineke, Adjustment and Discontent, Canada : Netherlandic Press, 1994b

JOHNS, A.H., Cultural Options and the Role of Tradition, Canberra ; Australian National University, 1979

KEMENTERIAN Pendidikan Malaysia, Kamus Dewan, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1993


MULDER, Neils, Individual and Society in Java, Yogjakarta : Gadjah Mada University Press, 1992

NIO Joe Lan, Sastra Indonesia-Tionghoa, Djakarta : Gunung Agung, 1962

PEARCE, Lynne, Woman/Image/Text, Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1991

PRAMOEDYA Ananta Toer, Tempoe Doeloe, Jakarta : Hastra Mitra, 1982

PUSPOSAPUTRO, Sarwono, Kamus Peribahasa, Jakarta : PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1991

ROSIDI, Ichtisar *Sedjarah Sastra Indonesia*, Indonesia: Penerbit Binatjipta, 1969

RUSLI AMRAN, *Padang Riwayatmu Dulu*, Indonesia: C.V. Yasaguna, 1988


SWEENEY, Amin, *Authors and Audiences In Traditional Malay Literature*, Berkeley: Center For South and Southeast Asia Studies, University of California, 1980

VREDENBREGT, Jacob, *As the Day Draws to an End*, Jakarta: Penerbit Djambatan, 1990. First Published by Nijgh & Van Ditmar, Amsterdam, nd


Articles


INGLESON, John, "Prostitution in Colonial Java" in CHANDLER D. and RICKLEFS, M., (Eds), Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Java, Clayton : Centre for Southeast Asian Studies Monash University, 1986, pp123-140


VAN DER KOLFF, G.H., “European Influence on Native Agriculture “ in SCHRIEKE, B., (Ed), The Effect of Western Influence on Native
Civilisations in the Malay Archipelago, Batavia : G. Kolff and Co, 1929, pp103-125

VAN DER VEUR, Paul, “Cultural Aspects of the Eurasian Community in Indonesian Colonial Society”, in Indonesia, No 6 (October), 1968, pp38-53


PhD Theses

AEUSRIVONGSE, Nidhi, Fiction As History: A Study of Pre-War Indonesian Novels and Novelists (1920-1942), Unpub PhD Thesis ; University of Michigan, 1976

