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“*Bukan Perempuan Biasa*” (Not Ordinary Women): The Identity Construction of Female Celebrity in Indonesian Media

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You can imitate her action, but it is impossible to imitate her fortune
(Ki Ageng Soerjomentaram cited in Jatman, 1996: 208)

ABSTRACT

Celebrities' gossips and their social life has long been a commodity of the Indonesian capitalist media. Since gossips and the female celebrity's stories are the product of those strong groups (i.e. capitalist media) in the society, so their figures that have been constructed by the media have influenced the views of society to the ideological interests of the media and their apparatuses. The images of female celebrities in this case can be seen as exemplifying figures of diverse, confident and liberated women as public figures which in turn could help to legitimate resistant to the concept of the 'autonomous women.' This text-based work focuses on stories and coverage of the top-rated high-earning female celebrities during 2001 to 2004. The paper looks at how social class and gender are involved and rearticulated in the formation of the celebrity personality in post-authoritarian Indonesia.

Key words: *Female celebrities, celebrities culture, cultural identity constructions, gender politics, female autonomy*

Ayu Azhari, a prominent female film star, was in a hurry to reach her lavish car. A journalist and a cameraman ran after her in the car park of one shopping mal in Jakarta. 'Ah, don't talk, if there's no fact,' Ayu said. This scene, which was broadcasted for less than thirty seconds, attracted Ella, a housewife and a fan of Ayu Azhari. Her eyes were fixed on her TV screen, regardless of Hafiz, her youngest son of two years old, whimpering for a spoon of his meal, so reported *Koran Tempo* (16 January 2003).

The shots of a tense Ayu Azhari fleeing the pursuit of the infotainment journalist and cameraman appeared on *BM on TV* of Lativi channel, the so-called 'infotainment' program of celebrity gossip and stories. *BM on TV* (an acronym for *Bintang Millenia*, a brand of weekly entertainment tabloid) is an example of the latest growth of local tabloidisation of contemporary television news, which has flourished on the national private television stations everyday in Indonesia.

Indeed, it is hard not to talk about celebrity gossip in Indonesia these days. Private television stations bombard the audience with hours of gossip shows from early in the morning until evening. Various infotainment programs, produced by independent

production houses, sell the juiciest celebrity stories of the week. Although those infotainment programs have been criticised for their low standard of journalistic style, and for the fact that they all look alike for running the same stories in the same formats with similar shots and presenters of a similar type, those entertainment programs seem to attract the viewers who care more about what the celebrities are doing than about the latest political corruption issue in the country.

Ella, the housewife viewer reported by *Koran Tempo* above, is typical of those viewers who show their interest in the details of celebrity's lives. Ella's interest in Ayu Azhari's coverage seems to signify that there is a curiosity and pleasure in consuming personal details and affairs of the media figures in recent Indonesia. A star is defined by *Variety* magazine as, 'a curious amalgam consisting of a person wrapped in a certain body of work at a particular moment in time' (Bart, 1997:4 in Miller, 2000:595). Ella and Ayu are two different Indonesian females in this text. Ella is representative of audience member engaging with media figures and makes meaning of her celebrity's body and identification, while Ayu is a star, a central figure to the present-day

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media culture who also sometimes collides with 'the discursive meaning-producing machine that culture is' (Hermes, 1999:70).

The relation between audiences and stars has been the object of analysis of cultural and media studies in a Western context. As stars 'personalize social meaning and ideology' and they are 'implicated in consumerism and stereotyping' (Miller, 2000: 96), the interrogation to unpack the creation of stars and their identification is significant, particularly in the context of Indonesia, which is still less studied. As Miller (2000: 596) argues a star is an 'object of personal as much as collective consumption' and therefore, they embody 'many contradictions of capital and gender and are capable of so many decodings by various minorities and cultures, that they are endlessly plural and have no form of their own.' Here in this paper, I use media and cultural perspectives to take up the celebrity-texts to analyse the constructions of Indonesian female celebrity figures and to look at how the constructions involve an imbrication of 'private agency of personal characteristics' and 'public domain of socially meaningful activity' (Miller, 2000:596) in the contemporary Indonesian context.

This paper thus aims to understand the significance of celebrity figures and identification in the socio-cultural and political context of Indonesia. This is achieved through an analysis of news articles in the mainstream publications between 2000 and 2005. This text-based work focuses on stories and coverage of the top-rated high-earning female celebrities during 2001 to 2004. The paper looks at how social class and gender are involved and rearticulated in the formation of the celebrity personality in post-authoritarian Indonesia.

Since under Soeharto's New Order regime the dominant image gave less on women's economic roles and marginalised groups such as working women and unmarried women, the emergence of new generation of Indonesian female stars is expected to release and exemplify alternative images of contemporary urban women challenging the conservative or long standing ideal image of the domesticated woman in Indonesia. As the stars are sites of 'cultural politics' (Gledhill, 1991:xii-xiii), this paper thus questions whether or not those female celebrities are marked by the media as icons of modernity and social liberalisation in contemporary Indonesia, and seen as 'different' figures—that is exemplify alternative images of transgressive urban elite women.

The dismantling of the New Order political structures and ideologies and reduction of state control of the media has created new opportunities for various formats of 'celebrity' both in the entertainment industry and the public intellectual and political contexts in contemporary Indonesia. In the era of, in Michael Wolf's phrase (1999), 'entertainment economy,' stories about celebrity have captivated and drawn the interest of media in Indonesia. Just as the entertainment world in Indonesia occasionally collides with politics and religion, so too such cultural and religious matters give the celebrity scene a different twist.

Aside from looking beautiful and being sexy and rich, a female celebrity is also expected to show religious devotion and a respect for tradition. I argue that the remarkable trend of media focus on the celebrity story in contemporary Indonesia remains crucial in negotiating rebellious issues to challenge a traditional and cultural conservatism in constructing 'mainstream' women's role models. The media depictions of the behaviour codes and social identities of the female celebrities appear to continue the process of cultural and ideological struggle for a women-liberated movement. In fact, the commodification of the celebrity story and gossip, as the driving wheel of the media generating profits from advertisements, should be regarded as an attempt to overturn traditional gender roles, female identities, values, and behaviours. Yet, both the media production and the sub-text of the celebrity gossip remain circulated as debates around morality, in particular as negotiations about the role of 'tradition' in a modernising Indonesia.

The Media and Celebrity Culture in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia

The development of private television industry in Indonesia has created incredible entertainment business terrains with massive cash flows. Faizal (2003: 33) calculated that the growth of entertainment business in Indonesia between 2000 and 2002, just like in California, reached US\$40 billion or equal to Rp340 trillion – by contrast, this amount was double the amount of foreign loan interests of the Republic of Indonesia, which had reached Rp150 trillion by the year 2004. He also maintains that all significant players such as singers, actresses, comedians, presenters, and models, and circumstances that are linked to entertainment business in Indonesia have

their own glamour and have become money-makers over the last few years. Actresses' management agencies, modelling schools, production houses, entertainment tabloids, and private television channels have also taken advantage of the rising new entertainment industry in post-authoritarian Indonesia (Faizal, 2003:26). 'Entertainment not autos, not steel, not financial services' (Wolf, 1999:4), is fast becoming the driving wheel of the new Indonesian economy in early 2000s.

After the collapse of the film industry in the late 1980s, one particular circumstance – the booming television drama industry since the late 1990s – has constantly encouraged and underpinned the formation of a new celebrity world in Indonesia. For instance, the mushrooming agencies, which provide newcomer actresses and models for teledrama production houses indicate the rapid development of the 'celebrity factory' in Indonesia. Every beautiful female in Indonesia seems to have the opportunity to become a star. One of the leading Indonesian teledrama (locally known as *sinetron*) producers, Raam Punjabi from Multivision Plus production house, suggests that having a beautiful face is a must for a woman who wants to be a *sinetron* star ('*Wajah mereka*,' 2002: 76). Although sometimes the audiences do not care about the actresses when they decide to watch a drama, Punjabi believes that a beautiful female and a handsome male are the first requirement to be able to play in his *sinetron* productions. He even emphasises that the two basic attributes for a marketable star are physical appearance and good looks. This view appears to confirm what Wolf posits, 'brands and stars have become the same thing. Stars attract us to entertainment products. Brands attract us to other types of products' (Wolf, 1999:28). Certainly, celebrities, especially the females, like the brand of a product, are considered by the capitalist media as commodities to be sold to the market.

In the era of *sinetron* industry, being a star or a celebrity in Indonesia seems tempting and demanding since the remuneration of a *sinetron* player is amazing. For instance, according to the television entertainment tabloid, *Cek & Ricek* (Check & Recheck), the new-comer actress or actor, who does not have experience acting in drama or stage performance, will be paid about Rp1,5 million (or equal to US\$180) per episode, usually for a minimum of fifteen episodes. They usually not only play in one series, but play also in two or three series at the same time. Those who have already been popular, at least after playing in three dramas, or those who have been widely exposed on television, will be paid a

minimum of Rp10 million (or equal to US\$1,000) to a maximum of Rp70 million (US\$7,000) per episode ('*Tamara*,' 2003:3) – far beyond the average salary of millions civil servants of the Republic of Indonesia, which is around Rp1,000 thousand (US\$100) per month. In addition, those actors and actresses not only star in the series, but also are sometimes employed as presenters for other television shows, such as quiz shows or variety shows, and for advertisements. Simplify because of the high financial rewards offered by the entertainment producers, the vacancies for a new *sinetron* actor or actress advertised in newspaper, tabloid, radio, or on the internet attract thousands of applicants.

Extending from the media coverage about stars or popular celebrities on Indonesian television, the term celebrity can be applied to a wide range of professional persons who have been widely exposed on television. 'The concept of celebrity is a little slippery, partly because its constitutive discourses have leaked into such a wide range of media formats and practices,' (Turner, Bonner, & Marshall, 2000:9). The term celebrity is not only used to describe *sinetron* actors and actresses, singers, and TV presenters, but also for those academicians, researchers, experts, politicians, and even the Moslem priests (*kyai*) who often speak in public seminars or workshops in Indonesian cities and who are frequently interviewed or exposed on the TV talk shows. The concept of 'celebrity,' thus, is extended to include, what has been defined by Siegel, those people 'who are known in their own lives to have achieved "success," that is, to have the means to live as they wish' (Siegel, 1986: 212). According to Siegel, the concept of celebrity of any sort is new text on the Indonesian scene. 'On any scale, they are a New Order phenomenon' (Siegel 1986:212).

Celebrity stories dominate the entertainment mass-market tabloids they represent a significant proportion of the national television programming content, and the rate of their appearance in news publications has flourished in Indonesia since the late 1990s. The celebrities' stories and gossip have been used as a commodity for the Indonesian media to attract advertising revenue. The celebrities' gossip shows have become the business joy of the private television stations and production houses. Everyday as early in the morning as 4.00 am until evening 6.00 pm, about twenty-five infotainment programs are broadcasted on ten national private channels. These 'tabloidisation' of television news have commercialised the intimate relationship of celebrities such as their love affairs, marriages, separations or divorces, and pregnancies. The

observation by Turner, Bonner and Marshall suggests 'the promotion of celebrity has been widely represented – even within the media which depends upon it – as the epitome of the trivialisation of the media, of the duping of contemporary consumers into pathetic relationships with fantasy figures peddled to them through the tabloid press' (Turner, Bonner & Marshall, 2000: 5).

Although the commercialisation of celebrity private stories has created debate among the celebrities themselves, the flood of such television shows has also encouraged the growth of media chain businesses, like TV tabloids and magazines, in Indonesia. *Tempo*, one of the leading Indonesian news magazines wrote how the celebrities, such as one of the controversial female stars Desy Ratnasari, have been threatened by the Indonesian media and her stories and gossip used to attract advertisements for many Indonesian media. 'There seems to be no limit to the way the media expose the ins and outs of her (Desy's) private life' ('*Wajah mereka*,' 2002:76). I would like to refer this phenomenon to Turner et al.'s suggestion that the appeal of celebrity for media audiences is a common factor that connects 'the flashpoint moments' with an industry that produces celebrity promotion for everyday consumption. They continue:

Of course, most of the time, the celebrity participates in our everyday lives in much more mundane ways than this. Furthermore, and under ordinary circumstances, our access to information about celebrity is strategically regulated in the service of interests, which are those of the agent, the promoter, the publicist, the media outlet or the celebrity themselves, rather than those of the consumer (Turner, Bonner & Marshall, 2000:4).

In fact, the coverage of celebrities' and particular of the presidential family and the top government officials' families' intimate relationships in recent Indonesian media, to some extent, has generated strong reactions around the notion of the 'sacralization' of privacy. As under Soeharto's New Order, stories and gossips around his families and celebrities involved with the families were off limits for media publication, but since the growth of the infotainment programs, the family members' sex affairs with particular celebrities and drugs scandals have been available for public consumption.

The Female Celebrity Images and Cultural Identity Construction

Responding to the rise of new young talented female celebrities in Indonesia, one of the popular TV entertainment tabloids, *Cek & Ricek*, in its April 2003 edition contained special coverage on the success stories of fourteen young female celebrities in Indonesia and positioned these women, who are employed in the entertainment business, as examples of the progressive Indonesian woman today. They are pop singers, *sinetron* actresses, TV presenters, fashion models, advertising models, and comedians. With the headline 'They Are Not Ordinary Women' ('*Mereka Bukan Perempuan Biasa*') these female celebrities were presented as models of women's progress in post-*Reformasi* Indonesia. With their talents and professionalism, these women, what the tabloid called 'queens of entertainment world,' are seen as opening up a new 'screen' of contemporary Indonesian women. 'They continue to fill important positions in various job sectors and have occupied positions that equal men in various professions, in various fields' ('*Tamara*,' 2003:3). However, in examining the depictions of those celebrities, the reportage contains the ambivalent media response and contradiction between images of women's success and the stereotype images of the Indonesian New Order's construction on women's roles. The intense negotiations which the celebrities provoke represent issues at stake in the public contest around women and gender politics.

Switching from one private TV channel to another, the Indonesian television viewers will still see the same faces of the TV stars. The five most popular female stars Desy Ratnasari, Tamara Bleszynski, Krisdayanti, Ayu Azhari, and Paramitha Rusady appear with different characters in different *sinetron* screened on national private television channels. For instance, Desy Ratnasari plays different characters in three different dramas during the 2004. On Monday she plays as Nisrina in *sinetron* titled *Cintaku di Kampus Biru* (My love on Blue Campus), on Tuesday she plays Ananta in *Cinta Tiada Akhir* (Never Ending Love), and on Wednesday she acts as *Nyak* in a TV sitcom *Gado-Gado Betawi* (Betawi mixed). She is also a presenter of a TV talk show, namely *Famous to Famous* on Metro TV every second Friday, and her video music clip has been screened many times on ten national private TV channels. So, just in one week, the Indonesian audiences can see performances by Desy three or four times.

Star images are circulated in the Indonesian society mainly through filmic/visual images, journalistic and political discourses. Certainly the celebrity images 'embody central but threatened values within a given social conjuncture' (Gledhill, 1991: xvii). Their images are important to represent the work of subject-identity and the ideological formations in a given society. Discussing the celebrity images in the Indonesian context, a major contradiction emerges between tradition and modernity, as it will be drawn in the following part of this paper. In particular female celebrity's images, changing values of womanhood, gender, relationships and appearance appear to meet with the deeply 'mythological' values embedding of the women image in Indonesian culture. The female celebrities then continue to live within the negotiation between such contradictory forces in the transitional Indonesia.

Nevertheless, the political transition from the authoritarian regime to the present democratic system is certainly expected by people to provide far greater opportunity to recognise and celebrate the diversity and complexity of the lives and roles of women. In the post-New Order period, official policy has begun to challenge existing stereotypes of woman's image at least to some extent. Women's organisations and activists have also attempted to endorse and provide discussion of women's liberation, but these movements will remain crucial, if the socio-political institutions, including the media, do not support the effort to raise the consciousness of women who are still subordinated under patriarchal customary relations.

Indeed, the political changes of Indonesia since 1998 have increased press freedom after decades of tight control. However, greater media reform has brought new forms of stereotyping that have serious implications for women's position in society as in the case of media coverage of young female Indonesian celebrities. Aside from their beauty, sexuality, wealth, and achievements, these Indonesian female celebrities are still placed not only in relation to their private life such as their singleness, marriage, or familial life, but also they are represented compromising their womanly roles to traditional cultural norms and the tenets of Islam.

Self-Appearance: Contesting the Moslem Outfits

There are five female celebrities, as mentioned above, who have gained most frequent coverage by the Indonesian media. These female celebrities are considered to be the top-rated earners in the

entertainment industry of the 2000s. They are also employed as brand images of several multinational products such as *Lux*, *Guess*, *Samsung*, *Jaguar* motor, *Sogo* department store, and others. As idols of many young urban women, these five female stars are labelled by the media as 'the most expensive' women and the pioneers of change for modern and liberated young affluent middle class women in Indonesia these days ('*Mereka bukan*,' 2003:3-4). Every change of their appearance, such as their clothes, hair styling, accessories, their dietary program, even their luxury vehicles, is rapidly followed or copied by young middle class urban women. This phenomenon suggests Richard Dyer's (1979) argument, 'In the early period, stars were gods and goddesses, heroes, models – embodiments of *ideal* ways of behaving. In the later period, however, stars are identification figures, people like you and me – embodiments of typical ways of behaving' (Dyer, 1979:24).

Those five female celebrities have become the focus of media gossip with stories of their love affairs, their tempestuous marriages and, sometimes, their involvement with drugs. However, there is an implication that if one is a celebrity, things can go wrong. For instance, Desy Ratnasari one time declared that she would consistently cover her head with a veil (*jilbab*) and conform to Muslim codes, but a couple of months later, she was already wearing sleeveless clothes in public. Because she is a star, such inconsistency was considered forgivable. 'Apart from their own problems, Indonesian female celebrities are phenomenal' ('*Tamara*,' 2003:4).

Although there has been a new trend in which many Moslem female celebrities in Indonesia wear Moslem clothes and a veil in order to gain more respect and acceptance from the audiences, this dress code seems to occur on a temporary basis and in the interests of (celebrity) self-marketing. In other words, the wearing of such Moslem outfits together with head scarf (*kerudung*) by many female celebrities in public offers the audiences such consumable images, as if as a sign of personal religious devotion. Certainly, in a country where Moslems are the majority, religious devotion seems must be displayed, especially by public figures, including these top-rated female stars, though they have problems with their marriages and love affairs. Therefore, in order to conform to the growth of religious attentiveness among middle class Moslem Indonesians, particular celebrity figures use costume and religious observance to consolidate their status in the society. Almost every week, the infotainment audiences know which celebrity goes to Mecca for *umrah* (pilgrimage).

The ways the celebrities wear their Moslem outfits, consciously or not, have been promptly adopted as a fashion trend by young urban middle class Moslems, both those who have committed to wear *jilbab* for religious purposes and those who have other agendas. However, among the female celebrities there seem to be some who are extremely anxious to confront the cultural values of women's dress codes in a country where Moslems are the majority. The socio-political controls from particular religious groups and the concerns of middle-class Moslem conservatism, which are now flourishing in Indonesia, continue to condemn the behaviours and appearances of the media figures in the country. For instance, the Indonesian ulemma forum (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia* MUI) and a fundamentalist Moslem group like the Islamic defender front (*Fron Pembela Islam* FPI) are two examples of Islam conservatism community organizations, which are actively against the behaviours and appearances of these Indonesian female celebrities. On several occasions MUI released commands (known as *fatwa*) dictating to women in general and female actresses in particular on how they (women) should dress in conformity with the Islamic (*syariah*) law. Under this *syariah* law, women are banned from wearing miniskirts, sleeveless shirts and tight clothing that men might find sexually arousing. Therefore, the (female) celebrities, as public figures in Indonesia, have to negotiate their roles and public appearances around such fundamental religious baggage.

As a consequence, to maintain the public acceptance of female stars' image and to put to rest the contradiction of her on-screen character that is considered as 'sexually hot,' Ayu Azhari, of Pakistani-Indonesian descent and a talented and award-winning film actress, attempts to balance her identity by demonstrating her strong principles in practicing Islamic values. As a result, although she does not wear a veil and Moslem clothes daily, her devotion to Islam is never missed by the media. As interviewed by *Kompas* daily (01 November 2004), Ayu stated, 'bad stories about me make me sad. I often cry when I do night prayer. I always complain to God and always ask to Him and to myself, "Am I like that?" ... I always discuss my problem to Allah' (*Ayu Azhari menghadap*, 2003). Ayu was married to Finn who converted to Islam. It is believed that a Moslem person who is able to convert her/his spouse to Islam is perfect in front of God. However, after nine years of marriage, she sought a divorce from her husband. Ayu also made her pilgrimage and is portrayed practising routine fasting every Monday

and Thursday to follow the Prophet Mohammad's way of life.

Relationships Do Matter

Desy Ratnasari is the most controversial female actress in Indonesia during the 1990s. The Indonesian media call her 'Miss No Comment', for she always refuses to speak when asked by the press about her private life. When she had an affair with Soeharto's Minister of Man Power who is also a wealthy retail business male, Abdul Latief, the stories became the hot gossip of the Indonesian press. Before her divorce from her first husband, she was the favourite and top earning actress in Indonesia. However, since she sued for divorce from her husband in 2000, after a year of marriage, her popularity declined until early February 2001, when news about Desy appeared again in the media. She made a controversial decision to end her career to wear a veil and made the pilgrimage to Mecca. Six months after the change of her appearance in 2001, Desy created another stir by announcing her second marriage to a wealthy intellectual business male. Once again she declared that she will totally resign from *sinetron* and will focus on her family and household. 'As for [family] income, let me be responsible for that,' her husband said in the press conference, as reported by *Gatra* (19 August 2001). Then in March 2003, Desy confessed to the press that she was living separately from her second husband and had asked for a divorce a couple of months after giving birth to a baby girl.

Desy's marital affairs are seen as unacceptable, because of a view that she had initiated divorce from her two husbands. Her action to ask for divorce has never been considered by the public and the media as symbolising the inevitable rebelliousness of young urban female of her generation to be free in determining her own life. Rather, she is seen as creating an "unordinary" image of Indonesian woman who is expected to respect the traditional view that a woman should guard her marriage. This can be seen from the advice of the chief of judge of the religious court in Sukabumi, West Java, where Desy lodged in her claim for divorce from her first husband, Trenady Pramudya, in 2000. The judge said 'you are both public figures who have been very national [well-known]. It would be better, if your claim can be reconsidered. It might make the Indonesian people cheer extremely happily, if this divorce claim is cancelled' (*Dessy dan Pram*, 2000: 17). Female-initiated divorce is, not viewed sympathetically. As reported in *Kompas* (29 March 2000), when Desy left

that religious court and rushed to her car guarded by several police officers, hundreds of local spectators outside the court expressed their annoyance to Desy. As a public figure and the focus of the greatest popular attention, Desy is expected to follow and adore her star personae including behaviour that is considered to conform to the social norms.

'Stars offer their audiences not only consumable images or ideological values but also personal relationships' (Gledhill, 1991: xvii). Paramitha Rusady another popular Indonesian female star married one of the popular Indonesian actors in Mecca in 2001. She then held her celebration at the *Istiqlal* mosque, the largest Mosque in Jakarta, in contrast to other celebrities who often celebrate their marriages with a glamorous party with thousands of guests. However, a year later, her marriage broke up because, according to rumour, she was unable to give a baby to her husband and she was a lesbian. In Indonesia, a woman who is infertile is considered as not a perfect woman. Another issue of why she could not maintain her marriage is because she was a selfish woman who only cares for her career and was careless of her husband. It seems that a woman, who prioritises her career outside the home, is considered risking her household. She has been pressured by the press after divorce from her ex-husband to marry another male. In every interview, she is asked when she will leave her divorcee status and remarry.

In Indonesia de facto relationships are considered infidelity (*maksiat*) and sin. Those who consider divorce or break up their marriage have to stay in their parents' home or with siblings and relatives. A divorced woman, especially, is supposed to be accompanied by her *mukhrim* (either parents or siblings, persons who cannot be married). If both divorced celebrities and those who are still single enter a relationship and want to live together with their partners, they first have to marry, otherwise they will be considered as *kumpul kebo* (living together out of matrimony). Recently, in March 2005, MUI urged the media to not report on of those celebrities who have de facto relationships, as reported in *Bibir Plus* (Lips Plus) infotainment program of SCTV channel.

Nevertheless, as different figures, the Indonesian female celebrities appear to celebrate a 'freedom' of confidence and independence to decide their relationship status. They can initiate first for divorce when they believe that their marital life cannot be continued. Moreover, in the more liberal post-Soeharto New Order social climate, certain parts of Indonesian society have seen a backlash against the

years of strict conservatism. For some, a loosening of the moral cannon has been welcomed and celebrities like Desy Ratnasari and Ayu Azhari, who initiated divorce from their husbands, represent the products of this moral unravelling. They appear to inspire some urban middle class women to take the divorce initiative, although in a country where Islam is followed by the majority, the female-initiated divorce is considered unacceptable and is condemned by society. Thus, this model of women's liberation is seen as encouraging women to determine their own relationships, but the initiative is valued wrong by the media and the public who continue to support dominant patriarchal attitudes. '[Female] Celebrities fail to fit themselves to the cultural norm. For instance, broadening relationships or going home late at night is used to undermine their position' ('*Dalam perselisihan*,' 2002: 10).

The new generation of female celebrities (like those five actresses) appears to challenge stereotypes, recreate images and contribute to the reformulation of Indonesian females' identities. They represent 'othering' figures of Indonesian young affluent upper-class Indonesian females in the post-authoritarian period, but that otherness continues dilemmatic. Those top-rated female celebrities, who are the product of socio-political liberation and economic reawakening of the country, seem to be celebrating their female autonomy in winning an income from their own talent and competence. However, their high remuneration standard is always portrayed together with their relationships and personal problems.

The economic self-reliance of a woman is considered to be the 'facilitating factor' in the break up of the husband-wife relationships. The construction of female (celebrity) identities in the post-authoritarian era of Indonesia sustains the notion that modernization and national development seem authorizing women to step into the public sphere and have only recently released them from their long-standing role as housewives. Indonesian women are enlightened yet unable to challenge the 'traditional' concept of 'ideal' women that encompassed woman's nature and dignity. The media, of course, play a crucial role in constructing the subjects-positions through the production of the female celebrity-texts.

Despite all the celebrities' love affairs and relationship problems, the married female celebrities are expected to continue to behave as good wives. Those who divorce their husbands are considered by the public and media to lack self-control, to be selfish, and as not perfect women. Divorce is seen, particularly for the Javanese, as indicating a lack

of self-control and refinement of the woman, and it puts the family in an embarrassing position. Both for the public and the media, a divorced woman should reduce her public activities, maintain her single image and think of looking for a new relationship to release her from the image of a divorcee, as written in the reportage about Paramitha Rusady in *Nova* tabloid (October 2003). Female-initiated divorce is always a more complicated procedure, especially under Islamic marriage law, though the marriage contract frequently stipulates grounds under which the wife could sue for divorce and the courts tend to be sympathetic to the woman. From these descriptions, thus, the traditional belief that women should maintain their marriage and familial unity continues to be the mainstay of the gendered political discourse in transitional Indonesia. A woman who prioritises her career outside the home is considered to be risking her household.

Contesting Female Roles and Being a 'Normal' Woman

During the New Order period, the discourses of womanhood and gender roles were an important dimension of state control. Males and females had clearly defined roles that reinforced particular constructions of identity. The public and private spheres were separated, with females' roles confined largely to the private sphere.

Wealthy life is the dominant focus of the Indonesian media in reporting the top female celebrities. These celebrities' incomes appear to be a delicate subject for the media. They are also portrayed as symbols of young wealthy Indonesian womanhood, who experience pleasure from being chauffeured in luxurious cars, and consuming high-priced products. They are depicted as not having any idea how to spend their money or just spending money to please their whims and also obtain spiritual satisfaction by making pilgrimage to Mecca. Those wealthy female celebrities seem to enjoy their high incomes and often report earning more than their spouses. In the patriarchal system of Indonesia, however, they can never be considered as a head of their family. Paramitha Rusady expressed in her interview with the leading women's tabloid, *Nova*, 'Not all males wish to accept the condition of a working woman, like me' (*'Paramitha,'* 2003). Thus, all those media portrayals of incredible incomes earned by those female celebrities seem unable to exemplify the model of women's economic liberation in contemporary Indonesia.

Paramitha of Euro-Indonesian descent has to fight for such media coverage about her womanly personalities. In her interview with *Nova* tabloid, she expressed 'I think at my age of over thirty years, it's time for me to think a bit more normal. For being normal, I have to reduce my shooting schedules and concentrate more on my social [charitable] activities. [So] I don't only think of myself, as I learned from my marriage that went wrong' (*'Paramitha,'* 2003). The notion 'normal' here signifies that image of a married woman is under threat if she does not give her entire time for only family/husband. Moreover, to achieve her status as 'normal' woman, in January 2004, Paramitha declared an end to her status as a divorcee and married a Bosnian male, who converted to Islam, as under Islamic *syariah* (marriage) law a Moslem female is prohibited from marrying a non-Moslem male. Indeed, it is hard for the female media figures in Indonesia to succeed in finding their own identities and their own personas. The images appearing both on and off screen should manifest the conventionality of the 'authentic' Indonesian female-subject identification.

In terms of their womanly role as a wife and a mother, Tamara Bleszynski, a Eurasian, and Krisdayanti, an East Javanese, gain more respectable coverage from the media in Indonesia. As these two top-rated stars who earn US\$ 40,000 per show during 2002 and 2003 (*'Tamara,'* 2003:3), Tamara and Krisdayanti are depicted as fantasy images for young urban Indonesian women; they are beautiful, rich and more importantly for Tamara, she converted from Christianity to Islam. Graduated from Perth's college, Tamara Bleszynski, maintains an 'Eastern' image (*orang timur*) as encouraged by her late mother. Tamara declares that she has adopted the Eastern 'ideology' in her life. For Tamara, being Eastern means a woman should be well-mannered 'when talking should be polite (*basa-basi*). Do not forget to ask permission' (cited in Jayani, 2003:27). Tamara continued, 'As an Indonesian woman, I feel very happy. I have been gifted with a child (*dikaruniai anak*), gifted with a kind husband (*diberi suami yang baik*), and [I] have been a mother (*sudah menjadi ibu*)' (*'Tamara Bleszynski,'* 2004:35). These are all the 'ideals' of a beautiful woman. The media then appear to support what Tamara has determined to be her identity. 'Playing in *sinetron* is actually not a major goal of Tamara. ... Tamara is one of the celebrities, who is not afraid of losing [her] popularity. She decided to marry at the age of twenty-three. After being gifted with (*dikaruniai*) a

son, she decided to concentrate more on [her] family' ('*Tamara Blesynski*,' 2004:35).

Krisdayanti, especially, is seen as a model wife and mother by the Indonesian government. Her family profile conforms to the government campaign on the Indonesian Family Health Program, and Krisdayanti's family has been used as a "brand" image of the campaign of 'Healthy Indonesia' (*Indonesia Sehat*) program, which will run until the year 2010, and as a 'Figure of National Family' (*Sosok Keluarga Nasional*). According to an entertainment tabloid, *Cek & Ricek* deemed Krisdayanti's household contributes to the improvement of celebrities' images in Indonesia. The tabloid also declared that Krisdayanti is idealised by many young urban housewives as a symbol of a perfect wife dedicating her love and honour only to her husband. Krisdayanti is also depicted as a wife who believes that obeying the husband is a must for Moslem woman and she will deserve heaven for that ('*Ketika KD*,' 2003:21).

Indeed, Krisdayanti figure is always exceptional. Her public appearances are either in a very strict long covered Moslem dress or in a strapless tank top and mini skirt; her images are seen by the media as transforming strength necessary for revolutionary change. However, contradictions and chaotic perceptions about her have never ended. In March 2005, though she does not have any root ethnic identity of Betawi, the indigenous people of Jakarta, the Jakarta's provincial government has declared and employed Krisdayanti as an ambassador and icon of 'Enjoy Jakarta' a domestic tourism campaign of the Jakarta's government in 2005. This policy has annoyed the public, who have condemned Sutiyoso, the controversial governor of Jakarta province, of disregarding the authenticity of Betawi ethnicity that should be promoted (Wilonoyudho, 2005: 1).

Problems with 'Othering' Images

The concept of 'otherness' and the media, and its derivative concept of othering, has been considered by various disciplines, particularly in many post-colonial writings. The discourses have been focused on issues of 'difference,' 'diversity,' 'multiculturalism,' 'representation,' and the 'post-colonial' (Naficy & Gabriel, 1993: ix). Naficy and Gabriel continue that the proliferation of writings on 'otherness' has also encouraged efforts to 'critique the status quo' and to 'open up new discursive spaces.' They state 'we are entering now not only a third but a multiple discursive and cultural space – a slipzone of practices

in the arts, literature, popular culture, cinema, and television – where all kinds of resistive hybridities, syncretism, and mongrelisations are possible, valued' (Naficy & Gabriel, p. x). It is adequate to note how the concept of othering can be relevant to my discussion in this paper. The term othering used in this discussion refers to a representational act, whereby a female (celebrity) is discursively constructed as a fitting foil for the collective self. As I mentioned above, the celebrity figures are situated in a place where their existence is recognised and taken seriously as privileged and centred, but their identity is reproduced and positioned in culture and in ideology to facilitate 'normalised' subjects that sustain the status quo's interest and its ideological perspective. In other words, the existence of the celebrity in contemporary Indonesia is recognised as 'other' in a sense that the celebrity is a central figure, holds privilege, and is different from ordinary people but that ordinary people can imitate the celebrity's action, but people cannot imitate her/his luck. However, the constitution of celebrity as the female 'subject' remains problematic for the mainstay of patriarchal ideological intervention in constructing the subjectivity of women and the uniformity of the hegemonic culture that emerged from state's apparatuses control that potentially disrupt the discourses of womanhood and 'differences' in Indonesia.

Aside from those five top-rated female stars mentioned in the previous part, Agnes Monica, a young pop singer and award-winning *sinetron* actress, is an exceptional media figure that has pulled the contemporary girl culture out into the open or public arena. The Indonesian press have recognised Agnes as looking more mature than the average young girls of her age. Agnes Monica of Chinese Indonesian descent is most frequently covered by the Indonesian media, without problematising her Chineseness. 'On television, Agnes Monica has never been representing as ethnically Chinese. She can appear as a child figure from a Chinese family whose mother and father have Javanese names, or even as young female who seems to not have a Chinese background at all' (Yulawan et al., 2002:1).

Her achievements and 'progressiveness' in fashion style distinctively exemplify the single female, liberated-woman, and Western inscription of body. Agnes is seen as awakening the young Chinese-Indonesian generation to take an active part in the public sphere of the country. She celebrates delightful public acceptance and attracts many television audiences in Indonesia. She was nominated as the

most favourite *sinetron* female stars and received a Panasonic viewers' choice award in 2002. Unlike other Chinese Indonesian stars, Agnes's appearance is seen by the media as controversial. Wearing a tank top showing her belly button with the ring in it, tight hipster pants and a piercing in her nose are the physical looks that are always embedded with Agnes's image. 'Together with her achievement as a top-rated celebrity, Agnes's appearance also looks very glamorous. Her body is always wrapped with exclusive dress code, beautiful, and fashionable. Wherever this beautiful girl, with the nose piercing, goes out, she is chauffeured with a black *Jaguar S* type made in 2002' (*Agnes Monica*, 2004b: 4). Her typical performance of 'feminine-masculine' seems to challenge the so-called 'normative dress code' of Indonesian women, but it continues culturally troublesome for her own identification in the public.

In April 2005, her stage performance on *Trans* TV channel was criticised by a group of Acehnese artists of Jakarta for using a *Saman* dance (traditional Acehnese dancing) in her choreography. *Saman* dance is considered a religious (Islamic) dance, as the dance signifies the way Acehnese people thank God the Almighty. Agnes used the dance as her choreography, whilst singing a punk-rock song and wearing a revealing outfit as reported by *Kompas* (17 May 2005). According to one of the Acehnese artists, Agnes had committed social and moral offences. She danced *Saman* in a revealing dress, while the *Saman* dancer is supposed to have the whole body covered. *Saman* contains many devotional words, but Agnes used it in the punk-rock song. *Saman* is also supposed to be performed by only female dancers, whilst in her choreography, Agnes danced with both males and other females (*Agnes Monica*, 2005:12). Agnes's dance has contravened the original text of the *Saman*, so reported *Sinar Harapan* daily (22 May 2005). This of course conflates her star identity as a person of Chinese descent and a non-Moslem woman. She is not an Acehnese female, not a Moslem, and not conforming to proper dress code as required for the *Saman* dancer suggests that contesting identity as 'other' (non-Acehnese artists *pribumi* (indigenous) and non-Moslem) seems to be taken seriously. The threat to one's identity, especially for the public figure, in the post-authoritarian era does not come from the state authority, but from particular social and religious groups. Indeed, traditional/religious conservatism has become a significant point of identity contention on the side of the anti-authoritarian forces.

Nevertheless, Agnes Monica symbolises the joy of Indonesian urban youth in the era of socio-political and economic transitions. Her business deals with one Indonesian film producer in 2004 for playing in a screen film, and her participation in a Taiwanese teledrama show a flashpoint of a very young female, who celebrates and takes advantage of the economic reawakening and social transformation of Indonesia today. The entertainment tabloid, *Cek & Ricek*, has called Agnes '*Kartini Panggung Hiburan*' (Kartini [Indonesian heroin of women's emancipation] of the Entertainment Stage). 'Smart, great talent and beautiful face, seem become very important when they are embedded in Agnes Monica's self. She is one of those young women who is successful in her own world, a figure that is always dreamt of by Kartini in order to stand up equal to males' (*Agnes Monica*, 2004:4). Agnes is marked by the media as an alternative figure of transgressive female youth of contemporary Indonesia, but she still needs to conform to the role of tradition in modernising Indonesia. As *Kompas* newspaper (20 January 2002) reported, Agnes is seen as one of the young urban female Indonesians who dares to feel free to ignore formality (locally termed as *cuek*) to dress differently to the mainstream young urban women. Indeed, to some extent, she has contributed to the reformulation of young Indonesian urban female-subject identity. However, the views remain unchallenged for ordinary women in contemporary Indonesia. It is only because she is a celebrity she can do things differently. This substantiates what Dyer has defined as the relationship of stars to 'ordinary beings' in which 'Stars articulate what it is to be a human being in contemporary society' (Dyer, 1987: 8).

Conclusion

Female celebrity's gossip and their private lives have been utilised as the commodity of the capitalist media sold to the market. As the gossip and stories of those female celebrities is the product of powerful groups in society, their images are created by the media to provide a view of the people with the ideological interests of the media and their apparatuses. The female celebrity images, in this case, are seen as divergent figures of assertive liberalism, which could help justify resistance to notions of female autonomy.

The heightened media coverage about the wealthy and glamorous lifestyles of those female television

stars shows women's progression and achievements in the public sphere could not release the alternative model of liberated women in the Indonesian context. The media still show those young successful Indonesian women tied to the domesticated position of women as mother and wife as expected by the cultural norms of Indonesia. More importantly, Islam in general has been deliberately distorted to discriminate against women. As such, the media is inherently incapable of providing portrayals of social change in Indonesia. The Indonesian female celebrities are depicted constantly negotiating the two extremes, filling a middle ground where they are both traditional (following the tenets of Islam) and modern at the same time. Thus, the female celebrity identifications, both on and off screen, still encompass behaviours that are distinctly rebellious of the rigorous social mores of Indonesian society and would be considered scandalous in any other context.

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