

The Portrayal of Women in the Works of Sugiarti Siswadi as the Manifestation of Lekra and Gerwani Ideology

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ABSTRACT

Sugiarti Siswadi was regarded as one of the most influential writers in Indonesia during the 1950s and 1960s. She was also known as an activist in the Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (People's Cultural Institute-Lekra) and Gerakan Wanita Indonesia (Indonesian Women's Movement-Gerwani), both of which were closely associated with the now-defunct Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). This study analyzes three of Sugiarti's short stories: "Jang Kesepian" (The Lonely One; 1960), "Anak2 Muda" (Young People; 1961), and "Si Udin Ketua Klas" (Udin, Class Captain; 1961). The three stories, published in *Api Kartini* magazine, address issues about the family as a social institution. Through the plot and characterization of these stories, Sugiarti dismantles and reverses gender roles to express her views as an activist and a woman. This study shows that these stories do not put male and female characters into binary opposition. We argue that the three stories reflect Sugiarti's agency in extending her feminist ideas seen through the perspective of a Lekra/Gerwani activist. As such, she enriched gender discourse in Indonesia during the 1950s and 1960s, a recurring theme in her works.

Keywords: Activist, gender, Indonesian women writers, Lekra, Sugiarti Siswadi, women

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INTRODUCTION

During Guided Democracy (1959–1966), Soekarno was a single leader who determined Indonesia's political inclinations. As Ricklefs (2010) underlines that since 1960, the Manipol-USDEK (abbreviation of the 1945 Constitution, Socialism, Democracy, Economy, and National Identity Political Manifesto) served as the main principle that guided the socio-political life in Indonesia.

Furthermore, as Caldwell and Utrecht (2011) stated, Soekarno incorporated the pre-existing Nasakom (Nationalist, Religious, and Communist) ideology into the concept of Manipol-USDEK and used it as a basis to implement a national work program. Furthermore, Abdulgani (1961) described Manipol-USDEK as a guiding principle based on which the government was run under guided democracy.

During the period, the Communist Party, which obtained the most popular votes in the 1955 General Elections, deployed its wing organizations to support the concept of Manipol-USDEK that Soekarno promoted. A wing organization frequently used by the Communist Party to run the mission was an arts and culture institute whose operation and work followed the party's ideology. Engaging the art and cultural institute was a strategic avenue to create a socialist Indonesian society that conformed to the Indonesian identity envisioned by the ruling government. According to Adryamarthanino (2011), Indonesian socialism was adopted to create a culturally characterized, politically and economically sovereign society. The envisioned Indonesian identity had to conform to the values of Pancasila, which manifested the Indonesian culture. All these ideals formed the skeleton of the Indonesian political structure during the era of guided democracy. However, as Anderson (1996) noted, Indonesia was heavily influenced by Javanese political culture, which shaped the political structure and culture during Soekarno's administration in the guided democracy period (1959-1966).

Chisaan (2008) argued that the way the wing organization structured Indonesian identity indicated the extent they exploited arts and culture as a means of political action. The art and cultural institute were used not only by the ruling party but, as Lindsay (2011) stated, also by artists and culture enthusiasts seeking people with a common ideology and a creative space to express their art. Similarly, Foulcher (2011) noted that in the period (the 1950s-1960s), the confrontation concerning Indonesian culture was taken up as a strategy to respond to the prevailing national and international political situation. The strategy was widely adopted by the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) through Lekra (People's Cultural Institute), which was established as a mouthpiece to channel the party's interest in art and culture.

PKI used Lekra to win its constituents over during the political contestation leading to the 1955 elections. PKI capitalized on Lekra to raise issues on arts and culture. Lekra was initiated by D. N. Aidit, M. S. Ashar, A. S. Dharta, and Njoto on August 17, 1959, during an event that was considered its first congress in Solo, Central Java, and brought a resolution concerning arts and culture to pass. The resolution was based on the particular formulation labeled as the 1-5-1 principle that pinpointed the tenet "the people as the only creators of Culture" through which precept Lekra members produced their work (Aria & Dahlan, 2008b). Sugiarti Siswadi was among the high-profile Lekra writers.

In this article, we look into the works of Sugiarti Siswadi, taking into account her status as a member of Lekra/Gerwani and as a woman. Sugiarti Siswadi was an important Lekra figure. Setiawan (2004) conceded in his memoir how profoundly he admired Sugiarti. In his view, Sugiarti was another prominent leftist writer besides Rukiah Kertapati. Sugiarti and Rukiah were prominent figures in Lekra and initiated *Api Kartini* magazine, which was later officially established by Gerwani's leadership.

Gerwani (Gerakan Wanita Indonesia) was established as Gerwis (Gerakan Wanita Sedar), which, according to Wieringa, conformed to PKI's policy following a Gerwani congress in 1954 (Wieringa, 2003). Gerwani focused on education, and *Api Kartini* magazine was a women's periodical issued as part of Gerwani's mission. Wieringa said *Api Kartini* magazine addressed Gerwani's middle-class and Indonesian women in general. Its focus was to educate its readers on women's rights (Wieringa, 1999). According to McRobbie (1994), *Api Kartini* delivered ideas on the construction of femininity, of which subcodes included Roman code, personal lives, fashion, and music. Sugiarti used the magazine as her vehicle to employ the agency to defend women's rights in Indonesia during the 1950s and 1960s.

The two issues of *Api Kartini* (1959-1961) had 15 of Sugiarti's writings, which comprised 11 stories, one poem, and three essays. This study examines the short stories "Jang Kesepian" (The Lonely One; 1960), "Anak2 Muda" (Young People; 1961), and

"Si Udin Ketua Klas" (Udin, Class Captain; 1961). We chose the three short stories because they were written between 1960 and 1961 during the guided democracy era. The situation presented in the stories illustrates the socio-political context prevalent during the Guided Democracy era, in which administration was based on the Manipol-USDEK ideology. We consider the selection representative of Sugiarti's ideology as an activist and a woman during the period.

Sugiarti Siswadi: Woman (Writer) of Lekra/Gerwani/PKI

Few have been documented about the life of Sugiarti Siswadi. Still, several writers of her generation penned insufficient stories implied in her writings and personal notes about her. Rosidi (2013) accounted for Sugiarti, a woman writer who mostly wrote short stories in 1961 for Lekra's publication. Some of her aliases were Sis., S.S., and S. Wati. Sugiarti actively contributed to and edited for several PKI-associated print media, such as *Api Kartini*, *Harian Rakjat*, *Zaman Baru*, and *Lentera*, and was a member of Lekra's central board.

According to Aria and Dahlan (2008a), Sugiarti played a significant role in founding the publishing houses of Jajasan Pembaruan and Lekra. She was among the writers in *Jajasan Pembaruan* who translated the works of left-leaning writers. Sugiarti adapted a short story by Ivan Osirikov entitled Indonesian "Musim Panas Budak", translated Nu Nam's short story "Tjinta Pertama" (1961) and Nguyen Cong Hoan's "Madjikan" (1965), showing her prowess

in languages. One of her works, a short fiction collection *Sorga Dibumi* (1964), was published by Lekra. However, Sugiarti also wrote stories for children aiming at imbuing a lesson that kids are the future of a nation, in addition to paying attention to stories of political themes. Consequently, (women) mothers have significant roles in Sugiarti's works. Her statement emphasizes purposes, "Our children's literature must call attention to these passions for the motherland, humans' work, peace, and parents, all of which crystallize into the passion for socialism" (Siswadi, 1963, p. 3).

One of the "passions" is concerned with "parents," which signifies a critical point to uphold the five desires ("pantja tjinta"). Thus, it is relevant to examine how the stories represented parents' capacities and the construction of gender roles in Indonesia in the 1950s and 1960s. Given her weighty status in Lekra/Gerwani, Sugiarti lays bare ideas relevant to feminism in her works.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been written on works by Indonesian women writers in the post-Independence (1950-1960) period. Shackford-Bradley (2000), Lawrence (2012), Mumtaz (2014), Priyatna (2016, 2018a), Wirawan (2018), and Isabella (2022), for example, focus on the dynamics of interactions among women in private and public spheres, this research delves into the impacts of feminist ideas on the development of women's subjectivity and their social environment. Shackford-Bradley (2000), Lawrence (2012), and Wirawan

(2018) analyze Rukiah Kertapati's novel *Kedjatuhan dan Hati* and explore how the women characters contribute to their country after its independence. Shackford-Bradley (2000) categorizes works by these women as autobiographical fiction, a literary genre which, in her view, is well suited for conveying feminist ideas with local color. Mumtaz's (2014) study analyzes works by Sugiarti Siswati, who, like Rukiah, was also involved in Lekra/Gerwani movement. Mumtaz argues that the works of the two women writers are inseparable from their organizational background and that their feminist views emerge in their works as part of their representation. Meanwhile, Isabella (2022) discusses Sugiarti's poem "Kepada Sahabat Asia-Afrika" (1961), in which she sees how Sugiarti's activism reflects the spirit of the Asian-African Conference and the forum's idea to foster solidarity among writers and to encourage the people of Asian and African nations to fight against colonialism.

In her two studies, Priyatna discusses Suwarsih Djojopustito's works from the 1950s, focusing on the issues of gender roles, sexuality, and autobiographical narrative (Priyatna, 2016, 2018a). As Priyatna shows, Suwarsih's works feature social documentation of how women are depicted as subjects who play various roles in constructing post-Independence Indonesia. In analyzing Suwarsih's works, Priyatna frames women's problems and transgression within an approach that views the works as belonging to a genre that Priyatna calls autobiographical narratives.

Research on women writers from the 1950s and 1960s mainly discusses works by Rukiah Kertapati and Suwarsih Djojopustito. More research, however, needs to be conducted to study Sugiarti Siswadi and her works. In our view, Sugiarti Siswadi and her works are worthy of critical review, considering her ideas as both a writer and woman activist. It is in this context that our study offers its critical significance.

Sugiarti had an important role in Lekra as a woman writer and member of the organization's central leadership (Aria & Dahlan, 2008b). Her insights on women's issues aligned with Gerwani's mission to heighten awareness of women's rights (Wieringa, 1999), making her works important to examine. In this article, we discuss how Sugiarti presents her feminist ideas by depicting women's subjectivity in domestic and public spheres as wives, mothers, and Lekra/Gerwani activists.

METHODS

Theories of feminist literary criticism, feminist narratology, and feminist politics inform the method used in this study. A close reading of the texts is needed to identify and unveil their layers of covert and overt meanings, motifs, and ideology (Barry, 2002). Rigorous attention to parts of the texts which, from a feminist perspective, show symptomatic textual and narratological characteristics contributing to conveying the themes typically conveyed by Lekra writers.

This study refers to the initial editions of the stories published in *Api Kartini* magazine (1959-1961 issues), anthologies accessed

from the magazine archives and rare books at the Indonesian National Library, and other supporting sources. The spelling used in the decade in which the works studied were published and the damage found on some pages make reading the stories interestingly challenging.

The literary texts studied were all written within a feminist framework. Their analysis must be accompanied by a method that accommodates the reading of what Cixous terms *écriture féminine* (Cixous et al., 1976). The overall analysis aims to describe how Sugiarti Siswadi's works textually and narratively convey her views on political issues in general and women's issues in particular.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sugiarti's Feminism: From the Private to the Public

Sugiarti Siswadi is regarded as one of the most influential writers of her generation. Considering her position in Lekra's central body, she was guided by the principles and methods Lekra promoted in composing her works. As such, her works amalgamate the political and the personal, the traces of which can be recognized in the short stories "Jang Kesepian" (The Lonely One; 1960), "Si Udin ketua kelas" (Udin, Class Captain; 1961), "Anak2 Muda" (Young People; 1961). The three stories discuss issues on economic conditions, the middle class, gender, and motherhood.

The short story "Jang Kesepian" is unusual in terms of ideas and the application of an external narrator through a character

named Sudjono. “Jang Kesepian” evokes the feeling of loneliness that Sudjono, the protagonist, must grapple with. The character lives in a family where the mother earns the livelihood, and the father can no longer bring home the groceries. As a result, the protagonist loses his attitude of reverence toward the passively apathetic father.

The situation thus posits him in a dilemma. On the one hand, he applauds the mother for doing what she does. Nevertheless, he feels disconcerted by people’s view of his mother’s profession as a model and an artist who, at that time, was largely denounced. Here is the narrator’s concern,

His mother, a woman he wanted to respect highly, lived a life he had never imagined approving. She did fashion shows in expensive hotels, cut her hair short, painted her nails, wore blouses or dresses to show off her cleavage, swayed her hips when walking, did any kind of dances from the regular ones to rock ‘n roll, took part in a myriad of beauty pageants. She indeed made it big by doing such “stints.” (Siswadi, 1960, p. 24).

The excerpt shows Sudjono’s reflection on his friend’s deriding his mother as a “worker” who earns a living by doing socio-culturally unacceptable jobs. The story depicts her mother through the child’s perspective, which seems quite strategic as it allows dual viewpoints toward his parents:

Johny (Sudjono) is both proud and ashamed of his mother and gradually loses hope in his father due to the absent masculinity.

The father is characterized as becoming stressed about not his inability to provide for his family. Despite engaging in the more fluid gender role that her wife plays, the character’s father still adheres to the normative gender role by

locking himself in the workroom. He looked older, and his hair turned grey. He rarely smiled and barely had a conversation with anyone...His face grew colder over time, and he was never curious about where his wife left for, was unaware of where she was from and never cared for the children. Johny thought of her father as gutless: he was a weak man. (Siswadi, 1960, p. 24)

Like his father, Sudjono still holds dear the normative standpoint on gender. He lacks reference on how to look up to his father. The father readily gives in to his circumspection and makes Johny uninspired. Sudjono sees the father as a failure in normative society. He does not find the image of a masculine figure in his father as a man and a patriarch. He has a parallel view of his mother, a woman he understands as having to play a domestic role. Sudjono says that he “couldn’t do anything. He couldn’t respect his mother as he should, and he couldn’t be proud of his father as he should be. He withdrew from loneliness, from hopelessness, and lapsed into Tommy’s company...” (Siswadi, 1960, p. 24).

He refers to roles that he accepts as “common” or “natural” in a “normal” picture of a family in a frame of normative gender roles. Sudjono does not possess any reference as to how a mother should be as a matriarch: a domestic mother who stays at home, one who provides him with affection, and one who bears all constructed features of a mother that Sudjono understands. Such disorientation inflicts on his joining a group of delinquents led by Tommy. We argue that the decision emphasizes the referred gender roles in normative gender relations.

Sudjono slips into irresponsible companionship with four lads in a group of delinquents dominating his hometown. The “mob” is portrayed as “five lonely bandits who alarmed the city with brainless acts and nasty gang brawls.” His joining the delinquents compensates for the absence of a male role model he has been looking for in the socio-culturally acceptable father figure. It can also be perceived as his effort to assert his masculinity, distinguishing him from his father.

The group of delinquents is led by a “son of a businessman with three wives” named Pratomo/Tommy (Siswadi, 1960, p. 22). Johnny and Tommy are equally lonely and unhappy, which Tommy explicates in a dialogue with another character:

Oh, okay.

“Yesterday, my dad was up in arms again. He and my mom had a quarrel. He spends too much time with his other wife in Cianjur. And, mom just showed up crying. Rather than feeling pity, he freaked out. It could not be more

fun for me. I took the key to his new Mercedes and started driving. It was a cool machine.” Pratomo told that story in a flat tone. It was hard to figure out whether it implied inner suffering or peace of mind. (pp. 22-23)

The above passage introduces two points in question. First, it signifies Tommy’s social background as a wealthy family member whose newest car collection includes a Mercedes. Here, the luxurious sedan symbolizes wealth, for owning a car in that period was a privilege. It also overtly signifies Sugiarti’s effort to display class distinction to accentuate the practice of socialism. It also reflects the feeling of anxiety, desolation, or alienation in Tommy (as well as Sudjono). Tommy feels discomfort at home for having a polygamous father. In the 1950s and 1960s, women’s fiction and movement, particularly Gerwani, commonly raised and problematized the issues of marriage and polygamy. Wieringa (2003) wrote that the Gerwani stood for three fronts of struggle during the first and second congress: political, women’s, and regional. On the women’s front, the Gerwani was actively against Government Regulation No.19, initiated a democratically drafted marriage bill, and avoided confrontation with President Sukarno.

Similarly, Martyn (2004) asserts that in 1958 the PKI initiated a draft of an anti-polygamy law to counter Government Regulation No. 19, which explicitly encouraged polygamy. Together, PKI and Gerwani attempted to resist polygamy in any way possible. As depicted in the story,

rather than punishing the polygamous male character, Sugiarti shows a crystal-clear example of the impact of polygamy on a family's unity and harmony. Sugiarti's craft was strategic, considering the patriarchal political culture strongly prevalent then. Instead of launching direct criticism, Sugiarti chose an implicit way of *éthok-éthok* (dissimulation)—obviously Javanese—to address her criticism. According to Magnis-Suseno (2003), *éthok-éthok* is a commonly used strategy by Javanese people to express their opinion without overtly showing what they have in mind. Thus, the story contains instances of *sanepa* (symbolism) not explicitly to criticize the long-established mainstream culture. Such a textual strategy is important given the context in which the family is a basic yet important institution to create a socialist Indonesian society, as prescribed in the USDEK Political Manifesto.

Sugiarti depicted the combination between feminist ideas and Lekra's activities incorporated in the principle of "*Tradisi Baik dan Kekinian Revolusioner*" ("Good Tradition and Revolutionary Modernity"), on which basis every Lekra artist must work to be both creative and respectable. Lekra nurtured the decency of its members by enunciating "Tiga Baik" (Three Proprieties): proper work, proper learning, and proper ethics (Aria & Dahlan, 2008b). The story of a marriage in the narrative may not be restricted to familial relationships but also social values concerning women in such issues as polygamy and gender roles. Putra (2011) also noted that one of the core ideas

behind the Manipol-USDEK policy was to shape and maintain an Indonesian identity, which was required to create a prosperous socialist Indonesian society. That was a point where Sugiarti's interest in articulating her feminist idea intersects to serve as a counterpoint within the patriarchal system strongly prevalent in Indonesian society at her time.

The image of a harmonious family plays an important role in the story because it fits the period's social context. Between 1950 and 1960, "the family" was institutional that was fundamental to the creation of a socialist Indonesian society characterized by the so-called Indonesian identity. Harmony was indispensable in the Indonesian political culture at the time, based on the Javanese political culture. Magnis-Suseno (2003) points out that harmony is a basic principle in the life of the Javanese people. Through the conflict among the characters in the story, Sugiarti underlines that what happens in Sudjono's family transgresses the basic norms of the Javanese people. According to Geertz (2017), to actualize the ideal, harmonious (Javanese) society, one's conduct must follow social norms and values. Since Sugiarti's story is set against the social situation of her time, it reflects the norms and values promoted by Manipol-USDEK under the guided democracy system. The story reflects how Sugiarti, an artist, conformed to and supported the Indonesian revolution.

The relevant story about family also reverberates in "Anak2 Muda" (1961),

which opens with the description of a family tying up with the children's bothersome attitudes. Junus, one of the children, is portrayed as a progressive university student. His parents have been preoccupied with legal matters concerning Junus, as shown at the beginning of the story, "Within the last three months, he had to take care of his son. And what kind of affair he had been into? Irritating, infuriating, and embarrassing ones" (Siswadi, 1961, p. 22).

The kind of juvenile delinquency is employed as a strategic motive to build the story so that the parents can be utilized to solve Junus's problems. Despite being a brat, Junus is born into a family of official/military personnel. He can avoid prison again because of his father's extensive network. The conversation between Junus and his father after the arrest illustrates Junus's characteristics.

"Well, Junus, can't stop worrying your quite busy dad, can you?"

"Of course, busy taking care of delinquent boys and bailing them out of jail..." said Junus.

"I don't ask much. Know what you are and where you are now. You're a university student. You must study instead of joining the protest march and throwing stones at buildings... it was pleasing indeed, sensational; it was as if it were heroic in nature, but empty heroism, rhetorical heroism. Bombastic. Sensational. No more, no less". (Siswadi, 1961, pp. 22, 24)

Junus is described as hard-nosed yet perseverant, as portrays in "Of course, busy taking care of delinquent boys and bailing them out of jail..." (Siswadi, 1961, p. 22). His nature and attitudes are set against his opportunistic father. The story portrays the father-son relationship as conflicting—Junus rebels against the father due to his rivaling stance in displaying his masculinity. As a son, he embraces a progressive attitude despite making compromises as his father does. Both embrace the normative gender role that is socio-culturally acceptable in that era. However, by placing each character in different political orientations, Sugiarti presents both characters resisting each other.

The father figure is central in the short story because Sugiarti presents a common stock character of a government official who, during those days, was typically engaged in corrupt practices, cahoots, and nepotism. Sugiarti may have employed the strategy to rebuke the so-called capitalist bureaucrats who were not in line with the Political Manifesto of guided democracy. Junus's father apathetically demonstrates reactions that he points out as empty heroism, bombastry, and sensationalism. Meanwhile, Junus is endowed with militancy upon which most fictional characters of proletarian literature in that era are built. As Toer (2003) reiterated, the commonly called socialist-realist works, which function as a front of struggle, must incorporate distinct features, including militancy: uncompromising and aggressive toward rivals and ready to present a tough defense among comrades. Therefore, the conflict between the father and Junus is made to signify a bigger matter than merely family issues.

The conflict, as mentioned earlier, does not overtly indicate domestic issues but can be taken figuratively as a political problem concerning the PKI and the ABRI (Indonesian Military). The story politically captures the conflict between the Armed Forces and the PKI, which escalated to a bitter political contestation. Robinson (2008) affirms that the US played a significant role in supporting anti-Communist components, including the highest military command (especially the Armed Forces), and eradicating the PKI from Indonesia's political scene. The father's military position represents the association that Junus criticizes: this can be interpreted as representative of Sugiarti's act in making critical remarks as a member of the Lekra/Gerwani/PKI in the narrative.

However, the short story "Anak2 Muda" portrays the life of the upper-middle class, personified in the father—a busy "Commissioner"—as the narrator depicts, "The father, who lingered in the office, did not typically have enough time to manage his own children" (Siswadi, 1961, p. 22). Sugiarti, both politically and domestically, assesses the role of the father or husband in the division of roles. As a husband, the character plays a role that fits socially as the breadwinner. Nonetheless, the characters fail as a father: he does not function suitably as a domestic partner in parental responsibility. This fragment shows how the husband forces his spouse to carry out the dual roles of mother and wife while withdrawing from doing otherwise, that is, being the head of the family.

Meanwhile, the female character in the story is portrayed as a wife and mother who takes care of all household chores. She is gender-conscious about her role in managing the family. Such a normative gender role was common when the Indonesian political culture was still heavily characterized by patriarchy. The wife/mother plays her role as a Javanese woman, who, as Koentjaraningrat (1994) describes, must act as the "authority" in domestic affairs. However, as a government official's wife, the wife/mother figure in the story is presented as being well-informed in taking notice of the current affairs, as can be seen in the dialogue between her and the husband: "You've been too busy at the office. Why the fuss with Junus's hanging out with his friends? I'm sure he'll be fine. He's not roaming around with those delinquents" (Siswadi, 1961, p. 22).

Capturing the view of the genteel (*priyayi*) view, the passage voices resistance towards the patriarchal Javanese political culture. The attitude is depicted in the wife's/mother's "complaint" (resistance) against her husband/father. By resisting her husband, the wife stands as the Other since the higher a woman's aristocratic status, the more she is tied to patriarchal norms. Koentjaraningrat (1994) describes that a male aristocrat's wife must accompany her husband. What the wife/mother character does in the story is visionary, considering that it was written at a time when the patriarchal culture was very strong. Sugiarti does not explicitly resist patriarchy in

her work by presenting her feminist ideas in suggestive ways. The story reflects a Javanese philosophy, namely “*mikul dhuwur, mendhem jero*,” which means that to create social harmony, Javanese people must show goodness and hide whatever is considered bad (Geertz, 2017; Magnis-Suseno, 2003).

The mother/wife figure is positioned in the thick of the conflict between Junus and his father. As a wife, she is portrayed as composed yet adaptable, even though the omniscient narrator tends to include morals through the wife/mother figure. Here is an example of the ideals:

But when she looked over her husband's grey hair and drained old face, she took a deep breath. His husband forsook the principle that he had held dear... something decent, noble, and utopian as a socialist individual, socialist society, world peace, global solidarity, peoplehood, antirealism, and individuality held in high esteem. (Siswadi, 1961, p. 22)

The above passage portrays the mother as understanding the problem with nothing to do with her domestic role as a homemaker. Accordingly, this can be perceived as an autobiographical narrative whose status of the author as an activist of the Lekra/Gerwani/PKI and a woman/mother is impossible to disentangle. When the character's wife/mother brings up such terms as the socialist individual, socialist society, global solidarity, and peoplehood,

we can hear the writer's voice, who was a promoter of socialism through Lekra/Gerwani/PKI. However, the character's mother/wife is presented as a homemaker.

Sugiarti uses the character wife/mother cum family manager to hint at feminine leadership. The cited description: “when she looked over her husband's grey hair and drained dilapidated face, she took a deep breath”, signifies her patience (Siswadi, 1961, p. 22). Her caring demeanor calms her heated husband, indicating the so-called transformational and transactional leadership (Lopez-Zafra et al., 2012). The theory suggests that female leadership differs from male leadership, which aligns with Visser (2002), who said that feminine leadership is ascribed to family. The story is based on a family issue. Through the character's wife/mother, Sugiarti demonstrates effective female leadership in solving the story's problems. The portrayal of woman leadership in the story suggests that the kind of feminism adopted in the movements is still suffused with traces of patriarchy, with which the Javanese culture has been associated. Thus, the woman's leadership in the story is not authoritative and power-centered. Rather, it is leadership that embraces and empowers. Sugiarti offers this concept of woman leadership throughout the story. She builds upon the argument that female leadership may resolve the family issue.

Sugiarti also characterizes the mother figure as compassionate toward her son. The character's mother extends her trust and tenderness to Junus and intercedes for her

father figure's absolute legitimacy and her son's teenage turmoil. However, as it gets ideological, Sugiarti tends to refrain from presenting the mother/wife/woman character as a superwoman because it was evident during the era that the socially-constructed gender role between men (public) and women (domestic) fell in the rigid division. In the story, women are not portrayed as central characters because, as Priyatna suggested, it was equally oppressive to insist on becoming matchless and bringing them down into insignificance as a mother and a wife (Priyatna, 2018b). What is revolutionary in the story is that Sugiarti presents a woman's character and the daily conflicts she faces. The story also provides illustrations of the numerous implications the woman character has to undergo, preventing her from resisting frontally. In a strongly Javanese national political culture, frontal opposition must be avoided. Magnis-Suseno (2003) points out that respect and harmony constitute a basic norm in the social life of Javanese people. Sugiarti strategically places the mother character as a mediator in the conflict between her husband and children in the story. Thus, the mother/wife (Sugiarti)'s believes that "I prefer Junus going to meetings to hanging out with the delinquents" (Siswadi, 1961, p. 24). Again, it emphasizes that the gender role in the narrative may be an attempt to affirm any socio-cultural construction.

While the two previous stories are about juvenile misbehavior in a family, "Si Udin Ketua Klas" (1961) is another story. The narrative seems to allow Sugiarti to

accentuate the role of mother/wife/woman in reinforcing the programs of the post-Independence Indonesian government regarding education. It echoes the strategic role in the education sector that the Gerwani played, plus the idea of "good tradition" in the works of Lekra's artists. Hence, didacticism and morality appear both covertly and overtly.

"Si Udin ketua klas" is a simple story about the interaction between a mother and her son, Udin, who is restless about the coming school enrollment test. The story begins with the narrator describing the mother's concern about Udin's unusual attitude:

"Udin had returned home at one o'clock. But, contrary to his habit, he didn't change nor ate after school. Now he looked busy on the table leafing through a book while mentioning the names of his friends."

Udin is anxious of preparing for the coming enrollment test to "secondary school". (Wati, 1961, p. 10)

Meanwhile, as "ketua klas" or a "class captain", the teacher asks Udin to encourage his friends to have more perusal on the subjects that will be tested and urges him "as a class captain to set up a study group" (Wati, 1961, p. 10). Sugiarti presents the mother as comforting and supportive of her son, providing the character with a central role, which implies gender normativity. For example, "Well, that will be excellent, Din. I'm all with you if you want to take the study

group here. I'll provide you all with water and cookies" (p. 10).

Udin is, in turn, excited upon hearing his mother's approval for the study group to be held at his home. It is strategic yet ideological to install the mother in the interaction. Sugiarti emphasizes the importance of a mother in child development with such an approach. Sugiarti introduces a gender-conscious character who can be considered a friend, a teacher, and a mother for a nervous child.

Meanwhile, the father figure is somewhat overlooked in the story. The character is only slightly mentioned during a short exchange: "Dad said that if I pass the test with a good grade, he will buy me a roadster bicycle. I'd be very happy. My dream would come true" (Wati, 1961, p. 10). The cited lines above show that the character's father supports Udin's learning activity in the house. Udin's parents' support makes the story representative of the typical harmonious family due to the agreeable gender role of the father and mother. Despite the more prominent role of the mother, Sugiarti eschews the justification that a mother is more substantial than a father. The key idea of the story is that parents have a critical role in motivating their children to learn at home, as narrated in the story: "Childhood was the period to learn. It shouldn't be wasted. Be virtuous and contribute as much as you can to the development of your country and nation. Keep the Republic of Indonesia safe, prosperous, and peaceful" (p. 10). "Si Udin ketua klas" is specially written for children.

Thus, it is strategic to display the portrait of a harmonious family insofar as the intended readers may grasp that supporting family results in a better learning process. Meanwhile, the statement "childhood was the period to learn...and may contribute as much for the development of the country and nation" implies the narrative's pursuit of promoting the "five passions," (Siswadi, 1963, p. 3), which adopt Lekra's principles in education and literature. The narrative brings out the idea of diligent learning to represent the motherland's passion, parental care, and respect to representing the passion for parents, and exuberance to represent the passion for socialism. "Si Udin Ketua Klas" was Sugiarti's contribution to the literature of socialist realism for children.

The story also instills ideas of how children may learn to value friendship, hard work, and gender consciousness. The effort to educate on gender issues may be seen in Mainah, a female character put forth as the leader of the study group:

"Why don't we elect Mainah as our leader, Manan interrupted. Although she's a woman, she's capable enough to lead us. On the plus side, she's patient and has a helping hand." As the group leader, Mainah was in charge of the group members and meeting their needs. She felt especially responsible for helping the study group in her neighborhood to improve... She was still seen talking with Udin to discuss matters that needed to be done. (Wati, 1961, p. 10)

The appointment of Mainah as the group leader is crucial in raising issues on gender roles. Sugiarti, through Mainah, shows that women are able as leaders. She offers leadership that embraces such normative features of women as “patient and have helping hands” (Wati, 1961, p. 10). According to Eagly and Johnson (1990), the democratic nature of women and their deep concern for specific issues are suited for leadership essentials. For this reason, Sugiarti may be regarded as a visionary because the story offers the concept of feminine leadership through which the significance of gender equality becomes apparent. The nature/attributes of women in the story are required to delegitimize the formalized form/attributes of masculine leadership. Such is the concept of woman leadership that Sugiarti offers in the story. Mainah does not show or exercise power. Rather, she ensures that everyone can work and learn together to reach what they wish to achieve. Magnis-Suseno (2003) explains that a Javanese woman and man must respect each other. Social relations are structured hierarchically so that each individual (woman/man) shows good conduct in accordance with their respective roles. Mainah is kept within her role as a (proper) woman to educate on the interweave of gender roles between the public and the private, as seen in the following: “a profound silence fell upon the group. Udin’s mother brought out tea and fried cassavas. Mainah approached her, helped her with the refreshments, and put them down before everyone” (Wati, 1961, p. 10).

The passage signifies a fluid gender role. Sugiarti radically presents the female characters in the story with valuable competence and performance without calling each gender role into question, implying the assumption that the story was written with strong gender consciousness. Readers may also follow ideologies interwoven into the narrative by Sugiarti as a woman writer and activist.

The depiction of female characters in the three aforementioned short stories underscores the importance of a woman as an individual, wife, and mother without having to degrade the role of a man, father, and husband in the family’s private structure. Normative family portrayal does not always refer solely to the role of the mother and parenting styles. Considering the presented issues and solutions, it is perceptible that Sugiarti suggests that a parenting style requires both a father and a mother. She leans not toward the idea that parenting simply depends on mothering in a culture of the sexual division of labor. Furthermore, the three stories offer feminist ideas that were revolutionary at the time when the patriarchal Javanese political culture still dominated the political culture. In the three stories, Sugiarti implicitly and explicitly presents important feminist ideas of gender equality that were ahead of when they were written in the 1950s and 1960s.

CONCLUSION

The three examined stories show the interweave of ideologies of Sugiarti as a (woman) activist and feminist. The Lekra/

Gerwani/PKI to which Sugiarti belonged was her vehicle to express certain notions during the 1950s and 1960s. Not only did Sugiarti raise political issues in terms of *jargon* of “*politik sebagai panglima*” or literally “politics as the commander” (the supremacy of politics above other aspects) that the PKI propagated, she also raised feminist issues to contribute to nationalist consciousness. However, the stories incorporate the intertwining of women’s roles in the private and public and propose an Indonesian feminist discourse during the 1950s and 1960s. This study shows that the selected works of literature published by Sugiarti Siswadi, an Indonesian woman writer between the 1950s and 1960s, indicate a feminist ideology and the spirit of gender equality. In addition to epitomizing her generation, Sugiarti deserves to be considered an important exponent in the feminist agenda and gender equality struggle. She envisions women’s roles transgressing the culturally assigned public domains and significantly contributing to establishing Indonesia as a young nation.

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