

Female Subjectivity in Oka Rusmini's *Tempurung* (2010): Female Identity in Marriages, Pregnancy and Motherhood

Anita Dhewy

Redaksi Jurnal Perempuan

anita@jurnalperempuan.com

Abstract

This paper aims to explain woman subjectivity reflected in *Tempurung* novel by Oka Rusmini by describing main character perception toward body and autonomy in the formation of woman subjectivity. In discussion I use feminist literary criticism approach. This study reveals that woman characters in *Tempurung* perceiving her body as a significant part of her subjectivity. Furthermore, woman subjectivity isn't her own project but a form of dialogue with other elements including her relationship with husband, children, body and social culture construction which surrounding her. The conclusion of this study is Oka Rusmini makes resistance to the notion of subjectivity on conventional/traditional thought by representing narrative of woman subjectivity which doesn't neglect body, doesn't individual, doesn't always rational, doesn't subject to "universal" notion of subject and doesn't finish.

Keywords: subjectivity, women, marriage, pregnancy, mothering.

Introduction

Notable ideas developed in the discourse of female subjectivity on the issue of body and identity. Meanwhile, the theory of subjectivity was constructed in the humanist framework where it is assumed that the individual is unique, coherent, and truthful (Weedon 1987, p. 32). This argument proposes that the essence of a subject lies with the subject's own consciousness, rationality, capacity for logic and thought. In the West, this model is deeply rooted in the Classical Greco-Roman understanding of subjectivity (the thought and the desire, the body and the soul, Apollo and Dionysus), one that tends to understand the physical body as the prison of the soul. When modernism appeared, the dichotomy of the body and the soul was further reinforced by Descartes' "Cogito Ergo Sum," where the body is understood as consisting only a small part of the whole material reality. Humans can be likened

to the 'thinking' process (I. Bambang Sugiharto 2000, p. 32) and thus our thoughts are often seen as representations of the self. In other words, the body is insignificant in the discourse of subjectivity. However, this point of view is a stark contrast between the male and female dichotomy whereby the female is usually viewed as being trapped within the existence of her body so much so that her rationality is questionable.

Under the liberal humanist construct, the individual was always viewed as a gender neutral object, yet it remains masked behind the male subjectivity. Here the Western normative logic had built subjectivity that normalises the subject as inherently male, thus female subjectivity is a deviation from the norm. As a result, feminists tend to fixate themselves on the previously mentioned construct as it serves to remind them about the female's ever-changing body (the growth of her

breasts, menstruation, pregnancy, breastfeeding, menopause). The body had, therefore, become a physical manifestation of a political struggle. Bordo (1995, p. 17) argued that French feminists such as Irigaray, Wittig, Cixous and Kristeva understood the body as a representative of a new understanding of subjectivity, whilst Beauvoir argued that the body should be understood within a particular context. Therefore, the discourse of female subjectivity remains unstable and never far from the politicisation of the body.

As a result of the above, the question of gender identity is a fluid one. In reference to poststructuralist perspective that views the dynamics of a language as a result of a perpetual conflict of linguistic meaning, Kristeva (1996, p. 351) argued that if a subject is a product of languages, and languages are inherently dynamic by nature, the subject is also dynamic. Feminism, in all of its forms, and poststructuralism pay special attention to subjectivity. Feminism propels the issue of subjectivity as a movement based on personal political conviction and opposes the concept of a wholesome and universal individual as proposed by liberalism. Feminism also criticises the existence of hidden structures of domination and male privilege underneath the seemingly gender-neutral concept of subjectivity. Meanwhile, poststructuralism attempts to deconstruct the humanist-liberalist view to theorise how meaning is reproduced, how meaning conflicts with one another and how meaning can be transformed. Literary texts are products of reality as they represent how the body is formed and categorised not only based on gender but on class, race, religion, and sexuality. It is in these texts the matter of subjectivity is touched upon, discussed, or even neglected altogether. This explains the rationale of feminist literature critics in emphasizing social gender structures and the coercive nature of gender subjectivity as the core perspective. Plain (2007, p. 9) saw feminist literature criticism as "a discourse to oppose humanist assumptions about identity, nature and progress, and to analyse the creation of myths to perpetuate femininity and masculinity".

Here I will analyse the literary work of Oka Rusmini especially her third novel *Tempurung* (Shell, 2010). Oka Rusmini is one of the most productive writers in the Indonesian literary scene where, apart from novels, she regularly publishes short stories

and poems. One of the defining characteristics of her work is her ability to showcase women's issues in the context of Balinese culture. Her identity as a woman, and a Balinese, had influenced her subjectivity as a writer. In an article written by Wayan Sunarta in *Journal Bali*, Oka Rusmini said "I have always lived in a family with strong connection to the Balinese culture. Perhaps this was a strong influencing factor in my writing." This statement exemplifies how Oka Rusmini understands the self/subjectivity as well as an understanding of how one relates to one's external world.

Tempurung is more complex and revealing than its predecessors. *Tempurung* is a novel about the life of a woman confronting her own body, religion, culture, and society. Several reasons contributed to my decision choosing to analyse Oka Rusmini's work. First reason is her identity as a woman. Secondly, Oka Rusmini had been loyal and consistent in discussing themes of personal journey within a political framework by placing personal decisions in a wider social context. She is able to explore issues such as the female body, rape, prostitution, caste, and culture clashes in a complex language without losing its aesthetics. Thirdly, *Tempurung* shows an interesting model of representative subjectivity, one with a potential to expand on the conventional understanding of subjectivity.

Tempurung tells a story of a woman trapped within the constraints of tradition, culture, religion, and marriage. Its storytelling style and drama structure differs from Rusmini's previous novels. This novel tells the story of a woman who must scheme to navigate against all obstacles in her life, some seemingly impossible to evade. The novel tells the stories of female characters with diverse background, each exploring her identity through her physical experiences. It can be said that the recurring theme of Oka Rusmini's work is the struggle of her female characters questioning tradition, culture, and religion. Interestingly, Oka Rusmini tends to present her main characters with a complex personal story and avoids a black and white binary representations of identity.

Oka Rusmini's consistent discussion of themes in her work have positioned her as a strong feminist. The many studies of her work have highlighted the strong feminist elements within her work. Maman S. Mahayana, the literary critic who have analysed the

theme of women and religion in Indonesian novels, argued that Oka Rusmini's novels such as *Tarian Bumi* (*Dance of the Earth*) and *Kenanga*, were intended to challenge the tradition, culture, and religion that tend to put women in a position of lesser value. Maman chose to apply gender-specific terms and to express strong feminist ideas in an analytical criticism. Whereas Wiyatmi in her study about 21st Century female novelists, specifically writers whose work deconstructs the patriarchal history of Indonesian literature, stated that Oka Rusmini's works are strongly embedded within the feminist framework.

In her reading of the 21st Century Indonesian female writers, Wiyatmi (2012, p. 88) has classified five distinct themes and argued that Oka Rusmini's works best fit the first theme, the social structure, and thus: "[the work] is understood within the feminist framework to challenge patriarchal domination and violence against women". Nyoman Darma Putra in the book *A Literary Mirror, Balinese Reflections on Modernity and Identity in the Twentieth Century* – a study on the development of Indonesian literary works from Bali from 1920 to 2000, analyses the dominant themes within the major literary works in those years and in relation to the Balinese understanding of identity – has called on Oka Rusmini as one of the prominent female writers writing from the female perspective.

Nyoman Darma (2011, p. 223-224) has also argued that Oka Rusmini – aside from Alit S. Rini and Cok Sawitri – represents a new form of highly educated female writers with a strong background in journalism and originating from a higher caste family where the gender injustice against women has been more prominent than other castes. This unique background enabled them to be more sensitive and critical when facing issues of gender inequality and women's rights.

Even though Oka Rusmini's first novel was published in 2000, she had written stories and poems since primary school and has only started publishing her work in high school. Her poetry includes *Monolog Pohon* (*The Tree's Monologue*, 1997), *Patiwangi* (2003), *Warna Kita* (*Colour We*, 2007), *Pandora* (2008), and *Saiban* (2014). Other short story works include *Sagra* (2001) and *Akar Pule* (2012). Her novels include *Tarian Bumi* (2000, translated into German in 2007 and English in 2011), *Kenanga* (2003), *Tempurung* (2010).

Oka Rusmini is an award winning writer. *Tempurung* has won two awards: The Department of Language Development Literary Award and SEA Write Award in 2012. Before it was published in 2010, *Tempurung* has been published as a short story in Media Indonesia newspaper in 2004. Both domestic and international appreciation and acclaim for Oka Rusmini's work extends to her being invited as guest speaker or writer in international and national literary forums.

Subjectivity in Feminism

Referring to Weedon (1987, p. 32) subjectivity is used to refer to unconscious and conscious thoughts and emotions of an individual, of the experience of self and how one understands the relation to the external world. Meanwhile Jaggar, as quoted by Weedon (2000, p. 76) argued that the subject, in the tradition of Western philosophy, refers to an abstraction of the individual "without the physical body" under the control of a conscious, rational thought. On the other hand, the lay-person's view of subjectivity within the Western culture tends to reinforce the humanist assumption that views the individual as unique, rational and the subject as a conscious actor. We are conscious that the external world is understood through our experiences and these experiences are expressed through languages. Transparent connections between individuals, experiences and languages have allowed for a smaller parameter to theorise contradictions, whether in the understanding of the self or the subjective interpretation of our experiences. Therefore, postmodern feminism seeks to deconstruct the hegemonic assumption that we, as individuals, are coherent and complete subjects with a unified identity.

The postmodern construct about subjectivity, beyond the conscious thought into the realms of unconscious and subconscious self-awareness, exposes the existence of the contradiction between the process and the change. This construct emphasises the bodily experience from subjectivity. Julia Kristeva, a prominent thinker in the issue of subjectivity, proposes the theory *subject in process* in her work *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Rather than viewing subjectivity as a static humanist essence, Kristeva saw subjectivity as rooted within the unconscious process, formed by symbolism and bound by the rules of the said symbolism process.

Kristeva's subject theory has been developed on the basis of Lacan and Derrida's thoughts. The important point from Kristeva's theory on subjectivity is the concept of the semiotic and the symbolic. Semiotic refers to the "pre-linguistic stage from childhood whereby the child copies the sounds the child hears, or articulates melody and alliterates under pressure to copy the external environment. In this stage, the child does not yet possess symbolic language required and thus has not adopted a strict interpretation of meaning from words. On the other hand, symbolic stage refers to linguistic modality that appears from the mirroring phase or the experience of castration in Oedipus complex where the individual can afford to receive linguistic symbols and articulate what is needed, in the subjective manner" (Kristeva 1996, p. 352).

In essence, the symbolic stage tends to put pressure and oppose the semiotic stage but with little success. Kristeva reasserted that dialectic relationship between the two stages, which has never succeeded in a synthesis, presents proof of a symbolising process that produces the subject. More accurately, the semiotic stage is present as part of a subtext of the symbolic stage, which was seen as a pulsing linguistic pressure and was created as part of experiencing contradictions. The different combinations stemming from semiotic and symbolic within the construct to reproduce many different subjects. As a result, semiotic, even though overlooked from the many regulations of symbolic, has been maintaining its revolutionary potential due to its ability to challenge and re-shape linguistic theory, and thus subjectivity.

Kristeva's subject theory, one that states the subject is always in a process of development, is of interest to the feminist contextual analysis. It can be said that Kristeva's theory presents a form of opposition against essentialism, which argues for the existence of a permanent and stable subject – thus imply the reductive nature of binary identities of 'female' and 'male'.

Apart from Kristeva, Beauvoir's argument for subjectivity also contain a special meaning for feminism. A most recent interpretation of a number of theorists on Beauvoir's work, *The Second Sex*, have related the matter of subjectivity, the female body as well as sex relations and gender. Beauvoir formulated questions about female oppression by

borrowing the framework of Sartrean existentialism. However, as was mentioned by Le Doeuff (cited by Kruks 2000, p. 72) Beauvoir stretched it "beyond and above the meaning." According to Kruks (1992, p. 100-101) Beauvoir's project to describe the seemingly universal female oppression initially employed Sartrean terms on the issue of female otherness. However, unlike Sartre, who saw the impossibility of the relationship ever becoming an equal and reciprocal one, Beauvoir saw a potential for reciprocity between male and female, whereby structural inequalities tend to produce dominant and oppressive relationship between the two.

Related to the issue of embodiment, Lundgren-Gothlin (in Kruks 2000, p. 73) argued that Beauvoir provided a dialectical version of the embodiment, in which the body is lived as a "situation", a complex dialectic of nature and history. While related to the assessment of Beauvoir's view over women's bodies are considered negative, Zerilli (1992, p. 112-113) found Beauvoir was using a rhetorical strategy that borrowed a phrase from Teresa de Lauretis as a "mode of speech" when talking about the female body with the aim to surprise readers and destabilize conventions. Related to the issue of subjectivity, as opposed to Sartre, Beauvoir proposed a version of subjectivity which is not always constitutive or liberating.

The idea of autonomy by early feminists were regarded with suspicion because they promoted unattractive "masculine" ideas, those considered to presuppose an "atomistic" concept of the personal. Recently, feminists have attempted to rehabilitate the idea of autonomy. The term "relational autonomy" is often used to refer reconceptualization of the idea of autonomy that distinguishes feminist version to the concept of an atomistic self. Referring to Marilyn Friedman (2008, p. 571), personal autonomy involves action and life lived by one's individual choices, as well as self prescribed values and identities within the permissible moral limits. Although autonomy is not inherently at odds with social relations, in practice, the autonomy often inadvertently disturbs certain social ties.

The body is an important part of the female self. Feminist thinkers have shown that the body is not merely a container, and the uterus is not just a container for a new life. The woman's body can be said to be more complicated and complex, whereas

the male body is relatively fixed and integrated. In the case of pregnancy, the female body shows how the concept of subjectivity is understood in the discourse of Western humanists / traditional view as a unique subject, steady, and coherent – which does not apply to women. The narrative about pregnancy and visual representations depicting its “unique temporality” and its fluid subjectivity from the perspective of conception is often absent from the discourse of culture, especially the West. As disclosed by Young (2005, p. 46):

We should not be surprised to learn that the discourse on pregnancy omits subjectivity, for the specific experience of women has been absent from most of our culture's discourse about human experience and history.

It is not surprising to know that the discourse of pregnancy has largely ignored subjectivity as we are reminded that women's experiences have been absent from most of our cultural discourse about human experience and history. Therefore, Tyler (2000, p. 292) argued the importance of pregnancy to reclaim it as part of the subjectivity discourse – but this is not fixed to reframe pregnant women as an active subject. I argue that pregnancy narrative by Oka Rusmini in *Tempurung* has somewhat been influenced by Tyler and deserves analysis as an interesting example.

Some feminist philosophers believed that pregnancy embodied the resistance in thinking about individuality, as initiated by Tyler (2000, p. 298) who viewed pregnancy as a “condition of resistance par excellence in conjunction with the individualism of the philosophical model of the self.” The concept of individuals of Western philosophy is a concept that can be argued to separate and distance the body as a disembodied experience (Gadis Arivia 2003, p. 311). Further criticism of individuality is also directed to the normalization of the male body as the basis for the construction of self. By making the male body as the norm, then the pregnant body will be considered as irregularity and disrupt the binary notion of self / otherness as well as subject / object. As Tyler argued (2000, p. 293):

Indeed, the embodiment of pregnancy highlights the difficulty of making any ontological claims with certainty. The pregnant subject defies the logic of classic ontology and is disruptive when thought as a transitional subjectivity, because it

can not be contained within the forms of being constrained by singularity and is at odds with the familiar models of the self-other relations.

Kristeva argued that “women” can not exist or claim an identity without erasing the differences among all women. In the essay “*Stabat Mater*,” Kristeva (1986, p. 161) put forward the idea that maybe it would be different with mothers given that their functions are only attributable to the female gender. Kristeva's arguments have shown us a problem inherent to the discourse. In Western culture, motherhood is often used to represent femininity as a whole, and even more problematic when examined carefully, the representation of motherhood does not refer to reality but rather on the fantasy of motherhood as “lost territory”. The representation does not refer to the real mother, but idealize the relationship between mother and child. Motherhood is a silent and hidden reality.

According to Kristeva, the union between mother and child occurs before the child goes into symbolic rules, and thus enters the life. Kristeva asserted that the process of becoming a mother lacks a subject. We can not say that the mother is the ruler of the pregnancy. The pregnancy occurred “before the symbolic language of the social contract” (Kristeva 1980, p. 378) and to assert that the mother is the ruler of this process is the risk of losing our identity because identity is built in the symbolic language of the social contract. According to Kristeva, examination of the pregnancy process would almost bring us to a level of psychosis so that mothers (the phallic maternal) is formed. Through the establishment of this mother we deny psychosis with the statement that, “Mothers exist, she embodies on this phenomenon; she guaranteed everything, and thus represents the experience” (Kristeva 1980, p. 378).

Autonomy of Women in Marriages

Marital relationships portrayed the characters in *Tempurung* indicated that the situation varies greatly. Dayu depicted the subjectivity of herself when choosing to marry men outside of her caste and religion.

To marry an outsider is an insult.

I had to choose. Love or dignity. I chose love because I know it is higher than dignity. There are no false truths in our love. No pretence. That was what I

thought, perhaps my future will be destroyed after I confronted the reality, sinking, and naked facing the real life. (Oka Rusmini 2010, p. 164)

Dayu's decision brings her consequences, one of which was her banishment by her extended family. "I was exiled by my extended family. Nobody wanted to know me. Maybe they thought I was lower than them. My father still accepted me." Marriage, for most people, is seen as a relation between two large families, so that the decisions taken by the subject or couples undergoing marriage will also have unavoidable implications for the familial relations. But for Dayu, this was not a problem for her because she thinks the human dignity is not only measured by blood or caste. Responding to this, Dayu exerted authority of herself, "The issue of the family, those who exiled me, did not matter – for love is greater than dignity. Father said, I have to be responsible for all of my actions." It is clear that since the beginning, Dayu was aware of the risks and consequences of her choice and therefore Dayu was ready with all the responsibilities of her decisions.

The consequences Dayu faced from her marriage was to sever all of her spiritual relationship with her ancestors and family as she was no longer allowed to pray in the *griya*, a temple. Therefore, Dayu had to perform a ceremony to ask for permission to leave, *mepamit*. Dayu performed the ceremony, in her Father's house and not in the *griya*. Dayu did not refuse to perform the ceremony, but she chose to do so at her father's home. This act showed her autonomy. Dayu did not want to perform the ceremony in *griya* knowing that she would be harassed. Her decision to choose the place to perform the ceremony symbolized her autonomous subjectivity.

On the other hand, Dayu also tried to give a positive interpretation on the ceremony. It can be said that her willingness to perform the ceremony is a form of compromise over tradition. However, giving a positive interpretation of the ceremony, and ready to face the consequences, Dayu showed subjectivity as a woman.

[...] "There may be a silver lining for us, apostates, too. We are so much more alive, so we are more driven to build a better family. Life is so much more exciting" (Oka Rusmini 2010, p. 198).

Autonomy is also shown in characters such as Jelangga. As with Dayu, Jelangga also chose to marry outside her own caste and religion. And not much different from Dayu, Jelangga must run from her home and leave her family as the relationship was opposed by her family. The following was the conversation between Dayu and Jelangga when asked about her feelings.

"Sad. But I've got to be realistic as well. I have already belonged to another person. I fought for love that I believed in. One day you might meet up with the man you love to death" (Oka Rusmini 2010, p. 178).

The narrative shows that with the decision to leave her family Jelangga brought sorrow to herself. However, Jelangga was aware of the consequences of her choices. It is a realistic attitude as a form of self-autonomy. Her belief in the love prepared her for all of the risks and consequences she had to face. Jelangga's decision to stay with her own religion also shows her autonomy.

"What? Did you convert?"

"No"

"Then? How do you pray? According to traditional customs, women follow her husband's religion. You could not possibly pray again in the griya. The ancestors had crossed out your name!"

"Nonsense!"

"Where will you pray? How will you pray? God belongs to man, Jenggala. They will always know who their God is regardless of who their wives are."

"Indeed. I often wondered why there are different religions, huh? Why do we have to unite with men of different religious beliefs? It is difficult. I did not convert my husband; I have never prayed in his place of worship. Does that mean I chose to keep my own religion?"

"Is it not complicated when there are two religions in the household."

"For the time being, no."

Even though Jelangga married an outsider, she chose to embrace her own religion and did not follow her husband's religion. In Bali, it is customary for married women to follow the religion of her husband. Women must perform *mepamit* ceremony to say goodbye to her ancestors, should they

choose to undergo an inter-caste marriage, and they should no longer pray in a place of worship at the family home. This provision applies only to women, while men are not subject to this custom. The rule is clearly discriminatory to women. In a different caste marriage, women suffered a layered discrimination. With this context in mind, Jelangga decided to stay with her religion. Jelangga felt she could not understand another religion, in this case her husband's religion. She also found it strange or uncomfortable entering another religion's place of worship. Therefore, Jelangga determined to stay with her religion. This decision clearly showed her autonomy. And this decision was reinforced by her readiness with regard to burial ceremonies as she chose to be cremated rather than buried.

Subjectivity of Women in Pregnancy & Motherhood

The issue of the body is an important point in *Tempurung* explored by Oka Rusmini. One explored detail is the embodiment of pregnancy. The main characters in this novel included a side character told through the process of their pregnancy. In this section, I describe the embodiment of pregnancy as interpreted by women within the framework of their subjectivity offering resistance to conventional thinking about individuality.

In *Tempurung*, each pregnant character underwent the period of gestation in their own separate ways, which confirms that the embodiment of pregnancy is experienced in different ways by each pregnant woman. This difference does not only happen between other women or pregnant subjects, but even applies to the same woman, each experience of pregnancy varies greatly. Thus, pregnancy can be very specific for each individual. The following narrative of Saring's pregnancy exemplifies the discourse:

It was difficult to contain. In the first six months I could not get up. I was bedridden. Every time I saw the sun, I vomited. Drunk. I did not know the location of the pain in my body. Nothing was pleasant. Everything seemed boring. (Oka Rusmini 2010, p. 56)

I was pregnant the second time [...] It did not bother me this time, I was still able to work. I was at Badung Market when my water broke. My son was born on the stairs. I gave him the name I Made Pasek

Subrata, yet another boy. (Oka Rusmini 2010, p. 57)

The first narrative of the Saring's first pregnancy shows a different situation to what she experienced in her second pregnancy. Both cases of pregnancy were experienced by the same subject and the same body, but each process was very distinct. The same process of pregnancy would also be experienced differently by others. Saring's situation shows that her body was actively responding to the pregnancy, that there was a reciprocal physical relationship between the body with the baby growing inside her. The big difference in the condition of the Saring's body during the first and second pregnancy shows that the body (female / mother) as active. This narrative undermines the view placing women merely as foetal containers. If that was the case, the response of the female body / mother in the first and second pregnancies, and so on, would remain the same, yet the opposite happened. The pregnancy itself occurred without the subject of pregnancy undergoing gestation. As experienced by Dayu:

*Some of the prophecy had come true. My baby had indeed become a man. My pregnancy was also a surprise, **unplanned**, yet **he** had **grown** two months **inside of me**. (Oka Rusmini 2010, p. 247, emphasis added)*

The above narration clearly shows the body can go through pregnancy without the intervention of the mind. Dayu's shock can be seen as a reaction to something growing in her womb, which is a part of her body that was not hers, bringing a number of changes in her body. The term "grow" signifies that Dayu was aware of the pregnancy marking the process of developing into two bodies. It also shows that the pregnant body is a living body. And, the foetus and Dayu are two entities coexisting in symbiosis. The woman's body (Dayu) is thus in the capacity of "giving" or "splitting". The bodily mechanisms, which decided the gestation period itself, also applies to the birthing process. The foetus can exit the body sooner or later than the time expected. As experienced by Dayu:

I did not think he would come out that fast, he was not even full nine months in my womb. He was whining out of my womb after eight months and eleven days. I was worried – afraid of things that happen outside my will. Premature births or other horrible things. My husband and I did not

think that the baby would be born on the 24th of June, because according to the doctor's diagnosis, he was expected on the 24th of July. A month too early. When my stomach was hurting, my husband got angry, he thought I had swallowed a variety of unhealthy foods that make my stomach turn. He grumbled and made me a cup of bitter tea. (Oka Rusmini 2010, p. 248)

From the narrative above we can see how the process of pregnancy and birth can occur without conscious reasoning. So it can be said that the body has a mind of its own, that the body is not merely the object of reason. Pregnancy is not purely a biological issue. It is also related to culture. Pregnancy becomes a kind of necessity that must be experienced by women. As experienced by Sipleg, who was expected to be pregnant, and gave a grandson to her in-laws.

"I heard you were pregnant." Sipleg remained silent.

"Do not be mad at me. I want you to bear a healthy baby boy to take care of the land and Sanggah, our place of worship." She said quietly.

Sipleg raised her head, her hands took her thin bamboo hat off.

"Do not work too hard. You could get sick. I want a grandchild! I'm afraid of losing my grandchild. Do not treat me like this!" Sipleg remained silent and walked towards Payuk's rice fields. (Oka Rusmini 2010, p. 145-146, emphasis added)

An example of culture in pregnancy issue is foetal gender preference. A patriarchal society, valuing masculinity and privileging men, prefers boys than to girls – to the point it can be said there is a communal glorification of a baby boy. In the context of the Balinese culture, it is associated with the notion that only men have the right to continue the family line and worshiping ancestors. A woman who can not give birth to a baby boy would be considered bad luck. And life without male offspring is considered apocalyptic, life is not worth living without a boy. Thus, it can be said that desires related to pregnancy are often culturally driven and supporting patriarchal power relations. But, pregnancy may actually be a female's authentic desire and also a source of power for women. The above narration is a conversation between Sipleg and Jinah, Sipleg's mother-in-law representing the general public's desire for a baby boy. Sipleg's attitude of not answering and remaining quiet is closely associated with marriage,

because Sipleg was forced to marry by her parents. The silence can be regarded as a form of rejection as well as Sipleg's resistance.

Tempurung also narrates several miscarriages. Beauvoir (1989, p. 479) stated that, "Even if women truly desire to have / give birth to a son, their bodies may fight violently when undergoing the process of reproduction". This situation was experienced by Songi, Sipleg's mother.

The meat made her laugh. The meat told her to throw up whatever she ate. Songi once sealed her lips tightly because of a nausea attack during an early stage of her pregnancy. It felt good to beat the desires of the flesh that grew in her body. When she wanted to eat, Songi resisted. She fasted one day. Songi felt victorious and free. She was laughing when the living creatures growing inside the body lost. Usually if you lose, they won't play fair, and they force their way out. Songi was trapped by the pain that ensnared her body. The creature would be dead on arrival. (Oka Rusmini 2010, p. 144-145)

The above narrative shows that there is a part of Songi who wanted to have a baby growing inside of her. Songi also consciously refrained from eating by fasting against the nausea attacks until the foetus died thus leaving Songi to suffer through a miscarriage. There is a kind of denial of the body that caused the foetus to die. On the other hand, looking at the context, Songi was constantly pregnant despite her wishes with her husband wanting to have a boy. Songi's intention to undergo pregnancy was not born out of a pure personal desire to have a child. So it can be said that Songi lies in a position of an object. However, the body can respond with rejection. This has killed Songi's foetus. Thus it can be argued that in her position as an object, Songi can show her subjectivity. Her body was forced to undergo pregnancy; the body's rejection is a response. Songi suffered oppression through her body, oppression and violence, but she also showed resistance. In a situation that was seemingly impossible to get out of, there were moments when Songi was in control of her body, even though it was done secretly. Songi seized subjectivity through the body by using the same repressive "tools". So Songi's attitude of silence (almost like Sipleg's) is a form of resistance and rebellion against the oppressive social construction.

Besides Songi, Maya told her fear of having infants with disabilities so that Maya finally decided

to abort her foetus. The following is a conversation between Maya and Dayu, her best friend, on her fears over the pregnancy.

"You did not know. I have a big phobia!"

"How strange of you to think about the birth defects. Even though you have never tried to get pregnant."

"I have been pregnant ..."

"And?..."

"I aborted it ..."

"Are you serious? Just because you're afraid of birth defects?"

"Yes. My mind is a dead end! When I knew I was two months into my pregnancy, I was chased by a nightmare. Continuously. Not one or two days. Every single time I sleep."

"What kind of dream is it?!"

"I woke up from my sleep and I opened the bedroom door. Behind the door was a crib, a one-eyed baby girl, with deformed legs, and no fingers on her hands. Her head continued to grow every time I looked at her" Maya sighed. She was profusely sweating across her face. She seemed terrified (Oka Rusmini 2010, p. 76).

With reference to Stekel, Beauvoir (1989, p. 479) argued that the miscarriage is also an "interference" as another part of the psyche of women refusing a foetus and associating it with death. Maya experienced severe fear, even phobias towards defective foetus – hence Maya's decision to abort. The narrative below describes the feelings Maya experienced after the abortion.

"Did you regret having to kill the baby."

"No. My fear overcame the birth of my child. You would never imagine having a mentally handicapped, physically disabled baby. Like a baby in my dream room. She had severe disabilities! It would be a pity if she lived. Who would take care of it if I was not there anymore?" (Oka Rusmini 2010, p. 77).

Maya's abortion can be seen as an attempt of censorship against genetic damage to the foetus. The mother's active response to scan the foetus. Thus it can be said that the real body of the pregnant mother is the active body. In addition, Maya's sister, Sarah, a woman with a disability not being able to grow and

function as a normal woman, further confounded Maya's concerns. By departing from the understanding that the rejection of the foetus is the result of the mother's body active censorship intervention, then the decision of the abortion of the foetus is not merely grounded in the interests of the mother.

By writing a narrative about the embodiment of pregnancy through the characters in *Tempurung*, I saw Oka Rusmini's efforts to bring the narrative that had been marginalized into the forefront of our attention. Literary narratives of the female body, especially the pregnant body, are still relatively few, and other narratives tend to be dominated by patriarchal discourse regarding the pregnant body as an object. Then it is clear that in the representation of the embodiment of pregnancy in *Tempurung*, Oka Rusmini attempts to return the 'other' back into the 'centre'. A narrative about pregnancy shown through the conversations and experience of *Tempurung* characters shows that women and men experience this embodiment differently, and even each female experiences are different. In addition, narratives about pregnancy and childbirth of Oka Rusmini in the stories of the different characters can be seen as an attempt to deconstruct the invisibility of pregnancy in the public domain. Thus, Oka's narrative on pregnancy demonstrates a disturbing notion of individuality and subjectivity largely centred on men. At the same time the narration blurs the boundary between self / otherness, subject / object, private / public.

Motherhood is one of the topics stirring the debate among feminists. This issue is also highlighted in *Tempurung*. Motherhood will here be discussed around the myths and stereotypes about the mother as well as the relationship between the mother and the child. The mother is often displayed as a beautiful woman, kind and engaging. While in reality the mothers and motherhood are complex. Oka Rusmini shows this in the narrative between Dayu and Maya in the following excerpt:

"[...] Childbirth, breastfeeding, child rearing. You will feel the extraordinary torture of motherhood. How wonderful and painful. Sleep becomes a luxury. Anyway, you'll discover a whole new, unthinkable world. Being a mother is unimaginable. I found something missing in me as I went through it. Gratitude, patience, and the joy of suffering. Did you know? I became less selfish and more appreciative of the time. Because if I was not able to manage my

time, everything would become a mess. Let's try to think it through again. Or are you scared to be a mother?" (Oka Rusmini 2010, p. 74-75).

Dayu recounted her experience of being a mother as a feeling of intense pleasure and torment, happiness as well as pain. Contradictory feelings, experienced simultaneously. This complex feeling presented a landscape ranging from pleasure to pain. And she stated this as a new world outside the brain's comprehension. This statement confirms that being a mother is not only a rational experience but also emotional. It is not easy to be a mother. For Dayu, becoming a mother made her less selfish and more appreciative of time. The description of Dayu's motherhood mentioned above can be said to constitute a fuller picture and not a partial picture, as often depicted in various media. Depiction of this kind would avoid the partial portrayals reducing the mother to certain categories. Motherhood has become an invaluable experience teaching many things, as per the following narrative:

I closed the computer, 1:23 AM. My body is tired. I had to finish my work quickly. Nothing has changed about the pattern of life and my biological clock after having children. All had to be rescheduled and to follow my child's mood. I had to succumb to a nine-month-old human. Huh, it feels really weird. I must first ask permission from my child to fulfil all of my arrogance, desire, dreams. (Oka Rusmini 2010, p. 159)

Child-rearing forced Dayu (a representation of women) rearrange her life schedule. She had to adjust everything to the child's rhythm. This adjustment process needs to be negotiated within a mother / woman. The narrative above shows how the relationship between mother and child affects female subjectivity. There is a consciousness in Dayu (female) exploring her relation to another (in this case, her child). But this process is not easy for Dayu (and perhaps also for other women), because existing wishes and dreams have to be tailored to a child's wishes. Thus it can be said the female subjectivity is no longer within a process of. On the other hand, the relationship between a mother and a child is not always good or pleasant, as Dayu stated in the following narrative:

I do not know well the female figure which I call "Mother" because she chose to leave me and my sister for another man in search of her happiness. I was almost eight years old and my sister was six.

She was tiny, whiny, liked to suck on her pacifier and was often yelled at by everybody else for doing so. Until now, my relationship with the woman who gave birth to me is like dealing with a stranger. I often observed her whenever we met by chance and I found no trace of an ideal mother in her. She was so foreign. Our relationship was strange and cold. It was usually filled with tiresome small chats. It often also made me restless and miserable when I was with her. I would ask myself: what kind of woman would I want to be? (Oka Rusmini 2010, p. 14)

The divorce of her parents estranged Dayu from her mother. Dayu's narrative above is an unusual narrative about the relationship between mother and child. Mother is generally perceived, displayed and judged as a great individual. This is evident for example in the myth of 'paradise under mother's feet', the myth of an ideal mother, the myth of the happy housewife, and so on. While in reality, the mother figure is very diverse. But the picture is not often revealed. Through an image of mother surpassing stereotypes and questioning myths, Oka Rusmini attempted diversity in her portrayals, depicting a mother as more complex than a perfect mother figure.

Conclusion

Female subjectivity in the novel *Tempurung* surfaces in the physical description of the main characters, their behaviour, and their personal views. Overall, the characters saw their body as an important part of subjectivity. Dayu, the main narrator and character of the novel, represents female subjectivity taking the form not of female projection of herself but rather of dialogue with other elements, including her husband, her child, her social and cultural constructs surrounding her. The subjectivity of Dayu appears to be formed through the relationship with her family (the distance between the mother and father due to their divorce) leading her to build an independent and assertive attitude. These personal characteristics then led Dayu to choose to marry men from outside her caste and religion, resulting in her being effectively banished from her extended family. In addition, her subjectivity as a woman did not depend entirely on her relationship with her husband and children, even though the two were strongly interrelated.

Oka Rusmini exposed the unequal relationship between sexes in the stories of relationships

between men and women, the husband and the wife. The inequality is caused, reinforced, and perpetuated by the rules – traditional customs, religion, and social constructs that gives men advantage. Oka Rusmini hence also questions the social construction that gives privilege for men. Inter-caste marriage, for example, will carry different implications for women and men, where women – those of the upper caste and lower caste – would experience discriminatory treatment as a requirement to break the spiritual relation with the ancestors and family. Customs and social privilege also gives strong preference to boys as they are more valuable because only men can continue the family line, whilst worshiping ancestors makes women, and girls, vulnerable to violence and discriminatory abuse.

Narrative of the embodiment of pregnancy, as shown by Oka Rusmini in *Tempurung*, can be interpreted as an attempt to move what has been seen as part of the private sphere into the public

sphere. Pregnancy can indeed be seen publicly, but the matter will stay within the private sphere. Pregnancy is thus brought to the public space with the possibility opened up to discuss female subjectivity. Furthermore, showing how pregnancy is experienced by each character is an attempt to disrupt the idea of individuality and subjectivity centred in men, thus placing the male body, steady and unchanging, as the norm. In addition to the pregnancy narrative, the narrative about the birth process is an attempt to change what is considered abject by patriarchal values so that the female body can become appreciated and highlighted.

I offered here some notes on the works of Oka Rusmini from a feminist perspective. She brings marginalized narratives back to the centre by writing about the problems faced by women especially in relation to the body, such as pregnancy, blood, concerns, misery, poverty, as well as violence. As such, Oka Rusmini's work is a political act introducing the story of the 'other'.

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