

City as Memory in *Five Bells* and *The Root of All Evil*

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Abstract: *Reading a city through texts shows that the city is often described as complicated (Cohen et. al., 1997). This paper attempts to disclose the representations of complicated city of Sydney and Jakarta in women's literary works in relation to gender and culture in texts of Jones's novel Five Bells and Anggraeni's The Root of All Evil. Applying Bakhtin's concept of chronotope, the result indicates both novels show the unsettling cities through the lens of individuals' memory. The complications are represented in the individuals' identity and idea of patriarchal society and masculine cities.*

Keywords: *city, chronotope, identity, memory*

Abstrak: *Membaca sebuah kota melalui teks menunjukkan bahwa kota sering digambarkan sebagai sesuatu yang rumit (Cohen dkk., 1997). Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis representasi kota rumit Sydney dan Jakarta dalam karya sastra perempuan, dalam hubungannya dengan gender dan budaya. Diskusi ini memakai analisis teks untuk mengungkap pesan-pesan dalam novel Jones yang berjudul Five Bells dan novel Anggraeni yang berjudul The Root of All Evil. Memakai konsep chronotope yang dimunculkan oleh Bakhtin, penulis menemukan bahwa kedua novel menunjukkan kota-kota yang resah melalui lensa ingatan para individunya. Kerumitan ini terlihat dalam identitas individual dan dalam ide-ide masyarakat patriarkal dan kota yang maskulin.*

Kata Kunci: *chronotope, identitas, ingatan, kota*

Women's perceptions of the city are mostly influenced by their experiences of gender treatments and the culture of urban society in the city. The city itself is considered as masculine in the way that the city conceives power and development that often "disadvantage" its female residents (Allentuck, 2005, p. 1). In a sense that the city provides more opportunities to people than the country, the idea of its masculinity complicates women's life in the city. This paper seeks to explore how the city is read in women's literary works, particularly women writers from Australia and Indonesia, in which each narrates

a different metropolis city; Sydney and Jakarta. In these novels, the writers unfold women's experiences of the city through the characters' past experiences, which are shown in the lens of memory.

Though memory has been commonly represented in literature as a property of the individual, memory is also inherently connected with social aspects. Regarding this awareness, Cattell and Climo assert that "memory is the foundation of self and society" (2002, p. 1), providing a way of identifying individuals as groups. The notion of self-identification is emphasised by Anthony Wall who proposes, "we are

because we remember. We exist ... because of our memories" (1990, p. 58). People negotiate their memories with their present self-perception and social practices. However, this negotiation involves "the dialectics of remembering and forgetting" (Cattell & Climo, 2002, p. 1) so that communities or relationships with others might influence one's restructuring of memory, either voluntarily or involuntarily.

Bakhtin proposes that literary works often portray historical events of the nation or humankind, such as war, in ways that parallel an individual's personal life or life-sequences, such as birth, marriage and death (1981, p. 216). He terms this connection as *chronotope*, that is, a spatial and temporal organisation. According to Bakhtin, literary genres develop strategies to represent reality, and in doing so represent time that "becomes artistically visible", and space that "becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84). Such fusions of time and space are constructed and marked by personal and public events in the form of memory and revisited history.

In urban writing, living amidst the metropolitan energy in the city involves the individual in a series of encounters with memories of urban contexts: streets, buildings, and even modern events and problems, such as globalisation and alienation. These contexts construct the connection between one's self and the public world. The connection often determines not only what one remembers but also what one forgets. An analysis of

time and place in the text are essential to recognise an individual's response to, and others' influence on, the development of self-perception. In this discussion, Bakhtin's concept is useful for exploring the representation of spatial or cultural, and temporal or historical, issues of city life. In narrative practices, everyday places and spaces take on symbolic perspectives and meanings because, memory, in particular, sustains meanings. Meanwhile, the spatio-temporal analysis does not limit the meanings of physical spaces but connects the texts with the events, which shape the context of the story.

METHODOLOGY

This paper seeks the representations of a city by exploring literary works of two women writers. The central preoccupation of this study is looking at their reading the city through the lens of memory of their characters. This paper focuses on the writers' examination of their female narrators' experiences of living in a city.

The Asian-Australian women writers are Australian-born Gail Jones and Indonesian-born Dewi Anggraeni. They are selected based on the proximity of their country origin to show the contrasts of their cultural perceptions of the city. Both writers reside in Australia. Anggraeni moves from Indonesia to Australia since the 1970s. Both writers' similar background of Australian urban culture adds to critical factors to compare their experiences of city life. Jones with her Western cultural background asserts the images of Sydney

seen by her Asian narrator. Meanwhile, Anggraeni unfolds her Indonesian-Australian narrator's perceptions of Jakarta.

FINDING

The analysis is structured beginning with Jones's *Five Bells* and followed by Anggraeni's *The Root of All Evil*. This structure is to get a clear view of how Sydney, a Western and Australian city, is perceived by a various number of narrators from different cultural background, and most of them are female. These first images of Sydney are compared with Anggraeni's female narrator's impression of Jakarta throughout her Australian background.

The findings present the women writers' background in the form of biographical details. As this paper analyses women's perceptions of the city, these female writers' cultural background and personal experiences are considered as pivotal role in the construction of their narrators' understanding and comprehending the city. One of the novels analysed is inspired by a previous poetry publication, i.e. *Five Bells* written by Kenneth Slessor. Therefore, a critical reading on Slessor's *Five Bells* is significant to provide clearer contexts of the narration and setting of the city.

Gail Jones, an award-winning writer, uses memory as one of her themes to address individuals' experiences of the city in several of her novels: for example in *Sixty Lights*, *Dreams of Speaking* and *Sorry*. Using memories, the stories frequently move between the past and the present in a non-linear way. Her other

recurring themes are death, loss, loneliness, and Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations in Western Australia. The most repeated topic in her works is "the relationship between subjects and their social spaces" (Roughley, 2007, p. 58) in which this relationship is inseparable from the temporal dimensions of the narrative.

Dewi Anggraeni was born in Jakarta and now lives in Melbourne. As a novelist and a journalist, she has published five English-language novels, one bilingual collection of short stories, and two non-fiction books. Her novels mostly cover issues of Indonesian mythical worlds and how these affect Indonesian women who are in relationships with Australian men. Her critical thoughts on Indonesian issues related to women are elaborated in her non-fiction publications, in which she is particularly concerned with domestic workers and Indonesian-Chinese women. Her poetry, short stories and essays relating to women, Indonesia and cross-cultural experiences between Indonesians and foreigners have been available in a wide range of anthologies. With this background, it is of significance to analyse one of her novels in relation to themes of memory and the city, compared to Gail Jones's *Five Bells*.

DISCUSSION

Jones's *Five Bells*

The theme of memory is particularly strong in Jones's most recent and fifth novel *Five Bells*. She constructs the novel, to use Bakhtin's chronotope of memory

“by means of analepsis (flashback)” (Vice, 1997, p. 223). She employs a circular way of narrating the story, by exploring the present experiences of the characters, but repeatedly returning to their memories of the past at particular points. She delves into individuals’ memories and past history to reflect the city as a place of connections. This novel repeats similar themes of death and mourning, but the story appears to articulate experiences of hope and forgetting.

It is interesting to note that Jones recently moved to Sydney from Western Australia, three years before the publication of *Five Bells* (McGregor, 2011, February 7). It can be inferred that the initial scenes of Sydney are an attempt to explore the author’s own experiences through her characters, who are new to the city, as she uses Western Australia as the home of two of the characters. Ellie and James were intimate friends in their childhood in Western Australia and have been separated for twenty years. Ellie has been in Sydney for six weeks to start her post-graduate study. James pays his first short visit to the city to meet her in order to reconcile with his past. Jones uses an Irish visitor, Catherine, to explore the city and to contrast Australia with Ireland in details. Catherine has only been in Sydney for two weeks for a new job and, in particular, as an escape from the loss of her brother. Similar to her previous novels where she uses Asian characters, Jones depicts an Asian’s perspective of the urban experience through Pie Xing who has been in Sydney for many years.

She is a Chinese migrant and often feels herself to be a stranger, both because of her ethnicity and her old age. She has escaped from dreadful experiences in the Chinese Cultural Revolution and has moved to Australia after her husband’s death.

Jones deploys temporal and spatial perspectives by exploring the characters’ past memories and individuals’ responses in this one-day, or circadian, novel. The narrative tells of one bright Saturday in one particular location, in Circular Quay and around the Opera House. These places become the main chronotope of the text as “the means of measuring how fictional time, space, and character are constructed in relation to one another” (Vice, 1997, p. 201). Circular Quay is considered here to be the site of intersection amongst the four characters as each individual is introduced through their arrival at the Quay. The Quay, a transport hub, also denotes Bakhtin’s road chronotope, the central places of “both a point of new departures and a place for events to find their denouement” (1981, pp. 243-244). The road metaphor is portrayed as the trains come and go; and in the port, ferries depart to and arrive from different places. For example, Ellie reflects on “the boats, bobbing, their green and yellow forms toy-like, arriving, absorbing slow lines of passengers, departing” (Jones, 2011, p. 1). The Quay becomes “a particularly good place for random encounters” (p. 243) as Jones’s characters traverse the crowds of city dwellers and overseas tourists wandering around the Opera House.

Kenneth Slessor’s *Five Bells*

Five Bells can be considered as a re-

writing of, or homage to, Kenneth Slessor's poem of the same title. In the epigraph, Jones recalls the poem, written in 1939, which is dedicated to Slessor's colleague Joe Lynch who had drowned in Sydney Harbour in 1927 (Jose, 2009, p. 441). The themes of memory and drowning in the poem occur throughout the novel. The theme of memory is established in relation to Ellie's childhood, Pie Xing's traumatic experience of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Catherine's loss of her brother and James's guilt at his student's death. The drowning theme is revisited in James's decision at the end of the novel.

Just as Slessor is still mourning Joe's death after a decade -- "Why do I think of you, dead man, why thief/ These profitless lodgings from the flukes of thought/ Anchored in Time?" (p. 443) --, so the Irish Catherine is mourning her brother's death. Her "obdurate mourning" initiates an uncomfortable relationship with Luc, her lover. By accepting the job offer in Australia, she hopes to free herself from restlessness. Likewise, what happens to James refers to his wish to end his guilt at his student's death by drowning. Although it is not stated outright, by the end of the novel James appears to drown himself in the same setting as Joe's death occurred. Possibly drunk, Joe was reported to have jumped off the North Shore ferry at night (Klassen, 2007). In Jones's novel, James boards a ferry and he "slipped over the edge [of the ferry] and the whisky pulled him down ... the water colder than he had expected and covering him quickly" (p. 207).

Slessor's imaginary of lights and

sounds recur in Jones's reflection of Sydney. In visual terms, Jones observes Sydney as colourful. It is portrayed as radiant, with bright water, a clear blue sky, and even the old-fashioned ferries are not just green and yellow they are "painted uniformly in emerald and gold" (p. 14). Catherine sketches this illuminated Sydney as affecting its people so that they seem "contented and relaxed" (p. 52), by which she contrasts them with the people in Dublin, her hometown in Ireland. The colourful and shiny Sydney constitutes a connection of Catherine's expectation to forget her grief of losing her brother. Dublin, grey and wet, is a site of grief and she imagines optimism in Sydney.

Employing strong auditory descriptions, Jones refers to her *Five Bells* to an "acoustical novel", suggesting another texture of imagining the city with Sydney's "currents of sound" (Gaunt, 2011, February 4). She uses the evocation of sound in written words to begin the novel: as Ellie comments, "*Circular Quay*: she loved even the sound of it" (p. 1, original emphasis). Throughout the story, Jones emphasises the sounds of the city, just as Slessor had: "a boat's whistle, and the scraping squeal" (Slessor, 2009, p. 446). She reiterates the resonance by capturing the banality of city noises: the rumbling escalator, the percussive glass walls, the rattling train, the echoing noise of the quay, the creaking boat, the chime of an opening laptop, the roar of traffic, the thundering bus, the moaning siren of an ambulance, the car alarm, and the rumbling mighty trucks.

These sounds epitomize Bakhtin's sense of place, "the locus for cyclical everyday time" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 247). The city is "a place of noise" (Williams, 1975, p. 1) as city life is reflected through the sounds of the transportation: the train, the boat and the bus, even the ambulance; buildings: the walls and their facilities, such as escalators; and modernity: the laptops and mobile phones. Jones suggests that this is a common place, where "the population is in movement" (p. 8). The city is a place where technology is in use, as well as where an accident or crisis may always happen.

Sightings of the Opera House

As the characters have their own past experiences and personalities, Jones "visualizes and portrays personality as another, as someone else's personality, without making it lyrical or merging it with her own voice" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 12). Though framed by a third-person narrator, each of the characters in the novel has their own voice. The way the individuals observe their surroundings explicates the connection of their perception of self. Throughout the story, each appears to have a network structure amongst the four characters: Ellie, James, Catherine and Pie Xing. Ellie and James eventually have similar recollections of their schooldays, as each anticipates their meeting. An event of a lost child brings Catherine and Pie Xing together in a police station, though previously they have already had an encounter of which each is unaware.

In the novel, Ellie, who desires to reconcile her previous intimate relationship with James, keeps connecting the images of

the city with her sexual experiences in their childhood. Certain things remind her of her schooldays. Her optimistic nature also affects her expressions for her surroundings. She sees "the bowl of *bright* water, swelling like something *sexual*" and for her, from the word "circular", Circular Quay "would be a circle like no other, *key* to a *new* world" (p. 1, my emphases). Her high spirits are projected by her narrative: "[t]he train *swung* in a wide arc" and "those blurred partial visions were a quiet *pleasure*" (p. 1, my emphases). The bridge is also seen to own an "*optimistic* uparching". As she decides "[w]hy not be joyful, against all the odds? Why not be child-like?" (p. 4), it is obvious that her childhood and schooldays, and presumably her intimate relation with James, leave her with pleasurable feelings. When she is to meet James, the pleasant memories return. In her first encounter with the Sydney Opera House, she marvels at it. Her optimistic tone leads her to illustrate it thus: "it was moon-white and seemed to hold within it a great, *serious* stillness ... *so singular* a building, so potentially *faddish*, or odd ... it looked *poised* in a kind of *alertness*" (p. 3, my emphases). Ellie is confident with her life. It is not aimless as she is about to start her post-graduate study.

In contrast, James is pessimistic. He is an intelligent person, as he wins two scholarships for his high school and university study. However, his shame and failure start when he cannot cope with the complexity of the study of medicine. He finally drops out in the first year as a medical student. He becomes a successful primary teacher but then fails in

his duty at his first school camp, as one of his students has drowned under his care. These traumatic experiences have ruined his life and he needs to consume benzodiazepines (sedatives) regularly to relieve his anxiety. These burdens of failure and guilt appear in the cynical tone in his narrative. Looking at the Opera House, he thinks that the building design is “*too pre-empted to be singular ... Its maws opened to the sky in a perpetual devouring ... Almost like teeth ... The monumental is never precisely what we expect*” (p. 5, my emphases). His sceptical tone in describing the “singular” building contradicts Ellie’s buoyant depiction. As he suffers from the guilt of losing his student, he metaphorically represents the white shells as something menacing: maws, teeth; threats to people’s trust of him.

In a different way, Pie Xing details the landmark by closely connecting it with her Chinese culture. Her description of the design suggests that Australia is the best place to rely on, after her vulnerable life in the period of Cultural Revolution. She visualizes it as “*jade-white ... It was a fixture she relied on. The shapes rested, like porcelain bowls, stacked one upon the other, fragile, tipped, in an unexpected harmony*” (p. 12, my emphases). From Catherine’s viewpoint, she describes it as “its folded forms stretching upwards, its petal life extending. The peaked shapes might have derived from a bowl of white roses, from the moment when they’re tired and leaning, just about to subside. *Blown*, that strange term, *a bowl of blown roses*” (pp. 14-15, original emphases). For her, the

shapes embody her grief at a lost life as she misses Brendan, her late brother and best friend who was killed in a traffic accident. Eleven months have passed but she still cannot release herself from the unyielding mourning.

By incorporating their emotional pasts into their experience of this one building, the Opera House, Jones is thus able to demonstrate that the individuals’ pasts have predominant influences on their perceptions of spaces and landscapes. The memories shape their own perception of the self: Ellie the optimist, James the pessimist, Pie Xing the peaceful, and Catherine the restless.

Gender and Family

Five Bells contests the masculine stereotype prevalent in Australian literature. It presents James as a vulnerable character in contrast with the other three female protagonists. Ellie and Pie Xing embody strong personalities, which show their “command of their own life” (p. 111). Although Catherine is still mournful, the remembrance of her dead brother’s spirit of adventure makes her confident. Furthermore, the novel demonstrates that the relation between family and a death becomes significant in shaping one’s perception. Here, Jones elaborates family history through memories that often return to the protagonists. More importantly, Jones shows that the memory recurs in public places and it might happen without one’s direct interaction with others, but be inspired by such stimuli as through movements, visions and sounds.

The recollection of her late father, Charlie, returns to Ellie when she sees the light in the Harbour, which reminds her of his old-fashioned electrical good store. She has grown up to learning that her mother, Lil, is “the active” one and has “a sense of ease and authority” (p. 133). Meanwhile, Charlie is submissive to his wife and has “a feminising trait” (p. 133). However, her parents raise her in happy and supportive circumstances that make her “grow up secure and strong” (p. 134). The encouraging relationship with her parents and her father’s natural cause of death, a heart attack, make her remember her father “with pleasure” (p. 140). She continues her life with contentment and confidence.

A similar pattern of using family relationship to shape one’s personality also operates in James, but with different circumstances. Here, Jones demonstrates the concept that family history influences the formation of one’s identity. For example, losing identity has been a part of the history of James’s family. His father left the family when James was only three years old, but he has learned that his father, Matheus, lost his identity as the breadwinner. He leaves when he cannot keep working as a tailor at a time when the people needed more builders. His mother, Giovanna, lost her sanity when James left for a school in the city. As a result, she needed to be put in an institution because she was “*a danger to herself*” (p. 27, original emphasis), living there until her death. It causes a sense of regret in James, which continues to haunt him.

Jones satirises some of the stereotypes of success in relation to masculinity established in literary texts. This idea is embodied in the description of James as he is “handsome, tall ... predictor of success” (p. 25) and wins more than one scholarship. He goes to a medical school because “this was a conventional aspiration for clever young men” (p. 70). However, Jones explores James’s failings as a result of his inability to make peace with his personal problems. Ironically, as a medical student, James has a traumatic experience in dealing with blood and fails to overcome this vulnerability. In childhood, Ellie remembers young James looking in horror, seeing a chicken’s blood. The medical school’s assignments in the laboratory and hospital only make the ordeal worse as he deals with “crushed brains” and unpleasant visits to “damaged and cruelly assailed” patients (p. 70). In the train, he sees a man with a T-shirt stamped with *teen spirit*, which upsets him because it evokes his nightmare after watching a Nirvana video-clip, involving a crucifixion and a woman’s inner organs (p. 75).

Remembering and Forgetting

The nature of memory involves remembering and forgetting mechanisms, which often depend on individuals’ willingness to retain or to obliterate the recollection. It is commonly understood that we try to forget adverse experiences, such as death or loss. Walter Benjamin’s writing in “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” discusses two types of memory. He defines voluntary memory as that which “reduces the scope for the play of the imagination” (Benjamin,

1968, p. 186). It provides information that we can recall consciously whenever we need it. Conversely, involuntary memory consists of “frequently unconscious data” (1968, p. 157), which accumulates and converges in memory. The latter is what one usually intends to forget. However, because of its unconscious nature, the memory might be recalled by others or even the site of the memory formation (Cattell & Climo, 2002, p. 3).

These mechanisms operate in *Five Bells* in various ways as each individual has different kinds of feelings about their past experiences. As this novel encapsulates a variety of memory and its insinuation, each character embodies different patterns of reminiscence. Although all protagonists experience “individual life-sequence” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 216) -- the death of a member of the family -- they contemplate the loss in diverse ways in accordance with the development of their self-perception. A one-day novel might not be adequate to illustrate the transformation of one’s self. However, *Five Bells*, with its analeptic structure, is able to convey the protagonists’ past life and how this personal history is reflected in the present day, and even “projects them into the future” (Wall, 1990, p. 51). Jones emphasises this through Ellie.

A bus-stop wait could cover all this, all this complicated history. A woman standing still in a main street on a Saturday afternoon could carry *all this*: death, time, recollected acts of lovemaking – all together, simultaneous, ringing in her head (p. 141).

James’s personality is the opposite of Ellie’s, he is “obstinately unjoyful” (p. 4), to

the point that he expects disappointment at any level. Bakhtin remarks that “time ... thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible” (p. 84): this state is excruciating for James as he suffers from this “memory siege” (p. 6). He is trapped in the involuntary memory and is unable to forget it in order to continue his life. Jones symbolises it as James being trapped in a carnival tent and not struggling to release himself. He imagines that “he would die there”, “he froze there, submissive” (p. 6). He always perceives himself as “an inadequate boy”, and the memory returns in the present of the novel at his sighting of the Opera House. The Sydney train becomes the site where James endures the recollection from what he sees before him that “so much of the past returns ... lodged in the bodies of others” (p. 4). An old woman’s leathery hands remind him of “his mother’s hands, the sign of history he did not want” (p. 4). The memory of his late mother reminds him of a daunting sense of self, that, “while she lived ... he was still a little boy ... he need not to be the grown up and sensible one” (p. 109). Jones seems to show that James is not willing to take responsibility of his failures as an adult. He keeps returning to the past when he was still a child and wanted to visit the Colosseum in Rome to “go back in time, to find another history” (p. 66).

Jones presents another scheme of remembering and forgetting in relation to optimism and forgiveness. In the novel, though Pie Xing and her family suffer as a result of the Chinese Culture Revolution, she remembers her parents in the “moments of happiness” (p. 41). Jones attempts to reveal

that the construction of self-perception is based on the subsequent events as they have happened to the characters. For example, Pie Xing eventually finds hope and security in Australia. Her parents and her husband do not survive the revolution and this condition brings her and her son to Australia, to be reunited with her brother. Jones draws an important element of remembering memory as a voluntary action, in that Pie Xing strongly recalls a complete vision of a pleasant event of having a new coat when she was still a child.

Jones uses Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, a novel on the Russian Revolution, to convey Pie Xing's memories of her father. It is possible that Pie Xing learns the importance of the wealth of individuals from that novel. In relation to this, Jones seems to emphasise that individuals' experiences are commonly governed by the basic human longing for companionship. This is emphasised by Pie Xing's images of an archetypal city as a place of both compassion and loneliness. Pie Xing encapsulates the idea that people do not need to feel lonely in the crowd, as she feels "*a chi*, moving between everybody, a collective spirit, a complication" (p. 8). She appreciates simple exchanges she makes with an ice-cream seller, Aristos, and a train-ticket seller, Mr Nguyen, as "the fabric of civility". She narrates that "[o]ne could die without it" (p. 44). The idea of loneliness is the reason Pie Xing forgives Huan, who was her prison officer who beat her in the Chinese Cultural Revolution era and who has also moved to Australia. Although Pie Xing initially struggles hard to forgive what Huan has done before, she finally

becomes Huan's only company when she is in the hospital. Faithfully, Pie Xing brings her lunch and reads *Doctor Zhivago*'s story to her in her weekly visits.

Pie Xing's ability to forgive her former prison guard is symbolic of an important message that Jones attempts to convey. Jones proposes two choices of managing memories: there are "forms of forgiveness that make life go on, and forms of reproach that hold history still" (p. 113). Pie Xing distinguishes herself from ordinary people, who torment themselves by reattaching to the unpleasant aspects of their history, like James.

Indeed, not only does memory have a significant role in this novel, but also the city plays a dominating meaning, which enables Jones to represent the construction of self-perception narrated by the four characters. However, in Jones's novel, the self-perception is shaped by individuals' personal interaction with others and the city, thus urban society as a whole does not play a powerful influence to the process. This represents a non-patriarchal culture in which men do not take controls of women. Therefore, in novels about a city, where patriarchy still dominates the urban system, they reveal different experiences between the memory and the city. In a patriarchal society, such as Indonesia, people, particularly women, have to conform to the societal-gendered norms in order not only to attain self-identity, but also to survive. A close reading of Dewi Anggraeni's novel, *The Root of All Evil*, demonstrates dissimilar formation of one's perspectives of self from Jones's *Five Bells*. Anggraeni's novel is set in Jakarta,

the capital city of Indonesia, which is very representative of a patriarchal society.

Anggraeni's *The Root of All Evil*

The Root of All Evil is Anggraeni's first novel, which is narrated in the first person by Komala, an Indonesian woman, who is married to an Australian doctor, Drew Minogue. They reside in Melbourne with their two children, David and Millena. She is a writer, known both in Indonesia and in Australia, under a different name, Layla Minogue. After a call from an old friend, Narsih, Komala is obliged to return to her hometown to attend to her sick father in Jakarta, Indonesia, leaving her family in Melbourne. Having been away from Jakarta for nine years disturbs her homecoming, since the city and the people, including her family, have changed beyond her expectations. Anggraeni unfolds Komala's changing perception of the city and her parents through revisiting Komala's past memories and contrasting them with her new perspectives of looking at events. Therefore, there are two significant elements of the city presented in this novel. The representation of the capital city, Jakarta, serves not only as simply a physical setting of the events but also has an influential function in constructing Komala's self perception and incorporating gendered views through the subsequent actions happening to other characters.

Family Relationship

Anggraeni describes, metaphorically, Komala's need for adjustment in her homecoming. This is illustrated in a typical tropical welcome for people who have

just arrived from a four-season country: one's body soaked with perspiration because of high humidity. This happens during Komala's arrival in Jakarta as she comments, "my body had not adjusted to the humid climate" (Anggraeni, 1987, p. 8). Not only does her body need to adapt to Jakarta, but her relationship with her parents also needs to be amended.

Anggraeni implies a causal link between the city and gender roles. In the 1980s, the policy of decentralisation prevailing in Indonesia had positioned Jakarta as the centre of governmental activities. This masculinised the city as a source of power and control that extended throughout the country. The citizens did not have the right to oppose the government's decisions and systems. For example, Komala's parents had to give up half of the front yard to support the governor's program of widening the street. Here, Anggraeni criticises the government's slogan: for "the good of the city", whereby, the city dwellers are unable "to refuse to sacrifice one's own property" (p. 20). Anggraeni also satirises the masculinised city in relation to a patriarchal system. This appears in Komala's relationship with her father, whom she considers to be God-like (p. 12). Meeting her father brings back the memory of her adoration of him as a child: she once believed him to be "powerful but gentle. When I grew up, I realised he was not that powerful, but he was still the recognised authority in the family" (p. 12). However, when a stroke renders Komala's father half-paralysed, Anggraeni unfolds

the loss of masculine power as his life now depends on his stay-at-home wife's efforts to cover house bills and the expenses of medical treatments.

Feminism has analysed power relations embedded in patriarchal societies. Power relations create gender hierarchies, which are fundamental to the universal oppression of women, such as in Indonesian discourses. In her 1974 essay, Michelle Rosaldo, a feminist and an anthropologist, argued that in patriarchal societies, "women are given a social role and definition by virtue either of their age or of their relationship to men" (Rosaldo, 1974, p. 29). Critiques of those issues are what Anggraeni attempts to raise in her novel, particularly in the mother-child relationship. Anggraeni criticises a typically patriarchal family that devalues a mother. Komala's mother, who is from the "country", is a housewife and is dependent wholly on her husband's work for financing household expenses. Rosaldo has asserted, "only when she is old and free of the responsibility of children, when she is dissociated from child rearing and also from sexuality, can a woman build up the respect that comes with authority" (p. 28). However, it does not operate in Komala's mother's case because the situation does not change when her children have married. Anggraeni seems to suggest that this is because of the mother's lack of education and her inability to understand others. Therefore, she tends to be pre-occupied with self-reproach for "not being educated enough to gain respect from her children" (pp. 4, 50, 51, 53). Komala finds that her mother "always"

misses the point of what her children and her husband have to say (pp. 16, 134). However, the mother embodies a woman who negotiates her place in the house by employing masculine traits: controlling others' emotions, as having "the amazing ability to make anyone uncomfortable" (p. 50), being "fairly stern" (p. 17) and as Komala remembers, "there was always an undertone of force on my mother's part" (p. 17). By this, Anggraeni explores the construction of Komala's identity as a woman by contesting it with her 'demigod' father and 'less divine' mother.

The Complexities of Jakarta

In a developing country, like Indonesia, urbanism has its own complexities. Unlike Jones's *Five Bells*, which examines individuals' psychological problems, Anggraeni's novel explores Indonesians as having much more complex factors to deal with, not only psychological, but also "economic and social factors" (Aveling, 1988, p. 44). The novel attempts to show "the sufferings of the downtrodden women of this country" (137) because "everybody is after money" (p. 104) and women commonly become the victims in negotiating the societal acceptance.

The unbearable heat of Jakarta is only a slight disturbance for Komala, compared to its crowds, congested traffic and city development. Anggraeni explores Komala's disturbance in the description of the changing Jakarta.

I hardly recognised Jakarta any more. The roads we passed were completely foreign to me. The tall floodlit buildings, replacing the ones familiar to me, no doubt were the fruition

of the urban development, the pride of the Government. It left me feeling I had come to the wrong place (p. 9).

From Komala's perspective, there has been a drastic change to the city and with consequences for city dwellers. Her old and quiet beautiful street of *Jalan Jambu Monyet* has turned into a busy street, crowded with people gathering around the fruit and food stalls. Not only the stalls, noisy horns and bells from cars, bikes and tricycles also occupy the small space. As a result, she yearns for her old street,

Where people had strolled casually on the dirt footpath, where the boys had stopped on their pushbikes to chat with Burhan [her brother] and me, where the horse carts had clip-clopped past, often leaving a trail of horse dung, and the oxcarts moved lazily along, the riders swaying slowly on the boxlike carriages (p. 20).

Anggraeni illustrates that modernity has changed the street into a polluted area, as Komala describes, "I had resented the smell of exhaust fumes replacing the stench of animal faeces" (p. 20). The development of the urban system also disturbs Komala's secure feeling of living in this new city.

Yet no way had I been prepared for what I was seeing now. Not only were front yards diminishing, residential houses were disappearing too. Cold, multiple storeyed buildings were dominating the scene. Crossing the road had become as hazardous as crossing the roads at Place de la Concorde (p. 20).

Anggraeni tries to represent Jakarta's complexities through Komala's street, which embodies the physical insecurity of the city. For example, while waiting for a friend to pick her up, Komala sees three accidents happened in her street,

one involving a schoolgirl and the other two adults. She is surprised to find the accident victims "just pulled themselves together slowly, favouring the injured leg, or holding their bleeding forehead with pieces of cloth offered by some passers-by, then walked away or hailed a *bajaj*" (p. 20). The accidents seem to be routine and insignificant incidents on the street. People would rather go about their own business than fuss about the accident, which might lead them into trouble with the authorities, namely, the police.

People's personal needs to be part of establishment have changed the city from its former order and beauty to a place of insecurity and chaos. In turn, as Anggraeni describes it, the city is also changing its dwellers' self-perception. For example, Komala encounters a callous waiter shooing some beggars out of the restaurant "to please his boss under the illusion of securing his job" (p. 65). For some people, living in a city where jobs are limited is not easy. Komala observes that many people around her are "grabbing at straws of false security, not able to care about the number of people they knocked over and trampled" (p. 65). She concludes that the city leads people "to identify with the establishment as soon as they get so much as the shadow of it" (p. 62). However, her old friend, Narsih, who has been experiencing this changed Jakarta longer than Komala, cynically responds, "Because when you are not the establishment you're on your own. No one thinks about you, let alone helps you ... Therefore, you make believe

you're one of them ... It gives you a sense of 'false' security" (p. 62).

The city that seems to be offering dreams to some people leaves others in hardship. Those who are unable to find decent jobs must struggle to find any way of earning a few more coins, including committing crimes or selling themselves. Anggraeni uses Komala's street and family problems to exemplify these issues. Day and night on the street are allegorically pictured as part of city life as observed by Mira, the father's nurse: "they sell food during the day and evening ... but during the night they sell themselves" (p. 30). Though Mira, who has a respectable job, comments that "some women have no self-respect" (p. 30), ironically, she is paid by the money from boarders whose occupations are not considered 'respectable'. Komala's mother is required to lease the bedrooms to pay for the father's expensive medical treatment. One of the boarders, Julia, is a beautician who appears to do more than "house calls" (p. 26). Another boarder is Hamdani, who is a student at the Academy of Languages. In order to protect his sister, Tati, who works as a hostess, he has no other choice than working as a cashier at the Tarantula nightclub, that is, not a reputable place to work. Anggraeni points out that when people are in great need of money, they can easily exchange their pride and respect for it. This circumstance brings new and different feelings of the city to Komala, as when she describes that, "despite its traps and vices, Jakarta still attracted women from other regions, who flocked to the capital city by

the thousands, like the suicidal flight of insects to light" (p. 76).

"Women are the root of all evil"

According to Bakhtin, space and time are "the primary categories of perception and the forms of the most immediate reality" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 85). Anggraeni seems to support this notion, in illustrating that the city has changed in culture and social formation in just nine years. Therefore, it is necessary for Komala to acquire a new perception based on her immediate experiences. Anggraeni appears to challenge the unperturbed memory of a beautiful city and harmonious family by exploring in the novel Komala's involvement with other women's problems with their men.

This novel enables Anggraeni to unfold "the downtrodden women" (p. 137) who suffer because of city life and men. This appears in Komala's new perceptions of the relationships between men and women in her home country. Through Komala's mother who concludes, "women are the root of all evil" (p. 32), Anggraeni criticises the treatment of urban society to female inhabitants by exploring a series of women being victims; yet they have to sacrifice for men's benefits. For example, Lestari, Komala's mother's wife, puts the effort to keep her weight down with 'happiness exercise', which becomes a trend in the city. The 'happiness exercise' is "a kind of exercise for women aimed at increasing their ability to please their husbands sexually" (p. 21). Running the centre of that kind of exercise becomes a lucrative business in Jakarta as the women learn to keep their husband satisfied. Narsih

cynically comments,

It's pathetic how those women, fighting middle age bulge and pushing forty, go to those 'happiness exercise' classes, hoping to keep their husbands from nightclub and steam bath hostesses and unscrupulous gold diggers. They should just accept that if they can afford those classes, then that means their husbands are rich enough to fall prey to gold diggers (p. 22).

Anggraeni's critic of women's position in urban system is particularly strong in Tati's tragic case. Being the mistress of one of the owners of the nightclub, Sonny 'Baldy' Sudradjat, Tati transforms "from a simple country girl into a sophisticated woman about town" (p. 53). However, after knowing her husband's infidelity, Sonny's wife douses Tati "with sulphuric acid" (p. 77) on the face and the front of the whole body which leaves her blind. This case enables Anggraeni to emphasise that women might be victimised both by women and men. In Tati's case, she is a victim of a woman, Sonny's wife, who blames her, not her husband though he is the one who is unfaithful. Tati is also a man's victim since she is unable to ask for Sonny's responsibility of his wife's conduct because he is a powerful and respectable man and he has "expensive lawyers under his wings" (p. 90). The witnesses of the event are not willing to come forward to defend Tati because they are Sonny's employees and will not risk their jobs for her. Even worse, they blame Tati for asking "more than hostess or kept woman status" (pp. 96, 100). Anggraeni shows the archetypal solution of becoming a victim that is, accepting the fate. This appears in

Hamdani's account of Tati's decision for not bringing the case to court.

If we went on with [the case], no matter how discreetly, it would still create a lot of publicity. Tati's picture might even appear in the newspapers. That's the last thing she'd want. She'd arouse hostile reactions amongst the married women. They'd consider it colossal cheek of her to demand any compensation at all from him [Sonny]. If, despite all that, we did win the case, who'd guarantee that he'd keep his part of the obligation? The Legal Aid gets a lot of cases every day; it'd be physically impossible for them to police it. All in all, Kom, it'd be an unnecessary trauma for Tati (p. 137-138).

Her old friend, Narsih analyses Tati's case based on her personal experience: "they always blame other women for their husband's infidelity... Then they turn against each other and let the men get away with everything" (p. 65). She concludes bitterly, "We breed weak men. And what gets me is, weak as they are, they still manage to control us" (p. 65). Narsih's husband, Nelson, betrays her with a series of love affairs. She tolerates the affairs with "decreasing pain" (p. 63). Because of Nelson's beating her, Narsih helps her husband's girlfriend, takes her to an abortionist, pays for the medication and even takes care of her for sometime after the abortion (p. 63). She considers her conduct is "necessary to save her husband's skin" (p. 63). Despite Nelson's disloyalty and violence, Narsih does not leave him, because she needs him for "the status of a married woman" (p. 64). Anggraeni emphasises that Indonesian society at large, and particularly married women, "don't like divorcees" because "they think divorcees, especially the young ones, are a

threat to their security. It's not a groundless fear either. Men get turned on by divorcees. They think they're fair game, all fun and no risk" (p. 64). Narsih's business of selling jewellery deals with "allegedly respectable married women" so she cannot afford to be divorced (p. 64). In Nurse Mira's case, her husband is in jail because of his affair with another woman (p. 32), as a result, she has to leave her children with her mother in a different city so she can work in Jakarta.

Not only do nurse Mira and Narsih become the victim of a husband's affair with another woman, but Komala's mother also has to endure her husband's infidelity. The family has protected Komala from knowing of his affair, as she regards her father as "a principled, conscientious man. The man she had been so proud of, the demigod" (p. 129). This infidelity causes her father's health to deteriorate and, eventually, leads to his death on the day after he has confessed the whole story to Komala.

The Root of All Evil deals with the impact of the increasing demands of city life, much or which is vividly comparable to Komala's past memory of her old house and family. It enables Anggraeni to convey her critiques on how Indonesian society treats women, as Komala describes for the reader.

I began to get a clearer picture of life in Jakarta now. Its pressure on women. If you are single and not suitably employed, you will have to wait around for a man to offer you security in the form of marriage. Once married, you have to summon all your wits and energy to keep your man happy and occupied, so that he will

not be tempted by other "loose" women, who are only after his money, which you also need. If you're not good enough he dumps you, then you become a "loose" woman. Then when you have experienced being dumped, you become wiser and realise your precarious position, your disposability. So you dig for gold, and you dig hard. Every opportunity could be your last (p. 76).

Anggraeni's novel revises the myth of "women are the root of all evil" and criticises the knowledge that being men's victims does not drive women to turn against men, but that "women ... turn against each other" (p. 131). The city, with its attraction and demands, is the cause of the problems. The men who are responsible for "the maintenance of the economic" (Rosaldo, 1974, p. 5) are busy making money and the situation creates a distance between a husband and a wife. When they have accomplished the goal of attaining wealth, the feelings of urban alienation drive the husband to find another woman. Urban life has changed the urbanites and their relations to each other. Past memories have simply become nostalgia and the old perceptions have changed into different understandings, anchored in the reality.

CONCLUSION

Both Gail Jones and Dewi Anggraeni use the city as a setting to explore the relationship between place and individuals, through the lens of memory. The distinctive ways, in which memory and the city are signified in both novels, express the idea that the city sometimes fails to deliver what it promises. Jones offers a solution to the problems through Pie Xing's

choice to forgive. However, Anggraeni's protagonist is not in the position to solve the complications posed by her city, because she does not belong to the city, or, the culture any more. In a patriarchal system, it seems the influential forces of the city are beyond the ordinary dwellers' power to resist. Both writers use a similar strategy to criticise the concept of masculinity in a way that the male protagonists deal with a sense of powerlessness, mentally and physically. The city has offered many opportunities to them, but they let themselves remain trapped in their own failings. This representation serves as a reminder that, as citizens of the complicated city, they have the individual power to make choices available within the city's dehumanising forces.

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