

# The urban-rural dichotomy in the Indonesian documentaries

*Nona nyonya? and Untuk apa?*

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## ABSTRACT

The media play a pivotal role in the democratization process in Indonesia and this is among others apparent in the surge of films, both fiction and documentaries that have been produced after the end Suharto's decades of control over the media. It is important to note, however, that compared with fiction films, the documentary genre remains rather unpopular in Indonesia. Indonesian documentary films struggle to depict stories of the subaltern and those living in the "periphery" in order for them to be seen and heard by the greater masses and by those in power – the ones in the "centre" or Jakarta. This paper discusses the connection between urban and rural voices and its impact in the documentary films *Nona nyonya?* (*Miss mrs?*, 2008) and *Untuk apa?* (*What's the point?*, 2008) produced by Kalyana Shira Films, an organization well-known for its work on gender issues using film as medium. Departing from the notion that the film industry itself is still largely Jakarta-centred, this article focuses on the way urban settings and voices are used to create rhetoric, and the impact of the domination of these urban voices over the rural ones.

## KEYWORD

Documentaries, subaltern, media.

## BACKGROUND

The fall of Suharto's New Order in 1998 caused much excitement in Indonesian cinematic circles. As media repression was lifted, many Indonesian films were produced. The Indonesian moviemakers of the late 1900s and early 2000s form a totally new generation. Clearly, the spirit of democratization brought about by the reformation has led to the production of films that portray stories that

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were silenced during the Suharto era. They includes the story of the Chinese Indonesian minority in directed by *Ca Bau Kan* (Nia Dinata 2001), stories about student activism, about the underclass, about the Chinese minority during the 1950s in *Gie* directed by Riri Riza (2005), and stories about the continuous fight for justice in an unnamed city in the film noir *Kala* directed by Joko Anwar (2007).

Some argue that Indonesian film's reawakening remains centred in Jakarta where most of the industry and the market are located (Heryanto 2008).<sup>1</sup> If freeing the people from repression and returning democracy back to them is one of the aims of the reformation, the periphery (or the poor and rural areas) should have a chance to voice their aspiration and express their ideas, which was almost non-existent in the time of the New Order. It is to the people's advantage that the early 2000s also marked an immense technological development, namely the World Wide Web and online social media. Increased technology has led to a further rally for democratization since literally everybody can create their own movies by using family handy cams, film cameras, pocket digital cameras, and cell phones, and can upload movies on YouTube and Facebook and thus reach millions of spectators. As a result, along with the upbeat commercial cinema, today we can find many amateur and indie films and documentaries made for all kinds of purposes including expressing emotions and opinions, community empowerment, and addressing social problems. They can also be used as media for advocacy.

In terms of David Bordwell's classification of the documentary genre, most Indonesian documentaries fall under the category "rhetorical" (Bordwell and Thompson 2008: 348). This is a distinct category because it offers persuasive arguments and uses series of elements to appeal to the audience's emotion thus allowing filmmakers to coerce the audience to certain opinions. For Bordwell, this category is meant not only to present a case, but also to cause viewers to make life-changing decisions that may affect their day-to-day behaviour, or to cause a shift in their ideas about the world (Bordwell and Thompson 2008: 348). This is exactly why the documentary genre is used by NGOs in Indonesia to arouse awareness and to change society's perceptions about issues considered taboo or non-existent during the New Order.

The Yogyakarta-based NGO, Kampung Halaman, for example, uses films as a means to empower Indonesian youth. Members of this NGO visit local youths in their villages and provide them with training and cameras enabling them to make their own films in which they can talk about their lives and address social issues -such as government regulations and endangered local traditions. These movies are subsequently uploaded onto the web and deposited in a *depotvideo* or a video stand, where other people can access

<sup>1</sup> Ariel Heryanto notes three important phenomena in the development of Indonesian cinema after the fall of Suharto's authoritarian rule. Firstly, the surge in female leading roles in literature and films; secondly, the parallelism that the development of Indonesian popular culture shares with that of other Asian countries such as India and South Korea; thirdly, "a noticeable decentring of Jakarta, the capital city, in the production of these creative works, in the direction of both a local and a global network" (2008: 73).

them. Numerous NGOs also produce documentaries to educate the people and to create awareness about current social issues. Examples include the Abdul Aziz-directed documentary film *Atas nama* (On behalf, 2010) produced by Indonesia's National Commission on Violence Against Women, and a compilation of documentaries made by the Kalyana Shira Foundation entitled *Pertaruhan* (At stake, 2008) which addresses issues centring on the female body. These documentaries talk candidly about cases that occur all over Indonesia, for instance, in Aceh and cities like Indramayu in Central Java and Tulung Agung in East Java, and bring the rural areas closer to the nation-state. The movie *Atas nama*, for example, brings to the fore the impact of the religion-based local regulation on the curfew for women in Tangerang, Banten Province and the local regulation on "proper" attire for women in Aceh, North Sumatra. Similarly, the production of the collective documentary film *Pertaruhan* began as a workshop for young and upcoming filmmakers. The film comprises four short documentaries, namely *Mengusahakan cinta* (Effort for love), *Untuk apa?* (What's the point?), *Nona nyonya?* (Miss mrs?), *Ragat'e anak* (Our children's fund), all focusing on gender issues and the female body. The documentary was featured in movie theatres and brought up issues such as the tradition of female circumcision as practiced in Indramayu and prostitution in Tulung Agung. Regarding women issues brought to the fore by the Kalyana Shira Foundation, Nia Dinata, founder and leader of the organization, stated that, "People in urban centres think that women are already emancipated, but in reality they are not" (see Paramaditha 2012: 85).<sup>2</sup> Having done the almost impossible, that is screening their documentary in commercial movie theatres in Jakarta, the foundation has shown its awareness of the relationship between rural issues and the urban audience to which the documentary has provided a meeting ground.

In Indonesia, the documentary genre is neither as popular nor as prestigious as the fiction genre. It is clear that the fiction genre is made alive through numerous film festivals and awards including the Festival Film Indonesia and Bandung Film Festival that receive abundant media coverage. So far, the documentary genre remains in the background; it is considered less popular, less attractive and more militant. Documentaries are also produced with less funding. Documentary film festivals receive less media coverage, and are a rather new phenomenon compared with festivals for fiction films. For one, there is the Documentary Film Festival (Festival Film Dokumenter, FFD) Yogyakarta, which was established in 2002. It is the earliest film festival in Indonesia and in Southeast Asia that is dedicated exclusively to the documentary genre. Another arena for competition is the annual Eagle Awards for documentary films in Indonesia, first held in 2004 with the sponsorship of Metro TV's news channel. Both FFD and Eagle Awards organize training sessions for documentary film makers (for Eagle Awards, contestants are asked to firstly propose their ideas in front of adjudicators), which suggests

<sup>2</sup> Nia Dinata particularly addresses these issues in another production, *Perempuan punya cerita* (Chants of the Lotus, 2007).

that there is a perception that the documentary genre is comparatively new and thus in need of capacity building.

In his paper ("From the judging table of the Documentary Film Festival; The discourse of contemporary documentary film") Budi Irawanto shows that during the National Film Festival (FFI), the documentary genre category is "less prestigious", and television programmers identified the genre as "limited" and not gaining an audience (Irawanto 2011: 184). In the same tone the documentary film maker and film scholar, Elizabeth Coffman, sees that one of the challenges for the documentary genre is that it is merely considered "a quick and easy supplement to other community activities and is often thought to remain in the 'background'" (Coffman 2009: 71). Thus, questions arise on whether a documentary like *Atas nama* is truly appreciated and criticized as an artistic work and advocacy media; or whether the movie is only aired during seminars and in cultural centres.

Irawanto (2011) also sees that the growth of Indonesian documentary films is still in its early stage and emerged only after Suharto's fall. Any production at this stage therefore, in my opinion, deserves appreciation. People can use documentaries as a medium to voice their feelings and ideas honestly and directly without having to resort to the use of fictitious characters. Nonetheless, a question persists, that is how well the voices of the people, particularly those in the villages, are represented in the urban-centred film industry. Kalyana Shira Films foundation persistently promotes the voices of the subaltern (rural society's) through the documentary genre despite the urban viewers' lack of attention and appreciation. The foundation consistently demonstrates its support for the documentary genre as a medium for advocacy by raising the issues of women and other minority groups. They also strongly strive to continuously inject the commercial cinema industry with a dose of documentaries. Kalyana Shira is perhaps the only non-profit foundation in Indonesia that dares to show its documentaries - *Pertaruhan* (2009) that deals with the issue of the female body and *Working girls* (2011) that deals with that of female workers - in 21 Cineplex, one of the major commercial movie theatres in Indonesia.

Regarding documentaries as a medium of expression for those outside the dominant industry, Irawanto also relates how independent documentaries stand to represent the lives of the people at the periphery "under the assumption that the mainstream media neglects them" and how they act as "mediators of the silenced subjects" (2011: 191). Irawanto further discusses the emergence of independent documentaries relative to the argument of the post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak (1988), who in her often-cited paper "Can the subaltern speak?" identifies urban academicians as mediators speaking for subaltern classes. The present article owes much to Irawanto's notion and aims to take a closer look at the problem of mediation between urban and rural communities in documentary films. This paper however takes a slightly different step than that of Irawanto's. It does not focus on the independent documentary makers as "urban" or as "mediators" for the "rural". This is because in the production

process documentaries are often made in collaboration with subaltern groups in rural areas, making it difficult to identify where the rural voice stops and that of the urban intellectuals begins. Rather, this paper pays more attention to the text and analyses how the urban/metropolitan and the rural/subaltern voices appear and relate to each other.

As many Kalyana Shira documentaries deal with issues unnoticed by urban societies and those who frequently go to 21 Cineplex, it is interesting to have a closer look at how the documentaries this foundation produces actually narrate the rural stories to the viewers. We will take a closer look at two short documentary films out of the four films in the compilation *Pertaruhan*. This research focuses on *Nona nyonya?* directed by Lucky Kuswandi (2008) and *Untuk apa?* directed by Iwan Setiawan and M. Ichsan (2008). We will not discuss how well these texts voice the issues of those living in the periphery. Rather, we will try to have a look at the narration of and between the rural and the urban population as they appear in the documentaries. This observation is done while being aware of the notion that after the New Order's collapse, certain strategies were needed to make the periphery's voices heard. We analyse how these texts convey the stories of the rural population to urban society and the nation-state, and how rural and urban society emerge and "communicate with each other" within the confines of the texts. We start with the assumption that the depiction of urban space and urban communities are crucial in these two short documentaries in their role as bridges for the subaltern message to reach the attention of the urban audience. However, this paper is further interested in explicating the consequences that the rural message suffers under the domination of urban depiction.

#### THE DOCUMENTARY AND THE SUBALTERN

The documentary genre is most easily recognized when contrasted with fiction movies. Documentary films always try to deliver factual information about the world. Documentary films share the same techniques as fiction films (Bordwell and Thompson 2008: 338). Its limitation, however, lies in elements such as staging where actors and events cannot be as "well-arranged" as they can in fiction films, and in cinematographic aspects since lighting often cannot be consciously arranged hampering the camera to capture scenes as they are. However, it is precisely this imperfectness that appeals to the viewers and helps to create a sense of the factual situation. The use of hand-held cameras and wobbly images, for example, often creates the impression that scenes are not pre-arranged and thus reveal the truth. However, as many critics (and documentary filmmakers) argue, a documentary can never fully validate itself as reliable and objective.

In Eric Barnouw's opinion, it is the position of the documentarist as communicator that hampers the film in its struggle to become objective when representing reality (1993 quoted in Bruzzi 2000: 4). "The documentarist, like any communicator in any medium, makes endless choices. He [*sic*] selects topics, people, vistas, angles, lens, juxtapositions, sounds, and words. Each

selection is an expression of his point of view, whether he is aware of it or not", writes Barnouw (1993: 287, quoted in Bruzzi 2000: 4). This epitomizes the misconstrued idea of the documentary genre as the negation of fiction movies and as non-fiction that takes reality and captures it as it is, maintaining "authenticity" in so doing. The saying "if something is not fiction then it must be the truth" also adds to the confusion (Godmilow and Shapiro 1997: 81). The direct cinema filmmaker Frederick Wiseman further says that documentaries are just "another form of fiction. It is arbitrary... made up" (see Coffman 2009: 64). The fact that it depicts a person's life in a shorter time frame than the life of the person itself, a documentary is just like any other work; it involves choosing the right frame, editing, and inserting sound and other elements found in fiction films.

The historian Ann-Louise Shapiro draws on the public's misinterpretation of documentary films as the "objective journalism representation" of historical events, social issues, and true stories of important people, thus creating an idea that "documentary is the concept of 'the real'" (See Godmilow and Shapiro 1997: 81). This creates a major misunderstanding about what documentaries can do and has led documentary filmmakers to look for a better term than "documentary". Godmilow and Shapiro use the term "films of edification" or "edifiers" since documentaries often try to enlighten the public. The documentary filmmaker Bill Nichols uses the term "discourses of sobriety" (see Godmilow and Shapiro 1997: 82). Terms such as "drama-tary" and "docu-drama" are also used to explain unconventional types of documentary where drama and fiction interweave; for example, stories or interviews of expert sources and real society may look like a dramatic film and provoke the audience's emotions (see Godmilow and Shapiro 1997; Scorsese and Donato 2007). Likewise, the director Martin Scorsese highlights the importance of having actors showing their real selves when playing fictional characters. This shows how a fiction film to some extent needs a "documentary personality", leading Scorsese to the term "docufiction" (Scorsese and Donato 2007).

Concerns surrounding documentaries include the genre's continuous struggle with objectivity. Coffman (2009: 64) notes that "maintaining objectivity for one's subject has been a challenge of documentaries for decades". Hence, in her paper, Coffman turns to civic engagement and collaborative film making in cooperation with the community in order to maintain objectivity, in contrast to a more hierarchal film production where film makers come and capture the subject only to keep their distance. Furthermore, she introduces hierarchal and collaborative film making as two extremes that are often not "either or" cases.

The issue of objectivity also arises in Indonesian documentaries. In the documentaries shown during the Yogyakarta Documentary Film Festival, Irawanto noticed a more touristic point of view of the subjects as a result of the long New Order documentary tradition - reflecting the subjectivity of the non-local filmmaker (Irawanto 2011). According to Irawanto (2011: 193), it is the "authorial exaggeration (of the subject)" that puts a distance between the viewers and the subject that they are watching, barring the audience from

entering the world of the subject. Meanwhile, Intan Paramaditha also talks about the *outside* position that women filmmakers take when talking about the issues of marginal female characters. She observes this in the real-life-inspired fiction film, also by Kalyana Shira Films, *Perempuan punya cerita* (Chants of the Lotus, 2007). "They (women filmmakers) perceive the problems related to sexuality among the lower-class women outside Jakarta as a national issue, yet they see themselves as outsiders rather than as *part of the problem*" (Paramaditha 2012: 85). Aside from resolving conflicts by using the solutions and perspective of the middle-class, distance in *Perempuan punya cerita* also occurs "between the emancipated women filmmakers and their unenlightened lower-class characters" (Paramaditha 2012: 85).

The problem of the distance between filmmakers and their subject is also hinted at in Irawanto's idea of the documentary as containing the positions of both metropolitan intellectuals and subaltern (subordinate) subjects. The term "subaltern" itself became widely known through Spivak's paper "Can the subaltern speak?" where she takes a look at the Subaltern Studies Group's perspective on the failure of the peasant movement against colonialism in India. Spivak (1988) argues that the subaltern is deemed incapable of writing its own story as it is difficult to talk about "the possible" in the middle of their experience of the "impossible". For Spivak, there is no subaltern that is able to represent itself to public and speak for itself as its consciousness is constructed by imperialists (Spivak 1988: 27). The next question is, with what voice and under what consciousness can the subaltern speak, and what is the role of the "urban elite"? Spivak goes on by suggesting,

There is always a counterpointing suggestion in the work of the group that subaltern consciousness is subject to the cathexis of the elite, that is never fully recoverable, that is always askew from its received signifiers, indeed that is effaced even as it is disclosed, that it is irreducibly discursive (quoted in Watkins 2001: 171).

The "elite", or what Spivak (1988) identifies as the foreigners and the dominant indigenous groups at all levels in India, can never fully represent the subaltern due to a number of reasons. *Firstly*, the marginalized subaltern groups are damaged, un-whole entities that are always out of touch and fragmented due to the discourses that surround them. *Secondly*, the elites can never fully grasp the fractured subaltern selves, are often trapped in their position as intellectuals, and lose sight of reality. Here, Spivak (1988: 27) thinks that problems arise because the "subject's itinerary has not been traced so as to offer an object of seduction to the representing intellectual". In other words, intellectuals easily fall into the pitfall of representing the subaltern while remaining entrenched in their own perspective and understanding, failing to stay conscious of who they are and where they come from.

The key solution to the matter, according to Spivak (1988), is to return to the subaltern and notice the unspoken. She refers to Derrida's phallogocentrism and notes how there seems to be an urgency to identify the subaltern as those

who cannot speak so that a higher hierarchy must speak on their behalf. An impact of this taking over by the intellectuals of the subaltern's speech is their reduction to an "object of investigation" and a "model for imitation" (Spivak 1988: 28). At the end, Spivak finds the importance of removing the label of powerless from the subaltern and points out that such labelling is the phonocentrism of the "colonial elites and modern philosophy" (interpreted by Watkins 2001: 172).

The message in Spivak's paper is multilayered. Firstly, it identifies the perception of the subaltern as speechless, and thus the need for the metropolitan intellectuals to take the initiative to speak on their behalf. Secondly, Spivak reveals the problem in representing a group that is no longer intact; and finally, she speaks about the need to give the power back to the subaltern, encouraging the intellectuals to stop perceiving the subaltern as powerless. This shows that ultimately, the intellectuals are bound to - and limited in - their position and unconsciously implicate themselves in rendering the subaltern powerless. We will use Spivak's ideas on the characteristics of the elites and the subaltern and their correlation to analyse the symbiosis between the rural/periphery and the city/urban areas in the Indonesian documentaries *Nona nyonya?* (2008) and *Untuk apa?* (2008).

#### *NONA NYONYA?* THE PERCEPTION OF THE (URBAN) WOMAN'S BODY

In its 26 minutes duration, the documentary film *Nona nyonya?* concisely introduces two issues. It shows the perception women have towards their private parts, and how they feel afraid, uncomfortable, and often hesitant to consult with a doctor when facing health problems related to their own body. The movie also candidly shows the social stigma prevalent in Indonesia on unmarried but sexually active women which becomes a problem when these women seek a pap smear check and face being morally judged by health practitioners. They are not only stigmatized as prostitutes and unreligious, but they have to struggle to surpass social stigma in order to receive health examination that is basically their right as citizens. With the help of hidden cameras, the movie shows a dialogue in which a doctor ends up lecturing the patient about staying true to God. In another scene made with this camera, a doctor initially refuses to give a young woman a pap smear test without her parent's consent, although she is already 26 years old. The doctor at the end was willing to give the pap smear test after a long heated debate which includes references to how in the eastern culture a virgin woman is still under the care and consent of their parents; in other words, they do not have ownership of their own body. These scenes, added by statements made by the women about how they detest and fear gynaecologists because of the existing stereotypes of unmarried, sexually active women as sinful that are generally embraced by medical practitioners and gynaecologists. One female respondents, for example, said that once she is in the doctor's stirrups, what comes into her mind is "perversion" (*Nona nyonya?* minute 51:42), while another fears coming to gynaecologist because she heard that she would be groped (*diobok-obok* in



*Nona nyonya?* minute 51:27). Through the unique method it uses of building its rhetoric, the movie argues that this situation has caused women to feel lost, often embarrassed, and not knowing who to turn to when it comes to female health.

In a short documentary like *Nona nyonya?*, the initial scenes are critical in order to catch the audiences' attention. For this purpose, it opted to make a montage of interviews held with doctors in order to brief viewers about the high incidence of cervix cancer and other diseases known to infect women. From there, the movie features extracts of testimonials made by "city" women while they visited a Ladies Day Bazaar in Cilandak Town Square, a popular mall in South Jakarta (Pictures 1a-b).



Picture 1a. Image of Ladies Day Bazaar in Cilandak Town square (minute 52:24).



Picture 1b. Women giving testimonials in the Ladies Day Bazaar, Cilandak Town Square (minutes 52:31).

The women were asked whether they knew what a gynaecologist is, whether they had ever consulted one, and about their overall feelings about a visit to such a doctor. The next scene depicts a glass of wine being poured

and more testimonials from women follows, hinting that these dialogues are daily conversations over a cup of coffee or a glass wine, only between women.

Apparently to try to capture a wide range of viewers and to direct the metropolitan audience's attention to situations outside themselves, the movie *Nona nyonya?* includes the story of Kelly who is a waiter in a café in Kemang, a prestigious area in South Jakarta. Kelly commuted daily from her home in Bogor to Jakarta, and her story represents that of the lower class and the periphery (of Jakarta's urban centre). She is introduced to the audience as she leaves for work walking through the paddy fields to the train station where she rides a commuter train, until she finally arrives in the upper-class café (Picture 2).



Picture 2. The film introduces Kelly (minute 53:55).

The scenes in Jakarta at the beginning of the picture are then linked up with Kelly's story and how she suffers from leucorrhoea or vaginal discharge and finds it hard to look for answers to her health problems. Lack of money and the stereotypes on the part of doctors and gynaecologists, make her hesitant to consult them and she can only talk with her friends who are as ignorant as she. For instance, in one scene, Kelly and her friends talk about virginity and one of them even thinks that virginity can be tested by walking through a gate near their school.

The women we interviewed in malls and cafes all had similar answers as Kelly's. Many of them do not know who gynaecologists are or what examinations they conduct, and for them gynaecologists are for married women or those planning to get pregnant. The issue is then driven towards the problems unmarried women face in having their health checked, and how they are forced to adopt the social category of either married (*nyonya* or "mrs") or not yet married (*nona* or "miss"), as if the medical world refuses to recognize single sexually active women and considers them immoral. Footage of some of the doctors shot with the hidden camera in their examination room act as if they are moral guardians. This problem is then "addressed" through statements made by practitioners associated with

the Indonesian Cancer Association, Women's Journal, and the Women's Health Association who are critical about the issue and urge the health practitioners to avoid stereotyping and focus on providing the services their patients need. The filmmakers also "steer" the audience by having the film crew act as patients in scenes shot with the hidden camera. They appear on screen and disclose who they really are to relate their experiences as patients during the hidden camera scenes. The director, Lucky Kuswandi, pointed out that the doctors who were formally interviewed did not admit that practices of discrimination against single women asking for pap smear test occurs, and only during the hidden camera scenes did "the truth come out".<sup>3</sup> Thus, the use of hidden cameras allows the viewers to take a peek at what happens in the practice rooms that are private and puts them in a position opposite the doctor's table, leading the audience to experiencing the situation as if it were really happening before their eyes. The film *Nona nyonya?* then concludes with the story of Ade, a lesbian who wants to have her health checked. She too suffers from the stigma society puts on the female body as she sees penetration into her female genitalia as something detestable. However, she is concerned about her health and wants to have a pap smear test as she is now at an age where she is prone to cervix cancer; she also comes from a family where cancer is hereditary. The female doctor she met works in a prestigious hospital in Southern Jakarta. Ade's story seems to represent the optimism that the movie tries to offer at the end. The doctor whom Ade met not only clearly explains to her patient the medical procedures and reasoning behind them, but also, more than willingly, performs a pap smear test to the virgin lesbian.

Kelly, meanwhile, manages to find some information in a local library, but continues to shun consulting a doctor. Her story ends with a symbolic scene of her coming down a dark stairwell taking us back to a statement by Ninuk Widyantoro from the Women's Health Association earlier in the film who says, "They (the medical practitioners) did not realize that by not providing access to knowledge, information, and facts, (they) push young girls and everyone else into the dark not knowing where to find information. Dark. *Tauk ah gelap*" (I don't know and I don't care) (*Nona nyonya?* minute 1:09:23).

Ninuk's statement shows a causal relation between the health providers' stigma towards women with the case of Kelly, a young girl in Bogor. The "unfriendly" medical world makes young girls like Kelly refrain from seeking professional help when they have problems with their female parts.

The subaltern in this film, represented by Kelly and her friends, are shown as those in need of "enlightenment" (as indicated by the symbolic dark stairwell) from the educated urban health providers or academicians. Kelly remains at a loss as long as the stigma surrounding the female body continues to live on. She is a victim of the metropole's stigmatization, as noted by Ninuk and highlighted by the scene of Kelly's ascending a dark staircase, which hints at her position as a clueless subaltern. Meanwhile, the solution

<sup>3</sup> Personal interview with Lucky Kuswandi by e-mail on 11-1-2012.

provided by the film through the female doctor that Ade met at a prestigious hospital in Jakarta would seem far-fetched from Kelly's perspective who has to seek information in a grim-looking town library full of old books. In terms of narration, Kelly's story ends at the bottom of the staircase and she is never brought back to the audience, as if she remains in the dark and "uncured".

*Nona nyonya?* seems to try to link the subaltern's case to that of the city women. Yet a gap remains. The dominating hidden camera scenes (and the title of the movie) point to the stigma that the conventional Indonesian medical world puts on sexually active, unmarried women, and not to patients' negative stereotype of gynaecologists as exemplified by Kelly's case. Nevertheless, Kelly's story supports the idea that conflicts between women and the medical world are universal, and that they occur in Jakarta and in other places in Indonesia, experienced by women in all social classes, and that, as noted by the narration having Kelly go down the staircase, it is the responsibility of the metropolitan academicians to enlighten the subaltern.

However, Kelly's case remains in the background. It does not stand out in the narrative compared to the powerful urban scenes, such as Cilandak Town square and the prestigious hospital shown in the documentary. When I showed the movie to a class of medical students in the international program of the University of Indonesia in 2011, they sneered and giggled as they watched the scenes about Kelly and her friends and their naive dialogue. However, when the scenes showed the women at the Cilandak Town square giving their opinions, the audiences smiled understandingly, showing how they could relate better with what appears on screen. This brings us to a further discussion of audience. However, this preliminary observation of the audience's response shows that the text does not permit the urban viewer to enter the subaltern's world. Rather, a further gap between the two is created. On the contrary, the dominant urban setting is significant and effective in bridging the issue of the subaltern. Without the urban scenes, the film would become unapproachable and the urban audience would remain oblivious to the medical issues and the naivety of the subaltern. The scenes at the mall and in the high-end hospital are critical in the film because they act as attention grabbers, allowing the crucial message of the female body both that of the urban society and the periphery - to be delivered.

#### UNTUK APA? A RURAL TRADITION AND THE CITY'S LOGIC

The documentary *Untuk apa?* tells about the tradition of female circumcision practice among Indonesian Muslims in many areas in Indonesia, and how religion and tradition are used to justify the practice and to control women. Different from *Nona nyonya?* in which filmmakers enter the scene and guide the audience to understand the issue with a hidden camera, the movie *Untuk apa?* builds its rhetoric purely by choice of scenes, editing, and interviews. An array of sources are carefully chosen, ranging from people in the villages who still practice the tradition and who hold on to the "values" behind it, to village clergies, women who questioned the tradition and were traumatized

because they were circumcised as a child and women activists and academics.

The film starts by portraying how villagers in Indramayu and a young girl go through the customary preparatory stages preceding her circumcision (Picture 3). It shows the arguments used by the local village clergy and the girl's parents in support of their belief that her female circumcision will make the girl a true Muslim, while it is necessary to control her sexual desire. A village clergy member appeared at the beginning of the film says that when not circumcised, women will not be good in bed, will be prone to cheat on their husbands and be carried away to do wrong, among others. Women are considered to harbour greater sexual drives than men and thus these desires need to be weakened and controlled. The film also talks about how the tradition is socially binding and women can be excluded by the community if they do not conform to it.



Picture 3. A young girl with make-up and dressed for the traditional ceremony that comes with female circumcision (minute 30:47).

The opinion of the village clergy is then supported by the speaker of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) who says that circumcision is to “stabilize women’s sexual desire” (*Untuk apa?* minutes 35:00). This however is then contrasted to another opinion, that of Gus Dur, the late chair of Nahdlatul Ulama, a major Islamic organization in Indonesia and Musdah Mulia, a muslim woman academic, who says that the tradition belongs to the dark age before the arrival of Islam has no medical benefit and was not preferred by the Prophet Muhammad.

Most importantly, the film contains interviews with women who have been circumcised and who developed opinions whether the practice should be maintained or banned. It hints at a new perspective that these women have gained about female circumcision and shows how they ensure that this practice is no longer extended to their daughters. These women are Nong Darrol Mahmada, a liberal muslim activist; Wangi Indriya, a female dancer residing in Indramayu; and Della, a journalist from Bukittinggi, now living in Jakarta. The rhetoric against female circumcision is also shown through the varied practices and methods of female circumcision by which some women

have their genital area rubbed by cumin, while some others suffer extreme pain. The extremity of the pain, however, is maintained and exaggerated in the final scene in which a baby girl is shown crying, voices of adults are heard praying, while a hand is holding a razor blade.

Through its choice of scenes and cast, the movie builds a connection between subaltern and urban society that differs from the one in *Nona nyonya?*. Here, the subaltern is shown to be those who cling to a repugnant cultural practice. The metropolitan intellectuals, activists, and journalists are shown as the ones who try to enlighten them. The urban sphere is thus presented as a place of reason and intelligence, and a person needs to go to the city to be enlightened.



Pictures 4a-b. Nong Darrol Mahmada visiting her father to question the tradition (minute 35:21) and coming back to her hometown (minute 36:36).

This is obvious in the story of Nong Darrol Mahmada. When she was interviewed, she seems to be set in an office and shown to be going to meetings at the Parliament's office in Jakarta. After returning home (Picture 4b), she asked her father, who is a religious figure in the village, about the tradition of female circumcision without confronting him (Picture 4a). She represents a woman who has grown up as a girl in a village and who has thus been part of the tradition. However, later she becomes a critical activist. Her return home

may be understood, in Spivak's terms, as the metropolitan elite revisiting the subaltern past.



Picture 5a. Della sitting on a Jakarta train station (minute 39:20).



Picture 5b. Image of Jakarta's road and skyscrapers in Jakarta (minute 50:55).

The story of Della who comes from Bukittinggi, North Sumatera adds to the compilation of interviews. Della's experience happened in Bukittinggi when she was a little girl, and this shows how the practice of female circumcision does not only occur in Java Island (such as, in Indramayu). Della's story also shows images of the city. Now working as a journalist in Jakarta, Della is presented as a person who is now critical and continues to look for answers about female circumcision. This is hinted at by scenes that show her sitting in front of a computer, doing research. Meanwhile, her position as an urban citizen is represented through scenes of her in a Jakarta's train station and images of Jakarta's roads and skyscrapers (Pictures 5a-b), as if repeatedly reminding the audience who and where Della is *now*, and that she no longer lives in North Sumatera.

After the urban scenes, the film revisits rural Indramayu and an Indramayu dancer, Wangi Indriya. She eventually reaches a decision, "If it's not compulsory, I'll choose not to do it", and the film ends with a female baby crying in pain, a razor blade in the hands of the adults, and a bowl of water with drips of blood, all occurring in a dungy room. In terms of the urban/rural and intellectuals/traditionalists dichotomies, the final scene seems to suggest that the struggle to create better awareness on the part of the subaltern about the repressive tradition still continues, and the job of the urban intellectuals is far from over.

What is interesting is that not all urban intellectuals are against female circumcision as shown by the speaker from the Indonesian Ulama Council in her skyscraper office. The movie has another antagonist - the fundamentalists. This is apparent in the scenes where Nong comes to a trial of a muslim fundamentalist. In one scene she is sitting in the background, shadowed by an emblem with the Saudi Arabian flag - suggesting identification of the Middle East with "pure" Islam in the mind of the fundamentalist.<sup>4</sup> In the shot, the audience can hear Nong's voice at the background saying, "Women are controlled to the extreme". Here the film goes beyond the case of circumcision and indicates the slow but steady growth Islamic fundamentalists' hold in Indonesia, which is also represented by a banner of a local Islamic community rejecting the building of a local church under which Della passes as she walks to the railway station (Picture 6).



Picture 6. Della walking to the railway station, a banner by the Islamic community (minute 42:20).

Here, the boundaries between rural and urban in the context of women in Indonesia have become blurred as they both share a common enemy: the fundamentalists. The muslim fundamentalists manifest themselves in many forms, according to the movie - in the form of tradition in Indramayu and

<sup>4</sup> Muslim fundamentalists caused much tension after the reformation in 1998 started. It revealed itself among others in the Front Pembela Islam (Front Defenders of Islam) or FPI which was involved in numerous acts of violence against religious minorities. For more on Islamic anarchist movements, see Tanuwidjaja (2010).



violence and pressure against other religious groups in urban Jakarta. The film thus illustrates what the subaltern and the urban have in common, which is their opposition against fundamentalist. However, as hinted by the final scene, the subaltern is rendered powerless and clueless in the face of repressive traditions and fundamentalism, while the movie makers or, in Spivak's term "the elites", are highly aware of the issue and create a rhetoric to deal with the culprits.

The film thus plays a role as a medium to educate subalterns, bringing up an issue that is close to them but about which they are often uncritical. The film therefore seems to render the rural subaltern clueless, as shown by the "naive" and "illogical" arguments put forward by of the local clergy in Indramayu, and portrays urban space as a place of enlightenment. Aside from the film offering itself as a medium for intervention and educating the subaltern, there is no scene that shows direct dialogue between urban academicians and the subaltern in Indramayu. Nong can only go as far as asking her father about the rationale behind the custom, without ever managing to tell him about her own thoughts. Della can only talk on behalf of herself now that she is a mother. She is never shown coming home to visit her past or to confront her family. Musdah Mulia's explanation remains within the confines of her classroom and never reaches those in the village in Indramayu.

The story of Wangi Indriya however demonstrates a different pattern as she represents the silent subaltern who does not need to go to the city to be enlightened. She speaks out and is very well aware of her repressive surroundings. Though her part in the film is not as dominant as those of Nong and Della, she hints at the second notion in Spivak's paper, that the subaltern should not be labelled speechless and should be offered a venue to talk directly on their own behalf and, relative to the documentary genre, to create a rhetoric of their own. Only then, will the subaltern become aware of and start to fight against the power that suppresses them.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of the films *Nona nyonya?* and *Untuk apa?* shows that the urban setting and conflict play a role in gaining the attention of a wider segment of the metropolitan audience and in conveying the issues of the subaltern to these influential viewers. At the same time, both movies repeat a similar pattern: the subaltern that needs saving, and the metropolitan setting that offers intellectualism and plays a role to help the nation. Many of the freshmen in the International Program of the Medical School at the University of Indonesia, Central Jakarta, left the screening of the movie feeling that they had learned something, giving comments such as "What we like is that the documentary exposes a tradition [female circumcision] that we haven't heard of before so it has been really useful to expand our knowledge" (anonymous, 30 November 2011, Jakarta). Furthermore, the students seem to have accepted the films' rhetoric well, as one of them wrote, "What we do not like is the public figures in the documentary [*Untuk apa?*] who [are] too conservative

about the tradition and are unable to open their minds to other ways of looking at things" (anonymous, 30 November 2011, Jakarta). This suggests that the stories about the subaltern has succeeded in reaching the urban audience, and helps them form an opinion about the issue and encourages them, as future doctors, to help subaltern society in the way the films suggest.

At the same time, the rural – urban dichotomy in the films helps create a myth about the urban as a place of enlightenment that is distant from the subaltern. A disparity between rural and urban remains, and the solution offered by urban professionals, academicians and activists seems farfetched from the perspective of the rural area. This may be the reason why the problems experienced by women in the rural area – in the case of this paper, female circumcision in Indramayu and Kelly's hesitation to meet a gynaecologist – remain difficult to solve. Narrative wise, the gap may also pose a barrier to the audience thus preventing them from entering the rural space, keeping them far removed from the problem for which they have role to play to solve. This is indicated by the way the audience giggled, during the movie *Nona nyonya?* when Kelly discusses virginity and reproductive organs with her friends and their illogical explanations about testing virginity. As shown in the panoramic scenes, this kind of hierarchal depiction of the rural areas as powerless and illogical, yet nostalgic is most likely the result of the decades-old myth built by the New Order regime. In other words, the difficulty the metropolitan elites have to represent the subaltern which, according to Spivak (1988), originates from the images of the subaltern being already fragmented due to the discourses among the powerful, that is the Suharto regime in the Indonesian context. Although the voices of the periphery are heard, this paper has made clear how the representation of the subaltern by the metropolitan academics is problematic. Rather than bringing them closer, it creates a disparity between rural and urban areas. The audience becomes a distant spectator to what occurs in rural areas, but it cannot fully enter the world of the subaltern to gain further understanding. The rural voices thus suffer because of the domination of the urban representation of them.

Aside from the opinionated rhetorical documentary, the documentary filmmaking industry in Indonesia has just recently been exposed to direct cinema, a type of film considered to be the earliest form of documentaries introduced in the US. In his productions, the filmmaker and anthropologist Aryo Danusiri uses this method by applying a subgenre known as observational documentary. Danusiri's work, such as *Lukas' moment* (2005), is appreciated because it gives the marginalized their voices back through the use of long shots and minimal interference by the filmmaker, where Danusiri himself does not appear on screen both visually and aurally. Nor does he seem to be interfering with the narration in the film. His films leave the subaltern to talk, represent their own lives, and use their own voice (see Hanan 2012).

The Kampung Halaman organization uses another way of empowering the subaltern. It reaches the youth through a video diary and collaborative film that allow those in the periphery to express themselves, make decisions

on various issues, and discuss and create their own productions. In an interview with Kampung Halaman, the organization mentioned that they chose video diary and collaborative film rather than other conventional forms of documentary to avoid creating “distance between the filmmaker and object” and imposing “the dominating perspective of the filmmaker” on the object.<sup>5</sup> Kampung Halaman admits that they have ventured on a mode of documentary film that does not fall into any fixed genre. Their purpose is to let the youth speak, know themselves better, be aware of the issues faced by their hometown, and thus contribute to the place where they live – a purpose that is embodied in the name of the organization, Kampung Halaman, which means “(rural) hometown”.<sup>6</sup>

Although the project aims at empowering the youth, the wider audience has limited access to the productions of Kampung Halaman. The films can be watched on-line, at several video depots established by the organization, and some of the titles managed to reach film festivals, but the success of the films is limited. They often have flat plots, and are not as appealing as Kalyana Shira’s productions which receive many favourable opinions on the internet. With the methods used, including using rural/urban voices, the movies in *Pertaruhan* have generally succeeded in reaching the audience in 21 Cineplex. The audience is even stimulated to write comments online about the movies and create debates on the issues raised. The use of the urban voice, in spite of the consequences of creating a gap between the audience and the rural subaltern, rendering the latter powerless, therefore becomes unavoidable (in fact, it can even be strategic) in a time when the documentary genre is still struggling to gain popularity among the post-New Order audience, which is still much influenced by the regime’s centralistic mindset.

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Kuswandi, Lucky [director]. 2008. *Nona nyonya?* Duration: 26 minutes; producer: Cinzia Puspita Rini; production: Kalyana Shira Film and Kalyana Shira Foundation; distributed by: Jive!; launched in: 10-12-2008.

Setiawan, Iwan and Muhammad Ichsan [directors]. 2008. *Untuk apa?* Duration: 23 minutes; producer: Nina Desilia; production: Kalyana Shira Film and Kalyana Shira Foundation; distributed by: Jive!; launched in: 10-12-2008.

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<sup>5</sup> Personal interview with Cilia Maharani and Abu Juniarenta by e-mail on 20-3-2012.

<sup>6</sup> See footnote 5.

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