

# WOMEN SPEAK: A WRITING-SUBJECT'S PERSPECTIVE ON TOETI HERATY'S *CALON ARANG* AND COK SAWITRI'S *JANDA DARI JIRAH*

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## Abstrak

Makalah ini mengkaji tentang perspektif subjek kepenulisan dari dua penulis perempuan: Tuti Heraty dan Cok Sawitri tentang bagaimana posisi subjek yang berkuasa memberdayakan dirinya sendiri dari konstruksi subordinat, 'the other' (liyan) pada kasus pembelaan diri seorang perempuan pendeta, yang dikenal sebagai Calon Arang atau janda dari Jirah, untuk menciptakan kebudayaan. Heraty berbicara atas nama seorang janda tua Jirah, Calon Arang, sebagai perempuan korban masyarakat patriarkal. Sebagai korban, janda tua ini diperkenalkan sebagai simbol kejahatan dalam dikotomi kejahatan dan kebaikan. Akan tetapi, Heraty memanfaatkan malapetaka dan target dari kejahatan Calon Arang untuk menghadirkan perspektif subjek kepenulisannya: kemarahan perempuan. Heraty, juga dalam kemarahannya, berbicara atas nama perempuan yang menjadi objek yang terobjektifikasi, sebagai subordinasi kekuasaan laki. Sawitri berbicara atas nama janda yang perkasa, janda dari Jirah, sebagai perempuan pendeta yang tak tertandingi otoritas kekuasaan laki-laki. Sebagai pendeta, janda tersebut diperkenalkan sebagai simbol Ibu yang Agung, tempat berlindung dan bernaung. Disini, Sawitri memanfaatkan ajaran-ajaran dari credo si Janda untuk menunjukkan perspektif subjek kepenulisannya: superioritas perempuan. Sawitri, dalam kekagumannya, berbicara atas nama perempuan yang menjadi subjek yang terobjektifikasi, sebagai 'the other'- sebagaimana juga laki-laki, untuk menciptakan harmoni. Baik Heraty maupun Sawitri berbicara atas nama pembungkaman Calon Arang dan Janda dari Jirah, Heraty dengan cara membebaskan perempuan dari esensi biologis dan mengasihani diri mereka sendiri, sedangkan Sawitri dari kemungkinan-kemungkinan filosofis dan keyakinan keagamaan mereka. Dua penulis perempuan ini telah menciptakan usaha yang luar biasa untuk berbicara dengan menggunakan perspektif-perspektif mereka terhadap pembungkaman Calon Arang dan Janda dari Jirah dalam posisi objek yang "tersubjektifikasi" dan subjek yang "terobjektifikasi".

## 1. Introduction

An old story about a widow goes to Petronius's *The Widow of Ephesus* (1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D.) – a woman with no name but entitled after the village where she dwells, is famed for her fidelity and love of her late husband; yet, succumbs to fidelity and love for another man as she reproaches the deceased. Another old

story of another widow—also with no name, and also entitled after the village where she dwells—is the story of a widow and her beautiful daughter of a small village in Bali – famed by the name of Calon Arang, Rangga Dirah, or *Janda dari Jirah*. The latter has been written and rewritten, told and retold, visited and revisited, and subjectified and objectified as the subordinate as well as 'the other'

by both men and women writers and researchers. They all speak and write about the widow in dual perspective: evil and purity. This paper attempts to see two women-writers, Heraty and Sawitri, speaking about Calon Arang as the Evil Witch Widow and as the Pure Lady Widow. Heraty discloses the widow's destructive witchcraft as an object of her being a victimized subject, and Sawitri reveals the widow's constructive power as a subject of her being a perilous object.

## 2. Discussion

### 2.1 Toeti Heraty's *Calon Arang*

In *Calon Arang*, Toeti Heraty deals with a writing-subject's perspective on the alibis of how the dominant subject-position gives itself as it constructs the subordinate as 'the other' in the case of fending off a woman priest, famed as Calon Arang to make culture. Heraty speaks of the alibis: of what is present and what is *not* present. What is present is man's dominant subject position and what is not present is its construction: woman's subordination, theoretically termed as 'the other'.

What is present in *Calon Arang: Kisah Perempuan Korban Patriarki* is the dominant subject-position, exposed as the established power of the males with their patriarchal system, Raja Erlangga, king of the Daha. The King trapped The Widow with a marriage offering: a handsome young priest, Mpu Bahula, for her lone pretty daughter, Ratna Menggali. The widow yields to the hands of a young priest and consents to handover her daughter. The marriage of Ratna Menggali and Mpu Bahula is actually the master-mind of top political government strategy and utility. Again, what is present is the marriage and what is not present is the strategy and utility. The first results in the demolition of the

widow's power and the latter results in Menggali's betrayal as she submits *Sastra Lipyakara - The Holy Script*, the source of the magical power of her mother, to the young priest who is later becoming her husband.

Heraty compares the love of Mpu Bahula for Ratna Menggali with the love of Delilah for Samson. What happens in *Samson and Delilah* is that Samson is deceived by Delilah tricks, so that she temporarily annihilates Samson's strength. The woman deceives the man by usurping love and making use of the man's weakness. She cuts his hair, blinds his eyes, imprisons him and ends up his life. But what is happening in *Calon Arang* is decisively hot. It is not the woman that deceives the man. Mpu Bahula seduces Menggali to surrender her body as well as her mother's sacred belonging to him. First is in the name of the love of a man for a woman, and second is the name of the love of a man for his country. Heraty sees such case as the becoming of the local woman's culture "*begitulah kira-kira budaya kita, perempuan dirayu ada maksud tersembunyi*" in *Calon Arang*. The culture comes from and is seen through the power of the male domination, and accordingly, cites 'what is **not** present' – the frailty of the female subordination as its victim.

Encountering widowhood, the widow is viewed from the concept of subordination and victimization system of the male domination. This Dirah widow is without a name. She is addressed Dirah because she dwells at Dirah. People address her Rangda – 'Widow' because it is her status being husbandless, which, may further be assumed a lone woman with a daughter, and worse, without the accompaniment of a man. Here Dirah is silenced, deprived from her own-self, even from her own

name. What is left in her is only the title 'widow', an angry and restless widow – a woman with no man to woe. Provokingly, Heraty herself speaks of her heroine, the widow, as being old; yet, tough and feared for her wicked spell, and boiled with rage as no man proposes her daughter. In her anger and dissatisfaction, she spreads turmoil and tumult and destroys whatever hampers her. Since Dirah is unmatched with no rivals, her competitors set a trick by enchanting her only daughter, Menggali, to fall for a handsome cultural *attaché*, Mpu Bahula. A daughter is a mother's love, pride and protection. Dirah loves Menggali very much and she is proud of being the mother of her beautiful daughter. No mother would refuse such a rare and long awaited proposal. She, no wonder, is also proud of Mpu Bahula – the man who at the long last, comes up to marry Menggali.

Surrounded by King Erlangga's men at arms and her in-law's as traitors, Widow Dirah or Calon Arang [aspired to be *arang*, 'ablazed charcoal'] – as she may be called, is at the end burned down to ashes by Mpu Baradah, the Head Priest – the Highest Spiritual Leader in Kadiri – as she is charged with practicing evil cult. Here, Heraty speaks of an old widow of Dirah, the *Calon Arang*, as the female victim of a patriarchal society. As a victim, the old widow is introduced as the symbol of evil in a dichotomy of purity and danger. Such dimensions are reflected in one view – the male dominance, versus 'the underling' view – the female sub-ordinance. The patriarchal society is represented by the male dominance, and is therefore identical to purity: the absolute monarchy of King Erlangga and his cunning legislators. The female victim is represented by the underling frailty, and is therefore identical to danger: the thorough and

threatening force of Widow Dirah. She, henceforward, is evil and should be exterminated; whereas her daughter goes on living under the strong male's pressure to accept a system of classification which degrades her and commits her to life servility.

Seno Gumira Ajidarma in his foreword to Heraty's *Calon Arang: Kisah Perempuan Korban Patriarki* recommends that the dichotomy of male-female is the main concept of the feminists, because they assert the truth of male dominance in the global culture. Such, according to Seno, is not the whole truth since there are [at many] times when the males are also oppressed by the females; so to say that the females implicitly allow themselves to take advantage of the male oppressions. Controversially, the female victims [the male victims, as well] are well contented and pleased with the male oppressions "*Karena proses internalisasi nilai tersebut, yang membuai pria, di sisi lain telah juga dimanfaatkan perempuan, sehingga mampu menangguk keuntungan, tidak marah, malah pasrah dan bahagia, dalam ketertindasannya.*" To follow Seno's recommendation, talented readers would sense his clever knick-knack that among the feminists – the disciples of the dichotomy, the binary oppositionists; there are usurpers, resulted from the internalization of the system, they become unfaithful to the principles of 'male dominance' and therefore live in harmony with their oppressors.

However, Heraty furiously clones Calon Arang or Widow Dirah's evil spell not as women's force to subdue male domination; she, on the other hand, designs Dirah from the idea of assassination onto the creation of victimization. First, she makes Dirah the predator; and next she transforms the

predator to be the prey; and, consequently, be plotted to be the victims of the male domination. Heraty gives an inkling of anger, including the anger of the feminists, she thereby diffuses the subject-object view points. Dirah, being a predator with her devilish spirits, has massacred citizens of the Kadiri regions. Many have become her victims, and this makes the King worried. Looking back at the phenomenon, one would appoint that Calon Arang is the subject – the active person, the one that commits crime, and the object is the King and his subordinates as the latter is the passive recipient, or the target of Calon Arang's boisterous act. This kind of subject-object and predator-prey transmission is again an internalization or dualistic harmony of the system.

Heraty also signifies the contradictive yet collaborative impairment of subject-object and predator-prey in *Calon Arang*, viewed from the patriarchal system, as acts of misogyny and *couvades* – men's mechanical defense and extension in their effort to be safe and to save face "*proyeksi pria yang haus kuasa, membenci dan mendendam sekaligus takut perempuan*". (Heraty: 16–17). The acts of misogyny and *couvades* emerge and maintain harmony among men and women; yet, are also ensuing the reflection of the feminist's hatred, anger and fear of the patriarchal society where they reside and internalize with. And Heraty recedes the male dominance by counter-attacking and separating the functioning parts of male and female biological essence. She gives emphasis on the specification of being a woman – i.e. giving birth and having menstruation to work against the classic concept of Freud's 'penis envy'.

The long-lasting disagreement among the feminists over God's grandeur

gift of the biological shape and function over being a male (having penis) or being a female (having 'penis envy'), [not to count the trans-gender] as seen in Heraty's *perempuan korban* – 'female victim' in a patriarchal society is not without a solution. Heraty bases the dispute on Calon Arang's confrontation with Mpu Baradah which ends up in Calon Arang's request to Mpu Baradah to burn her up to achieve the state of *moksa* 'charcoal'. Such state of affairs is parallel with the everlasting battle of the sexes as perceived by W.B. Yeats in his "Leda and the Swan". Leda yields all hers to Zeus—the Swan. She can no longer resist the passionate power of the feathered beast as Yeats questions his [female?] readers as if he proclaims the victory to his [male] readers as well "*//Being so caught up./So mastered by the brute blood of air./ Did she put out on knowledge with his power/ Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?//*" This kind of end-meets both in Heraty's and in Yeats' grows a new knowledge of harmony: Calon Arang gets the crown of *moksa*; and Leda conceives Helen of Troy—the most beautiful woman in Greece who indirectly causes the Trojan War.

Now that if 'harmony' croons to crown, Heraty with some other feminists speaks about the female's anger with what they allege as the patriarchal system. The conflict implies the writer's perspective of subject-object positions and the construction of women being subordinated and being posited as 'the other'. Such two folds emerge from an effort of the writer's writing creativity by making use of the classic conquest of Calon Arang or any woman in fending off women to make culture. Heraty could, in a way, use other medium, in the instance of female *mantis* instead of Calon Arang. The biological essence of a

female mantis does not necessarily need any protection or silencing since this *she* would gobble up the whole part of the male and leaves no tit-bits after mating. To make better cultivation and civilization of decent struggle in a patriarchal society, Calon Arang is, therefore, claimed to be the victim and should consequently be silenced instead of letting the Witch Widow perceptibly admit her defeat. Anger would be an excuse and so would self-pity in accommodating the female biological essence to cover up what Freud believes as 'penis envy', a shortage of women to men. One way or another, Heraty has made a great effort to speak of the perspective on the silencing of Calon Arang as the marginality and decapitation of womanhood in the 'subjectified' object position.

## 2.2 Cok Sawitri's *Janda dari Jirah*

Cok Sawitri talks about a writing-subject's perspective on the alibis of how the dominant subject-position of Janda Jirah, a woman priest, gives itself as the construct of 'the other' in the case of fending off the widow of Jirah to make culture. Sawitri's perspective is totally different from that of Heraty's. She is not talking about the 'silencing' or the 'victimizing' but she speaks about a woman from a different angle since an object can be projected from various direction. Such goes with the new addresses that Janda Jirah obtains. The habit practiced in Jirah acknowledges newlings as a substitute of the elderly. Janda Jirah subsides when she has her first born and therefore entitles after her daughter Ratna Menggali, 'ibu' [Ibunda] Ratna Menggali. At another circumstance, in the death of her husband, she is posited as *Janda Rangda ing Jirah* (widow of Jirah).

Sawitri also pronounces that the Janda Jirah is a supreme widow as the unmatched female priest in the authority of male's sovereignty and not as the female victim in the patriarchal society. As a priest, the widow is introduced as the symbol of Mother Superior in the sense of schooling, sanctuary and shelter:

*"Penghuni Kabikuan Jirah dari kecil sampai yang tua, sejak lahir telah terikat dalam tata krama Kabikuan, mengisi hidup dengan belajar. Karena itu mereka menguasai hampir semua ketrampilan tukang besi, menemun, memelihara kolam-kolam ikan, babi, ayam, sampai membuat bangunan dan bendungan air, hampir semua kebutuhan mereka, kecuali garam, dapat terpenuhi oleh hasil tangan mereka sendiri."*

[All the residents of Jirah Parish, from the youngest to the oldest, by birth have been bound with the parish regulation, filled up their days with skills. Therefore, they master almost all the skills of blacksmith, cloth-weaving, fish-breeding, pig and chicken farming, even building-constructions and irrigation-dams; almost all provisions, except salt, are self-supplied and self-managed (Sawitri, 31)].

Here, Sawitri makes use of the teaching of the Widow's credo to expose her writing-subject's perspective: the female's superiority. Janda Jirah's top achievement is proved by the strategy of expanding her territory. Jirah makes no war in her expansions. Since war has set apart neighbors, families, parents and left nothing but remnants of destruction and orphans; then, Jirah is the place for the abandoned. And to Janda Jirah they send their fatherless daughters.

What is happening in Jirah, including the widow's project for the direct descendants of the dead soldiers at war can be likened with DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution). Janda Jirah shelters these underprivileged youth and widows with education, farms, labors, and training which support them with life skills. Her efforts are appreciated as work of the Supreme Mother, which are totally contradictory in viewpoints of Heraty's. By not turning Jirah's superiority to inferiority or self-pity, Sawitri, much in her awe, speaks of women being objectified subjects as 'the other' -- as the male counterpart to set up harmony. As a result, Janda Jirah is accused of practising and spreading 'black spell', and, therefore, should be blacklisted.

The blacklist of Janda Jirah starts with her fame as Mother Superior in Jirah who extremely excels above King Airlangga's reputation. Such condition endangers the king's prominence and to encounter its extensions he summons and appoints *Poet Laureate* to write a historical report for saving royal and official occasions concerning the threatening fineness of Janda Jirah. The King demands Mpu Baradah accomplish and be responsible for the task. Thus, the author -- regarding the status he has been given, at the moment his studies and authenticity begins -- has been deprived and robbed from the very truth of what history may note for the sake of the social and political body of the Kadiri Kingdom. The poet laureate is involved in the system of valorization, artificially raised to fix and fit the king's problematic exercise of power as measured up to Janda Jirah's.

Story-making that makes history as a compensation of death penalty has rescued Scheherazade's life in the Arabian narrative *The Thousand and One Nights*. Scheherazade wittily creates a

new story each night totally makes one thousand and one efforts in order to escape and forestall death treaty. She, thereby, does not only keep herself alive -- she makes the king happy and maintains good relationship with him. However, the good relationship between the poet laureate and King Airlangga silences Janda Jirah; and as a result, the mark of her greatness is put aside and reduced to nothing more than an 'angry' widow for her fear of ever-awaited proposal to marry off her daughter, Ratna Menggali. The role of the poet laureate, or the history note-taker, has no authorization of his work as his writing has been politically determined so what is left in him is the merely bits of functioning-author; as yet, not to obey the king's orders will be penalized with his own life. The proper writing-game of the poet laureate is intended to perpetuate the king's unperturbed clean life. The link between the 'purity' of the king and the 'dirt' of Janda Jirah preserves the closeness of history-making and story-making:

*Pada suatu masa di tahun Saka, setiap empu dan penyair menanam pena mereka untuk tidak menuliskan sebuah cerita. Sebuah kisah tentang perempuan yang disegani di jagat Jawa dan Bali, bahkan oleh yang mulia Airlangga. Tanpa senjata, tanpa pasukan, mereka meluaskan wilayah. Airlangga tersenyum terkagum-kagum. Banyak hal yang harus ia pelajari sebagai penguasa baru. ...Tak ada satu pun penyair yang boleh mengungkapkan, dalam bahasa terselubung ataukah isyarat apa yang sebenarnya terjadi di Kadiri. Aku memohon kepada kalian, kejadian Desa Buangan, kejadian di tanah-tanah Kabikuan hendaknya ditulis dengan sebijaksana mungkin...*

*Ratna Menggali meneteskan airmatanya. "Selama ratusan tahun. Ibu akan digelapkan, namun itu bagi yang tak memahami. Bagi yang memahami, mereka sebenarnya mentaati ajaran Ibu. Kelak, orang akan mengenangnya jauh dari kebenaran. Kelak, namanya akan terdengar menggetarkan setiap kali disebutkan. Ia adalah ibu Ratna Menggali. Rangda ing Jirah...dan hanya dalam kitab kecil ini, apa yang tak boleh dituliskan yang terkubur beratus-ratus tahun lampau kembali dikisahkan.*

[One moment in time in the year of Saka, every intellectual and poet laureate tries not to put their pen down to paper about a narrative. The narrative of a woman highly respected by all through the land of Java and Bali, even by the honorable Airlangga. Weaponless and troop less, they expand their territory. Airlangga smiled marvelously. As a new ruler, there are many things that he has to learn. ...Not one of the poet laureates may either implicitly or secretly unfold what exactly happens in Kadiri. I beseech you, the incident in Buangan Village and in the Parish territory should be wisely and procedurally reported ...

Ratna Menggali drops her tears, "For hundreds of years, Mother will be silenced, but it is for those who do not understand. For those who understand, they essentially obey Mother's principles. In the forthcoming future, people will account her lessons far from the truth. In the forthcoming future, her name will shudder the ears that hear her name called. She is Ratna Menggali's mother, the widow of Jirah... and only in this little book,

what is prohibited to write and buried for hundreds of years – her story is retold (Sawitri, 36)].

When a writer has been accepted as a poet laureate, such as that in Kadiri, difficulties appear immediately. He must still ask whether everything that he writes, or leaves behind will make a culture. Silencing, blurring, and concealing 'the otherness' of Janda Jirah seems to solve Airlangga's problems but not Janda Jirah's. Airlangga's men of letters have made him a sacred character and politicized history possible, subject to the transcendental terms of repression and the royal principles of silent determinations. And this condition gives rise to revisiting from a different perspective. For this, Sawitri makes an appropriation of the poet laureate's work. She speaks and unfolds of the silencing of the Widow of Jirah, in a way that she fends off women from their philosophical potency and religious conviction. Sawitri has made a great effort to speak of her perspectives on the 'otherness' of Janda Jirah and reveals the widow's constructive power as a subject of her being a perilous object, a view point in the 'objectified' subject position.

### 3. Conclusion

Heraty and Sawitri happen to be women writers and both give privilege to speak about the same awesome woman, a widow in Jirah, famed by the title Calon Arang or Rangda ing Jirah. Heraty observes Calon Arang from a viewpoint of a patriarchal society and, thus, makes the widow a victim and symbol of evil. She makes use of the calamity and the target of Calon Arang's wickedness to represent her writing-subject's perspective: the female's anger. Heraty, in her anger, speaks of women being

subjectified objects as the subordinate of male sovereign. Sawitri, on the other hand, observes Janda Jirah from a viewpoint of motherly protection, the supreme widow as the matchless female priest in the authority of males sovereignty. The widow is introduced as the symbol of Mother Superior in the sense of sanctuary and shelter. Here, Sawitri makes use of the teaching of the Widow's credo to expose her writing-subject's perspective: the female superiority. Sawitri, in her awe, speaks of women being objectified subjects as 'the other' – as the male counterparts to set up harmony.

Both Heraty and Sawitri speak of the silencing of Calon Arang and the Widow of Jirah, in a way that Heraty fends off

women from their biological essence and self-pity; whereas Sawitri – their philosophical potency and religious conviction. The two women-authors have made a great effort to speak of their perspectives on the silencing of Calon Arang and Janda Jirah in the 'subjectified' object and 'objectified' subject positions. They have creatively contributed perspectives in different cultures of the precious human resource, which open up domains of conflict among the feminists in Heraty's and politicians in Sawitri's. Understanding perspectives means having an awareness of understanding multidimensional concepts of both the authors's creativity.

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