

# Performing motherhood in the height of the New Order era: The contestation of two women in *Dua Ibu*

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## Abstract

The New Order regime in Indonesia was marked with a strong and centralized power including in defining motherhood. This article is aimed at investigating how the "Ibu" or motherhood becomes a contested arena between nameless Ibu and Tante Mirah and how this arena reflects the contestation of tradition and modernity in Java in the 1980s. Using close reading technique and contextualization, an investigation is done to see how the one role is contested by the two women. The nameless Ibu represents traditions shaped by the cultural and traditional milieu in Solo, Central Java. Meanwhile Tante Mirah migrates to Jakarta and builds her new economy and life. It is evident that performing traditions has drained out Ibu's financial resources. At the same time, Tante Mirah is successful in accumulating wealth. Consequently, Ibu goes bankrupt and lets Mirah take the son back. The novel documents the inevitable change of socially defined motherhood performed in the center of Javanese culture.

**Keywords:** Adoption; modernity; motherhood; novel; tradition

## INTRODUCTION

Many stories depict women in terms of their maternal roles. The roles are socially assigned and seen as vital for the society, such as to the transmission of culture. The story will be challenging when a single position of a mother is contested by more than one woman (Fuller, 2019). Arswendo Atmowiloto's novel *Dua Ibu* (Two Mothers), first published in 1980 and re-published in 2009, presents two mothers seeking to assume the role of being a mother for one son, Mamid. Tante Mirah gave birth to Mamid, but it was Ibu (means mother, but the novel does not give another name except *Ibu* for this woman) who adopted and raised Mamid. To make matters more complicated, Mirah had been adopted by Ibu; thus, it should have been natural that Mamid calls Ibu as a *nenek* (grandma). However, the novel presents much more complicated relations among those three persons (Widodo & Adji, 2019).

*Dua Ibu* received an award of First Prize Winner of *Yayasan Buku Utama* in 1981 as the Best Fiction Work. Setting up in Solo, a famous center of Javanese tradition and history, and Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, during

the height of the reign of the New Order regime, this novel presents contrasting stages, one of the traditions and the other of modernity (Widodo & Adji, 2019).

The novel presents a nameless Ibu who has one biological child and eight adopted children. She adopted those children willingly and nurtured them sincerely during the time when her husband was still alive. Meanwhile, Tante Mirah gave up her son Mamid since he was a baby to be adopted by Ibu. She deserted Mamid in order to chase her dream in the capital city, Jakarta. Her economic was still in desperate condition at that time; hence, she could not afford Mamid's needs (Nasution, 2016). The narrative of the novel lingers in those three main characters. Based on the background above, this article is aimed at investigating how the "Ibu" or motherhood becomes a contested arena between nameless Ibu and Tante Mirah and how this arena reflects the contestation of tradition and modernity in Java in the 1980s.

### **Defining Ibu/Mother**

*Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (the formal dictionary of Indonesian language) defines *ibu* as a woman in three possible situations: a woman who gives birth to a child, an address for a married woman, a polite address for any married or unmarried woman (Afiyanti, 2003). The origin of *ibu* was from Javanese language and was first introduced by Ki Hadjar Dewantoro at school and educational contexts to refer to female teachers together with *Bapak* (means father) to their male (Romadi et al., n.d.). It was at the same time as the nationalist movement 1920s in which Malay was adopted as the national language. Contextualizing modern educational system at that time, Ki Hadjar with his *Taman Siswa*, adopted the family system of *Bapak-Ibu-Anak* (Father-Mother-Child) to relate teachers (*Bapak* and *Ibu*) with their students (*Anak*). Six decades later, in the 1980s, *ibu* has become so popular as a term referring not only to address female teachers but also to address a mother in a very general meaning (Tsuchiya, 1975).

The word "*ibu*" has a root in Javanese language and tradition. Afiyanti and Solberg observed the kinship in the same area of the setting of the novel (Solo) and noted a reference to mother follows the general language stratification of high (*krama*) and low (*ngoko*) where the reference for a mother is *ibu* and *mbok* respectively (Afiyanti & Solberg, 2015). Thus, Javanese people address the same person of mother in accordance with their social and cultural standing. Although there are some other stratifications in between, generally Javanese language is stratified into two main groups; the high (*krama*) and the low (*ngoko*) in which the appropriateness is highly demanded in accordance to one's class status (Riyanto, 2019).

From this perspective, *ibu* and *mbok* represent two different social statuses with their own obligation and privileges. Robson highlighted that more terms exist and are used in Javanese kinship system than in Western kinship system. This reflects the importance of the relationships within the family in Java. Family has a very strong presence in Javanese society (McIntyre-Mills et al., 2019).

Smith-Hefner (1988) reported about Javanese women in about the same decade of the novel publication time. Quoting and summing up references

from Geertz, Jay, Stoler, and Koentjaraningrat, Smith-Hefner stated that women in Java enjoy high status and a relatively high degree of independence (Atikasari & Kurniati, 2019). In terms of family economy, a woman as a wife, which means an *ibu*, enjoys the ignorance of her husband who turns his earning to his wife to be managed and controlled. Furthermore, an *ibu* is also free to interact with anybody and participate in religious, social, and even political life (Rye, 2018).

However, the above notion of the traditions for women in Java was not always compatible with the development in the national context. Indonesian New Order regime (1966-1998) was under one single strong ruler for 32 years. Unlike the previous regime which often clearly showed anti-Western attitude, the New Order regime embraced Western modernization. Jakarta, the capital, became the center of the changes dictating the direction of the development. In such a context, women were supposed to support the development and their roles were prescribed by the center (Hermana & Silfianti, 2011).

Abdullah on his study states that in that era “state ibu-ism” was a dominating discourse enforced by Indonesian New Order Regime (Suryakusuma 2011). Julia continued that Indonesian women were given two roles; as a wife (*istri*) and as a mother (*ibu*). Most important in Julia’s proposition is the mobilization of the nation resources to control both *istri* and *ibu*. *Istri* must follow and support her husband. For this purpose, the state created organizations to control the wife, such as *Dharma Wanita* (Abdullah, 2018). While *ibu* is assigned to nurture as well as educate children, Julia proposed that “ibu-ism” appropriated the feudal Javanese “*ibu*” and redefined it to serve the state purpose. In state ibu-ism, an *ibu* is considered as a “pillar of the nation” who is ready to serve and sacrifice to maintain the family, society, and nation in general (Crew, 2016).

Fuller reported the growing national order produced by New Order, especially the patriarchal gender system which considers the nuclear family arrangement as key for the order. Morality was important and the objective of the state was to generate obedient citizens who were members of a harmonious nuclear family (Platt et al., 2018). In this context, *ibu* is the key as a vanguard of morality. Herriman et al. (2016) state that being an *ibu* means reaching the “highest possible status achievement for a woman” in which ‘*ibu*’ means a ‘virtuous wife and mother’ (Fuller, 2019).

In practice of the ‘state ibu-ism’ due to the many roles that *ibu* should master in order to maintain the harmony of their children and family, a good *ibu* is perceived as a mother who is able to divide her times, patience, responsibility, and priority to the needs of her children as well as her own.

In fact, being a good mother is also demanded to strive on their best effort in order to be able to deliver positive meanings in terms of their devotion for the children and family – self-confidence, greater responsibilities in mothering, and supports from their surroundings (Sumaryanto & Aziz, 2019). Thereby, *ibu* in this society is defined not only as a woman who gives birth to her children, but is also able to nurture, manage, responsible, and be patient with both the children as well as herself.

Being an *ibu* necessitates a child or children who can be the result of the process of procreation and parturition. However, this is not always the case. In rarer cases, a woman may become an *ibu* with a child through adoption which

is 'any customary and optional procedure for taking as one's own a child of other parents' (Wicaksono & Dayanti, 2020).

Javanese women have been central figures in much important Indonesian literature. Three novels were written with the similar political background of the regime change between Old Order to New Order in 1965s. Taking the most western part of Javanese cultural domain, *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* (A Dancer from Paruk Village) by Ahmad Tohari (2003) presents a story in a remote village, namely Paruk in Banyumas. Being overwhelmed by poverty and disease, the villagers believe that they need to revitalize the old tradition of *Ronggeng* and chose Srintil to be the dancer. They are supported by some cultural enthusiasts from a nearby town. Unfortunately, those outsiders are seen as being involved in the losing party during the revolution. Thus, *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* illustrates efforts done by women to cling to tradition and be loyal to their patriarchy only to be destroyed by bigger political conflicts (Fajarini, 2017).

*Sri Sumarah and Bawuk* by Umar Kayam (1975) take the center of Javanese cultural tradition as the setting. Both stories have been seen as examples of the strong bond between Javanese women (as a wife or a mother) to traditions. Similar to *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, the bond has brought them to an inevitable calamity of being destroyed by a sweeping transformation as a result of the political regime change from Old Order to the New Order. Instead of having its own opinion, *Bawuk* was ignorance to her husband leftist political aspiration because the most important value for her is loyal and obedience to her husband (Pelawi, 2017).

Meanwhile, *Sri Sumarah*, being widowed, desperately clings to her higher social status by rejecting all economically wealthy suitors because she perceived that those men were subordinate in terms of social class. Indeed, to show that she still deserves the status, she organizes an extraordinary wedding celebration for her daughter by selling half of her land. The cost of the wedding is her economic downfall (Fajarini, 2017)

*Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* and *Sri Sumarah and Bawuk* clearly indicate political elements in the story. This can be seen from the involvement (or assumed involvement) of one or more characters in a political party in the early period of the New Order. *Dua Ibu* was set in one decade later in which the New Order has reached its height promising national stability as the prerequisite for the process of the development. However, this seemingly stable national condition has brought about tensions between tradition and modernity as seen in *Dua Ibu* (Nasution, 2016).

## **METHOD**

This research is a discourse analysis (text based) with close reading technique and contextualization. In a discourse analysis, contexts have vital roles. In such contexts, the reproduction, negotiation, and contestation of gender ideology and gendered power relation are symbolized and represented. This is in line with van Dijk's statement that discourse analysis deals with production and reproduction of dominance and the challenges (1993).

The text studied was Arswendo Atmowiloto's novel *Dua Ibu*, first published in 1980 and re-published in 2009. The data in this study are the sentences contained in the novel that represent the social role of the mother

and the social role of the aunt. All data collected were then grouped according to the roles of mother and aunt. After that, all data were analyzed carefully to reveal the two main objects of the study, namely the mother vs aunt and the contested motherhood in the novel.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned in the introduction, the aim of this article is to investigate the contestation of tradition and modernity in prescribing “*Ibu*” or motherhood in Javanese during 1980s as portrayed in the novel. The results of the research show that the contestation was complicated which involved local traditional Javanese culture, the central government of Order Baru definition of good *ibu*, and the foreign cultural elements such as those seen in the Jakarta urban life style and the term ‘*tante*’. Those three factors often overlapped to each other and produced tensions and confusions both to the mothers and to the son. In this section the discussion is divided into two parts; that is a description of the complication of the terms *ibu* and *tante* which are followed by a discussion on the contestation of being a mother itself.

### ***Ibu versus Tante***

One apparent change which emerged right in the core of the society, the family, is the presence of new “character” called “*Tante*” who becomes one of the main characters in *Dua Ibu*. The word *tante* itself derives from the French, Deutsch, and Dutch words which means “aunt”. It has a meaning as a greeting for a woman who is respected and familiar to the speaker (Dictionary.com and Oxford University Press (OUP) 2010). Aunt or *tante* tends to be referred to an adult or mature woman. It can be considered as a general greeting from the speaker who is younger than them, for example, children and teenagers.

Javanese word for aunt is ‘*Bibi*’ or sometimes *Bu Lik* a short for *Ibu Cilik* (Younger Mother). *Cilik* means small or young shows that the bearer is still a junior and is exempted from the responsibilities of the “full” *ibu*. Javanese recognizes *Bu De* or *Ibu Gede* (Bigger / Older Mother) referring to those women who are older than “*ibu*”. This order of *Gede-ibu-Cilik* illustrates hierarchical kinship relation (Robson, 1987).

However, the novel does not present Mirah as *Bu Lik*, but as a *Tante*, instead. Thus, the relation of the meaning between the nameless *Ibu* and Mirah is not as simple as a senior and a junior, ‘*Ibu*’ and ‘*Bu Lik*’, or mother and aunty in English. They cannot be explained using Robson’s Javanese kinship relation. While *ibu* relates to Javanese tradition, *tante* reflects a foreigner and new influences (Nasution, 2016).

The above heavily social assignments of being an *ibu* are carried out by the nameless *Ibu* in the novel. The roles and responsibilities of being a mother are reflected in *Ibu*’s characteristics or traits which are selfless, kind, sincere, and loving. *Ibu* embraces the prevailed customs and traditions in that society by adopting and nurturing those children with all of those traits. She is renowned and respected by the entire people in that village due to her selflessness and ability in multitasking – cooking, arranging event, mortgage, etc.

During the financial crisis after her husband has passed away, Ibu insists on raising and nurturing her adopted children with all of her best. The parent/s with a less financial state focus on the basic needs of the children first, hence to fulfill the other needs – school, tutors, etc. – require ultra struggle (Peterson, 2013). It can be seen from the mortgages which are conducted by Ibu. Yet, she still chooses to fight for her children in order to pay their education, needs, until each of their big day – Mamid’s circumcision and her daughters’ marriage. Afterward, she has to take over the role of father as well. The Javanese society tends to divide the role of father (decision maker) and mother (the nurturer of children and family financial caretaker) (Putri and Lestari 2015). Considering of many roles, responsibilities, and traditionality which have been embraced by her, Ibu then obtains the recognition of the society in the village. Thereby, she is called as *ibu* by her children as well as the society.

As for the character of Tante Mirah, she is completely contrary to Ibu. Tante Mirah is the first adopted child in the family of Ibu. She deserted her only son after giving birth to Ibu in order to chase her dream for money in the capital city, Jakarta, with her husband. She is smart, beautiful, fragrant, and special (107, 222). Those characteristics are recognized and admitted by the other children of Ibu – Tante Mirah’s siblings. Afterward, she has also two names or calls: Tante Mirah by Mamid, Ibu’s children, the villagers in Solo, and her maids in Jakarta; as well as Mami by her two daughters in Jakarta (110, 222, 279).

Ibu herself remains nameless throughout the story. She is depicted as a selfless and sincere woman. Although among of those nine children, only one is her biological child, but she never discriminates against each other. She gives loves, and as a return, she receives respects. It seems that her motivation to be a foster mother is love for children which in turn provides her with social gratification (Hampson & Tavormina, 1980). Ibu reflects a good mother" who promotes the well-being and development of her children and is almost always patient, protective, nurturing, and generous (Barlow & Chapin, 2010).

Her inclination to tradition is beyond doubt. She is renowned famously in her village by the detail proposition and determination when it comes to a big day in the life of her children such as weddings and circumcision. In this case, Ibu plays a crucial role in transmitting culture to build enculturated persons among her children, maintain the kinship (Barlow & Chapin, 2010).

On the other hand, Tante Mirah is portrayed as a woman who embraces modernity during that time. She is considered as the most special and smartest which brings her to a much better education among Ibu’s children (222). All of these are important for her success in Jakarta. She has left Solo and now lives in Jakarta. She lives in an anonymous urban neighborhood where there is no obligation to recognize and respect one’s neighbor. In such a context, Tante Mirah experiences a very different social and cultural environment than the ones in Solo.

This shows that the figure of Tante Mirah represents a modernity or embraces modernity which starts to emerge gradually at that time in the main cities. This modernity can be seen in the form of her wealth with her husband, Oom Bong. There are swing and fountain, which is moved to the backyard, to

be enjoyed by themselves (110). During that time, the lifestyle of Tante Mirah is considered not just as rich, but modern as well. Her husband, Oom Bong, is also the director of one of television stations in there. He likes to update the recent national as well as international news. It shows that the life of city has become a part of this spouse. Tante Mirah has detached herself from the traditionality that once becomes part of her in Solo. Thereby, besides of contains general meaning, her modern lifestyle contributes to her call as *tante* by the people around her. In one hand she has been freed from any traditional obligation toward her son because the obligation has been overtaken by Ibu. On the other hand, she has been cut from the tradition because of her living in the capital. This finding is in line with Nasution's (2016) study, revealing that it would be very likely that when one person moves to another place for a long time, he/she would adapt his/her new place tradition and be cut off from the old one.

The people around Tante Mirah call her as *tante* including her own son, Mamid, as well as the maids in her house. However, her two daughters, Mamine and Margareta, call her *mami*. That word is actually similar to *ibu* in which refers to mother. But, the first one is more modern, whereas the latter one is the contrary (Nasution, 2016).

As the time goes by, it is revealed that actually Tante Mirah has an implicit or hidden intention or motive towards the existence of her three children: to save her household relationship with her husband, Oom Bong. During that time, her marriage has reached a crisis and divorce. Her emotion is unstable and her children are affected as well. She tends to demand Mamid a lot to call her as *ibu*, and also harsh easily towards her three children.

### **The contested motherhood**

A special "ibu" was imagined by Mamid, the son. She should be the woman who had given birth and sacrificed for him. However, the novel presents two women for one child, Mamid, setting up a stage for being "ibu" to be contested by both women. Adopted and raised by the nameless Ibu, Mirah understands very well how Ibu functions as a performative mother. It may have been an important reason for Mirah to entrust Mamid to Ibu. She believes that Mamid would enjoy the same affection and love as she had experienced them herself. However, the moment Mirah gives Mamid to Ibu, that is the time when Mirah lost her chance to perform as ibu. Such a separation may destroy child-mother relation although the child has been nurtured properly by the other party.

The emptiness of a mother's role which should be filled with Tante Mirah then is replaced by the character of Ibu. It was Ibu who filled this hole impacting in an inevitable lack of the position of Tante Mirah as *ibu* in Mamid's perception. As a result, Mirah has lost the privilege to be called Ibu by Mamid. Her own child calls her Tante, means aunty, as her first name, so that she is called Tante Mirah, not only by Mamid, but also by everybody else such as neighbors, her maids, other Ibu's children (110). Later on, Mirah will find it impossible to make Mamid call her as ibu. The two years void left by Mirah was too much filled with Ibu.

Mirah's space as the mother of Mamid has been overtaken by Ibu. Mirah left for Jakarta to survive her economy, leaving behind Solo, her extended

family, the culture, the tradition, but most importantly, Mamid. Indeed, Mirah was considered as incapable to assume the role of a mother for Mamid.

Mirah's migration to Jakarta was driven by the dreams promised by the capital of the nation. Jakarta was the center of change, modernization, and most of all, opportunities to improve one's life. Mirah and her husband proved that the dreams could be true. Mirah's husband soon gained a better job followed by more money. Eventually, Mirah was able to empower herself. At this point, she was ready to take back the role of a mother for Mamid. This means she has to go back to Solo to see if the role was available for her.

In the meantime, the events in Solo showed how Ibu's power gradually deteriorated. Ibu's capability to adopt, raise, and nurture children is not without limit. Her husband's death made her fragile, weakened and eventually collapsed. Fuller (2019) says when a wife is left behind by her beloved husband, she tends to be weakened and collapsed. Behind her towering figure as an ibu, she depended so much on her husband. This is in contrast to Mirah who was able to improve her condition during her stay in Jakarta. As a result, she must leave the stage of being a performative ibu for Mamid and let Mirah takes her place, where it should be.

However, the arena of being an *ibu* is not merely about a woman being called *bu* (mum) or *ibu* (mother). There are social and cultural aspects as well. "That is Ibu. Her roles have been prepared by our traditions". Among those roles were to maintain the traditions itself. This finding is in line with those found by Nasution (2016) showing that Solo culture and tradition dominates the novel as seen in the worldview of the writer, the socio-cultural background, the writer's view toward women, and the characterization. The domination of the Javanese tradition in the novel has also been reported by Romadi et al. (2018). Among the striking traditional values seen in the novel is the domination of the Javanese masculinity especially in the realm of marriage. This finding corresponds to Widodo and Adji's (2019) finding stating that masculinity is one of the dominant Javanese characters.

The definition of *ibu* as prescribed by traditional Javanese culture with its dominating masculinity has been appropriated by the state-*ibuism*. However, even the state-*ibuism* faced great challenges when it must be implemented in real life. This novel shows how the traditional roles of '*ibu*' led to calamity. At the same time the 'modern' *ibu*, that is Tante Mirah, faced uncertainty in the midst of the urban Jakarta.

As claimed by Mamid in the novel, the tradition has prepared the roles for Ibu. Among the most important roles is to make sure that each rite of passage is done to the best the tradition requires them to be done, such as circumcision and wedding. Some societies, including Javanese, consider circumcision as highly cultural and as having "symbolic message concerning personhood, gender, cosmology, status, and community inscribed in the body" (Jouët, 2018). In that case, circumcision is to differentiate between male and female gender. The process of differentiation is not limited to the ceremony itself but related to the socialization of proper behavior to be a man. Harrington continued that a mother-child relation between a boy and his mother needs to be "replaced by proper masculine and role behavior" so that the feminine elements in a boy will be stripped off to be replaced by the expected male behavior (Stentiford, 2019).



To perform her role, Ibu sacrificed so much when she organized, managed, and financed Mamid circumcision by selling all of his late husband precious belonging (30). She even carried Mamid by herself on her back, something usually done by the father of the circumcised child. However, by doing this manly role, Ibu has maintained her relation with the boy until long after the circumcision. This is in contrast to Harrington's notion above. Perhaps the reason for the long-lasting relation is the absence of a father personae for Mamid throughout the story. Thus in Mamid's eye, Ibu might have been filling the role as a mother and a father as well (Romadi et al., n.d.).

Tradition also assigns that it was the responsibility of Javanese parents to marry their daughters (Wolf, 1990), a tradition which is vital to socialize the bride and groom into their new roles and identity as married persons (Kalmijn 2004). Ibu was willingly assuming the responsibility to marry all her adopted daughters. This assignment has been highly destructive toward Ibu's financial capacity. Ibu sells furniture and jewelry for Mujanah's wedding (14-15) and provides money for Ratsih wedding. Ibu has done all traditional duties to her adopted children. However, the financial impact was detrimental. Ironically, the impact has forced Ibu to let Mamid go into a more financially capable figure.

The contestation between Ibu and Mirah has shown that control over money had determined the performance of being an ibu. This performance includes nurturing and conducting traditional and social obligations. Role performance follows money. This is in line with Wolf's conclusion of her research on women factory workers in central Java in which because of their income as workers, those women were increasingly gaining a better position in dealing with their life such as choosing a husband. Thus, the process of industrialization in the 1980s in Java has given the opportunity to increase women autonomy through the increase of their income (Abdullah, 2018).

Jouët states that gender stratification has been determined by economic power, "who has the gold makes the rules". Thus, the economic factor has played a vital role in gender stratification. What happens to this novel is that the economic factor does not only determined the dominating gender as Blumberg and Wolf claims, but it also determine the dominating person for the same role with the same gender (Jouët, 2018).

Superficially the contestation of assuming the motherhood for Mamid done by Mirah and Ibu did not seem to be competitive. It was more like a shift, a turn-taking, in which the role was given to the one who was more capable financially. However, it did reflect the inevitable changes in the society. The novel shows how Ibu cling to traditions in Solo must give up the most wanted role that is being a mother. Ibu represents tradition and locality which are under big threats of changes and modernity with Jakarta as the locomotive.

The stage of being an *ibu* for a child Mamid has been contested by Ibu and Tante Mirah. Ibu, whether it be the feudal Javanese mother or of the *ibu*-ism offered by the state of the New Order was dominant in the early stage of the narrative but it does not seem to sustain. It bears huge financial consequences out of clinging to traditions. Ibu financial resources collapsed after conducting several rites of passages for her children. As a consequence, Ibu was not able to perform her role as a mother and let Mirah take it.

While Mirah was called *a tante*, an address which reflects her incapacity to bear the name of *ibu*. She is not even being considered as worthy to be called *ibu* by her own biological son, Mamid. However, eventually, she is able to take Mamid back to her and assume herself as Mamid's mother after she gained financial success. This is done by embracing modernity in Jakarta.

However, the modernity in Jakarta does not offer clarity nor stability for Mirah and Mamid. Mirah ties to her husband was in constant danger, often close to divorce. While Mamid finds it hard to accept Mirah as an "ibu" and keep on calling Mirah as "tante". Mamid himself keeps longing for Ibu in Solo.

This novel shows the modernity in Jakarta is experienced as an uncertainty for Mirah and her husband who try to embrace it. For Ibu in Surakarta, it shows an inevitable destruction of her traditions. This ever growing domination of the highly centralized New Order gradually invited more and more criticism (Riyanto, 2017). The New Order has been imposing the state-*ibuism* as the single prescription to be a good mother. Although it was adapted from Javanese traditional definition of *ibu*, yet this kind of "*ibuism*" has been depicted by the novel as fragile and even led to disaster. However, the novel offers more than the criticism toward state-*ibuism* since it also portrays the confusion of the uncertain future of the 'modern' *ibu* in the urban Jakarta as experienced by Mirah. It seems that the place for an *ibu* whether it be in traditional or modern situation is always challenging.

## CONCLUSION

The novel illustrates an asymmetrical contestation between the traditional roles of an *ibu* in the center of Javanese culture and the new wave of the contemporary 'motherhood' as the result of the development into modernity during the New Order. Financial factor has proven to be fundamental in supporting the implementation of the role. Ibu has drained out her financial resources because of her insistence in conducting traditional rites of passage ceremonies for her adopted children. On the contrary, Tante Mirah gradually gains more financial success because she is out of the context to oblige those traditional ceremonies. Eventually, it is the one with more financial capability who can assume the role of the being the *ibu* for Mamid.

The novel documents the inevitable change of socially defined motherhood performed in the center of Javanese culture. The traditional motherhood must be replaced with an uprooted *ibu* who chooses the capital city to live and embraces modernity. Yet, modernity itself offers success as well as uncertainty. Mamid becomes a torn child between a romantic memory of the lost traditional Ibu and the confusing modern Tante, his own biological mother, who is now forcing him to call her 'ibu'.

This novel has beautifully described the burden, the fights, and the struggles of both Ibu and Tante who share one son, Mamid. Whether following the traditional prescription of being a good *ibu* in Solo or embracing modern life in urban Jakarta, being *ibu* will always be a hard to fight role. There are so much sacrifices and pain to be endured. From this novel we can learn and appreciate that the love of mothers knows no limit. Hence, it is just natural that all children should try their best to repay in whatever means possible this unconditional love of mothers.

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