



# The melodramatic children: The representation of children in *Ratapan Anak Tiri* [Lament of Step- Children] (1973), *Ratapan Anak Tiri* [Lament of Step-Children 2] (1980), and *Arie Hanggara* (1985) Satrya Wibawa

## Abstract

The New Order's cultural politics of development of national identity were applied to Indonesian films made during this period as a form of cinema politics. The New Order conceived of cinema as a medium for ideological propaganda which could and should be controlled in order to maintain political stability. Most Indonesian films made during the New Order regime depicted children as part of a discursive strategy to promote national identity within an ideological framework defined by theories of social development and discourses of social and political stability. This article focuses on *Ratapan Anak Tiri* [Lament of step-children] (1973), *Ratapan Anak Tiri* [Lament of step-children] 2 (1980), and *Arie Hanggara* (1985), melodrama genre films that featured suffering children among the main characters was the result of a narrative shift initiated to avoid political problems with the regime. The typical narrative of these films includes the representation of a family with the father figure as the apex, a demonised woman figure, and helpless children at the bottom of the family structure. Primary child characters are predominantly depicted as weak, dependent, and less imaginative. These melodrama films emphasised this pattern in their narrative by presenting an image of the state's apparatus as a solver of family domestic problems.

Keywords: children, cinema, Indonesia, Gender mainstreaming, Melodrama

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## Introduction

Indonesian cinema offers a rich field for the analysis of the relationship between the figure of the child and the idea of nation for two reasons. First, Indonesian filmmakers have regularly placed children as central characters in their films' main narratives since the early periods of Indonesian cinema's history. Second, there is only limited academic work, both in Indonesia and internationally, that has focused specifically on the representation of children in Indonesian cinema. An essential study on Indonesian film, by Krishna Sen (1994), categorised Indonesian cinema into three different periods: the first one from the early 1900s to 1956; the second one from 1956 to 1966, or the period of "political polarisation"; and the third period from 1967 to 1994, or the "Institutions of New Order Cinema." Sen focused on the political impact of the New Order regime on Indonesian cinema, which I will elaborate on in this paper.

As part of its politics of culture, the New Order regime controlled the Indonesian film industry by classifying cinema as a political medium (Sen, 1994) and by restricting the potential for local filmmakers to offer ideological counter-narratives (Hanan, 2017; Nugroho & Herlina, 2015). As a political medium, Indonesian cinema during the New Order disseminated the regime's official propaganda of militarist ideology (Irawanto, 1999), national identity (Roberts, 2000), shared civic values (Soh, 2007), cultural attitude and gender (Murtagh, 2017) and diversity elimination (Kitley, 1999). Soeharto's government, through the Departemen Penerangan [Department of Information], applied tough censorship policies, including pre-production and pre-screening censorship. Lembaga Sensor Film (LSF), the Indonesian Film Censorship Board, was established for political purposes and was given wide-ranging authority to decide which films could be screened in public. However, getting approval from LSF did not guarantee that a film could be easily screened. In fact, the government sometimes used its power to cancel a screening for different reasons, but mostly if the film was assumed to be attacking the government's policies or credibility (Nugroho & Herlina, 2015). Examples of such films were, in 1989, *Langitku Rumahku* [My Sky, My Home] and *Nyoman Cinta Merah Putih* (Nyoman Loves Red-White).

Twenty-six films categorised within the children's film genre were made during the New Order period (Kristanto, 1995). There were also twelve films that placed children in the main narrative but were not categorised as children's films. While most of the films were produced by private film companies, the official government film company, Perusahaan Film Negara (PFN), produced some as well. (Unfortunately, most of them could not be found for the purpose of this research due to poor film archive management in Indonesia). Considering Indonesian politics during the New Order and

the increased number of children's films produced in this period, it is plausible to claim that the New Order infused its ideology into the narrative of those films to promote the regime's ideology of national identity, social development, and political stability. And I argue that children can be positioned as the representative that emphasizes unification among different elements in the nation that might potentially reduce social and political conflicts. In the context of Indonesian cinema, this can be used to explore how children's figure can be utilised to bond the difference social and political elements within Indonesia as a nation.

## **Literature review**

Children have been widely depicted in cinema, from a classical innocent creature to a political state agent. Henry Jenkins (1998) asserted that the myth of innocent children disconnects them from their own will; thus, children will be a perfect object to symbolise (adult) demands. Traditionally, children in media such as film and television have been seen as innocent creatures and represent conservative values in the family (Konigsberg, 2000). Contemporary children's films often explore complex issues that are traditionally defined as adults' problems, as a strategic approach to the practise of adults' power. Children's culture, according to Jenkins (1998), depends on how society constructs and attaches their ideas to children. Changes in society will affect culture, including children's culture. Children are constructed as ideologically vulnerable, so society easily embodies their ideology through children. The state projects children as representative citizens to deliver several messages, such as internal bonding in a nation, the good image of a nation, and changes in the nation.

Emma Wilson (2003) examined the theme of missing children in films and limited her research to non-mainstream commercial cinema. She argued that the child characters are utilised to represent the fears as well as the desires of the contemporary family. Timothy Shary (2005) demonstrated a trend where films in the US feature children representing more complex issues. He outlined a shift from depictions of well-protected children within the family to wild, rebellious children in society, and then to responsible characters dealing with complicated issues of adolescence. The works of both Wilson and Shary suggest a comprehensive understanding of how children are portrayed in cinema, but they are limited in certain aspects. While Wilson's work provided a broad analysis of missing children within a family culture, she limited her study to art-house and independent films. Meanwhile, Shary's research compiled interesting descriptions of on-screen children, but his research only focused on U.S. commercial films whose characteristics are different from other nations' films.

Vicky Lebeau (2008) discussed childhood's historical meanings and their impact on contemporary cinema. She argued that children in contemporary cinema are featured as attractive figures that propose questions about the adult's desire involved in constructing ideas of childhood. Similarly, Karen Lury (2010) described children in film as depictions of an otherness, often as an exploration of complex issues about troubled childhoods and sexuality. In their respective studies of children and film, Lebeau and Lury concluded that child characters are used in cinema mostly to represent otherness and powerlessness. However, they did not attempt to discuss the broader cultural and ideological context of the representation of children in film. Instead, they limited children's portrayal in film as a product of the filmmaker's perspective only. For them, depictions of children on screen have a minimal contribution to symbolising nationhood.

Peter Pozefsky (2010) described the father-child relationship as depicted in Russian films as a symbol of the unhappiness of children under Stalin. According to Pozefsky, the discourse on fatherhood and childhood in Russian cinema can be linked to the notion of nationhood. He also detailed how Soviet cinema portrayed children as innocent individuals who go on to learn a life-lesson that will remain with them as part of Stalin's ideology. In a similar study on German cinema, Ute Wolfel (2013) argued that father-child relationships are extensively used to symbolise the state-citizen relationship in DEFA-Germany films, where a child protagonist represents an idealised citizen within a changed state. Both Pozefsky and Wolfel suggested that a connection between nationalism and childhood is the ideological foundation for children in film.

Thomas Sobchack (1989) described how children symbolise a depressed power against the powerful authoritarian upper class that deludes national identity. Early British cinema presented the rebellious children confronting the "have" class that holds authority as the struggle of citizens taking back their society and restoring their identity as a nation. Children are pictured purely, with no political intention, and are symbolised as the new hope for the nation. Similarly, Jaimey Fisher (2001) argued that children represent the national value of anti-conservatism which builds the nation's foundation for the future. Children in German cinema extend the state's message that the nation should belong to the right citizen who gives their loyalty to the country. Children are pictured as a bond between elements of the nation. Both Sobchack and Fisher's study focused on the ideological aspect that connects a nation's internal elements.

The image of children utilised as a good model for a nation can be found in the following studies: Donald, 2005; Coenen, 2011; Weng, 2012; and Rajagopalan, 2013. Stephanie H Donald (2005) argued that in Chinese

cinema children were utilised as the role model for the ideal citizen and are projected as the country's future. The idealised citizen model, according to Donald, should present economic success and apply a strong ideological loyalty. Children are thus symbolised as an iconic description that expresses the emotional sentiment of a better future for China. The narrative of childhood represents a dynamic growth of China as a nation and, at the end, a greater China is symbolised by successful children. While Donald did not explicitly claim that China's authoritarian policy primarily initiates this image, I consider the state ideological system as strongly shaping these images of children in cinema. As Indonesia experienced similar ideological policy, I argue that to some extent, the state deliberately used children to represent its model citizen.

Similarly, Miaowei Weng (2012) found that Spanish cinema in the Franco era projected independent and strong children in the narrative to signify Spain as a strong nation of post-political turmoil. Childhood is framed as challenging territory where competing powers struggle for interpretation. The state occupies the dominant role in order to educate children to be good citizens. In this sense, children are constructed as strong and independent in order to move forward while reconstructing the past, and passing beyond the painful memories of Spain. It seems that children are expected to spread positive values and build the new future, allowing the state to build a positive image for the nation. By focusing on Spanish films' featuring of independent child characters, Weng challenged the classical portrayal of children as the weakest individuals in society and rejected the idea of unreliable children.

In addition, Jayashree Rajagopalan (2013) proposed that children in Indian cinema are avatars for the nation's new hope and better future. Rajagopalan argued that children are "primary focalizers and radical action-takers. They delve into themes inspired by socio-political realities, revealing ideologies that are essentially hopeful" (p. 11). Rajagopalan's thesis showed that children project the complex issues of the nation through their image of innocence and powerless position. He stated: "Adults need not always control children, because children are capable of seeing beyond everyday assumptions; they can visualise a world without social inequalities and moral corruption; they can make their own choices". (2013, p. 18)

Both Weng (2012) and Rajagopalan (2013) argued that the powerless innocence of children has been a stereotyped image in cinema, and they proposed a transformative, less controlled figure of children within the adult society, equally representing a dynamic, developing nation. These studies also suggested that children are utilized to represent the narrative of nationhood, recollecting the memory of the nation's past and projecting its future. The studies seemed to focus on one particular era of the nation's

long journey, while I argue that each nation has its political turbulence that takes them into different situations. Therefore, the present study proposes to explore how children are pictured within different periods of a nation.

Jennifer Coenen (2011) argued that children's images were used in German cinema to symbolise national identity through rebuilding society and collective social memory to signify the idealized citizen. She explained that German filmmakers utilised children's images as a discourse of the developing family's mission to rebuild society, including re-establishing the nation's identity in a global context. Coenen's research, which examined selected films from three different periods of contemporary Germany, suggested that children were pictured in various ways depending on the period of the filmmaking. In terms of national identity, Coenen argued that depictions of children were used in German cinema as a bridge to experience a collective social memory of Germany as a changed state within history. Children were placed as a guide for post-war Germany, while at the end of the Cold War, children were pictured as reunification ambassadors for Germany in the future. Coenen's study clearly described the transformation of children's identity within three different periods of Germany history. In her study, Coenen was able to show that social and political turmoil influenced the way children were represented in German cinema. Accordingly, the analysis of Indonesian cinema can be placed within specific historical intra-national circumstances amidst a broader international scope of social and political turmoil.

### **Theoretical framework: The New Order's ideology of family-ism.**

The political violence of 1965 enabled Soeharto's regime to replace President Sukarno's government, and to initiate a period of cultural change towards a New Order politics of identity. In the beginning, the New Order prioritised political stability by constructing a discourse of national development as its ideological priority (Hill, 1994). As the regime's political strength peaked, Soeharto promoted family-ism as an ideological foundation to support national development. The discourse of national development was also framed by an attempt to define an Indonesian national character, which could then be recognised as the foundation of a national identity (Hellman, 2003), to be widely applied through the family system (Shiraishi, 1995), schooling

The family allegory was integral to the construction of Indonesian national identity during the New Order. A principle of family-ism was applied as a basic foundation for Indonesia's social and political system,

through the educational system (Shiraishi, 1997), school curricula (Leigh, 1999), and the village system

Lyn Parker (1992) specifically argued that the New Order urged its citizens to be engaged in informal education through the family, and provided the formal curricula through the schooling system. The New Order endorsed the concept that children should be educated and trained to become good citizens. Therefore, explained Parker, mass schooling curricula were designed within a paternalistic and authoritarian culture to guide and direct the children into adult society. For example, under the centralised curricula, the New Order created an official textbook that delivered the state's messages, official "facts," and national values (1992, p. 216). For almost three decades, Parker added, the New Order was successfully spreading a homogeneous perception of national identity by constructing "regimes of obedience and silence" through school education (1992, p. 245).

The Indonesian mass schooling system during the New Order, according to Barbara Leigh (1999), worked as the state's fundamental political tool to "constantly assert and structurally assist in the maintenance of the unity of the nation-state" (p. 37). Leigh asserted that the school system reproduced a mass factory system that forced the students to speak the same language and obediently accept standardised knowledge and guidance without challenging them. The idea of Indonesia as a nation-state and a sense of Indonesian-ness were built into school students' minds and perceptions. The mass schooling system was designed, Leigh stated, to produce "a non-textured and smoothly appropriated adolescent Indonesian graduate" (p. 52). The national education system was directed to serve political goals to support the state's economic development. The students were constructed as passive learners with little opportunity for discussion in the classroom. In the end, the obedient student was expected to enter adult society as the state's ideal citizen.

Sarah Moser (2016) further explained how the Indonesian school system's symbols of uniformity were designed to shape students as ideal citizens by projecting a commitment to national identity through an image of "common goals, symbols and assumptions about proper conduct" (p. 249). Besides academic content through textbooks and teaching, Moser argued, the Indonesian state indoctrinated about Indonesian-ness through banal symbols such as school uniforms and school activities. Moser explained that the use of a school uniform by all students was part of mandatory practices to identify good Indonesian students, while a compulsory morning exercise for all students at school rehearsed obedience and following orders and practiced harmonious working together. Moreover, the students' flag

ceremony represented “the most formal and consciously nationalistic of the embodied activities” (p. 255) that indoctrinates the state’s expectation of Indonesian students. These school performances produced the common acceptance of the students’ subordinate position vis-à-vis the authority of the state.

In a similar analysis of the Indonesian schooling system, the importance of the family in constructing Indonesian nationhood was underlined by Saya S. Shiraishi (1995). Shiraishi argued that the family and the schooling system had reciprocal roles as both institutions placed children as the subordinate subject. Shiraishi underlined that during the New Order the figure of the family was heavily used to emphasise the state’s power in order to develop a sense of Indonesian-ness in children. The ideological framework of the family allowed the authoritarian state to educate and also punish the “disrespectful” family member, while representing the inequality between the state and its citizens. Indonesia’s concept of family is traditionally influenced by the dominant Javanese culture that highly respects hierarchy, with the father figure at the top among the members of the family. In this family concept, each family member has their own duties, and children, the lowest rank in the system, are obliged to be obedient and have no authority (Shiraishi, 1995). Shiraishi argued that this concept of family has been applied in Indonesia, especially during the New Order, and that it reflects the way the state indoctrinates its citizens with national identity ideology.

The relationship between people is affected by each individual’s degree of responsibility or willingness to do something. On this the state builds the relationship between citizens and the state as a reflection of the relationship between children and their father. Children will obey their father, and the father will protect and take care of them. This relationship thus contains a notion of the nation as a family in which the citizens (children) and the state (father) work together. The family culture is found in *kekeluargaan* or family-ism, a concept that permeates every crucial aspect of the Indonesian nation, including the school, and the modern bureaucratic system of government and other political institutions (Shiraishi, 1995).

Shiraishi also proposed a strong link between the family system, the school system, and politics in the Indonesian context. He explained that under Dutch colonialism, a nationalist movement used children’s education as a primary tool for the dissemination of a discourse of Indonesian independence. In fact, the *Taman Siswa* School, directed by Ki Hadjar Dewantoro, was a model for Indonesian nationalists on how to challenge the Dutch colonial government through education. The nationalist group, including Dewantoro, established a school that utilised Indonesian culture and language and a family-style system to challenge the established Dutch’s

school system. It allowed young Indonesian children, especially those who did not have an opportunity to join the colonial school, to have a proper education (Siraishi, 1995, p. 176). Jan Newberry (2010) argued that this school was also “a productive site for the introduction of a new family model” (p. 405). The family culture applied by the *Taman Siswa* educational system in the classroom was adopted by its graduates into their own institutions, including the government, after independence.

As Indonesians faced political turmoil, Shiraishi argued, “family-ism provided the alternative model for national politics” (1995, p. 178), which the New Order regime adopted for its political patronage. The family-ism originally used as a nationalist independence movement turned under the New Order into an authoritarian and paternalistic regime of politics. Mass schooling and the educational system, which were strongly supported by the media, reproduced the culture of family-ism in textbooks, curricula, and the way of life (Siraishi, 1995, p. 179). Family-ism was utilised as a political tool by the New Order to maintain their power for almost three decades. Family-ism culture in Indonesia can be seen as the most important link between discursive constructions of the nation-state and the family. In addition, Suryakusuma (1996) asserted that the ideology of *Ibuism* [the mother] is integrated in the New Order ideological concept of family. *Ibuism* refers to an attempt to maintain and reinforce gendered differences within government policy through socio-biological engineering (Fitriyah, 2019) Suryakusumah’s concept of *ibuism* highlighted children’s position in the family as the lowest in the hierarchy. In this hierarchy, the role of mother is to serve and also to represent the figure of father. As discussed by Hearst (1997), the significance of the family is marked by the state as an important institution to produce proper citizens, and as a mediator in socialising people towards the state’s values (p. 203).

## Methods

This paper examines three selected melodrama-genre films that feature children in their narratives, namely *Ratapan Anak Tiri* [Lament of step-children] (1973), *Ratapan Anak Tiri 2* [Lament of step-children 2] (1980) and *Arie Hanggara* (this film title refers to a name of the child who been killed by his parents) (1985). By conducting a textual analysis, this paper explores how children in these films are deployed to engage with changing ideas of Indonesia as a nation. This research utilises the approaches of film, textual, and narrative analysis, in which the focus is put on such elements as narration, story outline, plot structure, character, and point of view. Narrative analysis is utilised to explore how the selected films portray

children in film, emphasising the story outline as a site of comprehension made from a variety of signs and clues supplied by a sequence of events.

Robert Stam et al. (1992) defined story outline as the “pattern of relationships between characters and the pattern of actions as they unfold in chronological order” (p. 71). They emphasized story outline as a site of comprehension for the audience made from a variety of signs and clues supplied by a sequence of events. The story outline builds a complex chronological narrative structure known as the plot. This paper also examines point of view to understand dominant outlooks through various characters and events that lead to the importance of narration in these films. Point of view refers to a dominant general perspective of the narrator expressed through the characters and events in the film. This leads to the analysis of other important elements, such as characterization, verbal dialogue, images, and editing.

In analysing the child characters in *Ratapan Anak Tiri* (1973), *Ratapan Anak Tiri 2* (1980), and *Arie Hanggara* (1985) I utilise Barthes’ five levels of connotative coding: the hermeneutic code, the proairetic code, the semic code, the symbolic code, and the referential code. Unlocking the hermeneutic code is the first step in identifying stipulations to develop questions in the film story—such as how the films place children in the narrative—and to reveal the answer at the end of the story. I utilise standard elements of plot structure such as exposition, climax and denouement, as hermeneutic codes. Thus, film narrative should present a logical sequence of story determined by the discourse of the film. This pertains to the proairetic code which, developed from storyline and direction, divides a chronological storyline into logical parts. The semic code is a character’s representation of persons, places, or objects. Semic code assembles film elements to denote particular characters or themes in the narrative. I also unlock the symbolic code which is represented through signs and symbols in the film text. Furthermore, the cultural code implies a way to understand the element of film text through references or authorised knowledge. My examination of these codes reveals how the *Ratapan Anak Tiri* (1973), *Ratapan Anak Tiri 2* (1980), and *Arie Hanggara* (1985) portray children’s character in its narrative.

## **Discussion:**

### **Children and the ideal family in Indonesian film melodrama**

Film melodrama became a popular trend during the New Order. Krishna Sen (1993) explained that the melodramatic form in Indonesian cinema consisted of a narrative about relationships between men and women and focused on family crises. While this genre was also common in Indonesian films of the 1950s and 1960s, most films made in that period that were

acknowledged as good quality films or that won awards can be categorised as nationalist films, as they presented narratives based on historical events of Indonesian resistance against the Dutch colonialists (Sen, 1985). In the 1970s, the trend in Indonesian filmmaking gradually shifted from the historical towards the melodramatic genre. Thus, the melodramatic form became an important element of a good film in this decade, especially for films celebrated at Indonesian film festivals (Sen, 1993). This aesthetic shift from the historical nationalist form to the melodramatic form happened largely after the political turmoil that led to the massacre of alleged communist party members or anyone who was accused as favoring communism in 1965 (which caused deep trauma for most Indonesians). At the same time, the ideological battle and political turmoil of 1965 was utilised by the New Order regime to maintain its power by encouraging a fear of communism and any leftist-associated ideology (Sen, 1993). Aware of the risk that a film can be interpreted as carrying a communist ideology, filmmakers shifted their narratives from social towards private, domestic and family life issues (Sen, 1993).

This shift can also be seen in the representation of children in Indonesian films of this period. In the 1950s and 1960s, Indonesian cinema represented children as rebellious social characters. But in the 1970s and 1980s, Indonesian films depicted children in relation to their life within the family. In these films, most child characters are depicted in a difficult situation caused by their parents or having a bad relationship with their parents. *Ratapan Anak Tiri* (1973) started this melodramatic trend with a story about two girls, Netty and Susy, who are abused by their stepmother. After their mother's death, their father, Yuwono, marries his co-worker, Ningsih, who frames Yuwono, and has him put in jail, and takes over his wealth. The girls are then forced into domestic slavery and face their stepmother's physical and verbal abuse. Most of the duration of the film is filled by these girls doing household duties and crying under the harsh orders of their stepmother. The girls later run away and live in the street as they wait for their father to be freed from jail. Finally, Yuwono is released after the police find the criminal whose misdeed was blamed on Yuwono. The criminal and Ningsih are locked up, and Yuwono finds his children and re-builds his family.

*Ratapan Anak Tiri* (Sandy Suwardi Hasan, 1973) demonstrated the melodramatic trend in children's film in Indonesia by featuring scenes of children's crying, which dominate the story. According to [filmindonesia.or.id](http://filmindonesia.or.id) (n.d), (one among very few Indonesian film databases), while most critics gave negative reviews, the film surprisingly attracted almost 500,000 people in Jakarta alone. Following that success, this formula was copied by

several other melodramatic films, which also successfully attracted large audiences. Other Indonesian films from this period also presented similar melodramatic narratives with children in the main role: *Yatim* [Orphan] (Bay Isbahi, 1973), *Dimana Kau Ibu* [Where are you, mother?] (Hasmanan, 1973), *Tabah sampai Akhir* [Sincere until Last] (Lilik Sudjio, 1973), *Anak-anak Tak Beribu* [Children without mother] (Maman Firmansyah, 1980), *Ratapan Si Miskin* [The Poor's lament] (Sandy Suwardi Hasan, 1974), and *Arie Hanggara* (Frank Rorimpandey, 1985). These films depicted many scenes of children crying and similar storylines: conflict between a stepmother or foster-parent and their step-children, which cause the children's suffering. The films' stories tended to end happily for the children and badly for the adult. The characters' pattern was also similar in most films: a cruel woman in the image of a stepmother, the weak and powerless children, and the loveable but powerless father.

Almost ten years later after the unexpected success of *Ratapan Anak Tiri*, the producer made a sequel, again featuring the character, Susy. In this film, Netty was poisoned by her new stepmother, Paula, who was Yuwono's third wife. Susy was now a high school student and had a stepsister, Umi, who was Paula's biological daughter (Hasan, 1980). Despite Paula's bad treatment of Susy, both girls were very close. One day, Yuwono went to hospital for a lengthy medical treatment, and Paula started treating Susy like a slave at home. Susy even had to pay her own school fees, food, and clothes by selling her late mother's jewellery. Eventually, Susy could not handle Paula's treatment and ran away. Umi joined her and insisted on visiting their father in hospital. Knowing that Susy and Umi did not show up at school, their class teacher, Roy, looked for them and met Yuwono who was back from the hospital and proceeded to tell him everything. The film's narrative then turned grisly and ended with both Yuwono and Paula dying after swallowing poison.

This family melodrama trend persisted until the 1980s when *Arie Hanggara* (Rorimpandey, 1985) was made. Arie was a boy who died after being physically abused by his biological father and stepmother. The film's narrative was based on a real-life event that attracted nationwide media coverage in 1984. A divorced father, Tino Ridwan, wanted his children, including Arie, to be honest people. However, Tino, who married Santi as a new wife, used harsh discipline. One day, Santi found money in Arie's bag and accused him of stealing. Without listening to Arie's explanation, Tino and Santi punished Arie. The punishment went out of control and cost Arie his life.

*Ratapan Anak Tiri* (1973), *Ratapan Anak Tiri 2* (1980), and *Arie Hanggara* (1985) featured a similar stereotype of an evil stepmother,

represented by a young, beautiful woman who hated and abused her stepchildren. These wicked Indonesian stepmothers assumed the classic negative image of the stepmother of Western fairy-tales (Brown, 1987; Johnson, 1980). In *Ratapan Anak Tiri* (Hasan, 1973), Ningsih pretended to love her stepchildren in front of her husband, but was very cruel with them while her husband was away. In the sequel, Paula eventually killed one of them and regularly abused the other (Sandy Suwardi Hasan, 1980). Ningsih and Paula represent the idea that a stepmother is a family's disease. The characters of Ningsih and Paula were also depicted as modern women with a contemporary lifestyle, always wearing modern fashion and makeup. Ningsih smoked cigarettes and drank alcohol, and Paula drove her own car. Both were represented as career driven women who were doing office work. However, they were also depicted as cruel and evil stepmothers, and as materialistic women who wanted to take over their husband's wealth.

Significantly, a metaphor about a similar female character was used by Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo, a prominent Indonesian nationalist activist during the Dutch colonial period (Gouda, 1998). Tjipto's analogy of a beautiful but evil woman was used to describe the Ethical Policy as looking good but making Indonesians suffer. Similar depictions of beautiful but evil women were also used by the Japanese colonial government to represent western countries, especially the Netherlands (Santoso, 2008). Furthermore, the New Order also demonized women who joined *Gerakan Wanita Indonesia* (Gerwani, the Indonesian Women's Movement) associating them with the stereotype of a beautiful, sensual evil woman (Dhakidae, 2003; Wieringa, 1992, 2003).

This antagonistic characteristic of woman as evil stepmother was juxtaposed with the protagonist's biological mother, who was depicted as a devoted wife and wholehearted mother, who spent her time at home taking care of the kids and her husband, and wearing a traditional *kebaya*. *Kebaya* is the name for traditional clothes for women in south-east Asian countries, Indonesia in particular. This juxtaposition of female figures can be connected to the way the New Order constructed a politically correct appearance for women (Davies, 2005; Wieringa, 1992). Indonesian women's identity was constructed by the New Order regime by promoting the nuclear family, the nurturing mother, and the dedicated wife

In addition, in these films the father appeared as an innocent character who was trapped within the conflict. The father was depicted as innocent because he either did not know of his wife's ill treatment of his children as in *Ratapan Anak Tiri* (Hasan, 1973) or he was under pressure from his wife, as in *Arie Hanggara* (Rorimpandey, 1985) In spite of this initial vulnerability of the father, which was created by the evil stepmother, in the end it was the

father who resolved the conflict. This protagonist father figure was aligned with the New Order's patriarchal culture that promoted the father as the primary figure who held the greatest power within the family (Heryanto & Lutz, 1988; Suryakusuma, 1996; Wieringa, 2003).

In the films children were depicted as vulnerable when they were without their biological father. This children's world was dependent on a father figure. The children in the narrative got help from adult male characters rather than female characters. In *Ratapan Anak Tiri*, saviour figures were presented through male characters: a policeman, a trader, a taxi driver (Hasan, 1973). Similarly, in *Ratapan Anak Tiri 2*, adult male figures appeared as saviours for Susy: a trader, a gold-seller, a taxi driver and a teacher (Hasan, 1980). Netty and Susy, as the central figures in these films, represented powerless, defenceless, and dependence, who were taught to respect their parents no matter what. All they could do was cry, as a symbol of their suffering and defencelessness. The father and evil stepmother placed children in the weakest position in the family.

The children-parent relationship in these films marked the shift of Indonesian cinema's narrative in this period from social issues to domestic issues (Sen, 1993). However, while depicting domestic issues, these films showed the state's institutions contributing to resolving problems within the domestic domain. In *Ratapan Anak Tiri*, a doctor told Yuwono to not have another child for his wife's safety:

*Tuan Yuwono, semua sudah selesai dengan selamat. Tapi ada pesan saya yang harus tuan jalankan beserta istri tuan. Tuan Yowono, tuan dengar apa yang saya katakan?*

*Iya dokter. Eh, apa dokter?*

*Untuk keselamatan nyonya dan kebahagiaan tuan, terutama anak nyonya yang baru saja nyonya lahirkan, saya minta pada nyonya dan tuan, dengar baik-baik serta lakukan nasihat dokter. Nyonya masih ingat betapa gawat tadi? Ini adalah terakhir kali buat nyonya untuk melahirkan. Ingat dan jangan sekali sekali membantah atau melanggarnya. Nanti saya buat surat pengantar tuan untuk ke urusan keluarga berencana. Mintalah petunjuk-petunjuk pada mereka. (Hasan, 1973, 00:35:89)*

[Mr Yuwono ... I have a message for you which has to do with your wife. Are you listening to me?]

[Yes doctor. Eh, what is it about?]

[For your wife's safety, and your happiness, and especially for the baby that your wife has delivered, I ask you. Please listen carefully and follow my advice. Do you remember how critical Mrs Yuwono was? This has to be the last time you make your wife pregnant. Remember this, and don't argue with me or ignore my warning. I will write an introduction letter for you to take to the family planning program. Ask their advice there.]

The state, personified in the figure of the doctor, strongly warned and instructed, rather than advised, Yuwono to follow a family planning program. This strict welfare state was also present in the figures of a police chief and a teacher, respectively, in *Ratapan Anak Tiri* (Hasan, 1973) and *Ratapan Anak Tiri 2* (Hasan, 1980). While Yuwono as in jail, his daughters wanted to stay with him there. The police chief offered for the girls to stay at his home with his family. The police officer was depicted in a positive light when he released Yuwono so he could find his daughters. A teacher stood out as the children's saviour when he informed Yuwono that his daughter had been abused by her stepmother. In the end, this teacher figure also became the foster parent for Yuwono's daughter after Yuwono and his wife died. The doctor in *Ratapan Anak Tiri* emphasized an important public message: to join the national family planning program. (Hasan, 1973)

These officials represented the state's involvement in domestic issues. After taking over from Soekarno's regime, Soeharto's New Order focused on developing economic and political stability until the early 1970s. According to Terrence Hull (2007), in order to support the regime's concern with economic growth and political stability, national family planning became one of the priority programs. Family planning was strongly endorsed by several parties, including "U.S.-trained planning officials (technocrats), Ford Foundation advisers, Indonesian Planned Parenthood Association leaders, doctors, and members of World Bank missions" (p. 237). Family planning programs thus were prioritised and disseminated nationwide, and were used as compulsory programs for Indonesian families (Jones & Hull, 1997). The family planning program designated children as a family asset that should be preserved and controlled. Therefore, not participating in this program was like going against the national development program, for which there would be consequences.

Meanwhile, after the political and social instability of the 1950s and 1960s that involved armed conflict between many factions including the army and police, Soeharto took full control of all the armed forces, especially the army, through reorganisation and de-politicisation (Said,

1998). By taking full control of the army, the New Order assured citizens that the army and the police were only working for the state. Thus, this film depicted the police as friendly, positive, and ready to serve their community. As explained by the police chief to Yuwono:

*Bung Yuwono, hukum dan aturan harus saya jalankan, tapi peri kemanusiaan harus saya laksanakan. Terlepas dari persoalan polisi tapi sebagai manusia biasa.* (Hasan, 1973: 01:30:35)

[Mr Yuwono, I have to keep law and order; however, I also have to consider humanity. Despite being with the police, I am a human being.]

Similarly, the figure of Roy–Susy and Umi’s teacher in *Ratapan Anak Tiri* [*Lament of step-children*] 2 (Hasan, 1980)—showed how the schooling system was utilised to be both a cradle to enter adult life (Aitken, 2001; Shiraishi, 1997; Wyness, 2006), and a second family for children

The state’s involvement in family affairs can also be seen in *Ratapan si Miskin* [*The Poor’s lament*] (Hasan, 1974). This film follows the melodramatic trend but is slightly different to the *Ratapan Anak Tiri* series. This film is about the lives of Achmad and Komala, who were orphans who lived with their uncle and his wife. The couple demanded the children’s inheritance, and then abused and harassed them. The children ran away from their uncle’s home and were saved by the head of the village, who represented Achmad and Komala in court against their uncle, and then managed their inheritance and took them to the village.

These authority figures—doctor, police, teacher, and head of village—are all civil servants who need to show proper manners and good behavior, be model citizens, and are supported by a harmonious family life (Suryakusuma, 1996). By helping the children in these films, these civil servants showed that the ideal of the nuclear family is significant for the nation state. The family must be saved from instability so it can produce ideal citizens (Hearst, 1997) and so they need to be protected by the state. In this context, the New Order ensured that the family be prioritised as a theme in its official development program. An idealised family culture was constructed through the school system and the media, with the schooling process created by imitating the family environment. The patronage culture represented in the father’s image as the supreme member was applied in the classroom by positioning the teacher as the patron and primary figure, and students as subordinate. Mass media supported this patronage culture as acceptable national identity by disseminating the state’s ideology. The notion of nationhood depicted in the

image of children as citizens, and influenced by dominant ethnic cultures, was deliberately constructed through the New Order's ideology to support the regime's political purposes. Julia Suryakusuma (1996) argued that the New Order politically integrated the family concept into its principle of the nation state, as stated in the Fifth Creed of the Fifth Development Cabinet's goals:

The family household is the smallest unit of a nation [...]  
The [nation] state can only be strong if it is made up of strong families. A just nation can only be achieved through a just arrangement of families. For that reason, building a family implies participation in the building of the foundation of a nation. (p. 97)

These melodrama films embody key perspectives in their narratives. First, these films signify the central position of the traditional nuclear family in society. At the same time, they demonize the figure of the dominant woman who subverts the patriarchal order of the family through the combined image of an evil stepmother and a powerless father. Second, children are depicted as the weakest members of the family and therefore need to be saved. Third, the state is presented as the ultimate saviour of both the family institution and the individual citizen. The melodramatic turn in this period, while providing narratives on domestic household issues, reflected Indonesia's hegemonic political discourse of that time.

## **Conclusion**

The New Order's cultural politics of developing a national identity were applied to Indonesian films made during this period as a form of cinema politics (Hatley, 1994; Lindsay, 1995; Sen, 1994). According to this cinema politics, Indonesian films of the New Order portrayed social transformations but at the same time were utilised to reinforce the state's political and ideological agenda. The New Order conceived of cinema as a medium for ideological propaganda which could and should be controlled in order to maintain political stability. Thus, by restricting film narratives, cultures, and production opportunities, Indonesian filmmakers were expected to produce what the New Order regime considered as proper and positive narratives for Indonesia's program of development as a modern nation-state. As a result, most Indonesian films made during the New Order regime presented depictions of children as part of a discursive strategy to promote national identity within an ideological framework defined by theories of social development and discourses of social and political stability.

The melodrama turn of the Indonesian film industry that featured suffering children among the main characters was the result of a narrative shift initiated to avoid political problems with the regime. The typical narrative of the melodrama genre includes the representation of a family with the father figure as an apex, a demonized woman figure, and helpless children at the bottom of the family structure. Primary child characters are predominantly depicted as weak, dependent, and less imaginative, by utilising an order-disorder-restoration pattern in the films' narrative as a way to show the state's power over its citizens. Melodrama films during the beginning of the regime emphasised this pattern in their narrative by presenting an image of the state's apparatus as a solver of family domestic problems. Classical representations of innocent children were also used to legitimate the regime's praise of Soeharto. These children were modelled as idealised New Order citizens that strictly adhered to order and saw disobedience as a moral problem.

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