DOI:10.21776/ub.icon_laterals.2016.001.1.22

**The Identity Construction of Cosmopolitan Women
in Two Novels of *Supernova* Series Written by Dewi Lestari**

Ida Farida Sachmadi
Faculty of Arts, Universitas Padjadjaran,
Bandung, West Java, Indonesia
e-mail: i.farida@unpad.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how the identity of cosmopolitan women is constructed in two novels of *Supernova* series written by Dewi Lestari. The novels being studied are *Supernova: Ksatria, Putri, dan Bintang Jatuh* and *Supernova: Petir*. I analyse the actions of the female characters by using two out of the five codes offered by Roland Barthes: the proairetic code and the cultural code. The proairetic code allows us to unearth the actions of characters in a novel, meanwhile the cultural code enables us to go beyond the text and confirm or challenge a certain culture or what is regarded as common knowledge. The culture which is highlighted is the one related with women identity in Indonesian family, which explanation refers to two sources about family in Indonesia. Meanwhile, the cosmopolitan issue is taken from Yasraf Amir Piliang's essays about hyperglobalization. This study shows that the two novels try to present the identity construction of cosmopolitan women by challenging the common knowledge of women identity in Indonesia.

KEY WORDS: cosmopolitan women, identity construction, *Supernova*, proairetic code, cultural code

There is a lot of research on *Supernova* series which executed by students both of under and postgraduate program or by lecturers of Literature Study. In this paper, I analyse the characters as well, but more focus on how the female characters construct their identity. The analysis shows that their identity is typical of cosmopolitan society, and from the study of the actions and the views of the female characters, I can say that they try to challenge what Indonesian people think of women in general.

RESEARCH METHOD

To analyse the identity construction on the female characters, I refer to the explanation in *Questioning Identity: Gender, Class, Ethnicity* (2004), edited by Kath Woodward. Meanwhile, to unearth how the novels show this, I apply the way Roland Barthes study the narrative structure of *Sarrasine*, which he wrote in S/Z. Then, I take the explanation of cosmopolitan society from essays written by Yasraf Amir Piliang, especially when he talks about globalization; meanwhile, to identify the characteristic of Indonesian family I will refer to the concept of family according to Indonesia government.

Everybody needs an identity, so people can identify him or her to be someone different from others. Identity is different from personality; we can have similar personality traits without doing it in purpose, but we have to be active to make our identity the same with one particular group we choose. However, not only we make our own identity which is called *agency*, but there is also *structure*, the forces beyond our control that shape our identity (Woodward: 6). Identity can change; we can change our identity as we like, but it must be confirmed by other people around us. Woodward summarize the characteristics of identity:

- 1) It links how I see myself and how others see me.
- 2) It links the individual and the social.
- 3) It is marked by similarity and difference.
- 4) It involves some active engagement on our part and a tension between human agency and social structures.
- 5) There are single and multiple identities.
- 6) Identities can be seen as fixed or fluid and changing. (Woodward: 11-12)

We construct our identity by imagining ourselves to be member of a particular group. Then, we form it by interacting with people and perform our identity to them for example with our appearance, clothes, gestures. We do it intentionally, but sometimes we reveal some information about ourselves unintentionally. The unintentional performances relates to our unconscious mind, which can be explained with the psychoanalysis theory invented by Sigmund Freud. Our childhood experience can give impacts to our identity so we can say that identity is constructed by the past and through the present. Identity is also formed from “a series of conflicts and of different identifications” (Woodward: 17). Our identity is also shaped by organizations of society, such as class, gender, and ethnicity. This can cause tension between the individual and the social and between the agency and the structure of society (Woodward: 22).

The two of *Supernova* series show the identity construction of the characters, but I only focus on the female characters. I find their identity construction by applying Roland Barthes’ theory in analysing the narrative structure of a text. Barthes stated that there are five codes, which he identified in Balzac’s short story, *Sarrasine*. The first is called the proairetic code, which uncover indications of actions; the second is the hermeneutic code, which show enigmas providing narrative suspense; the third is the cultural code, where you can relate to references beyond the text; the fourth is the semic code, in which you link it to theme especially from the analysis of the characters; the fifth is the symbolic code, which consists of contrasts and pairings to find theme (Wolfeys, 1999: 39-40).

The word ‘cosmopolitan’ comes from Greek, consisting of two words: *cosmos*, a universal order, and *polis*, a society’s variabel order (Ribeiro, 19). In the *Merriam Webster’s Learner’s Dictionay*, cosmopolitan means a person who has lived in and

knows many parts of the world. However, through information technology nowadays, we do not have to live in foreign countries to be a cosmopolitan; by accessing internet, we can go through the border of a country and watch her society practicing their culture, economic, politic and other orders.

Piliang wrote his analysis on the 20th century society, one of which is discussing hyperglobalization. The term 'hyper' is adopted from Jean Braudillard, where he argues that discourse of social-culture develops towards *hypermodernity*, the condition when everything grows faster and leads to an extreme point (Piliang, 2011: 175). Piliang says that now globalization moves to the condition where people do something not for their needs anymore but for their prestige, class social, and other symbolic signs in society. This goes faster and faster because of information technology, telecommunication, television, and internet. People of global capitalism are made to compete in their life style so they change it in high velocity (Piliang, 2011: 208).

These two novels from *Supernova* series also present family issues. According to the Indonesian government regulation, the purpose of making a family is to create happiness to members of the family, which means it stands on legal marriage, can meet proper physical and mental needs, obeys God's rules, has good relationship among the members of the family and between the family and people in its neighborhood. It is also stated that there are eight functions of a family; a family must be able to bring up religion, social-culture, love and caring, protection, reproduction, socializing and education, economy, and environmental development (cited from BKKBN 1992 by Herien Puspitawati, 2012: 2).

Friedman (1988 as cited by Ginintasari) states that the structure of family consists of:

- 1) Father, who has roles as a breadwinner, protector, savior, householder, member of his social group and neighborhood.
- 2) Mother, who has roles as a housekeeper, babysitter, member of her social group and neighborhood, and can be a secondary breadwinner.
- 3) Children, who have a role as the ones being grown up in their physic, mental, social and spiritual potency. (Ginintasari, repository upi)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Two main female characters in *Supernova: Ksatria, Putri, dan Bintang Jatuh* have some similarities and differences. The first is Rana, a disconcerted wife and the second is Diva, a top model. Both of them seek for freedom as a woman, a wife, and a child in a different way. By challenging the traditional and modern way of a family in bringing up their children in the early 21st century, they try to build their own identity as a woman in the cosmopolitan world. To show this, I am going to analysis the actions of these female characters and then relate them to Indonesian culture about women and family.

Rana feels restless in her marriage with a good offspring for she feels she gets no freedom from the marriage. She gets married in a young age and she says it is because of their parents' demand.

"[Ferre:] Ada alasan khusus [menikah]?"

"Orang tua. Terutama mertua saya. Daripada membuka kemungkinan berzinah, katanya, lebih baik disuruh nikah cepat-cepat. Toh sudah pada lulus kuliah, sudah bisa kerja." (2001: 31)

She admits that her marriage in a young age is not her and her husband's decision, but their parents'. The reason is the common one among parents in Indonesia: to avoid

adultery, not because of the couple's love as Rana believes. She also only thinks the beauty of a marriage before her wedding.

Rana tak menceritakan bagian di mana ia benar-benar mabuk cinta. Mabuk akan imaji cinta yang terwujud dalam bahtera rumah tangga pasangan muda, rumah milik bersama di real estat baru, kredit mobil ditanggung berdua, mendorong kereta belanja sambil bergandengan tangan di supermarket, berdebat soal deterjen merek apa, mie instan apa, dan sambal botol keluaran pabrik mana. (2001: 31)

Rana is trapped in her belief of the common knowledge in her culture about the meaning of making a family. Making a family means avoiding adultery, besides having a soulmate to do a lot of beautiful things and to release any stressful thinking, as she says: "*Dengan pekerjaan yang rawan stress, masa kamu tidak ingi punya seseorang yang bisa bikin bikin kamu nyaman? Seseorang yang memasakkan kamu makan malam, diajak ke bioskop*" (32).

However, she begins to be restless when she needs something deeper, which is not merely knowledge indoctrinated to her mind, but something she can feel with her heart. She knows that a marriage is a commitment which she must respect in any condition, including when she meets her husband's weakness: "*Rana menghela nafas. 'Banyak sisi yang ikut muncul, sisi yang sebenarnya pasti ada, tapi tidak pernah diharapkan. Nah, di sanalah gunanya komitmen.'*" (32). The sentence '*Rana menghela nafas*' (She sighed) shows that she understands what she is speaking but she cannot admit it. Also when she says: "*'Cinta kan butuh pengorbanan,' tukas Rana pelan.*" (32). The sentence '*tukas Rana pelan*' (She retorted in a low voice) tells us that she is doubtful with her own statement. Moreover, her lover shoots a question which mutes her totally: "*Lalu idiot mana yang menulis: love shall set you free?! Tadinya saya*

pikir, cinta seharusnya adalah tiket menuju kebebasan, bukan pengorbanan. Agaknya konsep itu terlalu utopis, ya?” (33).

Rana knows her identity as a wife, but she is questioning it when she meets Ferre, a new friend falling in love with her, and then realizes that her relationship with her husband is insipid. Before, she only lives as a wife as the common knowledge tells her to be, not because her mind and her heart understands and feels it. Therefore, she thinks that her marriage takes her freedom away: she just acts what her parents and parents-in-law and her tradition teaches her. She feels she is not herself anymore.

Then, she tries to take some actions to find her own identity at present. The first one is she tries to trace back her life; she recalls her memory to see who she is. After graduating from college, she feels free: “*Setelah lima tahun mengonsumsi ilmu teknik industri yang sama sekali tak diinginkannya itu, ia akhirnya terbebas dari utang pada orang tua, ...*” (37). Here she shows that she has an identity as an obedient daughter, but it is formed by her parents; it is not an identity she wants. In her twenty years of age, she marries a man chosen (again) by her parents and people around her:

Ia bertemu Arwin. Pria santun dari keluarga ningrat berusia tujuh tahun lebih tua. Bibit, bobot, bebet—luluhlah hati kedua orang tuanya. ... Bagaimana mungkin tidak alau seuruh umat di sekitarnya memuja-muji setiap saat, berulang-ulang mengatakan betapa beruntungnya Rana dapat pria seperti Arwin. Dan tercucilah otak itu ...” (2001: 37).

She only follows the voice in her surrounding, especially her parents’ will; she obeys them both intentionally and unintentionally. It also happens when she is recalling her teenage life: “*... ada jejak-jejak kesalahan yang tak pernah terungkap: mengapa ia harus ikut begitu banyak les tambahan? ... Mengapa ia harus les menari Bali? Mengapa ia harus ikut klub renang ...*” (38). In a family as a daughter, her life is

controlled by her parents: she never has freedom to choose what is the best for herself. After tracing her past life, she begins to realize what she has lost in her life “*Sekarang ia tahu apa yang sekiranya hilang ...*” (40). She never forms her identity by her will; she never uses her *agency* to make it, she only obeys what the *structure* (her culture) orders her to do.

From the explanation above, I can say that Rana’s childhood has formed her identity, but when she faces a conflict she begins to question her identity and tries to change it. She wants to get her freedom, an idea aroused by her new friend, Ferre, a single, handsome, and rich managing director of a famous company in Jakarta. Ferre has lived abroad since his junior-high age until graduating from college. He is the cosmopolitan man and he brings different mindset to Rana’s beliefs. Rana is aware of that as she once says “*Buat seseorang yang dari SMP sudah pergi sekolah ke San Fransisco, mungkin [tradisi menikah muda] jadi hal baru.*” (31).

Ferre assures Rana that she can fight against her tradition to set her free from all other people’s will. He believes that Rana has a free will to choose to be Arwin’s wife or leave this man and marries with himself: “[Ferre:] ... *saya bisa melihat kamu memilikinya. Kekuatan untuk mendobrak. Membebaskan diri kamu sendiri.*” (85), but Rana knows her limited space: “*Mendobrak apa? Moralitas? Norma sosial? Kita hidup di dalamnya, Re. Saya cuma ingin mencoba realistis ...*” (85). This conflict makes her tired; after making a love affair with Ferre for a long time, she begins to feel uncomfortable. She wants to be free from her husband whom she does not love, but she also feels not free with Ferre for she is afraid of her parents’ and relatives’ blames on her.

Another action Rana takes in finding her own identity is talking to her mother. She tries to find confirmation of her feeling towards her husband. She begins with a

question “*Aku cuma mau tanya ... selama Ibu menikah dengan Bapak, pernahkah sekali saja Ibu merasa jenuh, atau seperti ada yang salah, seperti ada yang kurang ...*” (128). Her mother, however, cannot understand her because mothers act in accordance with what their tradition tells them to do: “*Apanya yang kurang dengan Arwin? Baik, tanggung jawab, saleh, pekerjaannya bagus, dari keluarga baik-baik ...*” (129). She never asks her daughter what Rana thinks and feels towards her son-in-law. She does not give her daughter a freedom to speak and act by her own will.

From her conversation with her mother, she finally finds what is wrong with her, a woman and a wife:

Itu dia! Rana berseru dalam hati. Ke arah sanalah dirinya dibawa bermutasi. Dan selama ini ia melihat mutan-mutan yang kebanyakan sudah tidak bisa lagi mewakili dirinya sendiri. Wanita di hadapannya bukan lagi Raden Ajeng Widya Purwaningrum Sastrodhinoto. Entah siapa dia. Yang ia tahu wanita itu adalah seorang istri. Seorang Nyonya anu. Seorang ibu dari anak yang bernama A, B, C. (2001: 130)

Rana thinks that a woman will get a new identity when she gets married and lost her own identity as a woman. She does not want it: “*Akan ada saatnya diriku lebur dalam identitas baru. ... Rana mana yang sebenarnya kuinginkan terus hidup? Masih belum terlambatkah?*” (130). By presenting this female character’s conflict in finding her identity and supported with the male character’s awareness of a true relationship, this novel is questioning the substance of marriage institution:

Lalu cinta seperti apa yang orang-orang itu miliki? Yang konon menjadi dasar sebuah komitmen institusi mahamegah bernama Pernikahan? Mengapa mereka begitu bernafsu menguasai satu sama lain, seperti sekumpulan tunawisma berebutan lahan dan dengan membabi-buta berlomba untuk

menancapkan plang tanda hak miliknya asing-masing? Bisakah cinta yang sedemikian agung hidup terkapling-kapling? Berarti apa artinya semua itu?...
(2001: 132)

This plot ends with a happy-ending event. Rana turns back to her husband since she realizes that she finds freedom in his love. Arwin loves her sincerely and ready to do anything to make her happy although he has to give her up to Ferre. He applies what Rana's mother advice her: "*Akan ada satu masa ketika kebahagiaanmu pribadi tidak lagi berarti banyak.*" (130). Rana feels that loving her own husband is much safer and more comfortable than making a love affair. She has tried to challenge her tradition, but she has to admit that the tradition, as a matter of fact, makes her happy. She takes back her identity as a wife, but with a new concept: that love of a married couple set themselves free.

The second female character is Diva, a super model and also an expensive whore. She only will make love with a man paying \$5000 for it. She takes this action because she has some ideas about freedom as a woman and a child in a family. She has a particular reason for being a whore: "..., *kita sama-sama berdagang. Komoditasnya saja beda. Apa yang kamu perdagangkan buat saya tidak seharusnya dijual. Pikiran saya harus dibuat merdeka. Toh, berdagang pun saya tidak sembarang ...*" (2001: 57). She argues that she is only a merchant by selling her body to be used by any man, but nobody can buy her mind. By having no boyfriend or husband, she thinks she has her freedom: "..., *saya tetap tidak terikat atau tergantung pada siapapun. Tidak ada yang menghidupi saya, saya bukan peliharaan orang, dan bukan peliharaan perusahaan. Saya enterpreneur murni.*" (100). She does not want to get married or to be loyal to one man only because it makes her think she is '*peliharaan orang*'. She wants to be free as a woman: does whatever she likes. This condition is

the opposite of Rana's, whom unintentionally obeys her parents and people in her surrounding.

Diva also does another action to show her idea of freedom. She protests towards the way modern mothers of metropolitan bring up their children, since these mothers dictate their own will to their children. In a children fashion show, she speaks her dislike of what these mothers do to their children: make them *little* adults. These young children wear clothes which she thinks are not suitable for them: "*Diva meamandangi kaki-kaki kecil mereka. Rata-rata memakai sepatu boots hak tinggi, rok supermini, tank top, dan jaket bermotif kulit binatang. Bahkan sekecil mereka sudah berdandan seperti tukang jagal.*" (59). These mothers also have taught their children to walk on the catwalk like flirty women. Diva is angry to them for she believes that children must have played toys or child games in their freewill, not forced to be artificial adults.

When the time to call the winners comes, she gets onto the catwalk and advices all children there by saying:

"Nanti kalau sudah sampai di rumah, adik-adik jangan lupa untuk terus bermain, ya. Nggak usah pakai sepatu tinggi, apalagi pakai-pakai lipstik mama. Percaya sama Kakak, nanti kalian juga bakalan bosan jadi orang gede. Bermain saja yang puas. Kalau adik-adik mau cantik, jangan tunggu dikasihtahu orang. Kakak unya mantra ajaib. Begini caranya, adik-adik pergi ke cermin, dan bilang begini: Saya cantik—saya cantik—saya cantik', begitu. Kakak jamin, kalian semua pasti akan cantik-cantik.sampai kapanpun. Selama-lamanya. Amin! Ngerti semuanyaaa?" (2001: 61)

She teaches freedom both to the children and their mothers: children have their own life, do not force them to obey what the mothers want them to be. It is the same as what Rana frantically tries to find: her own identity as a child.

From her actions, Diva builds her identity as a free woman in a cosmopolitan world. Almost in the end of the novel, she is discovered to be *Supernova*, a consultant in virtual world teaching people about how to solve problems in their life. She falls in love with Ferre, and vice versa, but to keep holding her idea about freedom, she chooses to leave him and her house and her country. She travels around the world, and this action shows her identity as a free woman in the cosmopolitan world.

In the next novel *Petir*, there are also two main female characters: Watti and Electra Wijaya. Watti, the older sister, marries a moslem and moves to Papua from Bandung. Electra stays in Bandung and tries to find a ojob for herself. She is the narrator, and through the analysis of her acctions, I can show how this character builds her own identity as a cosmopolitan woman.

Different from the previous novel, *Petir* does not give many preaches. This novel tells a story without comments or explanantion about a certain topic. The novel is more like a comedy for the events narrated by the main characters are humorous. Nevertheless, from what the female character's actions, I try to uncover an idea hidden in the story.

After their father passed away and Watti stays in Tembagapura, Electra lives alone in her large house she inherits from her father. She enjoys being alone and always feels disturbed if her elder sister called by phone from Papua. When Watti tries to persuade her to marry one of her friends or to move with her to Tembagapura, Electra always tries to give any reason to refuse all her sister's offers. She does not feel lonely, she loves being free from her sister and all her relatives. Without too many friends, the

main female character shows that being alone for a woman is alright. She constructs her own identity to be a free woman, not depend on anybody: sister, friend, or husband-to-be.

She always refuses any effort of her sister to help her. Watti openly is willing to help her by sending her money: "*Watti sudah berkali-kali memancing-mancing: Tra, kamu kalau butuh uang ngomong! Aku bisa kasih, kok. Cukup untuk biaya kamu sehari-hari,*" but Etra is far from doubtful to refuse it: "*Tegas-tegas aku menolak: Ngga usah, Watt. Saya bisa cari duit sendiri. Makasih.*" (46). Once Watti asks her to meet Napoleon, a rich friend of hers, Electra gives many reasons to reject the offer (2010: 68-71). She tries hard to find her own job, not depend on other people, although she has got to go through some silly ways. She thinks being a housewife will take away her freedom: "*Kepalaku panas. Bukan! Bukan saleh! Dia kaya! Kang Atam [Watti's husbnad] itu orang kaya dan punya kerjaan tetap, dan kalian semua membosankan! Mau-maunya dikurung di sangkar emas padahal diperah kayak sapi! ...*" (2011: 46). Explicitly, she says she does not want to put in a cage, a place you cannot go freely. She refuses totally when her sister advises her to find a rich boyfriend and then live with his support: "*Sudah, deh, Tra. Cari pacar yang oke yang baik, yang bisa menghidupi kamu. Beres. ...*" (47). In Indonesian culture, a wife does not have to go to work because it is the obligation of a husband, but Electra, being a modern woman, prefers finding a job for herself and earns her own money.

There are several issues the narrator wants to convey about the idea of living in a cosmopolitan world. First is about capitalism. Several people come to rent Etra's big house. The first is a woman, ibu Siska, who wants to open a baby shop because she thinks that is a big business. Etra does not like it because for her it is unfair to exploit mothers:

“Konsumen yang paling enak buat diporotin itu ibu-ibu hamil, belum lagi kalau belanja sama mami atau mertuanya, wah bisa segala dibeli. Matanya [Ibu Siska]mengerjap-ngrejap (uang-uang-uang!)”

Aku diam dan membayangkan. Entah kenapa, aku tidak suka idenya. Aku belum pernah jadi seorang ibu, tapi tidak adil rasanya menyerang titik lemah naluri keibuan yang bertetangga akrab dengan naluri pemborosan. Bukankah anaknya lebih butuh ASI? Ibu Siska tidak pernah kuhubungi lagi.
(2010: 43)

Here, the novel is criticizing capitalism, in which the doers make use of other people in a low capital to give the highest benefit for them. The second coming to Etra's house is a Pak Hedrawan with his boss. They want to make the house as the office of MLM (multi level marketing), but Etra refuses it all at once. She does not like this kind of marketing because she will do nothing but from her *downline*, she will get much money. She calls the money 'Gaji Buta', because she get it without working.

Her ex-servant also turns to this kind of business: MLM. However, this kind of person has been influenced by global capitalism, where—as Piliang says—they do not buy things for their needs but for their prestige or status. Yayah, the ex-servant, and her friend buys things they do not exactly need: TV 14 inch and VCD player, wigs, cigarette, etc. (58).

With various efforts, Electra eventually can find a suitable job for herself. She opens a computer rental in her large house. Together with an experienced computer rental businessman, she gains success in her own hard work. She invest her house to the business, then she can sit without doing nothing important she gets much money. It is interesting to notice that the business is related with connecting people to others

in different countries: cosmopolitan world. Electra provides facilities for other people to become cosmopolitan citizens.

CONCLUSION

The main characters in these two novels pursue freedom as a woman in different ways. They built their identity as a free woman. They do not want to be a wife or a 'mere' wife; they try to be an independent woman. This identity is not common in Indonesian traditional culture, where a wife should stay at home, brings up her children, and earns money as a secondary breadwinner. All female characters in these novels have no children, and they earn money as ambitious as the male characters. In conclusion, these novels are offering this kind of identity of a cosmopolitan woman.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books:

- Barry, Peter. 2002. *Beginning Theory*. Manchester: University Press. Pdf.
Lestari, Dewi. 2001. *Supernova: Ksatria, Puteri, dan Bintang Jatuh*. Bandung: Truedee Books.
_____. 2010. *Petir*. Bandung: Truedee Books.
Piliang, Yasraf Amir. 2011. *Dunia yang Dilipat*. Bandung: Matahari.

References from website:

- <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cosmopolitan>
http://file.upi.edu/Direktori/FIP/JUR._PSIKOLOGI/195009011981032-RAHAYU_GININTASASI/MAKALAH_KELUARGA.pdf
http://www.selfieresearchers.com/wpcontent/uploads/2014/09/woodward_questioning_p6to40.pdf (24/08/2016, 04:00)
http://www.vibrant.org.br/downloads/v2n1_wc.pdf cosmopolitan definition. (24/08/2016, 04:42)
<http://www.argyo.staff.uns.ac.id/files/2010/08/sistem-sosial-budaya-indonesiai.pdf> (24/08/2016, 6.20)
<http://ikk.fema.ipb.ac.id/v2/images/karyailmiah/teori.pdf> (nama file: teori keluarga. Akses 6.11)