Abstract

The argument in this article stems from A. Samad Said's statement that his first novel, Salina, revolves around every character in the novel, as opposed to being focused on the character Siti Salina alone. His statement is contentious, because it visibly contradicts the conclusions made in numerous articles and studies on Salina. Generally, these articles and studies find Salina's plot to centre on the protagonist Siti Salina, a 'noble prostitute' who lives in Singapore during World War Two. Because of this focus, the presence of Siti Salina is the cause of a lingering controversy. To frame this dispute, this article analyses the narrative devices in Salina, to identify the focus of the story, so as to confirm Samad's statement above. These include the characters and their characteristics, the geographical and chronological backdrop, plot (especially with regard to cause and effect), as well as the scenes and their description, including the manipulation of language. The analysis identifies two narrative strategies manipulated together in Salina, that simultaneously highlight her nobility and downplay her transgressions; both of which focus the story on the noble prostitute. This finding in itself negates the validity of A. Samad Said's statement above, and conversely reaffirms the findings previous articles and studies.

Introduction

A Samad Said's (henceforth Samad) maiden novel Salina was specifically written for submission to the 1958 Novel Writing Competition
(Pertandingan Menulis Novel) organised by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP). In the competition, Salina (originally titled Gerhana I dan II) was only awarded a consolation prize, with the author only winning a Parker pen.\(^1\) Besides being excluded from the major honours, the panel of judges also decided against its publication, based on reasons that will be explored below. And interestingly, despite this exclusion, Salina has travelled a much longer ‘literary journey’ than any of the other competition entrants, including the novel that came in first,\(^2\) with ‘literary journey’ referring to the critical reception which the novel received, and continues to receive, as well as marking the start of Samad’s prestigious literary career.\(^3\)

This literary journey also demonstrates how Salina has encountered many obstacles over the last 40 years or so since its publication.\(^4\) Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir (henceforth Ungku Maimunah) describes this journey as being fraught with “ranjau” (spikes) and “onak” (thorns), due to the evolving literary conventions of Malay literature,\(^5\) referring to the variety of frameworks that have been used to analyse the novel. It is abundantly clear from Ungku Maimunah’s observation that the controversy surrounding Salina centred on the moral of its protagonist, Siti Salina. It must be explained that Siti Salina is presented in the novel as a female prostitute who lives in post-World War II Singapore.

1. The judges of the contest decided that none of the novels deserved to win first prize. Coming in at second place was Hassan Ali’s Musafir, which won the silver medal and a cash prize of RM1000. Other novels that won consolation prizes include Bukan Salah Ibu Mengandung by Yahya Abu Samah, Seperti Laut Berombak by Saleh Daud, Berlindung Di Balik Pelarian by Abdul Aziz Alias, Tak Ada Jalan Keluar by Suratman Markasan, Sumpah Si Pingkar by Mat Yusof Jantant, Perjuanganku-Amiruddin by Zakaria Saleh, and Anak Petani Lembah Kinta by Abdullah Haji Abdul Rahman. See Dewan Bahasa, January 1959, p. 618.


3. Salina paved the way for A. Samad Said to receive several prestigious local and international literary awards, such as the ‘Pejuang Sastera’ award in 1976, the Southeast Asian Write Award in 1979, and the honour of ‘Sasterawan Negara’ (National Laureate) in 1985.


By employing the strife-laden post-war period as the backdrop of the narrative, the protagonist’s involvement in prostitution is rationalized somewhat, because it is catalyzed by pressures brought about by the war, which do not leave her with much choice in determining her own fate, as opposed to her involvement in the trade being the result of her own conscious desires. Thus, Siti Salina’s forced entry into prostitution enables the novel to present her as a noble figure who extends her charity onto others – a value of ‘goodness’ that are inherently opposed to the typical stigma that usually accompanies the profession. It was this highly contentious moral of the protagonist that led the majority of the judges in the 1958 competition to reject the work for first prize, and subsequently publication. There were, in fact, judges on the panel who argued that *Salina* was unfit even for a consolation prize because of this moral, as a member of the panel, A. Samad Ahmad, states:

... it was *Gerhana* [*Salina*] that took up most of the panel’s time ... many of them focused only on the parts they deemed lewd and improper. There were members who wanted the novel rejected outright from the list of prize-winning novels. Their argument was that the storyline *appeared to be sympathetic towards prostitutes*; in addition, there were sections of the novel that contained words which conveyed strong pornographic connotations. [They claimed] it was extremely unsuitable, and would likely corrupt the young readers. [My translation and emphasis added]

[... novel Gerhanalah yang banyak mengambil masa perbincangan... ramai dari anggota pengadil, semata-mata memandang kepada tempat-tempat yang dianggap mereka buruk dan cemar sahaja. Hingga ada di antara mereka yang mahukan supaya novel Gerhana itu, ditolak sama sekali dari senarai novel-novel yang menang. Hujah yang dikemukakan ialah kerana aliran ceritanya seolah-olah membela pelacur; tambahan pula, terdapat dalam beberapa bahagian novel itu, kata-kata yang mirip kepada pengertian lucah. Tidak sesuai sama sekali, bahkan akan merosakkan pemuda-pemudi kita membacanya.]

The above quotation makes it clear that the most important issue that the judges focused on was the portrayal of protagonist, in A. Samad Ahmad’s own words: “seolah-olah membela pelacur” (appeared to be sympathetic towards prostitutes). This moral dubiety presented through the character of Siti Salina is what has elicited the attention of a number

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6 A. Samad Ahmad, 1981, pp. 296–299.
of critics, such as Ali Haji Ahmad (1962), Kassim Ahmad (1979), Shahnon Ahmad (1979) and Mohd. Affandi Hassan (1999)\textsuperscript{7}, who generally find it to be opposed to an Islamic morality. In relation to this bifurcation of values, Shahnon Ahmad (henceforth Shahnon) finds that:

\ldots the author, A. Samad Said [in Salina], does not approach the story in terms of denouncing what is false, affirming what is true, correcting what deviates, or punishing what is wicked \ldots this is why only a superficially pure internal/external energy is created to amend the life journey of [Siti] Salina. [My translation]

[\ldots pengarang A. Samad Said tidak memecahkan persoalan dari sudut menyalahkan yang salah atau membenarkan yang benar atau meluruskan yang terpesong atau menghukum yang salah \ldots kerana itulah tenaga luar/dalam yang suci dan agung untuk membetulkan perjalan hidup Salina yang tidak sungguh-sungguh diwujudkan.]

A stern tone is taken by Mohd. Affandi Hassan, who finds Salina to be a clear manifestation of the 'false values' (his own term: "nilai-nilai palsu") which he assumes to be a recurring phenomenon in modern Malay literature. As he states:

It is based on these false values that literary works are accorded as venerable status. We see, for instance, Salina receiving high praise after being recognized by a Dutch scholar [A. Teeuw], while Musafir is sidelined and not discussed any longer. The main character of the former, a prostitute, becomes a model of a Malay woman who is loyal to her lover, who is willing to be sold into prostitution and abused by an immoral man... They say that what is depicted in the novel are matters pertaining to the cruelty of war, and the resulting poverty and human suffering. Because of that, they say, whatever form of "evil," if present, is only an honest depiction of what actually occurred in Malay society at the time. In actuality, it is this [form of depiction] which underscores the values in 'new [modern] Malay literature', where 'evil,' until today, is made into a central theme of important works by the local literati. [My translation]


\textsuperscript{8} Shahnon Ahmad, 1982, p. 131.

It is clear from the above views that the controversy accompanying Salina for its almost five decade-long literary journey is generally centred on the protagonist, Siti Salina.

In an effort to dispel criticism of his novel, it is interesting to note that Samad repeatedly made statements (most recently in 2005) that Salina’s narrative is not solely focused on its title protagonist, but rather the collective lives of the denizens of ‘Kampung Kambing’ (Goat Village), the village or locale that is the setting for Salina. No less interesting is Samad’s inclination to blame the title change of his novel, from Gerhana to Salina,10 to be the root cause of the negative criticisms directed towards the novel. As he states:

My stand is clear that [the novel is] centred on (or is dependant upon) all of the characters in the novel, and not only to Siti Salina who is believed to be the main character ... I have always believed that Salina is a story of a group of people in a village (given the original title, Gerhana), and not only its ‘Siti Salina’. I believe that the novel seems to be punished because of its title ... My argument is that attention is often paid to the character of Siti Salina, solely because the name of the prostitute stuck as the title of the novel (and not even the original title). Because Siti Salina is what stands out (as the title of the novel), people tend to assume or believe that the story is only that of Siti Salina’s impetuousness. They do not consider that ... I actually present a group of individuals, and the strife of a community

10 The change of the novel’s title from Gerhana I dan II to Salina was one of the revisions made by the editor, Keris Mas, and the author, A. Samad Said, to amend the contentious moral of the story. See Keris Mas, 1979, pp. 190–194.
beset by suffering, who cannot afford to stop and think outside of this suffering. *Thus, if the novel is to be judged or valued, it would also be wise to explore the interrelation of the individuals in that group.* [My translation, emphasis added]

[... pendirian saya masih tetap kukuh [novel ini] seputar (atau bergantung pada) keseluruhan watak dalam novel tersebut, dan bukannya hanya kepada watak Siti Salina yang dipercayai sebagai karakter utamanya ... Saya sentiasa percaya bahawa Salina adalah kisah kelompok manusia sebuah kampung (asal judul novelnya Gerhana), dan bukan 'Siti Salina'nya seorang. Saya, malah berhujah bahawa novel itu tampaknya telah terhukum oleh judulnya ... Hujah saya, perhatian sangat menjurus kepada watak Salina semata-mata kerana nama pelacur itu terlekat sebagai judul novel (dan ini pun bukan judul asal novel tersebut). Kerana Siti Salina yang terjerit (melalui judul novel), maka orang menyangka atau percaya bahawa kisah itu seolah-olah hanya kisah Siti Salina melulu. Mereka tidak terfikir bahawa ... saya sebenarnya lebih menceritakan tentang kelompok individu, kesa terhadap rakyat terdera yang tidak sempat atau tidak mampu berfikir di luar daripada kesengsaraan semasanya. Maka, jika diadili atau dinilai sangat wajar interelasi individu di dalam kelompok itu turut diperiksa dan dinilai.]

The following analysis will be based on Samad’s own statements, such as in the excerpt above, on the positioning of the protagonist, ‘Siti Salina’, whom he claims is not the focus of *Salina* (Samad’s words: “… [novel ini] seputar (atau bergantung pada) keseluruhan watak dalam novel tersebut, dan bukannya hanya kepada watak Salina yang dipercayai sebagai karakter utamanya” [the novel is] centred on (or is dependant upon) all of the characters in the novel, and not only to Salina who is believed to be the main character). The discussion will, therefore, analyse the manipulation of narrative devices, especially that of character and characterisation, to frame the question of the role and position of ‘Siti Salina’ in light of the narrative construction as a whole. The analysis will take into account Samad’s own call for a critical judgement of the roles of the other characters in *Salina*, as well as the relationships that bind them together (or in Samad’s words: “Maka, jika diadili atau dinilai sangat wajar interelasi individu di dalam kelompok itu turut diperiksa dan dinilai” [Thus, if the novel is to be judged or valued,

it would also be wise to explore the interrelation of the individuals in that group]. To achieve this, the role and positioning for each of the other characters (besides Siti Salina) will be explored, so as to gauge the validity of Samad’s claims that the story in *Salina* does not revolve around its protagonist.

The Narrative Conception of *Salina*

Before Samad’s claims can be explored, it is important for the discussion to delve into the early moments of the novel’s conception, based on the statements and records of the author himself. Besides Samad’s determination to participate in the novel-writing competition, the idea to write *Salina* stemmed from his desire to tell the life story of a prostitute, as he states:

I always discussed this novel [Salina] at length with A.S. Amin while we were having coffee at Owen Road, right in front of a ‘popular’ hotel [brothel]. I pointed out to a ‘popular’ woman [prostitute] to him, and told him: *that was the kind of person I intend to write about*. [My translation, emphasis added]

[Saya selalu berbincang lanjut tentang novel ini dengan A.S. Amin ketika kami minum kopi sarbat di Owen Road, betul-betul di hadapan sebuah hotel yang ‘liris’ [hotel pelacuran]. Saya tunjukkan seorang wanita yang ‘liris’ [pelacur], dan memberitahu A.S. Amin: *itulah jenis manusia yang ingin aku rakamkan.*]12

Samad’s statement in the above quotation shows that it was the ‘world of prostitution’ that triggered his interest to write *Salina*. It reveals Samad’s conscious choice of a prostitute as the protagonist of his planned novel, as is clear in his statement that a prostitute … “*that was the kind of person I intend to write about*” (*itulah jenis manusia yang ingin aku rakamkan*). He also details this inspiration in another statement: “… a woman who is *forced* to sell her honour due to unknown reasons.” [My translation, emphasis added] [Seorang yang *terpaksa* menjual maruahnya kerana sesuatu desakan yang tidak akan kita tahu.]13 From his own statements it is clear that Samad had identified the type of character he wanted to portray, specifically a ‘naive’ female prostitute, in the sense that she gets herself into the trade not of her own accord, but by “force”.

13 Ibid.
Samad also claims that: “It is not easy to record the love affairs of a noble prostitute living in the midst of pressures brought about by the war.” [My translation, emphasis added] [Tidak mudah untuk menurunkan seluruh liku kisah cinta seorang pelacur berhati baik ditengah-tengah desakan akibat perang.]\(^\text{14}\) This description of the creative process clearly shows what leads to the protagonist’s seemingly inevitable entry into prostitution is the war, due to its inexorable linkage with strife. This, then, would explain the positioning of the novel’s protagonist as a ‘noble prostitute’ (pelacur berhati baik), who is coerced into prostitution by the suffering precipitated by the war, and not as a result of her own volition.

Taking only Samad’s statement that a prostitute “was the kind of person [he] intend[ed] to write about” (itulah jenis manusia yang ingin aku rakamkan) into account, it is abundantly clear that Samad actually contradicts himself and invalidates his own later statements negating the centrality of the role the prostitute, Siti Salina, plays in the novel. Nevertheless, to retain academic objectivity, and to maintain a sense of fairness to the author, the discussion will, as far as it is possible, explore his statements in greater detail, by way of thoroughly examining the creative impetus behind Samad’s wish to narrate the life story of a ‘noble prostitute’ (pelacur berhati baik). With reference to the phrase ‘noble prostitute’, it is clear that the novel takes the stand that not all prostitutes are bad, and there are those among them who are good-hearted. It is also important to understand that the phrase is indeed contradictory, because the protagonist’s occupation (pelacur) is typically held to be a dishonourable and shameful one, as well as being contradictory to the values inherent in any definition of ‘noble’ (berhati baik). It is this contradiction of values that is the source of dispute on the moral of Salina, as I have described above. The rationalisation of the conflicting values (good and evil) that inhere in the phrase ‘noble prostitute’ (pelacur berhati baik) does indeed present a challenging task; in other words, the novel must present the tale of the ‘noble prostitute’ realistically and convincingly. The analysis thus identifies two important strategies that are manipulated to affect this rationalisation by way of foregrounding the idea of ‘noble prostitute’ that is by highlighting the protagonist’s nobility, and downplaying her transgressions, with both strategies working complementarily. The analysis also finds that the manipulation of both strategies also involve a large number of narrative devices, such as character, conflict, events, antecedents, story context, portrayal technique, and linguistic aspects, all of which are appropriated to reinforce the idea of ‘noble prostitute’. Thus, the following analysis will focus on the application of both storytelling strategies, and how

\(^{14}\) Ibid. p. 54.
they are executed through the manipulation of the narrative devices listed above.¹⁵

1) Strategy of Highlighting the Protagonist’s Nobility

Based on the above understanding, the discussion will now detail the strategies applied to highlight the protagonist’s nobility. The application of this storytelling strategy, as stated earlier, involves a number of narrative devices, especially that of character. The analysis finds that in line with the idea of the ‘noble prostitute’, the manipulation of the character device in the novel takes two things into account: the standing of the protagonist as a prostitute, and the instances of her nobility. Early in the novel it is determined that the protagonist, Siti Salina, works as a prostitute. The novel then brings this protagonist to life with ‘noble’ character traits, such as being generous, loving, sincere and all too willing to make sacrifices, accentuated by the placement of the protagonist alongside other characters who are in need of help, love and charity. Characters, such as Hilmy, Katijah, Mansur and Nahidah, are rendered in the narrative as being mired in misery, making Siti Salina’s generosity, love and willingness to sacrifice all the more relevant to the story, because it purposefully foregrounds her nobility, such as in the instances of Siti Salina lending financial assistance to these helpless characters to ease their financial burdens.

The strategy of highlighting Siti Salina’s nobility is also employed when she is juxtaposed alongside characters who serve as foils to her character because they possess contrasting traits. This is most evident when the characters Fakar and Zarina are endowed with bad characteristics, such as being lazy, exploitative, and inhumane. Fakar, Siti Salina’s lover, is indolent and lives off her ill-gotten earnings from prostitution, physically abuses her, and betrays her trust by cheating on her with other women. With such character traits, the novel easily foregrounds the nobility of the protagonist, especially when Siti Salina is shown as willing to pay Fakar’s keep, despite his mistreatment of her. It is important to understand that although both characters are presented in

¹⁵ A few ideas in this article were previously formulated in my doctoral thesis entitled “Seksualiti dalam Novel Melayu: Satu Analisis Teks Berdasarkan Persuratan Baru” (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2004). Those ideas formed the basis of several arguments in the Malay version of my article entitled “Antara Taklif dan Paksi Naratif: Satu Analisis Terhadap Novel Salina Karya A. Samad Said Berdasarkan Persuratan Baru” (in Pangsura 12, 2006, pp.197–226). As opposed to the Malay version of the article, however, which critically analyses the moral of the story in Salina based on an Islamic framework, the arguments in this article concern the manipulation of the characters in the context of their relationship with the protagonist in the narrative.
the narrative as lovers, their relationship is essentially more akin to that of 'nemeses', and as such, they exhibit opposing intrinsic characteristics – Fakar is coarse and abusive, while Siti Salina is gracious and kind. The opposition of traits that is borne from this conflict between good and bad characters only serves to enhance the intrinsic characteristics of either, especially that of Siti Salina's. This opposition is augmented by the introduction of Zarina, who is not unlike Fakar in character, in that she lives off the earnings of Sunarto and her two stepchildren, and treats them cruelly. The novel's establishment of Zarina as an evil character is most apparent in the zeal with which she pushes Nahidah to work as a waitress in the seedy local restaurant (it is important to note that at the time, restaurants were infamous for being exploitative towards women). In the context of her conflict with Siti Salina, her evil only serves to augment the latter's compassion and humanity, such as in the incident where Siti Salina stands up for Zarina's two stepchildren, or when Zarina tries to entice Fakar away from Siti Salina. It is interesting to note how the context of the clashes between Siti Salina and both her 'nemeses', Fakar and Zarina, reinforces two aspects simultaneously: i) the nobility of the protagonist, and ii) the corruptness of both Fakar and Zarina. It needs to be stated that the first aspect is emphasised further by the application of the second storytelling strategy, which will be addressed later.

The strategy of highlighting Siti Salina's nobility is also employed by the placement of Siti Salina alongside characters such as Kurupaya, Haji Karman and Razman. Unlike the relationship dynamics between Fakar/Zarina and Siti Salina, these three characters function to highlight the protagonist's nobility by way of comparison, and not direct confrontation. This is evident, for instance, when Razman's solitary nature is contrasted with Siti Salina's gregariousness. The difference in traits is more apparent in the context of the comparison between Kurupaya and Siti Salina: differing from Siti Salina's humanity which is manifest in her aid of Hilmy, Katijah, Nahidah, Mansur, and even Fakar and Zarina, Kurupaya is portrayed as an opportunist, who is all too willing to exploit the misfortunes of others. Clearly, the effect produced from this purposeful contrasting of traits is the moral superiority of the protagonist, who is selfless and sensitive to the welfare of her neighbours. Furthermore, Siti Salina's saintly image is made even more apparent with the introduction of Haji Karman, a religious teacher and fellow resident of Kampung Kambing. What sets Haji Karman and Siti Salina apart is in the way either character extends help to those in need. While Haji Karman is seen to berate and lecture people on their failings, Siti Salina offers financial assistance, seemingly a more tangible and practical method of solving her neighbours' problems. Suffice to say at
this stage that the character of Haji Karman is an invaluable tool in the strategy of portraying Siti Salina as a noble protagonist.

The analysis also finds the above strategy is also employed in another form of character device manipulation, that is by parallelising Siti Salina and another good character, Sunarto. In the novel, Sunarto is introduced as an ex-labourer from Java who lives on the streets in Singapore, before being taken in by Nahidah and Mansur. This parallelisation is clear, for instance, in their respective back-stories that are characterised by solitude, abuse at the hands of bad characters (Fakar and Zarina), and generosity in paying the keep of their abusers. The only visible difference between Siti Salina and Sunarto is the morality of their professions – while Siti Salina’s prostitution is commonly seen as an immoral, Sunarto’s rickshaw-pulling is an honest profession looked upon with honour. Nevertheless, the moral line that separates either occupation is somewhat blurred in the application of the second storytelling strategy, which will be discussed below. However, what remains significant about this blurring is that it is carried out through the diversion of the story’s focus: the particulars of Sunarto’s job as a rickshaw-puller are detailed clearly, but where Siti Salina’s prostitution is concerned, the details are purposefully vague. It is important to state that the moral obfuscation of Siti Salina’s and Sunarto’s respective occupations, does not disrupt, but instead strengthens the notion that both characters are similar, in the sense that they are essentially good characters who have been hard done by. In this way, the nobility of the protagonist is reinforced, enabling the novel to be manipulated to draw the reader’s sympathy. On this note, the discussion will turn to the second strategy, that is the downplay of the protagonist’s evils.

2) Strategy of Downplaying the Protagonist’s Transgressions

As explained above, this strategy of downplaying the protagonist’s transgressions complements the previous strategy, to foreground the narrative of the ‘noble prostitute’. It is important to first establish the meaning of ‘transgression’ in this sense. Based on the Islamic framework (that applied by Malay literary critics such Shahnon Ahmad, Ali Haji Ahmad and Mohd. Affandi Hassan in their criticism to the novel), Siti Salina’s ‘transgressions’ include prostituting herself; and cohabitating with a man. This would mean that the application of the second storytelling strategy is aimed at downplaying both acts. The novel employs several steps to affect this strategy, namely providing a reason for the protagonist’s involvement in prostitution, minimising descriptions of the trade, and diverting attention away from issues of her involvement. It is interesting to note that these steps also involve the manipulation of several narrative devices, such as antecedents, story
context, depiction of scenes, backdrop, dramatic action, and linguistic aspects, as will be analysed below.

As discussed earlier, the idea of the ‘noble prostitute’ is in itself a contradiction of two values – between the nobility of the protagonist, and the moral stigma that accompanies the ‘oldest profession’. In this context, one of the steps that the novel takes is to give attention to the antecedent events of Siti Salina’s involvement in the trade; effective because it shows that her involvement had nothing to do with personal desire. Necessarily, the step also means that the novel has to consider other plausible factors for the protagonist’s involvement. To that end, the novel chooses the post-World War II era, a period of strife and hardship, as the ‘story context’ of Salina, as connoted in the novel’s original title, Gerhana (eclipse).¹⁶ To depict this strife and hardship, the novel peppers the story with descriptions of the cruelty of Japanese soldiers, the scarcity of food, the decrepit living conditions, as well as the widespread outbreak of disease, indicated in the experiences of Siti Salina, Hilmy, Katijah, Zarina, Nahidah and Sunarto. It is through these descriptions of strife that the novel dispels any notion of choice in the characters’ life, by making survival their most paramount concern. More importantly, the story context is used as an excuse for Siti Salina’s involvement in prostitution. This is evident, for instance, when the novel describes the antecedent events of her prostitution – her rape by a group of Japanese soldiers, as well as the deaths of her family and her first sweetheart, Muhammad Yusuf due to the war. This is further reinforced by the halcyon gloss over her childhood and teenage years, such as in her exemplary education by her parents, her exposure to religion, as well as her secretive love for Muhammad Yusuf, all of which contrive to highlight her more innocent characteristics. It cannot be denied that the combination of the story context and such antecedent events designate Siti Salina’s role as a ‘victim of circumstance’, or more accurately, a victim of the cruelty of war, which left her to consider her survival above all else. Her positioning as a hapless character in itself renders her prostitution almost ‘forgivable’, because of the forces that conspired to lead her into the trade. What can also be observed from this positioning is that Siti Salina’s fate is manipulated so as to elicit the sympathy of the reader.

The strategy of downplaying the protagonist’s transgressions is also employed by way of the next step, which is to minimise the details of Siti Salina’s profession. In this context, the idea of ‘noble prostitute’ seemingly influences the action of the novel, in the minimal depiction

of the affairs of prostitution, since extensive detailing of Siti Salina’s activities would only serve to highlight her transgressions. And besides weakening the idea, it would also neutralise the efficacy of the previous storytelling strategy, that is to highlight Siti Salina’s nobility. Thus, the novel’s minimisation of the details of Siti Salina’s profession is seemingly a safety measure, evident when only 20 pages of the 387-page novel\footnote{A. Samad Said, \textit{Salina}, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1976.} are allocated to the details of her profession. At no point in these 20 pages are the scenes of Siti Salina servicing her clients in the brothel overtly illustrated, when it would seem a logical inclusion for a novel about the life of a prostitute. The only scene that implies as much is in the following excerpt:

They became silent when a Malay man, bulky and tall, stepped out. He appeared rather pleased with himself, with Siti Salina behind him – she was adjusting her clothes. The tall and bulky Malay man left the ‘waiting room’ without looking back [My translation.]

\[Mereka terdiam bila seorang lelaki Melayu, besar dan tinggi, keluar. Lelaki ini nampak senang hatinya, dan di belakangnya Siti Salina – Siti Salina sedang membetulkan bajunya. Lelaki Melayu yang besar tinggi itu keluar dari ‘bilik menunggu’ itu dengan tidak menoleh ke belakang.\]\footnote{Ibid. p. 323.}

Clearly, the above does not refer to what transpired \textit{during} the encounter, but instead what happened \textit{after}. Moreover, the details of Siti Salina’s prostitution are not given dramatic impetus, as opposed to the detailing of how Mek Kalsum, a co-worker of the protagonist, performs her services, as can be seen in the following excerpts: “Mek Kalsum’s voice could still be heard, followed by the sound of the door being closed”[My translation] [\textit{Suara Mek Kalsum mengilai kedengaran lagi, kemudiannya terdengar bilik terkunci}; and “Mek Kalsum was speaking teasingly, her tactic of luring in the highest paying customers”[My translation] [\textit{Mek Kalsum bercakap dengan manja-manja, menggunakan taktiknya untuk memenangi tamunya dengan harga yang tinggi.}]\footnote{Ibid. pp. 343,344.} It is clear in the comparison of both characters that the portrayal of Mek Kalsum as a prostitute is realistic, as opposed the whitewashed portrayal of Siti Salina as overly polite and gentle, quite unlike the typical and expected behaviour of a prostitute. With such a depiction, Siti Salina’s standing as a ‘noble prostitute’, one who is involved in the trade not out of her own desire, but out of circumstance, becomes more convincing. In this way,
the strategy of the novel to downplay the protagonist’s evil, by shifting the focus onto another character, is successfully executed.

Aside from that, it is also interesting to discuss how the novel manipulates linguistic aspects to downplay the scene that takes place after the service Siti Salina performs. This is achieved, for instance, by the use of phrases like “adjusted her shirt” (membetulkan bajunya), “appeared pleased with himself” (nampak senang hatinya) and “waiting room” (bilik menunggu). Although the phrases do indeed connote sexual relations when seen in the context of the scene, the depiction is nevertheless implicit. It is plausible that the sanitisation of the erotic scenes is connected to Keris Mas’ recommended revisions, specifically his request that the erotic scenes (which he referred to as pornographic) that irked the judges be removed, so that Salina could be readied for publication, as mentioned earlier. Even so, what is certain is that the use of these phrases do indeed play down the sex scenes involving Siti Salina, which, in turn, suppresses any questions about her profession. The latter is apparent, for instance, in the novel’s divulgence of veiled information on her profession, such as when Hilmy’s curiosity is piqued when Siti Salina comes home at 4 am. Besides creating a sense of suspense, this step also attenuates any questions on Siti Salina’s profession. This move significantly impacts the presentation of the novel, because the absence of a sex scene involving Siti Salina is considered by Shahnnon Ahmad to be a strong reason for Salina to be considered a ‘serious novel’, and not a ‘pornographic’ one, as he states:

The way this aspect [Siti Salina’s activities] is concealed is most noteworthy, and it is one of the features that makes it a work of outstanding quality. It is from this aspect that Salina is a non-pornographic novel, which was the concern of the judges, even if it revolved around prostitution. [My translation, emphasis added]

[Cara persembunyian aspek ini [kegiatan Siti Salina] amat baik sekali dan salah satu ciri yang menampatkan novel ini pada tahap mutu yang tinggi. Dari aspek inilah Salina sebagai sebuah novel bukan karya porno yang kononnya dibimbingkan oleh para pengadil meskipun kisah pelacuran yang menjadi inti.]21

Next, as stated in the analysis of the previous storytelling strategy, the opposition of Siti Salina and Fakar/Zarina strengthens their positions

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20 Ibid. p. 323
as either good or bad characters. Therefore, the following discussion will show how the context of this opposition renders the second storytelling strategy successful, that is, through the concealment of Siti Salina’s evils. As explained before, besides prostituting herself, another transgression from accepted moral norms is the protagonist’s cohabitation with Fakar out of wedlock. Siti Salina is said to be attracted to Fakar as a result of his resemblance to her first sweetheart, Muhammad Yusuf, who died in the war. After meeting Fakar, a sailor by trade, Siti Salina then invites him to move in with her, and they persist in this arrangement without being wed for two years. Based on this description, and to shed light on the following argument, it is important to reiterate the finding in the previous analysis that Fakar and Siti Salina are presented as ‘nemeses’, not lovers, in the novel. Due to the nature of their relationship, the novel does not elaborate at length on the intimacy between them, which is only presented sporadically, as in when the novel flashes back to their first meeting. Conversely, what is depicted in greater detail is the mistreatment of Siti Salina by Fakar, who physically and verbally abuses her. From this focus on the tension between them, the only issue that stands out is Fakar’s inhumanity, and thus, the issue of their living together is indirectly concealed. The effect is further reinforced by Siti Salina’s reaction to Fakar’s mistreatment, because she seemingly withstands his abuse willingly and patiently, without any dent in her loyalty towards him, to the extent that she continues to pay his keep. It is safe to say that normal human behaviour dictates that this ‘love’ affair, with Salina wilfully receiving Fakar’s abuse solely because of his resemblance to Muhammad Yusuf is unusual, or what A. Teeuw terms ‘tidak menyakinkan’ or unconvincing and ‘tidak masuk akal’ or illogical, especially when taken in context of the cause-and-effect principle. As he states:

... to me, as a Westerner, there are parts that are unconvincing, for instance Salina’s rationale for remaining loyal to Abd. Fakar no matter how violent he is, and the reason offered at the end of the novel [Fakar’s resemblance to Mohammad Yusuf] is illogical; unrequited love, for me, is a more plausible reason for Salina’s actions. [My translation, emphasis added]

[... bagi saya sebagai orang Barat ada yang tidak menyakinkan, misalnya alasan Salina untuk tetap setia kepada Abd. Fakar, walau pun bagaimana ganas perlakuannya, alasan yang disingkapkan pada akhir buku ini tidak masuk akal; rasa cinta yang tidak beralasan bagi saya lebih masuk akal sebagai alasan sikap Salina.]22

Clearly, Teeuw considers Fakar’s resemblance to Mohammad Yusuf as the cause of Siti Salina’s unwavering loyalty to him to be “illogical”. Nevertheless, it needs to be understood that this ‘unconvincing’ and ‘illogical’ love plays an important function in both the employed storytelling strategies discussed above. On the one hand, the ‘unconvincing’ and ‘illogical’ relationship paints Siti Salina as a naive person, and in turn, reinforces the strategy to highlight her nobility; while on the other, it helps the novel to shift attention away from the fact that Siti Salina is cohabitating with a man. Several scholars have pointed out the latter, in fact, in their questioning of the logic of Siti Salina’s loyalty to Fakar, especially since Samad himself has defended it as being “possible in a novel” [My translation] [tidak mustahil lagi dalam novel.] Whatever the excuse, it is paramount to state here that the focus of the novel towards Fakar’s violence and Siti Salina’s loyalty has enabled their ‘unconvincing’ love affair to attract the attention of many parties, and this has indirectly helped to mask the fact that they are living out of wedlock, which is opposed to the norms of Malay Muslim society. This masking is also helped by the absence of strong objections from their neighbours. Suffice to say at this stage that both storytelling strategies above have highlighted the protagonist’s good heartedness, and downplayed her transgressions from Islam. The effectiveness of both is visible, for instance, in the Laporan Panel Anugerah Sastera Negara 1985 (1985 Panel Report of National Laureate) which states: “Salian could have been a prostitute who lived with Abdul Fakar out of wedlock, two norms that are opposed to Malay and Islamic cultural values, but she is essentially a good and humane person”. [Emphasis added] [Salina mungkin seorang pelacur dan duduk tanpa nikah dengan Abdul Fakar, dua norma yang bertentangan dengan nilai budaya Melayu dan Islam, tetapi dia pada dasarnya orang baik dan berperikemanusiaan.] What emerges from this analysis is that the novel’s zeal and efficacy in foregrounding the idea of the ‘noble prostitute’, through the application of both storytelling strategies explored above, clearly shows the dominant role that the idea of ‘noble prostitute’ in the narrative construction of Salina.

24 This effect is clear in Samad’s statement itself, where, as he claims, the issue of Siti Salina and Fakar’s “luar biasa” (unusual) love, elicited reaction from many quarters, including A. Teeuw. A. Samad Said, 1987, p. 56.
Conclusion

With attention paid to the manipulation of narrative devices, the analysis is able to clearly identify the role and position of Siti Salina as the protagonist in the narrative construction of Salina. The analysis clearly finds that the process of the novel’s narrative construction was, from its conception, borne from the author’s wish to tell the story of a ‘noble prostitute’, resulting in the creation of a female prostitute named ‘Siti Salina’, whose story then becomes the focus of the novel. The analysis finds that the narrative construction of Salina is generally focused on two narrative strategies: to highlight the protagonist’s kind-heartedness, and to downplay her transgressions. The analysis also finds that these strategies are effectively brought about by the author through the manipulation of a number of narrative devices, such as the author’s aptitude in rendering the supporting characters in the novel. It is clear from the analysis that almost all these supporting characters in the novel function to either highlight the nobility, or downplay the transgressions, of the protagonist. The effectual manipulation of the character device underline the early idea of the author, to the extent that the story of the ‘noble prostitute’ is presented in convincingly. Thus, the analysis finds that the life story of the protagonist, Siti Salina, does indeed occupy a central position in the narrative of Salina, meaning that the author’s claim that the novel does not centre on the protagonist can be brought into question.
Bibliography


