

THE INEVITABLE GATEWAY FROM PROSTITUTION: A POST-COLONIAL STUDY ON
EKA KURNIAWAN'S *BEAUTY IS A WOUND*

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fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

In a capitalist society, where commodification knows no boundary, commodifying sexual intercourse is a genius strategy to augment the advent of capitalism since sexual desire and its fulfillment is indispensable to the biological need of human beings. This is tied to their fundamental needs which they will seek to meet at any cost. In monogamous society this need is often met outside of marriage via prostitutes. When the same requirement is in high demand in a post-colonial society, and the country is in political and economic turmoil, the exit from the life of a sex-worker is unimaginable. It is the combination of all the existing preconditions that force the economically dependent women to be confined within the horrors of this institution. The lack of realistically alternative choices victimizes innocent lives and leaves them with no viable options. This situation has been intricately portrayed by Eka Kurniawan in the novel *Beauty is a Wound*. This paper seeks to scrutinize these preconditions and the power these institutions hold over an individual to understand why it is not always up to the individual to choose a path. This paper will investigate from a postcolonial perspective, and in addition, will also focus on communist ideas in light of prostitution. Since a long period of time, communists had a well-built network in the lands on Indonesia and its influence have shaped the social and political circumstances to an extent. Although ultimately communist ideas had to see its way out, the possibility of what might have happened otherwise to these prostitutes have been discussed in the paper.

Keywords: *prostitution, communism, postcolonialism, social preconditions, magic realism, identity.*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the history of literature, there has been countless attempts to encapsulate the essence of prostitution through fictions, and non-fictions. Authors over the years tried to tackle this delicate topic in various different ways that gave us understanding of the practice itself, and its perception around the world. The practice of sex-work remains highly debatable among different school of thoughts. Different social context, political and economic status play significant roles in fueling these institutions, as well as the practice itself in concern.

This thesis aims to study these preconditions from a post-colonial perspective in the Indonesian context. The study is focusing on the Indonesian author Eka Kurniawan's novel *Beauty is a Wound*. This is the story of Dewi Ayu, a woman forced into prostitution in her early life and made to its slave till her last breath. The given political, economic and social circumstances seek to understand why she had no realistic alternatives as to escape from the life of a sex-worker. Additionally, the paper studies the Marxist ideology on the given circumstance since Karl Marx's ideas and communism has played a huge role in shaping Indonesia's political and cultural history.

1.1 Overview of the text

Eka Kurniawan's novel *Cantik itu Luka*, which is translated as *Beauty is a Wound* (can also be called – “How Beautiful – Wounds”) was published in 2002 in Indonesian language. Its widespread reach resulted in its translation to English and 23 other languages. The story is a fine blend of history, tragedy, revenge, legends, along with satire and dark humor. The contents touch upon some sensitive topics including rape, bestiality, murder, incest, etc. There are fantastical

and magical elements that were introduced in contrast to the sharp backdrop of the barbaric/sadistic history of Indonesia.

The story is set in a fictional town of Halimunda. Even though the protagonist is a Dutch-Indo woman named Dewi Ayu, the text dives into the lives of the people around her. The protagonist is born of an incestual relationship between a Dutch plantation owner's legitimate son and his illegitimate daughter from his Indonesian concubine. The story of Dewi Ayu's history of birth is a small demonstration of all the things readers are to encounter in the rest of the novel. The fate of Dewi Ayu takes her from a privileged life in a luxurious house to being enslaved by the Japanese and made to serve as a comfort woman. She is then fated to work as a prostitute for the rest of her life. There are many other characters in the novel who get a fair share of the exposure - everyone who adds a little something to the said Indonesian context and to the protagonist's journey.

1.2 Author and the content

Although originally published in 2002, the book debuted in English language more than a decade later in 2015. It was translated to English language by the award-winning translator Annie Tucker.

The text *Beauty is a Wound* separates itself from the ordinary fictional category and levels up along the lines of other higher literature due to its profound depth and perception. This is no everyday fictional story. The author, Eka Kurniawan has touched on some of the very sensitive political and social issues. His writing started from the colonial period, to Japanese invasion of Indonesia, its independence, its fight for freedom and its journey on being a truly independent nation after hundreds of years of exploitation. Although the story is told in a fictional manner

with the frequent use of magic realism, Kurniawan is careful to include all of the social, political and economic tension that was going on in Indonesia during the period of Dutch colonialism, Japanese invasion and the communist movement- three major events that shaped the early history of Indonesia as a country. The text is a representation of Indonesia's traumatic history, its sufferings and its impact, which were to last for decades and continue to haunt the Indonesians. This novel is much more than the story of a prostitute. It documents the socio-political situation, connects the economic-cultural tension, and involves the people who got caught up amidst all of the chaos.

Chapter 2: Background

2.1 Post Colonialism

Colonialism is not just the occupation of a country and exploitation of its people for economic advantages but an act against humanity itself. Although colonizers often claim their real motive to do greater good for the ‘uncultured’ and ‘inferior’ community, in reality they are expanding their economy with the looted capital and resources in exchange of minimum-waged labor and exploitation. The colonizer never colonizes without the intention to benefit themselves. It is always their ultimate goal.

Over the years, there have been many discourses, and discussions over the topic of colonialism and post colonialism. However, two notable authors – the French poet Aime Cesaire and Palestinian American scholar Edward Said have brought up this issue in the last century and their discourses have proven to be very important for the contemporary postcolonial situation. “Postcolonialism” itself is an unsteady term that does not have a concrete meaning. It is a discourse that talks about different things, a reaction to the end of colonialism. Firstly, there are different nations who are under this terminology, who have undergone colonization and each of the nations have a different story to tell. They were not colonized by the same people; they were not colonized in the same manner. While the Africans were used as slaves and manual labors sent to plantations far away, the Asians mostly had to serve from living here and cultivating and eventually making money for the colonizers. Postcolonialism intends on rescuing the past, history, culture that were contaminated, misrepresented to the rest of the world by the colonizers. They want to reclaim, reconstruct the fabricated information and image, challenge them and

finally create whatever is missing and correct whatever is wrongly represented. It is a fair claim to say.

Aime Césaire had an idealistic approach in his discourse on Colonialism. He talks about how colonialism was formed, and how the central goal was really to make money and their exploitation. He writes in his essay “Discourse on Colonialism”, “no one colonizes innocently, that no one colonizes with impunity either; that a nation which colonizes, that a civilization which justifies colonization and therefore force-is already a sick civilization, a civilization which is morally diseased, which irresistibly, progressing from one consequence to another” (Césaire 39). He argues, “between colonizer and colonized there is room only for forced labor, intimidation, pressure, the police, taxation, theft, rape, compulsory crops, contempt, mistrust, arrogance, self-complacency, swinishness, brainless elites, degraded masses” (42). Césaire introduces a term called “thingification” that he refers “colonization” to. According to him, the entire procedure of colonization is objectifying people, their identity, their culture and heritage into nothing but commodities. It is the mundane reduction of identity to a “thing” or an item, a tangible being that can be used according to one’s requirement.

Edward Said, however, takes a much lucrative approach towards the discourse. Said had a very practical and systematic approach with his claims. In his book, *Orientalism*, he puts forward different theories about the “self” and “other”, power of language and its connotated and denotated meanings. The European nations who refer themselves as the “occidents” and the “self” take it up to them to establish a discourse about the “other” who are then called the “orients” – the two equal portions the world and its people are divided into. The orient being the Eastern half and the occident being the Western. However, their definition and the regions that fall under these two categories were never stable, and rather they changed according to

convenience. This terminology was used to alienate the “other”, that is, the orientals who were known to be savages, illiterates who lacked in culture. That is essentially the beginning of the discourse that established the superiority of the “Western” nations. All that was really the beginning and the birth of colonization. The act of colonization itself was in fact an extension to that discourse put into practice.

2.1.1 Representation in literary texts

In the literary history, there have been numerous attempts to capture the act of colonization and its extent in fictional and non-fictional writings. Some have been portrayed in a grotesque manner, some trying to portray the side of the victims, some with controversial standpoints, some argumentative non-fiction, while others have been laced with satire. Regardless of the type of approach, colonialism and post-colonialism has been an inseparable section of literary writings – that not only serves the purpose of general reading, but challenges the dominant narratives projected around this act.

Notable colonial writer Chinua Achebe shares the history of colonization from the perspective of the colonized in his book *Things Fall Apart*, published in 1958. The novel is concerned with a village in Nigeria that has its own language, customs and traditions, a society that has its own rules and regulations. What we get introduced to is an established society – which may lack in advanced and modern commodities and lifestyle but is rich in culture. It is much later on that the colonizers come and decide the natives need to be “civilized”. At first, passively, but later more actively they act upon their colonial intention. Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is a novella published in 1899 where we get introduced to colonization from a white man’s perspective who views the colonized as uncultured, illiterate savages. Their portrayal is

disrespectful and dehumanizing, while the white men are portrayed as the civilized superior. The portrayals in these two books finely juxtapose one another. In Conrad's book, readers are introduced to the 'inferior' humans who are no match for the whites, who are depicted rather differently in Achebe's work.

In 1964, Achebe delivered a speech at the first Commonwealth Writers Conference titled "The Novelist as a Teacher". This is an essentially important piece of essay that explains the importance of a novelist, and more importantly as a writer who is responsible for representing his/her history to the world. The pen the writer holds has the capability to dominate a narration. This means, in a way the writer, the novelist is also a teacher. Achebe believes that every writer, especially ones with colonial history owes it to their people – who have been wrongly depicted. It is the novelist's duty to portray the right picture, and in doing so, the novelist must take pride in his/her work.

Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o takes a rather different approach towards this narrative as talks about how language is used to shape the cultural, historic identity of a nation in his book *Decolonizing the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature*, published in 1986. The western language and culture have always dominated the historical narratives, whereas the African language and culture has always been debased. Degenerating the nature of the Africans have always been a defining feature of the dominant narrative. In light of decolonization, another important aspect is getting over the trauma of colonization. The physical damages are slowly dealt with in administrative levels, but the psychological scars are what Franz Fanon discusses in his book *Wretched of the Earth*, published in 1961. Wa Thiong'o in his famous work *Matigari* shows the war hero who after his return observes the new locals replacing

the old colonial dictators. In other words, the ruling stays the same no matter the occupier of the chair. This story is more of a post-colonial time and its after-effect.

Perhaps the imperative book to discuss for this paper would be Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, published in 1967. This book not only shares similar elements with the primary text, but Eka Kurniawan has been specifically compared to Gabriel Garcia Marquez in terms of writing style. The New York Reviews of books even claimed Kurniawan to be the literary child of Marquez, as the latter being the senior. Kurniawan's mannerism and style is similar to Marquez's. Marquez's story-telling is not linear, he uses magic in a manner that fazes the boundary between reality. His playfulness with the chronology, although may be confusing to readers, highlight the connection between past, present and future. These two key features are something to be found in Kurniawan's work as well. Marquez's depiction of the post-colonial Latin America is emblematic, making the book a requisite peek into the Latin American history.

2.1.2 In Indonesian context

In the 1600s, the Dutch began settling down in Indonesia and slowly established their economic and political reign over the country and its people. Widodo documents in his paper how at first, the Dutch were interested in developing their economic regime, and they had succeeded in doing so as their trading company soon became a major power in the Asian trade. However, their political interest soon began to take over and it began in the island of Java two centuries later. The Dutch United East India Company, otherwise known as VOC (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*), had become a strong political and economic power. However, like

any other dominant they too had their fall in the later centuries of late 18th and early 19th century. Their expansion resulted in much corruption and maladministration amongst themselves. This was worsened by the fact that during this time, the British East India Company began anchoring their dominion in the Asian territory. It was a difficult competition, and although VOC could hold onto their power for some more decades, the British had taken over their power at one point of time. This engendered a falter in the strong dominion of the Dutch.

Despite the uncertainties, their regime carried on for another century. It was in the mid-1900s that they finally began to collapse. Their position was overruled by the Japanese who wanted to colonize Indonesia in the name of liberation. However, the Japanese strategy did not work on the Indonesian people who, by now, had realized the strategy of their ‘saviors’. Japan’s rule quickly fell and although the Dutch tried to seize control for a period of time, they were ultimately overthrown by the natives.

2.1.3 Eka Kurniawan’s perception at post colonialism

In the philosophy of the author and scholar Chinua Achebe, a novelist owes to his/her people; he owes to the history of the nation, and its past/present struggle. This is of course, especially applicable to countries who have overthrown colonialism and are now independent nations. They have a history to tell, and who is better than a novelist who is already attracting many readers into world of fictional and non-fictional characters. Novels and stories are not just piece of writing read as pastime activities – but they can comprise so much more. A novel can unravel historical accounts, trauma, injustice – whether that be economic, political, cultural, racial or colonial. Thus, it is safe to say that a novelist withholds huge responsibility as a teacher

in teaching his readers about a certain topic. He can give birth to a new discourse, and can attempt to challenge many existing ones. That, however, is the job of the novelist himself.

Eka Kurniawan was born and raised in Indonesia. After the completion of his education, he invests in writing novels, short stories and also non-fictions. Although Kurniawan has been writing for a long time, it is very recently that his works gained mass global attention after its translation to English language. When writing historical accounts, there are often sensitive topics to touch upon which may not be approved by the authoritarian narrative. Writers sometimes steer clear of those subject matters, and if they do choose to highlight them, they often take satirical approach, use magic realism, and often “gritty” realism as *The Guardian* would like to call Kurniawan’s *Man Tiger*. *Beauty is a Wound* and *Man Tiger* are among his famous works. In both the works he has shown a similar pattern of approach towards some of these heavy topics. His writing deals with grievous topics which are juxtaposed against humor using supernatural elements. Eka plays with the balance of the dichotomy to direct his message through the texts.

In *Beauty is a Wound*, the postcolonial genre is prominent as we delve into the life of the protagonist and some of the people around her who have lived through the colonial and postcolonial era. The effect of the changing regime is evident on their lives. In *Man Tiger*, however, although the novel is generally a crime novel, Eka keeps the historical account of the town as a major focus. This history includes the colonial era, specifically the Japanese regime and the postcolonial period. The monstrosity of the Japanese soldiers and their brutal treatment of the Indonesians has been narrated in grotesque, and yet justifying manner. The author does not hesitate to talk about sensitive topics such as rape, incest and bestiality – even though he knows that his vivid description of these events may make his readers, and in particular – the Indonesian readers, uncomfortable. Eka Kurniawan has not made any radical change in documenting the

history. He even highlighted some of the delicate historical accounts – such as the coup d'etat of 1965, which has been regarded as the chapter concealed from the history of Indonesia.

Another interesting prospect in his text is the element of revenge. The sequence of unfortunate events that were to take place in the lives of Dewi Ayu and her daughters and grandchildren was rooted in the act of colonialism. It was the Ma Gedik and Ma Iyang's separation, her being forced into the household of the Dutch plantation owner, his forceful sexual relationship with her and ultimately the birth of Aneu Stammer and Ma Iyang's suicide that set up the entire plot in motion. Although throughout the story readers may wonder why the characters live such bizarre lives, the answer is found at the very end of the novel when the ghost of Ma Gedik unravels the truth behind his revenge. It was colonialism, and in extension, its acts that ended up costing so many lives and its effects were only starting during the colonial period. In fact, it was the post-colonial period when the consequences of the heinous acts were taking in full action - a fine allegorical use of plot the author devised to outline the impact of colonialism.

2.2 Political and Economic State of Affairs

This section will primarily focus on the political and economic state affairs of Indonesia during the colonial and postcolonial period. Although historical accounts are unique to each country, one can observe patterns in the chronicles when compared. Often times, the fictional novels highlight the lost records rightfully than history books do.

2.2.1 Political Unrest in Indonesia and Historical Wipeout

In 1928, still under the colonial rule of the Dutch, Kusno Sosrodihardjo – better known as Sukarno today helped form the Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI, *Partei Nasional Indonesia*). Being a popular nationalist party, it caught the attention of the Dutch who saw Sukarno to be a threat and so arrested him in 1931 and sent him to exile. Sukarno remained in exile until the power of the Dutch diminish upon the arrival of the Japanese who drove the Dutch away and freed Sukarno. During the World War II, they made Sukarno their chief advisor who used this position to get Indonesia its long overdue freedom. In 1945, Indonesia become as independent country – Republic of Indonesia, and naturally Sukarno was the paladin. He was known as the “Great Leader of the Revolution,” and the “Lifetime President”. When he had become the first President of Indonesia. But under his rule Indonesian economy capsized. Sukarno was more invested in preserving his political attitude rather than focusing on the economy. Even though health, cultural sectors were improving it could not prevent Sukarno’s downfall in the coming years.

Sukarno’s ministers were corrupted and the nation faced ceaseless crisis. By this time, Sukarno had also dismantled parliamentary democracy which indicated his forthcoming dictatorship and his close relationships with the Communist Party of Indonesia (Partai Komunis Indonesia, abbreviation: PKI) threatened the people. This was the breaking point for all.

In 1965, the military with General Suharto intervened when they alleged the PKI on an “attempted coup” that killed seven military officers. What happened next was one of the darkest and shrouded chapters in the history of 20th century politics. The military was set to wipe out all the communist along with anybody related to them. It was 30th September 1965. Within a span of few days, the military had succeeded in killing more than half a million “communists”. The mass

killing happened fast and in secrecy as the national radio was intercepted, and news portals were put on hold, and the people were unaware of the severity of the massacre. Some were also tortured, sent to exile and some were simply wiped off from the face of the earth. The bodies were tackled well – mass burial, and all sorts of attempt were made to erase the signs of the dead. This frightening chapter marks a significant moment in Indonesia’s political history. Sukarno’s power soon came to an end afterwards and General Suharto was to be the next President of Indonesia. However, due to absolute media control the infamous “coup d’état” and the genocide it followed still remains as a lesser-known chapter in the history of Indonesia.

The petrifying mass extermination of the communists in Indonesia is although insufferable, but not exclusive to Indonesian history. In the Sri Lanka conflict that lasted for three decades from 1983 to 2009, killed an estimated number of 100,000 people. This civil war was the result of religious and ethnic differences between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. The Tamil Tigers, formally known as The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was a militant organization who strove for establishing an independent state for the minority Tamils in northern and eastern Sri Lanka. The Sri Lanka military killed thousands and their bodies were never to be found again. Till today, thousands of families are obliviate to what happened to their family members who were taken away. Were they alive? Were they killed? Where were there bodies? It is all but unknown to them.

The frightening history becomes the plot of Michael Ondaatje’s fourth novel *Anil’s Ghost*, whose story begins with Sri Lankan born forensic anthropologist Anil Tissera who has been living in the west for fifteen years. On her return to Sri Lanka for the purpose of “extrajudicial executions”, Anil is granted access to an ancient burial site which is otherwise restricted to the army. On her exploration, she discovers four skeletons among which three

appear to be truly ancient while one of them is recent. Bewildered, Anil sets out to unveil the truth behind the mysterious body and, in turn, the government's attempt at concealing history. What uncovers is the truth behind the deadly civil war which had trapped thousands of people on the island. Unknown is their identity; unknown is their life.

2.2.2 Socio-Economic Situation in Indonesia

Before the spread of Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism had bigger influence in Indonesia in the earliest centuries due to trade route being dominated by India. After the 15th century, Islam spread as the rulers of wealthy city ports started adopting the religion. The Muslim trade, although short lived, had created bigger impact on the Indonesians before the occupation of the Dutch East India Company in 1602. Indonesia was home to exquisite varieties of spice, and easily became the finest attraction for the Westerners.

The economy had gone through feudal system, before the final transformation into a colonial state. Although theoretically, their occupation was meant to benefit both the colonizers and the colonized, practically the profit went to the colonizer's home making them wealthy while the natives suffered poor economy and self-sufficiency. The colonial rule went on for about three more years. When the Japanese occupied in 1942, their true interest laid with Indonesia's petroleum, scrap iron, and other natural resources, meaning that they too had come for the resources.

Finally, after the independence in 1945 Indonesia was finally no longer under any foreign rule and had become Republic of Indonesia. Although people had expected Indonesia to thrive under their war-hero turned President Sukarno's rule, little advancements were observed.

Economy faltered and with other national crises, Sukarno's regime was far from anticipated. When his jurisdiction ended, Indonesia had gone through the horrifying chapter of 1965 genocide and at that time the staggering economy could not suffice the needs of the general public. People were made homeless; families lost their earning members – this was especially hard on women who now had no decent source of income.

However, the economy stabilized when the next President Suharto came to power, restoring good relations with the West and establishing a policy called the New Order which required foreign aid and Western investment. During General Suharto's three decade-long rule, Indonesia's standard of living rose substantially and its political state affair gained much-awaited stability.

2.3 Prostitution

Literature is a powerful narrative that portrays the contemporary social aspects in its beautifully narrated stories, but also contributes to the formation of new narratives and portrayals. Through the power of words, a certain act has the capability to change depending on how it is portrayed and thus, accepted by the social majority. The origin, the development and formation of modern-day prostitution is discussed in this sub-chapter. Along with that, the manner in which prostitution has been portrayed in the literary world and how its perception has evolved over time is looked at through the understanding of the texts.

2.3.1 The Genesis

“The earliest records of prostitution show that it took place in temples: to visit a prostitute was to make paeans to the goddess. In fact, one of the earliest known deities was Inanna – a female prostitute (Bassermann, 1993)” (Sanders et al. 2). Inanna (later known as Ishtar by the Akkadians, Babylonians, and Assyrians) was the goddess of love, sex, beauty, war, and justice in the ancient Mesopotamia. At the time, performance of a sacred sexuality between the priestess of Inanna and the king or the priest was considered to be part of the religious ritual. The priestess would also have sexual intercourse with the males visiting the temple as it would signify the release of fertile energy. Since the Mesopotamians relied heavily on agriculture, they believed that this act would bring them good agricultural fortune. The act was conceived to be a part of the religious offerings in devotion to the deities rather than for physical pleasures and the practice went on for hundreds of years.

In the seventh century, the Islamic laws prohibited the practice of prostitution. One of the companions of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) named, Abu Mas'ud Al-Ansari narrated, “Allah's Apostle forbade taking the price of a dog, money earned by prostitution and the earnings of a soothsayer” (Sahih al-Bukhari 3:34:439). However, the practice of sexual slavery still remained among many Arabs. In the 8th century, during the Arab trade, the trade route included Indonesia in its path. Merchants and traders would stop, trade, sometimes settle in. But it took a few more centuries for Islam to establish in the lands on Indonesia, therefore, bringing its ideas and laws along with it. Till this day, Indonesia is considered to have the largest population of Muslims in the world.

In the fifth book of the Old Testament, the Book of Deuteronomy, it is said that “there shall be no whore among the daughters of Israel, nor whoremonger among the sons of Israel”

(23:17). “Prostitution came under harsher regulations during the Victorian era and even more so in times of war, as prostitutes were blamed for the venereal diseases prevalent among soldiers (Laite, 2011)”. Author Jan Marsh writes,

“In the early Victorian period disease transmission was largely understood as a matter of inherited susceptibility (today's 'genetic' component) and individual intemperance ('lifestyle'), abetted by climate and location, which were deemed productive of noxious exhalations (a version of environmental causation)”

The Victorian era was a time when chastity, sexual propriety and modesty was highly valued. At the time, prostitution was an act that contradicted the moral values that dominated the period. The prostitutes were the “fallen women” and thus, added no moral value to the existing standard preconditions. So, when the soldiers developed any sexually transmitted disease, the blame was upon the prostitutes as they were seen as they were perceived as the antagonists against the chastity of the large.

At present, with the medical advancements, people are much aware of the sexually transmitted diseases and there are many preventing measures in the market that can be used to engage in safe sexual intercourse. This is why “the current discourses and laws regulating sex work continue to be framed around morality, which maintains the making of an outcast group” (Sanders et al. 2). Making of an outcast has been in process since a long time. As we have seen, as time progressed, the attitude towards the sex workers have changed. They went from being almost worshipped to be frowned upon, and now they are sent on the way to being the outcast. It is important to note that both the knowledge of religion, culture, and medical science has contributed to the out-casting of the prostitution. But with an industry such massive, we can

assume that the future of prostitution will take a different turn. The practice will continue in different forms.

2.3.2 History of Prostitution in Indonesia

“Particular criticism is levelled at women engaged in such transactions. They are called *wanita tuna susila*—women without morals— and are often stereotyped as predatory” (Hull 65). While men seeking for sexual pleasures are condemned, the “social attitudes of acceptance of the ‘naturalness’ of male sex urges, and by extension the appropriateness of men seeking sexual satisfaction outside of marriage” is larger. Terence Hull calls out Indonesian context for being contradictory towards men and women in the same behavior in his article “From Concubines to Prostitutes: A Partial History of Trade in Sexual Services in Indonesia”.

He discusses the commoditization of women has been an integral part of the feudal system since the ancient times in Indonesia. That is believed to be the beginning of modern prostitution in the country. In the mid-18th century, the kings in the Javanese Kingdoms owned everything on the land, which included its women too. The concubines taken up by the king were called “*selir*”, the shortened version of the word “*sineliran*” which means “the chosen one”- that is, the women chosen by the kings. The women would often come from the noble families as a form of present to the king. But these chosen women were also drawn from the commoners. The collection of these women was intended for more than just sexual pleasure. It was a political strategy that was meant to empower the king’s position as these chosen women will in the future bear him children, and increase the royal power. This also meant that the noble families of the chosen women would pledge lifetime loyalty to the king. The commoners would not get to enjoy this privilege since their social positions would not allow them to take “*selir*”. Since majority

followed Muslim law, they could engage in polygamy and take up to four wives. But this was also out of their bounds due to insufficient economic condition. Therefore, the practice of taking concubines was exclusive to the kings and later to the high officials.

Hull also discusses the colonial period when the Dutch had brought a large number of administrative officials with them. Many of them were single men. Since interracial marriage was not legal, they took up these women from families who were ready to sell their daughters. This was convenient as these women could come of domestic help and also help satisfy their sexual needs. However, these women were not only taken by single men, but also by married ones with families of their own.

During the mid-20th century when Japan was invading its neighboring countries and military soldiers were its powerhouse, the requirement of “comfort women” was incumbent. Military brothels were created in the countries Japanese were invading in. Although some Japanese women were taken into these brothels, most were from among the raided natives. Some of these women were pledged good fortune, while others were simply forced into it. After the second World War when the Japanese had lost and retreated, the brothels set up previously remained and the sex trade was carried on by the natives.

2.3.3 Portrayal in literary history

In the literary history, prostitution as a theme has been investigated by many authors. In the earlier history, women involved with commoditization of sex were seen as ferocious creatures who were alluring, but at the same time had to be pitied upon. They were never the heroes of their own story.

After Christianity's concept of sin, female prostitutes were viewed as 'the fallen woman' which referred to a woman who has "lost her innocence". The fallen woman is believed to have lost her capability to guard and protect her chastity, and is therefore has fallen in status in the eyes of God. Ancient renaissance paintings of these 'fallen women' also portray her in an ostensible manner. "They painted her costumed as a temptress in furs and jewels, with luscious breasts exposed, and also as a repentant sinner stripped of her finery, with an animal skin thrown over her, only partly hiding her luminous nakedness" (Roberts). Her clothing is revealing and tempting making her appear as someone who is trying to repent while maintaining her seductiveness. This quintessential image of prostitutes dominated the history of art and literature for many centuries. The following narratives were developed based on this depiction.

Mary Magdalene, who was believed to be an apostle of Jesus Christ was formerly a prostitute. As the legend says, after her repentance, she became one of the trusted apostles of Christ. She had travelled with him and was an eye witness to his crucifixion. Although she turned her way from the path of sin and devoted her later life to Christianity and she is appraised for her repentance, history continues to tag her as the former sinner, a fallen woman who was once a prostitute.

"In *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare underlined the virgin/whore dichotomy by juxtaposing the convent and the brothel, both institutions that contained and controlled women" (Roberts). Isabella is a celibate, and Mistress Overdone who is in charge of a brothel is welcoming to sexuality. Since the two women are poles apart in terms of their status and terms of sexuality, interaction between them is considered to be immoral. Jane Austen's novel *Sense and Sensibility* introduces a minor character called Eliza Williams whose extra-marital affairs and her eventual downfall is given small spotlight, yet portrays a powerful message. Eliza represents the

quintessential ‘fallen woman’ who degraded in terms of chastity and sinks further down in her life. Giving her character an unhappy ending seems to speak how her character was expected to meet the end in the early 19th century when the novel was published.

In other novels, however, the theme of prostitution begins to get more prominent. In *Fanny Hill: Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure Illustrated* by John Cleland, the female sexuality and prostitution is explored in broader spectrum. The protagonist Fanny delves into prostitution through her fascination of bodily pleasure. This graphic novel is ahead of its time considering being published in the mid-18th century and exploring topics such as homosexuality, and even giving the protagonist a happy ending.

Arthur Golden’s *Memoirs of a Geisha* written in 1997 has a similar plotline. However, the idea of prostitution is represented differently. The protagonist is subjected to human trafficking a child. Her loss of innocence as she is slowly exposed to the world of Geisha, and the concept of commoditization of women is a strong theme in the novel as per the Geisha tradition, women are made to engage with higher officials in times of political unease. Negotiations are uncomplicated when the bribing only requires a young beautiful woman.

2.3.4 From the view of Kurniawan’s text

Eka Kurniawan’s radical take on prostitution in *Beauty is a Wound* was compelling to the readers who found themselves travelling from the colonial period and its concubine system, to the era of Japanese invasion and forced prostitution to a liberating time where prostitution was no longer being forced upon. The progressive manner of an age-old practice shifting from one form to another was heart-wrenching, and yet fascinating.

Although the story begins with the protagonist Dewi Ayu's story and her introduction as a former prostitute, the readers are taken back and forth between past and present. So, we get to see a development, or rather a change in the attitude towards commoditization of women. Dewi Ayu was described to be the most beautiful and "desirable whore" in the town. All the men wanted her, and their wives were jealous of her. Despite being a sex worker, Dewi Ayu had maintained a respectable status in the community. As an outsider, if one saw her in the marketplace, one would never assume her to be a prostitute. Her appraisal of beauty and dignity is smeared on every page on the book. Here Kurniawan showed her as a moral figure, who, despite her social acceptability has an honorable demeanor to her character. Kurniawan by no means developed her characterization in any way that devalues her morals. Instead, if observed closely, she had much civility than most of the other characters in the novel.

Yet, when we follow the timeline and near the end, her respect almost seemed to have tarnished. Her daughter Maya Dewi is described to be a respectable woman in contrast to her mother's and husband's reputation, who was a town goon. When Dewi Ayu dies, hatred and disdain are all that is shown towards her by the other characters. The readers cannot help but notice the slow shift in attitude among the people towards this profession. The same women who did not dare speak on her face came cursing her on the deathbed. This intentional shift of attitude was cleverly incorporated by the author to show the progressive nature of the status of prostitution in the society.

2.4 Dewi Ayu – creation of a fascinating character

Eka Kurniawan's *Beauty is a Wound* succeeds its mission in captivating the audience through its brilliant storylines, unforgettable characters and bizarre turns of events. Despite all that brilliance, the protagonist stands out as being a fascinating character. Eka's brilliance is peeked through his portrayal of the character of Dewi Ayu.

The character of Dewi Ayu is ordinarily extraordinary. At times Eka made the readers connect with his central character Dewi Ayu in terms of her determination, strong will and ability to stand up for herself. When she allows herself to be a prey to the Japanese soldier in exchange of medical care for her friend, she shows heroism through her self-sacrifice. When she is taken to the brothel, she is calm and composed unlike the other girls and soon realizes that fighting will only make it worse for her. Instead, with her placid demure she finds out a bearable approach to fight her fate. She is a strong character whom the readers grow to admire. Yet, there are times when her decisions do not seem to settle right with the readers. Her decision to marry Ma Gedik, her decision to continue to work at the brothel when she was no longer in need of money were some of the times readers find her actions bewildering. It is this dichotomy, this amalgamation of association and disassociation with the readers that makes Eka's writing and the story so powerful and unforgettable. Dewi ayu, is in perfect symphony of an unrelatedly relatable character.

2.4.1 A sinful birth and self-redemption

Despite being born in a wealthy, prestigious family, Dewi Ayu's fate has been stained since birth. As an Indo woman, she was the continuation of a scarred family line that had blood

on their hands. The downturn of fate started the moment her wealthy Dutch grandfather forced her Indonesian grandmother into his household – taking her as a concubine, who was destined to serve him against her will. She was beautiful, and her grandfather, despite not being married to her forced sexual pleasures out of her right after separating her from her lover.

The first sin was committed when he came between two people who were deeply in love. The separation broke them and the pain haunted the two until the day they died. Ma Iyang, the concubine took her life by jumping off of a cliff after giving birth to her illegitimate daughter with her Dutch master. The series of unfortunate events was only starting. The child Ma Iyang had left behind, Aneu, the illegitimate child of Ted Stammler took his last name. Aneu Stammler's life too was cursed. She had fallen in love with Ted's son from his wife. The two half siblings, in spite of knowing the illicit nature of their relationship continued to pursue the affair. The result was Dewi Ayu, born of an incestual relationship. Aneu and Henri, knowing they could not face the unavoidable fate that would separate the them fled the town leaving their newborn with the grandparents.

Dewi grew up in the wealthy household under a privileged life. She was well aware of her ancestral history. In an attempt to redeem the past, she wished to marry Ma Iyang's lover, Ma Gedik. The old man did not consent. When he was married to Dewi Ayu forcefully, he sought the only way he knew. He too took his life the same way his beloved had done years ago. Dewi Ayu went from being a married woman to a widow within a span of a day. She never remarried, and spent the rest of her life paying for the debts of the vice of her ancestors.

2.4.2 The Propriety of Dewi Ayu

The careful articulation in creating the character of Dewi Ayu perfectly portrays the author's genius. Dewi Ayu, despite serving as a prostitute most of her life was yet highly respectable. Since day one, she had not been like other girls. When faced with the impossible choice of losing her virginity in exchange for medicinal care, she did not hesitate to give in. When taken to the prostitution centre reserved for the Japanese soldiers, she found a way to fight with her fate in a bearable manner. She was determined to give a different life to her daughters at the cost of her own freedom. She bought the house in exchange of lifetime service at Mama Kalong's whorehouse. As a prostitute, she was prestigious. She set ground rules for her customers and dealt with each of them with elegance. She dressed up beautifully and modestly, and her style of clothing easily fooled anyone into thinking she was not a prostitute. She did not let her profession affect her image in the society.

Prior to Japanese invasion, she had resolved to marry Ma Gedik – the man her grandmother was in love with. She very well knew his consent to the wedding, but proceeded with it nonetheless. She did not get to enjoy life as a married woman, as she was widowed the very next day.

As a mother, Dewi Ayu wanted to provide a life to her daughters that she herself did not get to live – a life full of love. She had separated her profession from her personal life and ensured a warm family life for her children. She feared for her beautiful daughters who were wanted by every man in the city. When the daughters' life took downturn, she prayed for an ugly daughter when she got pregnant for the fourth time. Her wish was fulfilled when the daughter she gave birth to was hideous to look at. Perhaps, Dewi Ayu's most defining moment was when she gave birth to her fourth daughter, Beauty, and laid in bed waiting for death. She was healthy,

yet she wrapped herself in white shroud with an intention to die. Although people laughed at her and mocked her, few days later, Dewi Ayu had passed away shocking everybody.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Beauty is a Wound

The New Yorker author Gillian Terzis calls the novel “an arresting portrait of Indonesia’s struggle for nationhood, delights in obscenity: no topic is spared from its bloodthirsty brand of satire” in the article “A Writer’s Haunting Trip through the Horrors of Indonesian History” (Terzis). He writes:

Beauty Is a Wound chronicles Indonesia’s occupation by the Japanese during the Second World War; its bloody struggle with the Dutch, who attempted to reassert their control over Indonesia after the war; the massacres of the mid-sixties; the violence and corruption that marked Suharto’s New Order regime; and the nation’s anxious lurch toward self-determination after Suharto’s leadership crumbled, in 1998.

The novel is filled with “scenes of brutality—of rape, incest, bestiality—are undercut macabre humor”. Sherif Abdel Samad comments in his book review titled “A hidden literary gem”, “indeed perhaps it was these horrors that made Kurniawan opt for the literary form of magic realism” (Samad). In a question answer session with Tim Mann, Kurniawan shares he initially wanted to write a ghost story. “You know from the first paragraph; it is clear that it is a ghost story. But as I wrote the book, it developed further, and it became a ghost story with a historical background” (Mann). “There are many elements in my work that I have borrowed from magical realism but at the same time I have mixed them with local influences, like martial arts novels, horror stories and pulp fiction”. When asked about the humor aspect of the novel he said it was “definitely intentional, to have this humorous tone. It was something that I studied

from wayang performances... I wanted to tell a story that is dark, that is epic, that raises lots of ethical questions, but tell it in a way that is light, and full of humour”.

Sumana Mukherjee writes in her book review, “For all the dark comedy and satire suffusing its pages, there is little irony or subversion here; indeed, sex is the women’s sole weapon of choice, their currency and their downfall” (Mukherjee).

Author Meghan Downes discusses Eka Kurniawan’s text and its reception across its translation. At first when the book was published in 2002, it gained little attention from its local readers. “Indonesian publishers and reviewers at the time had been largely unimpressed by Eka Kurniawan’s fanciful approach to history, his ambiguous genre choices, and—perhaps most significantly—the ‘vulgarity’ and sexually explicit nature of his language and content” (Downes 178). But after the publication of its translation about a decade later, this book began to get a larger media attention. “The tone and volume of the Indonesian coverage shifted markedly following his success outside Indonesia, becoming far more frequent and positive.”

The translation process is a form of mediation and when that happens, a larger audience gets access to the text. This allows a lot more perspectives. The “frequent scenes of rape, bestiality, incest, murder, and hauntings are all recounted in a darkly humorous and irreverent narrative voice throughout the hefty four-hundred-page saga” was not well received by many Indonesians as they found the writing to be graphics and to some extent disturbing (180). According to Eka, the Indonesian readers are “far more critical” as they found the text to be “too vulgar”. However, he does acknowledge that, “even though the translation is very faithful to the original text, maybe those scenes don’t sound as vulgar in English as they do in Indonesian” (Mann).

3.2 The concerns surrounding Prostitution

In the paper, “A Theory of Prostitution”, authors Lena Edlund and Evelyn Korn compare prostitution as a “low-skill, labor intensive” work that is in fact “well-paid”. “Prostitution has an unusual feature: it is well paid despite being low skill, labor intensive, and, one might add, female dominated” (Edlund and Korn 182). They discuss the marriage market opportunities in contrast with prostitution as a profession and explore the male sex ratio and how it supports the high demand on prostitution with such low reputation. “Random House Dictionary of the English Language, we learn that prostitution is the ‘act or practice of engaging in sexual intercourse for money.’ But a prostitute cannot simply be a woman who sells her body since ‘that is done every day by women who become wives in order to gain a home and a livelihood’ (Ellis 225)” (183). They compare both prostitution and marriage as a form of income source. The prostitute earns in capital, while a married woman earns in the form of a habitat, food, clothing and etc. The authors also argue that it is in fact the “Women sell, men buy”. What distinguishes the two cultures is really the fact that “prostitution is the act of rendering nonreproductive sex against payment” according to *The Client*. This is why “the wife provides the husband with children who are socially recognized as his, whereas the prostitute does not” (185).

Marriage is much like a business partnership. When it comes to the possibility choosing a partner, “some prostitutes marry, it is a fair guess that, on average, they do so on less favorable terms than they would have done otherwise” (186). Edlund and Korn continue:

As in Siow (1998), women are fecund when young, men are fecund when both young and old, and marriage and sex are desirable only with a fecund partner. Consequently, men

can marry at either age, whereas women marry only while young. If the only reason for divorce is remarriage, then men who married while young remain married when old unless they can remarry a young woman. Since there will be more men willing to marry than there are young women, not all old men can remarry. These men would remain married but seek sex with a young woman. If young married women are barred from extramarital relations, only prostitutes can satisfy this demand. (186)

In the article “The Economics of Prostitution” published by Forbes Magazine, Michael Noer discusses Edlund and Korn’s article. “But the implication remains that wives and whores are--if not exactly like Coke and Pepsi--something akin to champagne and beer. The same sort of thing” (Noer).

In the book *Prostitution: Sex Work, Policy and Politics*, the authors Jane Pitcher, Maggie O'Neill, and Teela Sanders try to investigate beyond the binaries of “choice” and “exploitation” of women in the prostitution market. They commented on K. Davis’s article, “The sociology of prostitution”, “he presents a functionalist approach: that the complexity of buying and selling sex boils down to the fact that as an institution, prostitution serves a useful function – it is a ‘necessary evil’” (Sanders et al. 3). They quoted Pheterson (1989: 231):

The prostitute is the prototype of the stigmatized woman’ defined by unchastity which casts her status as impure. The ‘prostitute’, or the ‘whore’, is contrasted to the female mirror image of the ‘Madonna’ which portrays the image of pure femininity: that is, sacred and holy. The ‘Madonna/whore’ binary projects the status of the prostitute woman as a failed example of womanhood, defined by

her immoral sexual behaviours, and someone to be avoided. (2)

Although the “sex worker is made morally reprehensible, a victim, impure, depraved and suffering marginalization and ‘whore stigma’ (Pheterson, 1989), and on the other hand, she is a body-object of fascination and desire”. As for the women, it is a rather perilous situation to be in. “Women’s generally disadvantaged position in the context of capitalist society is central to their experience as prostitutes ... Women’s entry into prostitution is characterised by an act of resistance to the experience of relative poverty or the threat of it”, McLeod says (1982: 26) (McLeod 2).

As for these sex workers, “Bell documents how there has been a continual construction of ‘the prostitute’ body through a process of ‘othering’. This has been done by contrasting the failed prostitute body with some primary image of female perfection: good/bad; healthy/diseased; agent/victim” (6). “Bell concludes: ‘The prostitute body was produced as a negative identity by the bourgeois subject, an empty symbol filled from the outside with the debris of the modern body/body politic, a sign to women to sublimate their libidinal body in their reproductive body’ (1994: 72)”.

Carole Pateman in her book *The Marriage Contract* writes, “prostitution is an integral part of patriarchal capitalism ... men can buy sexual access to women’s bodies in the capitalist market” (Pateman 189). “She states that the prostitution contract comes to symbolize everything that is wrong in the employment contract” (Sanders et al 7). Raymond, Farley and Jeffreys argue a very important point on this, “women can consent to prostitution when it is fundamentally sexual exploitation” (8). As for the wellbeing for the women in society, “Farley (2005) puts forward theoretical arguments that state that prostitution is always harmful to both the women who ‘prostitute’ themselves and women’s position in society in general”. “More recently,

Jeffreys (2008) argues that states which have legalized prostitution, or made provisions for regulation, are acting as pimps and are continuing the male domination of women.”

In the article “The economics of the sex trade”, author Stan Paul discusses the idea of “reputation mechanism”. Stan Paul is an economist and, in this article, he analyses the policy-making on prostitution. Prostitution is being studied through an economic lens. He quoted Manisha Shah, a researcher who had co-edited “Oxford Handbook of the Economics of Prostitution”. Shah says that in studying the sex market, it is very much similar to any other market studied by the economists. She comments, “We know that prostitution has important policy implications because of the effect that prostitution has on STI rates, risky behaviors, as well as its responsiveness to poverty. But we don’t know as much about optimal policy design” (Shah). Shah explains the concept of “reputation mechanisms”, “reviews create reputations for sex workers, much like eBay and Airbnb reviews create reputations for vendors”. So, a prostitute’s market value is highly likely to depend on the reputation she has among her clients. “Reputation, in other words, is the mechanism by which contracts are enforced in illegal sex markets”, she adds.

Authors Ivan Wolffers, Rika Subarniati Triyoga, Endang Basuki, Didik Yudhi, Walter Devillé and Rachmat Hargono on their article “Pacar and Tamu: Indonesian Women Sex Workers' Relationships with Men” discuss the reputation of a female sex worker in Indonesia and how this affects her relationship with men and forces her to form multiple identities within herself. In Indonesia, a female sex worker is considered to be “perampuan tuna susila” which refers to a “a woman without morals” and “pelacur”, meaning a “person with incorrect sexual behaviour” (Wolffers et al. 41).

Indonesian term “pacar” refers to a male partner. The necessity of having a male partner is important “because without a male partner a woman is seen as incomplete in Indonesian culture” (47). “Traditional values emphasise the need for women to please and find a man, and if she has not succeeded to do so before her 23rd or 24th birthday there is every possibility she may be perceived as “perawan tua” or an old spinster” (48). The main differences in the roles of women as wives and sex workers is that, “in their role as lovers or wives, women are supposed to be emotionally involved, while in their role as sex workers they prefer to keep their emotional distance” (42).

The term “tamu” is given to a man who visits the sex worker, and is a guest. “There is generally no emotional relationship between the sex worker and the tamu and interaction is characterized by behaviour that stresses this emotional distance” (45). “If tamu visit a sex worker regularly, they become a langganan. They also become tidak kotor (the word tidak means not)” (47). The term “kotor” here refers to the “perceptions of dirtiness”. So, when the client becomes a langganan, their “cleanliness becomes more or less proven because the sex worker has had sex several times with them and not experienced ill health or disease” and “this makes the relationship more emotional and less likely to be defined as a business transaction. The woman thereby crosses the line between being a sex worker and a person who is personally involved because of her needs as a woman”. In such cases, the sex worker is forced to form multiple identities within herself.

Sex workers often tend to keep their lives separate. Some will have separate households and not let their family know. Some will be widows with children who are turning to sex work for an extra income. For those with children, “being a mother may also be important in this respect” and “those who work far away from home” “can keep their identities separate” (44).

Their role as a parent and “their behaviour towards men is radically different when they are working” (45). Their career will demand them to form different personalities.

At times the sex workers will develop steady relationship with her “pacar” “to make them feel at home’ and to ‘satisfy their own feelings’. With him, she will go shopping together and spend part of her free time” (48). At times, she may develop a much deeper bonding with her langganan becoming a “simpanan or gundik, a mistress. As a secret wife or mistress, the sex worker will continue to live in the brothel but does not serve other clients anymore”.

Mohammad Suud takes a retrospective evaluation on Indonesia’s inconsistency on prostitution policy in his article “Retrospective Evaluation on Prostitution Policy in Indonesia”. The government has not been congruous with controlling the localization of prostitution. He writes:

The governmental policy could not grasp the goals: rehabilitation and resocialization. The policy has strengthened the institutionalization of prostitute-pimp relations. The government has secretly become an institution serving pimps (9)

Indonesian laws give its citizens – men and women – right to work. Although the government directed job opportunities are increasing, it is simply inadequate. As a result, sex workers who are wanting to turn towards more socially acceptable jobs are failing to do so. Suud holds the government responsible for this. he discusses the moralists, institutionalist and women’s social point of view and how they perceive of prostitution. He quotes Hull et al:

First are those who want prostitution to disappear from Indonesian society. Second are those who want the sex industry to be regulated and reformed effectively... There is a

third group that asks for a clear and consistent attitude from the government towards the existence of prostitution” (10)

There are “prostitution complexes are legalized and approved by the government” by the name of “Lokaliasasi”. During the colonial period in the 17th century, the government has established “house of correction for women' to rehabilitate prostitutes and protect public order” (Suud 12). These “public women” were made to work in brothels.

Around the 19th century, “the central government shifted responsibility for controlling brothels to local Governments”. “The Legislation of Prostitution. John et al. stipulated that up to the time there is no law in Indonesia prohibiting explicitly the sale of sexual services. The Indonesian Criminal Code just prohibits those who help and facilitate illegal sexual services”. At the present time there is no clear law prohibiting the act of prostitution, but Article 296, Article 297, Article 506 are all directed towards “pimps” who are benefiting from regulating the sex market. But the government regulated brothels are still on run and although the local police would raid the places once in a while, they are more likely to keep the pimps and sex workers imprisoned for some times and release them after receiving an amount of bribery. In this case the practice remains on run while the local police benefits from the periodic raids.

3.3 Post Colonialism and the Ideas of Communism

Colonialism follows a certain pattern. The colonizers are always masking their colonization under the pretense of doing greater good for the colonized people. The method and approach may change but their intention hidden beneath that façade eventually comes out sooner or later. Indonesia has gone through centuries of colonization. The present Indonesia we know

today has been formed under massive influence of the Dutch and Japanese who had previously colonized the country.

John A. Fairlie discusses the Dutch colonial period in his article “The Dutch East Indies”. “Early in the Christian era, Hindus came from India who introduced their religion, amalgamated with the earlier peoples, and developed important political systems. Later came Arabs, who spread the Mohammedan faith which now prevails” (Fairlie 711). In the 16th century, the European influence began with the Portuguese. “But these were replaced in the next century by the Dutch, who hold political control and constitute the largest part of the 200,000 Europeans”. Fairlie adds, “until the end of the eighteenth century, the Dutch control was exercised by the United East India Company; but in 1788 the company was dissolved and its political powers were taken over by the government” (712). Although the authority shifted to the British between 1811-1816, the power was restored back to the hands of the Dutch soon after that. “Legally, the Netherlands Indies form part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands”. “Public administration is highly developed and well organized” (713). “There are also native officials known as regents and subordinate native office”. Soon a system of provincial and local government was formed. “An act of 1922 provides for a new type of provincial councils for larger provinces”, where a governor will be selected for the larger provinces who will act as the head of the local self-government. “There are European courts for Europeans, and also in civil and commercial cases for natives and foreign Orientals, in so far as they are subject to European law; but also, native courts for some matters, as for matrimonial and inheritance cases in Java, where Islamic law is applicable”.

In their article “The Effect of Dutch Rule on the Civilization of the East Indies”, A. Vandenbosch discusses the effect of three-year long colonization on the Indonesian lives and

culture. Although the country was ruled by Western people, its “native society has not been deeply penetrated by Western influences. This is due chiefly to the character of Dutch colonial policy and administration. The Dutch have followed a policy of non-assimilation” (Vandenbosch 498). Native values and cultures were preserved and the education system was also kept as close to their native culture. “Dutch shown a preference for indirect rule, but they have sought to preserve, to revive where necessary, and to strengthen the native institutions and cultures. There has been no attempt to westernize the Indonesian” (499). The practice of non-assimilation was an important factor in sustaining their colonial rule for such a long period of time. They preferred an indirect rule, therefore the natives did not feel pressured to change their culture. Instead, the Dutch influenced them to strengthen their cultural values and native institutions. “Instead of forcing their language upon the natives, the Dutch have made intense studies of native languages and have saved some of them from extinction” (500). However, “after the middle of the last century, gave the native elite, in particular the Javanese regents, Dutch education”. Their method of colonization was slow and sly. “The natives were persuaded to change their methods of production and in one way or another were weaned away from their traditional ways of living” (499). Religious laws were also altered. Vandenbosch added:

Apostasy is regarded as an abominable act, punishable in this world and the next. Death, denial of the corpse-washing ritual, prohibition of the funeral ritual, denial of right of burial in a Moslem cemetery, dissolution of marriage-these are some of the legal consequences of a declaration of apostasy under Moslem law (500).

However, the Dutch rule allowed freedom to these people who could escape the punishment under the Dutch rule. This freedom also invited people of other religious beliefs to convert into Islam.

In 1942, the Japanese troops had invaded Java after fighting the Dutch for three months. They were the liberators who had come to free Indonesia from its Western colonizers and empower East Asia. However, their true motive was soon out in the open. Goto Ken'ichi writes in his article "Modern Japan and Indonesia", in the Greater East Asia Conference held in Tokyo in 1943,

The declaration upheld the ideals of 'the construction of order to achieve co-prosperity, mutual respect for sovereign independence, and the elimination of racial discrimination', Japan's actual involvement with Asian peoples was deeply tinged with the Japanese sense of being the leader in Asia, as their regimes in Taiwan and Korea readily demonstrate
(16)

When the Japanese started their rule, there was a sharp contrast between the style of rule between the Japanese and the Dutch. The Indonesians were quick to catch on and soon their shift in attitude towards their colonizers changed their fate as a prolonged colonized nation. "Except for the First World War period, Dutch rule was a peace-time regime governed by rationalism, in what Anderson called 'a calm, businesslike, bourgeois style'" (Ken'ichi 538). Ken'ichi also writes:

Japan's military administration presented a very different picture, partly because it was conducted in conjunction with the prosecution of the war, and it was characterized by ideological, fanatical romanticism. Therefore, Japanese military men dealt with Indonesians in a kasar (rough, crude) fashion symbolized by the practice of 'face slapping'.

In the Dutch colonial administration, the civil officials predominated. The Netherlands Indies armed forces worked for domestic peace and their objective was to restrain the nationalist movement in the political centre of Java. The Japanese on the other hand focused more on military and army domination. They helped form a “voluntary army” called “Patriotic Defence”. It was a military and semi-military organization which included local recruits as well.

“Soekarno, Mohammad Hatta and other prominent nationalist movement leaders and proponents of the non-cooperation line were thrown into jail or exiled” (539). The Dutch captured nationalist leaders like Soekarno and Md Hatta, whereas the Japanese liberated them under the condition that they cooperate with the Japanese whilst also having certain freedom of action. “From the point of view of nationalism, the period of Japanese rule also stimulated the politicization of the Indonesians in general, which led to the spread of nationalism”. They wanted to spread nationalism and during this time, many popular organizations were formed. “But perhaps an even more important development (though one hardly intended by the Japanese themselves) was the political and nationalistic awakening of many Indonesians as a negative response to Japan's policies and Japanese behaviour”.

Changes were made in terms of society and culture. Ken'ichi writes:

In the face of intense resistance from Muslim political forces to the establishment of the colonial system as epitomized by the Aceh War, the Netherlands followed the advice of C. Snouck Hurgronje and other scholars of Islam and tried to undermine the political power of this faith. Conversely Japan, quick to note the pervasive political and social influence Islam exerted on Indonesian society, notably in rural areas, pursued a policy of utilizing the latent energy of Islam to buttress the military administration. (540)

Japan helped Muslim students “become middle-echelon leaders in various segments of society as members of the Peta, the Hizbullah (Muslim volunteer corps), young men's groups, or local militias”. “Short-sightedly in contrast to the Dutch who had recognized Islamic social and cultural values and followed a policy of non-interference, the Japanese tried to thrust Japanese values upon Muslims”. Their treatment towards the natives also varied to a great extent. “They [Japan] made no attempt to approach the local masses directly”. “The radio and newspapers as well as theatres, cinemas, and literary publications were all mobilized to advertise the Japanese goals in the war and seek cooperation for the military government”.

“It hardly needs to be said that what aroused the apparently docile Indonesians, whom the Dutch had thought 'the meekest people on earth', to launch an armed struggle against the Netherlands and successfully win their independence was their ardent nationalism” (541). President Hatta said in a radio speech in 1981, “What matters above all other values is that the people's minds have been liberated from their sense of inferiority. In contrast to the Dutch, the Imperial Japanese army has taught us to be brave and to recognize ourselves on our own merits” (542).

The rise of communists and the government support the party received marks one of the notable events in the political history of not just Indonesia, but specifically of East Asia. Marxism had established its hold in Indonesia in 1920, which then slowly grew up to become a powerful non-ruling party under the name of Communist Party of Indonesia (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, PKI). The fate of PKI ended on a tragic note when more than half a million communist and non-communists were assassinated under the alleged coup d'état. However, with reference to the ideas of Communism and by extension Leninism, the debate on the validity of sex-work can easily be sorted out. Communism criticizes capitalism and according to Marx and

Engels, prostitution is a product of capitalism – the money-making propaganda, where one profits off of another in whatever way it is possible. The distinction between the borders of money making is faded. Women becomes the ultimate commodifying agent. On this, Vladimir Lenin says in “Capitalism and Female Labor”:

It is these women that the capitalists most willingly employ as home-workers, who are prepared for a monstrously low wage to “earn a little extra” for themselves and their family, for the sake of a crust of bread. It is from among these women, too, that the capitalists of all countries recruit for themselves (like the ancient slave-owners and the medieval feudal lords) any number of concubines at a most “reasonable” price. And no amount of “moral indignation” (hypocritical in 99 cases out of 100) about prostitution can do anything against this trade in female flesh; so long as wage-slavery exists, inevitably prostitution too will exist.

Marx and Engels, too have commented on how prostitution, as an extension of capitalistic demand serves the purpose of sustaining the bourgeoisie in the society in *Communist Manifesto*. It was them who established the ideals of communism in their collaborated work. Although this was first envisioned by Plato in the 4th BCE, where the governing body would devote themselves to the betterment of the entire community, it has recently found an established form under the name of Communism. Communism seeks to eliminate private profit-making agenda that ultimately gives rise to class division through the exploitation of a certain group of people. Communism on the other hand seeks to elevate the society as a whole – envisioning an ideal society where private property would be abolished and there would be economic equality.

Chapter 4: Methodology, Findings, and Limitations

4.1 Theory and Methodology

Under the socio-economic and politico-cultural circumstances of the post-colonial Indonesia, what exactly caused women such as Dewi Ayu to be forced into life-long prostitution? Why was there no way out for these women even when the brothels allowed them a way out? What forced them to be imprisoned in? The author Eka Kurniawan's impeccable writing captured not only the hearts of his audiences but shook them to the very core earning a spot beside Garcia Marquez. What was it about his writing that enchanted the audience to such extent?

I intend to study Kurniawan's text, *Beauty is a Wound*, from a post-colonial perspective. The study focuses on the circumstances of being forced into prostitution during the post-colonial times in the lands of Indonesia. The primary source of information is Kurniawan's text. Since it is prostitution, the key focus of this paper, learning and understanding the history of prostitution is also necessary. I have also studied the history of colonization in Indonesia, Indonesia's economic, political and social situation. These circumstances will help us understand the courses of public life and how that might have had affected the women who were forced into prostitution, and why return was not a viable option. Along with this, my study highlights Marxist and communist ideas that were prevalent in the postcolonial Indonesia and how these ideologies could have shaped the face of prostitution if communism were to establish.

Sex trade is hardly ever a profession that one chooses to engage in willingly. But this profession has been prevalent since the ancient days in various forms and has not lost its popularity despite of also being a highly disreputable job. At the present time, human trafficking

is one of the major causes of the expansion of the industry. In the olden days, it was considered a sacred act for the purpose of satisfying the authority – whether that be the priests, the kings or the noblemen. Through this paper I intend to develop this aspect of the narrative that has not yet addressed the issue in a post-colonial setting in the Indonesian context using the Kurniawan's narration. The paper will also discuss the difficulty of exit from this world of erotic chaos. All my sources are based on the primary text and the secondary texts including: fictions and non-fictions, journal articles, newspaper articles, and interviews.

4.2 Findings

As I have mentioned earlier, in spite of having a rich historical journey the global historical narratives often fall short to highlight the milestones of Indonesian journey from its colonial period to its gradual independence. It is because of that reason that their journey is lesser known. This also made my research journey a little more challenging as there were not many secondary sources found relevant to the topic of our discussion. Apart from some factual information, much of the data relied directly on the primary text. But this was also an opportunity to attempt to contribute to the void left by previous researches. My analysis is therefore based on the primary texts, the historical information of Indonesia from political, economic and social perspective, texts from other post-colonial writers who attempted to depict their history, and finally on the history of prostitution and its portrayal in the literary world.

4.3 Limitations

Documenting political history can be as challenging. Collecting accurate evidence of the historical accounts, choosing a format to represent them in a way that is best accessible to the readers and finally getting it published and reaching the audience can ultimately fail to see the end of the day as these books may pose a threat to the government narratives of the historical accounts, and thus, are bound to get blacklisted. Writing historical fiction is not easy. Most writers avoid the genre altogether. But when so much of the history has been suppressed and rewritten, the authors of the country often feel indebted to deliver the accurate details. Although most of the time, this does not set well.

In an article titled as “Wit as a Political Weapon: Satirists and Censors”, Leonard Freedman discusses and compares the constraints on political satire in different countries in the twentieth and twenty-first century. He writes:

Censorship is a defining characteristic of authoritarian regimes. Although there are wide differences in the rigor with which censorship is exercised, satirists in many autocratic systems must play a dangerous game, confronting deletions, bans, and confiscations of their work, and personal penalties ranging from fines, prison, exile, even death. (87)

Most government settings adopt this practice. During Hitler’s regime in Germany, political satires were censored. Nobody was allowed to publish any critical piece of writing on his ruling. In Russia, writers were allowed to make satires on everyday life, but writing about the Soviet system was highly unacceptable. In Egypt, the tolerance level of the satirical genre was higher. But they too had limitations. Writing about the President, rape, religion and social values were not allowed. It is important to note that although its tolerance may vary from one regime to

another, direct mockery of the person in power and their ruling system is nowhere acceptable. Books, articles, cartoons based on these topics are banned. In cases the artists are arrested and imprisoned.

Coming to Indonesia, the context is no different here. Due to the barbaric history of Indonesia, the natives are less vocal about their oppressions and sufferings. They will go out of their way to avoid any possible conflict. Dutch scholar Henk Maier accuses President Sukarno of suppressing the freedom of speech of his citizens. He criticizes Sukarno's political decree of no. 4/1963 that require every publication to be checked through the local prosecutor's office within forty-eight hours of publication. "The Attorney General is thus vested with broad powers to criminalize the writing and publication of certain books and to seize all copies of works adjudged by him as 'capable of disturbing public order' and having 'a negative influence on efforts to achieve the goals of the Indonesian revolution'", McGlynn writes in his article "Silenced Voices, Muted Expressions: Indonesian Literature Today" (39).

Prominent authors including Sujinah were imprisoned at the time. However, the laws loosened after President Suharto's fall. These powers were more relaxed and after 1990, authors gained more liberty to write about historical and political accounts. However, writings still had to go through censorship and it was during this time that the writers began to include many tactics in their writing. Under the repressive postcolonial regime, we can assume why Eka Kurniawan has adopted of magic realism into his fictional account.

When documenting colonialism and post-colonialism, people often tend to overlook the Asian, and specifically the East-Asian and Southeast-Asian context. Colonies in different countries of Africa, colonies in India are well-discussed within the discourse of colonization. Therefore, tales of colonization in countries like Indonesia, Korea, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong,

Philippines, and even China get lost among other historical narratives. While doing this research, finding much data about the history of colonization in Indonesia was not an easy task. On top of that, there were not many books written on the subject of Indonesian colonization.

Although most colonization had started with the white Europeans invading in the non-white lands, there have been other colonization which are often forgotten. The Japanese colonization of its neighboring Asian countries is one of the biggest and widespread colonial propaganda that was initiated in the early days of the 20th century and lasted till the mid-20th century. Some of the countries that Japan had invaded in include Indonesia, Taiwan, Korea, parts of China, etc.

Chapter 5: Critical analysis

5.1 Kurniawan's extraordinary style

Eka Kurniawan's impeccable style of writing is not only captivating while reading, but has the power to etch into the hearts of the readers. His story telling is simple, and yet very powerful. Kurniawan has the ability to use everyday language to describe very grotesque scenario in a light manner. The violent and erotic encounters juxtapose finely against his use of humor and magic realism. As the author himself claimed that his use of these devices was intentional, and he wanted to diversify his audience and create a unique viewpoint to showcase Indonesia's history. The language used plays a powerful factor here that allows it to depict the natural way of life. There is hardly any retouching done, and what we read are raw images showing the true portrayal of life in the colonial and post-colonial times.

The story, although has Dewi Ayu as the protagonist, sweeps through the lives of many other characters. Even in their short description Kurniawan ensures a panoramic view of their lives – including the lives of Dewi Ayu's all four daughters, their respective partners, the house maid, the local grave digger, and even the local legendary figure Princess Rengganis, and many others. Even though Kurniawan shares their stories with great detail and importance, he is careful to not sway away from the protagonist, Dewi Ayu. Through the lives of these various characters, we learn about the social and political circumstances a little better. Had it been only focused on Dewi Ayu, the conclusion drawn from the story would have been partial and the readers would not have known the story of the other side. But here, Kurniawan is giving access to all of it and letting his readers decide.

The readers are getting several male perceptions on their attitude towards visiting brothels. Dewi Ayu's husband Ma Gedik who swore to never take another lover or be disloyal to Ma Iyang quickly changed his mind after visiting the brothel for the first time. At first hesitant, he later argued that his interaction with the sex worker was solely based on the exchange of money and his relation was purely physical. It was simply a physical need that he was fulfilling, and therefore was not considered to be disloyal towards his lover. Here, the author craftily incorporated the male perspective on the engagement with prostitutes who view it as a transaction rather than infidelity. Therefore, they feel no guilt or shame in sexual intercourse outside their marriage. Speaking along the lines of Edlund and Korn, the male is not viewing the prostitute as another woman his wife would see as a potential threat, but as somebody he is paying in exchange of physical pleasures.

Another interesting technique worthy of noticing is that Kurniawan has kept all of his characters flawed. Not one of the characters were morally exemplary. The war hero, Shodancho who was celebrated and beloved by all, raped his wife time and again and treated her like an animal behind closed doors. The town goon Maman Gendeng, who is feared by all and would not hesitate to commit murder, is shown to be a considerate and loving husband. The madam of the whorehouse – Mama Kalong, who initially suggested to bring in the girls for sex work is even shown to be genuinely caring towards the girls serving in her brothel. The portrayals of these characters perhaps go as far as to suggest that they all have done moral wrongs, and truly, nobody is a saint. This can also be analyzed as such – despite the commotion caused by all the characters, it is somehow Dewi Ayu who caused the least of them, and yet it is her who is labeled as the “sinful one”.

5.2 The Demeanor of Dewi Ayu

The poise of Dewi Ayu laid in the factors that she had always maintained a standard of dignity for herself. Keeping her professional life in its place, she made all the efforts to give her children as normal a life as possible. With her role as a mother, she never compromised. “The children were cared for by Mirah, but during the day she took care of them herself just like any regular mom. She sent the kids to the best schools, and to the mosque to recite prayers with Kyai Jahro” (Kurniawan 86). Dewi Ayu herself although born into a Catholic household, was never a practicing Catholic. After the independence when the majority of the natives were followers of Islam, she had sent her children to get Islamic education even if she herself did not devote to it. In fact, she had little faith in prayers. “It’s been years since I believed in prayer” (20). But time and again we have seen her making prayers at hopeless situations. She had made prayers to get out of the brothel while being a comfort woman, she later prayed to have an ugly daughter who would not be an object of sexual desire. “There’s no curse more terrible than to give birth to a pretty female in a world of men as nasty as dogs in heat” she had commented (11). This was an essentially notable dialogue from Dewi Ayu that not only described her stance on having children, but how awful life could be to women, and especially to beautiful women without support in a world full of men who would view them as nothing more than objects to satisfy their sexual cravings. “The legend of her [Dewi Ayu’s] beauty rivaled that of the city’s founder, and the only reason there had never been a war over her was because she was a whore, so anyone could sleep with her as long as he had the money” (100). While her beauty had proven to be a curse for her and her three daughters – the reason she did not want her fourth daughter to be born or at least born beautiful - it, ironically, had also been the reason what protected her from being

further ravaged by the hungry men. Prostitution, a curse that had also been a blessing in disguise for her.

Although she voluntarily gave herself up to prostitution in the later days, her demeanor has always been praiseworthy. “Strangers to the city would never have guessed that she was a whore, dressed more modestly than anyone else and walking as daintily as a palace maiden” (100). She was also extremely professional while dealing with clients. “She strictly limited herself to just one man per evening” (87) and “she never tempted men in public: that was not her way” (100). She led a normal, civil life outside of her profession as a prostitute. Being the determined woman that she was, she managed to get back her house where she could give her daughters a decent life even if that meant sacrificing her own freedom. “Then I’ll come back and whore for you to pay off my debt”, Dewi Ayu said while leveraging herself as a promise of compensation to Mama Kalong before getting back her house.

Even at 16, she had a bold and commanding presence. The women at Bloedenkamp considered her as the group leader although she was not the eldest by age. She had wisdom, and understanding mature beyond her age. As we have seen the Japanese commandant who had imprisoned her along with thousand more people was also taken aback when she had boldly demanded medical care in exchange for the sexual favors he was asking for.

The Japanese started building places for their comfort women soon. As history tells us, many were natives, or people from among the imprisoned. Dewi Ayu was to be selected among them, being beautiful and of the right age. The priority at this moment was to provide physical comfort to the Japanese soldiers. So, the women selected had to be carefully scrutinized, then taken to a luxurious mansion where they were given private rooms as lavish as bridal chambers

with soft beddings, closet filled with clothes; they were fed well and kept under high security with “the two guards, there were more soldiers patrolling the expansive grounds” (64).

Dewi Ayu’s fate had once again given her an opportunity for a change when Maman Gendeng had proposed his wish marry her. She had refused this invitation of fate that could have brought her a change, given her a different life. At this point we have seen Dewi Ayu rejecting offers to turn her life around many times. On the surface level the absurdity of it might shock the readers. The woman who is trying to escape the life as a prostitute is actively denying any offer that are coming her way. I think this is where lies the key to understanding her character. Dewi Ayu wanted an out, but she wanted dignity and respect above all. She had shown to not compromise her integrity which made her who she was. As the wife of Maman Gendeng, she would no longer have to sleep with different clients a night, and although she will no longer be a prostitute, she will always be the woman who had once served in the whorehouse, and with her popularity as “the city’s favorite whore” a normal life would have been far from imagination. This is in addition to the fact that her own husband – Maman, too would have treated her as a former prostitute whom he took upon the pity to marry – rather than the woman he married for love. The respect and honor she had in her current position would have tarnished under this new identity.

However, this by no means suggests she was happy with her life as a prostitute. After giving birth to three beautiful daughters who had been utter disappointments despite Dewi Ayu’s desperate efforts, she finally decided to end her life. “‘If I live to be a hundred,’ she said with a measured calm, ‘then I will give birth to eight children. That’s too many’” (13). “My womb is a place where demons deposit their seed and so, I give birth to demon children. And I’m sick of it, Rosinah” (15). She also hoped her fourth daughter to be born ugly as then she would not have to

follow her mother's or her sisters' footsteps – because men do not want ugly women and so, they leave them alone. Beauty had truly become a curse, the title reference - a genius Eka Kurniawan had beautifully intricately within the story.

Around this time, we also notice a societal change in perceiving sex work. During her ripe age, when she had started working in the brothel and was a young woman, she was the envy of other women whose husbands would rather sleep with Dewi Ayu than with them. They were jealous, but had to act decently because she was an important person in the city. This reputation experiences drop with the passage of time. During her last years, the same women who would not have dared to call her names in person would slander her on her deathbed. The local *kyai*, also had started making more appearance. He called out her “shameful behavior” when she wrapped herself in burial shroud and laid down to die, the imam leading the burial ceremony even denied her wish to have a headstone with the words, “I gave birth to four children, and I died” because she did not deserve such request after living a sinful life. Dewi Ayu, the woman who was treated with respect and was considered to be an important person in the society was buried among the other “ill-fated” – thieves, goons, communists and the others who were considered to be the litters of the society.

The dignity, and the probity she had maintained all her life came to a disgraceful end when she died. Her own personality – her wisdom, her integrity, the charismatic presence she carried herself with, her leadership qualities, her compassion, her role as a wonderful mother – seemed to have had no value in the face of the label that was slapped onto her identity. Her identity was in the end reduced to her profession as a sex worker, one who had led a sinful life, not someone who was much more than that and was essentially the victim of her circumstances.

5.3 Colonial Circumstances

Before the Japanese invasion, the Dutch had kept personal concubines who were to serve as private sex slaves. The merchants and plantation owners were rich and this was one way showing off their wealth and status. At this time, the concept of public brothels was not yet in full practice. “At that time there was only one brothel, at the end of the pier. It had actually been built for the Dutch soldiers living in the barracks, but after syphilis spread most of them stopped going there, preferring to keep their own personal concubines, and then the port laborers began to visit” (32). The brothel as we see was also designed to serve the militants, and therefore inaccessible to the natives.

The brothel keeper of the novel, Mama Kalong who initially worked in the barracks as a young girl was not making enough money, but with her good business knowledge “she knew what they needed and they knew what she wanted. The soldiers paid her to straddle their laps naked” (69). With that she had started the first brothel during the Dutch ruling period. It was a viable economic decision. Later when the Japanese came, she saw this an opportunity to grow her business bigger. She had suggested that the soldiers needed physical comfort and that she had the facilities to provide them that. This intelligent business strategy was fruitful and “during the last years of colonial power, it is fair to say that she was the richest woman in Halimunda. She bought land sold by farmers who had lost everything...Her holdings were exceeded perhaps only by the Dutch plantations” (70).

The brothels had begun to expand in full force only at the end of the colonial rule and this provided satisfactory income. Along with that came reputation. Although her primary source of income was not exactly honorable, her extended wealth was massive and she had easily earned

herself a spot among the top socials. She was invited to every important event in the city and was treated with high significance.

Women like Mama Kalong whose business scheme involved the ruination of many other lives could easily be seen off as the antagonistic figures. While they might be to some extent – one has to understand the root of all of this. The beginning had always started from the strive to survive in a world that provided these women with no other alternate feasible living conditions. During the colonial period when women were forced into the plantation owner's households by their own poor family one simply had not have many options if one wanted to avoid this fate. The economy was in the hands of the Dutch and later the Japanese. After the colonial period had ended, the new-born country was struggling to recover its centuries long oppression and physical, economic and mental trauma. The country did not yet have an economic condition where penniless and abandoned women had decent means of survival. The political and cultural aspect is another issue. The political situation of a country ultimately helps shaping its economic, social and cultural aspects. We have witnessed many occasions in history where a certain political period of a country completely changed its position in the global economy and that economy, in turn, helps change the social and cultural aspects of the country. Mama Kalong is just an example of what a poor and imbalanced economy could give rise to. It is like a chain reaction, like the fall of domino effect that propagates a series of more. Her origin started from striving to survive, her later business strategy added to the blooming economy and the thrive was based on the cost of many lives like Dewi Ayu's. It is almost paradoxical how these women got trapped in their own hell that they had originally created to escape their helplessness.

Dewi Ayu had attempted to leave the brothel and she fought to live as normal a life as possible. But her tainted image and fate had to get in the way. It was again the money that she

had lost ultimately held her back. She had no option, but to return to the brothel to pay off the debt. Her image as a sex worker had also contributed to this in addition. Outside the brothel she was free to fall a prey. At a time when the law enforcement was crippling, single and beautiful women like Dewi Ayu were at the peak of vulnerability. We had seen how her reputation as a prostitute held the men back from barging into the privacy of her household – as they could willingly get her to do it in exchange of some amount of money.

5.4 Postcolonial and Communism - Relating to the context

Prostitution has continued its way throughout the course of history in various different forms have had different driving forces depending on the circumstances of the time. In the ancient time it was perceived to be a noble activity as the primary purpose was part of the religious rituals where the noblemen could engage in. As civilization began to evolve, societies were established and class structures had transformed, and prostitution had seen its new face. Wealthy merchants could now afford to have personal concubines serving them in exchange of food and shelter. The concubines would live in the same household, often work as a maid in the daytime and satisfy their masters in the nighttime. This practiced co-existed alongside a healthy marriage for centuries,

Soon, new religions began to be introduced which had different rules and regulations. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam imposed laws that prohibited the engagement of such sexual interactions. Now, the practice was falling under immoral values. Although the practice persisted, it was not religiously supported. Few centuries later, with the advent of medical science people began to learn about the health risks that lingered with the engagement of multiple sexual partners. They had begun to identify different diseases that spread through

unprotected sexual intercourse. Around this time, the custom of concubines was also plummeting. Colonization had already started three centuries ago that had spread to the African and Asian countries, enslaving the locals, pillaging the cash goods; but now was its peak time. The soldiers and officials who had been working tirelessly in this journey were in need of physical contentment. They were mentally drained and physically exhausted. Offering them a number of sexual partners was a brilliant way to relieve the stress.

Then in the 20th century when the Westerners were already colonizing the East for their profit, Japan too began to follow their route to its neighboring countries under the pretense of liberating them. During the decades of chaos all around China, Korea, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar and many more, Japanese soldiers used “comfort women” who were either tricked, or forced into serving the Japanese army. These “comfort women” were mostly from among the occupied natives, but also included some Japanese. The housings of these “comfort women” were later turned into brothels after the World War II when Japan had lost had drawn back.

The post-colonial era had established brothels in those countries who were already experienced in serving the higher officials and now, in the present postcolonial circumstance when the newly birthed country was recovering from the years of exploitation and economically stumbling, these brothels became the source of livelihood for the women trapped inside.

When we look at the island country Indonesia, that had gained its liberation in 1945, it did not have stable economic and political conditions that could provide well for its citizens. The country was still a long way from recovering from centuries long oppression. Its wounded history and birth laced with barbaric atrocity would continue to haunt them for a long time. Its first President Sukarno, a war hero back then was held at high expectations. He, along with

others, had fought to get Indonesia its long-awaited independence. The country felt safe in his hands. Events unforeseen, Sukarno failed to stand up to the expectations. His ministers doused themselves into corruption and the political and economic situation was seeing its collapse.

The brothels were now hosting locals – war heroes, politicians, goons, and ordinary people. Prostitution as an industry, – like any other industry, thrives from profit making. At a time when the economy was degrading, and locals were struggling to make ends meet, it was especially difficult for the prostitutes to come out of the brothels and search for economic source. Most of the prostitutes working at the time were forced into it during the occupation of the Japanese. Many of them had lost their families and had nowhere to turn to. Surviving on their own outside the brothels was unfeasible. This was a matter of survival, and so they had to continue to remain inside where shelter and food were guaranteed. Also, by this time after a long period of forceful sexual interactions, the drive to protest had diminished. The postcolonial circumstances, the aftermath of the war involving abuse and deaths, the loss of loved ones and the psychological trauma of their fate had drained their expectations from life.

“Look,” she said to another woman next to her, “they must be confused by two foreign nations making war on their land” (53). When Dewi Ayu and the remaining Dutch were taken into the prisoner’s camp by the Japanese, the native Indonesians were witnessing two foreign forces – who had no business in their land were necessarily stomping about deciding everything while they were mere spectators. They were given the least amount of consideration and account. The natives had already been serving the Dutch for centuries. The Dutch were thriving by abusing the natives while they starved in poverty, hunger and loss. If this was not enough, the Japanese decide to intervene and overthrow the Dutch in order to “restore” Indonesian rights. Only what changed were the people exploiting them and their mode of exploitation. The Dutch

preferred an indirect encounter that would ensure their longevity, while the Japanese wanted things quicker. The remaining natives, the rightful arbiters were kept shut. They had no control over their lives and certainly not over deciding what was to happen to their own land.

The scenario at the time can be explained by Marx and Engels in their pamphlet *Communist Manifesto*, “On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family, based? On capital, on private gain. In its completely developed form, this family exists only among the bourgeoisie. But this state of things finds its complement in the practical absence of the family among the proletarians, and in public prostitution” (24). When financial stability and personal profit become the backbone to a sound family structure and privileges that come along with it, the contradictory must exist with the opposition for this sound family structure to survive. It means, the thriving side cannot simply exist without the exploitation of the other. “Prostitution is only a specific expression of the general prostitution of the laborer, and since it is a relationship in which falls not the prostitute alone, but also the one who prostitutes – and the latter’s abomination is still greater – the capitalist, etc., also comes under this head” (Marx 42). The debate between proletariat and bourgeoisie relationship has been a defining explanation of the societal structure in a capitalist society. The ideals of Marxism, and in extension communism fights this very notion. It is the capitalistic nature that commoditize human beings themselves, their labor, and in this aspect, sexual favors. According to Marx, prostitution therefore is essential to the survival of a capitalistic system which he heavily criticizes.

The society that we live in, creates fine division between the two classes. The privileged are fueled from the sufferings of the underprivileged who are struggling every day to make ends meet. In order to do the bare minimum for survival, they are at the mercy of the upperclassmen who will not hesitate to ask them of any sort of favor. The underprivileged, here

are at disadvantageous position. It is the question of their survival, and so they are ready to give it all. This is where the root of exploitation begins. As Lenin suggests, no amount of “moral indignation” has the power to stop this, especially for the women who are bound at the hands of their exploiters. When the question is on the possibility of survival, moral dignity stands no chance. The class division, opportunities, benefits and privileges root from the very class structure that depends on the subordinates. When one is already pushed to the disadvantageous pool, the only way of survival becomes enslaving to the very system exploiting them in hopes that fate would reverse. After the Dutch it was the Japanese, and afterwards it was the liberated country’s own government. This sort of exploitations not only work at authoritarian level but also at smaller levels.

Mama Kalong too had attempted to shift her fate by setting up a business that proved to bring her large fortune, but at the cost of the exploitation of many others. It was at her expense that the women were dragged into the other side – where exploitation happened – only to sustain Mama Kalong’s wealth and status. At one point it truly becomes a paradoxical situation where one has to drag someone else in before themselves out. At a place of dilemma and contradictions, Eka Kurniawan leaves unto his readers to reflect upon the issue.

Theoretically, if PKI were to sustain and restructure the society according to the beliefs of Communism, prostitution in Indonesia would have seen a different phase. It is not to suggest that prostitution would have vanished completely, because the practice of sex work in exchange of capital still persists in communist countries like Cuba, even though legally it is not permitted. However, it is safe to assume that the manner of practicing prostitution and the preconditions setting up the stage to carry it out would have been different. Perhaps in the anticipated communist society, women like Dewi Ayu would have had realistic alternatives to quitting her

work, if the social institution allowed her a better choice outside. However, these assumptions remain theoretical as the reality often do not follow the laws of the rulebook.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In the fleeting nature of life, it is infrequent that we pause to contemplate on life itself – what makes life grey. Plastering a label on something and alienating is easier than trying to comprehend and accept. Perhaps it is somewhere ingrained in the human nature that does not wish to separate the boundary dividing the people. The hue around the boundary is too complex to understand, and so leaving it as is, is far simpler. “Ill-fated”, “sinful” – these are the labels we use every day. But is labelling really that simple? Did Dewi Ayu have any option but to return? Would the society, that called her a “whore”, have accepted her if she returned? What was the other life she could have had?

On the surface level, it is easy to blame her, to call her names and bash her for her “sinful behavior”. But when looked into her choices, the same bashful comments would lose their voice. Caught in a time when the only mode of survival forces one into the path of last resort, one cannot really blame the woman for the choices she made. Her choices may not have had the best outcome, but in the given circumstances, they were necessary. The protagonist’s own personality is a major factor here in deciding her fate. It is not that she never had options, but the presented options were never worth fighting for, were never worth risking life for, and lastly, were never dignified enough for her characterization. The postcolonial trauma had huge impact on the country in every possible form. The physical, mental, political, economic and social damage that were done demanded years of rehabilitation that unfortunately was not met with. This further inflicted the wound and made it hopeless for people like Dewi Ayu to resort to better options while residing in the country. Had the circumstances been different, life could have been better for Dewi Ayu. But with the economic instability holding her back and with the label plastered so fine, life could not give her any more roads to choose from.

Colonization scars people, takes away their every right as a human being, reduces them into nothing but flesh and bone designed to serve. But its after-effect is no less frightening. By the time the people are free, they are almost completely robbed off of financial benefits, the wounds are too deep to mend and above that, when the new regime begins following the footsteps of the previous exploiters the innocent people are left with no options. This is the moment of their ultimate defeat. Eka Kurniawan has beautifully captured every emotion in this hauntingly beautiful tale. His writing style, much close to Marquez's has the ability to penetrate the souls of the readers, to shake them to the core and leave an everlasting mark.

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