

Normative Femininity and Motherhood as Redemption: The Life Writing of Indonesian [ex] Nude Model Tiara Lestari

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Abstract When Tiara Lestari posed naked in Spanish Playboy magazine in the August 2005 edition, only few people actually knew her. She had been working mainly abroad. However, the publication immediately created waves of controversy as she is not only an Indonesian but a Muslim too. The adverse resulting from the controversy was the impetus of Tiara Lestari's blog. The blog eventually became the fetus of her auto/biography, *Tiara Lestari Uncut Stories: Playboy, Ibunda dan Kafila*. This paper investigates both forms of the life writing, namely the blog and the auto/biography as two interconnected works, which at times merge as one. As Tiara Lestari describes in her writing, she wished to be able to present the public with what is considered to be a more accurate representation of herself, particularly post-Playboy episode. This paper examines how the auto/biography is used to reconstruct Tiara Lestari's life in a way that negotiates the local Indonesian and global construct of femininity and womanhood. It also argues that while Tiara Lestari has been portrayed to transgress the boundaries, through her auto/biography she managed to reconstruct her image and recreate a new self that embraces the more conventional notion of femininity and womanhood as a form of redemption following the nude pictures.

Key words Tiara Lestari; celebrity, auto/biography; femininity; womanhood

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Introduction

Coming to the scene of Indonesian media through her infamous nude appearance in Spanish edition of Playboy, Tiara Lestari was exposed to nation-wide criticism for not conforming to Indonesian local values regarding modesty and sexuality. Her response was through writing. Asked if she was just defending herself through the auto/biography, she wrote, “I don’t intend to defend myself. I just want to counter the inaccurate news in various media about me” (Lestari and Ariestanty 6).

Aside from her official auto/biography, Tiara also maintains other blogs which are aimed at certain segmented audience, such as Tiara Lestari’s 4 Women Only which is dedicated to women whom she addresses as “Girls.” Other blogs include Sponsor Tiara Lestari’s Events, Tiara Singles Club, Tiara Lestari’s Press Info, Sensual to Elegance, Call Tiara Lestari, Dari SENSUAL ke ELEGANCE, Tiara Lestari Zone. According to Tempo Interaktif, to take care of her blogs, she dedicates around 3-5 hours a day. This demonstrates her seriousness in this undertaking. It also shows that representation and misrepresentation are significant issues because they concern people’s sense of self and identity.

Having lived and worked abroad, Tiara speaks English fairly well. Her initial blog, which is called Tiara Lestari’s Personal Journal is written in English. This is the one that she aims to be the bridge between her and the people “out there” (Lestari and Ariestanty 7). She also writes because she feels that the media has twisted the truth about her and that it has misrepresented her to the point of making up stories about her without any confirmation sought from her. Her blog, as well as her auto/biography, is opened with her statement about herself:

I am originally from Indonesia. Formerly residing in Singapore, I am now firmly back in my own beloved country. Modeling has been my passion and profession. My journey as a model has taken me to the cover of Playboy Magazine in a far away land and right in the center of a national controversy. It plunged me into depth of humility without prejudice or guilt. It guides me to see through changes, places and faces. Through it all, I understand that life itself is full of surprises that neither reason, nor logic can comprehend. It certainly has been a journey filled with joy and turbulence. It is a journey from sensuality to elegance. Welcome to my life. (Lestari and Ariestanty 1)

Within the context of celebrity auto/biography, from the very beginning it can be argued that her auto/biography was published to serve a specific purpose of controlling image damage at the very least, reconstructing the Self is most possibly the ultimate objective. Throughout her auto/biography, one theme is clear, Tiara is reinstating her normal ordinary Indonesian girl with a humble background, that she is not what her nude poses represent. The auto/biography articulates her side of the story as well as her stepping stones towards being a good woman, particularly through her relationship and later marriage to her [first] husband, and through the portrayal of her relationship with her mother, her mother-in-law and most importantly, through her own motherhood.

Reconstructing the Self Post Nude Poses

Obviously, she takes her appearance in Playboy as her point of departure. In fact, she was not known until after the controversy submerged. In the auto/biography, she refers to her appearance in the magazine as an “incident.” In this context, it is understandable why she seems to be urged to make up for her nudity with some intellectual works to counter the prejudice that the pose renders her “cheap.” She seemingly says that the naked pictures of her are not the true representation of her Self. It also implies that the authoritative source for the true representation of Tiara Lestari is Tiara Lestari herself as written and shown in her blogs. She contends, “I just want to be given the chance to show the real me after that incident. Something that is really me. Yes, the true Tiara. May I?” (Lestari and Ariestanty 6, emphasis added).

The so-called true Self or inner Self seem to be the constant preoccupation in her auto/biography. It can even be argued that it is almost always related to her previous decision to pose naked in various men’s magazines, most importantly Playboy. On one hand, it shows her guilty conscience although she claims, “Please take note! I don’t regret or feel guilty at all for what I have done” (Lestari and Ariestanty 7). On the other hand, it also shows the potential of “people out there” or the mass to construct one’s identity and sense of Self. In her case, the guilty feeling is not self-generated. It mostly comes from the reaction from people in general as reflected by the controversy and the waves of protests [as well as insults]. Such conscience is also developed through the response from the people around her, her family, notably her mother, and her future in-laws, notably her then future mother-in-law¹.

1 At the end of the auto/biography, she is married with a baby daughter. Her mother-in-law is a prominent pediatrician who happens to be the elder sister of a famous musician, Harry Roesli. This reference occurs almost every time the mother-in-law is mentioned. The Roeslis are a prominent big family whose root is one of Indonesian important writers, Marah Roesli. As per now, Tiara has divorced her first husband, married for the second time to a German man in 2012. Her second husband passed away on March 30, 2016.

As she writes, the first reason why she decided to end her career as a model abroad, and especially a nude model was the tears that her mother shed upon knowing that her eldest daughter was a nude model. In contrast with her claim that she regrets nothing, she finally confesses that she does regret one thing, namely to have made her mother cry. And to wipe the tears away, she said she would do anything, including refusing other offers to pose in *Playboy* in five different countries, “Which was [sic] one of which was from New York”¹. Asking for forgiveness from her mother, Tiara Lestari cried and promised never to pose nude again (Lestari and Ariestanty 7).

It is obvious that there is a conflict and at the same time inconsistency in what she claims regarding her feelings about the whole “incident.” She insists that she was just being professional and that she does not have any guilty feeling, but such a feeling as well as the sense of Self are not something that a person can totally control. Her insistence on being innocent in her professionalism was again contrasted to her submission to her mother-in-law’s statement that she deserves a second chance. In a way, this acceptance confirms the guilt. As narrated by her then-boyfriend:

“Tiara, she got a second chance to enter a new life. To be a better person.” That’s what my mother said. And that’s what I believe in. Everyone has got the chance to be a better person. Even Allah gives the chance. Why, are we human beings too arrogant to give somebody else the chance to be a better person? (Lestari and Ariestanty 98-99)

Likewise, her then boyfriend — now former husband, also takes the position of being the authoritative institution that “accepts her the way she is and supports” whatever she chooses in the future. Every person has the right for a second chance” (Lestari and Ariestanty 13). The whole notion of accepting her past suggests her past being flawed and that forgiveness is given to her as generosity from people around her, especially her boyfriend and mother-in-law.

As she narrates, when the pictures for *Playboy* were taken, she was made to believe that her nationality would not be revealed. Only later did she find out that the selling point was actually her Indonesian nationality as the theme of the edition was “Exoticas.” The “need” to reveal her nationality shows the idea of Indonesia being an “exotic” country, whose girls are sexually exotic too, as represented by

1 New York is, of course, not a country. Her constant use of code switching from Bahasa Indonesia to English or vice versa at times are often unnecessary and even out of context.

Tiara. Although Tiara refers to Spain as a “faraway land” (Lestari and Ariestanty 1), that is if the “center” is Indonesia, but in that magazine she is the one who actually comes from a faraway land. She is the one that represents an exotic Other to the Spanish readers. Her nude pose of Tiara somehow also signifies the unclothed Other who is not necessarily “sexy” in the sense of enticing sex appeal, but rather in a sense of being a woman of a “faraway land” who are “naturally” naked. Her nakedness is to be seen as a natural condition of being an Other, an exotic creature from a faraway land. In this way, I can argue that Playboy being a global network has made use of the still fascinating idea of Other, and even made use of it by exotizing it as exemplified by the depiction of Tiara Lestari as the exotic Other. On her part, it is precisely her globalized local position that has made her earn the fascination and recognition from people, mostly men, globally as well as locally. What is interesting though is that her local fame and recognition, was obtained only after she was globally “discovered” first. Thus, although she is a “cosmopolitan” (Lestari “Why Am I Cosmopolitan (Not the Magazine)”), it can be argued that the physical fascination for her will always remain in her position as a “local.” This is especially due to her inescapably dark skin.

Tiara herself once complained about her dark skin when she failed in a number of castings. She even envied other models whose skins are lighter and white. The consolation given by her white Croatian friend confirms her exoticism in her dark skin

‘You look beautiful with your color of skin. They just don’t realize, one day, I am sure, you will be a famous model. You are great! You are unique. In the west, we all want to have your skin color. It’s exotic’. (Lestari and Ariestanty 45)

This consolation was accepted gratefully as she then self-reflects:

Jasmina’s words relived my spirit. This has got nothing to do with skin color. You can be white, black, brown, or whatever skin color, you are beautiful as long as you’re proud of who you are. That is the essence of self-confidence. And of course, as long as you take care of your body! (Lestari and Ariestanty 45)

On one hand, this means that it is acceptable being any color. On the other hand, it also emphasizes that it is not enough to be any color, a woman needs to take care of

her body well to be accepted. If it is true that it is not about color, it is also true that a body that is not well taken-care of is a body that is not accepted. And if the well-taken-care of bodies are exemplified by her body, then this statement is as alienating as her experience of being denied her work because of her skin color. Just by its physical measurement, her body is not just an ordinary body, and if we should take that this kind of body as the acceptable kind of a woman's body, then the bodies of ordinary women will not be within comparable range with this body. In other words, she/her body is as different from ordinary women/bodies as her skin is different from the white skin.

In addition to her physically 'exotic' feature, Tiara also holds another "exotic feature," namely her religion. She is Muslim. Her appearance in *Playboy* as an exotic Indonesian nude model also creates another fascination. Indonesia being known as the biggest Muslim country in the world, and with the strong global image of Muslim women as those with hijabs and those oppressed by the supposedly patriarchal Islamic culture, it is difficult not to see the hidden promise of "exotic value" in her the image of a Muslim woman completely naked. As her friend clearly remarked on her nude pose, "...the problem is, you are an Indonesian and you're also Muslim" (Lestari and Ariestanty 122).

The significance of being an Indonesian and Muslim in the context of global phenomenon of *Playboy* clearly shows a conflict between the local and the global. In the case of Tiara, whose Self is transformed from a small-town girl to a cosmopolitan woman, she can be said to have transgressed the boundary of local and submits to the global sex capitalism. However, it is also evident that such transgression causes two different receptions. Tiara is considered a disgrace within her locality but highly glorified in the global. The local Indonesian and Muslim culture as embodied by Tiara make the local exotic and of high marketability in the context of the global *Playboy*. On the other hand, it is precisely the same features of marketability in Tiara that has made her the target of insult within her own locality. Her "exoticism" is considered as a disgrace within the local, yet an appeal in the global.

In many parts of Tiara's auto/biography, the notion of "being a better person" is frequently mentioned by Tiara and Andy. Such reference is ultimately framed not only in connection with "her past" as a nude model,¹ but also in its closer relation to her being a good Muslim and a good countrywoman. In fact, the controversy around her is mostly ignited by her being Indonesian and being Muslim.

1 Before she appeared in Spanish *Playboy*, she had appeared in *Penthouse* the edition of Thailand, Netherland and Australia.

Speaking of her determination to be “a better person”, although in the context of being a nude model, her professionalism has somewhat transgressed her being Muslim, Tiara Lestari nevertheless finds it necessary that to be a better person, she has to return to her religion. She also considers it necessary that in finding the right person to marry, her future husband has to be a Muslim too. As she explains, the same religion is an important consideration for her to choose her husband-to-be. She claims, “I want to marry a person of my religion. It’s impossible for Dave¹ to convert to Islam. I want my future husband to be able lead me in my religious life. I want to be a better person” (Lestari and Ariestanty 78). Thus, her being an Indonesian is closely related to her being a Muslim, and that her choice of her life in the future very much depends on the religion of her future husband rather than the more general reason of shared proximity. At this point, it can be argued that Tiara Lestari’s identities of being an Indonesian and being a Muslim are one package that is hard to disassemble.

The Body and the Self

In the chapter “Naked or Not Naked; That is Not A Question”, the question of Self and what she terms as “the inner me” get elaborated more. In a reflective narrative style, mostly interwoven by her recollecting interviews with the media or other situations where she has to answer questions, especially from her friends. This style somehow builds the sign of her need to justify her choices. I even sense a terrible guilty conscience in her continuous explanation why she decided to pose nude, such as:

I am more than that. Naked or not naked, that’s not a question. But why did I bare my body and my soul to the world...? And the answer is for something that I called ‘professionalism’ (118)

As I quote in the head of this writing, she claims she wants to be known as a person. “The inner me” (Lestari and Ariestanty 117). This somewhat Cartesian claim certainly raises a lot of questions: What does being “a person” mean? Doesn’t it include the body? Or is the so-called “person” equal to the so-called “inner me”? Why does she really want people to forget that first of all she is the body, that she embodies her body. People know her because of her body. Her body is important. Why does she really want people to forget that? Why does she deny her body and her embodiment?

1 Her former American boyfriend

In her frequent reference to her body and the Self, the Cartesian notion of the body and the self is quite clear. This is especially true in the way she positions the body as inferior to her supposed Self. The word “mere” in “[n]ot a mere Indonesian model who has posed in Spanish Playboy (Lestari and Ariestanty 117) implies that the body is just a mere container, the outer part of the true Tiara Lestari, which is deep inside the body. This Self is supposedly not as self-evident as the body, which explains why she has to work hard to ensure that she will not be mistaken simply for her body. This also explains her anxiety about being a model, who is often regarded as “brainless.”

In one episode in her auto/biography, she suddenly asked her friend, “Eh, why do you think people love to think that models are brainless?” (Lestari and Ariestanty 27). This question of whether “beautiful” is in reverse logic against “smart” is pursued almost in panic. The use of rude words such as “brainless” and “stupid” can be disturbing as well as exaggerating. She could use the word “*bodoh*”, for example, which also means stupid but not as harsh as “*goblok*”, which is almost a taboo word. The word used is “*goblok*” which is a very rude word that means stupid and ignorant. This word has a really harsh tone. The question and answer narrative style does not seem to be flowing in this part, suggesting that this topic is squeezed in. There have been long prejudice about beautiful girls, models especially, of being stupid. Also, there have been suspicions from other bloggers that Tiara hires a ghost writer, at least a professional editor, to write in her blogs, for example as pointed out by a blogger named Tuhu It can partly explain why Tiara seems to have the urge to argue that being beautiful does not mean being stupid. And that before anything else, she is the brain.

This question arguably represents her unconscious anxiety. She wants to be more than just a body, and more than the body is obviously the brain. Her efforts in writing show that the recognition of not being stupid is an important element in building her sense of Self. In other words, her perfect body is not to be taken as the more important representation of her Self.

This topic was discussed in an episode where she was hanging out in a café with a friend and her then boyfriend, Andy Arifin. In this episode, it was Andy’s opinion that became the final words of the “discussion.” He argued that it was unfair that models are considered stupid just because they do not use their verbal skills. He argues that different jobs require different kind of intellectuality. Tiara is described to be excited with anticipation for his answer to her question and she seems to be happy and in agreement with his statement. Andy in this episode plays the authoritative voice that justifies her sense of self. Paradoxically, although

other kinds of intellectuality, such as wearing high heels and walking gracefully are recognized, Tiara nevertheless seems to have the urge to show her existence and intellectuality through words, through her verbal skills, just as Andy defines what being smart in general is. In fact, it was Andy that suggested that Tiara should write a blog to voice her opinions and arguments. In other words, Andy suggested that Tiara should expose her verbal skills to the world to counter the prejudice that she is just a beautiful face and body, despite her other skills and intellectuality. Paradoxically, it confirms that final say of one's intellectuality is only obtained through verbal skills.

At the time this episode took place, Tiara seemed to have taken the decision to take him as her husband. In Indonesian context, as well as in Muslim context, the husbands are supposedly the head of the family. In such a context, the wives are supposed to seek for approval from her husbands in their activities and undertakings. The husbands' approval and support are highly imperative because it is husbands that can justify their wives for better for worse. Thus, "deviant" wives, the feminist wives, the busy and famous wives can make their husbands accessory to their purpose. In other words, they can get on/away smoothly with their undertakings and idealism if they get the approval and support from their husbands. The idea is that if the husbands seem to be alright with them, then other people are forced to accept that there is nothing wrong about them. This is a common phenomenon as I have discussed elsewhere in the case of Krisdayanti's auto/biography (Endah), and that of Tamara Bleszinsky (Prabasmoro).

On one hand, it can be read that women are subjected to men's authority. On the other hand, it can also be seen as a strategy for women to succeed in public domain. With the smooth negotiation with the husbands, husbands can play an active role in/as accessory to ensuring their wives' activities by claiming that the wives are thoroughly supported in their undertakings. Thus, husbands and wives are both "playing" a certain performance that disturbs the subject/object dualism in a way that subject and object are not two totally polar positions.

Global Culture and Identity: "Why Am I Cosmopolitan (Not the Magazine)..."¹

Evident in her auto/biography is the cosmopolitan identity that she has happily embraced. As she explains in her blog, not seeking definition from any dictionary, she defines "Cosmopolitan" as "[a] sophisticated person who has travelled in many countries" (Lestari "Why Am I Cosmopolitan (Not the Magazine)," emphasis added). She then claims that (Lestari "Why Am I Cosmopolitan (Not the

1 The title of her blog entry on her cosmopolitan identity and culture

Magazine)”):

If that is the meaning of the word, then it is very easy. I have travelled around the world. A lot. I have met people from across the globe with different backgrounds, cultures, beliefs and attitudes. I am like that boy character in the movie “meet the fockers”... I am like a sponge. I absorb. I adjust. In the end of the process is... ehm.. me. Like this. The one you see and the one you read.

Obviously, Tiara is proud of her “cosmopolitanism” although whether she is really “sophisticated” or not is not really the question. In Indonesian context, going abroad and working abroad are something to be proud of. It does imply wealth and/or intellectuality. Apart from that, in general the number of people who speak the third/foreign language¹ is quite low. Therefore, those who speak foreign language are also considered to be “sophisticated”, high class, and smart. In the use of her fairly good English she asserts her global identity and culture. In addition to that, as Cvetkovich and Kellner argue, the term globalization also denotes “modernization.” In other words, projecting oneself as global can also be signified as projecting oneself as modern.

In that context, it can also be argued that she performs some kind of sophistication in her continuous habit of code switching. This is especially true in her auto/biography where she uses both languages in sometimes-bizarre order. There are sentences where she uses English entirely and sometimes she just squeezes the English words into her Bahasa Indonesia. For example, there are sentences that are thoroughly English such as, “I love being a model. Really, I do” (Lestari and Ariestanty 23), but there are also sentences where she inserts expressions in English followed by Bahasa Indonesia such as: “Obviously, I can experience all that because of my profession as a model” (Lestari and Ariestanty 23). This code switching is sometimes not introduced smoothly making the sentences awkward, such as: “... refusing the interesting offers from five other countries. Which was one of the offers is from New York” (Lestari and Ariestanty 7, emphasis added).

Another awkward code switching is in her expressions in Bahasa Indonesia that are not actually recognized in Bahasa Indonesia. This kind of expressions leaves the traces of English in its production, making the kind of Bahasa Indonesia version of English. One example is to use the term “just or not” for the argument whether it is acceptable or not to refer to models as brainless and stupid as I have explained in the previous part. This expression is not commonly used by Bahasa Indonesia users.

1 Usually Indonesian people speak Bahasa Indonesia and their native language

Indonesians would say something like whether it is acceptable or not, or whether it is good or not, or polite or not. The expressions whether it is just or not to say that a model is brainless is not Bahasa Indonesia in its framework of thinking¹

This kind of code switching is commonly found in chicklits. In a way, I can argue that her auto/biography is of similar narrative technique as most chicklits whose primary target is young urban women. These chicklits also speak the same kind of Bahasa Indonesia/English and they also take urban culture as their setting. This will affect the readers, I argue, in two different ways. On one hand, it can build proximity between Tiara [and chicklit authors] and their target readers. On the other hand, it can also create a gap that can offer the image of Tiara as an “exotic” person, a real person whom one cannot necessarily comprehend and embrace, at the same time she can be just an Other, just a character in a fiction.

As I have explained, urban culture, which is very much the global culture is strongly marked in her book, particularly through the depiction of chain global cafes and expensive restaurants that she visits. The settings of the many chapters in her book are different cafes, shops and restaurants bearing global [or English] names, such as Cicero, Kemang Food Festival, Crossroad Café, Marriott Hotel, JCo donuts, Coffee Bean, etcetera. This mention of the cafes is also emphasized by the mention of food and beverages globally known and consumed such as wine, pasta, salad, and a lot other “western” delicacies. Although she does mention the episode when her boyfriend was having “*tahu sumedang*”, a local delicacy, and about cooking “*rendang*”, a traditional dish from Padang, most of the food and beverages that get mentioned are those of the “western” culture. She even writes that she is interested in wine and that her specialty is pasta. These cafes and restaurants as well as the “western” food and beverages also mark her social and cultural class because, obviously, cafés and fine dining [restaurants] are not everybody’s culture, and certainly not the culture of Indonesian people in general. As Nagel argues:

Globalization contributes to a collision between local and global sexual standards and images through the global circulation of culture-fashion, style, music, film, ideas, identities. (546)

Through reading her auto/biography, I argue that global culture is an act of consumption, an endorsement of a certain lifestyle supposedly accepted around the globe. In this particular auto/biographical act, this lifestyle establishes her identity

1 I consulted a lecturer in Bahasa Indonesia from Universitas Padjadjaran on 15 August 2007 and she confirmed that such expressions are, if not awkward, at least not commonly used.

through its frequent enactment, endorsement, and mentioning of a certain kind of consumption. In her case, this culture is not only metaphorically, but also literally consumed in the form of food and beverages.

While there are times when the use of these settings and mentions of food and beverages feel exaggerated, I find that there are points and topics that can be introduced without having such exposition. Arguably, the settings in the auto/biography are just a place where she can be situated in a casual communication with her friends. And it seems to me that by the excessive mention, such places are represented as the place for such purposes. Thus, it is my standpoint to argue that she does want to establish her identity as global although, at the same time, I can also see her desire to embrace her part of locality, her body and family bonding.

Body, Femininity and Sexuality

There are different kinds of femininity performed, expected, cherished, glorified as well as questioned in her auto/biography. Her first visible attribution of femininity is her highly feminine body. She is known for her body in such a way that her body becomes the dominant marker of her femininity. This normative femininity is highly connected to her sexuality, but not necessarily in the context of reproduction. As Bartky argues:

Normative femininity is coming more and more to be centered on woman's body — not its duties and obligations or even its capacity to bear children, but its sexuality, more precisely, its presumed heterosexuality and its appearance. (148-149)

As femininity is viewed more in terms of sexuality, it does not come as a surprise that it then defines women into the dualism of good women/bad women. According to McClintock, one of the fetishes commonly found in soap advertisements, which are mostly targeted at women, represent women as sexually hybrid. The idea of the ideal[ized] women takes us further to the notion of femininity in Victorian era. As McClintock writes, women in that era were expected to be “an angel in the drawing room, monkey in the bedroom” (McClintock 217).

Although, McClintock specifically refers to Victorian era, I believe that this dualistic notion of femininity is still very much in practice today. Women are still expected to embody both the lady and the monkey. What can be considered transgressive in Tiara's case is the fact that she shows “her being a monkey in a drawing room.” It can be argued that femininity is a series of highly codified traits and per-

formances expected at a certain time and space. Certain performances of femininity are not to be displayed in public. Transgression of the poles can cause social chaos and disorder, just what Tiara Lestari caused after her appearances in Playboy.

The fact that people are quick in their judgment about morality and propriety when it comes to women's sexuality implies the sense of ownership of women's bodies. What is supposedly "proper" is closely related to the sense of "property." What is not proper in her appearance is that she is supposed to be the property of certain groups of people who feel represented by her body. Thus, when this body becomes "improper", it becomes a shame to the groups to whom the body is supposed to belong. Far from being individual traits of being a woman, femininity turns out to be a shared property the ways in which deviance from its norms is punished severely. Tiara, whose sexuality threatens the supposedly rigid boundary of good women and bad women, has to receive even the rudest insults a woman can receive.¹

In addition to this transgression, in social context, her sexuality also threatens her other expected attributions of femininity, namely being a good wife and mother. In Indonesian culture, implied in this expectation is that the ideal woman to marry is a woman who is sexually flawless. It explains why there is the notion of guilt and even sin in the journey of relationship with her future husband. The frequent mention of "second chance" simply means that although she is sexually flawed for having shown her body to the world, she can nevertheless be purified by the acceptance of an authoritative man. Her husband who comes from a prominent family represents such authority in a way that her marriage to him has provided her with the protection from being referred to in the future as a "not very good woman."

Following Bartky's argument that "[f]emininity as a spectacle is something in which virtually every woman is required to participate" (140), women are basically object of gaze. Her being a woman happens as a spectacle, the ways in which, "[t]he precise nature of the criteria by which women are judged, not only the inescapability by judgment itself, reflects gross imbalance in the social power of the sexes" (Bartky 140). In thinking of Tiara as a conscious "object of gaze", there are two ways of interpreting it. On one hand, as Bartky argues whatever judgement is passed, it will reveal the fact that femininity and masculinity are not two equal positions. In this framework of thinking, we might consider her as an absolute object that has to

1 Most of the insults she receives are sexual. Other condemnations are related to her being a shame to Islam as well as to the country and the town where she comes from. See for example the comments on her at: <http://www.sp18.com/2005/09/04/model-indonesia-bugil-di-majalah-playboy>. Some "complimenting" comments are even painfully and sexually degrading. See for example comments at <http://asiapundit.com/2006/01/26/tiara-lestari-on-playboy-indonesia/>

receive the gaze from others, particularly men.

On the other hand, since her objectivity is a conscious decision and choice, this act can also be considered as an act of assertion of subjectivity. Thus, in making herself available to look at, she is actually the subject of the whole process of putting her femininity as an object of spectacle. In other words, her sexuality as object does not necessarily objectify her. Even in the situation where she is situated as an object, she can still play with that situation and make herself a Subject. In her discussion about prostitute and hetairas, Beauvoir argues.

Offering herself for the approbation of her admirers, she does not repudiate that passive femininity which dedicates her to man: she endues it with a magical power that enables her to catch the men in the snare of her presence and batten off them; she engulfs them along with her in immanence.... Paradoxically, those women who exploit their femininity to the limit create for themselves a situation almost equivalent to that of a man; beginning with that sex which gives them over to the males as objects, they come to be subjects. (Beauvoir 632)

Obviously, I am not referring to Tiara Lestari as a prostitute or hetairas, but her nude pose has caused her to receive insults and accusations that she is “cheap” and that she’s for sale. There is even an episode in her auto/biography when she tells a story about a man who “confesses” to have sex with her. She even agrees that some models are “for sale.” What I want to point out is that should even this “insult” be embraced, there is still a possibility to transcend the situation, which I think is precisely what she has shown through her blog and auto/biography.

In this sense, Tiara shows the blurry boundary of femininity. Femininity can be a situation wherein a woman is positioned as an object. However, at the same time, this position as an object can be a very strong foundation for a subjectivity that is recognized even by those who have previously taken the position as the subject. I find it interesting that Tiara has transcended her position as object and turned out a respected subject. It can be argued that this feature of femininity shows that femininity is not a fixed condition. It also shows that femininity can become a very strong trait of a woman that can be manipulated and made use of. In other words, although her body has been the marker of her objectivity, it is actually the body that has been the point of strength for transcendence.

Motherhood as Redemption

There are burning questions in my mind when thinking of what she writes and re-

flects as “choice” scattered through the chapters in her auto/biography. She chooses to pose nude in the name of professionalism. Then she chooses to be a wife and mother and quit her international career. She claims her husband to be a choice¹ (but she is destiny for him). Are these choices? Is posing nude a choice? Or is she trapped in a culture that enforces her to accept that choice as a “natural” path to take. Thus, she did not make any choice, she just followed the always already taken road. Likewise, is with the “choice to marry and withdraw.” Is it a choice or is it something imposed on her, again as a natural course all other women have “happily” taken?

Pleasance argues that in some girls’ magazines, femininity and feminine identity are defined as choices, although the fact that the choices are actually limited is not made evident. In her auto/biography, Tiara Lestari seems to be engrossed in the idea of choice quite deeply. One very obvious example is her husband whom she refers to as “choice.” Another word often used by her in semantic substitution for “choice” is “commitment” or, when it is related to her modeling work, “professionalism.” These words in a contradictory way mean that she is totally free to choose, but at the same time she has no choice. As Pleasance argues femininity is often camouflaged as choices but at the same time, women barely have any choice.

When Tiara was interviewed why she was willing to pose naked, she answered it was “for something that [she] called ‘professionalism’” (Lestari and Ariestanty 118). Having appeared in so many men’s magazines, posing almost naked and sometimes in very sexual and demeaning poses, she must be taking nude modeling as her line of profession. “Professionally”, this genre must have been a successful path for her as she gains her name from it. She expects, like Madonna, Pamela Anderson, Marilyn Monroe and Cindy Crawford, to achieve even higher goals and fame. This choice implies femininity as a marketable commodity. In her case, it is the sexual type of femininity that she chooses to “sell.” She asserts, “I already made that decision. This is my commitment” (Lestari and Ariestanty 132).

Nearing her career peak as she describes in her blog (Lestari “Tiara Lestari Blog Di Internet Mencatat Pengunjung Ke 100.000”), Tiara decides to put her international career on hold as she feels she has other feminine desires to pursue, namely to become a wife and mother. Again, she calls this urge “choice” and “commitment.” She contends that she will never be able to be an international model and a good mother at the same time, saying, “It’s just a matter of choice” (Lestari and Ariestanty 25). Then, she further elaborates this desire (Lestari and Ariestanty 26, empha-

1 Her husband claims she is his destiny, directed by God through dreams after praying particularly asking about his future wife. See Lestari & Ariestanty, 2007: 96.

sis added):

... I can't wait for the moment when I said, "Yes, I do" to the man that will spend his time with me till time does us apart....¹ This is my commitment as a woman. To become a wife and mother. This is my choice. I will become the beloved wife to my man. I will be a good wife to my children. I want them to be proud of me. "I am sure, my husband and my children will be proud of me."²

As in auto/biographies of Indonesian female celebrities (Prabasmoro et al.), in Tiara's auto/biography, femininity and all the traits of being a woman are mostly attributed and dedicated to her [future] roles as a wife and mother. In fact, there is a tendency in her to glorify such roles in such a way that there is a consistency in her idea of commitment and choice. For example, for a person who has decided to be so committed to her profession that she is willing to bare her body to the world, giving up is not supposed to be that easy. However, in her reflection about the roles of being a wife and mother, she claims that career is nothing compared to playing the roles of a good wife and mother. Upon her friend's withdrawal from modeling career, she writes:

One day, she sent me an email telling me that she had found the man of her dream. She told me how much she loves this man and that man is the dream comes true... ... "I decided to leave modeling and live in Croatia. I want [sic] being a wife and mother,"... I can understand her decision. It is obvious, what does career mean compared to finding the man to spend your life with? (Lestari and Ariestanty 47)

1 Indonesians do not have the culture of a man proposing to a woman the way the "Western" people do. Proposal shall be performed formally in the presence of the family. Islam does not teach that a marriage shall last until death does the couple part as in Catholic teaching, which in this context seems to be taken just as an English idiom spoken by a very romantic and sentimental person.

2 The Blog version of this part as included in the auto/biography is: "Make no mistake about it, I will take this modeling career as far as it can get me, before I say "I do" to man [sic] I love. When that day comes... I will be the most loving wife any can have. By choice. And I will be the best mother to my children. I want them to be proud of me. And I think they will" Lestari, Tiara and Windy Ariestanty. *Tiara Lestari Uncut Stories: Playboy, Ibunda Dan Kafilah*. GagasMedia, 2007.

This rather-too-easy switch creates some confusion in me. What does commitment mean? If one is committed, can one switch one's commitment to another just like that? Or, can we think of femininity that has "economic" values performed in public domain as inferior to femininity in private domain, such as becoming a wife and mother?

Tiara Lestari finds justification in her Croatian friend's decision to withdraw from her career, but more importantly, she finds a strong role model in Cindy Crawford, the international super model. She writes,

I remember Cindy Crawford. Lately this supermodel seems to have been swallowed by the earth. We haven't heard anything about her and her projects in modeling. All I know is that she is happy living with her family. Well, I really want to be like her. Someday I will become a mother. I want simple things like having a family, children. Lots of children, to be exact. Isn't it cool? (Lestari and Ariestanty 25-26)

There are a few reflections that can be made. First, there is a fascination in her for the white as race. This is particularly revealed by her wish to have lighter skin. This wish can also be understood in postcolonial context as the wish to switch her position as the other in the self/other dialectic to become the self. Her efforts to "change" her physiognomy can also be weighed in that context as well. Although she cannot change the color of her skin, she changes the color of her black hair to brown, making her "not totally Indonesian."¹

In Bhabha's term, she is mimicking the white self in such a way that on one hand it claims the "property" of the Self, on the other hand, she acknowledges her being Other. In this particular case, it can also mean the acknowledgement of not being entirely global and international. In her particular context, as long her otherness is signified as the marketable femininity, especially demanded in men's magazines, she will remain an Other. She will remain an exotic commodity from Java.²

Second, another fascination for white as culture and civilization is represented in her wish to follow the steps of the "International supermodel" from USA, Cindy Crawford. In taking Cindy Crawford as the role model, it is obvious that there

1 The natural hair color of Indonesian people is black. Other shades of this color imply unhealthy or at least unflattering.

2 The cover of FHM Singapore, September 2004 edition, presented her wearing bikinis in a cat position tagging it "Forget Coffee, She is Java's Hottest Export"

is a fascination with white femininity as well. As my previous research shows (Prabasmoro), white femininity is often regarded as the representation of modernity, even when it embraces the domestic values of femininity, as represented by Cindy Crawford's turn to wifing and mothering.

In conclusion, I argue that Tiara is an interesting site of struggle of femininity, local/global nexus as well as self/body dialectic. What can be derived from her auto/biography is her constant struggle of transgressing and trespassing boundaries in a way the discourses surrounding her can be regarded as unfixed. Although her hot poses are still on demand and still in circulation, she has been trying to establish a new image of herself, the one that is no longer "sexy" but elegant." She is still a model, but not "just a model" as she is now also a mother and wife. The two femininities are happening at the same time. It is almost as if she had been accepted as two different persons: the nude model and the new Tiara Lestari that holds a different kind of femininity, albeit perhaps the more normative one. Nevertheless, this promises a more flexible structure of femininity, subjectivity as well as global/local identity. One thing is clear though that motherhood has helped her to redeem her previous act considered to be transgressive and unacceptable.

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