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**Urban Sounds:  
Three Stories by Seno Gumira Ajidarma**

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## Urban Sounds: Three Stories by Seno Gumira Ajidarma<sup>1</sup>

This article performs a listening to three stories by Seno Gumira Ajidarma. In the article, I argue that an analysis of sounds – and how sounds are invested with meaning – provide a means for understanding a particular culture and society. Sounds are a means of reproducing state terrorism, while at the same represent a threat to the ordering of a particular society. This article shows that hearing and sound are markers of urban space. The sounds of others are interpreted as being disruptive, while at the same time, other sounds such as the call to prayer (*adzan*) are used to homogenise space. Sound is used by those who are in power and those who are marginalised. The selected stories in this article show that the categories of ‘powerful’ and ‘powerless’ are dynamic, contextual and changing.

For twenty-five centuries, Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for the beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible (Attali, 1985, p.3).

The sound of the scoop hitting the water in the tub was loud and suggestive of enthusiasm. But this not what the Pak RT was waiting for. Nor was he waiting for the sound of soap being scrubbed up against a wet body. A sound that could be interpreted in many different ways (Ajidarma, 2006, p.92).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Andy Fuller finished his PhD at the University of Tasmania in 2010. This working paper is drawn from his thesis titled, *Jakarta Flânerie: Selected Writings of Seno Gumira Ajidarma*. He thanks Dr. Michelle Miller and an anonymous reviewer for the publication of this working paper. Andy is the author of *Sastra dan Politik: Membaca Karya-Karya Seno Gumira Ajidarma* (Yogyakarta: Insist, 2011). He can be contacted at [acsfuller@gmail.com](mailto:acsfuller@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Bunyi gayung menghajar air bak mandi terdengar mantap dan penuh semangat. Namun yang dinantikan Pak RT bukan itu. Bukan pula bunyi gesekan sabun ke tubuh yang basah, yang sangat terbuka untuk ditafsirkan sebebaskan-bebasnya.

In this article, I explore how the sounds of urban daily life are a part of the structuring experiences of urban space. I argue that the writing of imagined auditory space is a way of knowing, interpreting and reading urban space. I draw on the work of R.M. Schafer (1977) Freek Colombijn (2007), Jacques Attali (Attali, 1985) and Rowland Atkinson (2007) to locate the function of urban sounds in selected stories by Seno Gumira Ajidarma. I argue that through these stories, sound provides a way of understanding urban space. Sounds are given particular meanings and are used as a means to give value to urban space. At times the sounds in the stories are ordering, and at others they are disordering. At times, sounds strengthen dominant ideologies and at other times they challenge these ideologies. Throughout this article, I will show how reference to sound is another means by which Seno creates a sense of urban space.

This article focuses on three stories: *Bunyi Hujan di Atas Genting*<sup>3</sup> (from here on *Bunyi Hujan*) (Ajidarma, 2007, pp.15-24), *Penjaga Malam dan Tiang Listrik*<sup>4</sup> (from here on *Penjaga Malam*) (Ajidarma, 2004, pp.175-180) and *Dilarang Menyanyi di Kamar Mandi*<sup>5</sup> (from here on *Dilarang Menyanyi*) (Ajidarma, 2006). Each story was written during a different stage of Seno's career as a writer and each story was published in a different collection.<sup>6</sup> The three stories will be set in context against three main ideas, namely the presence and pervasiveness of surveillance and 'state terrorism' (Heryanto, 2006); the significance of sound as a means of knowing a culture and society (Schafer, 1977); and the issue of time (Sennett, 1990, pp.169-201).

This article draws on the work of Seno Gumira Ajidarma to present a way of showing how a contemporary Indonesian author understands sound and how he has written soundscapes into some of his works of short fiction. Indeed, there is much scope for exploring the writings of other authors in order to gain a broader and more nuanced perspective on how sounds are heard and interpreted within contemporary Indonesia. That task, however, is well beyond the scope of this article. Instead, this is a short study that seeks to introduce some of the complexities of listening to soundscapes through a literary discourse. In the absence of field-recordings or other audio-visual material, listening through literature allows for 'listening' to take place from a distance and from a separate moment in time.

### SENO AND STATE TERRORISM: *PETRUS*, MYSTERIOUS SHOOTINGS

The stories in this article continue Seno's exploration of state terrorism. *Bunyi Hujan* alludes particularly to the *petrus* (*penembak misterius*/mysterious shooters) campaign of the 1980s. Kusno writes that the campaign of fear, as orchestrated through the *petrus* campaign, is indicative of other attempts by the New Order to maintain 'order' and 'security'. Kusno writes that the supposed threat of communism had lost much of its veracity some 20 years after the attempted coup in 1965. As such 'communism' became a threat that could stand for a number of ideologies or movements, regardless of their communist aspirations (Kusno, 2003, p.3). The state, Kusno argues, also becomes inseparable from the identity that was meant to be feared by the populace. Kusno writes,

What is important for us here is not only that the existence of this series of domestic "phantoms" is inseparable from the politics of the state but that the state has made its appearance in and through the phantoms it created.

<sup>3</sup> The Sound of Rain on Roof Tiles

<sup>4</sup> The Night Watchman and the Electricity Pole

<sup>5</sup> No Singing in the Bathroom

<sup>6</sup> In order of their writing: *Bunyi Hujan di Atas Genting*, July 15, 1985; *Dilarang Menyanyi di Kamar Mandi*, December 29, 1990 and *Penjaga Malam dan Tiang Listrik*, November 15, 2002.

And,

In a strange way, the state and the phantoms (it created) appeared interchangeably at anytime, anywhere, and everywhere both in reality and in imagination

(Kusno, 2003, p.3).

Siegel includes a quote from *Pos Kota* describing the reactions of a man who found one of the murdered gangsters: '[the man] terrified, ran to the nearest police post panting out of breath reported what he had seen' (1998, p.104). The irony in the man's running to the police need not be stated<sup>7</sup>. Seno's story also is consistent with the journalistic accounts of the ambivalence or positive attitude taken towards the murders. Siegel notes how the *petrus* campaign was compared to the 1965 anti-communist murders. Siegel quotes a *Tempo* article, which includes a comment from a member of the public, 'Junaidi', who makes the following statement:

Frankly, the people of Yogya feel grateful for the steps the garrison has taken. "In short, wipe them out, like the PKI ... once before," Junaidi hopes (Siegel, 1998, p.104).

Literary imaginings of the *petrus* campaign and the attendant fear it was supposed to create, provide a broader context for the presence of state violence within New Order Indonesia and complement the studies of Kusno (2003), Siegel (1998) and Heryanto (2006), among others. In *Bunyi Hujan* the death of a supposed criminal is an occasion for a kind of macabre festival. The public are willing participants in celebrating the *spectacle* of death as initiated by the state. Sawitri feels that her neighbours are used to the tattooed corpses. Moreover, she feels that they are happy to see a tattooed corpse sprawled out at the mouth of the alley every time the rain stops and the yellowish mercury lights shine upon the corpse. From her home at the end of the alley, Sawitri can hear what her neighbours talk about. While crowding around the corpse and maybe before it has completely stopped raining, the children shout "hooray! Hooray!"<sup>8</sup> (Ajidarma, 2007, p.19).

## SOUNDS OF THE CITY: VARYING CONCEPTS AND STUDIES OF SOUND

Jakarta is a city of diverse sounds. The sounds are a part of the city's qualities. To understand Jakarta necessitates an attempt to understand the semantics of its sounds. A clap is not just a clap. Two hand claps are used as signals to others: to a friend who might be passing on the other side of the street, or to get the attention of a taxi or *ojek* (motorcycle taxi) driver. A car horn means one thing when the button is pressed twice quickly and another thing when the sound emerges in one long sound. A *ting-ting* on a metal bowl may mean noodles, while a slow rhythm played on a hollow wooden tube could mean some kind of sate. Those familiar with their locality become hungry when they hear certain sounds and remain indifferent to other sounds, knowing that they don't like those flavours. Each sound has its own taste. For example, sound is a part of the technology of food delivery. In urban streets, there is a common sight of a man pushing his food cart and portable cooking machine – one hears the whistling of steam, perhaps a banging on a pot, or his own voice calling out, advertising the food he is hawking. This is opposed to the man on a three-wheeled

<sup>7</sup> This incident is, however, repeated in a literary way in Seno's story "Clara". As a rape victim, Clara informs a policeman of her experience. The policeman proceed to interrogate her in a way so as to deny her claim to the truth of her experience.

<sup>8</sup> Sawitri merasa tetangga-tetangganya sudah terbiasa dengan mayat-mayat bertato itu. Malahan ia merasa tetangga-tetangganya itu bergembira setiap kali melihat mayat bertato tergeletak di mulut gang setiap kali hujan reda dan mayat itu disemprot cahaya lampu merkuri yang kekuning-kuningan. Dari dalam rumahnya yang terletak di sudut gang itu Sawitri mendengar apa saja yang mereka percakapkan. Mereka berteriak-teriak sambil mengerumuni mayat yang tergeletak itu meskipun kadang-kadang hujan belum benar-benar selesai dan anak-anak berteriak hore-hore.

bicycle wearing the uniform of a multinational ice-cream company while its theme music is played out from a tinny loudspeaker.

Christopher Silver (2008) acknowledges the presence of these sounds by virtue of their function in commercial transactions. Generally, however, his journey into and throughout *his* Jakarta has been mute. That is, Jakarta is imagined through its planning and design – he gives little attention to the aural qualities of Jakarta. Sound is not drawn upon as a means of knowing the city. This ignoring of the sounds present on any bus trip or walk throughout Jakarta cuts off the reader (a participant) from a vital aspect of Jakarta's environment. We are not made aware of the variety in spoken sounds, those of minivans, *becak*, passersby, and of course, street musicians who practice on the street. The sounds of the *satpam* - security guards - are evidence of crime or, rather, the fear of it and the need to control it. In *Planning the Megacity*, Silver (2008) locates the urban sounds of Jakarta in their relation to the economy and surveillance. Throughout this article, Seno re-creates urban environments in which sounds are both subject to surveillance and a means of surveillance. In *Penjaga Malam dan Tiang Listrik* sound is a vehicle through which an area is kept under surveillance. Sound is also an essential element to the sense of space and place; it is a way of mediating place and of knowing the customs of a particular place.

In *The Tuning of the World* (1977), Schafer introduced several key terms and concepts for an understanding of the soundscape of the world. As with Jacques Attali's later book *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1985), Schafer's text argues that an understanding of the world is best gained through listening to it, rather than seeing it. Unlike Attali, Schafer emphasises the hearing of ambient sounds, rather than an analytical understanding of music. Schafer is not concerned with music, but with how changes in technology alter a region's soundscape. This term itself is something Schafer claims he should have patented: it is a term that is now essential to any discussions of sound-art and field-recording. It is as unremarkable as the related term, landscape. Schafer, a Canadian scholar and composer, started his research on the soundscape of Vancouver as result of his distaste for the 'more raucous aspects of Vancouver's rapidly changing soundscape'. A sound that appears in a soundscape is not necessarily beautiful or offensive. Meanings are applied to it by those who hear it. And thus, the sound of wind or rain or a particular mode of transport has varying connotations according to who hears it and in what contexts.

Cities are explored through sound in the work of artists such as Heinz Weber and Catherine Clover. Weber's recordings of Hamburg and Clover's of London, Hong Kong and Melbourne show the specific auditory qualities of each place. They address acoustic qualities and natural elements that remain part of an environment specifically made by human beings for human beings. Sound recordings offer a complementary media to that of writing and visual documentary of urban societies. Just as these sounds uncover elements of urban life, so too can they further existing ideas of urban societies in their representations. Sound is an ambivalent element: it can represent both confrontational and conformist ideologies. The work of contemporary artists and scholars and writers, such as Clover, Weber and Colombijn and Nordholt and Steijlen in the Indonesian context, is part of an increasing focus on sound in the arts and in literature. Seno's literary works emerge in the context of this more general 'auditory turn'.

The sounds of Indonesia are varied and plural. An understanding of the sounds is necessary for a successful understanding of urban and indeed rural space. Sounds have particular meanings in Indonesia and how one interprets them is a complement to one's understanding of visual signs as well as that of spoken language. A rapid tapping of a coin on a pole inside a bus indicates to the driver that one would like to get off the bus. A *tock-tock-tock* from a passing cart indicates such-and-such a dish, while a *ting-ting-ting* on a metal plate indicates something else. The call to prayer suggests Islam is dominant, the variety of tones in calls to prayer and the slightly different times at which they are announced suggests the plurality of human voices and organisation. Soundscapes in

urban spaces differ greatly from rural settings; while soundscapes within both contexts also differ rapidly.

A listening of Seno's texts helps to construct a discourse that can locate theories of sound within an Indonesian context. I use Seno's texts as a means to understand the ideological and social functions of sounds, rather than aesthetic phenomena representative of other and distant cultures. Seno's texts show the trajectory and values invested in sounds and practices of listening.

Freek Colombijn is one of the few scholars of Indonesian studies who have paid any particular attention to a city's soundscape. For his 2007 essay, *Tooooot! Vroooooom!* Colombijn draws on Schafer's landmark text. Importantly, Colombijn also mentions the subjectivity of his position as an outsider trying to investigate the soundscape of an other's environment (he is a Dutchman writing about Indonesia). For Colombijn, particular settings were very noisy; however, for the people he talked with and interviewed, they often wouldn't consider such noises (did they *hear* them?), or were not annoyed by them.

### HI-FI AND LO-FI SOUNDSCAPES

Schafer uses the concepts of hi-fi and lo-fi soundscapes. The hi-fi soundscape is that in which sounds can be clearly heard. Typically, such a soundscape is more likely to be found (experienced) in the countryside than in an urban setting. Jakarta late at night, however, can indeed represent a hi-fi soundscape. At such a moment, an individual speeding taxi or private vehicle may be heard, rather than becoming part of the general din as it may do in busier times of the day. A hi-fi soundscape is privileged particularly for spiritual events: it is common to see signs out the front of mosques that inform passers-by that they should not use their horns at times of prayer. The making of noise on Fridays and during the time of the congregational prayer has been cited as the cause of inter-communal violence. Mosques themselves, of course, are a source of public noise. An *adzan* (call to prayer) comes out of it, and at other times, so does preaching and recitation: such a noise-act spreads the blessing of the religion into the community. Noises - whether they are secular car-horns or sounds of frivolity - represent a challenge to the solemnity of the mosque interior.

Hearing is a means of understanding space. It also offers up the possibility of considering the negotiation of space and non-places. A non-place is created through uniform and featureless planning and design. Typically, non-spaces are identified with airports, car-parks, freeways and shopping malls. Non-spaces are places where *otherness* is neutralised; they are spaces in which an individual is able to function on his or her own terms and desires without disruption, interruption or interference from others or from environmental conditions (which are also another). As such non-place is somewhere that is controlled and that is used in a pre-determined manner. The presence or absence of particular sounds are also a part of the creation of non-place, just as they are of space. The sounds of non-place play a homogenising and dominating role: they originate from a centre and move outwards towards a periphery. Non-place sound environments speak of uneven relations of power. In extreme cases, this leads to censorship and the banning of particular sounds. It is in these moments – when laws are either introduced or enforced – that the act of negotiation is abandoned.<sup>9</sup> Both figures of authority that appear in *Dilarang Menyanyi* and *Penjaga Malam* assert a particular sound environment on the community of which they are a part. This, I argue, has the effect of pushing spaces towards non-place. That is, in *Dilarang Menyanyi*, the sound of singing is forbidden, while in *Penjaga Malam*, an electricity pole must be struck a certain number of times at particular times of the night.

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<sup>9</sup> This is explored in some recent lectures by University of Melbourne based anthropologist Ghassan Hage: <http://www.themonthly.com.au/taxonomy/term/378>

Marc Augé defines place by what is 'relational, historical and concerned with identity'. On the other hand, he hypothesises:

a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place. The hypothesis...is that super-modernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places...where transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating

(Auge quoted in Bull, 2007, p.15).

In Augé's definition, the spaces of *Dilarang Menyanyi* and *Penjaga Malam* are not non-places. They are, however, spaces with sound-environments that show traces of unequal power relations. For example, *Dilarang Menyanyi*, shows how a sound – singing – is silenced and smoothed over as it is imagined as a source of discontent. In *Penjaga Malam*, on the other hand, the auditory representation of time as performed by the nightwatchman also homogenises and makes space uniform.

### INDONESIAN SOUNDSCAPES?

Colombijn introduces four ways of categorising the sounds of Indonesian cities: sounds of the street, sounds of power, sounds of modernity and sounds of intimacy (2007, p.257). There is the potential for much crossover between these categories. A vehicle, for instance, emits a 'sound of the street', a sound of power (its sound is threatening to a pedestrian, for example; it is used by the powerful), and is indeed a 'modern sound'. Also, the interior of a vehicle is an 'intimate' space, as it separates oneself from the public who exist outside, beyond the windows. The street is by no means a uniform or generic space. Barker writes, it 'is a social space with its own particular cast of characters, its own forms of social organization, and its own vernaculars' (2009, p.155). As with any city, Jakarta's streets are highly varied: from roads such as Jl.Sudirman, the toll-way that runs around the periphery of Jakarta, to alleys (*gang*) that are only reachable on foot, or a slowly-driven motorcycle. The *adzan* - one of Indonesia's most ubiquitous sounds - is at once a sound of power as it represents the religious hegemony of Islam within Indonesia, as well as being a sign of diversity. The sound of the *adzan* is always varied and representative of the vocal qualities of the person making the *adzan*, not to mention the kind of equipment that is used to reproduce the sound of the voice. Despite the aural and political hegemony of Islam, the *adzan* itself is varied and thus becomes a sound not only of power, but also of plurality.

Just as Colombijn investigates sounds through his own experiences as an anthropologist, it is also possible to explore urban sounds through the reading of literary works. This makes use of a neglected and important source of urban documentation. The sounds used in literary texts show how authors conceptualise sound. Not only this, they provide a lasting documentation of something that is by its very nature temporal. Individual sounds have particular meanings and thus understanding how these sounds are given meaning provides an understanding of how a particular society is ordered. Seno Gumira Ajidarma has given much attention to soundscapes in his short stories and novels. He has used sound as a means of inquiring into notions of - among others - fear (*Bunyi Hujan di Atas Genting*), power (*Dilarang Menyanyi di Kamar Mandi*) and time (*Penjaga Malam dan Tiang Listrik*).

A literary sound analysis thus provides a new route into an understanding of Indonesia's urban fabric. This analysis draws on the studies of not only the aforementioned scholars - Schafer, and Colombijn - but also Atkinson (2007), Dick (2002), Nas (2003), and Mrázek (2004) among others. In line with Attali's invitation to apprehend the world through listening, scholars will also discover new dimensions of an urban society through *listening* to written texts. As Atkinson writes, 'sound provides an often-ignored element of our conceptualisation of the urban fabric' (Atkinson, 2007, p.1905). By engaging a study of 'literary geography' this article explores the way in which different sounds and different approaches to listening can lead to a greater understanding of the Indonesian urban fabric. This reading draws on studies of Indonesian cities 'as physical places' (to use Franco Moretti's term) (Johnson, 2000, p.199).

### URBAN SOUNDS IN THREE STORIES BY SENO GUMIRA AJIDARMA

These three stories are examples of how Seno has documented Indonesian urban life through looking at how sound is present and given meaning to in an urban environment. These stories indicate Seno's ability to represent and comment upon prevailing social and urban conditions. This representation of urban society is mediated in each of the stories through a narrator, who is at a distance from Seno himself. Seno's commentary on urban life is mediated through the narrator in these stories, whereas in *Jazz, Parfum dan Insiden* and the essays of *Kentut Kosmopolitan* the voice of the author is that of Seno.

This article presents three cases of listening - listening as a communal activity, listening as a private activity and listening as a domestic practice. In *Bunyi Hujan* an urban *kampung* acts together to form an audience to the state terror of the New Order. The state terror is perpetuated through the form of murdered accused gangsters thrown onto the street. One of the story's victims of state violence, Sawitri, listens in isolation, in the privacy of her domestic space, for the sounds that may or may not indicate that her partner will be found on a street near where she lives. It is the sound of rain beginning to fall that troubles her. The lack of the sound of rain falling - signifying its end - is what appeals to the urban *kampung* population. For after the rain has finished, they will be able to partake in the state sponsored spectacle of death. The sound of rain is terror for Sawitri, the sound of silence (the absence of rain) is joy for the residents of the *kampung*.

The different practices of listening are also clearly defined in the story *Dilarang Menyanyi*. The author presents a conflict in the ways in which meaning is applied to the sounds emanating from a bathroom. The high-density of urban *kampung* life presents a problem in the soundscape of a particular setting. The private act of bathing becomes a public act of terror when accompanied by erotic singing. Singing threatens order and thus it must be suppressed. The head of the *kampung*, initially, refuses to give meaning to the sounds of the woman singing. For him (and again, only initially) the sounds form a part of the background din. The high density of population creates a lo-fi soundscape where sounds mix and overlap. For the women of the *kampung*, however, the singing is a clear and individual sound which is able to be isolated from the general din. The representative head *hears* a *general* soundscape, while the women - alert to whatever threatens their peace and security - *listen* for *particular* sounds. The *kampung* women, who are disturbed by the sounds, inform the representative of the *kampung* that the sounds of the *kampung* must be ordered. An irony appears, though, when it is the women who accuse the representative head of 'being too busy organising the *kampung*' so as to not know the meaning of particular sounds:

‘What’s up with you Pak RT? Don’t be so busy organising the *kampung*. Make some time to watch some porno films, just for a break, so you know what is going on in the outside world.’

‘What’s the connection between my role as RT and watching porno films?’

‘So that you know why those sounds are a threat to the stability of the *kampung*.’

(Ajidarma, 2006, pp.94-95).<sup>10</sup>

*Penjaga Malam dan Tiang Listrik* also interrogates the practice of listening. Again, a dichotomy is established. In this case, it is that between the night watchman and the people of the local community who form his audience. The night watchman deliberately plays the sound of time for an audience who hear the sounds as part of the urban background noise. The sound of a rock being struck against an electricity pole is used for its striking aesthetic qualities: a high-pitched sound in a hi-fi soundscape. The sound made by the night watchman contrasts with the other sounds he hears throughout his soundwalk<sup>11</sup> made in the middle of the night (sounds of lovemaking, the blues and crying), which are all of a low frequency. In the case of *Dilarang Menyanyi*, it is the aesthetic qualities of the singing – that it sounds erotic – that is the cause of the communal disturbance. The disturbance arises only because the way in which the sounds are interpreted, not because of the mere act of singing. While in *Penjaga Malam*, the aesthetics of the way in which time is articulated form only a functional part of the way in which order is maintained and created.

The awareness of sound in the stories studied in this article are a kind of rejection of the act of ‘sounding out the city’ as argued by Bull (2000, 2007). Instead of shutting out the sounds of the city, characters in these stories use sound to make sense of urban space. Through the use of personal stereos, users are able to ‘successfully prioritise their own experience, personally, interpersonally and geographically’ (Bull, 2000, p.9). The sound walk performed by the night watchman, however, also allows him to negotiate urban space and manage his own experience of it. Through his hearing of particular sounds the night watchman is able to know that ‘night is passing as night should’ (Ajidarma, 2004, p.176). Use of a personal stereo, whether Walkman or iPod, on the other hand, cuts off the user from these sounds; denying the personal stereo user a means to engage and interact with their urban environment. For Bull, the iPod is the latest technology in the ‘Western narrative of increasing mobility and privatisation’ (Bull, 2007, p.2). The censorial act of silencing singing in the bathroom in *Dilarang Menyanyi* and sounding time as the night watchman does in *Penjaga Malam* are acts that deny the possibility for a personal and individual soundscape.

Sound also presents a key to a mapping of an urban environment. Sounds that are considered to be erotic are banned for they contribute to the disturbance of family life. The condition in which Sawitri interprets rain as a sound of terror, however, indicates a difference in interpretation between members of a community, rather than a variety of sounds. The reach of the sounds made by the night watchman delineates a community that is under surveillance and that is protected by a particular structure of security. Mapping an area through sound provides an alternative to mapping a society through its streets, parks and grand buildings. It also allows for a more sensorial understanding of space. It allows for an understanding of what transgresses physical boundaries. Reading urban space *through* sound as represented in literature allows for a broader understanding of how sound is interpreted and how it relates to particular ideologies. Mapping space through sound thus continues the work of Cairns in his chapter in *Urban Space and Cityscapes* (2006) as well as that of Atkinson in ‘Ecology of Sound’ (2007).

<sup>10</sup> “Pak RT ini bagaimana sih? Makanya jangan terlalu sibuk mengurus kampung. Seseekali nonton BF kek, untuk selingan, supaya tahu dunia luar.”  
“Saya, Ketua RT, harus nonton BF, apa hubungannya?”

<sup>11</sup> A walk undertaken with the purpose of listening to the auditory environment.

**SOUND AND STATE TERRORISM: *BUNYI HUJAN DI ATAS GENTING*,**

Seno's stories often deal with the matter of state terrorism. As I have shown elsewhere (Fuller, 2011), the violence perpetrated in East Timor was dealt with in an ambivalent manner: the narrator (Seno) was able to use jazz both as a means to empathise with the victims of the Santa Cruz massacre as well as to escape into an anonymous urban environment. Furthermore, by reading the reports of eye-witness accounts in far-off, distant and other East Timor, the narrator was able to remove himself from the conflicts, sufferings and state violence committed within the urban environment of which the narrator was a part. Seno's stories are of a time when state terrorism was perpetuated by the New Order government led by Suharto. This has been shown in the scholarship of academics such as Heryanto (2006), Siegel (1998), Cribb (1990) and Bourchier and Hadiz (2003) among others.<sup>12</sup> Heryanto defines state terrorism as follows:

[it is] a series of state-sponsored campaigns that induce intense and widespread fear over a large population, involving the following five aspects: The fear is derived from severely violent actions conducted by state agents or their proxies; these actions are directed against selected individual citizens (primary victims); these individuals are selected as representatives of one or more social groups (target population), which are often publicly identified; the victimization of the selected individuals, their representative status and the motives for the violence are publicly exposed in order to spread fear and uncertainty among the wider target group against whom similar violence can take place in an unpredictable future; consequently the general population reproduces and elaborates the image of violence and intense fear among themselves (2006, p.19).

The stories studied in this article show examples of how fear is reproduced by the general population. This reproduction of fear is enforced through the presence of sound in *Penjaga Malam*, the eradication of a destabilizing and threatening sound in *Dilarang Menyanyi* and the identification of the sound of rain with the omnipresent power of the state in *Bunyi Hujan*. In these stories, characters adopt the ideology of the state and perpetuate it further and thus give up an avenue for resistance. Sound, as such, is not a neutral element of daily urban life, but can be both a means to enforce established ideologies, or in other instances to resist the power of the state. The stories by Seno addressed in this article provide an opportunity for understanding the way in which sound is interpreted in contemporary urban societies. As such, this article explores the intersection of sound, urban life and political meanings.

The first story to be discussed is *Bunyi Hujan di Atas Genting* – one of the stories in the collection *Penembak Misterius*<sup>13</sup> (Ajidarma, 2007). The stories in this collection are, arguably, some of Seno's most critical and political writings. These stories show the most *typical* qualities of his writings: an awareness of the ambient qualities of a scene (sound, visuals), tension (through understatement), addressing violence (political or otherwise), and in some cases an ironic sense of humour. The subtlety with which Seno writes his stories also indicates his skills at the craft of short story writing.

The story consists of one main character: a woman, Sawitri, who is waiting for the return of her partner. She lives in a poorly constructed house (*rumah*) at the end of a narrow alley.

<sup>12</sup> Seno's stories such as *Telpon dari Aceh*, the collection *Saksi Mata* and *Jakarta 2039* are other stories that address the practice, varieties and implications of state violence.

<sup>13</sup> This story was written on July 15, 1985 and was published in *Kompas* roughly two weeks later in the edition of July 28 of the same year.

The importance of fear in this story is signalled at its very beginning. But fear does not have a self-evident meaning. However, the opening paragraph - as quoted below – places Sawitri within the context of fear. The story contains several kinds of fear. And, Sawitri’s fear that her partner has been killed is one of these fears. Other fears include the fear of the state towards the petty criminals (or *gali*), the fear of the petty criminals towards the state, and the fear of the community of being accused of being a petty criminal (Kusno, 2003, pp.3-4). The story starts as follows:

“Tell me a story about fear”, said Alina to the storyteller. So the storyteller told her about Sawitri.

Every time it stops raining, a tattooed corpse can be found, lying face up at the mouth of the alley. That is the reason why Sawitri fears the sound of rain falling on the roof<sup>14</sup>

(Ajidarma, 2007, p.15).

Sawitri fears sound: for her it is the sound that makes her remember her missing partner and that he has become a victim of the *petrus* campaign. Without the sound of rain she waits for him to return home. But when it rains she has become accustomed to seeing a corpse laid out in the rain. The corpses she sees are often associates of her husband. As such, Sawitri is associated with the victims and with the fear that is caused by the sound of rain. The sound of rain, rather than being a metaphor for death, is the sound of fear.

*Bunyi Hujan* has a narrow focus. Yet, at the same time, the story needs to be understood in a broad social context. The story invites readers to relate its characters, action and setting to conditions beyond the text. The journalistic bent of much of Seno’s ‘fiction’ relates his stories back to the realities of contemporary Indonesia. This is one of the typical characteristics of *sastra koran* or newspaper literature; a genre of which Seno’s writing is a part.

Sawitri’s waiting is a result of the absence of her partner, Pamuji. Violence is perpetrated against members of a particular social group – i.e. the *gali*, and gangsters, and is perpetrated by the state. Instead of being viewed as criminals, this story presents the *gali* as victims of the state’s violence. Sawitri is waiting for Pamuji for she knows that he is a criminal and she knows that he may well be a target of the *penembak misterius* (mysterious killings, also abbreviated to *petrus*) campaign. Sawitri longs for Pamuji, as he is tattooed, and, being tattooed during the time of campaign – it was believed – was enough to make one a target of the police.<sup>15</sup> According to Siegel, a *gali*’s tattoo ‘identified them as criminals; they were condemned simply by having incisions on their skin rather than because of the specific crimes they were judged to have committed’ (1998, p.111). Of the *petrus* campaign, Siegel notes:

[the] *gali* were for the most part petty criminals, members of gangs. Many of them had worked for the government party, Golkar, during the elections the previous year, then were discharged to go back to their old ways. Most *gali* bore tattoos

(Siegel, 1998, p.104).

<sup>14</sup> “Ceritakanlah padaku tentang ketakutan,” kata Alina pada juru cerita itu. Maka juru cerita itu pun bercerita tentang Sawitri. Setiap kali hujan mereda, pada mulut gang itu tergeletaklah mayat bertato. Itulah sebabnya Sawitri selalu merasa gemetar setiap kali mendengar bunyi hujan mulai menitik di atas genting.

<sup>15</sup> While living in Medan in 2000-2001, during a time in which I used the city’s buses a couple of times a day, it was usual to see drivers with scars across their arms where they had once had tattoos. It became a matter of urgency to have them removed in, no doubt, sometimes vain attempts at having oneself removed from hit lists.

Every time it rains, a corpse can be found at the end of the alley on which Sawitri lives. When she opens her front window, leans out and looks to the right, Sawitri can see the corpse. She notices that every time she does so, the corpse is looking in her direction. Sawitri recognizes some of Pamuji's friends. If the head of the corpse is already covered by the time she looks out the window, she goes down into the crowd and uncovers either the cloth covering its head, or its body, to see whether or not the corpse has a tattoo that will indicate to her whether or not it is Pamuji. She says that she only needs to see a tiny fraction of the tattoo to be able to identify the corpse as Pamuji or not.

The description of the manner in which the corpses are disposed of is also consistent with the journalistic reports that were published during the time of the *petrus* campaign. Sawitri describes seeing corpses dumped in the middle of the street. She describes how she hears 'the sound of an explosion'<sup>16</sup> – perhaps that of a gunshot. She describes how people gather around the corpse and create a kind of spectacle. She describes the happiness that each new corpse brings for some members of the *kampung* – including Sawitri's neighbours. The campaign, a kind of 'shock tactic', was a reaction to the dramatic increase in urban crime during the early to mid-1980s, which was apparently attributed to the massive influx of rural dwellers to urban societies, around the same time as a drop in oil prices that led to more severe economic conditions. President Suharto himself acknowledged the existence of the *petrus* campaign, stating that it was a necessary method to instil a feeling of safety amongst urban communities. Through the trope of the sound of rain on the roof, Seno explores how a specific member of one such urban community experiences fear.

Sawitri does not fear the death of Pamuji for she knows that he is smart enough as a gangster to either evade the police or to fight back against them. Despite the fear felt by Sawitri herself, she imbues Pamuji with a sense of courage. She imagines that he is capable of avoiding the death squads, but is not fearful of them. Rather than fearing Pamuji's death, Sawitri instead fears the sound of rain, a sound that is seemingly innocent, but which for her is the sound of death. It is the sound of death *becoming*. The sound of rain threatens to turn a fear of a potential death into knowledge of Pamuji's death.

Sawitri fears rain. She fears the looming presence of the state of Indonesia impinging upon her private life. Rain is uncontrollable. It is a natural phenomenon. But in this case, the sound of rain has become a sound of the state. The sound of rain indicates the centripetal power of the state to reach into areas that are a part of the private domain. The sound of rain indicates the degree of invasion made by the state to pervade the private. This was an ideology that dictated that some people, some citizens of the Republic of Indonesia, were dispensable, in the name of security. This ideology privileges the public above the private and allows no room for negotiation. The irregularity of rain, its naturalness, characterises Sawitri's fear as something both natural and uncontrollable. Sawitri is rendered powerless in her ability to control her fear of finding Pamuji's corpse in a crowded street. Sound – the sound of rain falling on roof tiles – thus becomes a means of oppression. Sawitri reproduces the fear that is created by the state through the adoption of a simulacrum of state terrorism.

Sawitri's waiting is a theme that is also explored or expressed in some of Seno's other stories: *Seorang Wanita di Halte Bis*<sup>17</sup> (2007, pp.93-102) and *Seorang Wanita yang Menunggu Telpon Berdering*<sup>18</sup> (2002, pp.32-39). On the other hand, collective waiting is described in *Loket*<sup>19</sup> (2007, pp.155-170). This characterisation of women is somewhat negative as they seem to be waiting for

<sup>16</sup> Semacam letupan.

<sup>17</sup> A Woman at a Bus Stop

<sup>18</sup> A Woman Waiting for a Telephone Call

<sup>19</sup> The Ticket Counter

indefinite periods of time. In the case of *Seorang Wanita di Halte Bis*, it is a man who offers to help the woman find an alternative mode of transport. Nonetheless, his offer of help is rejected and thus suggests the woman's independence. Danerek has written that Seno's 'female characters are unconventional and strong' (Danerek, 2006, p.32). Seno's occasional characterisation of women as disempowered and passive beings could be further researched in other scholarship and contrasts with Seno's more common representation of women as empowered characters.

The sound of rain plays a rhetorical role in *Bunyi Hujan*; it is a part of the creation of tension and the denouement of the story. This story is one example where Seno uses sound as a means to establish a notion of fear and to argue that meanings attributed to sound are variable and depend on one's perspective of listening. Sound in this story is identified with the fear of the state. The sound of rain becomes a sound of the state and represents the state's infiltration into all aspects of its citizen's lives.

The absence of Pamuji's corpse coexists with Sawitri's fear of the rain. The state, on the other hand, could be said to fear not criminality as such, but rather, tattoos. Thus, the state did not combat crime but instead adopted the criminal tactics of the petty criminals themselves in order to eliminate tattoos. The tattoos themselves became concrete embodiments, or, truths of criminality. This perspective leads us to the domain of hyper-reality, a condition consistent with the postmodernist notion of the non-referentiality of signs. The world of the hyper-real is a world 'devoid of things' (Simon & Barker, 2002, p.140). And, in this case, the things that are absent are Pamuji's corpse (which Sawitri fears but doesn't fear) and the criminality of the petty criminals (which the state fears, but suppresses through the elimination of tattoos). As argued elsewhere by Heryanto, the New Order government employed the ideology of the hyper-real as a means to practice its 'state terrorism' (Heryanto, 2006). And, as Kusno points out, the hyper-real was also used in the case of fearing the petty criminals (Kusno, 2003, p.3). Through the example of *Bunyi Hujan* I have showed how this intersection between noise, fear and notions of criminality relates to contemporary urban social conditions in Indonesia. The investing of particular sounds with particular emotions (fear, for example) plays a part in the reproduction of state terrorism as outlined by Heryanto.

### **SOUNDWALKS AND SURVEILLANCE: *PENJAGA MALAM DAN TIANG LISTRIK***

*Penjaga Malam dan Tiang Listrik* (from here on abbreviated to *Penjaga Malam*) is a more recent publication, included in the collection "*Aku Kesepian, Sayang.*" "*Datanglah, Menjelang Kematian.*"<sup>20</sup> (2004) The story was written in November 2002 and published in *Koran Tempo*.<sup>21</sup> *Penjaga Malam* is set in an urban housing complex. While not necessarily a gated community, night watchmen guard the complex. Night watchmen are a standard part of Indonesian urban and rural communities. They are often seen playing chess, talking on walkie-talkies, drinking tea and mixing with passers-by. They, like the sellers of street food, the *ojek* drivers and the traders who sell their wares in a cart, form a vital part of the street scene. That is, they are an essential part of the feeling of liveliness on the street. The mere presence of the security guards – known as *satpam*<sup>22</sup> - and the night watchmen creates a feeling of security.

<sup>20</sup> As this book's title is a quotation, I have kept the double quotation marks.

<sup>21</sup> February 16, 2003. Seno wrote the story while in Pondok Aren, a southern Jakartan suburb where many of his stories and essays are written.

<sup>22</sup> Satuan Petugas Keamanan. Security Unit.

Abidin Kusno writes of the *gardu* (gatehouse) – i.e. the place where night watchmen are based as a place where

(mostly) men gather to conduct night patrols or watches and engage in leisure activities such as gambling and gossiping...those who conduct the night watch are armed with hand weapons...their key instrument, however, is the *kentongan*, a hollowed-out tree branch with an opening line down the middle that produces a sound when it is struck with a stick (2010, p.224).

The night watchmen and the security guards are a part of the act of surveillance, part of an effort to establish knowledge about the goings on of a particular community. The night watchman acts as a kind of mobile CCTV camera. But, different from a CCTV camera, the night watchman is at one and the same time the seer and the interpreter.

*Penjaga Malam* is the story of one evening at a housing complex. The main elements of the story are the night watchman, the housing complex, and a third party – someone who comes to disturb the night watchman. The story begins with a reflection on the role of the night watchman: his purpose is to make sure that night becomes all that night can become (Ajidarma, 2004, p.176)<sup>23</sup>. Night must be like *night*. Night must have the attributes of night. The night watchman creates his own definition of what a night is: night must be dark so that thieves may carry out their thieving, night must be dark so that shadows can move around without being seen in the moonlight. Night must be dark so that it tests the loyalty of lovers.

The night watchman, in this instance, shows characteristics of being a *flâneur*. He moves through the neighbourhood slowly, listening to the aural qualities of the environment around him. This night watchman-as-*flâneur*, however, has relinquished his neutrality and indifference, and instead performs his *flânerie* in order to subject others to his surveillance. He listens for sounds that challenge his ideas about whether the night is passing as night should.

The night watchman understands the night through sounds. Without sounds he cannot affirm that night is acting as a night should. In a few moments before midnight, the night watchman leaves his post. Moving through the housing complex he hears the sound of blues music, he hears the sounds of lovemaking, he hears the sound of crying. Night is passing as it should. The authority of the night watchman to impose his authority on the aural environment of the housing complex is contested by the presence of a disguised and shadowy figure. This figure claims that his presence is to obstruct the night watchman<sup>24</sup>. The conflict of the story is based around which character will represent time and order through sound. The night watchman enforces a literal understanding of time. He asserts that midnight is midnight through the striking of an electricity pole twelve times. He asserts that one a.m. is one a.m. through striking an electricity pole once. Upon being obstructed, the night watchman reacts violently. The reason for this is that he lacks the vocabulary to express time in a non-literal way. But, not only this, he lacks the flexibility to perform the signal for one a.m. at a time slightly after the 'real' one a.m. For the nightwatchman, the post-modernist rupture of sign/signified hasn't been realised. Symbols, signs, sounds still have concrete, fixed and definite meanings.

This reading of time, I argue, is consistent with the conception of time in the ideology of New Order. (The story itself, however, is from the post-New Order era.) The era of the Suharto government was exemplified by both hyper-modernity and hyper-reality. The hyper-modernity was evident through the New Order's programs of development and representations of Indonesia's nation and culture.

<sup>23</sup> Menjaga malam, agar malam tetap menjadi malam seperti yang paling dimungkinkan oleh malam.

<sup>24</sup> He says, 'I'm here to get in your way, O-Night Watchman.' 'Aku ada di sini memang untuk menghalangimu, wahai penjaga malam' (Ajidarma, 2004, p.178).

The hyper-reality of the New Order government is evident in its efforts at enforcing its reading of history: the non-real becomes more real than the real. This Baudrillardian hyper-reality has been developed in the writing of Heryanto<sup>25</sup> and Simon and Barker<sup>26</sup>. In the case of *Penjaga Malam*, we see a situation and representation of time, where multiple realities are denied legitimacy. This is a reading of time as uniform and homogenous. This reading of time does not allow for the existence of different readings of history, different imaginings and different modes of existing. This counters the more general condition of plurality that characterises urban life in Indonesia and Jakarta in particular. I argue that Seno's stories have sought to highlight the plurality of Indonesian urban life and experience. As is shown elsewhere in the scholarly work of Colombijn (2007), Nordholt and Steijlen (2007), sound plays a role in the imagining of urban space and the reading of urban environments. As outlined above, sound also plays a role in the reproduction of state fear: it is incorporated into surveillance as well as being representative of state power.

### **DISTURBING ORDER: *DILARANG MENYANYI DI KAMAR MANDI***

*Dilarang Menyanyi di Kamar Mandi* was written in 1991, published in *Suara Pembaruan* in the same year and then became the title story of a collection published in 1995 by Subentra Citra Pustaka. The book was re-published in April 2006 by Galang Press. It has become one of Seno's more famous short stories. It is ironic, critical and humorous. It provides a commentary on social relations in a typical urban setting. The story contains familiar characters: housewives, cheating husbands, a confused and ambivalent Pak RT (local neighbourhood representative) and a woman of extraordinary sensuality. Like the two other stories discussed in this section, this story forms a vital part of understanding Seno's writing on urban conditions on account of its close attention to the aural environment. Partly due to its relative length – it is about three times longer than *Penjaga Malam*, and about a third longer than *Bunyi Hujan* – *Dilarang Menyanyi* provides several different insights into how Seno understands sound and noise and how sound and noise play a crucial role in his rhetorical structuring of a story, as well as how sounds are imagined to play roles in shaping and threatening the morals of a community.

In this story, the presence and roles of sound and noise function at a number of different levels. Firstly, we see literally that noise is a disturbance. Conversely in the case of *Penjaga Malam*, the literal noise is a means of enforcing order. The sound of the unseen woman singing from the bathroom of Ibu Saleha's boarding house emits a centripetal noise, which disturbs the harmony of the community. That she is unseen and that the sounds of a woman bathing while singing disturbs a community indicates the power of sound. The appearance and sensuality of the bather/singer becomes more erotic for the fact that she is unseen: those who hear her singing use their imaginations to satisfy their fantasies. The men of the *kampung*, in their imaginations, conclude that the sounds they hear are the sounds of a woman bathing, but, cannot help to be transported into thinking of 'erotic scenes'<sup>27</sup>. In this case sound becomes less literal owing to its detachment from its source. This is also reminiscent of the power of the spoken, uttered word throughout the New Order era. In the case of Rendra – a late prominent poet and critic of the New Order government - large crowds would gather to hear him speak, to hear him verbalise his otherwise static and dormant poetry. In the process of making them audible, large crowds would gather and these crowds would be interpreted as being a threat to security. The verbalising of his poetry needed to be suppressed.

<sup>25</sup> Ariel Heryanto, *State Terrorism and Political Identity in Indonesia: Fatally Belonging*, New York: Routledge, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Bart Simon and Joshua Barker, "Imagining the New Order Nation: Materiality and Hyperreality in Indonesia", *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 2002 (43), 2, pp.139-153.

<sup>27</sup> Adegan-adegan erotis.

Rendra's printed poems did not pose the same threat. Seno's writing after the New Order era continues to be a criticism of some of the policies and ideologies of the New Order.

The other level at which attention to sound is incorporated into the narration is through its description at the level of ambient noise. This is a quality of many of Seno's stories, but the degree to which Seno focuses on noise is of particular importance in this story, as in the two other stories of this section. The narrator uses descriptions of sound to create a degree of tension, to slow down the speed of what is being described. By describing sounds, the narrator creates a kind of cinematic experience. In the opening scene of the story, where the Pak RT has been asked to be an ear-witness to the woman's erotic and thus dangerous singing, the narrator privileges hearing as the key sense to understanding the scene. The passage reads:

The Pak RT saw faces full of desire. They were ready and not willing to wait any longer. It was as if they were waiting for the most amazing show in the world. Then, everything suddenly became silent. The sound of the door closing was heard clearly. There was the hum of electricity, the sound of clothes, and the soft sound of singing in a voice, which was definitely that of a woman. Then, *splash-splash-splash*. It seemed as if she was bathing with great gusto. The sound of the scoop hitting the water tub was loud. But this not what the Pak RT was waiting for. Nor was he waiting for the sound of soap being scrubbed up against a wet body. A sound that could be interpreted in many different ways

(Ajidarma, 2006, p.92).<sup>28</sup>

What we see then, in *Dilarang Menyanyi*, is a prescient awareness of the censorious tendencies amongst some sectors of Indonesian society. The story also presents a shifting power structure. The story emphasises numerous characters with their different positions of authority. At different moments in the story each character – or set of characters – exemplify and play out different roles of power. We see the power of a voice in turning men into victims of their uncontrollable sexual desire; we see the power of the housewives in forcing the hand of the Pak RT; we see the power of the singing and desire-arousing woman in provoking taboo thoughts within the mind of the Pak RT; we see the power of the singing woman to embarrass both the Pak RT and Ibu Saleha. This story thus is an insightful investigation, critique and subtle observation of the different relations that operate in Indonesian urban societies. Sound, in the case of the woman's singing is an interruption to the forces of order that the Pak RT hopes to enforce upon the *kampung*. Singing becomes symbolic of disorder and disharmony. Silence – or the absence of particular sounds – is a part of maintaining the kind of 'order' in which the rights of individuals are subordinated for the benefit of a broader population.

The power of the woman's singing is evident in the following passage:

The Pak RT was waiting to hear the woman's voice. And her gentle humming soon turned into a gentle singing. A voice, which was not so sweet, but was able to invoke images full of desire. Her voice was husky. Who knows what the people behind the wall thought of when they heard the sound of her husky voice. They looked as if

<sup>28</sup> Pak RT melihat wajah-wajah yang bergairah, bagaikan siap dan tak sabar lagi mengikuti permainan yang seolah-olah paling mengasyikkan di dunia. Lantas segalanya jadi begitu hening. Bunyi pintu yang ditutup terdengar jelas. Begitu pula bunyi resluiting itu, bunyi gesekan kain-kain busana itu, dendang-dendang kecil itu, yang jelas suara wanita. Lantas byar-byur-byur-byur. Wanita itu rupa-rupanya mandi dengan dahsyat sekali. Bunyi gayung menghajar bak mandi terdengar mantab dan penuh semangat. Namun yang dinantikan Pak RT bukan itu. Bukan pula bunyi gesekan sabun ke tubuh yang basah, yang sangat terbuka untuk ditafsirkan sebebas-bebasnya.

they had forgotten about where they were. It seemed as if the woman's singing had created another world and they were very happy to be there. Only the security guard remained unaffected

(Ajidarma, 2006, pp.92-93).<sup>29</sup>

This quotation appears at the beginning of the story and it presents the Pak RT as someone who is both unaffected by the desire-arousing singing, as well as someone who is aloof from his community yet also attentive to them. The story presents changes in the Pak RT's position. He moves from someone who defends the woman's right to sing to being ambivalent about her supposedly erotic singing to in the end enforcing a general ban on singing while showering. This, again, presents an ominous reading of attempts at restricting an individual's freedom of expression and participation in society. Sound is a part of the negotiation of societal relations.

## CONCLUSION

The stories discussed in this article are connected by the theme of surveillance. The stories all privilege sound as a means of understanding issues of surveillance and of criminality. Surveillance is needed to maintain security, a security that is disturbed by criminals. In these stories we have security and sound operating at three levels. Sound is an agent of disturbance. This is evident in *Dilarang Menyanyi*. It disturbs through its power to arouse the men who fall within earshot of the noises - imagined as erotic - coming from behind the walls of a bathroom. Secondly, sound is used as a means of enforcing strict, linear and concrete time. In *Penjaga Malam*, the sound created by banging a stone on an electricity pole maintains order. In the words of the narrator, the purpose of the night watchman is to make sure that 'night becomes all that it should become' (Ajidarma, 2004, p.176). Order is maintained through the sounding of time: a breakdown between time and its representation is a breakdown in order. Thirdly, there is the sound of fear: rain. Rain becomes noise because it disturbs the tranquillity of Sawitri's comfortable ignorance of the fate of Pamuji. Rain is a signal of the possibility that she might suddenly gain knowledge about whether or not Pamuji has been killed. In the eyes of the state though, Pamuji himself is a kind of disturbance. For he disturbs the silence, the peace, the order of the secure, safe and developing Indonesia as imagined by the New Order government.

This article has shown that hearing and sound are markers of urban space. The sounds of others are interpreted as being disruptive, while at the same time, other sounds such as the call to prayer (*adzan*) are used to homogenise space. Sound is used by those who are in power and those who are marginalised. As stories such as *Dilarang Menyanyi di Kamar Mandi* show, the categories of 'powerful' and 'powerless' are dynamic, contextual and changing. A flâneur's act of hearing place complements the act of flânerie, which primarily relies on visual stimulus. Hearing allows for another way of knowing the city and urban space. As has been shown by scholars such as Schafer and Colombijn it is a way of knowing that has generally been ignored in studies of urban history. The selected stories that have been discussed in this article show that Seno's writing of urban societies provides space for auditory culture and the manner in which flânerie encompasses the act of hearing.

<sup>29</sup> Yang ditunggu Pak RT adalah suara wanita itu. Dan memang dendang kecil itu segera menjadi nyanyian yang mungkin tidak teralu merdu tapi ternyata merangsang khayalan menggairahkan. Suara wanita itu serak-serak basah, entah apa pula yang dibayangkan orang-orang dibalik tembok dengan suara yang serak-serak basah itu. Wajah mereka seperti orang lupa dengan keadaan sekelilingnya. Agaknya nyanyian wanita itu telah menciptakan sebuah dunia di kepala mereka dan mereka sungguh-sungguh senang berada disana. Hanya hansip yang masih sadar.

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