

‘Open Desire, Close the Body’: Magic Spells, Desire and the Body among the Petalangan Women in Indonesia

YOONHEE KANG

1 Introduction

How do people perceive their bodies and talk about them? How do people experience and make sense of their desires? How are their bodies and desires represented and projected in language practices? This study aims to discuss the interplay among language practices, desire, and the body through an analysis of magic spells that are used among the Petalangan people of Indonesia.

As one of several indigenous ethnic groups living in the remote Kampar river hinterlands on the eastern part of Sumatra, Petalangans are well known for their practices of magic spells. They use magic spells in nearly every activity and for almost every pursuit. There are magic spells for farming, hunting, healing, promoting beauty, courtship, child-birth, and even for sexual intercourse.

This paper will focus on a Petalangan women’s genre of ‘obscene magic spells’ called *Monto Cabul* to discuss the discursive construction of

Language and Sexuality: Contesting Meaning in Theory and Practice.

Kathryn Campbell-Kibler, Robert J. Podesva, Sarah J. Roberts and Andrew Wong (eds.).

Copyright © 2001, CSLI Publications.

the body and desire¹. Many married women in Petalangan society told me that they perform this genre of love charms in order to enhance their sexual capacity for their husbands' sexual satisfaction.² Based on Judith Butler's notions of discursive construction of gender and the body (Butler 1990, 1993), I will analyze the texts and social uses of women's love charms to examine how cultural notions of the body and desire are linguistically constituted through performances of magic spells.

Inspired by Butler's notions of gender as performance (Butler 1990), recent language and gender studies have paid increasing attention to the performative power of language³ in relation to gender and sexuality (Hall and Bucholtz 1995, Livia and Hall 1997). According to Butler, gender is not a pre-given or fixed attribute of a subject, but rather an identity category created and constituted through the subject's 'repetition of acts' (Butler 1990: 140) where the subject repeatedly 'cites' and 'performs' conventional traits and features of a specific gender so as to be culturally recognized as having specific attributes of men or women (ibid). Gender conventions, thus, are enabling as well as constraining factors for gender performativity.

By the same token, Butler argues that the materiality of the (sexed) body is also discursively constructed (Butler 1993). Focusing on the intelligibility and accessibility of sex and the body, she argues that sex (that is, biological attributes of men and women) always presupposes its social significance (that is, gender). People recognize a person's body either as male or female based on the presupposition of conventional or stereotyped features of the male and female bodies. According to Butler, even the materiality of the body, that is, the 'fixity of the body; its contours; its movements' (ibid: 2), corporeal elements that are assumed to exist prior to cultural construction of gender, are also bound up with signification. She argues that the issue of the body is neither presuming nor negating materiality (ibid: 30). Instead, she calls attention to the fact that the process of delimiting and contouring the body as prior to any signification itself constitutes materiality (ibid). The (sexed) body, or its materiality then is not

¹ According to a dictionary (Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th edition), desire is defined as 1) conscious impulse toward something that promises enjoyment or satisfaction in its attainment, 2) longing, craving, 3) sexual urge or appetite. Although the definition of desire in the sense of 'sexual urge or appetite' is a modality of desires, I use 'desire' mostly in the sense of sexual appetite or lust throughout this paper.

² Men are also reported to use magic for sexual intercourse. Unlike women's *Monto Cabul*, however, men's magic is said to enhance their sexual stamina. Men's magic is more likely to use medicine or exercise, while women's magic uses spells.

³ Originating from Austin's speech act theory (Austin 1962), the term 'performative' refers to a constitutive or creative function of an utterance. The words are not just descriptive; they also act upon the world (cf. Searle 1969). For a discussion of 'performativity,' see Hall (2000).

a biologically pre-given basis of gender, but emerges as a product or effect of gender (ibid: 3).⁴

Criticizing Butler's universalized notion of a discursive construction of gender and the body (cf. Hall and Bucholtz *ibid*, Livia and Hall *ibid.*), this study analyzes ethnographic accounts of specific language practices and their social contexts to demonstrate more localized and culturally specific ways that the body and desires are discursively constructed. I will begin by examining Petalangan notions of language as action (cf. Austin 1962) and associated cultural notions that mediate the transformations of 'words to the world' (Searle 1979). In doing so, I will discuss three main questions in this article.

First, how are the Petalangan magic spells internally organized?

Analyzing linguistic features and patterns of these spells will reveal how a speaker's utterances are embedded in an unchanging formula of 'ancestors' words.' The highly formalized and poetic structure of magic spells renders a situated performance that transcends immediate authority by invoking ancestral authority.

Second, how do Petalangan women both recognize and represent their bodies and desires in magic spells? By applying Butler's emphasis of 'citation' or 'reiteration' of social conventions in materialization of the body (Butler 1993: 20), I will examine how women's magic spells project the female body by appropriating Petalangan conventional notions of female body, which are mostly based on male perspectives.

Third, how do women contest the dominant Petalangan gender ideology through the performances of magic spells (cf. Abu-Lughod 1986, Raheja and Gold 1994)? In contrast to the dominant Petalangan gender ideology that describes the relation of men and women as the dichotomy between 'reason' (*akal*) and 'desire' (*nafsu*) (cf. Tsing 1993, Peletz 1996), women's uses of magic spells reveal the women to be 'rationally' in control of their desires. I will discuss how women perceive and represent their desires and the female sexuality⁵ not as biologically ascribed but as a social requisite in achieving idealized wifely qualities. Differing with the conventional Western notion that desires and the body emanate from the individual, Petalangan women view desires and bodies as fully realized in their social relations.

⁴ Butler's discussion does not lead to the conclusion that materialization is caused or originated by language. Rather, she implies that language mediates materialization, the process of which itself is constitutive of materiality.

⁵ By *sexuality* in this paper, I refer to the quality or state of being sexual (Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th edition). In Petalangan society, however, there is no equivalent term for sexuality; they only have terms for men (*jantan*) and women (*betino*) respectively.

This analysis suggests a critique of the idea that a biologically distinct individual ‘self’ or ‘subject’ is the presumed locus of agency⁶ (cf. Ortner 1984), and similarly calls into question the idea that the subject’s individual intention is a condition of agency (cf. Hall and Bucholtz 1995, Livia and Hall 1997). The subjective ‘I’ appears as a subject of sex and desire in spells, but only if it claims its agency in ‘the ancestors’ voices’ that are embedded in a specific type of magic formula while denying individual intentions. Petalangan women’s agency is not located in their claiming of control over action. Rather, it is found in the very act of ascribing their agency to higher sources of power.

The data presented in this paper is based on a collection of magic spells that I gathered during twelve months of ethnographic and linguistic field research among the Petalangan people from 1998 to 1999. The majority of the spells were collected at Desa Betung, a Petalangan village in Kampar district. Through consultation and interviews with people from other villages, I found that practices of magic spells are common throughout the Petalangan society, and that the textual structures of the magic spells are similar in spite of some lexical variations from spell to spell.

2 Ethnographic Background: Men and Women of Petalangan Society

The Petalangan people in Sumatra (see Figure 1) constitute one of the indigenous ethnic groups that are categorized as *pedalaman* by neighboring ethnic groups. The term *pedalaman*, which literally means ‘people of the interior,’ implies a geographically remote and socially isolated people.⁷ Because of their lack of transportation and communication with outsiders, Petalangan society has been deemed relatively ‘backward’ or ‘primitive’ compared to other communities in Riau (cf. Tenas Effendy 1997, Turner 1997).

⁶ By *agency*, I refer to the capacity of acting (cf. Ahearn 2000).

⁷ Since the previous Malay kingdoms of Riau used to have their main cities and towns along the rivers, the term *Pedalaman* (inland people) has been used to refer to the people who lived far from riversides and far from the centers of the kingdoms.



Figure 1. Map of the Petalangan Region

Historically linked to both the Minangkabau of West Sumatra and to the Malay of East Sumatra, on the other hand, Petalangan society has been influenced by the Minangkabau matrilineal system as well as by a patriarchal Malay Islamic culture (cf. Andaya 1993). Petalangan society is thus an interesting example of male dominance within a matrilineal system. As a matrilineal society, each clan (*suku*) of Petalangers claims same ancestry through a female line, and these matrilineal descent groups consist of practical units in people's everyday lives. As a patriarchal Islamic society, only male members of the clan are allowed to control and enact customary law (*adat*), rules, and regulations of everyday life.⁸

For most Petalangers, rice cultivation, fishing and collecting rubber are the main sources of livelihood. Men undertake occasional but highly

⁸ From the Riau Malays' points of view, Petalangers' mixed culture demonstrates that they are not 'truly Malays' (Tenas Effendy 1997). See Peletz 1996 for another case study of the matrilineal Malay Muslim society.

intensive and visible works, such as fishing and cutting trees in the forest,⁹ while women engage in less intensive but ongoing and unremarked upon tasks, such as farming, rubber-collecting, child-rearing, and other domestic works. With recent economic development, many young people have started to work at neighboring palm oil plantations. Some people, especially young adult males, leave their villages for the city to find better jobs. The most distinctive feature of men's work is mobility; it is one source of men's power.

Ideologically, people describe the relationship between men and women as that of *akal* (reason) and *nafsu* (desire) (cf. Siegel 1969).¹⁰ These notions originate from Islamic gender ideology. *Akal* means reason, rationality, and intelligence, while *nafsu* refers to passions, desires, and bodily instincts. While animals only have *nafsu*, humans have both of these two components and *akal* controls *nafsu*. *Akal* thus distinguishes humans from the rest of the animal world. These components are associated with men and women respectively; men have more reason and women have more desire.¹¹ In the dominant gender discourse, therefore, women should be under the control of men, as desires are controlled by reason (cf. Tsing 1993, Peletz 1996).

3 Overview of Petalangan Magic Spells

In Petalangan society, practices of magic spells accompany most activities in daily life.¹² Having a knowledge of magic spells is especially important in dealing with others and managing social relationships. People believe that magic spells have the power to control other people's wills or feelings by penetrating into their inner selves.

From the Petalangan point of view, the boundary of the person is not fixed but flexible and even exposed to outside influence. The *mayo* (life

⁹ Men usually build their own houses on the river or in the forest and live there while doing work such as fishing and cutting trees for timber companies. Once a week, they will return home to the village where their wives and children live.

¹⁰ Originating from Arabic, *akal* and *nafsu* refer to 'reason' and 'desire' in Indonesian as well as in Malay.

¹¹ See Schimmel (1997) for the detailed gender representations and images reflected in the Koran.

¹² Petalangan magic or magic spells are largely classified into two categories: *ilmu masyarakat* (magic for society), and *ilmu privadi* (magic for individuals). Magic for society includes magic for communal activities, such as farming, hunting and collecting honey, healing and child birth, and so on. Magic for individuals is used to improve personal well-being; for example, it is used to promote health, beauty, and self-protection. This category includes *ilmu pemanih* (beauty magic), *ilmu kebal* ('thick magic' to strengthen a person's body for self-protection), *ilmu pengashi* (love magic), *ilmu pembenci* (hate magic), *ilmu penunduk* (defeating magic), and so on.

force) of a person is considered so weak and volatile that it can easily be shifted by the person or by others; it can even cross the boundary of the self. While closely related to the body and emotion, *mayo* is a spiritual concept located between the body and the mind. If someone's *mayo* is interrupted by the outside, he/she experiences changes in his/her bodily conditions or emotional states.

The notion of *mayo* that loosens the personal boundary or even renders it boundless helps to explain people's belief in the power of magic spells to control others' feelings. Fear that others will use malicious magic to control an individual is one of the most prevalent anxieties found among Petalangan people. Accordingly, Petalangans interact with one another under constant suspicion of what others may do to them through the use of spells. A person's allusion to the knowledge of magic displays him/her as having the potential to influence others to his/her advantage, which triggers fear in other people. This, in turn, motivates people to learn spells in order to protect themselves from the willfulness of others. Most Petalangan adults, therefore, claim some knowledge of spells. Typically, men learn magic spells from male elders and women from female elders.¹³

Magic lessons take place under very private, secret circumstances, and between only two people, a student and a teacher. Custom requires the student to provide the teacher with material goods such as gold, clothes, chickens, and the like. The spells traditionally have been handed down through oral tradition, and have no written texts. It is believed that the spells must be absorbed into the performer's body, and so the spells are thought to work only if they are memorized. If a student learns the magic spells by taking notes, the notes should be burned and the ashes should be eaten so that the words become part of the body.

As indicated by the emphasis on 'words become flesh and bones (*kato jadi daging tulang*),' the idea of oneness between words and the body is prevalent and serves as a basis for the efficacy of magic spells. Reciting magic spells, for instance, gives magical power to the performer, as words and the performer become 'one breath (*satu nyawa*)'¹⁴ when the words are uttered through the performer's voice.

¹³ Most Petalangan informants report that they start to learn magic spells around the age of fifteen to seventeen. Since the Petalangans consider magic spells an important resource by which they can deal with the opposite sex in relationships, they prefer not to reveal their magic spells to the opposite sex. People say that they don't want to give *senjata* ('arms,' which means magic spells) to *musuh* ('enemy,' which means the opposite sex). Therefore, it is easier to learn such magic spells from elders of the same sex, rather than from those of the opposite sex.

¹⁴ *Satu* means 'one' and *Nyawa* refers to 'soul' or 'spirit' that is realized and embodied by 'breath.'

Petalangans say that their spells come from their deceased ancestors, and that their ancestors' words come from God (*Allah*). In Petalangan belief, all animals were able to speak human languages when the world was created. Animals, especially birds, used to be messengers who brought God's messages to the ancestors. God's messages contained esoteric knowledge of this world and ancestors articulated God's messages into verbal formulas that living people could use. In Goffman's terms (Goffman 1981), God thus becomes a principal speaker and ancestors become authors. The current speakers thus become animators who repeat the words (Figure 2).

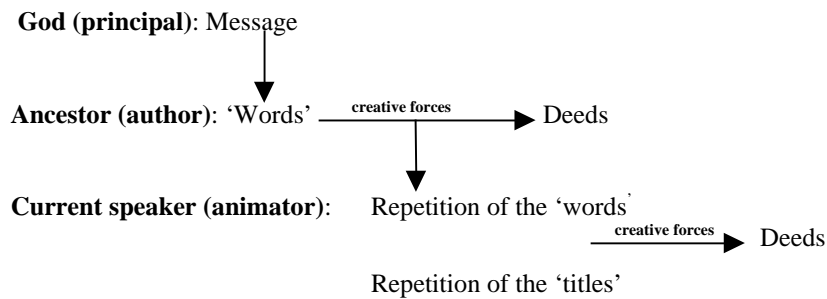


Figure 2. Petalangan Magic Spells: Creative Forces of Words

As it is believed that God creates the world through speech, ancestors' words that originated from God are thought to entail deeds within the utterance itself. Repeating the words thus carries the same creative force as the words did when uttered by the ancestors. Each Petalangan magic spell has a specific title that refers to the first owner of the spell, and it is believed that the mere utterance of the title has a magical effect (Figure 2). The practice of magic spells, therefore, is a very sacred ritual through which the performer invokes the divine power embedded in the spell.

In the following, I will focus on two types of Petalangan love charms. Many Petalangan women told me that they recite specific love charms before and after having sexual intercourse in order to increase sexual satisfaction for their spouses. Before sex, a woman recites the spell 'Opening (bodily) desires' (*buka hawa nafsu*) to herself in order to invoke her desire. Afterwards, she recites the spell called 'Locking Fatima's door' in order to 'lock the body' (*kunci badan*) for self-protection from any danger caused by the sexual intercourse.

The magic spells are recited when they take baths. Because people take a bath twice a day, in the morning and in the afternoon, they recite the

'Opening desires' during the afternoon bath prior to the night's potential sexual encounters, while 'Locking Fatima's door' is recited in the following morning bath after they have had sex. Sometimes the magic spells are recited to the water with which they take a bath. Magic spells should be recited privately and quietly so that others cannot hear the spells. Although various versions of spells may exist under the same titles, the spells show similar internal structure despite their minor variations of lexical changes; thus I have selected the most typical examples to illustrate Petalangan women's spell practices.

4 Internal Organization of Magic Spells

4.1 Parallelism



An analysis of 'The Prayer of the Seven Tastes' (Example 1) reveals special linguistic devices through which a particular speaker's utterance follows the standard structure of ancestral authority. A highly formulaic structure displays the immediate ever-changing performances as self-evident, and as having transcendental authority separate from the intentions of particular speakers.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>Bismillahirrahmanirrahim</i> | 1. In the name of God |
| 2. <i>Kunyit ku, kunyit abu</i> | 2. My <i>kunyit</i> (turmeric), <i>abu kunyit</i> |
| 3. <i>Di tanam di janke kayu awo</i> | 3. Planted at the roots of <i>awo</i> trees |
| 4. <i>Kuat sombu daging basombu</i> | 4. Strongly cured, flesh cured |
| 5. <i>Aku mamakai 'Tujuh Aso'</i> | 5. I use 'Seven Tastes' |
| 6. <i>untuk membuka hawa nafsu badan ku iko</i> | 6. to open desire in this my body |
| 7. <i>Kok duduk taaso-aso</i> | 7. If [he] stands, let [my vagina] be felt and felt [by him] |
| 8. <i>Kok togak taaso-aso</i> | 8. If [he] sits, let [my vagina] be felt and felt [by him] |
| 9. <i>Lubang puki aku iko</i> | 9. This hole of my vagina |
| 10. <i>Sataun jalan da'at</i> | 10. [If he goes] One year trip on land |
| 11. <i>Tigo bulan palayi'an</i> | 11. [If he goes] Three months fishing on the ocean |
| 12. <i>Lubang puki aku iko taaso-aso jo</i> | 12. Let my vagina be felt and felt [by him], too. |

- | | |
|--|---|
| 13. <i>Sapuluh cai bini,</i> | 13. [Even if he] Ten times looks for wives, |
| 14. <i>Satui cai kondak</i> | 14. [Even if he] one hundred times finds girlfriends |
| 15. <i>Tak ado sasodap lubang puki aku iko</i> | 15. There is nothing as tasty as this hole of my vagina |
| 16. <i>Dik < nama ></i> | 16. [His] sister, <name > |
| 17. <i>Barkat aku mamamkai tuju aso</i> | 17. Bless me who uses 'Seven Tastes.' |
| 18. <i>Kabul Allah, Kabul Muhammad</i> | 18. Please bless [me], Allah, the Prophet Muhammad |
| 19. <i>Kabul Bagindo Rasullullah</i> | 19. His Majesty, the Messenger of God |

Example 1. 'The Prayer of the Seven Tastes' (*Doa Tujuh Aso*)

The most commonly-found linguistic devices are framing devices (cf. Goffman 1974) through which a current speaker's speech is displayed as detached from the immediate pragmatic context of 'here and now.' In 'the Prayer of the Seven Tastes,' the text is marked by a pair of Islamic opening and closing remarks as shown in the following excerpt (Example 2).

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| 1. <i>Bismillahirrahmanirrahim</i> | 1. In the name of God | Opening


Closing |
| 18. <i>Kabul Allah, Kabul Muhammad</i> | 18. Please bless [me], Allah, the Prophet Muhammad | |
| 19. <i>Kabul Bagindo Rasullullah</i> | 19. His Majesty, the Messenger of God | |

Example 2. Framing Devices: Islamic Opening and Closing Remarks

The Islamic opening and closing phrases *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim* in the first line, and *Kabul Allah Kabul Muhammad, Kabul Bagindo Rasullullah* in the last line compose one of the most commonly found framing devices. Despite its minor lexical variations, most magic spells are internally framed by these Islamic phrases. These remarks frame the speaker's utterance 'in the name of God,' and locate the present speaker as an 'animator' of God (Goffman 1974).

1. <i>Bismillahirrahmanirrahim</i>	1. In the name of God	
5. <i>Aku mamakai 'Tujuh Aso'</i>	5. I use " <u>Seven Tastes</u> "	
17. <i>Barkat aku mamakai tuju aso</i>	17. Bless me who uses " <u>Seven Tastes</u> "	
18. <i>Kabul Allah, Kabul Muhammad</i>	18. Please bless [me], Allah, the Prophet Muhammad	
19. <i>Kabul Bagindo Rasullullah</i>	19. His Majesty, the Messenger of God	

Example 3. Repetition of the Spell's Title

The second framing device is employed through the repetition of the spell's title, found in the above Example 3 in lines 5 and 17 as shown above; *Aku mamakai doa 'Tujuh Aso'*, ('I use the prayer of the Seven Tastes'). These sentences define the very action in which the speaker is engaged. Framing the speech as 'Seven Tastes' allows the utterance to appear as a repeating phrase of the ancestors' words, detached from the speaker's immediate pragmatic context.

We also find the use of paired couplet from lines 2 through 5 of 'the Prayer of Seven Tastes' as shown below (Example 4). This shows a Pantun, a traditional couplet style of Malay poetry which displays an alternate rhyme pattern coupling in lines 2 and 4 and lines 3 and 5.

2. <i>Kunyit ku, kunyit abu</i>	2. My <i>kunyit</i> (turmeric), <i>abu kunyit</i>
3. <i>Di tanam di janke kayu awo</i>	3. Planted at the roots of <i>awo</i> trees
4. <i>Kuat sombu daging basombu</i>	4. Strongly cured, flesh cured
5. <i>Aku mamakai 'Tujuh Aso'</i>	5. I use 'Seven Tastes'

Example 4. Pantun (Couplets) of 'The Prayer of the Seven Tastes'

By layering the words with immediate repetitions, as in line 2, '*Kunyit ku, kunyit abu*' and line 4 '*Kuat sombu daging basombu,*' this Pantun style emphasizes the spell's poetic structure (Example 5).

2. <i><u>Kunyit</u> ku, <u>kunyit</u> abu</i>	2. My <u><i>kunyit</i></u> (turmeric), <i>abu <u>kunyit</u></i>
3. <i>Di tanam di janke kayu awo</i>	3. Planted at the roots of <i>awo</i> trees
4. <i>Kuat <u>sombu</u> daging <u>basombu</u></i>	4. Strongly <u>cured</u> , flesh <u>cured</u>
5. <i>Aku mamakai 'Tujuh Aso'</i>	5. I use 'Seven Tastes'

Example 5. Immediate Repetition of the Words

In the following Example 6 taken from ‘the Prayer of the Seven Tastes’, lines 7 through 14 demonstrate the structure of canonical couplets.¹⁵ Semantically, this spell repeats the imagined activities of the male counterpart,¹⁶ the speaker’s husband (A), expanded by diverse descriptions of the activities that he undertakes, such as ‘standing,’ ‘sitting,’ and ‘going on a trip.’ (In Example 6, these activities are schematically represented using A1 through A6.)

A(n): Husband’s activity: (He) does (something)

A’: Duration of the activity

X: Husband’s sensations: (He) cannot help feeling (the speaker’s body)

Y: The speaker’s body

7. <i>Kok duduk taaso-aso</i>	7. If [he] stands, let [my vagina] be felt and felt [by him]	A1+X
8. <i>Kok togak taaso-aso</i>	8. If [he] sits, let [my vagina] be felt and felt [by him]	A2+X
9. <i>Lubang puki aku iko</i>	9. This hole of my vagina	Y
10. <i>Sataun jalan da’at</i>	10. [If he goes] One year trip on land	A’+A3
11. <i>Tigo bulan palayi’an</i>	11. [If he goes] Three months fishing on the ocean	A’+A4
12. <i>Lubang puki aku iko taaso-aso jo</i>	12. Let my vagina be felt and felt [by him], too.	Y+X
13. <i>Sapuluh cai bini,</i>	13. [Even if he] Ten times looks for wives,	A’+A5
14. <i>Satui cai kondak</i>	14. [Even if he] one hundred times finds girlfriends	A’+A6
15. <i>Tak ado sasodap lubang puki aku iko</i>	15. There is nothing as tasty as this hole of my vagina	Y

Example 6. Canonical Organization of ‘The Prayer of the Seven Tastes’

As shown in the example above, the husband’s activities of the text are organized as A1 through A6. This organization is also modified by stative verbs; *taaso-aso* (be felt and felt) which is marked by X and produces the structure of [(A1+X) (A2+X)] //[(A’+A3)(A’+A4)]//[(A’+A5)(A’+ A6)].

¹⁵ Parallelism is one of the most prevalent forms of ritual speech found across societies. See Fox 1971.

¹⁶ Despite the fact that indexical pronouns for the counterpart do not appear within the text, I translate the omitted subject as ‘he,’ based on the self-referential term, ‘*Dik*’ in line 16. *Dik* (‘younger sibling’) is an everyday address term or a self-referential term for a girlfriend or a wife.

The husband's activities are thus expanded and paired by adding the semantically equivalent description of activities, which enhances poetic structure of the magic spell.¹⁷

Furthermore, each pair is followed by the phrase indicating the present performer's body (Y), with the indexical words of the first person form *aku* ('my') and deictic pronoun *iko* ('this'), as shown in Example 7.

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| 7. <i>Kok duduk taaso-aso</i> | 7. If [he] stands, let [my vagina] be felt and felt [by him] | |
| 8. <i>Kok togak taaso-aso</i> | 8. If [he] sits, let [my vagina] be felt and felt [by him] | |
| 9. <i>Lubang puki <u>aku iko</u></i> | 9. <u>This</u> hole of <u>my</u> vagina | Y |
| 10. <i>Sataun jalan da'at</i> | 10. [If he goes] One year trip on land | |
| 11. <i>Tigo bulan palayi'an</i> | 11. [If he goes] Three months fishing on the ocean | |
| 12. <i>Lubang puki <u>aku iko</u> taaso-aso jo</i> | 12. let <u>this</u> hole <u>my</u> vagina be felt and felt [by him], too. | Y |
| 13. <i>Sapuluh cai bini,</i> | 13. [Even if he] Ten times looks for wives, | |
| 14. <i>Satui cai kondak</i> | 14. [Even if he] one hundred times finds girlfriends | |
| 15. <i>Tak ado sasodap lubang puki aku iko</i> | 15. There is nothing as tasty as <u>this</u> hole of <u>my</u> vagina | Y |
| 16. <i>Dik < nama ></i> | 16. <u>Sister < name ></u> | |

Example 7: Indexical Elements Embedded in Couplets (Y: Speaker's Body)

Line 16 of the above excerpt (Example 7) names and locates the speaker as '*Dik* (sister).' Given that '*Dik*' is a common Petalangan address term for a wife (cf. n.16), by naming the speaker herself as '*Dik*,' the present performer of 'I' is finally objectified and positioned as the target man's wife in a specific 'here and now.' As organized in the formulaic structure, however, the speaker 'I' remains actively embedded in the unchanging 'ancestors' words.' Figure 3 schematizes the internal organization of 'The Prayer of Seven Tastes.'

¹⁷ See Keane (1997) for the importance of parallelism in ritual speech. See Fox (1988) for a review of general anthropological perspectives on parallelism.

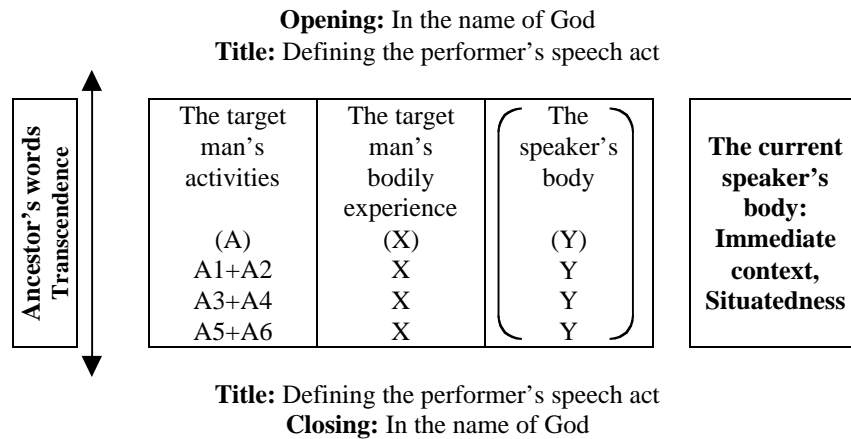


Figure 3. Internal Organization of 'The Prayer of the Seven Tastes'

The internal structure of the text reveals the present speaker as an animator of ancestors and god. The highly formal and poetic internal structure of the spell provides a set of interpretive frameworks by which the present performance is understood as a recitation of the ancestors' unchanging words, and as detached from the immediate ever-changing context. Use of indexical pronouns embedded in the whole structure of framing, however, retains the link between the current speaker and the original speakers.

4.2 Social Construction of the Female Body in Relation to Men's Sexual Experience

Another magic spell, *Kunci kati Fatima* ('locking Fatima's door') is recited to protect the female body from any possible danger of men's sexuality.¹⁸ Given that *Fatima* is one of the most common female names in Petalangan society, this name has become a generic term for woman.¹⁹ *Fatima's door*, furthermore, is metaphorically used to refer to the female genitalia (Example 8). By analyzing the second spell, I argue that the female body is socially constituted and constructed, and that its representation is mediated by conventional Petalangan notions of the female body and sexuality.

¹⁸ In Petalangan women's view, having sex could harm the women's bodies. This perspective is frequently expressed in their anxiety that they would have a 'watery (*beaye*)' and 'not-dried (*tidak koing*)' vagina because of excessive sex, which is usually caused by the husbands' strong appetite for sexual relations.

¹⁹ Not only in Petalangan society, but also in other Muslim societies, *Fatima* is a common female name. Since the biblical *Fatima* is the fourth daughter of Muhammad and the one most beloved by her father (cf. Schimmel 1997), many Muslims name their daughters after her.

- | | | |
|---|---|-------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Bismillahiramanirahi</i> | 1. In the name of God | |
| 2. <i>Cup takacup-kacup</i> | 2. <i>chup takacup</i> (sounds of jingling scissors), | |
| 3. <i>Tumbuh di padang sibui-bui</i> | 3. Grows in the foaming field. | |
| 4. <i>Takacup kacup-ku</i> | 4. <i>Takachup</i> , my <i>kacup</i> , | |
| 5. <i>Sotollah Allah tatogak dii</i> | 5. In the name of Allah who stands by himself | |
| 6. <i>Aku mamakai 'Kunci kati Fatima'</i> | 6. I use 'Locking Fatima's Door' | |
| 7. <i>Sompit belubang ja'um</i> | 7. <u>Tight</u> like the eye of a needle | } Use of similes (seven taste |
| 8. <i>Koing abu dapur</i> | 8. <u>Dry</u> like ashes in the kitchen | |
| 9. <i>Kosang sabut sekoping</i> | 9. <u>Fresh (crisp)</u> like a chip of coconut husk | |
| 10. <i>Hangat sepoti tempuyung</i> | 10. <u>Hot</u> like charcoals of palm trunk | |
| 11. <i>Podeh sepoti lado bepatah</i> | 11. <u>Spicy</u> like a piece of chili | |
| 12. <i>Asin sepoti ga'am seisak</i> | 12. <u>Salty</u> like a pinch of salt | |
| 13. <i>Lomak sepoti nio nan gulo</i> | 13. <u>Greasy and sweet</u> like coconut milk and sugar | |
| 14. <i>Pintu sogo si patima</i> | 14. <i>Fatima's</i> heaven's door | |
| 15. <i>Apo nan pulang ke o'ang</i> | 15. What returns to others are, | |
| 16. <i>Ambe sepoti ketopang nio</i> | 16. Tastelessness like a coconut's hull | |
| 17. <i>Sojuk sepoti ayi di dapur</i> | 17. Coldness like water in the kitchen | |
| 18. <i>Itulah nan pulang ke o'ang</i> | 18. Those are what return to others | |
| 19. <i>Aku makai 'Kunci kati Fatima'</i> | 19. I use 'Locking Fatima's Door.' | |
| 20. <i>Sotollah</i> | 20. In the name of Allah | |

Example 8. 'Locking Fatima's Door' (*Kunci kati Fatima*)

In 'Locking Fatima's Door' (Example 8), lines 7 through 13 show how the female body is constructed in relation to the men's sexual experience. In this spell, diverse similes describe female genital organs as having 'seven tastes'²⁰ or palpable characteristics, such as tight, dry, fresh (crisp), hot,

²⁰ In Petalangan conventions, the female genitals have been described as having 'seven tastes (*tuju aso*).'

spicy, salty, as well as greasy and sweet. This spell recites the names of objects that possess appropriate qualities of the seven tastes. These similes, however, describe neither the physical figures of female genitalia, nor the women's experience or feelings. Rather, the similes serve to constitute a partner's sexual experience, following conventional notions of the seven tastes of a generic woman's vagina.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 6. <i>untuk membuka hawa nafsu
badan ku iko</i> | 6. to open desire in this my body |
| 7. <i>Kok duduk <u>taaso-aso</u></i> | 7. If [he] stands, let [my vagina] be <u>felt and felt</u> [by him] |
| 8. <i>Kok togak <u>taaso-aso</u></i> | 8. If [he] sits, let [my vagina] be <u>felt and felt</u> [by him] |
| 9. <i>Lubang puki aku iko</i> | 9. This hole of my vagina |
| 10. <i>Sataun jalan da'at</i> | 10. [If he goes] One year trip on land |
| 11. <i>Tigo bulan palayi'an</i> | 11. [If he goes] Three months fishing on the ocean |
| 12. <i>Lubang puki aku iko <u>taaso-aso</u> jo</i> | 12. Let my vagina be <u>felt and felt</u> [by him], too. |
| 13. <i>Sapuluh cai bini,</i> | 13. [Even if he] Ten times looks for wives, |
| 14. <i>Satui cai kondak</i> | 14. [Even if he] one hundred times finds girlfriends |
| 15. <i>Tak ado sasodap lubang puki
aku iko</i> | 15. There is nothing as tasty as this hole of my vagina |
| 16. <i>Dik < nama ></i> | 16. [His] sister, <name > |

Example 9. Men's Bodily Sensations in 'The Prayer of the Seven Tastes'

The above Example 9 also shows how the female body is constructed through the men's sensations in 'The Prayer of the Seven Tastes.' As examined in the above section, this spell is recited in order to 'open desire' in her body (line 6). Throughout the text, however, we cannot find any description of female desire. Instead, we find the male counterpart's sexual experience as shown in lines 7 through 14. The use of stative affix of 'te(r)-' in 'taaso-aso,' which implies the passive state of feeling, such as 'cannot help feeling' in lines 7 and 8, makes the hidden subject of the sentence emerge not as an agent but as an experiencer-subject. Thus, the locus of women's desire is found not in their internal bodies or selves, but rather in men's sexual experiences.

4.3 Social Construction of the Female Body in Contrast to Other Women's Bodies

The speaker's female body also appears in contrast to those of other women. In Example 10 of 'The Prayer of the Seven Tastes,' lines 13 and 15 claim that the performer's sexual capacity is qualitatively superior to any other women.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 13. <i>Sapuluh cai <u>bini</u>,</i> | 13. [Even if he] Ten times looks for <u>wives</u> , |
| 14. <i>Satui cai <u>kondak</u></i> | 14. [Even if he] one hundred times finds <u>girlfriends</u> |
| 15. <i><u>Tak ado sasodap</u> lubang puki aku iko</i> | 15. <u>There is nothing as tasty</u> as this hole of my vagina |
| 16. <i>Dik < nama ></i> | 16. [His] sister, <name > |

Example 10. 'The Prayer of the Seven Tastes'

- | | |
|--|--|
| 15. <i>Apo nan pulang ke <u>o'ang</u></i> | 15. What returns to <u>others</u> are, |
| 16. <i><u>Ambe</u> sepoti ketopang nio</i> | 16. <u>Tastelessness</u> like a coconut's hull |
| 17. <i><u>Sojuk</u> sepoti ayi di dapur</i> | 17. <u>Coldness</u> like water in the kitchen |
| 18. <i>Itulah nan pulang ke <u>o'ang</u></i> | 18. Those are what return to <u>others</u> |

Example 11. 'Locking Fatima's Door'

In the above Example 11 drawing on the spell 'Locking Fatima's Door,' the performer's body is emphasized in contrast to other women's bodies, which are tasteless in line 16 and cold in line 17. The female body and desires are thus represented as constructed through men's erotic sensations as well as through a comparison with other women's bodies, drawing on conventional Petalangan representations of the 'seven tastes' of the female body.

5 Reciting Magic Spells and Shifting Values of the Female Body and Desire

What then do women do with these words? Petalangan women say that they use 'love charms' to deal with their fear of being abandoned by their husbands. Men's mobility—their freedom to go anywhere—is a threatening factor for Petalangan women. Men have more chances to meet other women outside the village, while women cannot circulate and socialize freely because of their restricted mobility. People also account for gender differences in courtship in that 'men are brave (*bo'ani*) enough to achieve

desired partners, while women are ashamed (*malu*) to express their own feelings to their lovers.'

From this point of view, Petalangan women think that the use of magic spells is more 'suitable' (*cocok*) for women, because they can be performed in private and personal circumstances but are still powerful enough to activate the spiritual agents beyond women's limited social boundaries. Through the authoritative 'ancestors' words', women are said to acquire 'spiritual vision' (*pandangan batin*) that can freely move around despite women's physically restricted mobility. 'While we do not see our husbands with the eyes, we could see them in mind. Once we seize them in our "spiritual vision," then they would never leave us.'

Based on analogical thoughts, practices of magic spells are believed to have the power to absorb and to transfer specific attributes and qualities of uttered objects in the spells into the designated bodies. In the spell of 'Locking Fatima's door,' for example, 'chips of coconut husk,' 'ashes in the kitchen,' and 'a pinch of salt' are verbalized in the hope of transferring the desirable attributes of each item, such as 'crispness,' 'dryness,' and 'saltiness' to the women's bodies.

Why then do women fear being abandoned by their husbands? More strictly, women fear the shame that they would face from other family members and neighbors, who would slander and despise them if their husbands were to leave. In fact, many women in the village have been divorced or left by their husbands. They have informed me that because they have been abandoned, these women have become 'ashamed' in their social interactions with other villagers. Fear of humility and deprivation leads them to recite magic spells. Petalangan women say, 'City women put on make-up, while we wear magic spells.'

Petalangan women, therefore, believe that they must satisfy the husbands' sexual desires in order to keep their families as well as their marriages intact. They say that although they may feel a lack of sexual appetite, they make an effort to 'open desire.' They do so by appropriating the conventional notions of the female body as determined by the men's sexual experience, not as internally owned by women. By reciting magic spells, therefore, women can achieve or control their own sexual desires, allowing women to appear 'rational,' in contrast to the Islamic gender dichotomy where men represent reason, and women represent desire.

6 Conclusion – Petalangan Women's Agency: Magic Spells Revisited

The Petalangan women's genre of magic spells, therefore, reveals the women's subjective views in negotiating the dominant gender paradigm. How, then, do the women acquire agency in their language practice? To answer that question, I would like to go back to the analysis of magic spells.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>Bismillahirrahmanirrahim</i> | 1. In the name of God |
| 2. <i>Kunyit ku, kunyit abu</i> | 2. My <i>kunyit</i> (turmeric), <i>abu kunyit</i> |
| 3. <i>Di tanam di janke kayu awo</i> | 3. Planted at the roots of <i>awo</i> trees |
| 4. <i>Kuat sombu daging basombu</i> | 4. Strongly cured, flesh cured |
| 5. <u><i>Aku mamakai 'Tujuh Aso'</i></u> | 5. <u>I use 'Seven Tastes'</u> |
| 6. <i>untuk membuka hawa nafsu badan ku iko</i> | 6. to open desire in this my body |
| 7. <i>Kok duduk taaso-aso</i> | 7. If [he] stands, let [my vagina] be felt and felt [by him] |
| 8. <i>Kok togak taaso-aso</i> | 8. If [he] sits, let [my vagina] be felt and felt [by him] |
| 9. <i>Lubang puki aku iko</i> | 9. This hole of my vagina |
| 10. <i>Sataun jalan da'at</i> | 10. [If he goes] One year trip on land |
| 11. <i>Tigo bulan palayi'an</i> | 11. [If he goes] Three months fishing on the ocean |
| 12. <i>Lubang puki aku iko taaso-aso jo</i> | 12. Let my vagina be felt and felt [by him], too. |
| 13. <i>Sapuluh cai bini,</i> | 13. [Even if he] Ten times looks for wives, |
| 14. <i>Satui cai kondak</i> | 14. [Even if he] one hundred times finds girlfriends |
| 15. <i>Tak ado sasodap lubang puki aku iko</i> | 15. There is nothing as tasty as this hole of my vagina |
| 16. <i>Dik < nama ></i> | 16. [His] sister, <name > |
| 17. <u><i>Barkat aku mamakai tuju aso</i></u> | 17. <u>Bless me who uses 'Seven Tastes.'</u> |
| 18. <i>Kabul Allah, Kabul Muhammad</i> | 18. Please bless [me], Allah, the Prophet Muhammad |
| 19. <i>Kabul Bagindo Rasullullah</i> | 19. His Majesty, the Messenger of God |

Example 12. 'I' as an Agent, Analyzed in 'The Prayer of the Seven Tastes'

Throughout the texts, the agency of speaking subject 'I' is not apparent. 'I' as an agent only appears in lines 5 and 17 of 'the Seven Tastes' (Example 12), and line 6 and 19 in 'Locking Fatima's Door' (Example 13).

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>Bismillahiramanirahi</i> | 1. In the name of God |
| 2. <i>Cup takacup-kacup</i> | 2. <i>chup takacup</i> (sounds of jingling scissors), |
| 3. <i>Tumbuh di padang sibui-bui</i> | 3. Grows in the foaming field. |
| 4. <i>Takacup kacup-ku</i> | 4. <i>Takachup</i> , my <i>kacup</i> , |
| 5. <i>Sotollah Allah tatogak dii</i> | 5. In the name of Allah who stands by himself |
| 6. <u><i>Aku mamakai 'Kunci kati Fatima'</i></u> | 6. <u>I use 'Locking Fatima's Door'</u> |
| 7. <i>Sompit belubang ja'um</i> | 7. Tight like the eye of a needle |
| 8. <i>Koing abu dapur</i> | 8. Dry like ashes in the kitchen |
| 9. <i>Kosang sabut sekoping</i> | 9. Fresh (crisp) like a chip of coconut husk |
| 10. <i>Hangat sepoti tempuyung</i> | 10. Hot like charcoals of palm trunk |
| 11. <i>Podeh sepoti lado bepatah</i> | 11. Spicy like a piece of chili |
| 12. <i>Asin sepoti ga'am seisak</i> | 12. Salty like a pinch of salt |
| 13. <i>Lomak sepoti nio nan gulo</i> | 13. Greasy and sweet like coconut milk and sugar |
| 14. <i>Pintu sogo si patima</i> | 14. <i>Fatima's</i> heaven's door |
| 15. <i>Apo nan pulang ke o'ang</i> | 15. What returns to others are, |
| 16. <i>Ambe sepoti ketopang nio</i> | 16. Tastelessness like a coconut's hull |
| 17. <i>Sojuk sepoti ayi di dapur</i> | 17. Coldness like water in the kitchen |
| 18. <i>Itulah nan pulang ke o'ang</i> | 18. Those are what return to others |
| 19. <u><i>Aku makai 'Kunci kati Fatima'</i></u> | 19. <u>I use 'Locking Fatima's Door.'</u> |
| 20. <i>Sotollah</i> | 20. In the name of Allah |

Example 13. 'I' as an Agent, Analyzed in 'Locking Fatima's Door'

Given that all of these lines describe the subject's speech activity itself—as with 'I use the prayer of the seven tastes,' or 'I use locking Fatima's door'—the speaker's agency is restricted to the activity of repeating ancestors' words. Moreover, the high formality of the magic spell infuses textual authority into the spells so that it appears unchanged from generation

to generation.²¹ The present speaker is an animator of the original speakers. In using the name of Fatima, a collective term for women, or by framing the present utterance in the name of God, the individual speaker's agency disappears only to reappear as collective feminine subjectivity, or as coming from higher sources of authority.

In conclusion, the female body and desires in women's magic spells are constituted and constructed in relation to men's sexual sensations and in comparison to other women's bodies and desires, which are mediated by Petalangan conventional notions of the female body. As Butler argues the discursive construction of the gendered body with the concepts of 'reiteration' and 'performativity' (Butler 1993), the Petalangan case also demonstrates how the female body is construed and represented based on their discursive conventions of the female body.

By reciting the magic spells, however, Petalangan women claim their 'rational' control of their desires and sexuality, which contrasts to the dominant Islamic gender ideology of 'irrational' women. Petalangan women redefine and represent their desires and sexuality as being socially embedded and culturally performed, which renders the Petalangan women's desires and sexuality as a social requisite in fulfilling their wifely role. Unlike Butler's universalized notions of performativity focus primarily on the 'reiteration' of discourse, paying less attention to its contextually contingent meanings, the ethnographic accounts of Petalangan women's magic spells draw attention to the multiple functions and meanings of the language practice as emergent in specific social contexts. In this respect, the analysis of Petalangan women's spell practices brings the issues of agency back to discussion, whereas Butler's emphasis on the discursive construction of gender and the (sexed) body has largely discounted the agency of the subject (Butler 1990, 1993; cf. Hall 2000:186). Petalangan women's agency operates in producing new meanings of female bodies and sexuality in specific social contexts, while embedded in the discursive limit at the same time.

Petalangan women's language practice, furthermore, demonstrates the multiplicity in forms and degrees of agency. Unlike the conventional Western notions of agency that emphasizes individual will and intentions

²¹ This process is explained by the term of *entextualization* (cf. Bauman and Briggs 1990, Kuipers 1990). According to Kuipers (ibid: 4), *entextualization* is a process 'in which a speech event is marked by increasing thoroughness of poetic and rhetorical patterning and growing levels of detachment from the immediate pragmatic context.' The authority of performance is explained as being constituted through this entextualization process.

(cf. Ortner 1984, 1996), Petalangan women acquire agency by denying their individual intentions as well as by invoking the authority of 'the ancestors' voices' embedded in a specific type of magic formula. Petalangan women's agency, therefore, is not an attribute or 'power' through which they assert control or 'authorship' over action. Rather it is found in the very act by which they ascribe their agency to the higher sources of power such as ancestors' words and God, as shown in their magic spells.

References

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1986. *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Ahearn, Laura. 2000. Agency. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 9:12-15.
- Andaya, Barbara. 1993. *To Live as Brothers: Southeast Sumatra in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Austin, John. 1962. *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bauman, Richard, and Charles Briggs. 1990. Poetics and Performances as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19:59-88.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies that Matter*. New York: Routledge.
- Fox, James. 1971. Semantic Parallelism in Rotinese Ritual Language. *Bidjra-gen Tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde* 127: 215-255.
- Fox, James, ed. 1988. *To Speak in Pairs: Essays on the Ritual Languages of Eastern Indonesia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Framing Analysis*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Goffman, Erving. 1981. *Forms of Talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.
- Hall, Kira. 2000. Performativity. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 9:184-187.
- Hall, Kira and Mary Bucholtz, eds. 1995. *Gender Articulated: Language and the Socially Constructed Self*. New York: Routledge.
- Keane, Webb. 1997. *Signs of Recognition: Powers and Hazards of Representation in an Indonesian Society*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Kuipers, Joel. 1990. *Power in Performance: The Creation of Textual Authority in Weyewa Ritual Speech*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Livia, Anna and Kira Hall, eds. 1997. *Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender and Sexuality*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ortner, Sherry. 1984. Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. 26:126-166.

- Ortner, Sherry. 1996. *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Peletz, Michael. 1996. *Reason and Passion: Representations of Gender in a Malay Society*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Raheja, G. and Ann Gold, eds. 1994. *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Schimmel, A. 1997. *My Soul is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company.
- Searle, John. 1979. *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge university press.
- Siegel, James T. 1969. *The Rope of God*. Berkeley, CA and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Tenas Effendy. 1997. Petalangan Society and Changes in Riau. *Bijdragen: Tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde. Deel 153.4:630-647*.
- Tsing, Anna L. 1993 *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-way Place*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Turner, Ashely. 1997. Cultural Survival: Identity and the Performing Arts of Kampar's Suku Petalangan. *Bijdragen: Tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde. Deel 153.4:648-671*.