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Secrets of the Keraton: constructing Indonesian beauty ideals through an indigenous beauty brand

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to study how a local beauty brand, Mustika Ratu, was able to compete with foreign companies by discursively constructing an ideal of Indonesian beauty that drew on cultural heritage and history, indigenous knowledge, nature and pre-colonial royalty, all of which represented alternative sources of authority to Western science but also reinforced the political and cultural priorities of the long New Order regime in Indonesia (1965–1998).

Design/methodology/approach – This research uses a historical case study drawing on archival, textual, visual and autobiographical data spanning 1940s to the 1990s. This contextualises beauty marketing in Indonesia leading up to the birth of Mustika Ratu in the 1970s and the trajectory of its growth up until the New Order era from 1965–1998.

Findings – This paper shows that while domestic brands can mobilise alternative sources of authority in their construction of beauty, including selective use of pre-colonial heritage and history, in doing so they can also reproduce existing cultural, ethnic and social hierarchies and political hegemony that exist within the "local".

Originality/value – While the global beauty industry has been marked by "scientification", we show how history and indigenous systems of knowledge can function as alternative forms of authority in the construction of beauty ideals. However, we also draw attention to the ways in which versions of history and culture are constructed for political purposes, and how this can find expression in products and marketing rarely associated with the State but which still reproduce existing power relations. Countries in Southeast Asia have been little studied by scholars of beauty history, and this paper shows how the evolution of beauty ideals expresses and reflects both versions of national identity as well as broader political and economic changes in the macro environment.

Keywords Indonesia, Beauty, Marketing, Mustika Ratu, Multimodal critical discourse analysis

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

> Madam Mooryati has an equal prominence position as the founder of Elizabeth Arden, or Helena Rubinstein, the founder of French cosmetics in Europe.
>
> (former CIDESCO [Comité International d'Esthétique et de Cosmétologie – CIDESCO is the World Standard for Beauty and Spa Therapy] Sweden section President, Kate Wacz).

In 2024, the founder of Indonesia's leading local beauty brand, Mustika Ratu – Mooryati Soedibyo – passed away at the age of 96. The business had small, domestic beginnings – while accompanying her husband in North Sumatra in the early 1970s, Soedibyo produced small batches of traditional skincare and herbal drinks as a hobby, sharing them with the wives of her husband's colleagues (Tinaprilla and Martawijaya, 2008). The popularity of these products grew, and Soedibyo's hobby became PT Mustika Ratu – one of Indonesia's leading skincare and cosmetics brands that enjoys global export success to 43 countries as well as significant domestic market share. It offers cosmetic products, as well as skin and body care ranges for women, herbal beverages and health supplements and wellness treatments at the brand's own *Taman Sari Royal Heritage Spa*. Mustika Ratu's products proudly feature native Indonesian plants such as jicama, coconut, cucumber, soursop, betel leaf, and *kemuning* leaf extract (https://mustika-atu.co.id/en/our-tory/, accessed 12 Sep 2024).

The success of a local brand like Mustika Ratu is noteworthy because the beauty industry is dominated by "global" (predominantly Western) brands, who have increasingly sought to penetrate the markets of "emerging economies" and arguably promote a homogenised and narrow "beauty ideal". Like other consumer goods and services (e.g., coffee, [Grinshpun, 2014], high heels [Parmentier, 2016], toothpaste [O'Hagan, 2022] and beauty salons [Ourahmoune and Jurdi, 2021]), we approach beauty products as cultural artefacts (du Gay, 1997): signifiers of economic development and globalisation that are outcomes of transnational movement of ideas, cultures and discourses. They represent what is desirable in markets, as well as embody traces of their origins and particular ideologies. Against this backdrop, we explore how constructions of "indigenous beauty" in the Southeast Asian context of Indonesia asserted an alternative ideal but one that nonetheless reinforced the local cultural and ethnic hegemony of a particularly dominant ethnic group and its elite and served the political objectives of the "New Order" regime. In doing so, we contribute to research that attempts to decolonise (Eckhardt *et al.*, 2022) knowledge production and explore broader cultural and political understandings of female beauty in rarely examined environments. To accomplish this, we use one Indonesian brand – Mustika Ratu – as a historical case to explore how a local brand emerged and developed alongside, and in response to, the opening of Indonesian domestic markets to foreign products. We examine how it explicitly used selective aspects of pre-colonial Indonesian history to construct beauty; we also identify the historical, socio-cultural and economic conditions which influenced its origins, growth and trajectory. Importantly, we draw attention to the connections between the case study brand and the political agenda and priorities of the long period of government under President Suharto. This shows how versions of culture are themselves political constructions, mobilising some versions of history while silencing others, and how this can find expression in products and marketing seemingly far removed from the sphere of state politics, but which are nevertheless deeply power-laden.

The paper is structured as follows: after reviewing relevant literature on the globalisation of the beauty industry, and its influence on non-Western markets, we then outline our methodology and research focus. Indonesia itself is a highly complex, culturally diverse country that experienced both Dutch colonisation (16th to 20th centuries), Japanese occupation during second world war and tumultuous periods post-Independence in 1945.

The following sections are dedicated to tracing these shifts and illustrating how they were reflected in gendered norms of appropriate womanhood and beauty advertising in popular culture. We then present our case study of Mustika Ratu, from its beginnings in the 1970s to the end of the New Order regime in 1998. We show how the brand combined discourses to construct a version of female beauty that referenced a specific elite ethnic culture and pre-colonial royal lineage, all of which also reflected how the ruling party used history and gender ideologies implicated in beauty ideals, as part of its nation-building project. We conclude by discussing the implications of our study for current understanding of local responses to the internationalisation of the beauty industry in the Global South, and how local brands can harness alternative sources of authority that resonate in the domestic market but also that researchers need to be attuned to the political agendas that may help to explain their success.

Globalisation of the beauty industry

Skincare and beauty are big business – Jones notes that in the USA, it is one of the "most profitable industries, just behind pharmaceuticals and software, and far above the average of all industries." (Jones, 2011, p. 1). Dominated by global brands, this industry has experienced ongoing, uninterrupted growth, unimpeded by economic recessions. For example, scholars have observed and tested the "lipstick effect" (Koehn, 2001) during economic downturns: despite reduced discretionary expenditure on personal items such as clothing, women continue to purchase cosmetics and even increase their spending as a "frugal way to treat" themselves (MacDonald and Dildar, 2020). Consumers are also presented by an ever–expanding range of products and services: not just cleansers and moisturisers but also products that "brighten", firm, combat aging, protect, conceal and beautify. New products and trends in makeup and skincare draw upon different sources of authority: some contribute to, and capitalise on, the latest popular culture trends, enlisting the endorsement of celebrities, while others increasingly incorporate scientific allusions and support, to the extent that Chen (2015, p. 207) and Kenalemang-Palm and Eriksson (2023, p. 1026) suggest we are witnessing the "scientification of beauty" (see also Mire, 2012). Regardless of the specific product's evidence for their claims, business expansion has been enabled by the beauty industry's extensive advertising budgets used to persuade consumers (mostly women) to purchase ever more sophisticated products for use in their daily personal care routines.

Advertising, of course, also constructs beauty as brands promote a "beauty ideal" (Greer, 1999), which has long been accused of representing women in a problematic way (Kates and Shaw-Garlock, 1999). Moreover, the beauty ideals promoted by industry have been heavily criticised for exporting "Western" standards to ethnically diverse (and developing) cultural markets. While globalised, the geographical epicentre of the industry and their leading companies have been predominantly located in the West (except for Shiseido from Japan), namely, the USA (Procter and Gamble and The Estee Lauder Company), France (L'Oreal), UK (Unilever) and Germany (Beiersdorf). Creative advertising agencies, mostly Western or "Western trained", generate increasingly standardised communications campaigns contributing to a "transnational look" (Frith, Shaw and Cheng, 2005), a "reduction in the range of global variation in beauty ideals" (Jones, 2008, p. 150) and a "narrow representation of beauty" (Yan and Bissell, 2014). Cultural representations and marketing of beauty emphasise Western ideals of whiteness embodied in fair skin, eye colour and hair texture (Glenn, 2008). Under the business rhetoric of operating "globally", the development and spread of Western beauty norms, particularly by French and American brands (Ourahmoune and Jurdi, 2021), and their emulation by Asian brands, suggest an ongoing role of the West in

cultural neo-colonialism (Varman, Belk and Sreekumar, 2024). From this critical perspective, globalization discourses are "Western, capitalist narratives" (Walck and Bilimoria, 1995, p. 4), not outcomes of real actions or forces. They function as a rhetorical and discursive device to impose and universalise narrow versions of beauty that serve an economic purpose. This raises the question of how local beauty brands, especially those in non-Western contexts navigate, construct, market beauty and build domestic presence, despite internationalization.

Increasingly, however, the rise of Asian economies spearheaded by Japan, South Korea and China, have influenced the way beauty ideals are marketed in Asia. In the 1980s to 1990s in Southeast Asia, players with global reach emerged from Japan (Kao, Kose, Pola, Kanebo and Menard) and South Korea (Amore Pacific) in the 2000s. These brands successfully penetrated regional Asian markets, including those less culturally similar and economically developed, but with a burgeoning middle class such as Indonesia. But it is important to recognise that Asia is a broad and ethnically diverse geographic region: some countries may have similar socio-cultural elements, (stemming, for example, from migration, language, ethnicity or legacies of colonialism), but their histories and developmental trajectories have unique and distinctive characteristics that impact their engagement with Western influences, modernity and cultural flows. Indonesia, for example, is an ethnically diverse and complex country in Southeast Asia, with a sizeable population and growing middle class that has attracted considerable attention from multinational companies seeking to expand into its domestic market. And yet, market research has indicated that local beauty brands in Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia and South Korea are consistently outperforming international competitors in these countries (Chow, 2016).

Previous scholarship on the responses of local brands to global products in their domestic markets suggest several potentially relevant factors. For example, while Roy and Chau's (2011) Australian study showed perceptions of global brands as higher quality, there was evidence that local brands could challenge them in domestic markets, at least in the car industry. In an earlier piece, Greer (1999) argued local brands may be able to compete with global companies if they were able to leverage "cultural capital", associated with place and history, to create "unique perceived value". However, a later research by Sassatelli and Arfini (2017) showed that this is not straightforward. They investigated how credentialling products and services from the Bologna region contributed to an "economy of quality" (p. 545) that drew upon geography and tradition to support authenticity claims. They also revealed the difficulties local producers faced achieving market recognition and understanding of the specialist knowledge underpinning the product or experience. Further, rather than just accepting the concepts of "local" and "global", work by Alcalde (2009, p. 49) suggests that a "more nuanced understanding of the 'local' is required". Their study of how the Peruvian drink, Inca Kola, outperformed Coca-Cola in Peru, showed how the marketing of Inca Kola relied on a particular construction of national identity which "glorified the pre-Columbian empire" and promoted a hegemonic image of its consumers related to "urban white-mestizo racial hierarchies". Taken together, this body of work suggests several factors could contribute to the success or otherwise of local beauty brands. However, none of this research explores the beauty or personal care industry and its histories, and these issues in relation to countries in Southeast Asia, a region which has been neglected in historical research in marketing (Witkowski, 2016).

Our research addresses this gap, specifically the question of how a local beauty brand that outperformed global competitors in their domestic market constructed a version of female beauty, and how this reflected its cultural, political and economic environments. We use a case study of one such brand in Indonesia – Mustika Ratu – which emerged in the 1970s and

became a leading player in the Indonesian market. As we will show, its emergence and expansion cannot be understood without regard to its historical and political context. Here we focus on developments in the 20th century including the legacy of Dutch colonization, Japanese occupation, eventual Indonesian independence, the government under President Sukarno and its bloody overthrow, and the long "New Order" period (1965–1998) under Suharto that ended in the late 1990s.

In the following sections, we explain how we undertook the case study, then outline key events which mark different periods in Indonesia's development. We illustrate these periods with sample beauty advertisements that reflect and reference the broader cultural, social and political environment of the time, before presenting the case study analysis. Rather than rely on global beauty ideals, Mustika Ratu used aspirational aristocracy and a sense of Indonesian nationalism which associated beauty with established traditions of the Javanese elite. In doing so, they constructed and marketed a version of Indonesian female beauty that drew upon an alternative authority to Western science and ideals while simultaneously reproducing Javanese dominance of Indonesian culture and politics, all of which reflected and reinforced the agenda of the "New Order" regime and its conscious crafting of a particular version of national identity and the role of women in society.

Methodology

To explore how our case study brand, Mustika Ratu, promoted a version of beauty from the 1970s to the end of the New Order period in 1998, we combine a social constructionist epistemology (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Gergen, 1999), with a critical discourse analysis methodology. From this perspective, reality is assumed as socially constructed, rather than pre-existing and objective, separate from social actors. "Discourse" here refers to "a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that together produce a particular version of events" (Burr, 2003, p. 66), the traces of which are found in texts (Parker, 1992); "critical" denotes a particular school of discourse analysis which is explicitly interested in how power operates through discourse (Machin and Mayr, 2023, p. 9; Wodak, 2001).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) involves analysis of texts but always in relation to their contexts. In other words, an understanding of context and power relations is woven into the analytic process. In relation to the current study, this involved, first, relating the evolution of the beauty industry in Indonesia to its broader macro political–economic environment and second, tracing how the case study brand's emergence and development from the 1970s to 1998 compared to the specific politics and priorities of the New Order period and the normative role it promoted for women. Following O'Hagan (2022, 2023) and Minowa (2024), we present a historical case study, drawing on advertisements, site visits and archival data. As stressed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001, p. 24), and others (e.g. Machin, 2013, 2016), discourses can appear in various modes, and multimodal CDA (MCDA, Machin, 2016) is used for the analysis of some of the data, for example, tools of visual semiotics (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001; van Leeuwen, 2008) along with written text and page layout in the case of advertisements, visual, space and the built environment, clothing, in the case of site visits. Our analysis was focused on identifying how different discourses and discursive resources were used to construct a particular version of beauty, represent categories of social actor and social action (van Leeuwen, 2008) and target a type of person. Drawing on Althusser (1971), Williamson (1978) describes the latter as answering the question of how the advertisement "hails" the viewer or reader or in Machin's terms (2016), what and how images (and texts) construct the position of the reader or viewer (see also van Leeuwen, 2008).

The specific research questions which focused our analysis were the following:

RQ1. What discourses are drawn upon by Mustika Ratu to construct a beauty ideal?

RQ2. How does the beauty ideal that is constructed position itself in relation to other authorities in the marketplace?

RQ3. How do these discourses and the beauty ideal relate to the broader macro environment (social, cultural, political) in which it operated?

The research questions are descriptive – they are interested in the "what and how" of beauty ideal construction – but they also require an analysis of the social, economic and political contexts in which this construction process occurs. We chose Mustika Ratu as our case study because it is a pioneering local indigenous brand which began during the New Order period with its fostering of domestic development. Purposeful sampling was used in this research; the logic and power of this method lies in strategically and purposefully selecting information-rich cases that are then studied in depth (Patton, 2002). This research uses archival, textual, visual and autobiographical sources of data spanning a period of five decades from the 1940s to the 1990s. The longer historical period is necessary to understand the context in which beauty marketing emerged in Indonesia leading up to the birth of Mustika Ratu in the 1970s, and how beauty marketing expressed economic, social and political changes, at times serving the explicit agendas of particular regimes and the roles they accorded for women.

Data were sourced from the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia, the digital collections of Universiteit Leiden, a repository of old print advertisements from "Iklan Jadul Indonesia", Mustika Ratu's annual reports, secondary interviews with [deceased] founder and articles published in the media about the brand. A total of 150 beauty advertisements were collected from 1940s to 1990s, comprising mainly soap, body products (lotions, scrubs and cologne), shampoo and toothpaste. These texts helped us to trace the historical context of the beauty market in Indonesia and how it changed over time in ways that reflected political and economic factors impacting on market and consumer sentiments towards beauty and personal care. Given Indonesia's developing status, record-keeping and documentation prior to the 1970s were sparse and incomplete. Therefore, some of the advertisements were from disparate, unknown sources and print magazines circulating in the second-hand market. Since Mustika Ratu was officially formed in 1978, their marketing activities were only observable from the 1980s onwards. To aid analysis, the advertisements and textual data were translated by one of the researchers, who is originally from Indonesia.

Before presenting the findings from our analysis, we first explain the Indonesian context and how gender norms and beauty ideals shifted from the 1940s to the 1970s, in ways that both reflected and served political objectives. Sample advertisements for each period are included to illustrate key points.

Indonesia as a context

Located in Southeast Asia, neighbouring Australia, Brunei, East Timor, Malaysia, Singapore, and New Guinea, Indonesia is a post-colonial invention. A big country in both size and population, at over 277 million people (World Bank, 2023), Indonesia has emerged as a significant consumer market. It has undergone rapid economic growth and modernisation to become the world's 10th largest economy (World Bank, 2023). Yet during much of the 20th century, Indonesia was one of poorest countries in the world and experienced decades of political and economic turmoil as they transitioned to independence post Second World War under their first president, Sukarno (Church, 2017). From

1950–1965, Sukarno led the nation through a period of liberal democracy before economic collapse saw the degeneration of its reasonably successful multi-party system into a form of autocratic rule that ended in a bloody coup d'état. The "New Order" regime that followed was closely supported by the Indonesian military, who then violently repressed the communist tradition that had flourished under Sukarno. Significant economic recovery was achieved during this period, but it was also characterised by authoritarianism, censorship, ideological and cultural control over the Indonesian people. Central to this control by the New Order regime was the crafting and promoting of one particular version of Indonesian history and identity, including versions of womanhood, that fit its contemporary political aims – effectively banning others (Ashton, Brahmantyo and Keaney, 2012).

This version also involved reinforcing the dominance of Javanese culture and its elite class, referred to as "priyayization" by Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis (1992), among a widely ethnically and linguistically diverse and geographically diffused population consisting of 13,667 islands (Ananta *et al*., 2015; Rahtz and Sidik, 2016; Woolf, 2011, p. 416). Prior to European colonization in the early 1600 s by the Dutch East India company, the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Companie (VOC), what is now Indonesian territory, was made up of many different (mostly Muslim) kingdoms, which had established trading relationships with Chinese, Malay and Indian merchants along the China and Southeast Asian commercial routes (Burbank and Cooper, 2010, p. 159). After conflict with other imperial European powers (most notably Portugal), the Dutch East India company established a base in Batavia (now Jakarta) to gain access to the spice trade. Although the Dutch East India Company was not an imperial nation state, it operated in much the same way because of the charter it received from the Dutch state allowing it to militarise, use force, expand and govern new territories and negotiate with other sovereign powers. Eventually, and due in part to war between England and The Netherlands in 1780 s, the VOC went bankrupt in 1798. Control of the territories it had colonised passed into the hands of the Dutch state (Burbank and Cooper, 2010) (see Table 1).

The Netherlands retained control of Indonesia until 1942, establishing complex bureaucratic systems of control and highly systematic educational institutions to produce the bilingual cadre of indigenous subjects needed to administer the colony (Anderson, 1991). The Dutch "systematically preserved difference" between and amongst the different ethnic groups of Indonesians during their political rule (Cribb, 2010, p. 70). They created many sub-classifications of people who were treated differently under the law. These included: Japanese, Chinese, Indians, Arabs, and "Natives" ("*Inlanders*" [Anderson, 1991, p. 122]) but also the many specific ethnic groups who inhabited the archipelago prior to colonization. The Dutch argued that colonial rule was necessary to protect the less developed Indonesians and deal with the disunity and inequality between ethnic groups. Paradoxically, Dutch

Table 1. Historical periods

Historical period	
1619–1942	*Dutch colonisation*, firstly through the Dutch East India Company with control passing to the Dutch state
1942–1945	*Japanese occupation* of Indonesian archipelago as part of Second World War
1945–1965	*Indonesian Independence*, revolution and guided democracy (President Sukarno)
1965–1998	*The New Order* (President Suharto)

Source(s): Author's own work

colonization (and education) also laid the groundwork for the independence movement that envisioned a unified Indonesian state, which experienced increasing repression by Dutch authorities from the mid-1920s onwards (Anderson, 1991).

Not surprisingly, during the colonial period in the early 20th century, Dutch and European beauty ideals were dominant. Just as the Dutch extracted economic value from local populations through a monopoly and control of agrarian output, forced labour and taxes (Indonesia Investments, 2018), Dutch products were exported for sale to the Indonesian domestic market. The Dutch brought with them European ideas of "modernity" and gender norms as part of colonization including a "colonial bourgeois preoccupation with sexual morality" (Stoler, 1995 cited in Blackburn, 2004) in the Netherland Indies as it was then known. While this included promoting education for girls, such potentially progressive policies were inadequately and inconsistently resourced by the colonial administration. From 1900–1942, Blackburn (2004, p. 11) argued, gender ideology was dominated by the views of "middle-class Dutchmen" where men were "projected…as primary income-earners and women as child-rearers and housewives" in a nuclear family. Tiwon (1996, p. 58) noted how the Dutch encouraged "vocational schools" and guides for native Indonesian women, teaching them the "European housewifely skills" of the middle-class including "hygiene and first aid, cooking and nutrition, interior decorating and cleaning, sewing, embroidery, and even knitting". Advertisements for beauty/personal care items from the period show this emphasis on normative "middle-class" femininity, targeting Europeans as well as local women of different ethnicities and of a similar socio-economic status who could afford to purchase such products. For example, the 1941 advertisement in Plate 1 for Unilever-owned "Sweet May" soap shows a cartoon-like drawing of two women greeting each other at a social event, presumably an evening party. In the background, the viewer can see a man and woman holding drinks, with the man dressed in a Western-style suit. The two women in the foreground are dressed in evening wear with virtually identical permed hairstyles and earrings: the one on the left is wearing a Cheongsam (ethnically Chinese outfit and wearing a watch) and is presenting the woman on the left (the hostess, wearing a necklace), dressed in a *Kebaya* (Javanese outfit), with the wrapped gift of Sweet May soap.

The cartoon speech bubbles show the guest saying to the hostess (Marika, a Dutch name): "I've chosen the one thing I know you will like!" while the hostess replies: "What a coincidence! I like this soap the most because it comes in so many different fragrances." While the brand name of the product is in English, the rest of the text (listing fragrances and ingredients) is in both old-fashioned Bahasa and Dutch:

"Only Sweet May soap has so many different fragrances that someone can choose the fragrance they like. Marika likes to keep changing soaps with different fragrances/perfume. She doesn't have to keep changing soap brands because Sweet May has 12 delightful fragrances:

In Dutch:
Lathyrus – Sweet peas
Roos – Rose
Lavendel – Lavender
Viooltjes – Pansies (viola)
Heliotroop – Heliotrope
Muurbloemen – Wallflower (*Erysimum cheiri*)
Anjelieren – Carnation (*Dianthus*)
Coldcream – Cold cream
Eau de Cologne – Cologne
Karnemelk – Buttermilk

Plate 1. Sweet May soap
Source: Iklan Jadul Indonesia

Glycerine-komkommer – Glycerine cucumber
Windsor – Windsor"
The advertisement ends with the statement:

> "Sweet May soap is liked by many not just because of its fragrances but also because it significantly beautifies skin at a price many people can afford."

The fragrances listed feature "Western/European" flowers not native to Indonesia, English beauty products such as cold cream and cologne, a British reference to a place or surname Windsor, a Western beverage buttermilk as well as a scientific ingredient glycerine. The people, ways of dressing, product range, names of the various fragrances and social interaction featured (giving a gift to a hostess) suggest it was targeting a particular class of (wealthier) consumers.

Japanese occupation (1942–1945)

The control and influence of European imperial powers in Southeast Asia was significantly disrupted by the Second World War. The *Netherlands Indies* (Indonesia) was occupied by Japanese armed forces between 1942 and 1945. The Japanese both exploited Indonesia's resources (petroleum, forced labour, agricultural output) and encouraged an anti-European (Woolf, 2011, p. 422) sentiment among the local population and a burgeoning independence movement. Dutch and other European administrators were interned, and Japan attempted to appeal to a sense of pan-Asian solidarity (Burbank and Cooper, 2010). However, the period is controversial because even as it supported a "nationalist-anticolonial" political consciousness among young, educated Indonesians, it also resulted in severe hardship (e.g. food scarcity) for Indonesian communities (Indonesia Investments, 2018). Military occupation by the Japanese saw a reinforcement of traditional gender norms, and the conscription of women into movements to support the war effort. Younger women were expected to join a volunteer army reserve. Wives of Indonesian government officials assumed leadership roles in Indonesian versions of a Japanese women's organisation (the *Fujinkai*) which mirrored the hierarchy of the bureaucracy: its focus was on promoting nationalism (Blackburn, 2004, pp. 20–21).

In popular culture, new magazines were launched to promote Japanese propaganda targeting local audiences, for example, *Djawa Baroe* (translated to "New Java") which featured advertisements for face powder, shampoo, soap and perfume, in both Japanese and Bahasa. In Plate 2, an oriental/Japanese model with smooth, very pale skin contrasting with the darkness of her eyebrows, small eyes and hair, is looking at herself in the hand mirror of a face powder compact sideways to the audience. Both Bahasa and Japanese languages are used, but it is clearly a Japanese product, manufactured in Osaka-Tokyo by the Nakajama-Taijodo cosmetics brand established in 1903. It invites the (female) viewer to join the *Bedak Moeka* (face powder) Club, addressing her as a respectable married woman (*Njonja*), and assuring her that if "you use this (once), you will understand the quality of this powder." Above *Bedak Moeka* is the brand name "Club Oshiroi" in Japanese, a white foundation powder for the face inviting Indonesian women to join the "Japanese club" in beautifying their faces. Non-European beauty ideals therefore emerged during this brief occupation period leading up to the next phase of independence.

Indonesian independence, revolution and guided democracy (1945–1965)

After the Japanese surrender in 1945, the independence movements that had been growing during the preceding decades were well-situated to proclaim themselves as new nation states (Burbank and Cooper, 2010). Most European resources were focused on rebuilding

Plate 2. Club face powder
Source: Djawa Baroe (1944)

economies and infrastructure at home in the post-war years and so there was little Allied support for The Netherlands' attempt to regain control of Indonesia. The "Independence Wars" (or rebellion) that followed from 1945 to 1949 between Indonesian nationalists and The Netherlands ended in the Dutch military withdrawal from the territories. However, they continued to retain economic interests through multinationals. Among these, Unilever was the most prominent and had to navigate precarious, volatile political dynamics and attitudes to their presence. From 1934, Unilever had begun manufacturing soap in Batavia, now Jakarta, taking advantage of the vast availability of raw materials and cheap labour (Wamsteker, 1993). Heavy import duties imposed by the Dutch occupation narrowed competition for soap and other domestic products, allowing Unilever to capture the local Indonesian market and become a household name while also profiteering from their existing export to Europe (Wamsteker, 1993). The influence of American popular culture of the time is evident in local Lux soap advertisements featuring a highly stylised "studio" portrait of Dorothy Lamour, the ad telling the reader she is a Hollywood film star who uses and recommends the product, as do nine out of ten film stars. The text included in the advertisement uses primarily Bahasa to address the viewer although the name of the product remains in Dutch (Lux toilet zeep/Lux toilet soap). Again, the viewer is addressed as *Njonja* (married woman) and promised "Lux soap will make your skin smooth, smell fragrant, as well as provide beauty that is refreshing". Reinforcing this message, the advertisement's text says, "Now you can follow the example from Dorothy Lamour and maintain your beauty through this soap".

Four years after declaring independence, a women's magazine titled *Wanita* (women in Indonesian) was launched and intentionally inaugurated on the same date as Independence Day, 17 August 1949. Sukarno, who had been imprisoned by The Netherlands prior to the Japanese occupation, was elected the first president of an independent Indonesia. This magazine was imbued with Sukarno's progressive views on the role of women. His vision that women from all over the archipelago could be *Ibu Bangsa* (Mothers of the Nation) was central to a newly imagined national Indonesian identity (Sullivan, 2020). Indonesian women were involved in political action and national building which took different forms – as symbols, mothers, activists, workers or assistants (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1989). Women's organisations across the archipelago collaborated to represent Indonesian women

and work for the interests of the revolution and independence (Martyn, 2004). In 1947, Sukarno even published a book titled *Sarinah: Women's Obligations in the Struggle for the Indonesian Republic* (translated) which outlined his view that women were equal partners in the present and future of the newly formed republic.

Alongside the crafting of a new national identity, post-Independence, women's magazines played a critical role during this period in articulating and promoting how contemporary women could be both "Indonesian" *and* modern. Sukarno was critical of Western expressions of fashion and culture as depicted in women's magazines (Sullivan, 2020). Instead, women should promote Indonesian culture by dressing in *kain-kebaya* (traditional Javanese clothing) or *batik* (a traditional Javanese art form where distinctive patterns are intricately created on fabric using a wax dyeing technique) clothing. Indonesian models, actresses or wives of government officials were held up as role models. Javanese identities were conflated with the identity of the nation, while the *kain-kebaya* acted as a cultural gatekeeper. Therefore, rather than just emulating Western fashion and beauty in a straightforward manner, there were discussions and debates about how a modern Indonesian woman in the 1950s could be fashionable and still embody a contemporary distinctly Indonesian identity.

Beauty ideals, and by default, gender norms and constructions of women, were present in articles and advertisements in magazines during the 1960s. More "Indonesian" female role models were being used, even by international brands. Lux soap advertisements, which previously featured American Hollywood and European actresses, used local celebrities such as Nanny Lydia and Aminah Tjendrakasih. A 1963 advertisement showed a male and female couple, standing and conversing outside a local cinema. The female commented on the poster of an Indonesian female actress, Nanny Lydia, praising her beauty. The male responded to her by saying that "you are just as pretty!" By being compared with the local actress, a local version of female beauty is elevated as aspirational to the Indonesian consumer.

However, there is little evidence in these beauty discussions and soap advertisements of the domestic political and economic turmoil that beset Indonesia from 1945 to 1965. Many challenges faced the fledging nation, some economic, others political and cultural. A central dilemma was how to construct a sense of unified national identity when Indonesia was both so diverse and itself a product of colonisation. The *Pancasila*, the five principles that formed the foundation of the Indonesian state, enshrined the centrality of religion to its national identity (Hefner, 2018) and, while Islam was dominant, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism were all considered official religions by the state. Indonesia's multiculturalism was recognised: the national motto, *Bhineka Tunggal Ika*, is Old Javanese for "Unity in Diversity"; while its symbol, the Garuda, was a sign of strength that expressed the unity of its people (Nguyen and Richter, 2003).

Sukarno's rule during this period was renowned for being distinctly personal, foregrounding the establishment of an ostensibly pluralist Indonesian identity through charismatic leadership (Church, 2017; Maiddin, 2016). Instead of following the post-colonial trajectories of many of its neighbours, seeking alignment with the West, Sukarno insisted on forging a unique path for Indonesia that would establish the nation as a regional power. Under a liberal form of parliamentary democracy, Sukarno drove a far-reaching program of nationalization, as well as upholding freedom of association principles for organisations supporting free and independent journalism (Church, 2017). Ultimately, however, the economic challenges presented by centuries of colonization proved difficult to overcome. An overreliance on the agricultural sector, stagnating economic growth and inflationary problems eventually overwhelmed the nation (Church, 2017). Experiments with

parliamentary democracy ended with reversion to an autocratic system of government (akin to a military dictatorship, see Scott, 1985). In 1958, Sukarno restored the powers of the president granted by the 1945 Constitution and was then able to more directly impose a political ideology that combined nationalism with Marxism and anti-Western sentiment (known as "guided democracy"). This was accompanied by suppression of opposition and censorship of criticism of his government (Blackburn, 2004, pp. 23–24). It has been argued that Sukarno politically appropriated existing Indonesian values and tenets of Indonesian culture to legitimise the continuation of his total command and control over the country (Maiddin, 2016). Alongside this "guided democracy" was a "guided economy", which referred to nationalizing former colonial plantations and delegating their administration to local bureaucrats. Sukarno may have been a charismatic leader, but neglected oversight of the basic elements of the economy, instead engaging in military confrontations with other countries in Southeast Asia which led to an economic disaster within where Indonesians were unable to afford daily necessities. A coup between 1965 and 1967 saw military and alleged U.S. foreign involvement in the overthrow of Sukarno and the elimination of the political left (Scott, 1985). Suharto assumed the presidency with the support of the USA and of the remaining Indonesian military leaders. For the USA, Indonesia was an important ally in Southeast Asia, part of its strategic defence against the spread of communism in the region.

Contemporaneous and "official" accounts of the coup vary. A group of generals had been kidnapped and executed, for which the Communist Party of Indonesia and its supporters were blamed (Roosa, 2006) An alleged planned attack on Sukarno was used to justify Suharto assuming control, with military backing, placing Sukarno under house arrest for his "own safety" (Roosa, 2006). What followed was a particularly bloody purge of any person suspected of having communist party links, including any left-leaning women's organisations (Sullivan, 2020). Women had played a key role in the nationalist movement and campaign for Indonesian independence and had also formed groups to educate ordinary women and mobilise support for Sukarno's vision for the country. The most well-known of these was the progressive "Gerwani", founded in 1950 which grew to three million members by 1965 (Weiringa, 1993). It worked collaboratively with other women's groups as "mothers of the nation" (Sullivan, 2020, p. xvi) but was distinctive in its combination of "nationalism, socialism, and feminism" (Weiringa, 1993, p. 19). Rather than just seeing women as ancillary to their husbands, Gerwani promoted an idea of Indonesian womanhood that was "militant and brave, social activists in their own right" (Weiringa, 1993, p. 19).

The new Suharto-controlled government portrayed the coup as a necessary intervention in a "moral crisis," in which left-wing women played a leading role. In their official narratives about the kidnapping of the generals, the incoming government alleged that these women had behaved in a particularly depraved, sexually immoral and transgressive way, accusing them of torturing these military leaders before their execution. For the duration of the New Order period, this version of events was memorialised in public monuments and government films which demonised women of the political left (Ashton *et al.*, 2012, pp. 88–91). In the immediate aftermath of the group, any women with links to Gerwani or the communist party were imprisoned, tortured and executed. Those who were released were subject to ongoing police surveillance and persecution. It is only in the past few decades that alternative and critical accounts have been able to be published, with various scholars and activists trying to recover traces of testimony and other source material, much of which had been destroyed to minimise harassment and arrest (Ashton *et al.*, 2012; Blackburn, 2004; Sullivan, 2020; Weiringa, 1993). Using the "sexual immorality" and cruelty of left-wing women as a rhetorical "foil", Suharto's new regime called for a return of a tightly prescribed normative

Indonesian femininity, one that was properly subservient to the State, her family and husband.

New Order period (1965–1998)

Sukarno's successor, Suharto, led an authoritarian regime supported by a military government. This long era, known as the "New Order", emphasised national "unity, uniformity and conformity" (Cribb, 2010, p. 70). While Indonesia achieved remarkable economic growth and political stability, which significantly improved living standards for the majority of the population, this period was also accompanied by severe repression of political dissent. Suharto aligned Indonesia with the West, adopting an anti-communist stance that won diplomatic favour as the country opened to foreign direct investment through trade liberalization (Widodo, 2006; Cribb, 2010). From the outset of the regime, Suharto delegated decision-making around economic policy to US-educated technocrats within his administration, who drove a so-called "free market" agenda of deregulation (Klein, 2008) during which modernization and economic development were the national priorities (Dhakidae, 1991). The global oil shock of the early 1970s catalysed a decade-long Indonesian oil boom, leading to rapid economic growth from the late 60s to the 80s as their oil exports quadrupled in value (Widodo, 2006; Elias and Noone, 2011). Whereas Sukarno had refused to accept foreign aid in his commitment to establishing regional dominance, under Suharto, Indonesia received foreign aid from ten countries, as well as leveraged the country's national endowment to obtain enormous resource rents (Cribb, 2010). Indonesia became increasingly globalised as international investments penetrated its markets, with rising discretionary incomes and technological advancements. Rapid industrialization from the mid-1980s transformed the Indonesian economy and by 1990s manufacturing exceeded agricultural outputs.

The New Order did not just concern itself with economic development or political rule under Suharto's patriarchy, but also the creation of a particular Indonesian cultural identity as part of its nation-building efforts. The regime used selective aspects of history to articulate its vision of a nationally unified country and to lend the government legitimacy (Ashton, *et al.*, 2012; Wood, 2005). This involved promoting a "golden era" of pre-colonial empires and royalty, emphasising a Java-centred "Majapahit-oriented past" and subsequent Islamic sultanates (Wood, 2005, p. 200). As Wood notes, history is one of the tools that can be used in the creation of national mythologies, references to which are apparent in various media including those in popular culture. We argue this view of national history is also evident in the construction of beauty ideals because the construction of a particular form of "womanhood" is not an unintended consequence but was central to Indonesia's national identity, political and economic agendas during the New Order period.

Indonesian scholar and journalist, Julia Suryakusuma coined the term "state ibuism" (*Ibu* meaning "mother") to capture the relationship between the government and its preferred version of female identity: a wife and mother who supported her husband and the maintenance of existing social and cultural hierarchies, helping to reproduce and raise the next generations of "good" Indonesian citizens (see also Blackburn, 2004; Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis, 1992; Imanjaya and Citra, 2013). According to Suryakusuma, this concept combines the ideal of the "Western housewife" as consumer, needed for capitalism to thrive, with the New Order emphasis on maintaining patriarchal authority in the family (and metaphorically in the State), the valorisation of the "Javanese hereditary elite" (*Priyayi*) and acceptance of hierarchical relations and government control of virtually every aspect of daily life. In Suryakusuma's words:

> Housewifization is to (Western) capitalism as ibuism is to (Indonesian) development. Since development in Indonesia is increasingly capitalistic, the gender ideology that has developed is influenced by these material conditions and also takes on some housewifization elements. However, the social construction of womanhood in Indonesia takes on a specific cultural form with which the concept of ibuism deals more adequately. The all-pervasive state then provides the structure for the development of a specific gender ideology that provides the official definition of how Indonesian women should be. (1988, p. 4)

As the politics of womanhood and idealised femininity began to take shape with the New Order government, the 1970s witnessed local beauty brands emerging in the Indonesian marketplace. Advertisements from the 1970s show the assertion of a distinctly Indonesian cultural identity targeting local female consumers. Originating in East Java, Viva was the first local Indonesian brand to produce and sell to the domestic market since 1962, deliberately positioning itself as "made in Indonesia" and therefore possessing an advantage for local consumers over foreign brands. In a 1974 advertisement for Viva Cosmetics (Plate 3), the ethnically Javanese model looks at herself in the mirror of a powder compact, wearing a modern (1970s) hairstyle with the viewer's focus drawn towards her face. At the bottom of the advertisement, the range of Viva cosmetic products are shown including nail varnishes and remover, powders, eye makeup, lipsticks, cleansers and toners, suggesting Viva offers everything the modern Indonesian woman would need:

> Viva Cosmetics recommendation/advice to its user. It is best to be cautious. Don't risk your skin by experimenting with cosmetics you do not recognise (that are foreign). Your beauty can only be assured if you use Viva Cosmetics. You can tell your friends: these are the most suitable cosmetics for Indonesian women and climate made by the most experienced in caring for women's beauty in Indonesia: Viva Cosmetics.
>
> Viva Cosmetics proven to be the most suitable for a tropical place. Made in Indonesia. Can be bought in shops, pharmacies and beauty salons all over Indonesia.

The economic success of the New Order period had created a burgeoning consumer class for whom beauty and skincare was more affordable. However, despite proliferating a sense of national unity and lifting millions of Indonesians out of poverty, Anderson (1983) argued the priorities of the New Order state were not to serve its people but generate opportunities for an Indonesian ruling class to accumulate greater wealth and power. During this period, local businesses flourished, through deliberate policies, especially those with government connections and/or associations including Mustika Ratu. As we shall demonstrate in the next section, the brand reflected and reproduced New Order economic priorities as well as its use of Java-centric pre-colonial Imperial heritage (Wood, 2005) to construct an Indonesian national identity.

By the 1980s and 1990s, Indonesia had undergone an economic transformation under the New Order. This was accompanied by a growth in the middle class (Cribb and Brown 1995) whose social and economic aspirations were reflected in increased demand for quality consumer goods. Jones (2008) found that there was a correlation between an economy's growth trajectory and the population's increasing use of personal care products (which include skincare and beauty products). As quality of life improves, personal care and aesthetics become an indicator of social superiority and mobility, especially apparent in a developing country. Not surprisingly then, the economic conditions of the 1980s and 1990s were fertile soil for brands that reflected aspirations for beauty and success.

In contrast to the 1970s, the marketing of beauty products in the 1980s and 1990s relied more on symbolic imagery, rather than focusing on the products themselves. An advertisement from 1980 (Plate 4), for "splash cologne" by Vinolia (originally an English

Plate 3. Viva 1974
Source: Femina 29 October 1974

Plate 4. Vinolia splash cologne (1980)
Source: Iklan Jadul Indonesia

brand acquired by the Lever Brothers which eventually became Unilever) features a local female model wearing a "sarong" or a towel wrapped around her body, leaving bare shoulders. While there is no spatial background, the viewer can assume the model is either in a beach setting or post-shower as she liberally pours cologne on herself, allowing it to cascade down her neck and chest.

In the 1990s, Sen (1998) has argued that discourses of women and beauty shifted to reflect rising incomes of working women. For example, a body lotion advertisement by Sari Ayu (Plate 5) features a couple sitting at the edge of a yacht (a highly expensive upper-class product). While the female is dressed in a green swimsuit, with a *sarong* wrapped around her lower body, the male is looking at a different direction with a pair of binoculars. A basket of fruit is evident, suggesting they are enjoying the outdoors on a picnic while at sea. The body lotion is fortified with sunscreen and marketed as a product that acts as a *tirai* (curtain) protecting from ultraviolet rays while at the beach. Both these advertisements differ from earlier soap advertisements in that they depict imagery and/or activity associated with lifestyle rather than an imaginary aspiration (the beauty of film stars) or simply focusing on the product attributes (what the product is and does). Local faces adorn the advertisements, baring the natural tan skin of native Indonesians and jet-black hair in contrast to Caucasian or Oriental looking faces as featured in earlier periods.

Having outlined the key economic, social and political changes in Indonesia in the 20th century, including shifts in constructions of normative womanhood and its relationship with national identity and dominant ideologies, we now turn to the analysis of our case study brand, Mustika Ratu, under the New Order regime.

Findings and analysis

This section explains our findings from the analysis of the Mustika Ratu brand, organised by time periods, with a selection of advertisements, autobiographical data and other artefacts grouped around three discourses: the Royal heritage refers to the Javanese beauty traditions that seek to legitimise a particular beauty authority, the *Keraton* princess and what we term a distinctively Indonesian beauty ideal or "idealised femininity". The *Keraton* princess (or *Puteri Keraton* in *Bahasa*) is represented by the promotion of a higher, aspirational form of beauty sourced from the previously exclusive *Keraton* or royal Javanese palace adapted to modern lifestyles. An Indonesia beauty ideal refers to the indigeneity and nationalistic form of beauty constructed by the brand including referencing nature. In what follows, we show how Mustika Ratu utilised these three discourses during three historical periods from the 1970s through the New Order period which ended in 1998. We show how Mustika Ratu grew in the New Order era and attempted to establish its stake in the marketplace using discourses of local tradition, heritage and nature. In addition, the brand benefited from Suharto's focus on internal economic development. It also reflected and reinforced the New Order regime's valorisation of both Javanese culture and its hereditary elite (*Priyayi*) and its version of idealised femininity of Indonesian women as *Ibu* (mother) that was so central to its political and cultural agenda.

Royal palace

Mustika Ratu, (*Royal Heritage)*, was founded by B.R.A. Mooryati Soedibyo, who was born 5 January 1928 in Surakarta, Central Java. The prefix BRA denotes a Javanese royal title (*Bandoro Raden Ayu* to mean Princess Ayu), signifying her aristocratic ancestry. Mooryati's mother was the daughter of Sri Susuhunan Pakubuwono X, the Tenth King of Surakarta. Her father was a government official, the Regent of Brebes in Central Java. At a very young age, she lived at the *Surakarta Hadiningrat Keraton* (circa 1745), or royal palace in Surakarta

Plate 5. Sari Ayu body lotion 1990
Source: Iklan Jadul Indonesia

while her parents stayed in Brebes. Her royal grandparents supervised her palace upbringing where she learnt high court traditional Javanese language (rarely spoken outside the palace), courtly ethics and manners, literature, music, dance, artistry and drawing traditional Javanese *batik* designs. Mooryati was also privy to traditional skincare and cosmetics recipes, and methods of concocting herbal medicine, or *jamu* – involving secret knowledge of native Indonesian plants allegedly known only within the inner circles of the *Keraton* aristocracy (Soedibyo, 2016). Her grandmother and mother taught her about the aromatic flowers, herbs, leaves of certain plants used for body care that grew in the palace gardens. A privilege only available to "aristocratic girls", she attended a Dutch primary school, completed secondary education in the Royal School and studied English literature in a University in Surakarta. She eventually returned to live with her parents in Brebes and left the *Keraton* at the age of 26.

Through her own choice, Mooryati turned down an arranged aristocratic marriage with the son of the Sultan of Yogyakarta to marry Ir Soedibyo, an engineer who worked for the government, in 1956. They then transferred to Medan in North Sumatra for work and had five children. Mooryati interacted with wives of government officials, taught them Javanese culture (Sumatra is a different province), grooming traditions, bridal makeup and "*jamu*" making. She also formulated her own products such as scrubs and masks and became known among the community for her beauty products. When her husband was transferred to Jakarta in 1959, she continued this hobby. Appointed as the chairwoman of the Ministry of Industry Wives' Association, Mooryati became famous for her on-demand *jamu* and beauty products in this inner circle. At the time, it was not customary for Javanese aristocratic family members to engage in business. In her autobiography, Mooryati framed this as the start of her "tradition-breaking" life choices.

1970s: from Tat's Beauty Secrets to Mustika Ratu

The 1970s was a period of robust growth for Indonesia. The government invested heavily in infrastructure and encouraged the private sector to play a larger role in economic stimulation to rely less on turbulent oil exports. Locally made beauty brands started to appear in the 1960s (Kelly, Fanbo and Viva) and 1970s (Sari Ayu). In 1973, during this period of economic stimulation, Mooryati (then 45 years old and living in Jakarta) decided to turn her hobby into a business. Obtaining a permit from the Minister of Industry, she started "Tat's Beauty Secrets" (short for Tatik, a nickname given to her by her Sultan Grandfather), from her garage. With two helpers, she took private orders for bottled *beras kencur*, delivered to people's homes by bicycle or her own Mazda car. Made from *kencur* or aromatic ginger (*Kaempferia galanga*), rice, ginger, tamarind and palm sugar, this herbal drink claims to soothe throat irritations and boost stamina. Demand grew and eventually, her product range expanded to include other *jamu* especially formulated for women's health, body aches, slimming, even in pill formats.

The first beauty product she formulated was herbal shampoo, after experimenting with her mother's recipe:

> My mother always made her own shampoo from *merang* [Oryza Sativa (Rice Straw) Extract] to prevent hairfall. (Soedibyo, 2016, p. 232).

The Javanese tradition of washing hair is known as *kramas* (Quinn, 2011) and is part of women's ceremonial rituals at significant life milestones. Traditionally, the *merang* or rice straw stalks are burnt; the charred stalks and ashes doused in hot water and left to form lye. Liquid is strained and the remainder is "shampoo" rich in saponin, with alkaline foaming characteristics to cleanse acidic oils from the scalp. The hair is then massaged with coconut oil extract called *cem-ceman* to restore lustre and shine. Mooryati consulted her friends in the

Indonesian Institute of Sciences to refine the traditional recipe and regularly researched the therapeutic effects of plants, herbs and flowers. Eventually, she offered other shampoos made from *bayam* (spinach), *lidah buaya* (aloe vera), *urang aring* (*Eclipta alba* plant), *daun waru* (leaves of the *Hibiscus tiliaceus* plant), *daun landep* (leaves of the *Barleria prioniti* plant), and *kacang hijau* (green beans). Based on her mother's recipes, she created another hair oil/tonic made from coconut, pandan leaves, rose and jasmine flowers. These shampoos became official Mustika Ratu products as seen in a 1985 advertisement (Plate 6).

This advertisement features a female's long black hair, with detailed explanations of each shampoo, its plant-based ingredients and benefits. The woman is dressed in a *kemben* or wrap revealing shoulders and light brown skin. The same model appears at the bottom, dressed in a proper *kain-kebaya* outfit with her hair tied back into a Javanese bun/knot called *konde*, standing in front of an ornately carved wooden door. *Konde* is a knotted hairpiece or chignon, usually styled while wearing *kebaya* for official occasions. The *kain-kebaya and konde* are a form of traditional Javanese cultural attire imbued with meaning and official authority. These are, in fact, a presentation style that constitutes Mooryati's *ngadi busono*, a Javanese cultural grooming philosophy upon which the brand is based. The text emphasises four plants used in each shampoo describing benefits such as strong hair, root strengthening, dandruff prevention, hydration, and hair shine. The word "traditional" appears four times, reiterating its significance. Shampoo *daun landep* even claims to restore "blackness" in "reddish" hair tones, foregrounding the superiority of characteristically Indonesian black hair colour.

In 1975, Mooryati sought her mother's advice on transitioning the brand from a garage enterprise into a private company. Her mother responded in Javanese (these words are still etched in the company's annual reports):

> Use the name Mustika Ratu for your company, a very valuable gemstone, Mustikaning Ratu. (Soedibyo, 2016, p. 236, translated)

Mooryati's mother's vision was for the brand to make this world a better place, balanced in its ecosystem, preserving and nurturing nature's richness from Indonesia for health and beauty. This high-minded objective set the direction for the kind of beauty constructed and marketed by this brand, drawing on Javanese cultural authority:

> I want Indonesian women to know and use the traditional heritage of the Palace which until now is not widely known to the public. If the rich heritage of the palace tradition, which is also Indonesian culture, can be used, packaged easily and attractively, not only Indonesian women will benefit from it, but also women in all parts of the world (Soedibyo, 2016, p. 236, translated)

Java is the most densely populated island in Indonesia, administratively divided into six provinces of which two are considered special territories, Jakarta (the capital city since 1963) and Yogyakarta (1950), the capital during the Revolution of 1946–1949. From the 16th to 18th centuries, Yogyakarta and Surakarta were united under the Mataram II Kingdom but with two *Keraton* palaces in separate cities because of East/West division of Central Java under the *Gianty* Treaty (orchestrated by the Dutch East Indies Company). *Keraton* was the centre of Javanese traditions and inside, plants are chosen for their symbolic relationship and meaning. For example, the banyan tree, always placed outside the palace gates, is a "life tree" believed to protect people from bad luck. The *asem* or tamarind tree, means *ngasemke* in Javanese (honouring parents and parents being proud of their children) (Tjahjani, 2009); it is also a common ingredient in a herbal drink as discussed later.

Mooryati drew upon Javanese principles to beauty and grooming called *Ngadi saliro* and *Ngadi busono* learnt from her Sultan grandfather (Soedibyo, 2016). The former refers to

Plate 6. Mustika Ratu shampoos 1986
Source: Iklan Jadul Indonesia

beautifying the self while the latter is beautifying through appearance and attire. Regularly drinking *jamu*, a traditional herbal medicine, beautifies the self internally and within the *Keraton* palace, a herbalist cared for the health of its occupants. Mooryati embodied these principles in her self-presentation: in public, advertisements and/or communication materials she is always formally dressed in a *kain-kebaya*, identified as an "indigenous" outfit (Locher-Scholten, 1997) by the Dutch since the 1920s. The *kain* is a length of unstitched *batik* cloth worn on the lower part of the body to match the *kebaya* top. While there are different types of *kebaya*, the dominant form is visibly traced to that worn in Java from the late 19th to early 20th century onwards. Based on Javanese tradition, the *kebaya* is a social marker (Taylor, 1997). It is a symbol of cultural and traditional superiority, personifying a certain feminine identity (Cattoni, 2004), the respectable *Ibu* and social elite. While worn by women of all classes in Indonesia, the fabrics vary – commoners wore cotton while Javanese royalty wore silk, velvet and brocade. This is illustrated in Mooryati's portrait, wearing a royal blue *kebaya*, which hangs in the spa and in the lobby of Sheraton Mustika.

As the business grew, a "traditional beauty care and training centre" was launched in 1976 in Central Jakarta. Based around the 5P principles of *pembersihan* (cleansing), *penyegaran* (toning/freshening), peeling, *pengurutan wajah* (massage) and *peremajaan* (anti-aging), the customers were mainly salon owners who eventually became Mustika Ratu's distributors. They used, promoted and sold the brand's products, "made and formulated in Indonesia". Mooryati became more well-known and regularly presented as a beauty consultant on national television and in newspapers. In 1978, the business officially became a private company as demand for her traditional beauty products continued to grow. By the end of the 1970s, Mooryati had 50 staff working in her "garage" business. Needing a larger capacity, a new factory was built in 1979 in East Jakarta. This aided the diffusion of the beauty ideal constructed by Mustika Ratu, promising ordinary women access to the beauty secrets previously known only by those within the palace.

1980s: "convenience" and the Keraton princess in the marketplace

Mustika Ratu grew rapidly in the 1980s, reflecting Indonesia's overall economic boom, a result of New Order government policies of the 1970s encouraging the growth of local non-oil industries. Domestic, foreign and private investors were attracted to Indonesia's large consumer market, increasing purchasing power and liberal trading. Foreign players (from the USA, Japan, France, the UK, and The Netherlands) competed fiercely with domestic companies in the personal care and beauty industry. The Indonesian consumer could choose between brands such as Revlon, Clairol Herbal Essences, Hazeline, Palmolive, Vinolia, Cussons, as well as the local Mirabella, Kelly Cosmetics, Sari Ayu, Viva and Mustika Ratu. Indonesia was modernizing and consumers experiencing "busier lifestyles" were targeted with products resonating with such trends.

In 1985, Mustika Ratu had 150 employees at a new headquarters, with modern management structures, leadership and a human resource department. An "ultra-high temperature" (UHT) machine was purchased to pack the otherwise highly perishable *jamu*. This traditional drink, once sold in glass bottles and delivered to homes during the 1970s, became a newly convenient product, suiting modern lifestyles, thanks to Western technology (as depicted in Plate 7), an advertisement which emphasises it can be consumed anytime (*setiap saat*).

Featuring three herbal drinks, namely, *gula asam* (tamarind and palm sugar), *beras kencur* (aromatic ginger) and *serbat* (mixed herbs and spices), the advertisement features ingredient information and health benefits of the drinks ranging from digestion, weight maintenance, fatigue, immunity, flu prevention and general wellbeing. A testimonial from

Plate 7. Mustika Ratu herbal drink 1985
Source: Iklan Jadul Indonesia

Mooryati herself (dressed in Javanese *kain-kebaya* and *konde*) addresses the family-oriented audience in a conversational style (translated):

> Progressing Indonesia's rich traditions is our mission. You already know the products we make, "*jamu*" and traditional cosmetic. Now with a humble heart, we introduce a refreshing herbal drink, not just as a thirst quencher but as goodness for your health. These drinks are all made from natural ingredients, produced in a modern way but with no artificial taste or additives. Packed in a practical carton. We are sure your whole family will enjoy the freshness and benefits of these drinks.

The whole family of father, mother and daughter is depicted in the advertisement, holding and consuming the products after a sporting activity (father holding a tennis racket). With the product positioned centrally, herbs, plants, roots, fruits and spices are also featured visually. Javanese culture (as opposed to Balinese or Sumatran for example) is referenced through the brand logo and how the brand name is written. The logo features a Javanese bride and groom, dressed in Javanese wedding attire, signifying the origins of the brand. The Mustika Ratu brand is written in a font style akin to old Javanese *Kawi* language.

Another key Javanese reference can be seen in Mustika Ratu's bestselling product from the 1980s to the current day, *minyak zaitun* or olive oil used for massage, make up removal and moisturizing dry skin, lips or hair. Olive oil is not native to Indonesia, but their version contains *mojokeling* (*Terminalia chebula*), essential oils of rose and jasmine. The packaging of the product is instructive (as seen in Plate 8). A traditional Javanese therapy known as *kerokan* (like Chinese *guasha*) uses a blunt coin to scrape a person's back. Well-entrenched in Indonesia, the word has its roots in Javanese language, meaning to "peel off" or remove an unwanted layer. A healing technique for muscle aches, body chills and improve blood circulation, the scraping is typically done with oil. The round, coin-like lid of the Mustika Ratu *minyak zaitun* bottle thus has dual functions and Javanese health culture is embedded, materialised and promoted through this product.

The brand thus combined both modern and traditional discourses in their products of the 1980s, specifically herbal drinks and olive oil. In relation to skincare and makeup, discourses of royalty and princesses were central to their beauty ideals.

The Keraton princess

Even up to her 90 s, Mooryati embodied the Javanese *Puteri* or princess in appearance and demeanour. Throughout its history, the brand emphasised its royal ancestry and mission to make aristocratic secrets accessible to the ordinary consumer – this is particularly evident in the marketing of its skincare and make up. The advertisement in Plate 9 presents "beauty secrets of a *Putri Keraton*" through three products. Claiming that Mooryati inherited recipes of *sekar tanjung*, *tasik kemuning* and *bedak Jebuk Sari* directly from her grandfather in the Surakarta *Keraton*. *Sekar Tanjung* is a moisturiser containing cape flower and olive oil, which prevents ageing and dryness, and protects the skin from the effects of the sun in a tropical climate. *Tasik Kemuning* is a foundation with a "yellowing" and skin smoothening effect infused with ingredients that cool the skin and reduce blemishes. *Tasik Jebuk Sari* is a facial powder "light" in texture to perfect and soften make up. *Jebuk sari* is made from rice flour and young areca nuts that can clear up pores and lighten dark facial marks. The ad states (translated) "All these genuine *Keraton* recipes have been proven for hundreds of years. Which is why nothing compares to the three make up series of Mustika Ratu".

The advertisement depicts a Javanese bride as the ultimate feminine beauty ideal. Against a romantic background of soft, flowing pink curtains and pink roses, the female model is formally made up, dressed in a strapless Javanese wedding attire, wearing gold earrings,

Plate 8. Mustika Ratu Minyak Zaitun
Source: Author's own work

Plate 9. Make up Puteri Keraton
Source: Author's own work

necklace and a hair tiara [mixed with small jasmine flowers], holding a pink fan with gold and wooden trimmings. Her light brown skin from her upper shoulders to her hands are exposed. The word "yellow" indicates how the makeup produces the desired skin Javanese colouring effect. The model's skin colour is *kuning langsat* which is a shade between white and brown (but not white). Neither a Caucasian White nor an East Asian form of "yellows" is the desirable or aspirational skin colour here, but a native Indonesian ideal (even though most Indonesians would naturally have a darker skin tone). Direct references to various shades of "Indonesian" yellow skin tone are made in the next advertisement in Plate 10:

> Match the right shade to your skin such as '*sawo matang*' (*sawo*, sapodilla fruit has brown skin, *matang* means ripe), yellow as *temugiring* (*Curcuma heyneana*, a type of curcumin yellow in colour), *kuning langsat* (pale yellow or light brown) and yellow as *temanten* (temanten imply a Javanese bride who typically yellow the skin with a traditional scrub called '*lulur*' to make it appear as 'glowing')

The princess discourse is still utilised in the second make up advertisement. "Mustika Ratu offers women a touch of nobility for your modern look" reflecting their "God-given instinct" (*naluri* in the advertisement) with the assurance of an imagined consumer saying, "This is the makeup range I've been looking for". There is a direct reference to the palace: "Mustika Ratu presents natural cosmetics used by generations in the *Surakarta Hadiningrat* Royal Palace [in which Mooryati was raised]. Cosmetics that have been proven to be a winner in various makeup competitions in Indonesia and other countries". The model is positioned centrally in the advertisement, with a distant gaze, in royal Javanese attire, with gold jewellery, and plenty of brown skin exposed as she wears a *batik kemben*, or a torso wrap. Shoulder baring and commonly worn during the Sultanate era and in Javanese *Keraton*, the *kemben* is featured in the brand's 1980s advertisements, associating the beauty ideal with nobility in past pre-colonial eras.

Mustika Ratu started to internationalise in the 1980s and began participating in makeup competitions in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Canada. Using the *Putri Solo* (or Solo Princess; Solo is another name for Surakarta city) as the beauty theme, Mustika Ratu showcased a princess who is "elegant, soft, good at organising yourself, with good mannerism and communication skills, is friendly and gentle" (Soedibyo, 2016, p.254). These properties combine inner and outer ideals, which Mooryati epitomises as an idealised form of female beauty. Both international and other local brands also often featured "celebrities" as part of their marketing but Mustika Ratu preferred featuring the "Javanese princess or bride" possessing both inner and outer beauty, reinforcing the New Order ideal of women as *Ibu*, wives and mothers (to-be) who would uphold existing hierarchies and traditions, including those within the family. With this discursive strategy, Mustika Ratu expanded to Malaysia in 1987.

1990s – Indonesian beauty heritage internationalised

1990s was a peak growth period for Mustika Ratu on three fronts. Firstly, a foundation for *Puteri Indonesia* was established in 1992 to organise and run a beauty pageant with the winner representing Indonesia in the Miss Universe contest. In this national competition, Mustika Ratu showcased "Indonesian beauty" through makeup, attire, textile, costume design and appearance. However, there was controversy over the Miss Indonesia contestant in Miss Universe appearing in a swimsuit, because of Islamic *aurat* law, according to which certain parts of women's bodies should be covered (Pausacker, 2014). In 1994 and 1995, Miss Puteri Indonesia winners were sent as "non-participants" with observer status. This compromise helped Mustika Ratu promote their version of Javanese aristocratic beauty to

Plate 10. Makeup 1985
Source: Iklan Jadul Indonesia

represent the "Indonesian ideal" alongside those of other nations, exposing the brand to an international audience.

In 1995, Mustika Ratu went public and listed its shares in the Indonesian Stock Exchange and in 1997 opened its *Taman Sari Royal Heritage Spa*, named after *Taman Sari*, a centuries-old bathing site for Javanese royalty (Yosephine, 2019). *Taman Sari* was built in 1758 not far from *Keraton* Yogyakarta, the other royal palace (*taman* means park and *sari* is scented garden) and is known as "*Water Kasteel*" in Dutch or water castle. The *taman* is a place for relaxing, recreation and leisure activities for the king, queen, concubines, princesses and princes. First located in Sheraton Mustika (a hotel the company built), the spa is created which offers to "unveil the secret from behind the Palace wall". Spatially, the spa references and replicates the *Keraton* palace, with a pavilion at the centre upon entry (see Plate 11). Called the *pendopo*, this "column-less space" whose purpose is to "meet and greet" guests in the palace but the spa utilises to showcase different herbs, spices and plants (turmeric, ginger, galangal, Javanese ginger or *temulawak*, lemongrass) traditionally used in Javanese beauty treatments and *jamu*.

Indicators of corporate heritage (Balmer, 2011) are evident in the design, sensory and architectural heritage through the built environment of the spa as Javanese culture is reified through aesthetics, design and practice. This includes the ornate décor and dark teak furniture, suede deep red suede curtains (Plate 12), *batik* sheets covering the treatment beds, gold carvings in cupboards and doors, therapists wearing batik attire, and a menu of indulgent beauty treatments with spices, flowers and herbs such as the "Royal Javanese Pampering" package.

Photos of Mooryati's grandparents (Sultan Pakubuwono X and Queen) are displayed on the walls of the spa, acting as reminders of her aristocratic lineage, while female changing rooms are called *keputren*, the official name for the princesses' residence inside the *Keraton* palace. Since *Taman Sari* was historically a royal bathing house, the purpose-built spa also focuses on water through its expansive pool and jacuzzi. The swimming pool is large and regal, with ornate decorations, an artificial waterfall feature, a mini *pendopo* pavilion that shades the jacuzzi, and wall murals of Javanese women and their beauty rituals (Plate 13 and 14).

A beauty industry insider (personal communication 2024a) commented *Taman Sari* spa was opened after President Suharto suggested to Mooryati that such a site could draw overseas tourists to Indonesia through an authentic Javanese spa experience. This illustrates one of the characteristics of the New Order regime – the close connections between the president, his family and social elites, who benefited in various ways from State policy (Ashton *et al.*, 2012). Overall, the 1990s was the peak of Mustika Ratu's success (personal communication 2024 b); *Taman Sari Royal Heritage Spa* expanded nationally as well as internationally to Canada and Malaysia, becoming an Indonesian export concept.

Discussion

In this study, we sought to explore how a local Indonesian beauty brand was able to successfully compete in the domestic market against foreign and other local players. Using a case study of Mustika Ratu, we investigated: first, how they discursively constructed a beauty ideal for their brand; second, how that beauty ideal mobilised (non-Western) sources of authority; and third, how the brand and its discursive construction of beauty reflected and reinforced the New Order's version of Indonesian nationalism and identity, through its selective use of history and idealised femininity. In this section, we revisit each of these questions and discuss how our research builds on and extends existing knowledge.

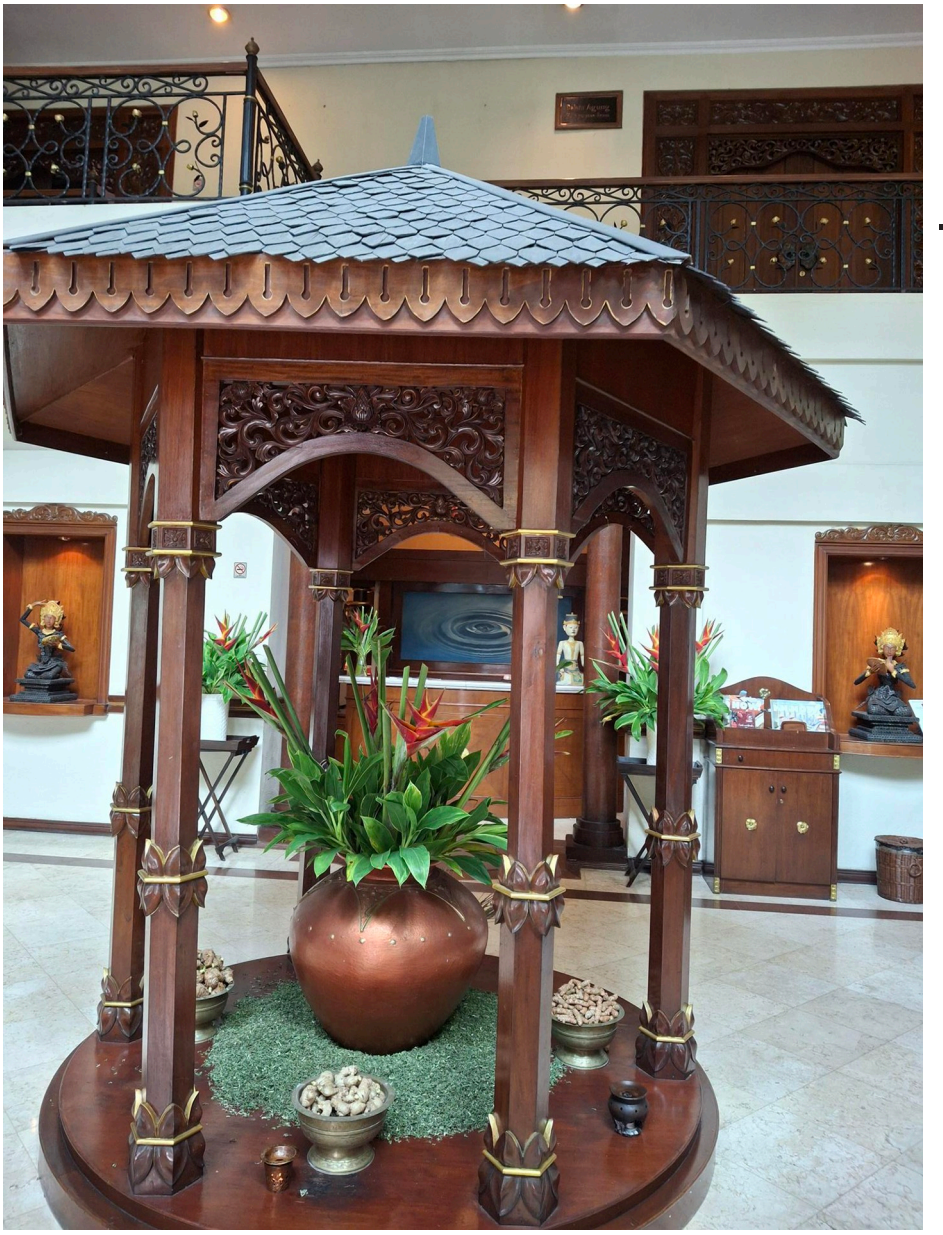

Plate 11. Spa pavilion
Source: Author's own work

Plate 12. Spa room
Source: Author's own work

Plate 13. Swimming pool
Source: Author's own work

Our findings have shown the brand constructed a beauty ideal drawing on specific culturally resonant discourses that aligned with the New Order's political project including its version of Indonesian national identity, selective use of history and the normative role of women. Other local brands, such as Viva, emphasised their suitability for Indonesian women and climate, but Mustika Ratu differentiated itself through its use of discourses relating to heritage, royalty and nature. Embodied in its founder, Mooryati Soedibyo, the Indonesian consumer was offered access to a secret and ancient system of knowledge, in danger of being lost, but which had been revitalised and made available through the brand's formulations and practices.

Soedibyo herself was a symbol of aspirational Indonesian womanhood, an entrepreneur but also a wife and mother, the quintessential *Ibu*, whose self-described purpose was to ensure she captured and translated the lessons she learnt from generations of royalty. Mustika Ratu rode the wave of the New Order and flourished in the 1990s. At the same time, it benefited from the State's focus on internal economic development and was strategically aligned with the government's gendered ideologies. *Ibu* Mooryati exemplified both the "priyayization" (valorisation of the Javanese hereditary elite) and the "state ibuism" (a "state mother" figure) that characterised the New Order period (Blackburn, 2004; Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis, 1992; Suryakusuma, 1988). Under Sukarno, women had been constructed as "active nation builders" and more equal partners, reflected in the involvement of women in political and social activism. However, under the New Order, women were to be "obedient and busy housewives" as well as "pious" (Wieringa, 2015, p.28), living out their God-given nature

Plate 14. Javanese murals
Source: Author's own work

(or *kodrat*) as peaceful homemakers and family guardians. Other beauty advertisements from the 80s and 90s depicted women as "modern" and living active lifestyles due to rising incomes. However, Mustika Ratu was based around a Javanese *Keraton* form of beauty and idealised femininity that was compliant, submissive, proper and most of all, non-confrontational. Rather than challenge established hierarchies and power relationships, this version of womanhood was both conformist, submissive and nationalist, which supported the New Order values of maintaining political order, economic development and familial stability.

Cultural heritage is thus a key discursive element of the Mustika Ratu brand, but it is a particular type of elite Javanese heritage, with explicit references to ceremonial traditions (e.g. weddings) and rituals that privilege a sense of social stability and preservation of established hierarchies (Pemberton, 1994). This resonates with the conscious recrafting of a national narrative by Suharto in which more recent history (i.e. the Sukarno era) was de-emphasised and revised, in favour of a return to an even more distant past of the glorious *Keraton* as a source of prosperity (Singgih, cited in Pemberton, 1994, p. 163). Aligning with this political–cultural project, Mustika Ratu's mission was to: "*melestarikan pusaka bangsa*" [preserve the nation's heritage], through "*memanfaatkan kekayaan alam dan budaya Indonesia*" [utilising Indonesia's nature and cultural riches] (Mustika Ratu annual report, 2019). Specifically, the brand sought to curate and continue an inheritance from the elites of the past [*Keraton* palace days] through the meanings attributed to objects, aesthetics, traditions and ways of life. These inheritance markers include its brand meaning and logo, beauty practices,

products, ingredients, décor, dress, aesthetics and spatial design of its spa. Cultural heritage and royalty (elite status) lend authority to the brand. Its use of local herbs and plants to create a portfolio of distinctly Indonesian products and services can be seen as a form of "indigenous science" (as opposed to traditional Western science, see Chaudhuri, 2015). This enabled the brand to maintain a point of distinction from other local products that also underpinned Mustika Ratu's internationalization. The strategic alignment with the culturalist nationalist discourse is further manifested through the brand's construction and utilization of the *Keraton* princess, legitimised through the founder's personal identity. In particular, the brand specialises in imagery and practices associated with the elaborate beauty work required for ceremonial display involved in Javanese rituals. Their idealised feminine beauty thus performs complex discursive work, constructing not only a sense of national identity but one that is connected to a more distant past, prior to Western colonization, all of which was made use of for political and cultural purposes by the New Order regime.

Post-Independence, the diversity of Indonesia's population gave rise to conflicting views between communities around beauty ideals, which relate to questions of national and ethnic identity, tensions between Asian and Western values, progress and modernity and sexual ethics (Pausacker, 2014). However, in the New Order period (1965–1998), such tensions and conflicts were suppressed and the hegemonic beauty ideals during the New Order period (1965–1998) must be understood as a key component of Indonesia's efforts towards nation building (Pausacker, 2014), While Indonesia's motto is "unity in diversity", what we find reproduced in the beauty brand is the hegemony of Javanese elite *priyayi* culture to symbolise Indonesian identity, not a reflection of the different ethnic groups that inhabited the archipelago pre- and post-colonization. The power of the indigenous discourse purported by the brand thus invokes Javanese culture with all its accompanying traditions. The brand in this case, acts as both a marketer of Indonesian indigenous [Javanese] beauty and a symbolic marker of nationalism and idealised femininity aligned with the New Order period.

In this regard, there are parallels between our findings and those of Alcalde (2009). In their research, they found the domestic Kola that outperformed Coca-Cola in the domestic market drew on a particular version of national Peruvian identity that "glorified" the Inca empire prior to European colonization. However, it also reinforced racial, ethnic and socio-economic hierarchies through their advertising. On this basis, they urged scholars to explore the power dynamics and exclusions that may underpin the "local". In our research, we have specifically addressed this issue, but in a different context and industry: Mustika Ratu emphasised pre-colonial empire, making the founder's royal lineage and promotion of aristocratic beauty rituals and norms central to its brand. In doing so, it reproduced social hierarchies, political agendas of the ruling party and the dominance of Javanese culture within Indonesia, reinforcing that hegemonic norm through its construction of female beauty.

We also extend Alcalde's (2009) study by showing how our brand's positioning reflected broader macroeconomic, political and cultural developments including specific policies of the Indonesian Government during the New Order regime. Selective use of Indonesia's pre-colonial history was central to the government's project to build a distinctive national identity which aligned with the version of feminine beauty and brand strategy of Mustika Ratu. Further, the government's focus on wealth creation among the elite and support for local business materially aided Mustika Ratu's growth, diversification and internationalization, as did the personal connections and networks the founder had with members of government. Materially and culturally then, Mustika Ratu was aligned with the priorities of the New Order regime. This highlights why an understanding of historical and political context is so critical to exploring the success, or otherwise, of local brands' responses to the entrance of foreign competitors into their domestic economies. It also

illustrates how brands can play an important role in constructing a version of idealised femininity that serves overtly political purposes, contributing to the construction of national identity, and women's role within it, in a developing post-independence nation and former European colony.

To date, little research on the history of the marketing of beauty has focused on exploring the economic, political, social and cultural dynamics of countries or regions in the Global South. Rather than being dominated by Western and Euro-centric beauty ideals, in this study we have shown how, in Indonesia, a local brand used a combination of cultural heritage, elite lineage and indigenous "secret" system of knowledge (i.e. science) to create a strong position for itself in the domestic market, as well as internationalise and export a version of Indonesian identity. As beauty brands absorb the cultural flows brought about through colonialization, post colonialization and globalization, they can also selectively draw on history and tradition as sources of authority while also reproducing local ethnic hierarchies and reinforcing hegemonic political agendas. Further, for those considering future research on these issues in other countries that are former European colonies, including those in Southeast Asia, we recommend attention be paid to the broader historical context, including political, economic and cultural dynamics, not just the history of the brand itself. To do otherwise would be to miss the opportunity to understand the conditions which give rise to local brands, as well as how their development and expansion (and possible demise) may reflect changes in the macro environment and even reproduce the political and cultural priorities of particular State regimes.

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