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Research Article

Responses to Human Rights Issues in Indonesian New Order Fiction

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates what approaches Indonesian fiction employs to represent human rights issues in Indonesian literature during the New Order, particularly the short stories. The fictional representation is closely bound with the issue of Indonesian postcolonial studies, which concern not only with external colonization but also with internal one. The examination deals with key issues related to oppression as a form of human rights violation committed by state related bodies, groups and individuals. Indonesian authors attempt to resist such action in the form of social narrative criticism, terror stories and trauma narratives. Such fiction reflects Indonesian writers' disagreement with injustice in the nation.

Keywords: Responses, Human Rights, Issues, the New Order, Indonesian Fiction.

INTRODUCTION

Dutch colonisation in Indonesia has ended but it has had an ongoing impact on Indonesian culture, particularly literary productions, in which colonial hegemony played its hidden tricks to dominate the colonised Indonesia. Hegemony influences the nation and thus shapes its national identity. Hegemony is now manifested through the widespread Western ideology, capitalism, and modernisation (globalisation) [6].

This writing argues that Indonesians have widely submitted to this prevailing ideology. Tineke Hellwig believes that "writers and readers are subject to ideologies which prevail in their societies". What is ideology? Diane MacDonnell writes: "Ideologies can be understood as "the beliefs, meanings and practices in which we think and act." (p. 15). All of this exists within the subjects. Drawing on Foucault's argument that human beings are made subjects culturally, Michel Pecheux

classifies subjects into three modes: "good", "bad" and "disidentification". The "good subject" is "freely consented to", and results from "identification" and "consent to the discursive formation which determines them" (p. 157). The "bad" subject is a "trouble maker" (p. 158) who moves away from the discourse. The third mode is "disidentification", in which the subject experiences "a subjective process of appropriation of scientific concepts and identification with political organizations of a new type" (p. 159).

The experience of disidentification during the process of colonisation causes subjects to unite and fight for their rights. Sharing a common feeling of being tyrannised by colonisation encourages subjects to understand who they really are and to find out who they should be. In other words, they build up their feeling of nationalism, which reminds them of their own identity. This has been expanded by Barraclough [3] asserts that a society's choice to abide by an ideology is a process of totality in which

the ideology embraces the whole life of the society's members and "manifests itself in their class structure, history, literature, art, religion" (p. 66).

2 Indonesian Postcolonial Studies:

Postcolonial experiences are clearly portrayed in many aspects of Indonesian life, including literature. The study of Indonesian postcolonial literature can provide the answer to understanding such effects. Indonesian postcolonial studies deal with the national culture (literature) during and after the domination of the Dutch and the effects that continue to remain in Indonesian contemporary literature.

What is post colonialism in the context of Indonesian literature? The definition of the postcolonial perspective (criticism or approaches) here refers to the one given by Tony Day and Keith Foulcher who argue that "Postcoloniality designates the literary traces and effects of colonialism, but it also refers to the subject position of the postcolonial writer and his/her narrative voice." Alongside the important concepts in postcolonial study such as diasporas, hybridity and mimicry [19], which might also be found in Indonesian literature, there are some other important postcolonial themes that are also relevant: language, identity, place and displacement [4] and resistance, history, allegory and globalisation.

I argue that identity is an important area for researchers to investigate, not only because it is relatively new to Indonesian literature but it also allows scholars to go deeper into the effects of colonialism on writers and the Indonesian people. Identity, which is also generally identified with the notion of hybridity, is believed to have coloured the works of most Indonesian authors. Hybridity, according to Day and Foulcher, is "a way of referring to the interaction of disparate cultural forms that over time results in the formation of new cultures and identities with their own histories and textual enactments" (p. 9). Hybridity can be organic or intentional in the process of identity formation or might appear as a result of the impact of gender, ethnicity and domestic spheres.

Recontextualising Postcolonial Studies in Indonesian literature:

It is important to evaluate where the concept of post colonialism and its application are situated in contemporary Indonesian literature. This evaluation is crucial because scholars and critics argue that Indonesian literature during the New Order was a national literature. It developed through the spirit of nationalism and is now free from the influence of colonialism. The argument might be true when it is situated in the context of conventional colonisation. Yet Western hegemony and ideology remain. That is why it is still important to locate postcolonial studies in Indonesian literature. We have also seen that the new nation state of Indonesia acts in a way that was

previously characteristic of the colonial power. Just as writers resisted the coloniser, who extensively violated the rights of the Indonesian people during colonisation, the New Order literature indicates similar resistance to this imposition of indigenous authoritarianism. Both male and female writers in the era produced different forms of literary resistance. So it is important to evaluate the concept of resistance literature in the study of human rights issues in the Indonesian New Order era.

Although the acts of violence committed by the Dutch had ended, the influence of such acts is still evident in Indonesian life post independence as practiced by powerful figures or institutions, including the government. Similar violent actions recur in a different relationship. Oppression takes place not between the colonizer and the colonized, but between the government and its people. Starting from Indonesia's first regime, the Old Order onwards, Indonesia has slowly moved from the traumatic experiences of colonization into domestic traumas. Indonesia no longer dealt with foreign powers, which imposed a variety of violent actions, but faced similar acts imposed by the domestic powers of the government, military, and non-governmental institutions. Violence was not enacted against a people by another people, but by the government against its own people. The situation changed from conventional colonialism to domestic colonialism. The government traumatized its people when the policies enacted by the government oppressed them directly or indirectly. Less powerful groups such as the poor, women and children have also become victims. This oppression was extended when the people of the former East Timor, Papua, Sumatera, Sulawesi and Aceh suffered internal domination (colonialism) within the Republic of Indonesia. In this case, political, economic and ideological movements were further transmitted from the central government in Jakarta to the people in the former East Timor and Papua. Internal colonization also occurred when political and economical movements were supported by the state against the people of Sumatra and Sulawesi during the *PRRI-Permesta* rebellion (1956–1961) and by the people of Aceh during the military operation (1976–2005).

Both neo-colonialism and internal colonization have shaped Indonesian society after independence, including literature. Many writers have depicted issues of government oppression and exploitation in Indonesia. Chief among these works are various novels and collections of short stories – Ismail Muharimin's *Dan Perangpun Usai (And the War Was Finally Over, 1977)*, Idrus's *Corat-Coret di Bawah Tanah (Scratches from the Underworld)*, Ahmad Tohari's *Kubah (Dome, 1980)*, Ajip Rosidi's *Anak Tanah Air (Son of the Mother Land, 1985)* and Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *The Buru Tetralogy*; and short stories – Mochtar Lubis's "Kuli Kontrak"

("Contracted Coolies", 1979), Damin Mahmud's "Jaman Pakuasi" ("The Era of Evacuation", 1991) and Satyagraha Hoerip's "Sesudah Usai Perang" ("After the War", 1995). The issue of internal colonialism has been another theme, which few Indonesian writers have represented in their works. The writers of this group include Ali Akbar Navis who represents *PRRI* issues in his works, Seno on East Timor stories and Motinggo Busye on the Free Aceh Movement. Indonesian literature after independence aimed not to resist colonization any more but to fight against any power within the country itself, which violated the rights of others. What is resisted is not the colonialist presence or ideology but its transformation in Indonesia after independence.

Indonesian writers have experienced such a case in dealing with their sociopolitical situation, particularly in the era of Suharto, where they resisted inappropriate acts in the process of democratization such as injustice and violations of rights. At the beginning of the New Order, Jassin [10] argued that:

Authors and artists since ancient times always uphold justice and truth. Their enemies are lies, falsehood, violence, and evil. They therefore not only become good friends of the society, but also sometimes become the enemies of the insolent rulers. (p. 21) (My own translation)

Although there are not many works of direct and outspoken resistance in Indonesian literature in the terms addressed by Jassin, indirect and implicit resistance is widespread. In a broader understanding, where the issue of human rights violation arises not only in the scope of a national struggle but also within domestic social criticism, the works of writers who address human rights violations are an important form of resistance.

3 Contextualizing Indonesian Literary Responses To Oppression:

This section discusses how the short story has often dealt with serious issues relating to human rights, particularly in the West. It provides some basic approaches to the study of human rights through the perspective of literature. This will later, directly or indirectly, also locate how Indonesian fiction, especially that of the New Order, also responds to human rights issues. This section consists of an analysis of various literary forms of resistance to social injustice and inequality, including the use of social criticism, trauma and terror narratives, and the connection between resistance literature and human rights.

3.1 Social Criticism Narratives:

This is the most general response to social injustices. Aaron C. Ahuvia [2] argues that "'Social criticism' is a broad term for works which deal with how individuals should act in society, asking what is wrong with our current social system, or how should

society be organized" (p. 143). Social criticism, Ahuvia continues, is not a single discipline of study but a multidisciplinary study, which might belong to different fields, including literature. Literary scholars have used broad social and cultural contexts to study literature. This is evident in the study of novels such as George Orwell's *Animal Farm* which portrays sociopolitical conditions in Russia in the 1920s, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* which depicts the dark side of human slavery in America, Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *The Fugitive* which deals with cultural impacts of Dutch colonization in Indonesia and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* which represents colonial impacts on Nigerians.

Such works of fiction vary in their themes and in the social and political settings they criticize. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for example, among its many political messages, voices the importance of education for the black slave sufferers [7]. Toer's *The Fugitive* depicts "conflict between patriotism and personal loyalties, sexual love and familial/filial responsibility" [3]. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* represents resistance against Western colonization in Africa [14]. All of them deal with sociopolitical problems of the country they represent. Stowe speaks for the black Americans of the U.S.A. Pramoedya for the colonized Indonesians, Achebe for Africans and Rizal for the Filipinos. These are some of the most important political novels globally because they fulfill the requirements of: "(a) literary quality, (b) narrative power, and, most importantly (c) historical/political/meta-political insight".

It is undeniable that great novels contain the three important elements Satin mentions. However, such elements not only appear in novels but can also be found in other genres of literature, including the short story. In the Indonesian context, short stories such as Lubis's "Kuli Kontrak", Pramoedya's "Yang Hitam" and Seno's *Saksi Mata* fulfill such criteria.

3.2 Representing Terror:

Social injustice can be inflicted upon the bodies and minds of individuals. Thus, literary writers' social criticism of violations of human rights can further be interpreted from the various aspects, which are represented in their stories. Representing physical and mental terror is a method which is widely applied.

What is terror? Charles L. Ruby argues that there are two main criteria in defining terror: a fearful state of mind and an intended audience. Based on these factors, Ruby describes terror as: "politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience" (p. 10). It is also possible, of course, for government-sponsored groups (the army, police, armed groups, etc.) to terrorize unarmed civilians. The representation of terror is often described in literature. Anthony Kubiak [11] proposes three types

of narratives which represent terror: first, writings which set out to explicate the ideological ground of terrorist acts; second, narratives about terrorism; and third, narratives which destabilize narrativity. He argues that the ideological reasons range “from spiritual faith, to political action, to nihilism” (p. 295). These discourses are “the admonishing, the calls to action, the steeling of will” (p. 296). The second group of narratives deals with “any form of literary discourse that sets out to explore the motives and ideas behind the socio-political and psychic act of terrorism” (p. 296); and the third involves “disrupting linearity, temporality, plot, character or whatever conventions may be regarded as essential to the production of stories, memories, dramas, or histories” (p. 297).

Margaret Scanlan argues that a number of writers have made use of literature to reconstruct history and the existence of terror. Analyzing works such as Dostoevsky’s *Demons*, James’s *The Princess Casamassima* and Conrad’s *Under Western Eyes*, she considers “writers and terrorists in these novels as remnants of a romantic belief in the power of marginalized persons to transform history” (p. 2). She further argues that writers of this group take advantage of fiction to criticize the dominant state power of discourses. Writers represent narrative-based terror in order to protest against unjust acts, including violence and the abuse of rights as performed by social and political groups wielding power.

Subjective violence is among many types of violence, which befall common people. Slavoj Žižek (2008) argues that subjective violence is “a violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent” (p. 1). According to Žižek, subjective violence takes two forms: systemic violence, “the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political system” (p. 1) and “symbolic violence embodied in language and its forms” (p.1). Bourdieu and Wacquant define symbolic violence as “the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” [15]. Systemic violence may be committed by a state against its people (state violence), a class against another class (class violence), individuals against other individuals (personal violence), and any of these against women (gender violence). Systemic violence can be physical or non-physical. Symbolic violence relates to the non-physical imposition of power and control upon less powerful members within a given structure.

This results in unequal relationships, in which the dominated may be treated as inferior, denied access to resources and limited in their social mobility and personal aspirations. Such situation is widely reflected in the works of Indonesian writers such as Putu Wijaya’s fiction, Ratna Indraswari Ibrahim’s stories and various works by Seno Gumira Ajidarma.

3.3 Trauma Narrative:

Terror acts can have a lasting impact on its victims. They leave traumas on their victims. Because of the traumas, writers have produced what is called “trauma narrative” to channel their anger and dissatisfaction, as well as their desire to expose what the perpetrators are doing. What is a trauma narrative? Laurie Vickroy defines trauma narratives as “fictional narratives that help readers to access traumatic experiences” (p. 1). Vickroy argues that trauma narratives provide readers with opportunities to recognize social and psychological problems in a number of ways. Vickroy suggests that a writer who experiences a traumatic event, personally or through the experiences of others, might write about this in his/her works. Although Vickroy is not aware of any necessary political aims behind the writer’s work, her description is beneficial in understanding the psychological effects of such works for readers.

Solomon [22] claims that stressful experiences can cause further trauma to those who experience them. Although for Solomon the form of such experiences are definitely different from one nation to another, she argues that they produce similar results: a specific threat to a person’s life or that of a community, such as experiencing severe physical harm or injury, or being a victim of harm that is intentionally perpetrated, like rape, torture or assault.

In presenting the idea of trauma narratives, Vickroy and Solomon suggest that all traumatic events are potential sources of fictional representations of human rights-related issues, which writers might represent and seek to understand and contextualize in their works. Their description of trauma narrative helps to reveal how Indonesian writers deal with such narratives. This is also clear in the works of some Indonesian writers. For example, Navis’s representation of state violence in his stories suggests his attitude towards human rights violations against groups such as the *PRRI*, resulting in war and arrests by the state.

Conclusion:

The question of whether a postcolonial study approach is applicable to Indonesian national literature is important. Although colonization has ended, state institutions still continue to follow the colonizer’s former practices. Violence and oppression, for example, which were commonplace during the colonial era, are again practiced by the state in the independence era. Yet, from the Old Order era onwards, although violence and oppression still exist, they have shifted from conventional colonial to domestic and internal colonialism.

To investigate the issue of human rights and their representation in Indonesian literature, scholars and critics need to look at the issue through a range of different lenses. The short story is one such lens. In Indonesia, writers, both important and emergent,

write their human rights works in different genres: poems, plays, novels and short stories. Among these writers, some have used the short story to represent human rights violations. Their stories can involve social criticism, representations of terror and of trauma. Such stories have affected a wide and diverse audience.

The stories, which represent human rights violations directly or indirectly, should be read not only as literary products but also as resistance to these unexpected acts performed by the state, its apparatuses or individuals. The theory of resistance literature is appropriate for explaining the case through detailed analysis and the refinement of theories. By applying different approaches, political, social and psychological, these theories can show who resists whom, where the resistance takes place, what is resisted and how the writers resist.

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