Notes of Some Indonesian Literary Critics

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Abstract

The tension between the individual standpoint and the communal perspective often lends colour to the works of literary critics of Indonesian literature. The use of communal perspectives in critiques and personal ideologies of critics are openly declared in their works. The communal perspective outweighs any liberal or conservative beliefs as the aim of most literary critics is to advocate for the development of the society. As such, literary critics either focus on reconciling progressive ideas with cultural values or criticise liberal themes since they prefer to maintain social ideals. Although Indonesia has some progressive values that are followed in the society, the traditional values that existed before colonialism are considered as superior and more beneficial to the society.

Keywords: critics, liberal, progressive, conservative, traditional

Abstrak

Ketegangan antara sudut pandang individu dan perspektif komunal sering kali memberikan warna pada karya-karya kritikus sastra sastra Indonesia. Penggunaan perspektif komunal dalam kritik dan ideologi pribadi kritik dinyatakan secara terbuka dalam karya mereka. Perspektif komunal lebih banyak daripada kepercayaan liberal atau konservatif karena tujuan dari para kritikus sastra adalah untuk memajukan pengembangan masyarakat. Dengan demikian, para kritikus sastra fokus pada rekonsiliasi ide -ide progresif dengan nilai -nilai budaya atau mengkritik tema-tema liberal karena mereka lebih suka mempertahankan cita -cita sosial. Meskipun Indonesia memiliki beberapa nilai progresif yang diikuti dalam masyarakat, nilai -nilai tradisional yang ada sebelum kolonialisme dianggap lebih unggul dan lebih bermanfaat bagi masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: *kritikus, liberal, progresif, konservatif, tradisional*

1. Introduction

Literature is often based in the reality of a writer and reflects the culture, society, values and hopes for a particular community. Literary critique is often undertaken in order to understand the methods used by an author and the objective of their work; based on social norms and the individual opinion of the critic on the topics under discussion. Indonesia's rich cultural heritage is a part of its literature, which includes discussions on religion and attitudes towards progressive ideas such as feminism. Indonesian critics of literature address all social issues from a communal perspective, which aims at the development of the country and its culture.

This writing attempts to analyse the works of literary critics of Indonesian literature and to evaluate their methods and attitudes towards the works they analyse. The tension between the individual standpoint and the communal perspective will be examined extensively in this discussion. The research will examine the personal inclinations of critics, which may either be progressive or conservative. This discussion will examine evidence of the use of communal perspectives in critiques and whether personal ideologies of critics are openly declared in their works.

The tension between the individual critic's views and the approach of the strong collective is common across all literary critiques of Indonesian literature. However, the communal perspective outweighs any liberal or conservative beliefs as the aim of most literary critics is to advocate for the development of the society.

2. Method

The selected research methodology for this research is the qualitative research methodology. It is the strength of the selected research methodology to enable the current research to get hold of the complexities of the research aim and questions (Holliday A 2007; Biggam J 2011) Understanding of textual narratives an.d interconnecting the fictitious characters of the stories to the real life experiences are the key features of any qualitative research approach (Dowling 2007; Eberle 2010). As this research work, is considering the analysis of selected Indonesian critics, qualitative research methodology stands as the most accurate means for understanding the character descriptions as maintained in the selected texts.

It is through qualitative research that a researcher gains the capacity to know the contradictory and detail understanding psychological emotions of the characters from Indonesian perspectives. The behaviour, values, beliefs and the socio-cultural existence of the practical human life from the selected novels are made possible through this selected methodology. As the selected qualitative research methodology, is very effective in terms of identifying indefinable status of human relationships, social recognitions and the context of national identity, its selection for the current dissertation turns up to be an obvious choice. Unlike quantitative research methodology, the qualitative research methodology lay serious emphasis over socioeconomic status of the selected society, role of gender, maintenance of class-oriented ethnicity (Holliday A 2007; Biggam J 2011). Qualitative research approach makes it very clear that the way to seek accuracy in the process of understanding inductive reasoning remains as a questionable matter, hence the appropriate way of understanding the identifying selected Indonesian literary critics (Biggam J 2011).

3. Results and Discussion

Indonesian Critics

The literary critics whose works will be used for this study include Diah Arimbi, Manneke Budiman, Budi Darma, Furqan Arif, Delukman Alauddin, Eagling Caroline Melita and Melani Budianta. The authors chosen have offered critiques on Indonesian literature while Furqan's work is on the Aboriginal community in Australia. By identifying their positions as either conservative or progressive, the attitudes of these critics towards literature will be examined to determine objectivity or any apparent bias when tackling problems within various texts that they evaluated. The tension between the strong collective and their personal ideologies will also be discussed.

Progressive and Conservative Ideologies

If chart or figures are part of secondary sources, it is important to state the source. The information about the chart or figure should be put below it. The layout of chart or figure should not be framed and it should be in high resolution.

In this thesis, 'progressive' means openness to modern or new ideas while 'conservative' refers to the maintenance of traditional values and the refusal to adopt new thought patterns. Progressive critics analyse the place of women and their roles in various texts, for example, with the aim of advocating for new ideas such as the inclusion of women in the public sphere, through employment and equal opportunities for all people. Since such ideas are new to Indonesian culture, they are evidence of progressive thinking within the society. On the other hand, conservative critics maintain the importance of following traditional values of Indonesian culture and refuse new thought patterns that promote Western ideologies.

Most conservative and progressive critics do not declare their personal ideological standpoints, which can only be determined from a thorough examination of their works. However, Delukman (p. 50) said it is an exception as she states in one of her critiques, "Man and woman are created by God in equality position, but in many aspects of life, man reveals domination and discrimination to woman... this research is a kind of liberal feminism"(Delukman 2018). Despite declaring her progressive viewpoint, Delukman is objective in her critique, as shown in her statement on the novel Monkey Grip by Helen Garner, "Nora, Rita and Eve are three women who have to stay as the strong women. They have fought in their difficult condition. Nora must keep her daughter by herself without a husband. Generally, as the woman, she needs a man to love her and she needs a husband to give love in the family including love for her daughter" The objectivity of the critic is observed from her lack of criticism towards a woman who chooses the traditional role of being a mother and wife.

The strong collective is the preferable approach for critiquing, as the aim of such critics is to maintain the cultural values present in the society. In case of any critique of destructive cultural practices observed in the country, the method preferred is one which aims at promoting the overall wellbeing of all members of the community, rather than individual benefits. As such, when tackling issues, including women's rights, solutions are adopted with the objective of promoting the development of the society. Conservative works recommend that women maintain their cultural roles as mothers and caretakers while progressive thinkers maintain that gender equality is a practice that should be included in the culture and religion (Budianta 2018).

Approaches to Literary Texts

The tension between the individual standpoint and the communal perspective is evident in all Indonesian literary critiques that were selected for this study. However, despite the personal viewpoint of the critics, the preferred method for critiquing literature is based on the strong collective, thereby advocating for strong social and cultural values, which would lead to the development of the society. The tension is evident across all literary works chosen for this study and is used by progressive critics to promote the improvement of social beliefs by adopting better practices that would improve the lives of Indonesians. Conservative works, on the other hand, advocate for upholding traditional values that define the society and its culture. The tension is explored in various subjects including feminism, equality and globalisation, as discussed below.

Principles in Indonesian Critics' Approaches

The tension between the individualistic voice and the strong collective is evident across all literary criticism in Indonesia. On one hand, the critics maintain the importance of preserving the social structure and maintaining the traditional socio-cultural values, while on the other, they are inclined to assert personal perspectives, which in some instances promote Western ideas such as equality. However, despite the tension between the two, critics adopt the communal perspective, which aims at maintaining social harmony and improving the society. In showing the importance of socio-cultural position in writing, Budi Darma (p. 5) states, "It does not mean, however, that the emphasis on form automatically has vanished. Postmodernism pays attention to form a lot, among other things because postmodernists are "defeated" by their being rootlessness," The 'rootlessness' described in the critique is the lack of cultural or social values in Western literature, which is thought of as lacking 'soulfulness' (Darma 2016).

According to the critic, postmodern ideas in Western literature lack social and cultural foundations which minimise their inherent value and ability to make a psychological impact on the reader. Indeed, an observation from the Indonesian critics is the example of the 'Conrad's inheritor' label, which is described by Darma as the social ties that writers incessantly incorporate in their work. The cultural background of the writer is therefore considered as an essential part of their writing, failure to which, only fiction can be created, as Joseph Conrad did in his work, The Inheritors (Conrad 1901). As such, Indonesian literature critics are influenced by their socio-cultural backgrounds and include the communal perspectives in writing. In advocating for the maintenance of the status-quo regarding gender, for example, Budiman states, "Many of the protagonists are portrayed as 'educated, professional, and well-travelled", but they are also "demure, restrained, and apolitical'… the works of these writers shed light on the "taste" of the readers, their "reading habits", as well as the ideological impact of the works on the readers' perception of women in general."

Budianta and Budiman also maintain Islamic values in their critique of literature, stating, "Readers familiar with Islam will be able to recognize the spirit of Islam as manifested in a discursive level or as it becomes part of the social practice of writing, and at the same time be dazzled by its distinct polyphonic expressions in various works that are foreign to the mainstream voice of Islam typically expressed in the Arab world."

Furqan (p. 91) chooses the communal perspective by promoting the cultural values of indigenous Australian communities by stating, "Globalization has penetrated the realm of Aboriginal hinterland so that previously sacred now has become profane" . Delukman also voices the position of the strong collective in the poems in Ars Poetica, advocating for harmonisation of feminism and traditional values on women positing, "Her small family didn't disturb her job and her job didn't disturb her family" (Furqan 2016). The critique therefore advocates for upholding the cultural values that encourages women to be homemakers and care for their children. Despite advancements made through feminism, allowing women to seek formal employment, Furqan believes that such work should not interfere with the job of a woman in taking care of her family (p. 91). As such, the communal perspective is primarily used in critiquing literary works.

The Tension between the Strong Collective and the Individual Approach

The maintenance of strong religious beliefs and other cultural values in critiquing literature is seen in the works of Indonesian critics, since the strong collective is an important dimension of the country's history, which contributed to the growth of its literature. Although personal opinions on either conservatism or progressive ideas are evident, the approaches used by the critics show that communal perspectives outweigh any personal beliefs. Arimbi (p.18), a progressive who offers feminist critiques of various works, states, "women can raise new consciousness of how women were, are now and might become, thereby provoking new directions for women in reading and understanding fiction, which in turn may contribute to women's personal growth" (Arimbi 2009). Although the statement advocates for equality of men and women, its objective is to address social injustice by changing the beliefs of its members, thereby focusing on the improvement of the entire community and culture, as opposed to simply stating that there should be development for women. A reconciliatory approach is therefore chosen to promote equality. Radical feminism is therefore not common in Indonesian literary critique because of the individualistic hostility that can be observed in promoting equality.

Budiman (p.43) also shows observance of a communal approach through the promotion of conservative Indonesian values regarding feminism by stating, "the category of 'woman' should be understood as 'constructed in a variety of political contexts that often exist simultaneously and overlaid on top of one another and only through such an understanding effective political action and challenges can be devised" (Budiman 2011). By using statements that recommend the reformulation of feminism to fit into the cultural practices in Indonesia, Budiman shows a conservative attitude even though his main focus is to promote Indonesian social values, which he considers important to any ideological discussion that affects the country's principles.

Budianta is a progressive critic whose individualistic perceptions can be seen in literary critiques dealing with issues of sexual minorities and feminism, but which remain within the approach of the strong collective. Budianta states, "Besides sexual minorities, the racial other in contemporary Indonesia is the Chinese minority, which makes up less than ten percent of the whole population… However, as suggested by M. Iksaka Banu's historical fiction, 'A Shooting Star,' there were moments in the past that contribute to the "othering" of the Chinese. Among these historical factors are the segregation of Chinese as a buffer between the colonial power and the 'natives'…" Although Budianta supports equality of all communities living in the country, his main focus is on the history of Indonesian people and relations with the Chinese, thereby promoting the belief that they are part of the culture and should consequently be given equal respect and treatment.

Darma, a conservative, also supports nationalism and the strong collective by promoting preservation of culture. In regard to feminism, Darma states,

"Males and females have the same chances in all fields, and yet in reality females are "defeated," because reality reveals that males are still superior. Radical Feminism admits that males consider women's bodies as the objects of males' enjoyment, and it is in a way an "insult," but ironically, in order to be recognized as accomplished females, females voluntarily let themselves to be half-naked as one can see in female famous models and actresses."

Furqan (p. 85), a conservative, also discusses the experiences of social minorities, particularly the indigenous Australian people, and states "Just a few decades ago the Australian public was faced with a dark history of The Stolen Generation".

The author discusses the loss of traditional values through Westernization that was brought about by colonialism(Furqan 2016). As such, the author is of the opinion that the change in cultural values amounted to theft of the social identity of the Aboriginals, thus showing his inclination towards the communal perspective that should be promoted by upholding the traditional norms of the people (Furqan 2016).

The importance attached to communal perspectives over individual beliefs can be summed up through the critique of Eagling (p.78), who states, "In these stories this revisioning is a subtle suggestion that the woman who operates outside the expectations of the government and society is none other than the Indonesian woman… This is an Indonesian woman of the Reformasi in all her difference. It introduces the notion of a pluralistic Indonesian woman; she is one who while caring for her family does not want to be seen to be transgressing the expected norms of Indonesian society." The common principles supported by most critics include religious freedom, identity, feminism and the role of women (Eagling 2011)

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The common principles supported by most critics include religious freedom, identity, feminism and the role of women in the society. In feminism, for example, the critics address the position and role of female characters in various texts, thereby promoting for reforms in the society or critiquing the impact that progressive ideas about equality would have on the culture. Tension is therefore evident within all critiques of Indonesian literature, revealing the struggle to find a balance between individual perspectives and a strong collective approach, when addressing social issues.

Themes in Progressive Criticism

The common issues that can be seen in progressive criticism of Indonesian literature are identity, equality, religious freedom, democracy and globalization. A common theme in literary criticism in Indonesia is the reconciliation of traditional cultural values with progressive ideologies adopted from other democracies, such as individual freedoms.

The different characteristics of the people within Indonesia are analysed in literary critiques, with the aim of promoting tolerance and respect of the choices of individuals who turn away from the social norms. Budianta and Budiman (p.8) states that the works of Intan Paramaditha and Norman Erickson speak to the theme of regulated gender and sexuality in contemporary Indonesia. Intan's story on the traditional dangdut singer, a musical genre which is usually performed with sensual movements of the body, addresses this issue. Norman Erickson's poems channel the anguish of the third gender, amidst homophobia in the urban landscape (Budianta 2018).

Delukman asserts that (p.52) the differences between the culture and the individual is evident when homosexual people are incorporated in literature, for example, and as such, progressive critics increase social understanding of their experiences and advocate for acceptance of various identities that are not similar to traditional cultural values. Equality is therefore championed by Indonesian literary critics(Delukman 2018).

Religious Freedom

Although the majority of Indonesian people are Muslims, literary critics adopt a viewpoint that promotes tolerance and equality when discussing religion. Budianta and Budiman (p. 10) state, "The theme of diversity is also strongly reflected in Lily Yulianti Farid's short stories. The setting of Lily's story "Kitchen" is Makassar in South Sulawesi, with a majority Muslim population. One character in the story is a female Christian cook from the Molucca islands in Eastern Indonesia, where the majority is Christian"(Budianta 2018).

Popular ideas in Western states, such as democracy in political leadership and capitalism, which promote globalization, are supported by progressive critics of Indonesian literature. Budiman describes democracy in positive terms by stating that at the dawn of the Reformasi, after Suharto stepped down and Vice-President B.J. Habibie took over as leader of the country, two dominant issues came to the surface on Indonesia's political scene: democratization and decentralization. The former was the result of what Indonesian citizens demanded after having lived under authoritarian rule for more than three decades. The latter was a state-imposed policy to avoid a collapse of the unitary state, a situation that happened in the former Yugoslavia.

Critiques of Indonesian literature recognise the socio-cultural values that shape the ideologies in the country, regarding issues such as equality, democracy, social identity and attitudes towards globalisation. The works of the critics use approaches that include the psychology, history and moral claims of the Indonesian people. Consequently, an observation of their works shows tension between following the position of the strong collective and the individual voice. The communal perspective is, however, dominant in Indonesian literary critique as the promotion of social values and unity of members is a common objective in literature.

4. Conclusion

As such, literary critics either focus on reconciling progressive ideas with cultural values or criticise liberal themes since they prefer to maintain social ideals. Although Indonesia has some progressive values that are followed in the society, the traditional values that existed before colonialism are considered as superior and more beneficial to the society. As such, the objective of critiques is to address the limitations of liberal ideas from the West and show the benefits of the traditional norms.

The tensions between individual perspectives and communal perspectives are proven in all Indonesian literary criticism chosen for this research. However, apart from the personal perspective of critics, the preferred method to criticize the literature is based on a strong collective, so that it advocates strong social and cultural values, which will lead to the development of society. They are proven in all literary works chosen for this research and are used by progressive criticism to promote increased social trust by adopting better practices that will improve the lives of Indonesians. Conservative work, on the other hand, advocates to establish traditional values that define the community and their culture. Tensions are explored in various subjects including feminism, equality and globalization

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