

Cultural Violence represented in Indonesia and American Literatures

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Abstract. This article is aimed at describing the lives of dominated people of both Indonesia and America. Among the dominated people in Indonesian community are Indonesian Chinese people, and those in American community are African American people. The discussion on some Indonesia novels of post tragedy of 1998 shows that personally Chinese faced a hard life; and socially they were dominated. Therefore, it can be concluded that: (1) the personal behaviour of Indonesian Chinese is represented through the hard life, (2) social behaviour of Indonesian Chinese is represented through the dominated social life, and (3) cultural behavior is represented through the religious life with many problems. This is say that the cultural behaviour of Indonesian Chinese in Indonesia novels is represented through cultural violence. The similar result of discussion on some American novels of post slavery shows that (1) the black man as the representation of Black people (African-Americans) was always in a dilemmatic condition leaving him without any options. Whatever he chose, will have negative consequences, (2) the struggle for 'equality' through 'violence' will result in a 'tragic fate', and (3) the novel reflected the black people who yearned for freedom from white domination and expected to have good education, good employment, and equality in political opportunity, law enforcement/law protection, and in other sociocultural life.

Keywords: dominated people, Indonesian Chinese, African American, and cultural violence

1 Introduction

Indonesian Chinese literary authorship activity stalled. The cessation of activities of authorship was caused by a number of factors, among others: (1) the emergence of Balai Pustaka to control the reading material for society (Rukardi, 2010), (2) the strengthening of the Indonesian language as the national language in 1928, (3) an end of education separation for Indonesian Chinese (Sumardjo, 2004: 2-3), and (4) prohibition against Indonesian Chinese to express their culture in the era of New Order (Soyomukti, 2012: 203). The researches on literature with Indonesian Chinese's life background were conducted by, among others: (1) Sainul Hermawan, (2005), which discussed the bad stigma of the Chinese in Indonesian Literature, (2) Alfiah Chusjairi (2005), which constructed Identity of Indonesian Chinese in Post New Order through the media, (3) Woodrich Christopher Allen (2011), which connected the tragedy of 1998 in the writing of novel *Putri Cina* (Princess of China), and (4) Kurniati Christina (2013), which examined the dynamics of the violence experienced by Chinese women.

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Meanwhile, the history of the United States has recorded African-American experiences, especially grievances. The spirit of independence has been marred by the Americans enslaving the black people. Even after the Civil War, when the slavery was abolished, the black people were regarded as inferior citizens; they have still been treated unfairly by the white people (Martin, et al., 1989; Franklin & Moss,1988).

Although the slavery was abolished after the Civil War, and slaves were proclaimed free, they were still regarded as inferiors who were discriminated and segregated by the white people. Facing this fact the black people struggled for equality, African-American writers raised those subjects in hopes of contributing to a social revolution. These writers' commitments to the political implication of their creative work are all the more apparent when we note that several of them maintained simultaneously as activists and as literary figures (Smith, et al.,1993: xi). They are, among others, Langston Hughes, Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, and Richard Wright (Smith, et al.,1993). In *Native Son* Richard Wright portrays the white domination and promotes human rights through the Max's defense of Bigger Thomas who was accused of raping and killing Mary, a white woman (Wright, 1966).

Based on the above description, both Indonesian Chinese and African Americans were under domination of the powerful parties or groups. As consequences, they physically and culturally experienced the bad treatments. Both faced what we call violences: physical and cultural violences.

2 Method of Study

This study uses a comparative method, trying to find out the similarities between Indonesian literature and African American literature having the same themes. There are some Indonesian novels with the theme of violence; one of those chosen as the source of data is *Putri Cina*. There are also some African American novels with the same theme as that of *Putri Cina*; one of those chosen as the source of data is *Native Son*. Both are studied on the basis of interdisciplinary approach.

3 Findings and discussion

The research findings show Chinese group : (1) are well-known to have a high working spirit, (2) have a view to be superior, resulting socio-cultural problems, and (3) Indonesian Chinese live under the domination of mainstream group. Their inferiority causes them to face some prejudice, discrimination, segregation, expatriation, and to become the object of violence, pillage, robbery, murder, and rape

3.1 Work Ethic

Indonesian Chinese have a high working ethics. The high working ethics are indicated by : (1) seriousness, (2) perseverance (3) hard work, and (4) never giving up as presented as "*Bekerja dengan memeras keringat*" "Working with sweat" . "*Bekerja tanpa kenal lelah*" "Working tirelessly" (Putri Cina, P. 74). To be successful, they must work hard.

3.2 Having problems for being superior

Indonesian Chinese had been positioned at a higher social class than native Indonesian people in the colonial era "*Kompeni menjunjung orang-orang Cina secara istimewa*" (Dutch's company upholds the Chinese in a special way) (Putri Cina, p.105). "*Kelihatan berbeda dan lebih daripada kaum pribumi*" (They seem to be different and to have higher social position than the native Indonesian people) (Putri Cina, p.105). After independence of Indonesia, the feeling of superiority resulted in sociocultural problems.

3.3 Stereotype, Prejudice, and Discrimination

Indonesian Chinese people have a label of the economic animal “[Mereka] *Tergila-gila akan dagang juga tak bisa disalahkan pada orang Cina*. “Loving business cannot only directed to Indonesia Chinese” (Putri Cina, p. 80). This label is rejected “[*Dibantah karena di antara*] *Mereka menjadi tukang kayu, tukang batu, pandai besi, bahkan juga banyak yang masih menjadi kuli, yang semiskin kaum pribumi* (They become carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, even many are still coolies, which are as poor as the native people” (Putri Cina, p. 105). They are regarded as the resource of chaos “[*Dianggap*] *Jadi biang keladi kekacauan di Pedang Kemulan ini adalah orang-orang Cina* (They were regarded as the main causes of chaos in Pedang Kemulan) (Putri Cina, p. 150). They are discriminatively treated “[Mereka] *Dilarang berdagang di kota kecamatan dan kota kabupaten*. Orang Cina hanya boleh berdagang di kota-kota besar (The Indonesian Chinese businessmen were banned to trade in the centre of subdistrict and country town) (Putri Cina, p. 144).

In relation to the aspect of stereotypes, the data presentation give the meanings that Indonesian Chinese accept the stereotypes as economic animals and treasure lovers. The way they have taken to get the treasure is the trade. Through the trade, they accumulate wealth that bring them into the wealthy; and for avoiding their domination in trade and in some aspects, they are banned to trade in the strategic areas.

3.4 Segregation, Violence, Robbery, Rape, Expulsion and Murder

Furthermore, Indonesian Chinese have the problems of residential segregation, violence, robbery, rape, expulsion and murder, as summarized in the following. They are segregated “*Tempat tinggal mereka pun dipisahkan dari penduduk pribumi, supaya mereka kelihatan berbeda dan lebih tinggi daripada kaum pribumi* (Their houses were also segregated from the native Indonesian community, in order that they looked different from and higher than the native ones) (Putri Cina, 105)”. They are violently treated “*Mereka (pribumi) menyerbu permukiman orang-orang Cina, menjarah hartanya, dan membantainya* (They [native Indonesian people] raided the settlement of the Indonesian Chinese, looted their property, and slaughtered them) (Putri Cina, 107).

Chinese women are the victim of violence “*Bila pertikaian itu pecah, maka dia dan kaumnyalah yang menjadi korbannya* (When the riot broke out, she [Putri Cina] and her people were the victim) (Putri Cina, 124). They are the victim of robbery “*Harta mereka dijarah. Rumah-rumah mereka dibakar. Tempat-tempat berdagang mereka dibumihanguskan* (Their property was looted. Their houses were burned. Their trade center was burned down) (Putri Cina, 150). The women are the target of rapping “*Ketika akhirnya terpegang, para lelaki itu dengan beringas menelanjangi wanita-wanita Cina itu, merebahkan mereka, dan melampiaskan nafsu mereka, sepuas-puasnya* (When she was finally held in check, the man violently stripped the Indonesia Chinese women, laid them, and lusted heart's content up to the point of satisfaction) (Putri Cina, 119). *They are the victim of explulsin* “*Malah mereka mengusir sebagian orang orang Cina dari Batavia. Banyak orang Cina waktu itu terpaksa pulang ke Negeri Cina* (Instead, they drove some Indonesian Chinese from Batavia. At that time, many Indonesian Chinese were forced to return to the Land of China) (Putri Cina, 106). They are the victim of murder “*mayat-mayat orang Cina bergelimpangan di mana-mana*. (Indonesian Chinese dead bodies were everywhere) (Putri Cina, 107). “*Cina, kamu! Kamu harus mati di tangan kami* (You are Chinese! You must die in our hands) (Putri Cina, 150)

This segregation was not just physical separation (in the case of separating residences) but it was also social one (in the case of positioning Indonesian Chinese community on the higher level position than the indigenous peoples). In the present context, the Indonesian Chinese community are getting a negative stigma as an exclusive community.

In connection with the violence, the above data serve the meanings that the tragedy of May 1998. This tragedy was triggered by national economic crisis. Toward the crisis, mass demonstration that was initially held peacefully, turning into a huge riot and as a consequence many people died. When a mass demonstration turns into a riot, Indonesian Chinese women: (1) were in the condition of great fear, and (2) were subjected to rape, and (3) many of them were brutally murdered. In the riot, demonstration mass, that had been provoked, destructed whatever belonging to the Indonesian Chinese, looted, robbed, and burned their properties. This makes the Indonesian Chinese be in a state of extraordinary fear. The state of the fear is influenced by the past experience, namely: mass riot turning into the tragedy.

In connection with the act of expulsion, the above data show that the expulsion of Indonesian Chinese community took place since the Dutch colonial era. In the Dutch period, although under the pressure, the Chinese had the strong mentality, high work ethic, and unyielding attitude. The condition was regarded as harming the interests of the Netherlands, thus Dutch colonial expelled them from Batavia and returned them to the land of China. In the reign of the Old Order, Indonesian Chinese traders were not allowed to trade in the rural areas and subdistricts. They should move to trade in big cities. In the period of leading up to the collapse of the New Order, a number of Indonesian Chinese preferred to leave Indonesia and live abroad because of unsafe condition.

The above data also show the mass killings against Indonesian Chinese and the followers of the Indonesian Communist Party in Batavia occurring in the Dutch colonial period, in the Tragedy of 30th September, 1965, and the Tragedy of May 1998. Mass killings against them in the Dutch colonial period because they were considered to launch rebellion ; the mass killings in the Tragedy of 30th September, because they were considered to be involved in the rebellion conducted by the Communist Party of Indonesia; and massacres in the Tragedy of May 1998 because they were considered to be the prime cause of the monetary crisis.

Meanwhile, the history of the United States of America shows that black Americans or African-Americans and the other minority groups are positioned as the secondclass citizens. In the past, most African Americans were brought, sold, and then enslaved to work on plantations. As slaves, they were badly treated and severely punished whenever they did wrong. When they did something wrong, they were severely punished.

When slavery was abolished, the freed blacks did not automatically obtain equal rights as the whites. In almost all the aspects of life, the Black American or African American people were under the White domination. Such condition continued until the appearance of Richard Wright's *Native Son* in 1940. In *Native Son*, the whites' assessment of the blacks depicts their racial prejudice. In this novel, Richard Wright portrays the blacks' inferiority through Bigger, and the Daltons. Aware of being inferior, Bigger felt uncomfortable in the white family's house. He addressed Dalton and his wife using 'Mr.' And 'Mrs.', 'Sir' and 'Mare, Mary Dalton as 'Miss.' And Jan as 'Mr.' Or 'Sir'. The Daltons except Mary addressed Bigger as 'boy' or calling his first name. Other terms symbolizing the blacks' inferiority are 'sonofabitch' [son of a bitch] (Wright, 1966: 253 and 289), 'black ape' (Wright, 1966: 312), 'apelike animal' (Wright, 1966 : 256), and 'dog' (Wright, 1966: 235). Bigger had to behave in such a way that he could be accepted by the whites.

Richard Wright portrays racial discrimination in housing through Bigger Thomas' statements: "We live here and they live there. We black and they white. They got things

and we ain't. They do things and we can't. It's just like living in jail. Half the time I feel like I'm on the outside of the world peeping in through a knot-hole in the fence" (Wright, 1966: 23).

Residential segregation implied by Richard Wright in his *Native Son* can be pictured that black people "live here [in ghetto area] and they [white ones] live there [in the other area specified to them] (Wright, 1966: 23). Between the areas of black people and of white people there was a "line"; a black man, Bigger, could cross the "line" (Wright, 1966 : 234); the "line" was sometimes called a shadowy region, a No Man's Land, the ground that separated the white world from the black one (Wright, 1966 : 67).

Residential segregation seems to be planned by white people, "for they have agreed among themselves to keep Negroes with the ghetto- areas of cities ((Wright, 1966: 363), and it is that "residential segregation is imperative. Such measure tends to keep black people as much as possible out of direct contact with white women and lessen their attack against them" (Wright, 1966: 261).

Through *Native Son*, Richard Wright pictures white domination upon black people manifested in the ways of racial prejudice, discrimination and segregation. These manifestations result in the ill treatment of the blacks by the whites.

White domination can destroy all aspects of life such as cultural, social, educational, occupational, and political aspects, and in law protection or law enforcement between black and white people. As a consequence, the domination of the white people has negative impacts for the black people in almost all the aspects of life. Thus, the injustice toward the people in the black skin showed that democracy in America has not been completely developed. Democracy is not based on equal rights in all aspects of life.

White domination also causes unfair treatments in education which Richard Wright (1966) portrays in his *Native Son*. He writes: "If you wasn't black and you had some money and if they'd let you go to that aviation school, you could fly a plane." "I could fly a plane if I had a chance" (p. 20). "I wanted to be an aviator once. But they wouldn't let me go to the school where I was suppose' to learn it. They built a big school and then drew a line around it and said that nobody could to it but those who lived within the line. That kept all the colored boys out." (p. 327). The statements imply that Richard Wright wants to indicate that there is discrimination in education. A black man, like Bigger Thomas, is exempted from a certain school because he is black. The whites consider blacks as inferiors who do not have the right for equality in education. As stated above, the obstructions to maintain black people's inferiority through education can be in the educational fund, facilities, programs, opportunities.

Black workers can easily lose their jobs when they do wrong. Bigger was afraid of losing his job when he was befriended Mary and Jan. Whereas, Jack, a black worker, stated that he lost his job because Bigger killed Mary. This implies that if black man does wrong, another black man also endure the effects. The whites consider that he would commit the same crime against other white woman (Wright, 1966, p. 244).

The black people's social protest toward social injustice caused by white domination is related to their difficulties in achieving their rights in education, employment, and political participation, and in other aspects of social life. The history of the United States of America also shows that the whites commit violence against the blacks such as beatings, whipping, and lynching. Violence committed by the blacks is a response to the violence done by the whites upon them in the past. The death of Mary Dalton in the hands of Bigger Thomas is a reaction of violence committed by the whites to whom he hates and fears of. Mary Dalton symbolizes 'white power' which Bigger regards as an oppressor upon black people.

4 Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that: (1) the cultural behaviour of Indonesian Chinese in Indonesian novel is represented through cultural violence, and (2) the black man as the representation of Black people (African-Americans) was always in a dilemmatic condition leaving him without any options.

Whatever both Indonesian Chinese and African American chose (1) will have negative consequences, (2) the struggle for 'equality' through will result in a 'tragic fate', and (3) the novels reflected that both faced the different treatments in education, employment, and in political opportunity, law enforcement/law protection, and in other sociocultural life.

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