

Nationalism and Familyhood: the Struggle against Authoritarian Government as Seen in Leila Chudori's *Laut Bercerita*

Antonius Wisnu Yoga Windharto

Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta

e-mail: antoniusyo91@gmail.com

<https://doi.org/10.24071/ijels.v4i2.2304>

ABSTRACT

Social injustice is the reason why people protest against the government. The activists seek to find the equality from the government. As the result, some of activists were abducted and killed by the soldiers. The activists are not the group of people who hate the country. Most of them are nationalists, and they cannot keep silent in seeing the injustice in front of their eyes. The family of the activists also play important role in shaping the activists. The connection between the members of family is important in shaping their nationalism. *Laut Bercerita* is a novel which talks about nationalism and familyhood in Indonesia. Using this novel as the primary data, the issue of nationalism and familyhood as the characteristics of South East Asian people are discussed in this paper.

Keywords: *familyhood, Laut Bercerita, Nationalism in new order, social injustice*

INTRODUCTION

Nationalism and Familyhood are two important themes which can be found in the literature from South East Asia. There is a correlation between these two topics. Love is the line that connects these two topics. Love to the country brings nationalism, and love to the other member of family brings familyhood. These issues can be seen clearly during the authoritarian government.

Oppression and persecution play important roles in the authoritarian government. These are the tools used by a dictator to control the society under the regime. Without controlling the society with the hard pressure, the protest will be received by the dictator. However, the resistance always happens in the country controlled by military government. The resistance as the result of oppressions cannot clearly be seen because of the oppression of the military controlled by the dictator government hides

the fact and silences the activist during that era.

There are several countries in South East Asia which experienced the authoritarian government in 20th century. The examples are Republic of Indonesia during President Soeharto's government and Republic of the Philippines during President Marcos's government. These two countries in South East Asia have rule that used by the government to silence the opposition. In Indonesia, the New Order government used Anti-Subversion Law to silence the protest. Furthermore, this law also violated the human rights. Ariel Heryanto (2006, p.109) states that anti-Subversion law allowed the Attorney-General to arrest any suspects and hold them for up to a year without trial, and

to direct and supervise the prosecution if a trial did take place.

In Republic of the Philippines, Martial Law is used by Marcos government. Manipulative state emerged in the early 1970s with Marcos's declaration of martial law (Rommel A. Curaming, 2008, p.139). Martial Law is the law used by military government to control the normal civilian government, especially in emergency time.

In the history of Philippine, Martial Law is declared when the president thinks that the country is in danger. The government under President Marcos used the Martial Law in order to maintain the social order in Republic of the Philippines during that time, when many activists seek justice by demonstration. President Marcos is seen as the supporter for the rich people and his policy did not support the minority.

Roderick G. Galam (2010, p.487) states that the martial law period was distinguished not only by "more aggressive attempts to destroy protectionist barriers, but also that the export-oriented industrialization policy was bound up with the liberalization program. Martial Law in Republic of the Philippines was used by Marcos to enforce the rule over the public. However, the activists who protested against government in both countries were not communist. Furthermore, they were nationalists who want to improve the freedom in the country.

In both countries, the activists are seen as communist, as their demonstration to seek the social justice/equality. In Indonesia, lot of people were accused as the member of PKI (*Indonesian Communist Party/Partai Komunis Indonesia*) after they protest against the government. Not only the activists, but also the family received the oppression from the government. Family is seen as the important aspects of South East Asian people. The family is the primary social unit for mankind. With the Martial

the social order. The missing member of family can bring emptiness for the other member of family. Harari (2014, p.361) states that in the past, the daily life of most humans ran its course within three ancient frames: the nuclear family, the extended family and the local intimate community.

Most of people work in their family and in their communities, without the help of the government. At first the market and the state discovered their path blocked by traditional families and communities who had little love for outside intervention. Parents and community elders were reluctant to let the younger generation be indoctrinated by nationalist education systems, conscripted into armies or turned into a rootless urban proletariat (Harari, 2014, p.363). With the emergence of country, the bound between the family members were loose. The powerful government can take over the control of the family member.

In Indonesia, however deadening the New Order's legacies, democratic change commenced with student demonstrations, urban upheavals, and the resignation of President Soeharto in 1998. In the Philippines, where President Ferdinand Marcos had punctured the country's democratic record by declaring martial law, politics were re-democratised during the 1980s through 'people power' (William Case, 2010, p.191). These cases in two different countries in South East Asia shows how the people who love the country can change the condition of the country. Furthermore, they can change the authoritarian government with a democratic government.

These two topics: nationalism under authoritarian government and family are the topics which can be found in the work of South East Asia Writer. The nationalism

Law/Anti-subversion Law, the government can easily abduct the member of family who was seen as a person who can disturb

is important for the activist who seeks the justice during authoritarian government. Furthermore, the importance of family for

the nationalist activist is the theme which is interesting for South East Asia readers. These two themes can be seen in the work of Leila S. Chudori entitled *Laut Bercerita*

(*The Sea Speaks His Name*). In the first part, this novel talks about the activists during the New Order government. The second part tells about the story of the sister to find the activist. Therefore, this paper examines the issue of the importance of nationalism and familyhood in *Laut Bercerita*.

DISCUSSION

Laut Bercerita is divided into two parts: the first part deals with the story of Biru Laut, the students of English Letters of Gajah Mada University and it sets around 1991-1998; the second part is the story of Asmara Jati, Biru Laut's sister, who seeks the truth about the existence of her brother after the fall of the new order regime. Laut is the secretary of Winatra, the group of students who tries to protest against the New Order government as the result of social injustice they experienced. Furthermore, they seek the justice for every people in the new order regime. As the result of the activity, Biru Laut and his friends have to hide from the intelligent. They hide for several years while managing several discussions with university students. Finally they were abducted by the soldier in March 1998 and received bad treatment from the soldiers. The soldiers try to get the information from the activists, but the activists keep silent. As the result of silent action, some activists including Biru Laut were killed by soldiers.

The second part of this novel uses the perspective of Asmara in her struggle to find his brother and friends. Asmara, the doctor, joins The Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (Komisi Orang Hilang) to find the truth about her brother. With her works in this commission, she can find several facts behind the missing of her brother. She travels to Kepulauan Seribu to interview the local people who find skele-

ton in the sea. Furthermore, she also tries to make her parents realized that Biru Laut was already been missing for several years. In this novel, the parent is depicted as the people who believe that their son is still alive. She also manages to learn from the mother of Argentinean activists who seek the justice from Argentina government. This lesson leads to the other event, when the activists' family seek the justice from the government. Like what happens in front of the palace every Thursday, the families of the activists in this novel also protest the government and seek the justice by doing silent protest in front of the palace.

These two parts of *Laut Bercerita* promotes the important issue in South East Asia literature. The line that connects between nationalism and familyhood can be seen clearly in this novel. Biru Laut as the activist loves his country, and seeks for freedom in his country. As the member of family, he loves his family, and mostly he loves his sister, Asmara Jati. The close relationship between them can be seen in the last part of the novel, when the last words of Biru Laut are about Asmara Jati.

Nationalism of *Biru Laut*

The nationalism of Biru Laut is also constructed in the family. Her father is a journalist, and he also loves literature. He supports Laut with lots of newspaper and comic. He also helps Laut to be familiar with several classics novels from European and Latin American writers from the childhood. The example of novels read by Biru Laut is *The Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens, Julia Alvarez's *In the Times of the Butterflies*, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

These three books promote the issue of social injustice and the resistance against military government. Julia Alvarez's *In the Times of the Butterflies* depicts the Mirabal sisters, who struggle and are killed by the military government. Ramirez (2008, p.15) states that the major themes in Alvarez's writing are identity and culture, exile and

home, hybridity and assimilation, the negotiation of the past and the present, and language and memory. As the results, this reading also shaped the nationalism of *Biru Laut*. He is inspired by the struggle of the characters in the novels that he read in dealing with the condition which is similar with his life.

Biru laut shows his nationalism to the country through the protest against the authoritarian government. The example is the Blangguan case. In the history of Indonesia, the military army takes the land of the farmer to build the place to train the soldier. In this novel, Laut and his friends try to plant the corn in order to protest against the military army who wants to take the land of the farmer; however, they cannot do the protest because of the screening and oppression from the military soldier. What *Laut* did does not endanger the nation. Furthermore, he wants to show his respect to the farmers who defend their land from the military soldiers. The result of this incident is *Laut* and his friends receive bad treatment from the military soldier after they got caught in Surabaya. However, the soldiers only warn them and after that they released *Laut* and his friends.

The underground movement starts after this incident. *Laut* and his group manage several discussions which are seen as subversive action from the perspective of the government. They become fugitive and have to hide from the government. They manage the underground resistance movement. They protest against the government with the poster posted in the wall, and with writing radical message on the wall like 'Gulingkan Diktator' and 'Gulingkan Orde Baru'. These messages used to inform and ask the society to change the dictator government. They have to run and hide for several times, and finally get caught by soldiers in March 1998 to be imprisoned in hidden jail.

They were interrogated by the soldiers for several times. They received daily treatment like get kicked, get punched, get an

electric shock and they also have to lie down in the ice during the interrogations. The military soldiers believe that *Laut* and his friends are connected to some political party, although *Laut* already states that they move by their own motive. However, they show their resistance. They love their nation, and they do the movement by their own ideology, without the support of any political figure as accused by the military soldier. The activists refused to make a fiction in order to be safe. In the end, several activists were killed and the others are freed. *Biru Laut* belongs to the activists who were killed by soldier, and his family does not know about this fact. The missing activists are also the factor triggering the down of Soeharto. Whatever the motivations were, the abductions provided the necessary catalyst to 'breathe more fire into the increasingly vigorous anti-government student protests countrywide (Singh, 2000, p.82). The fact about missing students calls the national-wide demonstration from the students who love the country, and finally the president resigned in 21 May 1998.

The Familyhood in *Laut Bercerita*

The nationalism and patriotism of *Biru Laut* affects the family. To find *Biru Laut*, the soldiers also come to the house and oppress the family. *Laut's* father was asked to call *Laut*, but he is smart to give code to *Laut* that he was surrounded by the soldier. This event shows how the military government will do anything to get what they want. However, the relation among family members is stronger than the oppression from the military soldier.

The relation among family members in *Laut's* family is strong, as every member of this family has special relationship each other. The familyhood in *Biru Laut* family can be seen in their custom every Sunday evening. In this family, all members of family have to eat together. Mother and *Laut* are the master chefs of this family. The close relationship between them can be seen from the way Mother always cook

Laut's favourite food. Laut also helps Mother to cook the food.

The Sunday evening custom also used by the family to talk each other. The parent begins to ask about the condition of their children, and their children talk about their life. This kind of depiction shows the harmony in the family, although in the end this kind of custom brings difficulty after Biru Laut missing. After the fall of New Order regime in May 1998, Biru Laut family tries to find the position of Biru Laut which already missed the communication started from March 1998.

The struggle to find the missing of family member shows the strong bond between the members of family. Laut's father used his identity as journalist to find the fact about Biru Laut by asking some military office. His effort does not give any result. With the missing of Biru Laut, the stability of family changed. The member of family, especially Laut's father and mother, pretend that Laut is still alive.

They always do their custom in Sunday evening. The most difficult event for the family is the uncertainty whether Laut is still alive or not. The easiest way for them is to pretend that Laut is still alive. It shows the importance of Laut in the family. Furthermore, after Asmara talks about her finding in Kepulauan Seribu, the parent leave the discussion on Sunday to go back to their house as they are scared that Laut will come home.

The situation changed after the Father passed away. While the Mother is cleaning Laut's room, she finds the last short story written by Laut. In the conversation between Mother and Asmara, it can be seen clearly that the familyhood is important. With the missing member, the other members of family have to support each other to strengthen each self. The importance of the bond in family is connected to the nationalism. The nationalism from the family is not shown by support the government.

The nationalism is shown through the weekly silent protest. The protest is used to find the truth behind the missing activist. In the novel, it states that Asmara and her friends learn from the Mother of the Plaza d Mayo in Argentina. The mothers experienced the missing children during the military regime. Through the protest, they exposed the blind eye of most world governments in relation to human rights abuses in Argentina (Meada, 2010, p.518).

They try to build a better government who support the human rights. The silent protest held every Thursday is used to remind the government that they still have a homework related to the missing activists. The participants of this protest are not only the family of the missing activist, but also the people who sympathize with them. They become a big family who loves the country and wants to improve the country by asking the justice in Indonesia after the fall of Soeharto.

For them, Soeharto is not a good president. However, this issue still become the minor in Indonesia, as lot of Indonesian people praise Soeharto as the best president in Indonesia. There was also a growing awareness in elite circles that while the students and some media outlets were strongly advocating for Soeharto's legal prosecution, only very few ordinary Indonesians actually wanted to see him behind bars. In fact, the nostalgic support for Soeharto that erupted on the occasion of his death had built up gradually during Indonesia's difficult and decade-long struggle to develop a functioning democratic system (Mietzner, 2009, p.111). As the result, the issue of missing activists still goes unsolved in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Nationalism and familyhood cannot be separate from the South East Asian people. These two terms are the characteristics of people. The tight line connected the nationalism and familyhood in Indonesia. The family has a role to construct the children.

The nationalism constructed in the family through the way parents educated the children. Through *Laut Bercerita*, Leila S. Chudori proposed the importance of nationalism and family. Nationalism is not always support blindly the government, but through the critical protest to shaped the government better. However, in the authoritarian context, the critical protest is not allowed. As the result, the activists who criticize the government are abducted. The familyhood can be seen clearly from this part where the family tries to find the missing activists. The bound between the family members is strong, and after the fall of authoritarian government they use silent protest in order to find the missing activists. This kind of protest shows their nationalism, to build a better government who care about the human right.

REFERENCES

- Curaming, Rommel A. (2008). Contextual Factors in the Analysis of State-Historian Relations in Indonesia and the Philippines. *Philippine Studies*, 5, 2, 123-150.
- Galam, Roderick G. (2010). (En)Countering Martial Law Rhythmanalysis, Urban Experience in Metro Manila, and Ilokano Literature (1980-1984). *Philippine Studies*, 58, 4, 481-522.
- Mietzner, Marcus. (2009). Indonesia in 2008: Democratic Consolidation in Soeharto's Shadow. *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 105-123.
- Case, William. (2010) *Soeharto's New Order and Its Legacy*. Canberra: ANU Press.
- Chudori, Leila S. (2017) *Laut Bercerita*. Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia.
- Harari, Yuval Noah. (2014). *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. Oxford: Signal Books.
- Heryanto, Ariel. (2006). *State Terrorism and Political Identity in Indonesia fatally belonging*. London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Meade, Teresa A. (2006). *A History of Modern Latin America*. West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing.
- Ramirez, Luz Elena. (2008) *Encyclopedia of Hispanic-American Literature*. New York: Facts On File, Inc.
- Singh, Bilveer. (2000) *Succession Politics in Indonesia: The 1998 Presidential Elections and the Fall of Suharto*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.