Another Side on Indonesian History of Communism through Leila S. Chudori's *Pulang*

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Abstract

At present, 2014, Indonesian people learn to exercise their political right in the biggest people party, which is held every 5 years, the presidential election. Observing the debate, the campaign, and the supporters, one can learn that Indonesia has reached a progress in their political life. The progress is achieved through complex process that only some experienced. Back in the 1960s Indonesia experienced an uprising which caused turmoil of its government. Indonesian learnt two versions of its story, one which was officially broadcasted since 1966 and one which is only stated implicitly through some literary works.

Reading Leila S. Chudori's Pulang, there is another side that Indonesians comprehend about the life of the so called communists by the new order regime. It sees the life of the people who are accused of murder and communism. The depiction is far from judging and framing their political agenda, it shows the reader how their life, as human, affected by the event.

Culler (1997) states that literature is the noise of culture as well as its information, and it is a writing which requires readers to be engaged in the problem of meaning. Thus, one can learn the history of a nation through its literary works. Pulang is considered particular in its publication because it needs a 6 year process and its first publication was in 2012, the time when Indonesia has achieved a different level of democracy since 1960.

First, this paper discusses how Indonesian history, particularly on its political turmoil in 1965, 1968 and 1998, are read and written by Indonesians. Second, it discusses how the present social context influences the discourse of the novel.

***Keywords**: communism, history, new historicism*

Introduction

In 2014, Indonesia held the annual people's party, the presidential election. The election resulted in the appointment of Joko Widodo as the next president. In the process and after the election, the political events which determine the future of Indonesia for the next 5 years continue. There are new policies established, new members of the house of representative (DPR), and perhaps more on new controversial laws. After 69 years of independence, the nation still evolves and in the process, and the people learn democracy and political life. Despite the recent political condition, Indonesian people have gained their awareness in their political rights. Compared to the political condition during the new order regime, there have been many changes and development. Indonesian people are aware of their roles in the course of their nation.

In the advance of the internet and the freedom of speak, nowadays Indonesian people have easier access to news and information. History is written in many versions and it is in the hand of the readers to decide which one is factual. A new regime was born after the old fell and in 69 years of independence; Indonesia has seven

presidents recorded in the history. Among the seventh presidents, one has reigned for 32 years, the late Soeharto. His regime ruled after Soekarno's fall in 1966. As the history was written by the winner, Indonesian generation who was born during Suharto's reign and was not equipped with critical thinking believed in the propaganda. Only after his fall, the texts published revealed or stated the "real" history.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss how history in 1965, 1968 and 1998 are read and written by Indonesians. The discussion of the history is limited to the history surround Soeharto and the Communist Party of Indonesia or *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (*PKI)* based on the government's version. The specific years are chosen because *Pulang* is focused on the history of Indonesia in 1965, 1968 and 1998. After knowing how the history is presented and perceived, the paper will focus on how the recent social context influences the discourse of *Pulang*.

New Historicism

New historicism is a method which is based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts. The term was coined by Stephen Greenblatt in 1980. New Historicism places a literary text within the frame of non literary text. Using new historicism, one should be able to read the literary text as a co-text and use the text and the co-text as expression of the same historical moment (Barry, 1995: 173). Furthermore, this method supports the liberal ideals of personal freedom and accepts as well as celebrates all forms of differences and deviance. New historicism considers the issues of state power and its colonization in the mindset. It sees how literary works are influenced by the historical and cultural context at the time of production. Thus, this method is used to understand how the history of communism in Indonesia is presented from the eye of Leila S. Chudori.

Soeharto and Partai Komunis Indonesia

To be able to read and understand *Pulang* as an Indonesian, one must acknowledge the history of Indonesia during the Soeharto's regime or the new order regime during 1966 – 1998. The discourse which is shared within the mental construct of an Indonesian who was born in the era, can only be understood by those who learn history only from the government version or the new order regime. Under the Soeharto's regime, Indonesians have limited access to information and limited freedom in all aspects. History was learned through history books which were published by the government, and there were also limited literary works published regarding to the history of Indonesia. The history known was the history of the winner, Soeharto. Here, the discourse was made only from a single text. Most Indonesians share the same history that Soeharto was the one who saved Indonesia from communism (*PKI*) and the opposition was left alone with a negative branding.

Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) was lead by D. N Aidit and bold with its efforts on the wealth of farmers and laborers. *PKI* was blamed by Soeharto as the one who threatened national stability, and Soekarno was defeated by Soeharto using Soekarno's relationship with *PKI*. In 1965, Soekarno implemented a doctrine called *Nasakom* in Indonesia. It means that *PKI* was allowed to participate in every aspect of the nation. *PKI*'s influence grew stronger.

PKI was mentioned to have eliminated their competitors by using the power of Soekarno. History recorded that *PKI* tried to overthrow Soekarno by killing eight officers and a daughter of A.H Nasution. The reason of the killing was mentioned by *PKI* through two vital communication media in Indonesia at that time. The killing was directed to the generals who planned a coup. Two days later, *PKI* was defeated and the government seized controls of the nation's security. Aidit as the leader of *PKI* was pronounced dead on November 24, 1965 (Notosusanto, 1985). Years after the coup, people learnt its details through movie and history books in school. Since 1965, PKI becomes a symbol of terror and brutality. No one dares to have a relation or known as a member of PKI. A year later, Soeharto was declared the second president of Indonesia through *supersemar* and Indonesia was ruled under the next regime, the new order.

Indonesia in 1965, 1968 and 1998 on history books' version

Indonesia consists of various tribes and has some history of occupation. This has made a complex situation to define an Indonesian. As stated by Mangunwijaya (1999), the reason of becoming an Indonesian is not a matter of skin color or ethnic face. Furthermore, he quoted Soekarno's statement that it is the desire to unite self. The variety of tribes and occupation makes it difficult to describe the origin of Indonesia. As the nation develops through time and history, Indonesians also develop. Becoming an Indonesian means that one needs to be ready for changes. The changes of leaders always resulted in the changes of policy and it is the desire to unite self to specific things which define the identity. If the nowadays Indonesian generation is more attached to western culture, they become a generation that easily consumes western and eastern culture at the same time.

In order to be able to read a text as an Indonesian, one should learn and be aware of the history which define the context of each regime. As a young nation which only got its independence 69 years ago, Indonesia has seven presidents. Each has left a specific mark in the history of this nation. The political events in 1965, 1968 and 1998 are closely connected to Soekarno and Soeharto. 1965 was the year when Soekarno lost his controls over Indonesia because he was considered to have failed in handling the coup on September 30, 1965 or known as G30S/PKI. *PKI* as the accused of killing generals who were told to have planned a coup on Soekarno was disbanded along with its civil organizations. Here, Soeharto, as the major general, succeeded in giving a label to *PKI* and declared himself the savior of national security. D. N Aidit as the leader of *PKI* was pronounced dead two days after he was caught (Notosusanto, 1985). In 1968 Soeharto was inaugurated the second president of Indonesia. By the power vested in him, he continued to eliminate *PKI* to its roots and established his power inside and outside Indonesia. Soeharto reigned in Indonesia for 32 years and were demanded to resign in 1998. The process of his resignation is one of the dark periods in Indonesia. Indonesia has a *Tragedi Trisakti* on May 12, 1998. Habibie (2006) stated that the tragedy started when the staged rallies by the university students of Trisakti were blocked by the security apparatus and killed four students. The tragedy became the trigger of larger riots on May 13- 15, 1998. The riots affected several aspects and left a tragedy on *Tionghoa* race in Indonesia. *Tionghoa* people suffered great loss in spiritual and material things. Although there was no official claim from the government on the event until now, many shops owned by Tionghoa race were burned down and burgled, and *Tionghoa* women were reported to have been raped.

1965, 1968 and 1998 Read and Written by Indonesian

Culler (1997) states that literature is the noise of culture as well as its information. It is a writing which requires a reader to be engaged in problem of meaning. Literature allows one to experience history, and it pushes the reader to see things from the author's point of view. Reading Indonesian history from Chudori's point of view also means knowing the other side of the history. Literature played a significant role in the readers' construction on identity. *Pulang* is a combination of history and fiction which is narrated by one of the witnesses of the history. It means that *Pulang* enables the reader to experience history from a particular point of view, "the communists".

Pulang has several major characters, they are Dimas Suryo, Lintang Utara and Segara Alam. Dimas Suryo is a reporter who is forced to stay in Paris after he fails to go back to Indonesia. Dimas is described as a literary man, he has a great interest in the development of literature, yet he fails to decide his alliance between *Lekra* and *Manikebu*. He is the father of Lintang Utara and the husband of Vivienne Deveraux. After several unsuccessful efforts to make a living in Paris, he succeeded in having an Indonesian restaurant in Paris. As a man who loves to cook during his youth in Indonesia,

Dimas made the restaurant a symbol of the fight for identity.

Lintang Utara is described as a beautiful young woman who needs to finish her thesis by doing a research in Indonesia. After being equipped with knowledge of Indonesia from the story of her father, her lecturer, and her friends, she flies to Indonesia. Lintang is a mixture of Indonesian man and French women, a mixture of beauty and mind. Her research in Indonesia is actually her journey to find her identity. Her bad experience of being known as Dimas daughter leads her to search the truth of their identity.

Segara Alam is the son of Surti Anandari, Dimas Suryo's ex-girlfriend. Alam is a man who grows without a father. His father is Hananto Prawiro who died after being arrested without trial. Alam's childhood memories are full with alienation from his surroundings. As the son of a man who was accused of a member of *PKI*, he learns to be the best among others so that his teachers will not question more about his identity by seeing trophies that he gets.

They are related because of the history and their stories are bound together as the victims of the horrible events on September 30, 1965. Dimas is depicted being deeply homesick and lonely because of the exile. Though he has a beautiful wife and a beautiful daughter, he cannot escape from the past. His struggle to survive in Paris has cost his health. Lintang sees her father as someone who is trapped in the past, unwilling to be happy with all his achievements in Paris. Lintang, as having a cynical and pessimistic father, grew up into a girl who is sensitive yet driven by her ambition to know her identity. Depicted as a student of Sorbonne University, Lintang is a modern woman who is educated, passionate and well mannered. Lintang falls in love with Alam, a young man who graduated from the faculty of law, yet laughs at its discrepancy. Alam found a non-governmental organization for the minority who is treated unfairly. Alam grew up with a vengeance toward the government and his surroundings who labeled his family a *PKI*, as a person who has no God, cruel and cursed.

Chudori stated in *Pulang* that she is indebted to the late Sobron Aidit, a step brother of D.N Aidit who is exiled in Paris and the late Umar Said, a senior journalist who is also exiled due to his task as a reporter in Aljazair on September 30, 1965. Both of them are the founding fathers of *Koperasi Restoran Indonesia* in Paris. Chudori stated that one chapter of her book, *Empat Pilar Tanah Air,* which describes the *Restaurant Tanah Air,* is inspired by the interviews with Sobron Aidit and Umar Said. The struggle of being marked as a communist is depicted in every aspect of life; education, social, economic, and political life. Each of her characters describes the negative effects of the coup. Dimas and his friends in Paris are alienated socially, economically and politically. Alam and his best friend, Bimo, suffer from the official version of the history. They are described as boys with pressure from their environment as the sons of communists. They were mocked and beaten because they were the sons of "communists". Through the narration of young Alam, Chudori criticizes the sole version of history without giving the alternate versions of the event. Reading *Pulang,* one could tell that Chudori does not try to justify *PKI* as the innocent, Soekarno as the hero, and Soeharto as the villain. She merely asks for the full version of Indonesian history surrounding the coup so that there will be a complete and honest version of history (Chudori, 2012).

The Present History

I am interested in analyzing *Pulang* after knowing that this book needs 6 years in the making and is written by a journalist of *Tempo*, one of Indonesian weekly magazines which is temporarily banned because it was considered a threat on the nation stability. Its first publication was in 2012; the year when Indonesia has celebrated the freedom of speech and comes in an era as so called as a reformation era. Of course my main interest lies in its topic, May 1998. Personally, the event becomes one unforgettable memory because I witness the tragedy. I was in Solo at that time, so I saw the mass loot and burn shops or buildings. I felt the terror, as my mother and neighbors wrote the word "*pribumi*" to protect our house. Growing up under Soeharto's new order, I was educated

as a student who learns that *PKI* is an evil party which killed innocent people. I spent more than five years watching a movie about the coup on television every time we celebrate our Independence Day. Only after Soeharto's fall, I learn that there are other stories hidden under the makeup reality.

Studying literature, I learn that literature is the voice of the era. Chudori here presents the suffering of family and relatives of those who were called *eksil politik.* In an era which emphasizes the freedom of speak, there will not be a resistance from the government regarding the topics. It is not a taboo, but it has its charm when Indonesia people are questioning history. It comes in a safe political life. Although *Pulang* tells about the communist's side, it does not try to give an absolute belief in the readers' mind that *PKI* is innocent. It reconstructs the readers' mindset on the family members of the communists who state that they are also the victim of Soeharto. Chudori as a journalist presents the book in a time when the society has learned that history is written by the winner. It is safely and easily landed on the hand of the readers. It does not need to compete with the government regulation, or to be afraid of banning. Indonesia has grown into a better society; it has a critical mind which is open to all possibilities. Reading *Pulang*, one is not questioning the claim of the author on her statement that the book is inspired by one of the *eksil politik*. It also means knowing the history of the victim. Chudori's profession in the new order's regime is also object of repression since Soeharto strictly monitored media and literary works. *Pulang* is easily accepted because the regime has fallen and the witnesses or the victims who hides and burry the stories have emerged one by one as democracy is upheld higher.

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