



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## Writing novels under the New Order: state censorship, complicity, and literary production in Indonesia, 1977-1986

Hanafi, T.

### Citation

Hanafi, T. (2022, March 31). *Writing novels under the New Order: state censorship, complicity, and literary production in Indonesia, 1977-1986*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3281344>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3281344>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

## Chapter 5

### Literary Mode: Narrative, Perspective, and Language

“I wanted to prove that I could also write in a language those literary ‘gurus’ use.”

Yudhistira Massardi<sup>368</sup>

In a conversation on March 27, 2019 about the inspiration behind the writing of *Aku Bukan Komunis* (later edited into *Mencoba Tidak Menyerah*), Massardi claimed that as an author he was equipped with the ability to write like those literary gurus who excelled in contemporary Indonesian literary scene — using a language that was refined, authentic, and organized (*tertib*), a language that mimicked contemporary literary modes and conventions. However, records show that, from the beginning of his literary career until right before the publication of *Mencoba Tidak Menyerah*, Massardi had always been associated with ‘un-literariness’ and a refusal to adhere to literary norms (*bebas-terbang layang*).<sup>369</sup> He was also accused of not having the literary expertise to bring about serious social and cultural themes in his works, despite his previous award-winning novels and play. In the light of this literary bias, *Aku Bukan Komunis*, which elaborated on personal memory, social trauma, and state power, was intentionally written as Massardi’s own way of refuting those authoritative figures and producers who kept pushing him to the sideline.

Moving on from the publishers and editors, in this chapter I focus on the writers and explore how and why they used particular strategies to ensure that they could tell the stories they wished to tell. I examine the novels at the heart of this study by looking at both contents and narrative techniques, together with the creative tactics that were used by the authors to link their experiences and observation, as well as the social, cultural, and political discourses that overlay their stories. For this, I incorporate into my analysis a narratological framing that relies heavily on the ideas and terminology developed by Gerard Genette (1930-2018), a French structuralist literary theorist, in combination with New Historicist approach that was first developed in the 1980s primarily through the work of the literary historian Stephen Greenblatt (1943- ).<sup>370</sup>

---

<sup>368</sup> Online conversation with Yudhistira Massardi on March 27, 2019 on the motif behind writing *Aku Bukan Komunis*. “Tujuan awalnya nulis ‘hanya’ utk sayembara, yg terbayang cuma para juri. Maka, ya harus nulis sebagus dan seotentik mungkin. Nggak mikir yang lain. Yang sangat dipikirkan adalah bgm menulis novel baru yang formatnya sama sekali berbeda dgn Arjuna Mencari Cinta (yg sdh juara sebelumnya). Jadi dari segi bentuk dan terutama Bahasa, harus lebih ‘tertib’ dari AMC. Itu utk membuktikan, selain bisa nulis ‘bebas-terbang layang’, aku juga bisa nulis dengan para ‘guru bahasa’.”

<sup>369</sup> See for example *Horison* May 1978 No. 5 Tahun XIII, p. 135. This issue presented, a debate about Massardi unworthiness as an author who did not deserve to win literary award, nor to be juxtaposed or put on the same level with Indonesian literary giants.

<sup>370</sup> Genette 1980; Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000.

Narratology is a useful tool for categorizing different techniques used in literature — allowing for an examination of why authors chose a specific narrative strategy in the course of telling a story, and whether their choice, for example, suggests a difficulty in expressing a certain topic or dealing with specific issues and/or ideas (in this case, the Indonesian massacre). In *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* Genette divides his narrative theory into five different categories, namely, order, frequency, duration, voice, and mood. Due to concerns with perspective and narration, my main narratological focus will be on voice and mood. Voice, according to Genette, refers to the narrator of a story, whereas mood deals with the issue of point of view and is based on the character(s) ‘whose point of view orients the narrative perspective (or focalization).’<sup>371</sup> One of the most important sets of terms regarding voice is Genette’s division of narrators into three different types: ‘heterodiegetic’, commonly known as a third-person narrator, one who is entirely external to the action of the story; ‘homodiegetic’, a first-person narrator who is not the protagonist of that particular narrative; and ‘autodiegetic’, a first-person narrator who is also the protagonist.<sup>372</sup> This distinction is important, since the narrator’s capacity for knowledge regarding a certain situation and what takes place varies widely, depending on whether the narrator is a witness or participant in events, or is relaying what she or he has been told. Similarly, the mood or focalization of the narrative can also have a strong impact on the amount and type of information that is conveyed to readers. It comes in two different types: external and internal, each of which limits and/or allows access to the character’s thoughts and perceptions.

Equally crucial to the examination of the novel in this chapter is the New Historicist approach. New Historicism, which emphasizes the historical nature of literary texts, locates the novels within the social, political, and aesthetic contexts in which they were produced, and breaks down the distinctions between a text and its historical background as conceived in previous forms of criticism that views work of literature as a self-contained, self-referential aesthetic object. The New Historicist approach is concerned with ‘finding creative power that shapes [these novels] since their significance can be fully grasped only in relation to the other expressive possibilities with which it interacts.’<sup>373</sup> This approach, therefore, enables one to display a broad historical context for analyzing literature and allows for the examination of how the work is a reflection of the times in which the author wrote it, and the socio-political circumstances that might either encourage or hinder writing. By means of this approach, I argue that the texts are not exclusively self-referential but should also be seen in a complex societal context.

In this regard, Massardi’s style and grammatical preference which I briefly mentioned in Chapter 4, were not, I argue, simply a matter of sentence structure commonly used and found in Indonesian texts. Instead, they present a strong indication of a pre-existing serious issue in language use and probable narrative

---

<sup>371</sup> Genette 1980, p. 186.

<sup>372</sup> Prince 1982, p. 103.

<sup>373</sup> Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000, p. 13.

tactic on the part of the author. In connection with state censorship, they can, thus, be regarded as one of the author's own anticipations and forms of preventive censorship. The moment he automatically resorted to using the repetitive passive voice, he was maneuvering with some kind of socially controlled form of speech in order to deal with the issue of agency. Exposing agency under the repressive socio-cultural setting where the novel was produced was considered overly sensitive and might have posed dire repercussions. In this specific case, passive voice operated as a means to stay clear of state censorship, because this sentence structure could distance the actors from their action, to the point that it might have even erased such agency completely (e.g. instead of the active voice clearly stating 'I do something' or 'he did something', the passive voice ambiguously states 'something was done' without clarifying who performed the action). In addition to this grammatical choice, Massardi used a narrative strategy for his novel by choosing an eleven-year-old boy as the narrator-agent, who with all of his innocence, naivety, lack of wisdom or judgement, recounts the tragic tale of the treacherous political situation, conflicts, disappearance, and mass killings.<sup>374</sup> Suggesting such innocence, Massardi's narrator falls under a narratological category of 'unreliable narrator,' as he possessed varying degrees of deceptiveness and/or mistaken beliefs in his own qualities and perceptiveness that diverged from those of the implied author's, all of which might have eventually helped Massardi to avoid state censorship.<sup>375</sup>

My close, critical reading of the rest of the novels shows that such use of narrative strategy and/or language play was not necessarily unique to Massardi, since it was also shared by the other two authors. Ahmad Tohari and Ajip Rosidi, among the few authors who recollected and wrote an account set against the background of the Indonesian killings of 1965-1966 in a light that is somewhat different from what the New Order has prescribed, formulated similar ways of recounting the unspeakable.<sup>376</sup> Tohari, as briefly mentioned in Chapter 4, developed by way of preventive censorship a unique style of narration which he called '*mlipir-mlipir*', which indicates carefulness, constant self-revisions, and simultaneously, direct self-censorship. Being the only author that comes from a culturally rich area in central Java but had never been known for literary expression, Tohari also brought local color into his story (in addition to using the passive voice like Massardi). He filled his first two volumes of the trilogy with extensive cultural references, a narration

---

<sup>374</sup> Narrator-agent is a narrator who is a character in the situations and events recounted, and has some measurable effect in them. See, Ducrot and Todorov 1979.

<sup>375</sup> Booth 1983, pp. 158-159.

<sup>376</sup> In the late 1960s, short stories on 1965 were published in *Horison* and *Sastra*, written by authors such as Satyagraha Hoerip, Gerson Poyk, Usamah, Umar Kayam, Martin Aleida, Ki Panjikusmin. These short stories, however, were written in a uniformed tone that confirm the state narrative of the event — putting the blame solely on the communist, and giving no ample room for them to speak. Throughout the first half of 1970s writing about it was virtually absent. Only in late 1970s and the 1980s, longer works that recognized the mass killings and the violence that followed were written. The recognition, however, was indirect and subtle. Three of the novels are the center of analysis of this chapter.

mixed with Javanese words, and detailed depictions of nature and tradition.<sup>377</sup> The setting was so detailed that Tohari's biggest critic at the time of the publication was a botanist who was also an editor at some wildlife magazine.<sup>378</sup> The most controversial and experimental part of the story came only much later, which suggests an intended delay of language play on the part of the author in order not to become too direct or politically subversive for recounting the tragic event, nor to appear as communist sympathizer to avoid bigger repercussion from the state.

Furthermore, in a rather perplexing way of telling, Tohari alternates between various narrators in the course of telling a story of *Ronggeng Duku Paruk*. Tohari first used the heterodiegetic or all-seeing/third-person narrator and then changed to, and alternated between, a homodiegetic narrator, a first-person narrator who is not the protagonist of the novel, and autodiegetic narrator, a first-person narrator-cum-protagonist. This choice of narrative strategy can be read as not merely a linguistic decision, but as having social and political motivation. In a similar vein, Mangungwijaya's *Durga Umayi* was wrapped in a wayang-style narrative, with complex language, obscure references, and run-away sentences, a mad rush of narrative reflecting and refracting Indonesia's tumultuous history over decades. To add to the complex narrative style, Mangungwijaya tells his story through a protagonist with many names, making it difficult for reader to stay in the storyline.

As for Rosidi, he wrote *Anak Tanahair*, a novel that has distinct autobiographical characteristics, as an attempt to see the 'naked truth with regard to civil society's role in the massacre while simultaneously implying the crucial part of the army in the massacre.'<sup>379</sup> It was 'a realistic historical novel, in part a historical documentary, and peopled by actual historical figures, either under their own names or thinly disguised behind pseudonyms.'<sup>380</sup> To achieve his goal, Rosidi crafted multiple first-person narrators, shifted between them when narrating the first two parts of the novel, and ended the final part by using an epistolary approach, which is a narrative technique that pertains to letters intended to give the reader immediate access to the head of the character/narrator and minimize narratorial mediation. In addition, it becomes one means for the implied author to let go off his authorial responsibility and to detach from his account.

In this light and in connection to my thesis' central question, I argue that the reason that these sensitive-themed novels were published can be tied to the language play and narrative strategies that were molded into a method of preventive censorship which was (in)-directly and subtly applied by these authors. As language can be used to construct events and personages with qualities they do not or did not

---

<sup>377</sup> Setting is defined as the spatiotemporal circumstances in which the events of a narrative occur. Setting may be textually prominent or negligible, consistent or inconsistent, vague or precise, presented objectively or subjectively. Furthermore, it can be utilitarian (every part of it has a function in the action), symbolic (of a conflict to come), and so forth. Chatman 1978; Grimes 1975; Prince 1982.

<sup>378</sup> Floribertus Rahardi, vice chief editor of *Trubus*.

<sup>379</sup> Hoadley 2005, p. 53.

<sup>380</sup> Foulcher 1990, p. 106.

possess, the authors produced or attributed characters that would either challenge or conform to the general narrative that existed during the period of the novels' publication. For example, in order to be able to tell the story of ideologically sinful Srintil, Tohari created a second main character that was almost a paragon, and ascribed to him the personal power of a savior, as he was a member of the army. Such choices proved effective in facilitating publishing.

Complementing these surreptitious techniques aimed at publishing works, I explore the novels in relation to the experimental use of language. For instance, I examine the character's use of vocabulary and passive constructions in order to shift focus from the actors to mere actions, and the author's choice to use an epistolary narrative style. This provides an immediacy that immerses the reader in the character's head, in the character's emotions and psychology, while on another more removed level, allowing the author to wield the power of details, imagery, and other rhetorical devices in 'anticipation of currying reward and avoiding punishment.'<sup>381</sup> These techniques and strategies play with tone, mood, voice, literary and cultural traditions, and rhetoric in subtle and ambiguous ways for both literary and political effects. Before going into the analysis of language play and the historical contexts that situate the novels and the authors in a larger socio-cultural framework, I begin my analysis by providing a summary of each novel in order to show how each story relates to the 1965-66 massacre.

## **Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk**

### **Synopsis**

The trilogy tells the days of mid-1960s Indonesia through a love story between Srintil and Rasus in Paruk, a hamlet in Central Java that struggles to keep up with the changing world as it is drawn into the turbulent situation, following the abortive Communist coup in Indonesia.

The first volume of the trilogy narrates the birth of a *ronggeng*, a traditional dancer that is also often associated with fertility and, thus, prostitution, in a remote Dukuh Paruk, a hamlet of twenty-three houses where everyone was related.<sup>382</sup> For eleven years 'since the time when many inhabitants, including the former *ronggeng*, had died from food poisoning after eating *tempe bongkrek* (fermented soybean cake, or tempeh)' that Srintil parents made and were also killed by, Dukuh Paruk had been a backward, barren, and lifeless land.<sup>383</sup> Upon hearing that Srintil, the main character, who was only eleven years old, was chosen by the *indang* (the dancing spirit) to revive the *ronggeng* tradition, the villagers became delighted and hopeful

---

<sup>381</sup> Lee 1998, pp. 55-73. See also Skjerdal 2008, pp. 185-206.

<sup>382</sup> According to Damono, the first critic to ever comment on the novel, Dukuh Paruk, the setting of the novel, is depicted in such a way that it appears to be a *negeri dongeng*, a fairy land, that Tohari, the author, knows so well — as if Tohari was an inhabitant. Damono, 1983.

<sup>383</sup> Arnez 2017, p. 132.

that the hamlet would be finally be saved from starvation and recuperate its old fame. Equally central to the story was the 14-year-old Rasus, Srintil's fast friend, who was, like Srintil, orphaned due to the *tempe* poisoning. It was in Srintil's self that Rasus found the reflection of a mother he never knew and longed for. The mother image, however, was broken when he realized that he could not have Srintil for himself. In line with the village customs, Srintil was 'not only expected to perform dance and invite men to join in, but also to offer sexual services' to those who dared pay.<sup>384</sup> As Srintil blended into tradition and could not escape it, Rasus turned his back on the village — leaving behind Srintil and the image of the mother. He went to a neighboring town, Dawuan, where he entered military service and eventually became a changed and enlightened man.<sup>385</sup>

The second volume depicts Srintil's disappointment after Rasus left. She became ill and refused to dance anymore, which led to Dukuh Paruk's gradually losing its fame and life again. Until one day, 'prior to the events of 1965, Bakar, an official of PKI, entered her life and persuaded her to perform publicly as a *ronggeng rakyat* (dancer of the people),'<sup>386</sup> replacing the long-established title *ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, in order to garner sympathy for the political party he was linked to. She became more 'political' and appeared even closer to Bakar and his activities — performing more frequently as *ronggeng rakyat* in the PKI general meetings, propaganda events, and parades — gathering crowds and mobilizing people.<sup>387</sup> Furthermore, together with the villagers, she even welcomed the erection of communist flags and symbols at the entrance of Dukuh Paruk. This volume ends with a brief reference to the aborted coup of 1965, the killings of the general, and, subsequently, the imprisonment of Srintil and her troupe members for their political activities. Srintil did not understand the intricacies of politics and in the end was forced to accept reality as a victim of the chaos in life. Her detention became the turning point of an important change in the course of her life as a *ronggeng*.

As an immediate continuation of volume two, volume three begins with the depiction of ruins. In early 1966, Dukuh Paruk was in its worst condition. Houses were burned down and their owners were deprived of their livelihood and their leaders. While the rest of the troupe members were finally released a few months after they were first detained, Srintil remained in a military detention camp in Dawuan. After two years of imprisonment and harassment, Srintil returned to Dukuh Paruk but never recovered from the horrible experience. What is more, her new

---

<sup>384</sup> Arnez 2017, p. 132.

<sup>385</sup> Interview with Ahmad Tohari on August 10, 2017 in Jatilawang, Banyumas. Dawuan, a district in Banyumas, plays a historical significance in Tohari's creative process. Regarding his brief detainment in Jakarta in 1986, the interrogator who finally let him go after a series of questioning at the KOPKAMTIB had the same background. He came from Dawuan. Tohari claimed that the spatial affinity that he and the interrogator had, and the unique linguistic background, had made him spare Tohari's life.

<sup>386</sup> Arnez 2017, p. 132.

<sup>387</sup> General meetings, *rapat umum*, were events regularly organized by the Communist Party to break down and explain the party programs to its constituents. To attract large masses, these meetings often included art performances. See Aidit 1955.

status as a former political prisoner rooted out the dignity and humanity she ever had, leaving her forever ostracized and under constant threat. Then Rasus reappeared on the scene — ending the novel with the return of the military man-cum-savior to Dukuh Paruk to save both Srintil and Dukuh Paruk.

## Analysis

When writing *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, Tohari was motivated by two things: (a) the ghost of the young woman whom he personally knew, an alleged communist who was harassed, abused, silenced, and left to suffer until her demise, and (b) the fear of censorship that has left many Indonesians in the dark about the mass killings.<sup>388</sup> In the New Historicism, the context of a literary work and the details that surround it help determine the ultimate meaning of the text. What lies on the outside is of equal importance to the words on the page. In this light, Tohari's encounter in his teenage years with a *ronggeng* he would not dare to name (except for giving her initial, B) became the pivotal point from which the story of *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* was developed, combined with other materials that existed in the social realities of the author, which he incorporated in his creative works and manifested as a network of relation between facts and fiction.<sup>389</sup> Here, in line with the New Historicist approach which is concerned 'with finding the creative power that shapes literary work since its significance can be fully grasped only in relation to the other expressive possibilities with which it interacts,' *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* does not exist in a vacuum, but instead interacts within a historically and culturally specific context.<sup>390</sup> It speaks about and on behalf of 'B' together with all the historical and sociopolitical events that surrounded her, including the repressive nature, i.e. rampant censorship, under which the story was produced.<sup>391</sup>

Looking back at the creative process, Tohari called the writing of *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* as pouring into writing an accumulation of memory. He was seventeen when the coup broke out and the massive violent aftermath followed. Despite its prevalence — known by many but spoken only in silence, Tohari was aggravated by the absence of written accounts from authors whom he thought would bring about better and more comprehensive writings about the tragedy, such as Goenawan Mohamad, Rosihan Anwar, and Mochtar Lubis. He thought that it would have been a great mistake if this tragedy had never been recorded in Indonesian history. After a

---

<sup>388</sup> Interview with Ahmad Tohari on August 10, 2017 in Jatilawang, Banyumas. See also Riyanto 2006, p. 46.

<sup>389</sup> *Ronggeng* is Javanese traditional (erotic) dancer-singer performing for money. The fact that *ronggeng* sometimes offered sexual services fosters the image of *ronggeng* as prostitutes. See Ahmad Tohari. 1987. *Aku Hamil Mengandung Srintil*. Unpublished paper presented in 1987 in a seminar organized by Ikatan Keluarga Sastra Indonesia in Rawamangun, Faculty of Arts, University of Indonesia, Jakarta Personal document. Also, "The novel came from my own experience when I was a teenager. I changed the name; but she was definitely the *ronggeng* that I portrayed in the novel — detained and harassed by the military that run the prison." Interview on August 10, 2017.

<sup>390</sup> Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000, p. 13.

<sup>391</sup> Tohari 1987.



little waiting of more than a decade and seeing that no single Indonesian influential author would write about it, Tohari took matters into his own hand. “If not me, then who?” is the rhetorical question that he returns to when asked about his decision to write.<sup>392</sup> He then left his job as chief editor in *Harian Merdeka* in Jakarta and went back to Banyumas, his hometown in Central Java, the very place where he witnessed all the atrocities, to start writing about the haunting memories. He attempted to give meaning to his personal experiences. Even if his story failed to inform on the factual elements of historical events, it would still shed light on the prevailing ways of thinking or doing at that specific period.

Equally important to addressing dark pages of the past that were swept under the rug by the New Order regime, the writing of *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* also worked as a treatment for the trauma that Tohari had been suffering from for years since he witnessed the mass killings. Tohari analogized the feeling of having completed the book with the feeling of a mother who just gave birth — exhausted but relieved.<sup>393</sup> In this regard, he looked at history not as an explanation of events that happened in the past, but instead as a complex description of human reality.

Tohari gave B a new name, completed her story in 1980, and introduced her to Indonesian readers first through a serial in *Kompas* and, later, in novel form published by Gramedia in 1982. After its first publication, *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, consisting of three volumes *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk: Catatan buat Emak* (1981), *Lintang Kemukus Dini Hari* (1984), and *Jantera Bianglala* (1985) was reprinted twice, in 1986 and 1988 — an indication that, according to Indonesian publishing standards at the time, it had a relatively large readership. Such readership was also evident in the number of translations of the trilogy into English, Dutch, and Japanese immediately after the original versions came out. The appearance of *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* on the cultural landscape strengthened the presence of local color in Indonesian fiction, and reflected the popularity of literary works that engaged with political history.<sup>394</sup>

In *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, Tohari kept the story very simple and told it in chronological order. As a novel, the first volume could stand alone as a complete story. It is a novel about unrequited love, which was a common theme that appeared in Indonesian popular novels of the 1970s and 1980s. Alternatively, it could also be read as a novel about a character with a mother complex, as the protagonist’s preferences were based on the actions and personality of his mother projected in his female counterpart. However, the novel was the first of a series, and Tohari used it as an opening to the second novel in which he signaled the beginning of a humanitarian disaster, and to the third novel in which he elaborated on the dark pages of Indonesian history that were almost always overlooked in writing published at the time — hence, its rather sensitive nature.

---

<sup>392</sup> Riyanto 2006, p. 42.

<sup>393</sup> Tohari 1987.

<sup>394</sup> Riyanto 2006, p. 13; Yudiono 2003, p. 8.

This first volume begins with a lengthy description of natural landscapes of a remote hamlet surrounded by fields and paddy that have been dry for seven months due to prolonged drought. With the closest residential areas, the hamlet is only connected by a network of dikes that are almost two kilometers long. In addition, a detailed description was also given to the tomb of Ki Secamenggala, which was located on a small ridge in the middle of the hamlet, considered sacred and the mecca of the mystical life of all its citizens which also insinuates the village's isolation from both knowledge and modernity. Such isolation, however, led Dukuh Paruk to develop its own value system, created and maintained by its people. While one may feel that this lengthy description of the setting and use of stylistic tools with constant reference to local languages, in particular Javanese, were rather tedious, these were the tools Tohari used to safely gain readership and were actually in accordance with Tohari's intended lack of assertion to avoid being too obvious in presenting a grim theme that had never been written about. As Tohari himself described, this is a practice of *mlipir-mlipir*, where he tiptoed on the periphery before he finally would mount a protest against the injustice that the government had directed towards its citizens without having to directly challenge the regime or draw too much attention.<sup>395</sup>

Furthermore, Dukuh Paruk became a favorable setting for Tohari to work on the plot and characters. Tohari, the implied author who also acted as the narrator, did very well in the first part of the four sections of the novel as he narrated the story in simple language, with most sentences presented in bite-size chunks. And as a means to tell the story, Tohari seemed to have worked consciously with shifting narrators through whom perspectives and narratives were oriented.<sup>396</sup> In the first chapter of the first volume, the narrator is omniscient and was not involved directly in the story as a character. This was intended to take the readers by the hand as he 'gave the floor to his character,' introduced the main characters, Srintil and Rasus, and dove deeper into or played with their characterizations.<sup>397</sup> Portraying Srintil and Rasus, as eleven and fourteen-year olds, respectively, Tohari highlighted his characters' flaws in judgment regarding events taking place around them and simultaneously took advantage of their unreliability in narrating such events. In narratology, an unreliable narrator, like Rasus, is defined as a narrator 'whose norms and behavior are not in accordance with the implied author's norm; a narrator whose values (tastes, judgments, and moral sense) diverge from those of the implied author's.'<sup>398</sup> In this case, this in itself can be interpreted as a literary disclaimer on the part of the author, which insinuates that the author gives up his claim to the information given in the novel, or that the author has no direct involvement in it.

After breaking down the setting and introducing the characters in the first 43-page long chapter, Tohari abruptly switched his narrator. Shifting from the implied

---

<sup>395</sup> Interview with Ahmad Tohari on August 10, 2017 in Jatilawang, Banyumas.

<sup>396</sup> Genette 1980, p. 186.

<sup>397</sup> Genette 1980, p. 172.

<sup>398</sup> Prince 1982, p. 103.

author or the all-knowing narrator, Tohari now let Rasus, who is also the main character, recount the story of Srintil, the tradition that his village held, his love for Srintil, his longing for his mother's image, and the projection that he sees in Srintil, as well as his disappointment in the traditions that his village held. From the second chapter to its final part of the first volume, Rasus took charge and recounted the situations and events in his very own limited perspective as both a first-person narrator and a fourteen year old infatuated with Srintil.

In the second volume, after Rasus left Dukuh Paruk, the narrative technique shifted back to the all-knowing narrator. In this volume, Srintil claims her narrative position as the main character. Throughout the novel, she is portrayed as the most beautiful woman in Dukuh Paruk, gaining great attention from all its residents. Wealthy and respected men were coming from neighboring villages, willing to pay dearly to vent their lust. Despite great fortune, Srintil was conflicted, particularly because Rasus' departure led to a change in Srintil's characterization — from longing, to being disappointed, to getting duped by the communists, and eventually, imprisoned and harassed by people or the army without due process.

The change in her characterization, however, was unusually crafted by the author. Throughout the first 180 of the total 209 pages, readers were simply taken by the hand to explore the life of a *ronggeng*, her sexuality, vivid sensuality, and lewd description.<sup>399</sup> There was no mentioning of communist ideas or neither sympathies, nor was there an implied challenge to the state via a narrative that deviates from what was agreed upon by the society about what happened in 1965, such as the involvement of the army or the police in the massacre. The event that connects the *ronggeng*'s story to the communists and their massacres, imprisonment, and ostracism only appeared very suddenly in the final chapter of the volume, where Bakar entered the scene and persuaded Srintil to participate in his party activities. This almost makes the second volume of the *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* trilogy work similarly to the first volume, with its unusually long introduction. However, in this final part, Tohari eventually arrived at the beginning of his true narrative goal.

After a long walk of *mlipir-mlipir*, in the final pages of this volume, Tohari mentioned historical aspects that were never known before or had been kept in silence until the publication of this novel. He explicitly mentioned the police commander and the military, their involvement in arresting Srintil and the people associated with the Communist Party, and most importantly, the lists of names that they kept. In doing so, Tohari did not complicate the narrative style nor resort to complex grammatical structure. It did not, for example, follow the passive structure in order to eliminate or disguise agency. The sentences simply read:

---

<sup>399</sup> This is remarkably because if we refer to the list of books that were banned or criteria for this issued by the Attorney General Office in Jakarta (see Chapter 3), the first two volumes of *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* should be subjected to censorship or even ban as it could easily be considered pornographic or promote underage sex/prostitution.

‘The police commander stood up and went into another room, followed by the military officer. The two armed men spoke.

‘[Your name] is on a list of people we are required to arrest. This is a command from our superiors, and I must carry out my duty.’<sup>400</sup>

Like the two previous volumes, the third opens with extensive and meticulous descriptions of natural landscapes, which again form a narrative strategy in itself as they probably create readerly boredom or textual deviation from the true message that the author tried to get across. In fact, the burning of Paruk, which bridges the second and the third volume, was described as ‘a just fate’ (*bagiannya yang sah*) by the ‘*Sang Mahasutradara* (Great Director –God), who had a taste for playing out His game in this universe, and whom Paruk had ignored.’<sup>401</sup> It was never clearly thought of or portrayed in the novel as a direct consequence of the village’s political involvement. Furthermore, the third-person narrator juxtaposes the burning of Paruk with the numerous cases of ‘food poisoning, inescapable destitution, and perpetual ignorance,’ suggesting the political retaliation as something that is natural, and beyond human control.<sup>402</sup> In this regard, the perpetrators were dismissed from the narrative as events were depicted as something that just ‘happened’ and did not require human agency.

This strategy, however, did not seem to belong entirely to the author. In the first editions, volume two (1984) and three (1985) are not as well connected as volume one (1981) and two (1984). However, if one reads the original manuscript as it also appeared in the much later edition which was published after the collapse of the New Order regime (2003), the imprisonment of Srintil and her fellow villagers that was portrayed in the final part of volume two flows rather smoothly. The mentioning of the ‘police commander’ and the ‘military officer’ (even though depicted in general functional terms) who kept the list of people they were ordered to arrest which basically ends volume two was bridged properly as it was followed by an entire portion detailing the military involvement in the political event of 1965 and the killings that followed in volume three. In the original manuscript, volume three opens with a clear mentioning of suspected perpetrators of the terrible things that befell Srintil and Dukuh Paruk, instead of resorting to repetitive lengthy descriptions of the setting. In the original manuscript, the very first page of the volume reads:

‘More than six months of oppressive darkness. Apart from security personnel such as the police, the armed forces, or paramilitary officials, nobody ventured outside after the sun sank beneath the horizon. Sounds of occasional gunfire sporadically echoed in the distance. Every so often, there was the roar of an arriving or departing truck followed by heavy steps of booted feet.’<sup>403</sup>

---

<sup>400</sup> Tohari 1985, pp. 203-204.

<sup>401</sup> Tohari 1985, p. 207.

<sup>402</sup> Tohari 1986, p. 7.

<sup>403</sup> Tohari 2003, p. 247.

From this description, Tohari dismissed his act of *mlipir-mlipir* and directly linked the events that took place in the closing of volume two — creating an uninterrupted narrative flow. In the passage above, Tohari's common strategy of narrative delay and the extensive descriptions of the setting were absent. In fact, he even directly attributed the fall of Dukuh Paruk to the actors that he mentioned above.

Furthermore, in the sentences that follow, Tohari accused them of having committed the killings.

‘The nights were often shattered by the howls of roaming wild dogs inflamed by the smell of blood and rotting flesh. Corpses, by the hundreds, drifted lazily down the rivers and streams. Hundreds more were buried in shallow mass graves, others left lying in open fields.’<sup>404</sup>

In addition to the killings, the dehumanizing act committed by the military was also evident in the following passage which portrays the dire condition in prison camps.

‘The walled house was an emergency prison camp, holding almost two hundred people, many of them women. Because of the extremely limited space, the prisoners had to remain standing, packed together like bundled kindling wood. The air reeked of the stench of humankind. Sweat. The floor was slimy with urine and shit.’<sup>405</sup>

The walls had turned moist with condensation from sweat and humidity. Despite these appalling conditions, several of the women, no longer having the strength to stand, sat on the floor leaning against the wall with their legs folded up as tightly as possible.

‘There was little communication among the two hundred prisoners, only occasional soft whispering and the momentary exchange of glances. Some of the prisoners remained awake, while others dozed off even as they stood, no longer able to withstand the physical exhaustion and lack of sleep. In those eyes that were still open were inscribed images and entire stories of the collapse and destruction of human dignity. The eyes winced in unison at the sound of gunfire in the distance. What were they thinking? Perhaps they thought that the gunfire was the source of power representing the authority that now shackled them. And if every gunshot was being aimed at a particular human target, who would be the next one to fall headlong with his chest or head shattered by a piercing bullet? The eyes squeezed shut.’<sup>406</sup>

I would argue that if these passages had been printed in 1986, the Attorney General would have had more than enough reason to issue a decree to ban *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, as it not only insinuated the role of the state, c.q. military in the killings but

---

<sup>404</sup> Tohari 2003, p. 247.

<sup>405</sup> Tohari 2003, p. 272.

<sup>406</sup> Tohari 2003, p. 272.

also posed a challenge against the state for promoting a ‘false’ narrative about the events. In this regard, the decision to delete these entire passages and to re-package the final volume with a narrative that is similar to the first two volumes, which are filled with lengthy plots and rather unstable narration through ever-changing and complicated perspectives, had made the narrative become less attractive or disruptive in the eyes of the censors.

## **Mencoba Tidak Menyerah**

### **Synopsis**

*Mencoba Tidak Menyerah* opens with the first-person narrator — who becomes the main character — overwhelmed with extreme anxiety in his search for his father, who had been disappeared. It flashes back to the recent past to provide information about the narrator, his father, and the entire family. The narrator comes from a hardworking family; the mother is an astute businesswoman who runs small ventures like a local food stall, while the father is a successful, hard-working entrepreneur, running a bicycle repair shop. He also works organizing a cooperative that distributes basic needs for the villagers and sells the two left-wing newspapers. The narrator and his brothers were also taught to be self-reliant, helping in the repair shop and to sell the newspapers (*loper koran*) to make extra money.

The year 1965 was a turning point for the first-person narrator. The ‘I’ narrates that the communists mercilessly butchered six army generals. Prior to that, the narrator witnessed mass mobilizations of organizations from the left and the nationalists, as well as the Muslim groups. They were all involved in violent fights against each other during the commemoration of Independence Day. After the aborted coup, homes of the alleged communists were burned down, while the owners were rounded up and taken to the Kodim (military bases), before they were finally tortured, beheaded, and thrown into the river. The ‘I’ then became known as ‘*anak PKI*’ (the son of a communist), his house was burned down, and his father was detained in a nearby military base under the accusation that he was a communist. This accusation was foreshadowed in the novel by the references to the two daily newspapers that his father sold, and the distribution of basic needs to members of the cooperative that he ran. After his father’s arrest, the ‘I’ becomes the breadwinner for the family. He works for a Chinese family doing house chores; sells newspapers; and even re-opens the repair shop. He finds solace in visiting his father, who was then imprisoned and transferred from one military base to another. His affection for his father grew stronger over time to the point that he considered his father to be Old Shatterhand, while he himself was a crybaby Winnetou. But one day, his father could no longer be found anywhere — not in the military base, nor in the nearest forest, nor in the rivers. He had disappeared.

## Analysis

As I have hinted in the opening of this chapter, *Mencoba Tidak Menyerah* (1979), originally *Aku Bukan Komunis*, began as Massardi's attempt to prove his worth to condescending Indonesian literary judges and critics. When in 1977 he won the DKJ award for his poem anthology *Sikat Gigi*, other winners, namely Sutardji Calzoum Bahri and Abdul Hadi, both of whom were already literary giants, disparaged Massardi as un-literary,<sup>407</sup> and said he did not deserve to be put on the same level as they were. Furthermore, critics and prominent authors and poets also belittled him as a writer of 'pop' quality, typically bringing forth works that were lighthearted, witty, and sarcastic, the quality of which was evident in his *Arjuna Mencari Cinta* (*Arjuna in Search of Love*, 1977), *Obladi Oblada* (1979), *Wot atawa Jembatan* (*Wot or a Bridge*, a play, 1977), and *Ke* (*Towards*).<sup>408</sup> Through these works, he was accused of bringing the mundane into literature and using language that was too easy to understand, which was why, according to another critic, Massardi was of a different standard, and belonged in a lesser category. Worse, Taufik Ikram Jamil, a Riau-born literary critic, equated Massardi's work to *dodol*, cheap sticky often tasteless rice cake.<sup>409</sup> Yudhistira took such accusations lightly. In fact, he responded by internalizing the accusation and calling his works as '*sastra dangdut*', a disparaging genre that he intentionally coined himself to refer to literary works that connect to readers with low taste in literature, just like *dangdut* was considered as music that belonged to the people with low taste in music. But, like that genre in popular music, Massardi's *sastra dangdut* had enabled him to establish a reputation in the Indonesian literary scene as it reached and communicated with a larger number of readers, including important figures such as Ramadan Karta Hadimadja, Soeharto's biographer, and Goenawan Mohamad, both of whom praised Massardi for his *Arjuna Mencari Cinta*, his very own novel that had also introduced him to Daoed Joesoef, Suharto's Minister of Education and Culture, who personally handed over the prize that Massardi won.<sup>410</sup>

However, even though Massardi took the disparaging comments half-heartedly, he still felt overwhelmed by a tension between maintaining his supposed lack of literary seriousness and proving the literary rulers and critics wrong. This time he opted for the latter, and began writing *Mencoba Tidak Menyerah*, which revisited and recounted the haunting memories of some of the darkest pages of

---

<sup>407</sup> "Mana bisa Yudhistira disejajarkan dengan Sitor Situmorang, Sutardji, Abdul Hadi, dan yang besar-besar itu?" (How can Yudhistira be put on the same level as Sitor Situmorang, Sutardji, Abdul Hadi, and those giants?). See *Horison* Mei 1978 No. 5 Tahun XIII, p. 135.

<sup>408</sup> See Scherer 1981. *Arjuna Mencari Cinta* came out as the winner of best fiction by Yayasan Buku Utama, while both of his plays, *WOT atawa Jembatan* and *Ke*, won prizes from the Jakarta Arts Council. See, blurb *Mencoba Tidak Menyerah* (1979).

<sup>409</sup> See Jamil 1985, *Antara Menjual Sastra dan Dodol*. See <https://dapobas.kemdikbud.go.id/home?show=isidata&id=48>.

<sup>410</sup> Ramadan Karta Hadimadja, popularly known Ramadhan K.H. and Goenawan Mohamad wrote personal reviews for Massardi's *Arjuna Mencari Cinta* that was innocent, iconoclastic, and anti-establishment. Private collection of Yudhistira Massardi.

contemporary Indonesian history. According to him, writing about a topic that was considered serious and extremely sensitive at the time and basing its intrinsic narrative elements on events that happened to and around him would be the easiest way to start writing a story in a very organized (*tertib*) language that paid attention to the then literary convention that the literary giants had been safeguarding.<sup>411</sup>

*Mencoba Tidak Menyerah* reflects the turbulent period as its historical context. But most intriguing is the fact that the plot, the characters, setting, and all intrinsic elements of the novels reflect the actual life of the author when he was 11 years old, making it work like ‘a historical documentary, full of autobiographical elements, and peopled by actual figures.’<sup>412</sup> Massardi claimed that the similarities in plot, characters, setting were intentional — not because it was meant to be autobiographical, but because it was easier for him to write a serious novel without having to craft new intrinsic elements for the novel.<sup>413</sup> A complication in the motive, however, surfaced when Noorca Marendra, Massardi’s twin brother, a playwright, a novelist, and a poet in his own right, revealed that *Mencoba Tidak Menyerah* really is autobiographical and Yudhistira’s attempt to revisit his troubled childhood after the disappearance of the father.<sup>414</sup> Through this documentary writing, Yudhistira tried to come close to expressing the dismal sensation which his horrendous and painful experiences produced. *Mencoba Tidak Menyerah* is ultimately tied to its creator more than to its audience.

In revisiting and recounting the haunting memories of the dark pages of Indonesian history, particularly in relation to his own father’s disappearance, Massardi chose a different approach than that of Tohari. While it took three books for Tohari to finally speak subtly about the disappearances, imprisonment, and mass killings of 1965-1966, Massardi opens his novel with his narrator-cum-main character’s fear for not knowing how to bring back his father, who was recently disappeared. The father had worked as a distributor for the two left-wing dailies, *Harian Rakyat* and *Warta Bhakti* — hence, his disappearance. Massardi tells his story straightforwardly and jams the first few chapters with portrayals of the violent events that followed the aborted coup of 1965. The vivid description is most evident in the final pages of Chapter 2, which reads:

‘Buildings were razed to the ground, and the workers were rounded up and taken to the KODIM (military district command), after having been severely battered...

Days and nights, they were ransacking villages. Looting the houses owned by suspected communists. And burned them down...

---

<sup>411</sup> Online conversation with Yudhistira Massardi on March 27, 2019.

<sup>412</sup> Foulcher 1990, p. 106; Moriyama 2017, p. 152.

<sup>413</sup> Interview with Yudhistira Massardi on July 22, 2017 in Pekayon, Bekasi.

<sup>414</sup> Personal email correspondence with Noorca M. Massardi on July 22, 2017.



The communists were annihilated to their roots, each and every one of them; both party officials and unsuspecting sympathizers, [most of whom were] farmers, plantation workers, women, the underprivileged.... Or wives of members of BTI were rounded up, so were husbands of members of Gerwani....

October was the month of retaliations.... People who tried to run were captured and beheaded on site. Their bodies were tossed into the river. Fear was so extreme that it caused some other alleged communists to take their own lives.

Within days, rivers turned red. Filled with human carcasses, decapitated heads, rotting limbs, and whatnot...<sup>415</sup>

Since the aborted coup took place to the time of the publication of this novel, these kinds of descriptions of the aftermath of the coup could only appear in scholarly accounts written by mostly Western scholars (see my discussion on the Indonesian killings in Chapter 2). Horace Sutton, for example, reported in the *Saturday Review* on February 4, 1967 about the extensive killings — so extensive that often there was neither time nor inclination to bury the dead. The bodies were then tossed into rivers, hundreds, perhaps thousands of corpses floated with the currents, winding through the landscape past villages, so many of them that the waters turned red, and mutilated and decomposing bodies collected and accumulated at certain passages and bends in the rivers.<sup>416</sup>

In that regard, such descriptions were almost certainly absent from any research pieces or accounts that were written in Indonesia by Indonesians during the New Order period. To write like that, especially clearly mentioning KODIM which implicated military involvement in the Indonesian massacre, would immediately be considered a direct challenge to the already widespread state narrative — even the slightest sympathy for the dead would be faced with dire consequences. As I described in Chapter 2, the widely accepted narrative about 1965 in Indonesia under the Suharto regime centered exclusively on the tragic killings of the army generals which were blamed solely on the PKI. The extrajudicial killings of suspected communists by the military-backed mobs, their imprisonment and ostracism were never publicly discussed or researched — they were told only in silence.

Furthermore, besides describing the aftermath, before going into details of the massacre together with its portrayal of the angry mobs and the military behind them, the first-person narrator, the ‘I’, expressed great admiration for Sukarno, whose historical presence and importance in the Indonesian socio-political realm were reduced and downplayed by the New Order regime via the de-Soekarnoisasi (de-

---

<sup>415</sup> Massardi 1979, pp. 24-26.

<sup>416</sup> *Saturday Review*, February 4, 1967, p. 29.

Sukarnozation) campaign. However, as if intentionally challenging the regime, Massardi through his narrator openly praised Sukarno.<sup>417</sup>

‘I don’t know any right person who would be able to replace his position as president. And I doubt if anyone can match Bung Karno’s greatness. Is there anyone, really, who is as ‘*sakti*’ and great as Bung Karno?’

The rhetorical question above was cynical or sarcastic in nature as it clearly made a direct comparison between Sukarno the Sakti and his unworthy successor, Suharto, who by the time this story was run as a serial (1978) had just entered his third term in power. As if the intentional taunt was not direct enough, the first-person narrator continued with mockery towards the military.

‘No, I don’t want to become a soldier. I want to be smart. So, when the friends of my father or anyone else asked what I want to be when I grow up, I always answered, ‘*Insinyur*’ (engineer).’<sup>418</sup>

That derision, which can alternatively be read as a direct insult to the profession, and the intelligence of average military personnel, did not even wait until the middle or final part of the novel. Massardi, the author, did not seem to care about narrative delay or the *mlipir-mlipir* strategy that Tohari employed in his *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*. He presented the insult in a very blunt and immediate manner. It appears in the novel in the sixth paragraph of the first chapter, which made it almost impossible for any reader or other unwitting censors to overlook.

While being direct, however, Massardi’s attempt to break the silence about the killings was also nuanced with narrative elements which could possibly ensure the success of his storytelling. In the novel, Massardi via the eleven-year-old boy narrator never specifically named a person. Like Tohari in *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, Massardi used rather general functional terms, such as *tentara* or KODIM, which were also often rendered invisible, or implicit, by his constant use of passive voice, for example:

‘The communists were crushed to their roots, both big political figures and sympathizers.’<sup>419</sup>

Due to such passive constructions found throughout the 164 page novel, agency is often missing; and perpetrators, therefore, could not easily be traced.

In addition to strategic grammatical use, the first-person narrator was also portrayed to show extreme empathy to General Nasution, the right-wing general who

---

<sup>417</sup> De-Soekarnoisasi campaign was intended by Suharto to defame Indonesia’s first president and diminish his presence in Indonesian history, see Feith 1968, pp. 88-105. Also Winarno 2013; Kusuma and Elson, 2011, pp. 196-209.

<sup>418</sup> Massardi 1979, p. 8.

<sup>419</sup> Massardi 1979, p. 25.

was one of the seven main targets of assassination by the communists. The fact that Nasution managed to escape the assassination attempt by the G30S was briefly glorified in the novel especially when the first-person narrator described him associating with the General and pointed his opposition to the G30S. In addition, he also expressed his condolences to the passing of the General's daughter after she was brutally shot by the communists.

'The news about General Nasution's safety is also a relief. But I was deeply saddened by the fact that his daughter, Ade Irma Nasution who had fallen a victim to the cruelty of the communists. The little girl was shot in a cruel and inhuman way. But I am certain that she will go to heaven. How she will be happy there, meeting the angels, and walking alongside the kind god.'<sup>420</sup>

In doing so, the narrator 'I', set a clear boundary and simultaneously informed the readers which side he was on. He even made it clear in a statement in later pages that he was not affiliated with the communists.

'Who did they call a son of PKI? Does that mean my parents are PKI? Preposterous. I don't believe it.'<sup>421</sup>

Furthermore, to gain narrative reliability, the narrator attributed to himself a high moral virtue which contrasted with what the communists upheld, or were generally assumed to hold under the New Order Indonesia. He described himself as a pious Muslim who often stayed and even slept in the '*Rumah Tuhan*' (literally the House of God, a reference to the mosque) and therefore established an intimate relationship with God.<sup>422</sup>

All the while, he simultaneously characterized the communists as evil and ungodly, and therefore worthy of God's wrath and eternal punishment.

'When their parade passed the great mosque in our town, where I often prayed and made call of prayer, their shouting became more intense. They even brandished their fists and showed their butts towards the mosque. They exclaimed, "God is dead! God is dead! I got goosebumps and was horrified. They were bound for the burning hell of which flames, according to my religious teacher, were a thousand times hotter than earthly fire.'

Such portrayal shows the tension and narrative complexities that *Mencoba Tidak Menyerah* possesses. In his attempt to recount the unspeakable historical truth together with the events that led to and resulted from it, Massardi could not entirely challenge the state's view without simultaneously conforming to the state's narrative on the subject matter. In other words, in order to break down and bring into public

---

<sup>420</sup> Massardi 1979, p. 25.

<sup>421</sup> Massardi 1979, p. 29.

<sup>422</sup> Massardi 1979, p. 28.

discussion the mass killings, the imprisonment, and the ostracism of the alleged communists, Massardi had to partially surrender to the dominant narrative and agree to attach bad attributes to the communists — if not significantly dehumanizing them. Even prior to the disappearance of his father, the soldier who came to his house to arrest the father was portrayed as a savior instead of a symbol of state oppression. The soldier told the narrator that the reason he took his father to the KODIM was in order to remain safe and avoid bad things happening to him — ‘*Supaya aman dan terhindar dari kejadian-kejadian yang tak diharapkan.*’<sup>423</sup>

Eventually, all this may have had a similar effect as the extreme delay, massive deletion, and re-packaging of the final volume of Tohari’s novel and caused Massardi’s *Mencoba Tidak Menyerah* to be overlooked by the censors, especially since a large portion of the narrative was in accordance with the New Order orthodoxy.

## **Anak Tanahair: Secercah Kisah**

### **Synopsis**

*Anak Tanahair* consists of three parts: (a) ‘*Kilasan-kilasan*’ (*Flashes*), which narrates the story of the main character, Ardi, during his school days in the early 1950s; (b) ‘*Helai-helai Kehidupan*’ (*Pages from Life*) which elaborates further development of Ardi, who now as a painter becomes accidentally involved with the left-wing cultural arm (LEKRA); and (c) ‘*Surat-surat Dini Hari*’ (*Letters from Early Morning*), an epistolary story (told through letters) from the other main character, Hasan. Rosidi’s deserved reputation as one of Indonesia’s most prominent authors is evident in the three narrative voices that develop the plot, respectively.

The novel begins with Ardi accepting the offer from his uncle, Abdulmanan, to come with him to Jakarta and pursue an education there. The plot of the novel develops from this very event. Ardi was happy to go. But once he arrived in Jakarta, Ardi was shocked upon seeing his uncle’s house, which was located in a slum — a small non-permanent hut that was also occupied by three other people. Despite the condition, Abdulmanan was determined to send Ardi to school, where Ardi would eventually cultivate a new interest in arts and began drawing sketches. After finishing school, Ardi became involved in youth groups concerned with the development of national arts, politics, and the tumultuous conditions that became very prevalent during the period. This concludes the first part of the novel. The narration now shifts. Ardi, the protagonist, now narrates the story from his own perspective.

As Ardi became even more established as an artist, he engaged more intensively in youth organizations. He moves out of his uncle's house and shares a room with his new activist friend, Ahmad. During his stay with Ahmad, Ardi was

---

<sup>423</sup> Massardi 1979, p. 75.

introduced to Hermin, with whom Ardi established a romantic relationship. He also befriended a communist activist, Suryo, who persuaded him to sign a document in support of *Konsepsi Presiden*, which signaled President Sukarno's turn to authoritarianism. Ardi believed it was simply a token of support for the president without any political consequences. But he was wrong, as he discovered that his signature meant that now he belonged to the Communist Party, which ended his friendship and relationship with Ahmad and Hermin. They both argued that Ardi was completely unaware of the kind of harm that he risked for himself when he joined the communist organization. To make matters worse, the magazine, where he was sending his sketches to earn a living, started to reject Ardi's work. But Suryo remained by his side. He designed and funded a solo exhibition for Ardi. The exhibition proved a success. Positive reviews and praises appeared in left-wing media. He was sent on several trips overseas as representative of the Communist Party.

On a trip overseas, Ardi ran into Hasan, his old painter friend. In this chance meeting shortly before the mass killings started, Hasan told Ardi that he despised politics and said that art was bigger than politics. He, too, warned Ardi that PKI was a dangerous establishment that took advantage of innocent people like Ardi. Because of Hasan, Ardi finally came into an understanding that he had been wrong. He decided to resign from LEKRA and PKI. But, when the attempted coup broke out, Ardi fled to Central Java, and was never heard from again, which gives the reader the impression that he was killed.

## Analysis

In contrast to Tohari and Massardi, who in the 1970s and 1980s were still relatively new to the Indonesian literary scene, Ajip Rosidi had long been celebrated as an established author. He was equipped with both (a) means of literary production as he owned his own publishing house and had run at least two literary magazines, i.e. *Suluh Pelajar* (*Student Torch*, 1953-1952) and *Mingguan Sunda* (*Sundanese Weekly*); and (b) extensive networks of artists, poets, and authors from both extremes (LEKRA and Manikebu), as well as endorsement from political patrons. As a matter of fact, he was also one of the literary 'gurus' that Massardi was trying to prove his worth to with the writing of his award-winning *Aku Bukan Komunis* or *Mencoba Tidak Menyerah* in 1977.

Born on January 31, 1938 in Jatiwangi, West Java, Rosidi started his literary career at the age of fourteen (1952). His early works in two languages (Sundanese and Indonesian) appeared in numerous magazines such as *Mimbar Indonesia*, *Zenith*, *Gelanggang*, *Konfrontasi*, and *Indonesia*.<sup>424</sup> From 1955 to the first half of the 1980s, Rosidi published at least one book a year, making him the most prolific author in Indonesia. These works were later translated into many languages, namely, Dutch,

---

<sup>424</sup> See <https://web.archive.org/web/20120425235717/http://indonesiabuku.com/?p=6158/>.

Chinese, English, and Japanese. In addition to being very prolific, Rosidi also built ties with Ali Sadikin, the governor of Jakarta, who in 1968 singlehandedly welcomed Rosidi's initiative to establish the Jakarta Arts Council (DKJ) as a part of the state's cultural campaign, which Rosidi himself chaired for three consecutive periods from 1972-1981. While chairing the DKJ, Rosidi also held a position as the chairperson for the IKAPI from 1973 to 1979. In the IKAPI, he was closely connected to, or even considered as the very right hand of army General Ali Moertopo, one of Suharto's closest aides, who Suharto consulted regularly for advice and the Minister of Information in Suharto's Third Development Cabinet (1978).<sup>425</sup> Furthermore, Rosidi was summoned regularly to Suharto's office in Binagraha to discuss matters on literacy and cultural development with President Suharto himself.<sup>426</sup>

Despite a head start in the publishing industry, his own literary privilege, and close connections with national political figures, Rosidi suffered from an acute inability to articulate his life experience in writing, especially in regard to 1965 and its aftermath — the topic which he claimed had been racing in his mind and disturbing his life for many years ('...*sudah bertahun-tahun mengganggu kepalaku*').<sup>427</sup> He was capable of writing down a few first pages about the topic only when he distanced himself from Indonesia. In November 1980, he was appointed a visiting scholar in Iwakura, Kyoto. It was there and during this year that he began writing a small portion of his story about 1965. However, shortly afterward, the writing, again, came to another halt. Only after three years of postponement, when he moved to Osaka Gaidai, another university in the neighboring city, Osaka, in August 1983, did he manage to finish a 300-page manuscript in a final burst of writing — incredibly, in just one week.<sup>428</sup> In that completed manuscript, which he called *Anak Tanahair*, Rosidi examined the anti-communist political pressure which he personally witnessed, experienced, or was impacted by.

In his attempt to recount historical events that directly affected the life of the individuals, he followed Massardi's and Tohari's train of thought and conformed to the generic view of the 1965 tragedy in order to clarify his own political and literary position. In 1979-1980, a rumor resurfaced and circulated among literary circles and in the publishing industry, accusing Rosidi of being a staunch supporter and member of LEKRA. The original accusation first came out six years earlier when Yahaya Ismail, Rosidi's contemporary, in 1972 mentioned Rosidi's direct affiliation with

---

<sup>425</sup> In a conversation with Asrul Sani, Indonesia's prominent screenwriter, on the state's plan to establish the Dewan Film Nasional (Indonesian Film Council), Ajip was informed that Ali Murtopo rejected Sani's proposal to appoint Umar Kayam, Syumanjaya, and Wahyu Sihombing to run the national film council. Murtopo, instead, favored Rosidi, considering him to be the most eligible and trustworthy individual to run the council. Murtopo said, via Sani, "Pendeknya... yang dapat saya percaya hanya satu, yaitu Ajip Rosidi" (I can only trust one person [to carry chair the Indonesian Film Council], that is Ajip Rosidi). See Rosidi, A.2008b, pp. 783-785. See also Elson 2001, p. 169.

<sup>426</sup> Rosidi 2008a, p. 796.

<sup>427</sup> Rosidi 2008b, p. 826. In a letter to Benedict Anderson, he said that he should have written it down since 1970. But he could not. See Rosidi. 2008a, p. 323.

<sup>428</sup> Rosidi 2008b, p. 826.

LEKRA.<sup>429</sup> This rumor resurfaced following Rosidi's rejection to the written request, or circular, to be precise, from the publisher and the Attorney General in order not to include works from leftist writers in the poetry anthology that he was compiling. The circular instructed that poems written by Utuy Tatang Sontani, Rivai Apin and Sobron Aidit, all of whom were members of LEKRA, be removed from the book, and their names deleted. In the meantime, the public was also aware of the intellectual intimacy that Rosidi had been maintaining with these communist writers. Initially, Rosidi was not really concerned about the accusation but as it grew even more serious, he felt the need to defend himself — one of his undertakings was by breaking down his stance in nuanced storytelling of *Anak Tanahair*, where he favored neither LEKRA nor Manikebu.

Rosidi's non-involvement stance, which he addressed to Manikebu, declaring 'his ultimate rejection of any hint of sympathy with those authors who aligned with the left,'<sup>430</sup> combined with Rosidi's anxiety and urge to spell everything out, resulted in a positive outcome. Unlike the lopsided story of the state's narrative, *Anak Tanahair* came out as a novel that covered the experience from both extremes, in addition to insights from an outside observer — a third-person narrator in the novel. Furthermore, similar to Tohari's *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* and Massardi's *Mencoba Tidak Menyerah*, *Anak Tanahair* provides a glimpse into the socio-political situations before and after the attempted coup in 1965, and reveals events that were almost always skipped over in Indonesian history, especially at the point where it hinted at the involvement of the army in the Indonesian massacre.

Before going into the heart of the story, *Anak Tanahair*, the narrative dwells first on the psychological and moral growth of Ardi, the protagonist. This first part of the book, which can separately work as a *bildungsroman* on its own, elaborates on the relationship between Ardi and other supporting characters that were significant in molding his personal thoughts and perspectives. Using a third-person narrative technique, it recounts Ardi's journey from his hometown to Jakarta in a rather detailed and much-delayed description of things, with frequent transitions to earlier periods that interrupt the chronological plot; hence, the title *Kilasan-kilasan*, or flashes.

Prior to arriving in Jakarta, for example, the narrator meticulously details Ardi's short stay in Bandung. Even though this locus of the event was short and rather insignificant for the development of the entire novel, at least two pages were written exclusively to narrate earlier events in Ardi's childhood and to describe the age-worn Bandung where things were

'completely the opposite of the pleasant imagination that Ardi once had after listening to stories about the city's charm. And opposite of the beautiful

---

<sup>429</sup> Rosidi 2008a, p. 322. Also see Ismail 1972.

<sup>430</sup> Foulcher 1990, p. 117; Moriyama 2017, p. 159.

thoughts that arose from books that gave praises to the city. All the books that depicted Bandung as the most beautiful city in Jawa.’<sup>431</sup>

Similarly, a lengthy detailed description of Jakarta when Ardi first arrived is also presented in the earlier part of the novel. Upon arrival in Jakarta, the narrator carefully portrays Ardi’s shock upon seeing the poor conditions of his uncle’s house in an overcrowded slum of Jakarta — a common scene of the period.

When reading the descriptions of settings, one could argue that these function as the author’s critique of the ‘Old Order’ regime and the poor socio-political conditions that it had enabled or created. From a narratological point of view, however, this was intended in order to create engagement between readers and Ardi’s character development, as well as the story world where he exists. Simultaneously, it also produced a similar delay that Tohari created in his *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, for almost exactly the same narrative purpose — either to gain readerly trust or to distract the audience from focusing too much on the sensitive topic that the novel is centered on, which is the account on the Indonesian massacre and the events that surrounded it.

After a lengthy introduction, Rosidi only begins touching on the political aspects of arts just halfway through the novel where Muhammad, Ardi’s housemate, has a heated debate with Ardi on the role of arts in the socio-political life of the people. Tellingly enough, Muhammad is characterized as the main proponent of the ‘art for art sake’ camp, with an implied reference to the Manikebu. He says:

‘Arts should always be all about beauty. It should also limit itself to things that are decent for us to see or talk about in public. Consequently, it should bring pleasant feelings and inner peace.

Arts should imitate the beauty of God’s creations.’<sup>432</sup>

The moral virtues that Muhammad highlights in his statement originated from the discussion on the reproduction of Affandi’s nude painting, which was published in a Solo-based *Seniman* magazine. Muhammad argues that the arts are noble and should be separate from all sorts of moral decadence.

Muhammad’s virtue was further made apparent in a different event in the story, at a wedding of Ardi’s uncle, where he directs a verbal attack against the communists, and simultaneously against Sukarno. The fact that both communists and Sukarno become targets in the novel has something to do with the autobiographical nature of the novel. Unlike Massardi, who openly praised Sukarno in his *Mencoba Tidak Menyerah*, Rosidi in *Anak Tanahair* views Sukarno as a leader who:

---

<sup>431</sup> Rosidi 1985, p. 13.

<sup>432</sup> Rosidi 1985, pp. 67-68.



‘refused to see changes that were taking place in society. He denied the reality that was happening before his very own eyes. He rejected the people’s demand for justice. While he was living in a dream, filled with luxury, and not aware of his surroundings. He wanted Indonesia to become a respected nation; however, what he accomplished so far was just creating small-minded people and blind followers.’<sup>433</sup>

In the narrator’s telling, Rosidi reduces the presence of Sukarno in Indonesian socio-political realms and downplays his importance in Indonesia’s history.

Furthermore, he accuses Sukarno of maintaining a treacherous balance among the nationalists, religious groups, and communists.

‘If Bung Karno keeps pushing this, the unity that he keeps promoting will soon collapse. We can never dine at the same table with the communists. They never believe in national unity. Even if they did say so, it was a just false pretense in order to achieve their aim to establish a communist state. They are actually destroying our revolutionary goals.

How can Bung Karno forget about the treason the communists committed in Madiun during the revolution? Did he really think he could tame them...?’<sup>434</sup>

The above remarks were clearly linked to the prevalent New Order’s narrative of things, particularly about the latent danger of the communists and immediate distrust towards them, and, most significantly, the ‘de-Soekarnoisasi’ campaign.

As the passage above suggests, Rosidi’s presence in the political and cultural discourse in 1960s Indonesia became apparent as he subtly appears in the story through the mouth of the narrator. In his attempt to become a holistic chronicler, however, he casually presents a more balanced perspective on the Left, which under the New Order narrative had almost always been attacked, particularly in regards to its commitment to political involvement under the slogan “*politik sebagai panglima*” (politics as commander), which according to the argument, eventually resulted in the polarization of debates over cultural issues and the escalation of friction between LEKRA, ‘as the only legitimate voice of Indonesian cultural workers,’ and the new contender, Manikebu.<sup>435</sup>

In this regard, contrary to Muhammad, who viewed the nude portrait as a blunt symbol of decadence, Ardi was portrayed in the novel as a character that was against such normative views of arts and believed that beauty is an ambiguous matter, and resides in the eye of the beholder. It can originate from trivial daily matters or even from things that one finds repulsive or disgusting. ‘*Kuda berak pun mempunyai keindahan*’ (even horse shit presents a beautiful thing in itself).<sup>436</sup>

---

<sup>433</sup> Rosidi 1985, p. 311.

<sup>434</sup> Rosidi 1985, pp. 155-56.

<sup>435</sup> See Chapter 2. See also Foulcher 1986, p. 186; Jones 2013, p. 107.

<sup>436</sup> Rosidi 1985, p. 68.

Corresponding to the Leftist view on arts, Ardi also argues that arts should be forever detached from false pretenses, and instead, rely heavily on the artist's "*kejujuran*" (honesty, p. 68). Artists, he argued, "*tidak boleh bersikap tak acuh akan kenyataan masyarakat [dan harus turut serta] menyelamatkan negara*" (should forever be concerned with the reality of the people, and must collectively help to save the nation).<sup>437</sup>

Interestingly, the hint of sympathy towards the left is also made more explicit in the narration, especially in the second part of the novel, *Helai-helai Kehidupan*, in which the narrator is Ardi himself. Responding to Muhammad's anger about the communist prevalence in the national politics and arts, Ardi chooses to be civil and "*lebih menjadi pendengar saja*" (decides to become a listener, instead).<sup>438</sup> He resorts to a Socratic mode of questioning to elicit a clear response and reasoning, and politely challenges Muhammad by asking,

'But didn't they gain the people's trust through the general election? You cannot just ignore the fact.'<sup>439</sup>

To highlight the author's sympathetic attitude towards Ardi, in the second part of the novel words or phrases that follow and accompany Ardi's remarks always relate to the character's wit. When Muhammad throws a tantrum over Sukarno's "*Kabinet Berkaki Empat*" (p. 155) warning that it represents a precarious move that could lead to the division of the nation, Ardi responds as though he is a defender of Sukarno. He cites facts such as that it was fair for such political move in order for Sukarno to create balance within the cabinet by accommodating the PNI, the Masyumi Party, and Nahdlatul Ulama, and by incorporating the PKI into it. Furthermore, he adds that "*Mereka sudah keluar sebagai salah satu dari empat partai besar*" (They came out as one of the winning parties in the 1955 general election).

Through Ardi, Rosidi even goes further by arguing that PKI should probably be given the opportunity to prove its worth.

'Don't you think the PKI deserve our trust and perhaps it is even their turn to lead the people?'

Not only sympathetic to Ardi and his cause, but the narration also continues on this track to the point that Ardi ridicules Muhammad and his artistic and political beliefs. Being fully in charge of the entire narrative and perspective of this second part of the book, Ardi responds with sarcasm offered in simple short jabs of questions like '*Mengapa?*', '*Jadi, bagaimana?*' or '*Maksudmu?*' while '*berkelakar*' (acting funny). As a matter of fact, Muhammad the anti-communist is blatantly humiliated through this dialogue where he does not know how to respond and stumbles inarticulately.

---

<sup>437</sup> Rosidi 1985, p. 227.

<sup>438</sup> Rosidi 1985, p. 156.

<sup>439</sup> Rosidi 1985, p. 156.

His very response to Ardi's question above, for example, is blunt and thoughtless, '*Itu akan berarti kehancuran*' (That can only mean destruction), without giving further explanation to this argument. Furthermore, his other responses are often juxtaposed with phrases that indicate impatience ('*katanya mencoba menyalakan diri*'), unpreparedness ('*Dia tampak tertegun*'), banality ('*sepele*'), and anger ('*katanya sengit*'). Ending the chapter, Ardi even accuses Muhammad of '*tidak riil... [dan] menakut-nakuti orang akan bahaya teoretis*' (not being realistic...and scaring people with only theoretical harm).<sup>440</sup>

Later, in the second book, as if answering his own rhetorical question about giving a chance to the Left to prove their worth, Rosidi included historically-based events — starting from the communist cause, its socio-political role, the positive view on revolution, organization, the *konsepsi presiden* as a token of support for Presiden Sukarno, and, most importantly, the success story of one of its members, that is Ardi. This hint of sympathy continued in part three where Rosidi repeats the narrative pattern by ensuring that the story covers all the bases.

In this part, the narrator shifts to another protagonist of the novel, Hasan, who is also Ardi's contemporary. Hasan actually appeared in Part Two, but he was narrated through the lens of Ardi, where he appeared to have minimal agency. Unlike Ardi, Hasan was portrayed as an unsuccessful painter because he chose not to have his art affected by politics. However, Ardi admires Hasan and considers him to be '*seorang guru yang baik...[yang meskipun telah berselisih jalan telah] berhasil mengembangkan potensi-potensi yang dimilikinya*' (a good teacher who, despite differing views, has successfully developed Ardi's potential as an artist).<sup>441</sup>

In regards to distance, Hasan also keeps one from the immediate reader or audience as he narrates poignant epistolary reflections of events that he and Ardi experienced. This was done by not telling the entire story in first or third person, but through letters that were compiled by the author to form an entire book, which allows readers to get a sense of what the narrator, who is also the main character, says.<sup>442</sup> This part consists of nine personal letters that Hasan wrote to another character that he calls "*sahabat*" (good friend). Didactic in tone and nature (which explains why Ardi refers to Hasan as *guru*), these letters were written in early mornings from the beginning of 1963 to December 8, 1965. The first eight letters are filled with information on socio-political conditions that took place between the said dates and operated as if they were the basis for the first two parts of the novel.

The last letter, however, was written after the disappearance of Ardi. Hasan opens the letter with a generic account about the 1965 tragedy which fit the New Order's narrative of the event.

'A number of generals were butchered at the end of September. The perpetrators were members of the Pemuda Rakyat and Gerakan Wanita

---

<sup>440</sup> Rosidi 1985, p. 157.

<sup>441</sup> Rosidi 1985, p. 262.

<sup>442</sup> Genette 1980, p. 171.

Indonesia, two organizations under the Communist Party. Those butchers were dancing on top of the dead bodies that they mutilated before they were thrown into the dead well. The cruelty didn't end there; those murderers danced while naked and singing *Genjer-genjer*.<sup>443</sup>

Clearly, the opening of Hasan's letter conforms to the New Order mythology of the event, presenting a fabricated story about dancing and happy singing in order to disparage and discredit the communists. In the late 1950s and early 60s, *Genjer-genjer*, a folk song arranged by M. Arif, the head of of LEKRA's Music Association in Banyuwangi, East Java, gained popularity throughout Indonesia.<sup>444</sup> The song, which literally translates as 'yellow velvet leaf' or *sawah* lettuce initially began in the 1940s as a satire to ridicule the Japanese occupation and trigger memories of hardship that the people faced. In 1962, after Njoto, who held a high position in the PKI, took interest in the song, it came to be seen to have communist overtones. Sadly, this did not bode well for the song, as its fate drastically changed immediately after the aborted coup broke and the six generals were killed.

While the lyric tells about a woman harvesting *genjer* for sale in the marketplace, one line in particular, "*genjer-genjer neng ledokan pating keleler*" (*genjer-genjer* is spread out on the ground), was taken by the military as a blunt reference to the bodies of the generals who were laid down on the ground after they had been previously tortured by the immoral, dance-loving communists women. Furthermore, since the song had been used as a rallying theme by the Communist Party, it was singlehandedly interpreted by the military as a part of the PKI's maneuvering in preparation for an intended takeover of the government. Throughout the New Order and beyond, *genjer-genjer* became guilty by association, and singing it risked grave repercussions.<sup>445</sup>

This history is recounted in the novel from the state-sanctioned perspective, as Hasan states:

'I wouldn't have believed it if I had not read the news and saw pictures of the dead generals printed in newspapers. Their bodies were not intact.'

Through the eyes of Hasan, the agent of narrative objectivity, Rosidi claims to have first been filled with doubts that his fellow countrymen and women would have committed such unimaginable cruelty; however, like average Indonesian readers, he was tormented by the utterly false yet massive and unending newspaper reports. As I

---

<sup>443</sup> Rosidi 1985, p. 311.

<sup>444</sup> See Saptono 2005. Also, Setiawan, Hersri. *Surat dari Negeri Kincir Angin*...<https://www.mail-archive.com/search?l=siarlist%40minipostgresql.org&q=surat+ke+negri&x=0&y=0>

<sup>445</sup> On May 9, 2016, members of Mojokerto-based reggae band, Mesin Sampink, were rounded up by the police after they performed the song and were, therefore, accused of propagating communism in Indonesia. See <https://news.okezone.com/read/2016/05/09/519/1383611/band-reggae-pembawa-lagu-genjer-genjer-tak-bermaksud-sebarkan-paham-komunis>, and <https://news.detik.com/berita-jawa-timur/d-3205803/nyanyikan-lagu-genjer-genjer-konser-musik-reggae-di-mojokerto-dibubarkan> [accessed on August 10, 2021].

elaborated in Chapter 2, newspaper reports about the tragic death of the generals, the torture, *genjer-genjer*, and the diabolical communist women were fabricated by the New Order regime as one means to entirely eradicate the communists and, simultaneously, establish the regime orthodoxy. Anti-communist hysteria accounts for much of the informing logic of this relentless propaganda. But the killing was so widespread, with rivers literally flowing with blood, that there was also a need to admit that some serious sanguinary violence had taken place. Thus the propaganda pinned the violence on the communists, and away from the actual perpetrators. But heart-wrenching images and memories continued to haunt many Indonesians, and it was into this ominous psychological space that writers like Rosidi, Massardi, and Tohari began to explore imaginative possibilities for expressing what was still officially prohibited. These efforts were cautious, tentative, employed numerous narrative strategies, and the authors were often twisted with multiple motivations, including self-censorship. But the fiction of this period reflects some attempts to grapple with the enormity of what took place in Indonesia. Almost all articles about the deaths of several generals came from and were organized by Army-run newspapers and propagated so intensively that average Indonesians did not have any other options except to conform to this myth-turned historical account.<sup>446</sup>

The passage that immediately follows the opening of Hasan's letter, however, is interesting as it recounted the historical events that were almost always absent in Indonesian national written history and, therefore, very sensitive in nature. The passage elaborates on immediate retaliation and military involvement:

‘The communists were hunted down. The people went on street rallies demanding that communist organizations throughout the country be banned. But President Soekarno rejected the people's demand to disband the Communist Party. The military commanders in every region across the country took initiative to freeze the Communist Party and all organizations under it.’

Furthermore, after suggesting military involvement, the next paragraph was told in an uncannily similar wording as the report written by western scholar Horrace Sutton in *Saturday Review* published on February 4, 1967, which was also shared by the previous two authors, Tohari and Massardi, in their novels. The paragraph in Hasan's letter reads:

‘I heard that in East Java, hundreds of thousands of communists were slaughtered by the angry mobs. Brantas rivers, and rivers in Solo (Central

---

<sup>446</sup> Between October and December 1965, all of the newspapers above propagated reports about orgies, torture, brutality and genital mutilation. *Berita Yudha* quoted eyewitness who claimed that Gerwani women had cut the generals' genitals, while *Angkatan Bersendjata* wrote that the women had mocked the generals before they killed them by playing with and fondling the genitals of the victims while at the same time displaying their own. See *Angkatan Bersendjata*, October 11, 1965; *Kompas*, November 30, 1965. See also Drakeley 2007, p. 15.

Java), and other smaller streams, were jammed with floating bodies—people refused to bury them because they were atheists.’<sup>447</sup>

Compare that narration with Horace Sutton report that reads:

‘Mutilated bodies, some missing heads and hands, and some already decomposing came floating down the... Brantas River in East Java. ... The bodies jammed like logs and stayed there for days, decaying.’<sup>448</sup>

Hasan also narrated about how artists who were active in LEKRA were attacked and killed by mobs, including Trubus. ‘*Kudengar para pelukis yang aktif dalam LEKRA di Yogyakarta diserbu oleh rakyat dan dibunuh juga. Trubus konon tak diketahui nasibnya.*’<sup>449</sup> Rosidi found it necessary that this story be told particularly because one of his friends, Trubus Soedarsono (1926-1965), a professor at the Arts Institute in Yogyakarta and LEKRA activists, was killed in the aftermath. This makes Hasan, the narrator, is interchangeable with Rosidi, the author.

In addition to the killings, the letters also elaborate on extrajudicial arrests and the destruction of homes of the alleged communist artists, together with the paintings that they hung in their houses. Lamenting on the destruction of the artistic intellectual products, Hasan bemoaned, ‘*Sahabatku, kaulihat, juga karya-karya seni yang tak berdosa itu dihancurkan karena dendam yang meledak*’ (You see, good friend, those innocent arts were destroyed by explosive vengeance).

If one looks back at the ten criteria for a ban formulated by the Attorney General (Chapter 3, Criteria for a Ban), these passages, with their bits of sympathetic attitude and contestations over the state-sanctioned narrative about the tragedy (Chapter 2), could easily be considered violations against exactly the said criteria, particularly about the point of a narrative that is against state orthodoxy and might damage public trust in the national leadership. Despite the passive voice and unclear agency which means no clear mentioning of the perpetrators, these particular passages would easily be subjected to censorship.

However, the fact that this story largely fit with dominant narratives that reflect the state’s perspective and language, had probably contributed to making it appear innocent in the eyes of the state censors. Despite the evidence of sympathy that appeared in earlier parts of the novel to the opening of this last letter in the third part of the novel, Rosidi’s distance from his own story and his echoing of New Order’s language about the tragedy were of strategic importance in the success of the publication of *Anak Tanahair*. What is more, prior to concluding the novel with reference to divine interference and limitless gratitude towards Allah, one last condescending remark was made in mockery of Sukarno and his failed Guided Democracy, which would have probably pleased the New Order’s supporters.

---

<sup>447</sup> Rosidi 1985, p. 312.

<sup>448</sup> See Chapter 2. Also *Saturday Review*, February 4, 1967, p. 29.

<sup>449</sup> Rosidi 1985, p. 312.

‘He was drowned in rhetorics and superfluous ceremonies, wasting the nation’s wealth. He wished to become the leader of the world; he considered himself as the leading warrior of the new emerging forces against the old established forces.’<sup>450</sup>

## Conclusion

The novels in this study share a common thread: they explore the theme of the violent aftermath of the 1965 cataclysm that had been for years swept under the rug by the New Order government. They were the first few known accounts that dealt with the state-sanctioned killings and the disappearance of men and women, and scrutinized the country’s dark past by making critical examinations on it. Fully aware of the circumstances under which their novels were produced, the authors developed narrative strategies that have both similarities and subtle distinctions between one another. These strategies, in both content and language use, were intended as one way to navigate and steer clear from or anticipate the rampant state censorship so that the tormented perspectives of survivors of the massive violence could be expressed to a wide audience, albeit through muffled and indirect voices, and cunning, furtive narrative techniques. Tohari opted for subtleness in narrating the repression and persecution generated by the state against its citizens, making only nuanced implications of the military involvement in the mass killings, and Massardi made use of the innocent perspective of an eleven-year-old narrator and the constant use of the passive voice in order to disguise agency, while Rosidi highlighted his neutral position by covering all the bases, by simultaneously criticizing both the perpetrators and victims through his epistolary approach.

The varying strategies these authors employed in their stories, in addition to their conformation to the state language and narrative, were significant factors that helped the publications of the novels, as they laid the groundwork for the storytelling. However, due to observable challenges that the novels posed, most evident in *Mencoba Tidak Menyerah* and *Anak Tanahair*, social connections that the authors had established with characters outside the texts were equally decisive. Tohari, due to his over-cautious editor, suffered from extreme preventive censorship as he lost the main part of his story, which, if they had been printed, would have caused a much greater consequence. Massardi had an advantage from his connection with literary gurus, and most importantly the state, c.q. the Minister of Education and Culture himself. In his speech on September 22, 1978, Joesoef praised Massardi’s literary work as a great contribution to the advancement of the people (*bantuan berharga untuk kemajuan rakyat Indonesia*), the development of the Indonesian language (*memperkembang bahasa nasional*), and the foundation of national development (*landasan kebijakan pembangunan bangsa*). At the moment the minister handed over the prize to Yudhistira, Daoed Joesoef had not realized that

---

<sup>450</sup> Rosidi 1985, p. 314.

Massardi's novel poked fun at the wayang story, which the minister considered sacred. As for Rosidi, he was never really concerned about state censorship because, in addition to his neutral position in literary politics, he belonged to the small circle most authors looked for social connections with.