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

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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

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

SUMMARY

Within the framework of a larger debate on literary history and censorship studies, this research delves deeper into the role of literature in narrating Indonesia's bleakest pages of history, namely the events of 1965-66 and the mass killings that followed. The historical legacy of the events was a matter of grave contention within Indonesia and to speak directly and write with honesty about them could become fraught with danger. Therefore, throughout most of the 1970s, creative literature in Indonesia was almost totally silent on the background and meaning of the killings of 1965-66, the very specific topic that did not collocate with the values of the authoritarian New Order regime. The aftermath in the lives of individuals who witnessed this tragedy was also skipped over in Indonesian literature. In addition, the traumatic nature of the experience seemed to have been expunged from the memories of witnesses and inhibited a wider group of people from talking. However, against all odds, a few literary authors spoke up and openly addressed this theme in their novels. They were even sympathetic in portraying the victims even though the regime was at the height of its power and exerting maximum social and political control through rampant censorship.

In this regard, this dissertation addresses the broader question about what this case of literary production tells us about the nature of censorship under the New Order. In doing so, this dissertation begins, in **Chapter 2**, with an analysis of the New Order regime in which economic growth, political stability, and cultural change took place, which provides a setting under which the literary works central in this study were produced. It looks at the regime's cultural policy that was believed to generate growth in literary production and in the initiations of cultural institutions and activities. It also elaborates on the regime's shift into a state of increased constraints and tighter control that homogenized and policed cultural production.

Against the backdrop of the increasing control, and informed by theoretical literature by Jaringan Kerja Budaya (1999), Fauzan (2003), and Yusuf (2010) on regime of prohibition and modes of censorship, and by Burt (1994), Yamamoto (2011), Darnton (2015), and Bunn (2015) on New Censorship theory, this dissertation, in **Chapter 3**, moves on into a more specific discussion and thematizes the process of carrying out research at the heart of the state body that was tasked with censorship. It elaborates on the implementation of censorship which includes the rationale, mechanism, and procedures of censorship under the New Order which was run and coordinated by a single state apparatus, namely the Attorney General. The upshot of this was that the production or prohibition of literary works occurred in accordance with the interests of literary producers on the one hand, and the political ruler on the other.

While the state maintained stability by preventing subversion from entering the cultural field, literary producers protected literature from political contamination. This led to a situation where censorship was not exclusively carried out by the state institution but rather run more diffusely as a collective result of censorial subjects within the censorship system. It operated in terms of complicity and collaboration, as

discussed in **Chapter 4**, between the state and literary producers. Censorship drove literary authors, editors, publishers and censors closer rather than further apart. As a result, the general view that censors consisted of ignorant and unskilled political bureaucrats distorts the real picture of censorship under the New Order.

Instead of fostering constant antagonism, as often highlighted in the liberal conception of censorship, in actual practice, the state, the censors, authors, and publishers engaged in an interdependent and nuanced relationship that was in constant negotiation, anticipation, and delicate recalibration. All this is evident in the language play, nature, form, and functioning of narrative used in the novels at the heart of this study as examined in **Chapter 5**. Through the New Historicist approach, this chapter looks at the structure of the authors' works and the strategies in writing the story the specific way they did, and problematizes differing recollections and opposing accounts of the same historical events.

In conclusion, **Chapter 6**, this dissertation asserts that it is, therefore, a misunderstanding to view censorship in Indonesia entirely as an unorganized, arbitrary process in the hands of power holders that pit censors against authors, and agents against victims, while negating the complexity, complicity, compromise, and anticipation that took place during the entire process of literary production. It opposes a Manichean view of censorship that reduces the subject to simply a battle of light versus darkness, repression versus liberty, or authority versus innocent authors and poor publishers. In fact, censorship under the New Order relied greatly on collusion, collaboration, and complicity enforced by a vast network of actors and institutions. In connection with the wider debate in the field of censorship studies, the case of censorship under the New Order Indonesia conforms to New Censorship Theory that stresses the multiplicity and generative effect of censorship, an activity hitherto seen as purely repressive.