

Memory of The Past in Ahmad Tohari's *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*

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Abstract—This study aims to describe the crisis of the identity of a character that is built by the memory, identity and the narrative framework in Indonesian novels. This study uses a qualitative method with Vieda Skultans post-memory theory approach. The data source of this research is Ahmad Tohari's *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*. The data taken is in the form of units of language in the form of sentences or paragraphs that describe memory, identity and narrative framework. The analysis shows how the influence of memory on the construction of the identity of the characters and the narrative framework in the novel.

Keywords—*past memories, post-memory, identity, narrative framework*

I. INTRODUCTION

Memories or remembrance of the past is not something that can be overlooked because it will have great effects on human life in the future. Especially, if the memories contain difficult life, painful and miserable. According to the French historian, Pierre Nora "memories are always in our mind" (Eckstein, 2006). So, memories are not only remembered, but also discussed, even very influential on human behavior.

Memories not only live in the past, but live to the present, even very likely until later. Memories stay in the hearts of every person and every group of people, being the basis of every person's actions in the present and the future.

Memory is important in human behavior. Remembrance of the events of the past will be experienced by every person and will determine their personalities. Memory becomes an important instrument in understanding humans individually and as a social group.

According to Hacking (1998) memory has become 'a powerful tool in the search for understanding, justice and knowledge'. Memory, therefore, has become an interesting research object lately. Muller (2004) argues that memory is very important for several fields of scientific research, for example is the study of nationalism, questions about ethnic identity and 'political recognition', where groups are given the least recognition of their excommunicated past experience in which suffer from. In addition, there are many cultural memory studies such as those expressed in monuments, memorials and works of art, as well as in school text books.

Memories are also contained in the narrative in novels, because a novel is about humans and their journey. The conflicts experienced by the characters in the novel are built from memories of their past. These memories are generally bad, painful and sad events. The relationship of memory and narration is also discussed in depth by Skultans.

Skultans (1998) explains that memories cannot be separated from narration. Narrative represents personal past as well as the cultural history and literature, it is hard to

separate personal memories and textual. In particular, memories of violence penetrate cultural symbols and are framed by cultural lines. Personal past records show specific ways in which social events affect personal. Narrative theory has become a feature of anthropological discussion which shows that oral testimonies can provide social and cultural history and at the same time offer theoretical insights about the nature of memory, identity and narration.

Literature as a universe in a text is also filled by events that are influenced by memories of the past. *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* novel by Ahmad Tohari also revolves around the memories of the past that influence the lives of the characters. Memory of the glory of Paruk in the past because of the presence of the *ronggeng* (dancers) making people of Paruk miss the presence of *ronggeng*. Memory of his mother who is unknown whether is alive or not makes Rasmus misses the presence of a mother which he found within Srintil. Remembrance of his parents died from accidentally eating poisonous *tempe bongkreng*, made Srintil want to change her way of life as a *ronggeng*. Memories like that is what continues to build the narrative in this novel.

Based on the description above, the research objectives of *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* novel form these focuses of the study:

1. The memories contained in the novel that affect the characters,
2. Construction of a character's identity caused by a memory of his past
3. Narrative framework composed by the influence of memory.

This research is a qualitative study using a sociological approach to literature in the perspective of post-memory of Vieda Skultans. Data is taken in the form of language units in the form of sentences or paragraphs that represent the focus of research. Then the data is analyzed by the steps of: data reduction, data presentation and making conclusions. The data is summarized and selected in accordance with the focus of the research, presented in the form of a brief description and relations between categories, then concluded about the past memories of the main character in *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* novel.

There have been some research conducted using post-memory perspectives. Fernanda (2017) examines the creative process of post-memory in the process of transmitting memory from the first generation to the next generation and looks at the important role of gender in the transmission process. Through analysis using Marianne Hirsch's post-memory theory, the traumatic transmission was finally discovered. The results of her research show that (1) there are two transmissions that make up the novel, namely familial

transmission from the family so that it gives rise to imagination and affiliate transmission. In the transmission process, gender plays a role to whom and what narrative is told to *post-generation*; (2) the role of gender in the novel can be seen from the *infantilization* against the Greeks and the *hyper masculinized behavior* towards the Turks as an *icon of destruction*.

Still using the theory of Marianne Hirsch, Ernawati (2019) studies traumatic memory transmission process in Fuji Rieng Prastowo's *Kadang Suriname Sanak Merapi*. The study found that (1) there is familial transmission which led to the affiliate transmission; (2) The Government of Indonesia and Netherland experiencing *hyper masculinization*; Indies and exiles experience *infantilization*; (3) memory reconstruction is done by *cropping* through dominating Indies and outcast stories.

The two studies are relatively similar, both in terms of the theory used and the results obtained. By using different theories and material objects, the research on "Memory of the Past in Ahmad Tohari's *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk: Perspectives of Post-Memory of Vieda Skultans*" is different from previous studies, because the purpose of this study is to find the influence of past memories by constructing the identity and narrative framework in *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*.

II. MEMORY

Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk uses several point of views. There are chapters that use a third person approach, there are also chapters that use the first person approach, namely Rasmus as a narrator. This novel uses the subtitle "*Catatan Untuk Emak (Notes For Mother)*". The *Emak* (Mother) was Rasmus's mother who was thought to have died when the *tempe bongkrek* accident struck Paruk, or went somewhere with a paramedic who cared for her. Rasmus' use as a narrator shows that the traumatic experience significantly affected the development of identity of Rasmus and Srintil's narrative framework as a central figure. This is in line with Skultans' thinking when writing about Latvian narration.

According to Skultans (1998), he wrote about Latvian narration because: (1) he was Latvian from birth; (2) as an anthropologist he is very close to matters concerning Latvia; and (3) trying to find a link between memory and perceived reality. The reason for Rasmus' uses as a storyteller is not much different from Skultans reasons, namely: (1) he was a young child of Dukuh Paruk from birth; (2) as traditional agents and indigenous people there are very close to matters concerning Paruk; and (3) trying to find a connection between past memories and the present reality.

Thus, the memories and narrative framework contained in this novel are physical and mental experiences experienced by Rasmus. He tells about his own memories and experiences.

By using Rasmus as the narrator, this novel seems to be a construction of Rasmus's memory and experience of his past. It shows that the story in the *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* novel is really alive, really real. The story in a novel cannot be separated from events that occur in the real world.

The memory in literature is a written form of what has happened before. Memories come from past history but also are shaped by social, political and religious events in the lives of figures in literary works. Memory used in three different

constructions: *first*, to establish the validity and importance of the text based on the expertise and reputation of the previous writer; *second*, as a means to instill feelings of nostalgia in a text; and *third*, and the most universal, as a method of building individual and cultural identity (Bookworm, 2012). The first construction is very common in pre-Indonesian literature in the type of literature such as the works of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi. The second construction was used throughout the 20th century by Indonesian writers during the time of Balai Pustaka and *Pujangga Baru* which were influenced by sociopolitical upheaval caused by World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945). The works of Merari Siregar, Marah Rusli, Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana, Chairil Anwar, Idrus and so on are literary works written during the sociopolitical upheaval. The third construction exists in various spaces and times in all literary works related to individual or cultural issues, including post-modern and post-structural literary works. Ahmad Tohari's works belong to this third construction.

Fernanda (2017) explains that in the works of post-memory, memory of past are the basic of the story. By bringing together the *memory of others* and imagination, post-generation build a new body for the memory of the past that was in the warehouse of one's mind. Something like that also happened in Rasmus and Srintil. The following data concerns memories that affect the narration of the character's life journey.

Until the age of fourteen, when Srintil began to become a ronggeng (a dancer), I managed to get a little information about my mother. There are people who inadvertently said Emak indeed died in polyclinic in Kawedanan. But her dead body was taken to the regency, where dead body of his mother was sliced to pieces by doctors. They want to know more about the poison of tempe bongkrek. Thus the mother's dead body never returned to Paruk. Where mother was buried, no Paruk people knew about it.

There are also people who say mother can be saved. But until a few days mother cannot leave the polyclinic. The person said, after mother was perfectly healthy she left the polyclinic. Not going home to Paruk, but who knows where with the paramedics who care for him (Tohari, 1982).

The quote explains that:

1. The mother's situation (mother of Rasmus) is still a puzzle, whether she is alive or dead.
2. The situation that was completely unstable about his mother made Rasmus experienced extraordinary trauma in his life.

Rasmus prefers his mother died and her dead body is used as an object of research on the influence of *tempe bongkrek* in human life, rather than being taken away by the paramedics who care for her. For him, the mother would be far more honored to die and her dead body be the object of research, than to live then disappear with another man who is not his own father.

Rasmus's attitude indeed seemed paradoxical, the attraction between the protagonist and the antagonist, between the child's good attitude towards his mother and bad attitude. He

chose his mother to die rather than live in shame, is not a truly praiseworthy attitude. But that is the risk of choice. So strong is the influence of the memory of the past with the choice of attitude that determined Rasmus.

His mother disappeared, Rasmus also tried to create another mother in his life, because after all mother was the womb where he lived. Srintil is also regarded by him as an incarnation of his mother, the mother model that he consciously constructed. Therefore, when Srintil was ordained as a *ronggeng*, Rasmus felt very lost. He felt he lost the mother figure who he loved for the second time.

"Srintil, who somehow in many ways I consider to be the incarnation of mother, will be destroyed this afternoon." (Tohari, 1982).

In this case, Rasmus experiences psychological ambivalence, because positive and negative things are present together in his mind.

Bad memories about his mother did not get lightened. The hope that hoped will be born from Srintil was in fact only a utopia. Rasmus' soul is empty as written in the following text data.

In my heart there is an empty side. There should be mother there. I made it that way, but it never came true. The emptiness that developed with my growth from childhood, created aridity and anxiety. The thirst for seeing and having mother has stained my life (Tohari, 1982).

An empty heart means a dead heart. It could be that Rasmus experienced neurasthenia. This is in line with Skultans research. Skultans (1998) explains that his research project on Latvian narrative began as an anthropological study of neurasthenia. The research aims to look at how the diagnosis is used to direct personal and social dissatisfaction and to explore symbolism in everyday speech. Rasmus experiences personal and social dissatisfaction in his life because of the memory of mother and its past. Rasmus thought that Srintil was a physician to his empty soul, but in fact it was only utopia.

Maybe utopia never existed. There is only dystopia. That is what makes Rasmus live in a situation where his heart is always rebelling, trying to destruct, and to find everything that it dreamed of. Of course that is not easy.

Srintil's past is very different from Rasmus. Although her parents died from deliberately eating poisonous *bongkrek tempe*, she was not too traumatic, because at that time Srintil was still a baby. Then Srintil was raised by her grandparents.

As a child who live with their grandparents, Srintil is active like other small children. Sufferings is not too felt, let alone remembered. Srintil spends her time playing, imitating *ronggeng* dances and occasionally helping her grandparents work.

Srintil's memory is only in her being with Rasmus. This was realized by Rasmus when observing Srintil's attitude. Regarding this matter can be read in the following data.

In the cendol stall, my understanding was wrong. From the way Srintil spoke, from the way she sat beside me and from the look in her eyes, I knew Srintil recorded the incident behind Kartareja's house specifically in his heart. So I am forced to believe in people's words that the event of surrender of virginity by a girl will not be

forgotten throughout the ages. Also I believe the words that once I heard that no matter how the dancer is a woman. He expects a love (Tohari, 1982).

Before the 'bukak-klambu' ceremony was held, Srintil was willing to surrender her virginity to Rasmus, the young man she loved. Memory of the event which makes Srintil earnestly wants Rasmus to marry her and have children from their relationship. The 'bukak-klambu' ceremony, which is a patriarchal hegemony construction, is apparently not easy to resist. Similarly, marriage was used as a way to getting rid of the hegemony if one failed with other means.

The failure has an impact on the difficulty of Srintil escaping from *ronggeng* life. *Ronggeng* life that made her not independent as a woman, was not easily resisted.

Memories of the past of Rasmus and Srintil are different figures. Rasmus records all of his memories of past, especially about his mother and affect the narration of his life now. Meanwhile, Srintil only has memories with Rasmus. The memory encouraged him to break away from patriarchal hegemony, though it failed to achieve.

III. CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

Rasmus in the context of events in this novel can be categorized as a young child. Theories about young people are in many ways interesting and rich, including young people as transitions, young people as identities and young people as actions (Jones, 2009).

Their maturity is no longer determined by biological characteristics, but is marked by cultural or tradition identity. The thin line between the lives of adults and children, makes them not understand the limits of taboo.

The change from children to the realm of young people occurred in Rasmus. When Srintil danced for the first time she was only 11 years old, while Rasmus was 13 years old. Actually it is still classified as a teenager but because of the tradition of *ronggeng*, they were precocious.

Singing erotic songs by young children is not taboo in Paruk. That's what makes calendar age cannot mark a child is really a child or has become an adult without realizing it. The following data proves this,

Erotic song. Srintil, a virgin who was only eleven years old, sang it earnestly. Maybe Srintil didn't understand the meaning of the song's lyrics. But it's the same. Paruk will not be troubled if there are small children singing even the most obscene songs (Tohari, 1982).

In such conditions the identity of Rasmus and Srintil is not merely built from their internal selves, but is shaped more by external matters outside themselves. These things are the myths that live in Paruk about the need for a *ronggeng* presence, poverty in the area, the power of the elderly, and patriarchal hegemony. Rasmus' identity as a cassava seller and eventually became a soldier was caused by his grudge against Paruk which made Srintil a *ronggeng*, poverty of Paruk and his love for Srintil. Srintil's identity as a *ronggeng* is caused by the myths about *ronggeng*, the power of the elders and patriarchal hegemony that is impossible to fight.

That identity is what led to the action, which was carried out both by Rasmus and Srintil, when Rasmus was hurt because

of his mother's shadow in Srintil has vanished, Rasmus left Paruk to go to Dawuhan. His grandmother was left alone as illustrated in the following data.

Grandma became the victim of my revenge against Paruk. She left me with a few goats. Let it be. Grandma belongs to Paruk. I thought Paruk continued to recognize my grandmother as a citizen until she joined Ki Secamenggala at the cemetery (Tohari, 1982).

So simple is Rasmus' way of thinking. His grandmother was old, left with nothing, eventually she would die too. The average Paruk inhabitants live by abiding natural laws. Therefore, grudges are common. Crimes are rewarded with crime. His desire for revenge on the paramedic who carried off his mother made Rasmus want to destroy the paramedic's head. So, he formed a head shape with a rock to imagine shooting and destroying the head of the elderly.

... extraordinary. The head of the paramedic is left to be small pieces. A man with a broken head like that could not run away. Since then he has become a carcass. I have freed you. She would I brought back to Paruk now. I won, becoming the most mighty son who managed to gloriously free his beloved mother from the clutches of Satan (Tohari, 1982).

Revenge makes Rasmus live in the shadows. He has a mental disorder, even though it does not mean he is crazy, called neurasthenia. Rasmus' condition was in a tense state of mind, always moody and restless, hopeless, scared, his action forced, experiencing hysteria and he is filled with bad thoughts. That are what makes Rasmus absurdly shoot a rock as a substitute for the head of the paramedics.

Srintil's memory of bad things when she owned and carried out her identity as a *ronggeng* made Srintil want to marry Rasmus and have children. Only by having children, Srintil can be freed from the necessity as a *ronggeng*. That is the action Srintil wants to do. The following data explains this.

"Eh, Rasmus. Why do you mention things that are past? I submit my request now. Listen Rasmus, I will stop being a ronggeng because I want to be the wife of a soldier; you are the one" (Tohari, 1982).

It's just that secretly Rasmus left her. What Srintil wanted was finally not realized. Both Rasmus and Srintil failed to establish a full identity. Every identity that is constructed is always destroyed by the circumstances experienced.

According to Giddens (1991), self-identity is built by the ability to execute self-narratives so that biographical continuity occurs. The problem is that Rasmus and Srintil always face obstacles when acting in perpetuating the narrative.

The failure is caused by the myths that live in society, especially myths about *ronggeng* and everything that surrounds it. Because of this myth Rasmus failed to build his mother's shadow in Srintil. Because of this myth, Srintil failed to realize her dream of living happily in marriage with Rasmus.

There is an inseparable relationship between identity, action, and efforts to perpetuate biographical narratives. The

identities of Rasmus and Srintil encourage them to take certain actions in an effort to build the eternity of their life's narrative.

IV. NARRATIVE FRAMEWORK

Skultans (1998) writes that war is 'remembered' by most narrators, even those who are too young to do so have personal memories about it. The war is terror, a terror against both mental and physical. Terror is not easily forgotten.

The situation in Dukuh Paruk is identical with war. Poverty, suffering, and ignorance make people live in uncertainty. The residents of Dukuh Paruk experienced terror that was caused by the situation. That means that all memories of the poor Paruk and *ronggeng* myth will always be remembered by the narrators, in this case most of the population of Paruk.

Rasmus and Srintil as part of the Paruk population were also narrators. According to Skultans (1998) narration of the past in Latvia avoids some moral problems. The narrative stands as an intermediary between the narrator's past terror experience. Moral in the past in Paruk was defeated by myth.

According to Danesi (2011), the initial narrative of a culture is called a myth. It really happened in the life of the Paruk community. The people there really believe that the Paruk without *ronggeng* is the same as if the *Dukuh* (Village) is dead. Paruk poverty will no longer be felt when *ronggeng* was born there. This can be read in the following data.

Sakarya smiled. It has been a long time since the descendants of Ki Secamenggala felt the lack of Paruk because no ronggeng was born there. "Paruk without ronggeng, is not Paruk Srintil, my own granddaughter, will restore the true image of this dukuh," Sakarya said to himself. Sakarya believed that the spirit of Ki Secamenggala would burst out in his grave if one knew there was ronggeng in Paruk (Tohari, 1982).

The myth about the *ronggeng* and spirit of Ki Secamenggala as a sacred figure in the village really lives in the hearts of the people. Memory of myths is a starting point for the journey of life narrative framework of Rasmus and Srintil in their biographical narratives.

After Srintil became a *ronggeng*, Rasmus felt he lost his mother in Srintil. He then left Paruk, settling as a cassava seller in Dawuhan Market. This is actually an identity construction that is being built by Rasmus. He can see Paruk from a distance so that he is more objective. His knowledge of life also increased compared to when he only lived in his village. The narrative turned out to be able to shape Rasmus's identity.

Rasmus's insight about life also increased. He slowly began to recognize a religion that he did not recognize during the Dukuh Paruk. Rasmus also learned something new about women; Dawuhan women cannot be tempted like Dukuh Paruk women. Rasmus realized that in living together in society there were actually social and religious norms that had to be obeyed and implemented.

Whereas Srintil, after being declared a *ronggeng*, improved her life economically. *Ronggeng* is worshiped not only by men, but also by many women. Unlike Rasmus, whose identity is formed by the biography narrative, Srintil's identity

shapes her narrative. Srintil feels tired of being a *ronggeng* because of her bad memories as a *ronggeng* woman. The story ends precisely when Rasmus left her.

Srintil tried to change her identity as a *ronggeng*. She wants to be an ordinary woman who lives normally. However, her desire was unable to be achieved because of the extraordinary power of myth.

According to Danesi (2011) fictional narratives have become the standard for examining human actions and characters, because the structure of the narrative can function as a reflection of the structure of events in real life. That is very possible because literary works are written by taking material from life experiences and events in the reality of human life. The same thing happened in the narrative of Rasmus and Srintil. They are also very likely to represent the real life experienced by the community in a particular village.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the description presented parts by parts, it can be concluded that the memories of the past affect the construction of identity and narrative framework of the figures of Srintil and Rasmus. Memory of *emak* makes Rasmus try to find the figure of mother within Srintil although it ended in disappointment. Srintil, who wanted to free herself from her *ronggeng* identity, eventually failed because Rasmus refused to marry her.

Rasmus' life narrative shapes Rasmus' identity, and in contrast, Srintil's identity as a *ronggeng* influences Srintil's life narrative. All of that happened because the sources of the memories differed between Rasmus and Srintil. Rasmus' memory formed by going past the bad, while memories of Srintil stemmed from being together with Rasmus.

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