

Islam and Local Culture at the Crossroad in Faisal Oddang's *Tiba Sebelum Berangkat*

Akhmad Zakky
English Letters Department
Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University
Jakarta, Indonesia
akhmad.zakky@uinjkt.ac.id

Padel Muhamad Rallie Rivaldy
Faculty of Humanities
University of Indonesia
Depok, Indonesia
rallierivaldy@gmail.com

Abstract— The aim of this research is to see the religious and cultural context, or more precisely Islam and local faith within Buginese society, of Faisal Oddang's *Tiba Sebelum Berangkat* through literary frames. Regarding the period of DI/TII (Islamic State/Indonesian Islamic Army) rebellion and the present, this novel depicted a fictional representation of the indigenous community and long way Islamization of South Sulawesi. The primary data of this research were taken from Oddang's novel that was published in 2018. In order to support the analysis, the researchers also elaborate secondary data from articles, journal, and books which were related with the issue in this research. By using qualitative method, this research investigated the religious and cultural context which was portrayed within the novel by elaborating Homi K. Bhabha's notion of hybridity. The research finding showed that the contradiction between Islam and local faith was viewed as forces that collided each other. As the novel suggested, Buginese societies' daily life practices, sacred rituals, and even their political attitudes, in response to rebellious movement that used Islam as the basis of ideology, were determined as hybrid.

Keywords—Islam, local culture/community, hybrid identity, Buginese

I. INTRODUCTION

"1958 was the year of endless resistance," this note came from *Harian Rakjat*, a daily news media which committed on leftist party. Velthoen described that the central figure of this overcast past was Andi Aziz, an officer of *Koninklijke Nederlandsch-Indische Leger* (KNIL) who defended the landing of Javanese Army in Makassar. In the southern side of Sulawesi, the resistance was headed by Kahar Muzakkar, who affiliated his movement with *Darul Islam*, a group who maintained the existence of Indonesia as Islamic State [1]. One of Indonesia's literary author who raised the issue based on this narrative was Faisal Oddang, a promised young writer who brings locality as main theme on his works. He gains award from *Dewan Kesenian Jakarta* (DKJ) or Jakarta Arts Council on 2014 by his outstanding novel *Dari Puya ke Puya*.

The discourse of relation and resistance between religion and culture is one of the interesting things that can be seen from a literary work. As a product of culture, literary works are born and absorb energy in society where they emerged. Literary works, then, seem to be a reflection as well as criticizing the

society that is being told. By taking a story that has a root in a socio-historical context, literary works can be seen as a medium to show what actually happens to the people in the society.

The spirit to tell stories that have social and historical roots in society can be found on Faisal Oddang's latest novel *Tiba Sebelum Berangkat* [2]. By taking its setting in South Sulawesi from 1950's until contemporary Indonesia, he actually described how a religion and a local culture interacted with and shaped their hybrid form. Generally, his novel tried to talk about Islam and a local faith in Buginese society through the conflict among several local community, nobles, and a group who wanted to maintain the purity of the religion. *Bissu*, noble people who lived in South Sulawesi were the characters who went through the intersection between culture and Islam in their daily life, and along with it, and this experience shaped new subjectivity.

Tiba Sebelum Berangkat narrated *bissu* named Mapata who was kidnapped and held captive by group of people. During the confinement, Mapata was investigated by the group of people about their life as a *bissu*; his decision to become *bissu*, the life of *bissu* community, and people around the *bissu* community. From the investigation, Mapata, who as also the narrator in this story, smoothly gave an overview of *bissu's* life as the person who mediate God with humans in the Buginese tradition in South Sulawesi. In addition, the depiction that emerged in the investigation carried out against Mapata also showed how the interface among Islam, *bissu*, and the Buginese community. The Buginese community had to live among DI/TII rebellion, Indonesian army, and local culture at that time. This condition had formed the identity of people in South Sulawesi. In one side most of them are Muslim, but in other hand they are still practice the local culture.

The series of events that occurred, then, raised a situation that made people face two belief systems that were present in their society. The interaction of the two belief systems (Islam and *Tolotang*) in the Buginese community and people response to this situation was the starting point in this research. As a fictional representation of a society, this novel was enough to give an illustration of how in the end people saw the two belief systems which existed in their society were not considered to be contradictory, they saw both as something that could run

simultaneously. In one side, the people accept and run Islamic teachings, and the other side, they are still practicing their local belief *Tolotang*.

II. METHODS

Since the fundamental touch-stone of this paper is to analyze relationship between Islam and local culture in *Tiba Sebelum Berangkat* through literary frames, the researchers used qualitative method and descriptive analytical technique, which allowed interpretation in order to decipher the phenomenon of cross-cultural interaction [3] within Buginese society as portrayed in the novel. Like Foulcher and Day noted, Indonesia got external influences that produced social structures, aesthetic forms, and belief systems [4]. In order to gain objective result, beside considering sociological aspect of South Sulawesi, this research focused the analysis based on structural/textual approach. The primary data of this research were taken from Oddang's novel published by *Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia* in 2018. In order to support the analysis, the researchers also elaborated secondary data from articles, journal, and books which were related with the issue in this research.

The notion of hybridity which was firstly conceptualized by Bhaba was considered as appropriate tool to decipher the phenomenon of cross-cultural interaction between Islam and local belief of South Sulawesi in Oddang's novel. The origin of Bhaba's concept actually derived from idea of post-coloniality and was influenced by terminology of French thinkers, such as Jacques Derrida, Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. By contrast to Bhaba's concept of mimicry, hybridity referred to the mixed ideas of different cultures [5]. There were many kinds of hybrid entities that are related with this concept, but specifically the concept of hybridity elaborated in this research is religious hybridity. Instead of referring to a part of society religion's convert into the faith which arrived from the *outside*, the religious hybridity, in this respect, means how different belief systems interact with traditional and local cultural-religious frameworks.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Oddang's novel, which is dominated by epistolary writing, depicts the complexity of gender discourse in Buginese society and historical moments in transition period; from traditional to modern Indonesia. Oddang himself claimed that his writing was an output of research and his commitment to archive non Java-centric historical document. This research noted the role of Oddang's novel as a recent fictional work that was taken up the issue of cross cultural interaction of Islam and local belief of traditional community in South Celebes (Sulawesi). In order to gain deep understanding of socio-cultural context of Buginese society in the novel, the explanation of gender discourse and a historical document of South Celebes were needed.

Sharyn Graham [6] explained that the gender division in Buginese society consisted of five. Besides man and woman, Buginese admitted the concept of *calabai*, a man who deserved the existence of woman in his self, and *calalai*, woman who demanded the role of man in her daily lives. However, they do

not expect themselves to be fully integrated as woman or man. In other side, Buginese also acknowledged the concept of *bissu*, a gender that transcended hetero binary opposition. *Bissu* were considered sacred and had important role to lead the sacral and religious ceremonies in Buginese culture. *Tiba Sebelum Berangkat* also narrated *bissu* in Buginese beliefs who had a high social and cultural position. Since *Bissu* was considered as intermediaries between God and humans; he was the liaison of the physical and metaphysical world and considered as a sacred person. Therefore, the culture of the Bugis community positioned *bissu* as a sacred person who was made a spiritual advisor, either in the Bugis kingdoms tradition or in the society in general. In a Mapata statement to Ali Baba, he said "since the first man appeared, *bissu* was also present as a sacred person. That is what developed continuously so that the Buginese kingdoms greatly glorified *bissu* and made him a spiritual advisor. The quotation illustrated *bissu* who got a special position in society. Besides that, it could be seen the strong relationship between *bissu* and Buginese society.

Concepts of gender that were mentioned above were part of Buginese society local belief, which was represented through *Puang Rusmi*, a character who eventually baptised Mapata, the main character, to become a *toboto* (assistant of *bissu*). Through focalization of Batari, Mapata's fiancée, Rusmi who was firstly named Rusming as "a pure man before the thing that he mentioned as *the call* to become a *bissu*." This quotation shows that rather than essentially constructed as *bissu*, Rusmi's identity was fluid and dynamic. There were transformations within his subjectivity from a pure man who gained feminine attitude along his desire to prevent "bodies' aroma, hair style and length of his nails" appeared, and finally decided to become a *bissu*.

In Mapata's case, there was another scheme which has crucial role in constructing his dynamic identity as a man with nonhetero sexual orientation, who later became a *toboto* of *Puang Rusmi*. At first, Mapata was also a pure man who liked to grope his classmate's bodies to achieve sexual satisfaction. However, since his mother decided to build family bound with a bisexual man, Sukeri, Mapata got a trauma that led to his future sexual orientation as explained in the chapter *How Mapata Poops and Flush?*. The chapter described the sexual scene of Sukeri who practiced sodomy to Mapata by the pretext of woman devil's expel. This trauma led Mapata to questioning the truth until finally he realized that his father action was a trick. But, his confession suggested that the experience influenced his sexual orientation in the later days: "and damn, I miss him (Sukeri) and also miss Puang."

Since the first chapter of the novel, Oddang portrayed the contradiction of local culture/belief and Islam by carrying out the setting of rebellion of DI/TII, which often mentioned as *gurilla*. From this view, the opposition of two different cultures were represented black and white. But, the representation of other character, such as Ali Baba, the antagonist in the novel, brought wider perspective on nonlocal belief of South Sulawesi, since he admitted six religions that were legitimated by Indonesia's government. This research underlined several points which made the interaction between these two values more complex, rather than regarded as a fixed antipodes each other.

Before turning his self as a *bissu*, Rusmi had a intimate relationship with a man from a noble's group of South Sulawesi, Andi Upe, who was obliged by his family to gather with South Sulawesi Guerilla Unit (SSGU), which later named Indonesian Islamic Army (IIA). To maintain their ideology of purity, this group practiced oppressive action to discipline the traditional community that perform old traditions. However, the novel explained that starting point of this action actually does not rooted from the mission to annihilate the local community, especially *bissu*. In Buginese culture, there were also conception of *siri*, a feel of shame that was interrelated with honor [7]. The main motive of TII was "to be avowed by official government as APRIS (League of Republic of Indonesia War Force (LRIWF)," but rejected for some reasons.

Whereas Ali Baba was allegorical figure of fundamentalist and chauvinist group which performed the illegal organ's trade with his pretext of jihad (*holy war*) in defending the purity of motherland's legitimated religions. Since he also performed rape and murder, his motives were likely a blind extreme crime with social and economical purpose. These factors shows that the main contradiction between Islam or any legitimated religions and local belief was interwoven with material condition and macrocosmic of wider political circumstances. In the other side, cross cultural interaction of these two different culture can be viewed from the representation of Buginese society in Wajo, most importantly symbolical figure of Abba Rusmang, Rusmi's brother.

Both Mapata and Rusmi, actually did not admit Islam as their belief, but this research noted that interaction between *bissu* community and major Buginese society who accept Islam as their religion presents hybrid form of identity. As Graham suggests in his article that *bissus* have important roles in Buginese society, such as leading sacral ceremonies [8]. The *bissu* community which domiciled in Wajo were represented to taking this role, while Wajo's people avow and appreciate their roles. This depiction was symbolically represented by Abba Rusmang:

"[...] Puang is just inaugurated to become a *bissu* when most of his pals are chased by TII. Abba was in rage because *bissus* are respected and have a lot of merits in our village. Abba defend the *bissus*, including Puang."

Rusmang himself had a symbolic power as Islamist expert in Wajo, but he performed a tolerant attitude in responding to the existance of the *bissus*. His appearance was a symbol which meant an act of dignified existance of local communities within Buginese cultural practices. His positive attitude was also manifested towards homage the will of Wajos to practice

mappalili and invite *bissu* to lead some religious ceremonies and marriage. This interrelationship confirmed what Bhaba mentioned as hybrid identity, in this respect, a new form of religious subjectivity. Moreover, the portrayal of his grave as also a metaphorical imagery which could be interpreted as a juncture point which confronted the harmony of Islam and local culture of Bugis: "Abba was buried near a tamarind trees that he plant before. In the past, he determined our village with this tree and regard it as a safe border."

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Oddang's latest novel, *Tiba Sebelum Berangkat*, bravely raised the issue of cross-cultural interaction between Islam and local belief, and historical moments of DI/TII rebellion which were rarely explored in contemporary literary works. Besides that, the setting in the contemporary Indonesia illustrated the possibility of this issue was still exist and always giving a chance to interpret in identity context. Therefore, this novel gave fictional depiction on the lives of local belief in Buginese society with its external influence; either cultural, social, or political aspect.

In addition, Oddang's attempt to develop the archival document articulated by the local subject was reasonably appreciated. This research revealed how the juncture point which met Islam and traditional faith were not in a fixed antipode each other that symbolically and metaphorically represented through literary ways. However, the readers can gain a spirit of religious pluralism through the novel, since its conflict problematized the issue allegorical depiction of legitimated religions by Indonesia's government. The future researches on historical perspective on the novel are suggested to gain more understanding on periphery narratives.

REFERENCES

- [1] E. Velthoen, "Memetakan Sulawesi tahun 1950-an" dalam "Antara daerah dan negara: Indonesia tahun 1950-an," Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2011.
- [2] F. Oddang, "Tiba sebelum berangkat," Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2018.
- [3] N. K. Ratna, "Teori, metode, dan teknik penelitian sastra," Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2007.
- [4] K. Foulcher and T. Day. "Clearing a space: postcolonial readings of modern Indonesian literature," Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002.
- [5] H. K. Bhabha, "The location of culture," New York: Routledge, 1994.
- [6] N. I. Idrus, "Siri', gender, and sexuality among the Bugis in South Sulawesi", *Jurnal Antropologi Indonesia* Vol. 29, No. 1, 2005. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7454/aiv29i1.3527>)
- [7] S. Graham, "Sex, gender, and priest in south sulawesi, Indonesia," *Research Report IIAS Newsletter* No. 29, 2002.