



The Third Path in Indonesian Literary Politics: After Lekra and Manikebu Clashed

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Abstract

Lekra and Manikebu are two arts and cultural organizations in Indonesia that bring different artistic ideologies: "art for the people" and "art for art." In literary history, both of them negate each other; both use power to silence their opponents. Both are eager of power, bringing a totalitarian ideology that wants to change the tradition of creative and open thinking into something single and "independent". Both of them are banned organizations by the Indonesian government. We still feel the impact of the conflicts today. During the New Order, issues of violent politics were rarely represented in literary works. To date, there has not been any Indonesian literary work worldwide that has won a Nobel Prize, for example, even though we adhere to the ideology of universal humanism. This paper tries to find a third path of literary politics, which is needed as a guide not only for academics, but more for Indonesian writers in their work. The third path is a necessity if we want a climate that is conducive to the growth and development of Indonesian literature, towards a higher value literature.

Keywords: Lekra, Manikebu, socialist realism, universal humanism, the third path.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the history of Indonesian literature, the dispute between the Lekra group (short for the People's Cultural Institute) which carries the ideology of socialist realism art (art for the people), and the Manikebu group (a satirical abbreviation of the Cultural Manifesto) which carries the art ideology of universal humanism (art for art) became a very prominent phenomenon (Taum, *Literature, and Politics: Representations of the 1965 Tragedy in the New Order State*, 2015). The issue of "politics in literature" and vice versa "literature in politics" once controlled the public sphere of literary history and dragged academics, performers of the arts, and their sympathizers into violent and ideological debates. The Lekras were accused of dragging politics so far

into Indonesian literature through the policy of "politics is the commander". The Manikebu people were accused of being Western stooges who brought art into elitism, isolated from the dynamics and heterogeneity of the Indonesian nation. They are even accused of demeaning the people and their traditions.

Both sides rely on political power to cancel each other out while claiming ideological truth. Lekra writers' closeness to the PKI and the power of the Old Order, as well as their control of the dominant mass media at that time, made Lekra win the battle. By using the hands of political power, they succeeded in silencing the Manikebu writers. On May 8, 1964, President Soekarno banned Manikebu, which was considered counterrevolutionary. Literary works produced by the literary man Manikebu are prohibited from circulating.

After the September 30, 1965 incident, the situation reversed. Ajib Rosidi calls it a "reversed pendulum," Keith Foucher likens it to a spinning wheel (Samboja, 2010). President Soeharto took power from Soekarno, placed the PKI as a banned party, executed the PKI political elite, massacred and imprisoned PKI people, including almost all Lekra writers (Muhammad, 1980). All literary works written by the Lekras are prohibited from circulating.

This description shows that both Lekra and Manikebu were assigned the status of "forbidden organizations" by the Government of the Republic of Indonesia (Hoerip, 1982). Mutually silence each other's right to speak, the right to express opinions of their opponents. They both experienced bad luck, even though the suffering of the Lekra people was far worse than those of the Manikebu people (Hoerip, 1982).

What impact will the struggle for ideology and power between Lekra and Manikebu have on the development of Indonesian literature? How was political violence represented in literary works during the reign of the New Order? Likewise during



the reform era? How do we view the relationship between literature and politics? Are our writers today inspired and motivated to write and discuss major political themes that occur in our country? What is the relationship between literature and our politics today?

To answer the above questions, I will start by exposing the ideological positions of Lekra and Manikebu. It is from this ideological position that we trace the impact and various other consequences. It is time for those questions to be discussed openly. It is also time for literary scientists to gather to discuss the third path of literary politics after the two groups of arts organizations have crushed each other.

THE IDEOLOGICAL POSITION OF LEKRA AND MANIKEBU

There have been many writings that reveal the ideological positions of Lekra (RhomaDwi Aria Yuliantri, 2008) and Manikebu (DS Moeljanto, 1995), including those of academics (Taum, *Collective Indonesian Memories of the 1965 Tragedy*, 2015). I repeat by giving a long explanation. There were a few notes relating to the context of the birth of the two cultural organizations that I present as a basis for further discussion. However, Lekra and Manikebu did not appear suddenly. They came from a process that was truly historical. Therefore, the context of the birth of the two institutions needs to be examined.

Lekra was born in the same year as the year of the "Gelombang Trust Letter" declaration. The letter was declared on February 18, 1950, among others by Chairil Anwar, AsrulSani, RifaiApin, M. Balfas, Henk Nantung. Six months later, on August 17, 1950, the People's Cultural Institute (Lekra) was born, which was initiated by D. N. Aidit, Njoto, M. S. Ashar, and A.S. Dharta. Not all Lekra members were members of the PKI(Tau15).

In July 1961, at the Plenary session of the central leadership of Lekra, the slogan "politics is commander" was accepted as a principle of creative work, but not as an instruction or necessity (Samboja, 2010). The reason they accepted this motto was that in the 1950s there was propaganda that wanted to expel or alienate artists and writers from the political arena. The propaganda that was launched, among other things, said that politics was only a matter for political people, that politics was dirty while artists and writers were holy, so they did not need to be involved in political affairs, including in their art. This propaganda was seen as against the spirit of the National Awakening (Ajob, 2004).

This context clearly shows the difference in principle between the Gelombang Belief with the ideology of universal humanism and Lekra which promotes socialist realism.

What was Lekra fighting for? In its Preamble it is stated, "Lekra advises its members, but also to artists, scholars, and cultural workers outside of Lekra, to deeply study reality, learn the essential truths of life, and to behave in every way reality and truth. " It is easy to conclude that the essential truth, for Lekra, is socialist realism, a reality that exists in people's lives. For socialist realism, every reality, every fact, is only a part of the truth, not the truth itself.

They also encourage artists to achieve artistic beauty as high as possible. "In the arts, Lekra encourages initiative, encourages creative courage, and Lekra approves of every form, style, and so on, as long as he is loyal to the truth and as long as he strives for the highest artistic beauty" (Samboja, 2010).

The literary stage, which is dominated by literary Lekra with its totalitarian and violent ideology, has received resistance from other young artists, including Goenawan Muhammad, AriefBudiman, Boen S. Oemarjati, MochtarLubis, and Taufiq Ismail. Together with H. B. Jassin, WiratmoSukito, and TrisnoSumardjo they issued a statement which would later be called the Cultural Manifesto, on August 17, 1963. The Cultural Manifesto was later abbreviated to Manikebu by his political opponents. In their expression, they reject the concept of "politics is the commander" and the artistic ideology of "socialist realism". They proposed another ideology of art, which they called "universal humanism." The contents of the Cultural Manifesto are as follows.

"We, Indonesian artists and intellectuals, hereby announce a Cultural Manifesto, which states our stance, the ideals of our National Culture.

For us, culture is a struggle to improve the conditions of human life. We do not prioritize one cultural sector over another. Every sector strives together for that culture according to its nature.

In carrying out the National culture, we try to create with sincerity honestly as a struggle to maintain and develop our self-dignity as the Indonesian nation is a society of nations.

Pancasila is our cultural philosophy. "

These Manikebu artists expect a freer climate of creativity. However, his appearance



received strong protests and criticism, especially from artists and Lekra sympathizers. They think that art cannot be related to life in general, humanity in general. Art always deals with individual human problems. In short, art cannot express the universal and eternal values of everyone. They also considered that the Cultural Manifesto was similar to President Soekarno's Political Manifesto. For this strong reaction, on May 8, 1964, the Cultural Manifesto was banned by President Soekarno, because the Indonesian nation already had a Political Manifesto as a product of Pancasila (Maier, 2004).

A year after the ban on Manikebu (1964), to be precise September 30, 1965, there was an important episode (pivotal episode) that became a turning point in Indonesian history. This incident ended the Old Order government system and initiated the New Order regime, which was completely different in character and character (Taum, Literature, and Politics: Representations of the 1965 Tragedy in the New Order State, 2015). The Lekra stage was closed tightly, almost all of its artists and writers were killed (Muhammad, 1980). "The frenzied rumbling has not been heard since the incident which President Soekarno referred to as the Gestok erupted and burned all dry straw throughout Indonesia" (RhomaDwi Aria Yuliantri, 2008).

REPRESENTATION OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN LITERATURE

The cultural stage in the era of President Soeharto's government must follow the new order (order). The stage has been cleared of the political field. "It's bleached. Literary ones must return to literature. Music must return to music. Performing arts must return to the magnificent art building.... No longer should the people be allowed to organize stages in a free, glamorous, sloppy, and wild manner. Everything returns to the norm that returns to its nature" (RhomaDwi Aria Yuliantri, 2008).

What is the impact of the ban on the works of Lekra writers and the murder and banishment of those writers? Was political and military violence during the New Order represented in literary works?

The 1965 tragedy is the biggest one in Indonesian history (Giebels, 2005) and is one of the biggest mass killings in the 20th century (Hinton, 2004). Even though it is the largest mass murder of the 20th century, it is very surprising that this gruesome murder incident has almost disappeared from the collective memory of the Indonesian people and is hardly questioned by the world community. With great question marks, Hinton

(2000) states that our knowledge of the 1965 revolution is lacking.

At this time, little is known about the horrors of Indonesian Revolution on 1965. It is really astonishing that this very big murderer almost vanished in Indonesian collective memory. The more disconcerted thing is that there are so few Indonesian scholars and writers who pay attention to address this tragedy.

This mass murder incident was rarely mentioned in history textbooks in schools during the New Order (Adam, 2004). In the field of literature, Foulcher notes that the historical events of the 1965 tragedy and the killings of the communists in Indonesia do not seem to have attracted the attention of writers to make them a source of creative writing (Foulcher, 2004). According to him, throughout the 1970s, creative literature in Indonesia hardly voiced the meaning of the events of 1965 and their consequences for the life of individuals, society, and the nation. According to the records of Yakob Sumarjo (Sumarjo, 1981), during the years 1970-1980, 210 novels were published in Indonesia consisting of 60 serious novels and 150 popular novels. Of that number, only 4 novels (so about 1.9%) mentioned the 1965 tragedy. During this period, history did not have a place in national literature because great writers were more interested in exploring personal experiences or writing about international issues.

In particular, in the field of poetry, Aveling saw the emergence of a flow of 'neo-romanticism' which emphasized the lyrical projection of melancholy and personal emotions rather than becoming a landscape of external images (Aveling, 1975). According to Aveling, thematically, such poetry sometimes shows artists as foreign adventurers, crossing a landscape that is open and empty without humans, usually at late night. The poetry trend that emphasized critical observation of the world and personal experiences was less popular and less popular at the time.

Indonesian writers are afraid to discuss the theme of power politics, especially those related to the 1965 Tragedy. Ahmad Tohari in "The Moral Responsibility of Indonesian Writers in Dealing with the Human Tragedy in PKI 1965 Revolt" (2003) Tohari notes and questions similar things.

1965 revolt in Indonesia led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people accused of communist associations. Tohari asks why there are so few Indonesian writers who address this tragedy?



How is the representation of the 1965 tragedy in literary works during the New Order? Studies show that the literary works produced during the New Order show the nature of power at that time.

Literature sometimes fiercely resisted, fought humanistly, or compromised with power. Consider Table 1 below.

Table 1
Literary Representations of the 1965 Tragedy
During the New Order Power Period

| Description | The Three Stages of the Evolution of KekuasaanOrdeBaruand Its Representation | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| | 1965-1970 | 1971-1980 | 1981-1998 |
| The main features of the evolution of the New Order regime | Political consolidation & economic recovery. The anti-communist alliance was expanding. Dominant army. In the field of literature, there is still freedom of expression: resistance literature appears. | Economic growth is improving. Rulers focus on "political control." Ideological conformity is guaranteed by P4. Institutionalization of the anti-communist movement. In literature, there is no resistance. | The status quo of power cannot be challenged. Presidential authority strengthens. Anti-communist ideology entered the cultural area. In the field of literature, resistance continues. |
| The 1965 tragedy out of literature (non-literary texts) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The news of G30S through daily news of <i>Berita Yudha</i> and <i>Angkatan Bersenjata</i> (1965) 2) The Establishment of Kopkamtib (1965) 3) PenjaraPulau Buru(1969) 4) The Commemoration of HariKesaktian Pancasila (1966) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The constructing of the Monumen Pancasila Sakti and Museum Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI (1973) 2) The publishing of Buku Teks Sejarah Nasional Indonesia (1975) 3) The upgrading of P4 (1978) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The producing film of <i>Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI</i> (1984) 2) The publishing book of <i>Tragedi Nasional Percobaan Kup G30S/PKI di Indonesia</i> (1989) 3) The publishing of <i>Buku Putih Sejarah G30S Pemberontakan PKI</i> (1994) |
| The 1965 tragedy in the realm of literature (literary texts) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Pada Titik Kulminasi" Satyagraha Hoerip (1966) 2. "Perempuan dan Anak-anaknya" Gerson Poyk (1966) 3. "Bintang Maut" Ki Panjikusmin (1967) 4. "Domba Kain" Ki Panjikusmin (1968) 5. "Perang dan Kemanusiaan" Usamah (1969) 6. "Musim Gugur Kembali di Connecticut" Umar Kayam (1969) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Sri Sumarah Umar Kayam</i> (1975) 2. <i>Mencoba Tak Menyerah</i> Yudhistira Anm. Massardi (1979) 3. <i>Jentera Lepas</i> Ashadi Siregar (1979) 4. <i>Kubah</i> Ahmad Tohari (1980) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Trilogy of <i>Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk</i> Ahmad Tohari (1982) 2) <i>Anak Tanah Air Secercah</i> Kisah Ajip Rosidi (1985) 3) <i>Jalan Bandungan</i> Nh. Dini (1989) 4) <i>Durga Umayi</i> Y.B. Mangunwijaya (1991) 5) <i>Para Priyayi</i> Umar Kayam (1992) |



| | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| | 7. "Ancaman" H. G. Ugati (1969) 8. "Maut" Moehammad Sjoekoer (1969) 9. "Bawuk" Umar Kayam (1970) 10. "Malam Kelabu" Martin Aleida (1970) | | |
| The power of relations and literary resistance models | Three types of resistance: 1. StrongResistance 2. Passive Resistance 3. Humanistic Resistance | literature alienated from its world. Literature becomes only a 'locus' or fields of power game. Literature appears without criticism and resistance. | Three types of resistance: 1.StrongResistance 2.Compromise with the Power 3.Humanistic Resistance |
| Minimum Hegemony | Minimum Hegemony | Total Hegemony | Hegemony Declines |

(Source: Literature and Politics, Taum, 2015: 267-268)

The table above shows that the production of literary works dealing with the theme of the 1965 Tragedy during the New Order period shows three stages of evolution. During the 1965-1970 period, 9 short stories with the theme of the 1965 Tragedy were produced. These short stories provided three types of resistance, namely hard resistance, passive resistance, and humanistic resistance. The New Order has demonstrated its hegemonic power to a minimum. In the period 1971-1980, 4 novels were published which were "isolated from their world". Literature is only a battlefield of interests. During this period, the New Order regime showed its hegemonic character. Furthermore, in the 1981-1998 period, 5 novels appeared. These works provided strong resistance, humanistic resistance, but some also compromised the rule of the New Order. The

power of the New Order showed decadent hegemony.

Since the early 2000s, an astonishing phenomenon has emerged, namely the proliferation of memoirs related to the 1965 Tragedy. Some of them are (1) *Memoar Pulau Buru* by Hersri Setiawan (2004); (2) *Diburu di Pulau Buru* by Hersri Setiawan (2004); (3) *Dari Kalong sampai Pulau Buru* by Adrianus Gumelar Demokrasno (2006); (4) *Kesaksian Tapol Orde Baru: Guru, Seniman, dan Prajurit Tjakra* by Suyatno Prayitno (2003); (5) *Kidung pada Korban: Dari Tutur Sepuluh Narasumber Eks-Tapol* by Hersri Setiawan (2006). This list is likely to continue to grow. If we view these memoirs as literary works, then this phenomenon has jolted our consciousness. Apart from that, various literary works have also appeared, which I summarize in Table 2.

Table 2
Post-New Order 1965 Tragedy Novels

| No | Pengarang | Judul | Tahun |
|----|-------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. | Umar Kayam | <i>JalanMenikung</i> | Jakarta, 2000 |
| 2. | AyuUtami | <i>Larung</i> | Jakarta, 2001 |
| 3. | EkaKurniawan | <i>CantikItu Luka</i> | Yogyakarta, 2002 |
| 4. | Noorca MMassadi | <i>September</i> | Solo, 2006 |
| 5. | Tinuk R. Yampolky | <i>CandikAla 1965</i> | Jakarta, 2011 |
| 6. | Leila SChudori | <i>Pulang</i> | Jakarta, 2012 |
| 7. | AyuUtami | <i>ManjalidanCakrabirawa</i> | Jakarta, 2013 |
| 8. | LaksmiPamuntjak | <i>Amba</i> | Jakarta, 2014 |
| 9. | Dhianita KhusumaPertiwi | <i>Buku Harian Keluarga Kiri</i> | Malang, 2019 |

(Source: Compiled from various sources)



This illustration shows that creative literature needs a conducive climate, especially freedom to express thoughts and feelings. The large number of bandings that were carried out during the New Order era made artists not free to work. Moreover, during the New Order, the PKI and all its *onderbow* were portrayed as a very frightening ghost. Anyone who touches on that problem will get into trouble.

THIRD PATH

Satyagraha Hoerip initiated the third path. In a rhetorical question, "Is it possible to make a kind of" dough "between established universal humanism and matured socialist realism?" (Hoerip, 1982). For me, we have to reexamine these artistic concepts for their relevance and contribution in developing literature in the country.

The principles of universal humanism are not everything. As quoted by Satyagraha Hoerip, H. B. Jassin "set aside" the principle of universal humanism when van Mook broke into Jogja and asked him to publish a magazine. The consideration was that the cannon muzzles of the colonialists were raging in the country.

The principle of socialist realism - which was believed by the Manikebu circles to be a bad artistic ideology, inhuman, which was seen with the struggle of the weak, marginalized - was certainly not a bad ideology. Nobody can say that the tetralogy of Pulau Buru by Pramoedya Ananta Toer - which is a socialist-realist is a bad literary cart, just because its characters fight for the emancipation of their position and fate. What I think needs to be rejected from Lekra is its slogan "politics as commander" (Hoerip, 1982). Art cannot be led by any sector: politics, social, economy, militarism, even aesthetics.

Aesthetic issues - which indeed need to be taken into account in literary works - are the question of how to present the problems in the human world into literary works of aesthetic value (Maier, 2004). In order to be useful for life, the principle of "art for art" is a choice that is no longer relevant to life. It is a quiet path that is comfortable, safe, and will not be disturbed because it is only occupied with itself. He will not question power, politics, economy, oppression, underdevelopment, poverty which are real problems in society.

After World War II, which had undermined belief in science, knowledge, and technology that destroyed the rights of human life, literature sought a new direction to have meaning for human society. In France, existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre brought to life the idea that artists have a

responsibility to society. Therefore, the term "Littérature Engagée" (French: "engaged literature"; Ind: partisan literature) emerged, namely literature that sides with human issues. Writers consciously put themselves in real action. This position is also a reaction to the previous artistic dogma "art for art's sake" which is only complacent with literary means rather than with its readers.

The moral challenge for writers to be involved in defending humanitarian interests has led to the emergence of a new genre of "Human Rights Literature" which contains the idea of the need for literature to question - either directly or indirectly - issues of "Human Rights". The concept of human rights literature became famous around 2010 when Vered Cohen Barzilay wrote an introduction to the anthology *Freedom: Short Stories* which shows the power of literature in changing society. Human rights literature believes that every human being has a moral obligation and the power to change society. Human rights literature firmly believes in the tremendous power that literature has in changing society.

After World War II, a partisan literary genre emerged, namely literature that was involved in politics and the ideology of real humanity. Literary criticism movements such as Feminism, Queer Criticism, Postcolonial, and cultural studies depart from the same basic ideas, which are related to literature and partisan politics.

The third path of Indonesian literary politics is "The mixture of universal humanism that is solidified with mature socialist realism!" Indonesian writers must have the freedom to create their works. He must be able to work on the themes of socialist realism that occur in the country, in all its sectors, including politics, power, economy, and culture. He must also be able to develop and achieve a high aesthetic taste.

II. CONCLUSION

Literature has an important position, role, and social responsibility as a catalyst in the life of the nation and country. Its role is very important in education and in shaping the character of the nation. Efforts to understand the characteristics of the growth and development of Indonesian literature along with the politics and ideology that it promotes and strives for are necessary so that we become wiser in fostering a climate that is more conducive to respecting the dignity of the Indonesian nation among nations.

The idea of the third path of literary politics is an idea that needs to be further explored and interpreted. The existence of the People's Cultural



Institute (Lekra) on the stage of Indonesian literary history for approximately 15 years (1950-1965), it must be admitted, has brought its color in Indonesian literary and cultural life. By adopting the aesthetic model of 'socialist realism', literature in Indonesia (not only those incorporated in Lekra) is in direct contact with the problems and struggles of the people to achieve a better standard of life. To achieve high artistic ideals, a climate of complete freedom needs to be given to writers in their creations. Thus, the ideology of Lekra art, socialist realism does not need to conflict with or be opposed to the ideology of universal humanism. The unity between the two artistic ideologies gave birth to a path in the politics of Indonesian literature.

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