Ambivalent Post-colonial Experiences in Mochtar Lubis' *Jalan Tak Ada Ujung*

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Abstract

This paper explores the minority's experience of several characters in Mochtar Lubis's *Jalan tak ada Ujung*, the minority here are the characters with hybrid experience. By employing several postcolonial thoughts from prominent thinkers within the discipline, it is found that the post-colonial experience was something ambivalent. The experiences, then, not only portray the restlessness of the ex-colonised in defending their liberty but also the struggle to maintain humanity's order in countering colonialism. Moreover, the experience of post-colonialism later developed and degraded the mental state of the characters as well. Several thoughts are regarded as the analytical tools, comprising Cesaire's multiculturalism, Fanon's thought on nationalism, and Gandhi's humanism.

Keywords: independence, Indonesia, nationalism, post-colonial, postcolonialism

Introduction

Post-colonial or the era after colonialism, often defined as the liberation from the status of "colonised". National identity of the ex-colonised is finally getting recognition after the emergence of revolution, sometimes marked by a proclamation; the case happened in the Republic of Indonesia. In the effort to maintain the liberty, historical accounts that were sworn under Nationalism record the Indonesia's struggle in facing the Dutch's military aggression or *politionele actie*, the same pattern is applied to the coloniser and their discourse. Doolan, in *Collective Memory and the Dutch East Indies*, argued that the Dutch media during Indonesia's struggle for independence (1945-1949) actually released propaganda in order to sanitise the war reality for the members of the public (Doolan, 2021). For the coloniser did exercise the sanitisation, so did the colonised, through Nationalism that is married to art forms, literatures, and discourses.

However, Mochtar Lubis' *Jalan tak ada Ujung* portrays a unique nuance of restlessness, he questions both sides' atrocities after a colonized nation freed itself through the characters of his novel; the nuance where the main characters are outside of colonial and national discourse then,

could explain the Postnational situation (Gandhi, 1998).

Several studies have been conducted on the work; however, most of them are psychoanalytic studies. Suprapto using Freud's model of Psychoanalysis, found that the characters in *Jalan tak ada Ujung* display the id, ego, and superego; they are found from the characters' development throughout the story (Suprapto, 2018). Wicaksono, by employing Greenblatt's New Historicism, analyse the meaning of fighting or struggle or *berjuang* in three novels, which are *Burung-burung Manyar*, *Larasati*, and Jalan tak ada Ujung. He argues that the writers respectively bring the nuance of *berjuang* in different ways (Wicaksono, 2019). Nahumpang, Hinta, and Kadir employ a different approach compared to Suprapto; they employ Sullivan's psychology analysis on Jalan tak ada Ujung. They found three important notes on the main character that are dynamism, personification, and self-system in recognition of Isa's experience in dealing with his problem (Nahumpang et al., 2023). The last, Hidayatullah, by employing gender analysis on *Red Badge of Courage* and Jalan tak ada Ujung, found that the struggle of the characters from the novels is nuanced with masculinity, which fuels the motivation to fight (Hidayatullah, 2023), he mentioned it is worth noting that the masculinity found in *Jalan tak ada Ujung* actually has a continuation until the post-reformation era or even beyond. It is also worth mentioning that Febriani, in her study of the cultural politics of obscenity in 1950s' Indonesia, provides a brief explanation on morality, powerlessness, and masculine anxiety of the main character, all due to the independence and political emergence during the years (Febriani, 2025).

Furthermore, this study will examine the post-colonial experience of several characters which formed their approach to national-idealism by employing postcolonial thoughts. It is intriguing that the characters are reflecting the usual anti-colonial spirit and for some; pacifist spirit as well.

Methodology

This article was written during a postcolonial course, thus, to employ the thoughts of many thinkers should fit the criteria of this study, the thoughts comprising the first wave and the later wave of postcolonialism. Multiculturalism and the danger of replication, originated from Cesaire and Fanon, are presented in this study to analyse the object of this study, as do later thinkers are also presented; Said, Bhabha, and Gandhi. In answering the questions that surround the object, close reading is employed, and it includes repetition as well.

Results and Discussion

1. The post-colonial experiences

The plot of the story is in a mixed form of chronology; the early chapters are meant to introduce the main characters, who are Isa and Hazil, one of whom is in reverse chronology, and the other is not. The focus of the earlier paragraphs centres on unnamed characters like *Tukang*

Loak or a regular seller, *Ubel-ubel* or a mock term to the British-Indian soldiers, and *Tentara NICA* or simply Dutch soldiers. In general chronology, the plot set in the era after Indonesia proclaimed its independence and took place in Jakarta, it brought the story of how the ex-colonised maintain their independence, along with the intrigue in the maintenance.

> *"Masuklah," teriaknya, "tidak apa-apa. Ubel-ubel itu Cuma mau mengambil keluarga Indo di rumah sebelah. Katanya mereka merasa terancam di sini, dan minta dipindahkan ke Bataliyon Sepuluh. Ubel-ubel datang untuk melindungi mereka."*
> *Sebentar terlntas dalam kepala Isa, mengapa perlu orang dimatikan hanya untuk itu.*
> (Lubis, 1992)

In this section, the nomenclature of the characters could introduce the reader that the issue of nomenclature for the characters is reversed. According to Bel, the unnamed characters are applied to the colonised, implying the hegemony of colonisation that lowly regard the oppressed (Honings et al., 2024) thus reflecting the post-colonial effort conducted by Lubis; he exclusively named the colonised characters, no specific names for the colonisers, and instead named the nationalistic antagonists in a mocking nuance, i.e. Ontong.

> *"Tiga hari yang lalu pada kedua Perempuan Tionghoa yang tidak berdosa itu. Seminggu yang lalu di Jati Petamburan. Seorang gadis Indo kecil yang hanya berumur delapan tahun. Mata-mata musuh. Semuanya mata-mata musuh. Kemarin dahulu di Kampung Bali, seorang Belanda tua yang telah kakek-kakek. Selama kita masih punya Ontong, Imam, dan Kiran, maka ini semua akan terjadi. Dan Ontong, Imam, dan Kiran masih terlalu banyak pada kita. Masih lama sekali baru mereka akan menghilang dari tengah-tengah kita."*
> (Lubis p. 85, 1992)

Ontong and his company fall into the category of nationalistic-antagonist. Hazil, one of the characters argued that they fail to maintain their moral judgment, however, this group's act arguably stems from the fixity of identity for they conduct the atrocities only to those who belonged to the third-space. Bhabha by regarding Fanon, points out that the negation conducted by the people with the identity-fetish would force the unhomeliness on the members of the third space (Bhabha, 2004), relating to Lubis' work, the negation of Ontong and his group that carrying identity-fetish is causing the death of the innocents. The innocence of Ontong's victims is socially assumed from their cultural and personal background; the Chinese-female diasporas that are totally unrelated to the revolution got killed, a young Indo-female that obviously has no capability to bear spying task got killed, and an old Dutch-male that also has no capability in spying task got killed, all due to blatant suspicion and one thing remains clear that they are all non-indigenous people.

The portrayal of *cherry-picking* fallacy conducted by Ontong and his group proving Lubis' message that mentally-unstable revolution and/or revolutionist could resulting in many or just one big ethical wrong. Relating the previous quote by Bhabha that fixity and fetishism of identity that have the possibility to produce negation "could prevent 'beyond' that establishes a boundary" instead of bridge as the key of homeliness, Said on the other hand further argued that

Nativism is not the only alternative to counter colonialism, for “there is the possibility of a more generous and pluralistic vision of the world, in which imperialism courses on,” and “the relationship of domination continues, but the opportunities for liberation are open.” (Said, 2012).

> *“Dalam trem beberapa orang melihat seakan mengejek kepada biolanya. Seakan mereka hendak berkata, siapa pula orang gila yang membawa biola dalam hari-hari pertempuran seperti sekarang. Orang mesti membawa senjata, tetapi orang ini membawa biola. Meskipun mereka sendiri membawa senjata, tetapi orang mudah mengejek orang lain dalam saat-saat seperti itu.”*
> (Lubis p. 34, 1992)

Now that the revolution is happening and the nationalism is imbued to the scheme of identity fixity, it is also resulting in the masculinity in revolution. In previous study, Hidayatullah argued that “Wartime needs its heroes with masculine qualities such as patriotism, bravery, agility, and toughness”, thus it is assumed that the fetishism not only goes beyond identities but also personal or even social preference, enforcing the stigma to the non-masculine like Isa to fall into the perception that he is a non-nationalist. Thus, Isa’s ambivalence can be included to the hybrid category where he supports the revolution but at the same time oppose the antagonistic values as shown by his comrades.

> *“’Persetan!’ sumpahnya. ‘Kenapa mesti saban pagi mesti ada tembakan? Dunia ini sudah mau kiamat. Orang semua sudah gila.’*
> *Dia mengeluh, teringat pada waktu sebelum perang, dan dia masih menjadi kepala Landraad. Ketika itu orang hidup senang, apalagi orang seperti dia, pegawai tinggi pemerintah”*
> (Lubis p. 19, 1992)

The section above portrays not only the characters’ experience after a nation finally be freed from colonialism which includes the nationalists and the third space, but also the pro-colonial from the indigenous perspective. Lubis portrayed this experience of post-colonial society through the character named Kamaruddin, who previously worked as a chief in the colonial court for the inlanders (*landraad*). It is argued that Kamaruddin experienced the whitening which turned him to support the colonial more than the revolutionist, portrayed by how he expressed his feelings i.e. “Dunia ini sudah mau kiamat” to picture his uneasy feeling towards independence and “Ketika itu orang hidup senang, apalagi orang seperti dia, pegawai tinggi pemerintah” to compare how happy and prosperous he was during the colonial government.

The nuance of Kamaruddin’s statements resonates with what Fanon and Cesaire, Kelley argued, “Both Fanon and Cesaire warn the coloured world not to follow Europe's footsteps, and not to go back to the ancient way, but to carve out a new direction altogether” (Césaire & Kelley, 2000), the resonance between Kamaruddin’s statement and early postcolonial thought could go beyond and be related to the other characters’ statements: to Isa’s dream of a bloodless revolution or to Ontong’s bloodlust revolution.

> *"Beberapa 'warlord' kecil-kecil telah timbul. Kepala bermacam-macam pasukan bersenjata yang tidak memperdulikan sesuatu apa. Banyak pula yang telah mulai memeras rakyat, minta beras, sapi, uang. Dan kekejaman-kekejaman yag berlaku. Terkadang aku merasa malu, mengingat kita mengutuk dan menyumpah teror yang dijalankan Nica di Jakarta. Tetapi kita sendiri juga telah mulai menjalankan teror pada rakyat kita sendiri."*
> (Lubis p. 97, 1992)

Hazil's argument here resonated much with Bhabha, "The grim polarities of the colonial encounter, he maintains, are necessarily bridged by a 'third-space' of communication, negotiation and, by implication, translation." (in Gandhi, 1998), and the postmodernist nuance in several statements by Hazil proves the necessity of the third space in bridging the ex-colonised to the road of a proper revolution.

2. The attitude to Nationalism

Aside from the post-colonial experience, the ex-colonialised society would also experience the realm of Nationalism. It is arguable that Nationalism is a natural counter to colonialism, Anderson also argued in the preface of *Imagined Communities* where nationalism works in a way to forget the older consciousness as in colonised consciousness (Anderson, 2006). In relation to Lubis which offering an alternative view between the two powers, the attitude towards Nationalism in the novel then, is also wretched, there are a multitude of unique experiences that affect the attitude.

> *"Manusia seorang-seorang. Tahukah engkau maksudku? Bagaimana harus aku terangkan? Perjuangan manusia yang bukan dalam gerombolan. Bukan salak serigala dalam kawanan yang melakukan pemburuan, tetapi salak dan geram, sedu-sedan, dan teriak nyaring serigala seekor-seekor yang merebut hidup. Bagiku individu itu adalah tujuan. Dan bukan alat mencapai tujuan. Kebahagiaan manusia adalah dalam perkembangan seorang-seorang yang sempurna dan harmonis dengan manusia lain. Negara hanya alat. Dan individu tidak boleh diletakkan di bawah negara. Ini musik hidupku. Ini perjuanganku. Ini jalan tak ada ujung yang kutempuh.'"*
> (Lubis p. 46 quote 1, 1992)

Not only unique, but Hazil's statement also remarks on the nuance of postmodernity in his post-colonial experience, and even though Hazil joined the revolutionary struggle, he does not reflect the spirit of Nationalism as he stated that Nation is just merely a tool, portraying the nuance that Hazil lay his belief in individuality and refuse to acknowledge Nationalism as the end of his struggle. Thus, to Hazil, freedom of a nation is not defined as a grand narrative of the nation itself with also the bourgeoisie leading it, but beyond that; freedom for individuals without hegemony of colonial government or a new nation. Hazil's view could be defined as a crisis in the social fabric, or even the opposite (Gandhi, 1998), depends on which side's reaction, to nationalists for sure, such thought will be a huge threat. However, resonating with Cairns and Richards, in embracing an imagined community, contradiction will always happen in the

community, whereas the minor voice would contradict what the majority said (in Ashcroft et al., 1995).

As a new nation arises, and the contradiction begins as Cairns and Richards stated, then the intrigue is not between the revolutionist and the ex-colonialist alone, but also between the member of this new nation.

> *"Guru Isa melihat pada Tuan Hamidy. Tuan Hamidy gemuk pendek selama zaman Jepang tidak ada kerjanya yang tertentu. Tetapi uangnya selalu banyak. Dia saudagar atau tukang catut. Guru Isa tidak suka padanya. Guru Isa banyak mendengar cerita-cerita tentang dia di kampung. Sekarang kabarnya dia menjadi saudagar beras. Kata orang dia amat pelit. Tetapi menurut pendengaran Guru Isa sekarang dia banyak menyumbang untuk perjuangan, memberikan uang untuk penjagaan malam, dan sebagainya."*
> (Lubis p. 66, 1992)

Tuan Hamidy is an example of the national bourgeoisie; with his financial factor as the mode, he joined the revolution as a means to elevate his position in society. The phenomenon of *tukang catut* is common during Indonesia's revolution; these phenomena are also accounted for in several other novels, i.e. Toer's. The emergence of tukang catut that became the national bourgeoisie resonated with Appiah as he noted, "The national bourgeoisie that took on the baton of rationalisation, industrialisation, bureaucratisation in the name of nationalism, turned out to be a kleptocracy" (in Ashcroft et al., 1995) and resonated as well with Fanon that the national bourgeoisie is that of the businessman and not a captain, the greed made the national bourgeoisie as such, and the system of embargoes set up by colonialism has left them with no other choice (Fanon, 1965).

Moreover, the regular people in the nation or the rest of the population that is not the national bourgeoisie, are left with no choice but to follow the chain of command. As Rapoport argued, sustaining sentiment in the military is what cemented people in politics (in Huntington, 1973).

> *"'Kita tidak berperang dengan Inggris dan Amerika. Musuh kita Cuma Belanda,' kata Hazil.*
> *'Ah jangan percaya, Pak. Kapan Bung Karno sudah bilang, kita mesti linggis Inggris dan seterika Amerika. Rakyat Cuma turut pemimpin Pak. Disuruh ke kiri, kita ke kiri, disuruh ke kanan, kita ke kanan. Maklum kita semua bodoh politik. Cuma saya betul tidak mengerti, mengapa kita belum mulai perang. Orang kampung semua sudah semangat betul, Pak. Di mana-mana ada siap-siapan.'"*
> (Lubis p.78, 1992)

Canonically, Karno, who has no military background, used the military as his mode of political gain, and Karno himself, who used military action from the civil force to revolt against colonial society, as stated by what the civilians in villages are doing, is related to "*perang-perangan*" or war. Thus, in absence of Hazil and Isa who carried the third-space messages, the

Nationalists then are in absence of counterbalance as well, leading to the possibility for them to conduct a brutal revolution.

Conclusion

Jalan tak ada Ujung by Mochtar Lubis is offering the experience after colonialism ended, not in a romantic way that any effort is glorious, but in a way ambivalent. Characters like Hazil and Isa are a reflection of third space in post-colonial experience, where the characters are longing for freedom from colonialism, but at the same time, they have their distinguished motive, i.e. anti-establishment (even from the concept of nation itself) and bloodless revolution. These minor knowledges, then, however, are being crushed by colonialism and even the nationalism itself, for both of the characters ended up caught by the Dutch force, and the remaining revolutionary force is being dominated by the corrupted nationalists. Thus, in conclusion, the minor knowledges were being outshone by the hegemonic force from the coloniser and the nationalists as well.

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