

Memory Transmission: Political Trauma in the Short Story 'The Last Night' by Leila S. Chudori

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Abstract. The short story “The Last Night” by Leila S. Chudori shows how student activists were treated badly during Indonesia’s New Order era. It also shows how political trauma is passed on from one generation to the next. This study looks at how collective memory and trauma are passed down from those who experienced them firsthand to subsequent generations, using Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory. This research is important because it shows how historical trauma affects how younger people see political events and authority. The research uses qualitative descriptive methods to look at the conversations in the short story and identify and analyse the factors involved in memory transmission. The research found that both familial and affiliative postmemory transmission play a part in how political trauma is inherited. The story shows how the younger generation’s views and feelings are influenced by the experiences and actions of those who lived through the traumatic events. This study helps us to understand postmemory and how it affects how future generations see political history.

Keywords: Postmemory, political trauma, memory transmission, New Order, activist

1. Introduction

The short story "The Last Night" by Leila S. Chudori (2024) describes the situation of injustice and violence experienced by student activists in the New Order era [1]. It's a story about the suffering experienced by the generation who experienced the ills first-hand, but it also represents the second generation or post-generation who suffered the impact of the trauma. Some students and activists have experienced traumatic incidents of torture at the hands of the police. On the other hand, there's a girl who hasn't experienced the repressive action directly, but seems to feel it through the transmission of memory between generations.

Fundamentally, trauma experienced by individuals can have a lasting impact, extending across time and space and transmitted from one generation to the next. Several previous studies illustrate this well. Joko Santoso (2021), in his research on the character Mapata in the novel *Tiba Sebelum Berangkat* by Faisal Oddang, describes the trauma experienced by a bissu and toboto who became a victim of violence during the DI/TII conflict. In the novel, Mapata undergoes brutal physical torture, including the cutting of his tongue and the use of a book as an instrument of torture. This violence reflects the dominance of sacred authority over Mapata’s

profane identity. The trauma he endures is not only embedded within himself but is also passed down to the next generation, highlighting the phenomenon of postmemory that involves the psychological and social impact of oppression [2].

Another study by Jalu Norva Illa Putra (2023) focuses on trauma in the film *Ali & Ratu-Ratu Queens* through the character Ali, who inherits the trauma of loss from his father. This trauma stems from the absence of a mother in Ali's life, as well as the emotional conflict conveyed through the narratives and experiences shared by his father, including arguments over the phone that shape Ali's perception of loss and uncertainty. In his search for an ideal mother figure, Ali tries to understand and construct his own identity, reflecting the complex relationship between trauma, memory, and the search for self. In this context, Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory becomes essential, particularly in understanding how the trauma of previous generations can influence and shape the life experiences of subsequent generations [3].

Marianne Hirsch says that the collective trauma of those who experience events directly can be passed on to the next generation, which is later called the postgeneration [4]. These traumas aren't experienced in person, but through stories, pictures, or behaviour around them. The short story "The Last Night" shows how past traumas are transmitted and translated into "memories" by future generations, creating narratives that affect their views and experiences of the event. Hirsch introduced two types of memory transmission: familial postmemory transmission and affiliative postmemory transmission. Familial postmemory transmission is about passing memories or stories down through family ties, which affects how a child understands and builds on a story they have received [5]. This research gap calls for a closer investigation of how stories like "The Last Night" illuminate socio-political implications of memory transmission. Thus, the purpose of this research is to investigate how the transmission of political trauma in "The Last Night" across generations influences the perspectives and experiences of those who did not directly experience these events. Specifically, this paper will analyze how Hirsch's two types of memory transmission—familial and affiliative postmemory—operate within the narrative to explain how these forms of memory influence the younger generation's perception of historical trauma. By doing so, this paper seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of collective memory transmission and its role in shaping social consciousness.

2. Methods

The research employs qualitative descriptive methods with the objective of describing and exploring collective memory and memory transmission in relation to

the political trauma depicted in literary texts. This research approach is based on the study of memory transmission, as proposed by Marianne Hirsch. The primary source of data in this study is the short story "The Last Night" by Leila S. Chudori, which is included in a compilation of short stories bearing the same title. The research data is a dialogue in the short story that represents the process of memory transmission and the type of postmemory.

Miles and Huberman (1994) said that the data collection process is conducted in several stages [6]. The initial stage of the research process involved a meticulous examination of the material object, namely the short story entitled "The Last Night" Secondly, the data pertinent to the established indicators, namely memory transmission factors and forms of memory transmission, must be identified. Thirdly, the results of the research described in accordance with the findings obtained from the identified data. The data analysis techniques in use are based on an interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman. This technique comprises three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion (Miles & Huberman, 1994) [6]. The process of data reduction entails the simplification and abstraction of pertinent data from a short story. The data presentation stage entails the collation of data in a structured format, thereby facilitating its interpretation. Ultimately, conclusions are drawn by identifying patterns and themes that emerge from the data, which are then interpreted in the context of memory transmission studies.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Theme and Setting of the Short Story

The short story "Last Night" by Leila S. Chudori raises the theme of the injustice and cruelty experienced by student activists during the New Order in Indonesia. The narrative is structured around two contrasting settings: the prison cell, where four students and activists are confined, and the residence of a government official in Jakarta. The four student/activist figures arrested were identified as the Slim, the Glasses, and the Fat. They were women activists who were subjected to torture at the hands of the police while incarcerated. The prisoners discuss the tragic fate that awaits them, including the execution that is already a certainty. Conversely, office buildings are depicted as symbols of wealth and comfort. The girl who lived in the house lived a life of tranquility, in stark contrast to the suffering experienced by the activists.

3.2. Memory Transmission and Political Trauma

3.2.1. Affiliative Postmemory

The short story "Last Night" effectively describes the complexity of memory transmission and postmemory as presented by Marianne Hirsch. It demonstrates how past trauma affects not only those who experience it directly but also the next generations who inherit the memory and emotional impact of the experience. The transmission of such memory is illustrated in the following quotations from the story:

" It's strange, the papers don't mention anything. Even the radio. You're just thanking the soldiers hundreds of times who supposedly managed to eradicate the riots. But, Papa, what is the proof of the charges you've been casting on these students? If there was any evidence, Papa would have known." (The Last Night, 108)

In this dialogue, the girl shows trauma to the government by thanking the soldiers who have eradicated the riots, without clear evidence of the reason why some students and activists were arrested by the police. From a postmemory perspective, the critical attitude of the girl proves how trauma is transmitted through injustice and lies nurtured by the government. The trauma depicted in this dialogue is included in the affiliative postmemory transmission because it is based on information he gets through the radio media.

"This is an example of democratization that they are shouting around the world. This is the implementation of actual updates that are never new. This is a history rehearsal where we're just thousands of little deer lying in their shoes...." (The Last Night, 110)

In this dialogue, Si Kurus is one of the activists who were arrested and subjected to torture at the hands of the police. Si Kurus demonstrates his anguish over the authoritarian actions of governments that appear to be repeating history, as if freedom of expression in the context of democratic governance were a falsehood. It is crucial to acknowledge that the violence and oppression that occurred in the past are not merely historical events. These experiences are still felt by subsequent generations, even though they have not directly experienced them. This suggests that the political trauma experienced by previous generations continues to influence and shape the views and experiences of the present generation. The memory transmission experienced by Si Kurus figures is included in the category of affiliative postmemory transmission, as it is based on narratives related to repression in the past that are not experienced but capable of being felt.

3.2.2. Familial Postmemory

"No, no, my heart. You're not going to do stupid things like them. You've studied well. Eat and sleep enough. And respect and respect the counsel of others. Anyway, they've embraced and felt the difficulties of this life. They're the ones who built this great country. Young people are often caught up in everything new and adventurous. No, my dear, you're going to be more calculated and strategic than these young boys." (The Last Night, 109)

In this dialogue, Father, as a government official, conveyed his trauma to his daughter's. He assumed that the young people now, as a postgeneration, do not want to respect the previous generation or older people who are known better how to take care of the country. He wants his daughter to be a prudent child and not engage in the kinds of actions he thinks are foolish, like the students and activists arrested for the suspected burning of the train. In a postmemory perspective, the father is projecting his trauma and conservative views on the girl. He attempts to avoid the traumatic experiences he has experienced or witnessed in the younger generation by instilling a view that he believes is safer and more stable. This memory transmission is included in the family postmemory transmission, which refers to the transmission of memories or stories through the bloodline of a father and his daughter.

3.2.3. Political Trauma

Political trauma, understood as a collective trauma, is defined as arising from politically driven human actions that lead to widespread consequences, impacting communities through destruction and violence [7]. This type of trauma is often tied to events involving severe human rights abuses, such as wars, forced migration, and torture [8]. These experiences are not limited to individual suffering but extend to the collective experience, with the potential to reshape social connections and, in some cases, even forge new communities [9]. The impact of such collective experiences underscores the ways in which trauma can be woven into the social and cultural fabric of groups affected by political violence [10].

In the short story "The Last Night" by Leila S. Chudori (2024), the political trauma depicted centers on the authoritarian repression of dissent during the New Order era in Indonesia. This form of trauma arises from government-sanctioned violence, specifically the suppression of student activists through arrests and torture without due process or evidence. The trauma is twofold: it directly affects those who experience the violence, such as the activists who face torture, and it indirectly impacts the next generation, who inherits a deep-seated distrust of authority and a sense of injustice. This collective trauma is reinforced through the government's

control over public information and the glorification of state actions, contributing to an enduring fear and skepticism among those who experience this trauma vicariously. By portraying both direct and transmitted forms of trauma, the story emphasizes the lasting impact of political repression on collective memory and intergenerational relationships.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, “The Last Night” by Leila S. Chudori (2024) illustrates how political trauma from the authoritarian practices of the New Order era in Indonesia can be transmitted across generations. The story conveys the lasting impact of state repression on those directly affected, as well as on those who inherit the collective memory of this trauma. By examining the skeptical outlook of the young girl toward the government's lack of transparency, we see how these inherited memories contribute to a sense of distrust in authority. This dynamic demonstrates that, even without directly experiencing the violence, the younger generation still perceives its impact through stories, conversations, and social narratives shared by family members and society.

The interactions between the father and his daughter highlight the role of familial postmemory transmission in this process. The father's conservative perspective, shaped by his experiences during the New Order, leads him to impose a cautious outlook on his daughter. He hopes to protect her from involvement in activist movements, subtly discouraging rebellion by instilling in her a sense of respect for established authority. This familial transmission illustrates how trauma-informed perspectives are often passed down within families, shaping the worldview of subsequent generations through conservative values and caution. By controlling his daughter's exposure to progressive ideas, the father attempts to shield her from the perceived dangers of activism.

Finally, the character Si Kurus embodies affiliative postmemory transmission, where shared narratives of state oppression resonate deeply within the younger generation, evoking empathy and a collective consciousness. His understanding of recurring violence and repression illustrates a broader societal memory that transcends personal experience. The recurring themes of suppression and denial of freedom, as portrayed in the story, reveal how authoritarian trauma persists in influencing the views, behaviors, and attitudes of those who inherit these memories. Ultimately, Chudori's story emphasizes that political trauma, whether transmitted within families or through society at large, leaves a lasting imprint on the collective identity of post-generational audiences, shaping their perspective on authority and governance in Indonesia.

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