

Traumatic representation of Chinese woman in the novel “Ingatan Ikan-ikan” by Sasti Gotama: Norman fairclough critical discourse analysis

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Abstract. This research aims to reconstruct the traumatic narratives experienced by Chinese women as victims after the May 1998 riots. The approach used is Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis model, which includes three main dimensions: text analysis, discursive practices, and socio-cultural practices. The main data source in this research is a contemporary Indonesian literary novel entitled *Ingatan Ikan-Ikan* by Sasti Gotama. The novel not only represents historical values, but also reveals the psychological aspects experienced by Chinese victims. The research findings indicate that the victims were deeply traumatized by past violence. However, the narrative in the novel shows the presence of the power of recovery that comes from love and friendship, which is slowly able to erode memory wounds and open space for the healing process.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, Norman Fairclough, Chinese women, trauma, and history.

1 Introduction

The novel *Ingatan Ikan-Ikan* presents a narrative of past trauma that overshadows the life of a Chinese woman named Lian in the vortex of the May 1998 riots. Through her story, the novel highlights how large-scale historical events can leave deep psychological scars and illustrates the dynamics of individual struggles to recover from painful memories. Lian, a veterinarian, chooses to isolate herself from the social environment and build emotional closeness with her blind chef fish as a form of escape from traumatic reality. Based on this background, the problem discussed in this study is related to how the traumatic representation of Chinese women in the novel *Ingatan Ikan-Ikan* by Sasti Gotama using Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis approach.

According to Fairclough (1995: 104), critical discourse analysis (AWK) highlights three main functions in a text: representation, relation, and identity. All three are related to how social reality is constructed in language. AWK consists of three dimensions of analysis: text, discourse practices (the process of text production and consumption), and socio-cultural practices that reflect the influence of ideology, power, and cultural values. Therefore, novels as cultural texts are relevant objects to

be analyzed because they can represent complex social and psychological dynamics. In addition, AWK can also reveal the hidden power relations behind the text, so that it can dissect the linguistic aspects of discourse and understand the social and cultural changes that occur in modern society (Philips, 2007: 116, in Abadi, 2017: 171).

Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (AWK) approach has been widely used in various previous studies. One example is a study entitled Critical Discourse Analysis: The Social Dimension in Mochammad Bayu Firmansyah's Novel *Negeri Para Bedebah* (STKIP PGRI Pasuruan, 2018), which reveals the social aspects in Tere Liye's novel. Another research was conducted by Anindra (2021) with the title Critical Discourse Analysis of Parasite Film: Social Inequality in Modern Culture, which analyzes the representation of social inequality in the Korean film. Thus, research on Traumatic Representation of Chinese Women in the Novel *Ingatan Ikan-Ikan* by Sasti Gotama: A Norman Fairclough Critical Discourse Analysis has never been done before.

2 Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is able to produce narrative data that explains social phenomena in depth, as explained by Djajasudarma (2006: 10), that this method presents data descriptively in oral or written form that reflects social reality. Qualitative research is also interpretative in nature which aims to understand the meaning that arises from the interaction between text and socio-cultural context (Maghvira, 2017). The data collection technique is carried out through the free listening method, which is an intensive observation technique of the text without the direct involvement of the researcher in the object under study. This technique allows researchers to observe and record the linguistic structure and meaning implied in literary or media texts (Sudaryanto, 2015: 204). The data analyzed in this research is the content of the novel *Ingatan Ikan-Ikan*, which contains social dimensions related to the historical trauma experienced by victims of the May 1998 riots. The analysis was conducted using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (AWK) theory to reveal discursive practices that represent social dynamics and ideology in the text (Fairclough, 1995; 2003).

3 Results and Discussion

Sasti Gotama's *The Memory of the Fishes* tells the story of a Chinese woman named Lian Wen who works as a veterinarian choosing to withdraw from social interactions, especially human laughter. She thinks that the sound can bring emotional pain that brings her to memories of the past. On the other hand, Ombak, a fish shop owner, has difficulty sleeping every night despite his best efforts. Even being able to fall asleep does not free him from nightmares. Lian and Ombak both have traumatic experiences in the past, specifically during the May 1998 riots. They became victims of the mass upheaval at that time. Both continue to carry the wounds, deeply embedded in their subconscious, through their lives and affect their daily interactions. Until 2005, both received mysterious letters inviting them to believe in miracles in order to be free

from bad memories. They, separately, came to Penatu Binata to have the memories erased.

3.1 Analysis of the Textual Practice Dimension

Based on the study of various linguistic devices applied by the author in the novel *Ingatan Ikan-Ikan*, three main elements were found to be used to represent the themes and characters in the literary work. These three elements include diction choice, causality sentence construction, and source selection as representative strategies.

a. Data 1

"Ndak usah bilang Cina-Cina lagi. Aku paling kesal kalau dikatai begitu. Dulu ada cowok di pinggir jalan yang siulin aku, terus bilang aku 'Cina kesar' dan menyuruhku pulang ke tempat asalku. Lah, ini rumahku, tempat lahirku," (page 63).

This quote displays a discourse construction that shifts the meaning of strength from physical resilience to emotional and psychological strength in the face of trauma. The metaphors "be stone" and "be weather" illustrate a rhetorical strategy that offers an alternative form of strength, while at the same time providing space for the expression of hurt and sadness. The sound of human laughter that triggered the trauma of May 1998 connects the characters' personal experiences with the broader socio-political context, showing how language represents collective memory and resistance to patriarchal domination. A'i's statement inviting Lian to make peace with the past illustrates efforts to reconstruct identity through acceptance and emotional healing. As such, the text emphasizes the role of language in negotiating the identity of women who are both wounded and strong.

b. Data 2

"Tak perlu tergesa-gesa. Lian tak harus menjadi kuat. Bertahan pun adalah salah satu bentuk kekuatan. Jadilah batu. Abaikan semua yang menyakitkan. Jadilah cuaca. Entah hujan, petir, atau halilintar. Itu lebih baik daripada jika kamu hanya memendamnya. Tak apa sedih, tak apa marah, tak apa lari dari suara tawa manusia. Dunia memang tak selalu bekerja seperti apa yang kita mau, tapi Lian toh masih punya Papi dan A'i." (page 104).

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3.2 Analysis of the Dimensions of Discursive Practice

Discursive analysis examines the dynamics of discourse production and circulation by tracing how a text is created, disseminated, and interpreted within a specific social framework. The emphasis of this analysis lies on the institutional structures and practices behind the process, including the strategic role of institutions, media, and individuals in shaping and directing the circulating narrative. In the context of this novel, the author shows a tendency to combine elements of prose and poetry in one narrative unit, as illustrated by the following statement.

a. Data 4

"Kamu benar. Tidak ada. Badai bisa menerpa sekonyong-konyong tanpa pertanda, dan tak semua orang punya bunker perlindungan. Kadang seseorang hanya bisa menautkan tangan pada rumput, pada ranting, pada tiang lampu taman. Jadikan aku rumput itu. Sambil menunggu badai berlalu, tak ada salahnya menangis. Menangislah, Lian." (page 137)

In the quote above, the author shows how the text is produced by using the metaphors "storm" and "bunker of refuge" to describe the trauma and uncertainty experienced by Lian's character. This choice of language constructs a narrative of vulnerability and an attempt to find life guidance in the face of life's difficulties. In terms of consumption, this discourse invites readers to feel emotion and accept helplessness as part of the healing process, while at the same time rejecting cultural demands for resilience without an expression of hurt.

b. Data 5

"Mungkin di kehidupan lampau, kamu mengenalku. Bisa jadi kita adalah sepasang bajing atau kadal." (page 138)

This quote shows a symbolic and imaginative discourse production practice in building emotional closeness between Lian and Ombak. The choice of diction "past life" and the metaphor "a pair of bajing or lizard" reflect the way the characters try to create a safe space that is playful and beyond logic, to avoid traumatic reality. In the context of consumption, the reader is invited to enter a light-hearted yet meaningful conversation, as a form of resistance to the harsh realist narrative. This discourse serves as an empathic bridge between characters as well as a psychological escape from past wounds.

3.3 Analysis of the Socio-cultural Practice Dimension

Socio-cultural analysis is an approach that examines how external social conditions shape and influence the direction and construction of discourse in a text. This analysis includes three main layers: first, the situational level that highlights the immediate context in which the discourse is constructed; second, the institutional level that examines the role of institutions or formal structures in the production and distribution of discourse; and third, the social level that reflects the enactment of ideologies, dominant norms, and patterns of social relations that operate in the wider society. The following is an example of the analysis results.

a. Data 5

"Tidak hanya Nona Lian yang mengalami hal ini. Di Kota J, bahkan ada

yang mengalami kejadian buruk itu di depan umum. Mereka dikeluarkan paksa dari mobil, lalu ... yah, begitulah. Kejadian mengerikan itu berlangsung di tepi jembatan dan disaksikan beberapa orang. Di Kota J, beberapa korban bersedia bersaksi, salah satunya Nona IM. Di Kota S ini banyak yang memilih bungkam. Ada yang langsung dikirim ke luar negeri oleh keluarganya, ada pula yang, maaf, memilih untuk mengakhiri hidupnya. Kami tak ingin hal buruk semacam ini terjadi pada Nona Lian. Kami akan mendukung Nona Lian menegakkan keadilan.” (hlm. 100).

This quote reflects the social reality of the post-May 1998 riots, particularly the violence experienced by Chinese women, both in public spaces and often witnessed without intervention. The phrase “many chose to remain silent” highlights the culture of silence resulting from trauma, stigma and structural injustice. It also reveals the state's failure to protect victims and exposes the unequal treatment of minority groups. The statement of support for Lian symbolizes resistance to dominant narratives that encourage oblivion and emphasizes the importance of justice as part of social reconciliation.

b. Data 6

“Jangan bilang kamu menjijikkan. Yang memuakkan adalah orang-orang yang melakukan itu kepadamu. Kamu tetap murni. Mereka yang selayaknya dikebiri. Harusnya aku tetap tinggal di dekatmu, tetapi waktu itu Awan ...” (hlm. 149).

This quote raises the discourse of resistance to the stigmatization of victims of sexual violence prevalent in patriarchal society. Ombak's statement that “you remain pure” explicitly rejects social narratives that blame victims and taint the identity of abused women. In a broader social context, this sentence reflects an attempt to deconstruct the myth of purity as a measure of women's value, and shifts the focus of responsibility from the victim to the perpetrator. The phrase “those who deserve to be castrated” contains a strong critique of the system that allows perpetrators to escape accountability. This text, in its social practice, fights for symbolic justice for victims and opens an affirmative space for the restoration of women's self-esteem and agency after trauma.

4 Conclusion

Through the novel *Ingatan Ikan-Ikan*, Sasti Gotama conveys a subtle criticism of the systemic impact of socio-political violence on individuals, especially victims of Chinese descent after the May 1998 riots. Within the framework of Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, this narrative not only presents a representation of personal trauma, but also reveals the power relations and ideological hegemony that normalize minority suffering. Textually, the use of body and memory metaphors shows how trauma resides in language and everyday experience. In discourse practice, the novel represents the way language is used to treat wounds and resist the culture of silence that normalizes the suffering of victims. On a social level, the work reveals the failure of the system to protect vulnerable groups, while

emphasizing the importance of recognizing historical trauma. Thus, this novel reflects memory as a medium of resistance and restorative measures for the collective wounds that continue to be felt by the post-reformation society.

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