RACISM IN MANDAILING LITERATURE: A POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract

This study aims to discuss racism in Mandailing literature in the colonial period. The emergence of racism is motivated by the authors’ attitude in Mandailing who tend to favor their respective works. The authors came from the indigenous Mandailing (colonized community) and the Dutch colonial (invaders). This phenomenon led to a dichotomy in Mandailing literature. The Mandailing literature is divided into two: colonial literature and anti-colonial literature. To examine the phenomenon, the author uses the postcolonial paradigm. Through it, binaryism in Mandailing literature will be seen. The binaryism then brings out ambiguity in the authors. Said and Bhabha’s theories are used to show their identity ambiguity. To support the paradigm, the author uses a discursive method. This discursive method takes a discourse from several experts discussing the Mandailing literature. The statements of the experts are critically analyzed by using the postcolonial paradigm so the binaryism could be solved.

Keywords: racism, post-colonial, Mandailing, Willem Iskander, Si Balus-Balus Si Rambuk-Rambuk.

1. Introduction

The racism issue emergence in postcolonial discourse was initiated from Edward Said’s writings entitled Orientalisme. It describes the Western imbalance looking at the East. The main points of Said’s statements in his book are; firstly, a discussion of the ideology inclusion in the discourse developed by orientalists. Secondly, the close relationship between politics and knowledge. Thirdly, the dichotomy between the West and the East is getting stronger. Based on these points, many important issues emerge after colonialism ended, including the racism emergence in the colonialism discourse (Sunaryo, 2004, pp. 122–123).

1 This fact is reinforced by Harahap’s opinion (2011) which states that the most prominent theme in Mandailing during the colonial period is about the issues of traditionalism and modernity.
Sunaryo also explains Young’s idea (2001) which discusses hybridism races in the post-colonialism discourse. Young states that this belongs to an important discussion as it will cause the identity issue. For example, the relationship between the United Kingdom and its colonies, Sunaryo see that there is a power relation within it. Many hybrid generations re-issue the identity dichotomy. It is concluded that racial hybridism occurs because of a meeting between colonizers and colonized both naturally and through the commercialization process (Sunaryo, 2004, pp. 127-128).

In the Batak land especially in Mandailing, the racism has been initiated since the arrival of evangelists in spreading Christianity. At first, they were well-received as they made improvements in various sectors of the Batak people life. However, their superiority attitude was gradually hated by the Batak people. The hatred of evangelists, who collaborated with the colonial government, finally brought out their nationalism spirit. Kozok interprets nationalism as an understanding which creates and maintains a country sovereignty by realizing a shared identity concept for a group of people. Then, the excessive nationalism tends to direct at a racism attitude to the Batak people (Kozok, 2010, pp. 51–83).

Kozok states that there are many racism cases in the world before the last three decades in the 19th century. In Germany, he describes the cruelty to Jews as an inferior race. The intermarriage was also banned in various states of the United States until 1967. In Arizona, there was a law banning the marriage of whites and blacks in 1865, Kozok concludes that the racism case had taken root long ago. Especially, when the law expanded in 1931 (the prohibition of marriage between India and the Malay nation with the term “one-drop rule” a drop of black blood was still considered as black), Kozok calls it as an assertion that racism existed in various parts of the world. The background of the racism growth is inseparable from the tragedy of imperialism and colonialism in a region (Kozok, 2010, pp. 53–54).

There are also many superior and inferior racial gaps in Africa. One of them is described by Saidi’s analysis (Saidi, 2014) of the John Maxwell Coetze novel. Coetze, is an influential writer born in Cape Town, South Africa in 1940. In his analysis, Saidi explains the oppression of inferior barbarian girls in South Africa. According to him, apartheid described in the novel is an example of the identity struggle between self and other. There is an unequal relationship between the races created in the novel. Each character finally attempts to find an “identification tool” in the form of recognition from others and seeking a new identity. The apartheid politics described in the analysis is an example that the superior and inferior races are still perpetuated.

In the Mandailing literature, the racism ideology also colors the literary works of local authors. There have been brought out many literary works carrying the nationalism theme but finally lead to the racism ideology. It happens as some writers compete each other to favor their culture, as seen in their literary works written in Nasution’s (2014) article below. Firstly, the literary works considered carrying the Mandailing culture belong to the writings of Willem Iskander which consists of Hendrik Nadenggan Roa, Sada Boekoe Basaoon ni Dakdanak (1865), is a translation published by Van Zadelhoff and Fabritius in Padang. Then, Leesboek van W.C. Thurn in het Mandhelingsch Vertaald, was published in Batavia by Landsdrukkerij in 1871. Furthermore, there were Si Boeloes-Boeloes Si Roemboek-Roemboek (Iskander, 1872)/Si Bulus-Bulus Si Rumbuk-Rumbuk (Iskander, 2002) and Taringot di Ragam-Ragam ni Parbinotoan dohot Sinaloan ni Alak Eropa. This text is an adaptation of Cerita Ilmu Kepandaian Orang Putih (The Story of the White Man Skill) written by Abdullah bin Abdulkadir Munsyi in 1873. Second is literary works written by Martua Raja Siregar, entitled Hamajuon, Doea Sadjoli: Boekoe Siseon ni Dakdanak di Sikola (1971) and Ranto Onas (1928). Thirdly, Soetaan Hasoendoetan Sapuhutar wrote his respective works entitled Turi-Turian, Siti Djaeraah: Padan Djandji na Togoe (Pustaha magazine series published in 1927-1929), and Datoek Toengkoe Adj

The literary works above mostly glorify their local traditions which actually legitimize the racism ideology. The indigenous race to Mandailing is perfectly described in the frame of customs. Unlike the non-indigenous races (colonialists), they only dredge local wealth so it is considered as uncivilized races. Likewise, the local races also favor their culture as the best ones. The non-indigenous race is described as being uncivilized and underdeveloped races (Said, 1994).

The phenomenon elicit binaryism in Indonesian literature, especially Mandailing literature. It also brings out new researches about the emergence of colonial literary dichotomy and anti-colonial literature. To examine the dichotomy, the author uses discourses from several experts who concentrate on the text of The Si Bulus-Bulus Si Rumbuk-Rumbuk, including Willem Iskander. The research is expected to be able to see the racism phenomenon on Mandailing literature through postcolonial perspectives and discursive methods. Hopefully it beneficiates in the development of literary science, especially post-colonialism studies and developing regional literary treasures.

2. Method

To examine this phenomenon, the researcher use the postcolonial paradigm. This postcolonial perspective is considered appropriate because of the effects of colonialism discussed in the postcolonial realm (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2003). Through the perspective, the phenomena of racism in Mandailing literature will be described, especially in the text Si Bulus-Bulus Si Rumbuk-Rumbuk. Therefore, the researcher uses the discursive method. This method refers to the concept of Foucault’s discourse [see (Foucault, 1972)]. This method takes several discourses from the experts who are competent in deciphering the racism phenomena in the Mandailing literature. The experts’ discourse is considered as a colonial discourse which is not established and must be deconstructed, as is the case with postcolonial work.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Dichotomy of National and Colonial Literature: A Discourse

The discourse of Western and Eastern binaryism arise from Edward Said’s contribution (1994) in criticizing European policies in keeping the East in perspective. His writing influences various scientific discourses in parts of the world, including in Indonesia. By analogy with the binaryism, the Indonesian literature is also ambiguous in shaping its identity. On the other hand, it remains its nationalism identity. However, it also maintains its West-oriented Indonesian literary identity (Faruk, 2000, pp. 18–19).

The dichotomy in literary science is also reinforced by Kroef (1958). He highlights the author’s side as a Dutch colonial. The three writers that Kroef talks about are Mesdames
Sloot, Vanger Frank, and Ijzerman Junius. Their works were published around the 1860s and 1890s. The story themes revolve around life in the service of the bureaucracy, world of plantations, and flavored romance. Kroef refers to these novels with colonial novels, which are also considered to be etiquette novels.

Some of them then underlie the discussion about the national and colonial literary dichotomy in Mandailing literature. The national literature is literary works written by Mandailing people, while the colonial literature is written by Dutch people. According to Dongoran (1997, p. 167), the background of the dichotomy emergence is inseparable from the divide et impera politics by the Dutch colonials. The politic is able to break the struggle of the Mandailing people against the colonials. Almost all of the life aspects change due to this policy, including in Mandailing literature.

The dichotomy discussion will be seen from two aspects. First is the themes which were carried out at that time and in the publishing process. The theme of the two parties is quite different. The national literature tends to convey the problem of tradition and social protest, while the colonial literature tends to discuss colonialism in Indonesia. It is seen in the works that appeared at that time, for example in the works of Max Havelaar (Multatuli, 2000) written by Multatuli (a colonial author) and Si Bulus-Bulus Si Rumbuk-Rumbuk (Iskander, 2002) written by Willem Iskander (a Mandailing author).

In his article, (Murwani, 2008) discusses the influence of Max Havelaar on Dutch colonialism. Because of his writing, the Cultivation System (culturstelsel) was finally abolished. Murwani describes Max Havelaar as a form of trap between the Dutch and the Dutch East Indies. On the other hand, it legitimizes colonial power, namely the Netherlands as the ruler and the natives as a slave servant. However, on the other hand, Max Havelaar criticizes the Dutch policies for the cultivation system. The dual perspective of Max Havelaar described by Murwani could also be considered as carrying out the colonialism ideology. Thus, Multatuli can be said to be the author who bring out the theme of colonialism as well as anti-colonialism in the Dutch East Indies at that time.

On the other hand, the text of Si Bulus-Bulus Si Rumbuk-Rumbuk mostly describes the traditions and customs of Mandailing. Although there are several works in the form of social protests against colonialism, they still highlight the indigenous identity. Through this text, Willem Iskander tries to hegemony the readers by glorifying the Mandailing culture, for example in the poems of Mandailing, Mata Ni Ari, Olo-Olo, Na Mananom Na Mate, Ama Ni Marpoeh Olong, Marboeroe di Bagasan Bilik, Amamate Ni Alak Na Lidang, Di Amateon Ni Boroe Na, and Oendan Dohot Oera-Oera which highlight the tightly relationship of the socio-cultural in the Mandailing custom frame. Like Willem Iskander’s prose, for example, Pidong Garuda Bosar, Tiroean Ni Olong Ni Roa Marangka Maranggi, and Si Baroar. The similar theme is also found in the Angkana Dohot Anggi Na drama.

Not much different from Multatuli, Willem Iskander finally experience ambiguity in his works. On one side, he glorifies the Mandailing tradition, but on the other hand, he favors the Dutch colonial culture. For example in poems and prose entitled Na Binoewat Tingoing Barita Ni Teowan Colombus, Di Danak Na Mompos Godang, Mandailing, Adjir Ni Amang Na di Anak Na, Na Kehe Toe Sikola, Olo-Olo, Sikola, Si Baroar, Sada Alak Pulonta On Na Mabiar di Ahaila, Na Dangol, Moeda Na So Binote, Amamate Ni Alak Na Lidang, Oendan Dohot Oera-Oera, Di Amateon Ni Boroe Na, and Siakkak Dohot Landoe. The entire works narrate the almost perfect Mandailing culture in the frame of customs, but he makes mistakes when participating in narrating the colonial culture in it.

On the other hand, Foulcher (1995) states that some authors succeed in convincing the readers that there is a nationalism spirit in Indonesian literary works. His statement could be used as a form of defense against Willem Iskander’s works. His works always include the
nationalism ideology, keeping trying to carry the theme which identifies itself as national literature. However, it simultaneously discusses the colonial tradition.

It could occur because of Willem Iskander’s ambiguity (1840-1876) in the Mandailing literature. Firstly, it is ambiguous in identifying himself as indigenous or non-indigenous citizen. For example, Willem Iskander is a native who hate colonialism but also receive an educational scholarship from Dutch colonialism, including changing his native name Sati Nasution to the Dutch name Willem Iskander. Second is ambiguous romance as it chooses to marry a Dutch woman rather than a native. Third is his ambiguous death. He was buried in the Netherlands, not in Indonesia (see Dongoran 1997; Iwan, Aprida, & Miswaruddin 2018; Harahap via Iskander 2002; Lumbantoruan & Sahril 2013; Lubis 2011; as well as Siregar, Djono, & Agung 2018).

Besides Willem Iskander’s ambiguity, there is also his popularity. Besides being seen as a local writer, Willem Iskander is also considered as the main education initiator in the North Sumatra. He meritorious in pioneering formal education in North Sumatra (Harahap via Iskander 2002, 14). It is also supported by Reid (2011, p. 55) who state that Mandailing was the first area to recognize formal schools in North Sumatra. Reid also writes that the Mandailing people from South Tapanuli, who were the fastest to take advantage of the colonial education opportunities in East Sumatra and quickly joined the higher levels of Malays on the East Coast. Harahap (1977, p. 27) also strengthens Reid’s opinion by stating that the people had occupied positions in the fields of administration and trade in the Eastern lowlands during the colonialism. According to him, the Mandailing nomads have appeared on Malay Peninsula Land as religious teachers, farmers, traders, planters and tin mines. Even in Malaysian history, Sutan Puasa, a Mandailing leader, is a founder of Kuala Lumpur in the middle of the last century.

Lubis (2011, 47) also emphasizes that the teacher education progress in the North Sumatra could be initiated because of the idea of Willem Iskander. According to Lubis, because of his perseverance, the Mandailing people have been able to enjoy formal education until now. For his services, Dr. Kroeskamp, a Dutch scholar gave a compliment and mentioned that Willem Iskander was a figure to be proud of (see Harahap in Iskander 2002, p. 1).

Based on the explanation, it can be seen that the ambiguity of Willem Iskander’s attitude, the author of the text Si Bulus-Bulus Si Rumbuk-Rumbuk has contributed to form the literary dichotomy in Mandailing. The experience gained by the author during the colonialism is pervasive in his works, likewise with the other authors. The colonialism impacts are very influential on the psychology of authors of texts, novels, etc. As Said stated that the colonial and imperial realities in the literary works should not be ignored as there are many interesting things stored in them (Said, 2005, pp. 12–13). Of course, the realities are similar to Willem Iskander’s experience.

The second aspect is the issue of literature publishing. In this discussion, the author uses the discourse proposed by Rodgers (2007). Rodgers initiates his discourse by seeing the writing phenomenon in the Batak tribe in general. The Batak tribe includes the Mandailing tribe. According to Rodgers, the text of the formal Batak language has existed since the emergence of the school pioneered by Willem Iskander in 1872 AD. Since that time, the tribe of Mandailing has begun writing with Latin letters. The writing development is also more intense with the emergence of newspapers/press, followed by literary works: novels, etc. the Batak fiction has sprung up in the southern area of Tapanuli. In the colonial era, it was called by Rodgers as an Indonesian colonial novel.

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1 The Dutch colonialism took place in Mandailing around 1833 AD, carried out by the Paderi War in the Bonjol and Rao areas (Lubis 2010, 9 and Lubis 2011, 12).
Looking at Rodgers’ writing, there is an effort to eliminate the dichotomy. Rodgers tries to naturalize the dichotomy of national and colonial literature by joining it into a colonial Indonesian novel. Implicitly, the dichotomy does not appear. He ignores that there are ideologies that are lodged in a literary work. That ideology can be found in the fiction and the author life.

In his other writing, Rodgers (2012) also discusses a local literary author in Mandailing named Sutan Pangurabaan. Sutan Pangurabaan is an author who rewrite the language landscape and an originator of commercial and publishing politics in Sumatra. It took place at the end of Dutch colonial rule. Rodgers explains that Sutan Pangurabaan works as a freelance writer and has a career in a teacher in South Tapanuli. His writings have sprung up around the 1930s. He thinks that Sutan Pangurabaan’s works are ambiguous in colonial political power. His works are suspected of being a form of ideological resistance to colonialism.

According to Rodgers, the ambiguity is due to Sutan Pangurabaan’s idealism, which refuse to use Western references, including the Dutch references in his writing process especially in writing Mandailing dictionaries and grammar books. Rodgers explains that it aims to show the existence of Batak people. The Batak people also have their local language and are also able to publish their own books. His commercialization politics is considered by Rodgers as an advantage as it is able to place it on the complex political dynamics.

Based on the phenomenon above, it is clear that the literature publication in Mandailing is a form of legitimacy of the two dichotomies. In the publishing process, there are interferences from the colonial government. As long as, a region experiences imperialism/colonialism, new dichotomies will continue to emerge on various aspects. In accordance with Said’s opinion, the discursive situation is more like an unequal relationship between colonizers and colonies, or people who are oppressed with their oppressors (Said 2000, p. 225).

4. Conclusion

Colonialism in Mandailing delivers a psychological impact on the Mandailing literary repertoire. These psychological effects emerge to ambiguity in the authors of Mandailing. The ambiguity is influential in their works. The effects of the authors’ ambiguity of attitude and the creative process finally lead to the dichotomy in the Mandailing literature. The literature is divided into colonial literature and anti-colonial literature. The colonial literature was represented by Dutch colonial authors who were considered superior. Meanwhile, the anti-colonial literature considered as inferior party representing the work of indigenous authors. The dichotomy, then, lead to the racism ideology in the Mandailing literature. The ideology forces the Mandailing literature included in the hybrid literature. Its hybridity can be seen through the authors’ ambiguity in creating their work. For example, the Willem Iskander’s text entitled Si Bulus-Bulus Si Rumbuk-Rumbuk which many discusses about the Mandailing tradition as well as the colonial traditions.

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