

The Trilogy of *Gadis Tangsi* Novels By Suparto Brata: Postcolonial Pragmatism Study

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Abstract: This study discusses five aspects (intention, representation, expression, reference, projection) which build literary communication system (*Gadis Tangsi* Novels) based on postcolonial pragmatism theory. Intention analysis indicates that by writing the novel the author wanted to convey historical experience (colonial) and cultural past (kingdom) that could be used by readers as meaningful matter for the future. Representation analysis indicates that *Gadis Tangsi* novels represent colonial aspects in the form of power relations (dominative, tendentious, legitimate, emancipative, inspirational, compromising), identity (hybrid), mimicry (impersonation that undermines the essence of invaders), and resistance, which is against oneself. Expression analysis shows that colonial aspect of the novel is expressed verbally (narrative structure, space, time) and non-verbally (visual). Reference analysis points out that the colonial aspect of the novel can be a reference for the emergence of thematic ideas (ideological) of justice, wisdom, democratization, respect for oneself and others, dynamic, creativity, independence, national spirit, and insight into the future. Projection analysis indicates that the thematic ideas in this novel can be used as a projection medium for reader's life in developing character. Since this novel is loaded with positive ideas (character and value), *Gadis Tangsi* novels deserve to be teaching material in schools and literary study material in higher education grade.

Keywords: *Gadis Tangsi* Novels, postcolonial pragmatism, intention, representation, expression, reference, projection

1. Introduction

History recorded that more than three quarters of people in the world have suffered from decharacterization as a result of colonization (Ashcroft, 1989: 1). This decharacterization had been occurred since the Europeans invaded foreign countries, such as India and Africa in 14th century (Kozlowski, 2010: 2). For the colonies, European colonization had given more negative effects than positive. Because of colonization, the local civilization was destroyed and the people who originally free became slaves (Ryan, 2007: 265-266). Nowadays, using more sophisticated strategy, the same thing happens in the Middle East by the American empire (Said, 2003: xvii).

History also recorded that decharacterization of mankind was not only in India, Africa, and the Middle East, but also in Indonesia as a result of Dutch colonization. Initially (1596) Dutch came to Indonesia only for trading. But, together with VOC (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*), the Dutch also carried out political role so that people who had suffered were worse. It is no wonder that as a result, therefore, many people resistance emerged, such as Padri War in West Sumatra and Diponegoro War in Java (1825--1830) (Simbolon, 2006: 129-132). The suffering lessened after the Dutch employed *Etische Politiek* (since 1901) as a "debt of honor" through three programs: irrigation, emigration, and education.

Although Indonesia has been independent (1945) for more than a half century, the colonial problem that once plagued the indigenous people—particularly in Java—remains until today. In fact, the colonial problem was not only recorded

by authors in the colonial period, as shown in *Siti Nurbaya* novel (Marah Rusli), *Salah Asuhan* (Abdul Muis), and *Belenggu* (Armin Pane) or in the early days of independence, as seen in *Atheis* (Ahdiat K . Miharja) and *Keluarga Gerilya* (Pramoedia Ananta Toer), but it was also recorded in 2000s Indonesian novels. One of the novels of the 2000s was *Gadis Tangsi* by Suparto Brata.

Although it was written in the 21st century, a time far from colonization era, *Gadis Tangsi* novel consists of three books (the trilogy) with a total of 1328 pages that intensively represent colonial practices, attitudes, and behaviors, especially during the Dutch and Japanese colonialism (by 1945). This evidence proves, it is not mistaken to state that colonialism has indeed given an impact prevailing so far beyond its actual time and generation. Therefore, this research studied how aspects of colonial (postcolonialism) were represented in trilogy of *Gadis Tangsi* Novels.

In an interview (2012) Suparto Brata stated that the stories in the trilogy of *Gadis Tangsi* novels were written based on real experience. This story was written in the novels with the hope that the history that he depicted can be used by the reader as a mirror of life in the future. This means that Suparto Brata had done a pragmatic act as the novel he wrote had certain practical purpose, namely to educate readers. That is why, in this study, in addition studied colonial aspects (postcolonialism) in the novels, it is also examined its function in the system of literary communication.

By placing postcolonialism into literary communication system (the relationship between authors, literary works, and

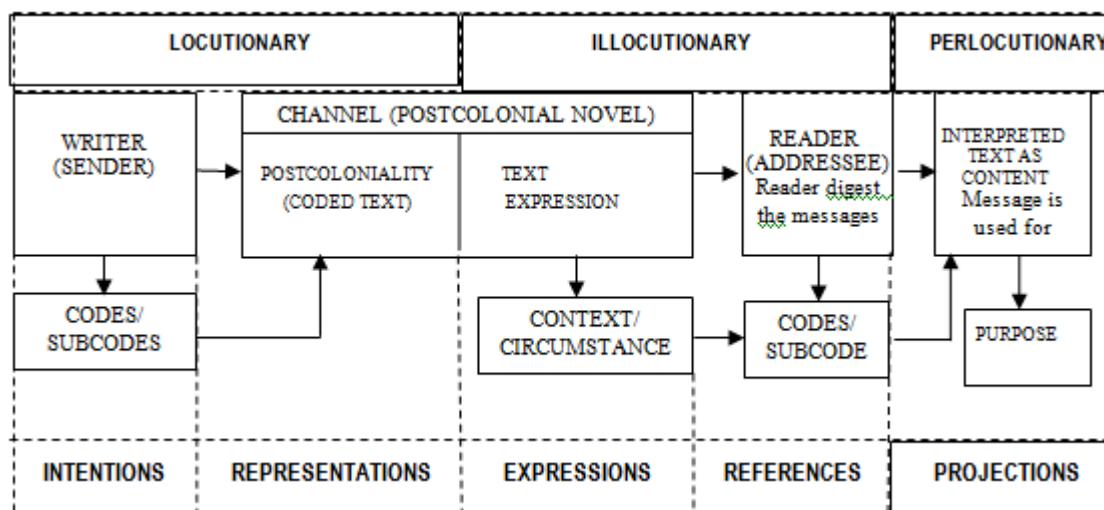
the reader), the problems formulation are intention (author), representation (postcolonial), expression (text), reference (thematic ideas), and projection (for the reader).

2. Theoretical Background

This study uses postcolonial pragmatism theory. It is a new term—because according to my observation this term has never been used in the field of literature study—which combines postcolonial and pragmatics. Postcolonial theory is the study of the impact of colonialism (Aschroft, 1989), whereas the pragmatic theory (in the semiotic concept) is the study of sign use (Seung, 1982: 76-80). In this case, postcolonial theory is only a reading strategy because its presence is merely a variant of (post)-structural theory (Loomba, 2000: 247). Therefore, meaning strategy of postcolonial theory still based on a text (semantic). It is different from pragmatic theory because meaning strategy in this theory is based on a context (pragmatic).

In the concept of postcolonial pragmatism, semantic meaning enters into and become an integral part of pragmatics meaning. Therefore, in literary communication system, the aspects of colonial or "postcolonial" (Day and Foulcher, 2008: 4) only became other (new) code (message) in the system of signification and communication in sign interpretation and production theory (Eco, 1979: 5) that is transmitted by the author through the channel (text) to the reader. On the basis of this new code, the focus of attention in the post-colonial pragmatism theory is subjected to a series of actions as shown in speech-act theory: locutionary (intention and representation: the act of producing the sign and the sign was already able to be read), illocutionary (expression and references: signs that have been expressed contain power and are ready to use), and perlocutionary (projection: as realization of aesthetic function, content or message used by the reader to achieve a particular purpose).

If the theory is displayed in the form of a chart, literature meaning model of postcolonial pragmatism concept (this chart is elaborated from Eco, 1979) looks like the following.



3. Methodology

This research was a qualitative study. The approach used in this research was a critical approach, namely the ideological approach which was based on the need for freedom and liberation at the same time (Cooper and White, 2012: 17-19). Data was collected by reading technique, interviews, and document study (Sudaryanto, 1993: 136). Data validity was tested through triangulation (Stake, 2010: 123-125).

Data analysis of colonial aspects (postcolonial) was conducted by deconstruction method and the technique is to identify oppositional relation (Faruk, 2012: 214-215), while the data analysis of the context (pragmatic) was performed by content analysis method and message function analysis. Content analysis technique was not conducted with frequency models, but with intensity because the goal was to make inferences, not to describe the content (Krippendorff, 2004: 15-17). Inference was performed by transaction method, which is like reader response theory.

4. Results and Discussion

The Trilogy of *Gadis Tangsi* Novels consist of three volumes (books): *Gadis Tangsi* (2004), *Kerajaan Raminem* (2006), and *Ufuk Mahligai di Ufuk Timur* (2007). *Gadis Tangsi* novels tell about the vagaries of Teyi's life (the main character) in a family of KNIL soldiers in the Dutch colonial period. In this novel Teyi appeared as a character who tried to oppose values prevailing in the *tangsi* (KNIL soldier dormitory) life. *Kerajaan Raminem* novel talks about Teyi (and her mother, Raminem) who tried to build a new life after her father passed away as a Dutch soldier. In this novel Teyi appeared as a mirror of *wong cilik* (lower class society) life obsessed to achieve economical prosperity for the sake of raising her social status. Meanwhile, *Mahligai di Ufuk Timur* novel tells about Teyi who had managed to build a "*kerajaan padi*" (rice barn that shows one's wealth and prosperity) during the Japanese rule.

Broadly, the Trilogy of *Gadis Tangsi* Novels tell about Teyi's life since the Dutch colonial period, the Japanese occupation, to the eve of the Indonesian independence in 1945. As a representation of colonized people, Teyi

appeared as a lower-class indigenous who tried to get into and then against the authority of the Western power (the Dutch) and the Feudal (Kraton Surakarta) by studying their language, culture, and knowledge system. Toward this story, based on postcolonial pragmatism theory, the analysis results intention, representation, expression, reference, and projection of Trilogy of *Gadis Tangsi* novels are as follows.

4.1 Author Intention

As one of author pragmatic actions, literary texts are undoubtedly written based on specific intention, since without intention, literary works are impossible to be materialized. And, Suparto Brata did the same thing. Through *Gadis Tangsi* Novels, he wanted to (1) document the history of past experiences, particularly in the colonial and kingdom period (Kraton Surakarta), (2) remind present generation not to forget national cultural history, and (3) invite Indonesian young generation to actively learn to read and to write literature.

Why did Suparto Brata intend to document a history of colonial period? The reason was that colonial era experience was painful memories but beautiful at the same time because it is impossible to be experienced again. Although for others it is painful, Suparto Brata felt that the colonial era was a wonderful era because at that time he received good education, especially in reading and writing. According to him, a good education in the colonial period did not happen again in the present day because since 1975 the education curriculum in Indonesia ignored reading and writing subjects. Therefore, through these novels, he hoped that recent generation will realize that the reading and writing world is the world that needs to be keened in order to face better future.

Meanwhile, why Suparto Brata intended to document the cultural history of Kraton Surakarta? The reason is that he himself is Surakarta nobleman but he never enjoys his life as a nobleman. Therefore, in his novel, Suparto Brata deliberately combined kraton life event (*priyayi* 'noblemen') and life of ordinary people (*wong cilik*). Through this combination he tried to show that enjoyment of life and human dignity were not determined by his/her status, position, or nobility (as *priyayi*), but by his or her effort and hard work.

It is true that the story, which was told by Suparto Brata in his novel, was a story based on real life experience, both his own experience and his mother in law's experience. Thus, the novels are not merely a romance, but also recorded (facts) history. Citing de Goncourt's opinion, Suparto Brata stated that *L'histoire est roman qui a été, le roman est une histoire qui aura été pu être*. It means history is basically a romance that ever happened, and the novel itself is a history that (probably) ever happened.

The above explanation means that reading a romance (novel, literature) is like reading history; and it also means that to conserve history, people have to read romance (novels, literature). In this regard Suparto Brata reminded us that we must not ever forget national cultural history because the cultural history of a nation is the root of the

national cultural development in the future. Building a future without considering the history is like planting a tree without roots. Therefore, history is very essential for remembering the past, understanding the present, and preparing the future.

4.2 Postcolonial Representation

The results of the research indicate that The Trilogy of *Gadis Tangsi* is a postcolonial novel (discourse). As a postcolonial discourse, the novel intensively represents the attitudes, behaviors, and practices of colonial power. These attributes of colonial power took place when the Dutch colonized in Indonesia (the Indonesian archipelago), especially since about two decades before Indonesian independence, which were then continued by the Japanese invader until August 1945. Colonial aspects (postcolonial) that are attached to *Gadis Tangsi* novel discourse are as follows.

4.2.1 Power Relations

As a postcolonial discourse, The Trilogy of *Gadis Tangsi* novels is characterized, firstly, by the presence of power relation (binary opposition of colonizer-colonized). From the power relations, as a result, emerged colonial problems such as identity change (hybridity), mimicry (imitation), resistance (offensive), and the like (Bhabha, 1994; Mondal, 2014). In terms of power relations, patterns of relationship in the novel are constructed by relation between the Dutch and *Tangsi* Community, the Dutch and Teyi, Princess Parasi (*kraton* princess) and Teyi, Kus Bandarkum (*kraton* young nobleman) and Teyi, as well as the Japanese and the Indigenous.

Power relations between the Dutch and *Tangsi* Community are dominative. The Dutch as colonizers treated the indigenous as they pleased so the latter were always positioned as inferior, marginalized (sub-altern), while the Dutch had always been strong and superior. In fact, this dominative pattern was not only treated by the Dutch, but also followed by a group of Foreign East nations (China, Japan). Meanwhile, the relation between the Dutch and Teyi is instrumental and tendentious. The fact was, behind the Dutch dominative attitude, Teyi was actually used as a "mouthpiece" by the Dutch when they had to make relationship to barracks society. Why did the Dutch make Teyi as an instrument? It was because Teyi was good at fluent Dutch language.

The relation between Princess Parasi and Teyi was more emancipative and legitimative. Emancipative relation was pointed out by Princess Parasi's effort to educate Teyi to learn the Dutch language and kraton cultural custom. Legitimative relation was exposed in Princess Parasi's action in promising Teyi for finding a mate in Kraton Surakarta solely to confirm that the noble class (*priyayi*) was always superior to the lower class people (*wong cilik*). Meanwhile, relation between Kus Bandarkum and Teyi was about equality and sympathetic by nature. Thus, though Kus Bandarkum was a nobleman, Teyi was not treated as *wong cilik* that should be dominated (suppressed), but she was treated equally. In fact, because of her intelligence and perseverance to work, Teyi would later be married by Kus

Bandarkum. Kus Bandarkum saw Teyi's character as a feminist heroine, who was like Kartini, so that in the future she deserved to be invited to fill independence with him after the defeat of Japanese invader.

Finally, the relationship between Japanese and the Indigenous were dominative and inspirative. As invader, Japan also treated the indigenous cruelly. This was shown in Japanese' actions to force everyone to follow Japanese wish, including forcing farmers to submit a third of their own harvest. However, because Japan also trained indigenous youth to become Japanese soldiers when Japanese had to fight the Dutch, the dominative relation was also inspirational. In this way, when the youth had become soldiers, the youth turned against all form of colonialism, including against Japanese that had trained them. For indigenous youth, what in their mind was only freedom that all invaders had to come to an end.

However, what becomes a problem, since the act of invader domination (the Dutch and Japan) was delivered only through indigenous viewpoint (the narrator behind Teyi character), then the dominative relation nature turned into compromisistic relation because colonialist domination was not so perceived by the indigenous. This happened because the figures that were presented had distinctive characteristics of Javanese people that dislike confrontation but would rather promote harmony (social harmony) (Hardjowirogo, 1989: 42).

4.2.2 Identity

In terms of identity, (colonial subject) characters that had changed into "the others" are Teyi, Princess Parasi, and Kus Bandarkum. Teyi changed from '*anak kolong*' (a soldier's child raised in barracks in colonial period) into a "*kraton princess*" and "*Dutch nonik*" (call for young Dutch daughter). This change occurred because Teyi was educated by Princess Parasi to read and to write Dutch and to learn about *kraton* cultural custom (*ngadi busana* 'how to dress', *ngadi sarira* 'how to treat own body', and *basa krama* speaking polite Javanese language). Therefore, Teyi then had access to the Dutch authorities and Kraton Surakarta.

Princess Parasi's identity shifted from her position as a noble princess, which was equal to European became (and mingle with) a ordinary people (barracks society). This happened because Princess Parasi wanted to fight the custom in *kraton* environment which was feudal and wanted to live independently as ordinary people. By her action, which was getting out of the aristocratic circles, Princess Parasi felt that in fact the meaning of life was not only obtained in *kraton* environment, but it could also be found everywhere, even among ordinary people. Meanwhile, Kus Bandarkum identity shifted from a young nobleman into a European-style youth. It is because since his childhood he had been educated in European schools (the Dutch) and at any time he consorted with European youth.

However, one thing should be noted, because in the end the three colonial subjects were shifted back to their original identity, it can be said that the process of hybridization in this trilogy novel was void. This happened because Teyi went back to the village (Ngombol) for farming while

establishing reading and writing school. Princess Parasi through "her duplicate Teyi" also returned to *kraton* environment with the intention to preserve *adiluhung* "high" culture. Likewise Kus Bandarkum went back to *kraton* with intention to fight for independence of his nation. It can be presumed that the embodiment of hybridization is influenced by the typical of Javanese man (figure) who prefers to state something indirectly (*wong Jawa nggone semu*) (Hardjowirogo, 1989: 110) in order to maintain concord and social harmony (Mulder, 1984: 64).

4.2.3 Mimicry

In the case of mimicry, colonial subjects that performed imitation (emancipation) were Teyi, Princess Parasi, and Kus Bandarkum. Aspects or cultural models and life which were offered by colonialists and became targets of impersonation by their subjects were language, lifestyle, livelihood, social system, art system, and system of knowledge. Among the three colonial subjects, the most intense character for doing imitation was Teyi. Teyi fitted into almost all cultural models offered by the invaders. She did imitation on polite Javanese language offered by *kraton*. She also mimicked modern livelihood systems such as those offered by the Chinese people when she built *Kerajaan Raminem*. In addition, she also imitated art and knowledge systems that were offered by the West in terms of reading and writing literature.

Meanwhile, Princess Parasi only imitated the language and knowledge system, while Kus Bandarkum imitated the language and lifestyle system. However, it should also be noted that the mimicry performed by the colonial subjects in the trilogy novel did not strengthen invader authorities, but it undermined the essence of the invaders. This was caused solely by the desire of colonial subjects to return to their own (national) culture. For example, by her ability to speak Javanese and Dutch, Teyi wanted to build reading and writing school for children in her village; and with his ability and experience Kus Bandarkum also wanted to realize an independent nation (*Mahligai di Ufuk Timur*).

4.2.4 Resistance

In terms of resistance, colonial subjects that fought against the invaders were also Teyi, Princess Parasi, and Kus Bandarkum. However, the invaders in this case were not only in terms of the West (the Dutch) that colonized Eastern nations (Indonesia, Java), but also in a broad sense. Therefore, Teyi's resistance was not merely addressed to the arrogant Dutch and Japanese since, the most importantly, it was precisely aimed at the self-ignorance, gender inequity, and inferiority of the indigenous culture. With an intention to fight self ignorance Teyi decided to establish reading and writing school for indigenous children who were indeed unintelligent.

Likewise, Princess Parasi, she was not against the Dutch, but rather she was against the *kraton* nobility custom that had been perceived as manacled. Kus Bandarkum too, he did not fight openly against the Dutch and Japanese, but he more deliberately demonstrated his resistance against all forms of colonialism. So, the three dominant colonial subjects were dominantly ambivalent, they were not explicitly against the invaders, but the one to whom they were against was

themselves. It means that the resistance in the novel was basically a resistance without enemy. Thus, it proves that this trilogy novel shows a typical Javanese resistance with the principle *nglurug tanpa bala* 'attack without troops', *menang tanpa ngasorake* 'win without humiliating' or *kena iwake, ning ora buthek banyune* 'gain the fish, but without muddy water'.

4.3 Postcolonial Expression

Result of a study on the text (novel) as an expression medium of colonial aspects indicates that postcolonialism in the Trilogy of *Gadis Tangsi* Novels is expressed in two ways (forms), non-verbal and verbal. Through non-verbal expression, the colonial aspects have been seen in the title and cover picture (visual) that show specific signs as existence aspect of power relations, identity, mimicry, and resistance. In the first novel (*Gadis Tangsi*) there was the image of the high *kompeni* officer (VOC army officer) and a barrack girl that showed power relation. In second novel (*Kerajaan Raminem*) there was an image of a middle-aged woman who appears like a king (queen), which showed the attempt of imitation (mimicry). In the third novel (*Mahligai di Ufuk Timur*) there was an image of a young woman who appeared like a noble princess (*kraton*) with background of a hut that showed the existence of mimicry together with resistance.

Meanwhile, through verbal expression (in the text), aspects of colonialism appear in narrative structure, space structure and time structure which show a tendency to return to the East (to their own culture). This is evident in the narrative structure, which was similar to Javanese puppet play. The space structure was from the East goes to the West and returns to the East. The time structure showed that the future was not always located in the West, but also in the East (*Mahligai di Ufuk Timur*). It proves that—despite there is some noise that interferes in the literary communication process—the Trilogy of *Gadis Tangsi* Novels somehow are able to be a counter-discourse (post-colonial) for colonial discourse.

4.4 Postcolonialism as Thematic Idea Reference

The results of the study on postcolonialism as thematic idea reference (ideological) shows that the power relation aspect in the Trilogy of *Gadis Tangsi* Novels can deliver ideas of justice, wisdom, and democratization; identity aspect can deliver idea of self-esteem and other people (nation); mimicry aspect can raise idea of dynamic, creativity, and independent; and resistance aspect can raise idea of emergence of national spirit and insight into the future.

However, the thematic initiatives (ideological) that are general and ironic can still be broken down into many similar ideas; and all of these ideas are basically a set of requirements (nature, characteristics) that have to be fulfilled if a construction of superior man is expected to emerge. Therefore, pragmatically this trilogy novel expresses a hope that a superior person will soon be born. Superior man that is explicitly expected to appear (immediately) by (and within) the trilogy novel is "a qualified generation of Javanese nation". The term "Java" in

this case is not particular to Javanese nation (tribe), but also of Indonesia nation (Archipelago). It means that, directly or indirectly, the trilogy novel was written with the intention to educate reader (society) in order to be superior beings.

4.5 Thematic idea as Pragmatic Projection Media

The research results of the thematic idea as pragmatic projection media showed that pragmatic ideas contained in the Trilogy of *Gadis Tangsi* Novels can basically be used by the reader as a projection medium to achieve many goals. It seems that in the trilogy novel the existing ideas contain an invitation to readers not to forget their local cultural values, which can also be found in Javanese literary works.

This evident is clearly shown in character actions that encourage readers to read Javanese literary works, such as *Sasanasunu*, *Wedhatama*, *Candra Rini*, *Serat Rangsang Tuban*, *Kirti Njunjung Drajat*, dan *Ngulandara*. It is beneficial to follow the suggestion because the Javanese literary works mentioned above actually contains teachings that lead to the improvement of relationships between a man and himself, a man and others, a man and nature, and a man and God. This is the point where reader can use the recommended (value) in this novel trilogy as a medium for self-projection and life.

In this case, the reader can set an example of the positive values (virtue) and avoid negative values (vice). Meanwhile, thematic ideas (values) that are inscribed in the novel can be basically categorized as a statement of "character" and therefore by readers (or anyone) can be used as a means of character education. This means that the Trilogy of *Gadis Tangsi* novels is proper to use as learning material in teaching literature in schools and as a subject of study in universities.

5. Closing

Basically colonialism still happens everywhere in the world. It is true that almost all countries in the world have been politically independent. However, it is not true that the entire country has been independent economically and culturally. In fact, colonialism is currently produced and reproduced by more sophisticated means and strategy, so that it seems no longer like colonialism, but rather as hegemony. As a result, human decharacterization is no longer seen as a serious problem because it has turned inevitably into a "new character" that becomes more hegemonic. Therefore, there should be particular effort to cope with the matter.

No matter how simple, reading and studying literature works becomes one of many efforts to reflect human life behavior in this world, not least the colonial behavior that is still apparent in sight. Therefore, to this day literary work is still believed as a cultural product that is capable to record human life and all of their behaviors. One of these evidences is the Trilogy of *Gadis Tangsi* Novels as a literary work of an Indonesian author (Suparto Brata) discussed in this research. As literary work that highlighted colonial problem, this trilogy novel seems eager to urge Indonesian people (the nation) to return to their ultimate characters.

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