

COLONIAL OPPRESSION
IN M. H. SZEKELY LULOFS' COOLIE

Latifa Nurjamila

Faculty of Cultural Sciences, University of 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya

latifanurjamila@gmail.com

Abstract

This thesis aims to analyze postcolonial issues in M. H. Szekely Lulofs' Coolie. The topic is focused on colonial oppression reflected in the novel. There are two problems that will be discussed in this thesis i.e. how colonial oppression is represented through class, gender, and race; and how the text in the novel show its side on colonialism. The theories applied in this study are postcolonial theory and postcolonial issues by Ashcroft and Tyson. The research applies qualitative method due to the fact that the data of the study is qualitative and the interpretation of the data is presented qualitatively. In addition, topic of the study is about postcolonial issue i.e colonial oppression, so that postcolonial approach is applicable to this study. After conducting the analysis, the writer finds out that the colonial oppression reflected in M. H. Szekely Lulofs' Coolie is represented through class, gender, and race. Moreover, based on the text's side on colonialism represented through class, gender, and race, it can be inferred that the text undermines colonialism. After conducting this study, the writer finds that the study will make the readers aware of having a sense of unity as a community of a nation.

Keywords: *colonialism, oppression, class, gender, race.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Colonialism is the practice by which a powerful country directly controls less powerful countries. Colonialism has been the most frequent way for one group of people to dominate another. Bell (1991) states, colonialism is the maintenance of political, social, economic, and cultural domination over people by foreign power for an extended period. One of the famous colonialism was Dutch colonialism because the Dutch had conquered several countries in the world and the Dutch had also gained status as a world power before world war II.

Oppression happens when less powerful people are shut up, ignored, shut out, seen as abnormal, and look down upon. They may experience an oppressive condition when they are in a group who has many differences such as race, religion, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, and so on. The differences may lead to oppression, especially for people who have no power to face it. Oppression is the experience of repeated, widespread, systemic injustice. It need not be extreme and involve the legal system (as in slavery, apartheid, or the lack of a right to vote) nor violent (as in tyrannical societies) (Deutsch, 2006:10).

Oppression happen in the era of Dutch colonialism in Dutch East Indies was well portrayed in Lulofs' *Coolie*. The story was set in Deli, East Sumatera, which was one of the regions of Dutch East Indies colonized by Dutch. It tells a story about the life of contract coolies who received oppression in many different ways.

Since the idea of oppression carried out by the Dutch colonialist is very strong in this novel, the writer is interested in analyzing how the oppression conducted by the Dutch colonialist is portrayed in the novel. Moreover, writer is interested in the history of colonialism in Indonesia carried out by the Dutch. This research aims to describe colonial oppression that happens to coolie that is reflected in the novel.

The three issues of colonial oppression in Lulofs' *Coolie* are class, gender, and race. In term of class, according to Ashcroft (2007: 33), class was an important factor in colonialism, firstly in constructing the attitudes of the colonizers

towards different groups and categories of the colonized (native). In term of gender, Tyson (2006: 85) states that patriarchal woman has internalized the norms and values of patriarchy, any culture that privileges man by promoting traditional gender roles. Traditional gender roles cast men as superior and strong; they cast women are powerless, nurturing, and submissive. In term of race, Ashcroft (2007: 180) states that race is a term for the classification of human beings into physically, biologically and genetically distinct groups.

Previous studies on colonialism have been done by Nadhiful Mustofa entitled "A Study of Postcolonialism in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*" and also Endang Sriwahyuni entitled "Postcolonial Reading in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*". The reason why the writer conduct the research because it is different from the others, firstly in theories that applied. The issues of colonialism that is analyzed in previous studies is a normal issues, while the writer focuses on issues of colonial oppression that is reflected in the novel.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

There are two previous studies presented in this study. The first previous study related to this research was done by Nadhiful Mustofa, the student of University 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya. In his thesis entitled "A Study of postcolonialism in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*". His thesis discussed the characteristic of colonialism depicted in the novel. This research was designed as qualitative research and applied both extrinsic and intrinsic approaches. The discussion showed that there were six characteristics of colonialism that appear in the novel i.e. subaltern, marginality, feudalism, cultural hegemony, power and resistance. The present study is similar to the previous study in terms of its topic. The difference lies in the theories applied in the studies.

The second previous study was conducted by Endang Sriwahyuni, a student of University of 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya (2011). In her thesis entitled "Post-Colonial

Reading in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*". The writer analyzed postcolonial identity reflected in the novel. The writer applied postcolonial approach, focused on the operations – politically, socially, culturally, and psychologically- of colonialist and anti colonialist ideologies. The result of the study showed that there were several postcolonial issues related to postcolonial identity i.e. eurocentrism, unhomeliness, and mimicry. The present study is similar to the previous study in terms of the application of postcolonial approach. While the difference lies in the theories used in analyzing the data.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The research approach used in this study is postcolonial approach. Ashcroft (2007:168) states that the term was originally used by historians after the Second World War in term such as the post-colonial state. Post-colonial had a clearly chronological meaning, designating the post-independence period. This study analyzes the colonial oppression in M.H. Szekeley Lulofs' *Coolie*. Therefore, postcolonial approach is applicable to this study.

This research is qualitative in nature. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2), a qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This method is relevant for this research because the data in this study is descriptive data and the analysis presents interpretation of the data descriptively. Therefore, this study belongs to qualitative study.

The data of this study are taken from M. H. Szekeley Lulofs' *Coolie*. This novel can be called as the primary data source. The data are quotations from the novel that are related to the topic being discussed. The researcher has also used other secondary data sources which can assist the researcher. The researcher gathers much information taken from journals, reference books, and websites.

The instrument in this research is the human instrument who is the researcher herself. As the instrument of the study, the researcher decides the focus of the study, collects the data, analyzes and interprets the data, and makes a conclusion.

In collecting the data, the first step done by the researcher was reading the novel repeatedly in order to get good understanding about the novel. The next step done by the researcher was identifying the data. In this step, the researcher underlined the the suspected data and marking the novel pages containing the data.

There were three steps conducted by the researcher in analyzing the data. First, classifying the data. In this step, the suspected data were classified based on the topics which were presented in the statements of the problem. Second, analyzing and interpreting the data. The suspected data that had been classified based on the topics of the discussion were analyzed and interpreted. The analysis process involved matching the data to the theory that is congruence to each problem statements and analysis. Last, making conclusion. After conducting the analysis, the researcher made conclusion based on the result of the analysis.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The discussion is divided into two subchapters i.e. the representation of colonial oppression in Lulofs' *Coolie* and the representation of text's side on colonialism in Lulofs' *Coolie*.

4.1 The Representation of Colonial Oppression in Lulofs' *Coolie*

Oppression of coolies in Deli has become common thing. Everyday the coolies suffer with a system created by the colonial. The system is very detrimental to the natives. They were forced to obey all colonial commands. In other word, coolies lived in oppression under colonial rule. The colonial oppression reflected in M. H.

Szekely Lulofs' is represented through class, gender, and race.

4.1.1 Oppression Represented through Class

As Ashcroft (2007: 33) declares that oppression is one of the colonial issues that can be explain through class. The classes reflected in Lulofs' *Coolie* are the European, represented by the Dutch and the native. Further, the class of the native are divided into upper class and lower class. The upper class is represented by Mandurs and the lower class is represented by coolies. This class division determine the power of the class. Coolies whose position is at the lowest have the least power and always become the victims of oppression done by both the Dutch and the upper class native.

“Well now, whatever this tuan asks you, you’ve got to answer yes. Do you understand (Lulofs, 1984: 31)?”

The quotation above tells about Ruki who has just arrived at the place where he will work as a coolie and he is obliged to obey all the rules applied at the place and anything ruled by a Mandur and Tuan besar. Ruki has no right to fight due to Ruki's position as a coolie. Mandur and Tuan besar have full power over Ruki and all other coolies who work at the plantation because of the position of the coolies under the Mandur and the Tuan besar. The concept of class is reflected in the quotation above where a colonized coolie experiences injustice. He must obey the words of the Tuan.

The agent wiped his hand. “ go back to your place, and don’t come here again!” Ashamed and humiliated, Ruki slunk away, squatted down, and gazed fixedly at the earth. A hot feeling of hatred had invaded his heart. He had never felt hatred before. There seemed to be a mist before his eyes.

“That’s only the beginning,” said the older man, who was sitting in his side.

“You’d better do just as they tell you. It’s better for you”

Ruki did not reply. He continued to stare in front of him (Lulofs, 1984: 36).

The sentence was spoken by an old man who was in that place, he saw Ruki being tortured by a European men. The old man said, what was experienced by Ruki was just the beginning. In other words, the coolie who has lived there for a long time has experienced something worse than what Ruki is experiencing right now. Therefore, it would be better for Ruki to do whatever is ordered by the European man. If not, Ruki will be insulted and tortured. The old man advises Ruki so that Ruki could live well. Ruki has to adapt to such depressed condition. Ruki's position is only a coolie who does not have any power there. If Ruki wants to live, he must adapt to conditions that are less good and different from the conditions in his village.

He stooped down, seized Ruki by his neck, and pushed his head under water. After a couple of seconds he allowed him to come up, and then pushed him under again. Meanwhile he scolded angrily in Dutch.

“You rotten novice! You good for nothing! I’ll teach you, by god! Down into the mud, that’s where you can laugh. Grin as much as you like now, you beastly black hound!”

Twice more he pushed Ruki down under water, a little longer each time. Stifled, frightened to death, he coughed out the mud from his nose and his mouth.

“will you stop grinning now?”

“Yes, sir!”

“Will you work?”

“Yes, sir.”

Tremblingly, Ruki answered “yes” to everything (Lulofs, 1984: 79).

The quotation above tells about the white man's rude treatment to Ruki. The white man tortures Ruki by pulling Ruki's head and putting it in the water. The rough treatment is repeated twice until Ruki drains mud from his nose and mouth. The

white man wants Ruki to obey all his orders. After torturing Ruki, he scolds and insults Ruki with harsh words. The white man shows that in this area, he has the highest position, the most powerful, and has the right to do whatever he wants. Everyone who is there must obey his orders.

4.1.2 Oppression Represented through Gender

As Tyson (2006: 85) declares that traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive; they cast woman as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive. Gender in Lulofs` Coolie is represented by the men as superiors, firstly in constructing the attitudes of the superiors toward women. Women are just men's satisfaction. They are forced to be sleep mates and take care of men. Women suffer from gender inequities. They cannot do anything. They are powerless. This patriarchal system has been produced by society. This problems faced by the women are not easy. First, women are trapped in a patriarchal system that oppresses them just because they are women.

The woman bit and kicked around her, but the sailor seized her by the knot of her hair, lifted her head up a little, and gave her a blow with his closed fist full in the face. She screamed loudly. There was some commotion among the men.

“Don't beat her abang!” the Javanese said. “Let her cry! She has forgotten her child, an now the devil has come into her. It is not her fault” (Lulofs, 1984: 42)

The quotation above tells about a woman who is tortured by a sailor from Madura. The man is angry because the woman screams. That is because the woman has lost her child and she screams hysterically because her son is missing. She tries to find her son and shouts for her son. The woman is hysterical and loses control. She bits and kicks her surroundings. What

this woman does make the sailor angry, so the sailor pulls her hair and gives her a blow. The woman screamed loudly when the sailor hits her. In that era, women were not respected, insulted and tortured. This shows the existence of gender in that era. Men consider themselves superior to women and make use of their position to oppress women. Where men have full power over women, so they have the right to torture women. They can do anything against women.

“And now have a look at the new coolies. How many women are left among them?”

“Only one,” mumbled Nur.

“Well, if that's so... you can get along home. Now then, off with you!”

Nur stood up, muttering vaguely, threw his spade resentfully over his shoulder, and disappeared into the rapidly gathering dusk.

Ruki watched all this anxiously. The one woman who remained was Karminah. And sure enough she was given to an old Javanese named Marto, a coolie from section one.

“Now then, you there, follow him” (Lulofs, 1984: 63)

The sentence above shows that Karminah has become Marto's wife. Karminah is one of the young female coolies who has just arrived at Deli, but unfortunately she is forced to become a wife of a coolie. Women in that area are just men's satisfaction and they are forced to be sleep mates and they have take care of the men. They cannot refuse because they are only contract coolies. In other words, they have been bought by European. Therefore, they must follow all the commands of the European. If they resist they will be tortured by them. This shows the existance of gender oppression.

“You and she are to go together to the tuan's house”

“Why, mandur?”

“The tuan wants your women”

Marto looked at the mandur in silence. He was an old Javanese, lean and ill-cared for."But I have waited so long for a woman," he brought out at last.

"Can I help that? the tuan wants her. Presently, when more women come, you'll be given one. Do you understand?"

"Yes, mandur"

Karminah listened in frightened silence.

"why I must go to the tuan? She asked.

Marto looked at her and shook his head. Women, he thought, they are stupider than buffaloes. Then he answered, "But because you please the tuan, of course (Lulofs, 1984: 92).

The quotation above tells about the Tuan who wants Marto's women, Karminah. The Tuan told Mandur to call Marto and Karminah to his house. Marto is confused when Mandur conveyed Tuan's orders to Marto. Marto does not want to give Karminah to Tuan, but he cannot do nothing. Marto must let Karminah goes. Karminah is scared, but she can only be silent and accept whatever her destiny. Her beautiful face, attractive body makes Tuan wants to have it. Tuan does not care even though Karminah belongs to Marto. It is very easy for Tuan to get what he wants, including having Karminah. Marto has to give Karminah to Tuan that day. The concept of gender is reflected in the quotation above. Women are considered like goods that can be owned by anyone. Women lose their self-esteem.

4.1.3 Oppression Represented through Race

As Ashcroft (2007: 180) declares that particularly pertinent to the rise of colonialism is race. Race thinking and colonialism are imbued with the same impetues to draw a binary distinction between 'civilized' and 'primitive' and the same necessity for the hierarchization of human types. The race in Lulofs' *Coolie* are represented by European, natives who have power, natives who are powerless, Madurese, Javanese, and Chinese. The

racist as superior, firstly in constructing the attitudes of the superiors toward other races. Racists consider a group of other races have many differences based on biological, physical, characteristic, and so on. They think that their race is the best than others. The kind of racism, bullying, discrimination, and humiliation is reflected in terms of race.

The Tuan spoke Malay. None of them knew many words of this language. "Well, Amat have you had a good catch?" Amat, a man from Batavia, grinned. "Peasant boys from a distant campong. Fools, but young and strong."

"Fine" said the European, as he moved some papers. The three of them had squatted down respectfully. (Lulofs, 1984: 32)

The quotation above tells about the tuan who asked Amat about the new coolies. Amat said that he has found a coolie from a village in Java. Amat also said that the coolie is a stupid farmer. In this case stupid word addressed to Ruki and his friends because they are believe in all the words of Amat easily. They do not think in advanced about Amat's offer to go to Deli. In fact they have been cheated. This shows that Amat, a man from Batavia considers the Javanese as being ignorant and can be influenced easily. Amat also considers that Ruki and his friends are strong and young, so they are suitable to be coolies in Deli. Amat's attitude shows that he is a rasist. He categorizes young people from Java as a group of people who are stupid and suitable to become coolies because of the strength they have.

But the European saw only the grin on the dark face. He sprank at Ruki and struck him with his open hand. "you monkey! You brute! Do you think you can be lazy here, and impertinent into the bargain? I'll teach you to laugh, by god! There (Lulofs, 1984: 78)!"

Europe has a negative effect on Indonesians. It can be seen from European behavior that is always rude and arrogant. European categorizes indigenous people through genetic, nation, geographical origin, and so on. They treat the indigenous population as their servants and they act as if they are in their own country. There is no Indonesian people who dares to fight the colonials. They are helpless. Negative behaviors of European affects the indigenous people of Indonesia. In a short time, they imitate these negative behaviors. Starting from taboo words and violence action. The concept of the race is reflected in the quotation above, where the European always differentiate each native. There are two categories, i.e natives who work as the employee of the European and natives who work as coolies.

“What do you want?” he asked angrily in order to hode his shame at having lost.

“Nothing,” she said, and giggled again.

“Go away,” he said, “go to your man, or are you on your way to the Chinese again?”

“The Chinese pay well,” she said.

“Aren’t you ashamed, you a Sundanese woman, to go with Chinese who eat pig’s meat?”

“But am I not orang kontrak? So why shouldn’t I go with Chinese? We are not in Java here. Everything is different (Lulofs, 1984: 108).”

The quotation above tells about Ruki who is annoyed by Saima. Saima insults Ruki because Ruki loses in gambling. Ruki who is embarrassed insults Saima. Ruki said "Aren't you ashamed, you are a Sundanese woman, to go with Chinese who eat pig’s meat?" to Saima. In this case Ruki said that the Chinese are foreigners and pig eaters. It is considered shameful by Ruki. Ruki is a young man from Java. He considers the Chinese are different group from him because they come from China and eat pigs. It shows that the concept of race is reflected by Ruki.

4.2 The Representation of Text’s Side on Colonialism in Lulofs’ *Coolie*.

Since the European colonized Indonesia, there was a lot of oppression of the natives, especially those who did not have power. All kind of oppression can be seen from the text in novel *Coolie* that reflects colonial oppression. The representation of the text’s side on colonialism can be seen through class, gender, and race.

First of all, the text’s side on colonialism is reflected through representation of class. The Dutch colonializers are oppressive to the natives who are powerless. Oppression is conducted in the forms of physical violence such as pushing, hitting, slapping, and killing. There is also oppression in the form of verbal violence such as shouting and swearing that affects the mental condition of coolies.

The text’s side on colonialism is also reflected through gender. Men are superior, so they have the right to do anything to women. Women coolie are threatened inhumanity. Women are forced to be men satisfaction. They have lost their dignity and they are forced to serve European. Women do not have strength to fight. If they fight then men will oppress them. The injustice treatment that happens in Deli make women unable to do anything.

Finally, the text’s side on colonialism is shown through race. The colonizers who are European considers racis other than European as subordinate. The colonizer oppress the native in many way just because they think that the natives are subordinate to them in terms of race. Racism practiced by the Europeans makes the life of coolie in Deli even more difficult. So, it can be cocluded that based on the text’s representation related to issues of colonial oppression shows that the text undermines colonialism.

5. CONCLUSION

The researcher has found three issues of colonial oppression in M.H Szekely Lulofs’ *Coolie*. Those issues of colonial oppression are class, gender, and race. The study found that in general, class issue of colonial

oppression is the most frequently occur in the data. In term of class, the Dutch colonializers are oppressive to the natives who are powerless. The colonial oppression is also reflected through gender. Women are threatened inhumanity. Women are forced to be men satisfaction. Women do not have strength to fight. If they fight then men will oppress them. Finally, the colonial oppression is shown through race. Racism practiced by the Europeans makes the life of coolie in Deli even more difficult because European always differentiate each native.

The second discussion is about the representation of text's side on colonialism in Lulofs' *Coolie*. The oppression can be seen from the text in novel *Coolie* reflected colonial oppression. In term of class, there are a lot of oppression. Such as physical violence i.e pushing, hitting, slapping, and killing. In term of gender, women get double oppression. First, women are trapped in a patriarchal system that oppresses them just because they are women. In term of race, European always differentiate each native. There are two categories, i.e natives who work as the employee of the European and natives who work as coolies. Based on the text's representation i.e. class, gender, and race show that the text undermines colonialism.

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