Pesantren Literature as a Form of Ideological Discourse Countering Communism: the Representation of Communist Figures in Ahmad Tohari’s Kubah

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Abstract

One of the subculture literatures, *pesantren literature* remains “an unexplored territory” of literature study in Indonesia. As the cultural product of the pesantren tradition, it has ideologically shaped some significant narrative cultural enterprises. Following Jamal D. Rachman’s three main definitions of *pesantren literature*—as a literature that lives and develops in *pesantren*, as a literature written by people who are from the pesantren tradition and as a literature dealing with the pesantren (Ismah, 2011), I only focus on the second as the object of the research. By the second, a novel written by an author who is from *pesantren* is investigated, i.e. *Kubah* by Ahmad Tohari. The analysis shows that in regard to general features of *pesantren literature*, Ahmad Tohari’s novel *Kubah* strongly embodies a form of ideological discourse countering the dominant political ideology at the time of 1950’s-1960’s, Communism. All in all, the paper reveals that *pesantren literature*, like other literary works, naturally tends to be positional and political.

Keywords: Kubah, Communism, Pesantren, Pesantren Literature

Pesantren literature: A brief introduction

As a subculture,¹ *pesantren* is perhaps one of the oldest traditional educational systems which mainly focus on Islamic-religion knowledge. The uniqueness of this religion-based educational system is found in its boarding school system. The students, called as ‘santri’, live in the so-called “pondok pesantren” (*pesantren* boarding house). The more comprehensive definition of *pesantren* comes from Azra et al. (2007, 175) quoted by Ismah (2011, 106-107):

The *Pesantren* is a residential school dedicated to the transmission of the classical Islamic sciences, including study of the Qur’an and hadith, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Arabic grammar, mysticism (*tasawwuf*), and the Arabic sciences (*alat*). A typical pesantren complex consists of a mosque, studyrooms, dormitories, and kyai’s [the Islamic scholar who builds and leads the pesantren]

The students live there for 24 hours a day, not only for schooling but also for all of their daily activities, such as eating, washing, cooking, and so forth. The santri studies many subjects related to Islamic traditional courses from theology to Arabic grammar, from

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¹ The term ‘subculture’ refers to the idea that pesantren culture for a long time has been a unique mode of life deviating from the general mode of life in Indonesia. This idea mainly refers to Abdurrahman Wahid’s thought in a book chapter “Pesantren sebagai Subkultur” (Pesantren as Subculture) (see “Pesantren dan Pembaharuan” (Pesantren and Reformation), Dawam Rahardjo (Ed.) Jakarta: LP3ES, 1988, 4th printed, p.40)
Islamic jurisprudence to theosophy. Besides, one of the courses in pesantren is literature. Traditionally, the most common form of its literature is the so-called ‘Syi’iran’ or ‘Syair’ (religious-traditional poem) which is mainly written and spoken in Arabic and local languages, such as Javanese, Sundanese, Bugis, and so on. The similarities of the Syi’iran works are on the themes they choose which mainly concern the love to God and the Prophet Muhammad. It reveals that the literary practices in pesantren are mostly a part of religious ritual prayer to God.

These days, this limitation of the so-called pesantren literature has changed. According to Jamal D. Rahman, an Indonesian poet and pesantren alumni, pesantren literature covers not only (1) a literature that lives and develops in pesantren, like ‘Syi’iran’ or ‘Syair’ (Old religious-traditional poem), but also (2) any kind of literary works which are written by people who are from the pesantren tradition, and (3) any kind of literary works dealing with the pesantren life as its main theme and issues, including Djamil Suherman’s *Umi dan Tjerita-tjerita Pendek Lainnya* (1963), Abidah el-Khaliqi’s novel *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (2009), etc. (Ismah, 2011, 107). Based on the definition above, this paper only focuses on the second dimensions—literary works which are written by the pesantren people. The best example I have chosen to examine is Ahmad Tohari’s *Kubah*.

**Ahmad Tohari and the pesantren world**

Ahmad Tohari was born in June 13, 1948. He was a ‘pesantren native’ from the very beginning of his life. He lives in Tinggarjaya, Jatilawang, Banyumas (Central Java) and grew up in the middle of pesantren cultural tradition. In his childhood, he studied “kitab kuning”—a type of traditional religious books written in Arabic, from which santri (pesantren student) wrote down the meaning of the word in the language of Arab pegon (Javanese Arabic). This type of the book—written by Islamic scholars teaching Islamic disciplines, such as hadits (the Prophet’s words), fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), nahwu (Arabic grammar), and so forth—has become a compulsory in the curriculum of pesantren. In a personal interview with the author, he recalled his childhood memory when experiencing the beauty of the use of Arab pegon words in translating the Arabic Koran.  

Although Tohari’s parents were both from farming backgrounds, his father had received a good Islamic education and, while employed as director of the regional office for the Ministry of Religious Affairs, was responsible for the establishment of a pesantren in Tinggarjaya. Tohari’s father has been described as a "progressive intellectual" and under his guidance Tohari developed a deep understanding of Indonesian politics and a strong sense of social and environmental responsibility. Tohari has described himself as a mischievous child who often visited a neighboring abangan village (i.e., one that practiced a less orthodox version of the Islamic faith). Although Tohari's education in the pesantren developed by his parents left him with deep religious convictions, as an adult his progressive

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2 Personal interview
interpretation of Indonesian Islam has also been criticized by some as being out of step with the status quo.³


**Theoretical framework**

New Historicism theory can be used as theoretical optic to comprehend the discourse beyond the text. As a tool of analysis, the theory assumes that historical phenomena can be read like a text or otherwise. H. Aram Veeser has isolated five key assumptions (Castle, 2007, 132):

1) “Every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices”;
2) Every critique inevitably “uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes”;  
3) Literary and non-literary texts “circulate inseparably”;
4) No discourse “gives access to unchanging truths” nor “expresses inalterable human nature”; and
5) Critical methods under capitalism “participate in the economy they describe.”

By underlining the third notion, it is clear enough that one should not separate literary and non-literary texts. Both are inseparable and complete each other. After all, both “the fact of the fiction” and “the fiction of the fact” interchangeably narrate the text.

**Research method**

This paper is a descriptive-qualitative research which mainly applies New Historicism theory. The method relevant to the theory is a “thick description” or “in-depth reading” method. It means that the researcher reads the same text, *Kubah*, repeatedly in order to get a comprehensive meaning (Geertz, 1973, 25). After finding the “always-temporary-meanings of the text”, the researcher tried to locate them in the formative discourse of the historical event, which is mainly recorded in the secondary data such as historical books, journals, magazines and so forth. All in all, both the meaning from the fiction and the non-fiction are challenged and read meticulously, so that the production of ‘new’ meaning becomes always possible.

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The post-1965 tragedy: conflict, reconciliation and fiction

In 1950s Indonesia, the PKI (the Indonesian Communist Party) became one of the major political powers in the country. In the first general election of 1955, the party won fourth position, following PNI (the Indonesian National Party), Masjumi as the first runner-up and PNU (the party of Nahdlatul Ulama). In the 1960’s, the PKI became even bigger and formed powerful organization in the fields of politics, economics and culture. Thus, it was the biggest Communist party in the world, outside of Soviet Union and RRC. Then, political relationship between the PKI and the President Sukarno became more intimate. This was proved when Soekarno declared a national slogan that became famous at the time: “NASAKOM” (Nasionalis, Agama, Komunis)—the idea of the unity of these three major political elements of the nation. This political development created ‘political anxiety’ among other major elements of the nation, such as the nationalists, the Muslim parties (e.g. Masjumi and PNU), and also the military.

On the night of 30 September/1 October 1965, something tragic happened. Six army generals and one lieutenant were kidnapped and killed at “Lubang Buaya”, in Jakarta. Then a military coup happened that finally ended the power of President Sukarno. The new president was inaugurated led by General Soeharto, the founder of the so-called “New Order”. Soon after the rise of the New Order, the president and his government constructed the idea of “the tragedy of 1965”. With his military power, the new order created the one and only official historiography that declared the PKI as the mastermind of the tragedy, though some recent publications have provided other version of the tragedy. Unfortunately, this official version of history soon became the only narration that has been accepted by the people. Thus, further consequence in the field of social, politics, culture, and economics could not be avoided.

In the context of global politics, the 1965 tragedy happened at the peak of Cold War when the Western alliance (the capitalist USA and UK) had the same global agenda to fight against Communism, while at the same time the ideology of Communism was expanding rapidly throughout the world.

What happened next in the aftermath of the 1965 tragedy? There were two forms of conflict which happened in the country; vertical and horizontal. Vertical conflict happened between the military government and the PKI supporters. Immediately the PKI was listed as a forbidden party in Indonesia, all of PKI members and those linked to PKI were jailed and many of them were killed.

Accordingly, the horizontal conflict happened between the PKI and other elements of the nation, particularly the Nationalist and Muslim groups. This civil conflict can be seen as the result of political propaganda which was controlled totally by the New Order, either in the official media or in the private media. In some districts, some mass organizations linked to the Nationalist and Muslim parties voluntarily “helped” the military, executing-killing-murdering PKI supporters, such as Pemuda Pancasila (the Youth of Pancasila) that
was linked to the Nationalists, Gerakan Pemuda Ansor (the movement of Ansor Youth) and Barisan Serbaganua (Banser) that was linked to the Muslim party, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). The enmity between the Communists and the Muslims particularly happened in some regions where NU with its large landholdings were the majority, such as in East Java and many parts of Central Java and West Java. In this phase, some elements of Nationalists and Islamic groups played significant role in killing and rounding up Communists.

After the reformation of 1998, some new reports have been published which provide more critical accounts of these events. The most recent publication is a report from KOMNASHAM (Indonesia’s National Commission on Human Rights) which investigated the mass killings in 1965/66. The Indonesian army unleashed a campaign of terror against the supporters of the PKI and groups that were associated to the party. Up to one million people were killed and many of them were imprisoned as “TAPOL” (political prisoners). The report also said that this human tragedy committed by the army was done with the support of gangsters, civilian mobs, and para-military groups. Another recent report was the film The Act of Killing (Jagal) by Joshua Oppenheimer. It has drawn international attention to the 1965 massacres. The film shows how proudly local gangsters in Medan, North Sumatra played their roles in the killings, especially focusing on the leader of the gangsters, Anwar Kongo. The film also shows how one of para-military groups, Pemuda Pancasila played its role in the tragedy. A further report was made by some NU members (especially the youth), with the aim of making reparations for the violence of the past and to bring communities together. They tried to reconcile ex-Communist Tapols with their communities and teach them that both Muslims and Communists were “the same victims of the same past”.

The 1965 tragedy was also documented in Indonesian fiction. There are some literary works dealing with the 1965 tragedy that were written under the power of New Order; Sri Sumarah dan Bawuk (Umar Kayam, 1975), Para Priyayi (Umar Kayam, 1992), Kubah (Ahmad Tohari, 1980), Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk (Ahmad Tohari, 1981), Nyali (Putu Wijaya, 1983), and Anak Tanah Air, Secercah Kisah (Ajip Rosjidi, 1985). These literary works written under the New Order regime were mostly written by non-Communist or affiliated-Communist writers. After the reformation of 1998, more literary works dealing with the tragedy were published. It has been possible for ex-Communists to publicly tell their stories and for young writers to explore the meaning of 1965 event for later generations. Among these works of literature are: Merajut Harkat (Putu Oka Sukanta, 1999), Tapol (Ngarto Februana, 2000), Layang-layang Itu Tak Lagi Mengepak Tinggi-tinggi (Martin Alaedia, 2003), Derak-derak (Zoya Herawati, 2005), and Kemerdekaan Dimulai dari Lidah (A.D. Donggo, 2005), Pulang (Leila Chudlori, 2012) and Amba (Laksni Pamuntjak, 2013).

In this context, Kubah, first published in 1980, contributes something distinctive to modern Indonesian literature, in that the novel sees the events of 1965 and their aftermath from within the culture of the pesantren. After thirty two years, the novel was republished in 2012, and included Gus Dur’s endorsement as an expression of reconciliation between Communism and its foes, particularly Islam. Perhaps a major reason for republishing the
novel was that it can be seen as contributing to current mood of reconciliation. This message can be seen from the end of the story, i.e. the reconciliation between a figure from pesantren (Haji Bakir) and a former Communist (Karman). On the other hand, I will argue in this paper that the novel as a whole does not have a reconciliatory message. Rather, I will show how the novel perpetuates established negative stereotypes of Communism and its alleged supporters.

**Ahmad Tohari’s Kubah: the representation of Communist figures**

The cover of the latest version of the novel can tell a lot about *Kubah* and its relation to Communism. There are three endorsements in the cover. The first is: “The best novel of 1981”, from the Yayasan Buku Utama Ministry, of Education and Culture. It points to the fact that *Kubah* was one of favorites of the New Order regime under General Soeharto. Although it also discursively presents a critique of the military regime, it was mainly considered to be a strong critique of Communism as represented by the one and only Indonesian Communist Party—the biggest political enemy of Soeharto’s regime.

The second is: “It has been published in Japanese language”. This shows us that the novel has already been recognized as an ‘international’ work. It has drawn the attention of other countries. The third is an endorsement by Abdurrahman Wahid (or Gus Dur), the then-President of Indonesian republic: “KUBAH brings a great idea of reconciliation of post 1965 tragedy which was first written in 1979 and then published two years later.” For Gus Dur, the main idea of the novel was the reconciliation of Communism and its enemy, Islam, as represented by the political and cultural power of pesantren through the Party of Majelis Sjura Muslimin Indonesia (MASYUMI) and the Party of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU).

**Characterisation as political statement**

While for Gus Dur *Kubah* brings the idea of reconciliation and for Tohari a kind of cultural response to the tragedy of 1965, I see it as a serious critique of Communism and its challenges to Indonesia from the perspectives of the Islamic pesantren. All the Communist supporters are represented as “antagonists” of the story. Above all, my analysis reveals some cultural representations of Communist supporters as variously victims of the party, schemers, immoral women or simply Chinese. On the other hand, *Kubah* portrays all of the pesantren-connected characters as positive protagonists.

**Karman’s story: plot summary**

Karman, the main character of the novel, was born in 1935 in Pegaten. His father was a *mantri pasar*[^4] and his mother was a housewife. In his village, the family of *mantri* was considered as part of priyayi (elite-noblemen class). As part of the elite, Karman enjoyed a good life as a child. Everything changed when the Japan soldiers came and stole people’s rice. People then just ate *ubi-ubian* (*cassava or tuber*), including the Mister Mantri’s family. Of priyayi, he believed that the elite should eat the best rice, not *ubi-ubian*. In order to have

[^4]: A government officer whose job was to manage a traditional market.
rice he finally insisted Haji Bakir to take his entire land in exchange for rice. Mister Mantri soon became poor. When the war independence came, he chose not to be a part of the Republic but to be a part of the colonizer, with a hope that one day he will become mantri pasar again under the power of colonizer. One day the Republic corps, which was mainly supported by kampung and santri youth, took him to the jungle and he never came back home (p. 60-61). People knew that he had died.

As an orphan, Karman lived with his mother, bu mantri. The little Karman always played around with his friends, including Rifah, Haji Bakir’s daughter. Sometimes Rifah invited him to play with her in her house. Soon Haji Bakir’s family realized that there was an orphan among their neighbours and it was their duty as Muslims to take care of him. By giving him a job, Bakir’s family paid him some money and also gave him some zakat or infaq (religious alms). This helped Karman and his mother. At this time, he was also a diligent santri who always recited the Koran in Bakir’s little mosque at night. He always spent the night at the mosque. With his friends, he usually went home after Subuh (dan) prayer. He happily did this religious routine and worked activity for years for the Bakir family. After three years, they asked him to live with them in their house where he received all adequate food and proper daily clothing.

In 1950, when he was fifteen years old, his uncle Hasyim came home after four years defending for the young Republic as a member of Laskar Hisbullah, a Muslim militia. Karman now left Bakir family and lived with his uncle’s family (p.80-81). He became a student at the junior high school (Sekolah Menengah Pertama-SMP) and finally graduated in 1953 (p.93).

After the 1948 coup d’état by the PKI,⁵ people paid less attention to the actors of the uprising who then escape from Madiun. Muso, as the mastermind of the action, quickly succeeded at spreading his political influence among various circles of Indonesian intellectuals (p.84). One of them was Margo, a mastermind of the Communist party in Pegaten. It took a long time for Margo to find a young man with great potential to become a distinguished political cadre but he finally found the young Karman (p.85-86). Then, a new chapter of Karman’s life soon began.

After investigating Karman’s life and family, Margo started to approach Karman with some ‘ammunition’. First, knowing that Karman was a graduate of SMP who was looking for a job, Margo and his compatriots tried to find him a job. Before talking to Karman directly, Triman and Margo approached his uncle Hasyim. Then, they found a job for him as a secretary (juru tulis) in a sub-district office. Surrounded by many Communist figures, immediately the young Karman became a member of the Communist party.

Margo also knew that Karman was recently disappointed by Bakir’s family because they had rejected his marriage proposal to Rifah. Haji Bakir had instead accepted Abdul Rahman's

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⁵ Though in the novel Tohari just clearly names the party as Partai Komunis (the Communist Party), it’s clear enough to refer it to the one and only Communist party in Indonesia at that time, that is Partai Komunis Indonesia (the Indonesian Communist Party).
marriage proposal. He was a santri (Muslim scholar) from the pesantren of Tebuireng Jombang and his proposal had come earlier than Karman’s. As a result, Karman was frustrated, angry, and ashamed. All he want is to take revenge and to hate Haji Bakir. He was reluctant to meet Bakir and his family, and never visited their house. He also soon stopped the obligatory worship in the Bakir’s mosque. He did it at home. On Fridays, he chose to worship in another mosque.

All his actions were actually forms of personal revenge. By not worshipping in Bakir’s mosque, he was attacking Haji Bakir. Everything became even worse. He stopped attending obligatory worship. The mosque and Haji Bakir as a Muslim figure were both symbols of Islam in Pegaten. The more he avoids the mosque, the more he felt satisfied (p.101). Margo and his group made things worse. They enthusiastically turned him against Haji Bakir (p.102).

Margo further taught Karman about the struggle of proletariat people against the bourgeois. The left-wing political views were very powerful. Margo also recited the story of Karman’s land. Based on his different version, it was a fact that an Islamic leader like Haji Bakir had greedily occupied the land of Karman’s father (p.103). It took only a year since his meeting with Margo’s group for Karman to become extremely cynical and always suspicious of anything related to Bakir. He openly left the mosque and stopped his prayers. He regularly quoted Margo’s words that religion is opium for the oppressed people or the masses (p.103).

The climax of his personality transformation came about near a well behind the house. One day he stood angrily in the backyard with a chopper in his hand. He looked, hesitated, but then slowly moved to a water basin made of bamboo and furiously cut it into pieces. The basin was full of water for wudlu (an obligatory ritual of cleansing the body before prayer). By doing this, he sent a message to the people that he was a real symbol of his transformation; he was now the Communist-atheist Karman (p.104).

Then the tragedy of 1965 happened. The suspected cause of the tragedy was the Communist party. The consequences were tragic. All Communist activists and those who supported the party were hunted down and arrested by soldiers. Some of them were murdered, while some others were imprisoned. After quite long period on the run, Karman was finally arrested and ‘luckily’ was not murdered by the soldiers. He was one of those who were imprisoned. The military government of General Soeharto sent him and many Communist activists to the political prison of Pulau Buru (Buru Island). Pulau Buru has become famous among Indonesian people and others because of its function as a jail for many Indonesian political prisoners who were suspected of being Communists. Including the most prominent Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer, who wrote “The Tetralogy of Buru Island” while imprisoned there.

Karman was thirty years old at that time. In 1971, his wife Marni decided to remarry another man. After giving up hope of marrying Bakir’s daughter, Rifah, Karman married a
young girl who really loved him, Marni. After Marni’s remarriage, Karman finally realized that his political activity as a Communist party activist had been wrong. While debating with his companion Sitepu in jail, Karman said “…because of the party, I’m now here in jail, far away from home, and my wife will remarry another man” (p.15). In jail, he had realized that he was just a ‘victim’ of the Communist party.

After twelve years Karman was finally released from Buru Island. On the first day of his release, he felt as if he was nothing and the most wretched person in the world (p.9). In 1977, “I’m just an ex-political prisoner!” , he said to himself repeatedly (p.7). He did not realize that the people of Pegaten had forgotten the horrible tragedy of 1965. Those who were involved to the tragedy either imprisoned or not, had become good civilians. They regretted what they had done. Karman finally came home and people accepted his coming home. Even Haji Bakir and his family came along to his house to welcome him.

In front of neighbors, Karman ran to welcome Bakir then knelt down in front of him. He tightly embraced the old man and cried loudly like a child. Bakir could do nothing and let him cry (p.194). The old man and the ex-Communist activist were finally united again. For the people of Pegaten, the rendezvous was a symbol of reconciliation between Islam and Communism. Then the story ended happily; Bakir and the people agreed to give him a job that is making a kubah (Mosque dome) (p.209). Finally, the ex-Communist “came home” to his origin, Islam; and the Communist Karman had finally “died”.

A Communist Margo: “The Mastermind”

Margo was the mastermind behind the Communist Party in Pegaten. His devotion to the party is reflected in the description of his room. Although the room was not a good library, there was a poor cupboard which was fulfilled with books. It was not very large. Above the cupboard there was a portrait of Russian Communist leader; Lenin, on a red background. From the books which were all dirty and crumpled, we knew that the owner of the room loved reading lover. Besides, the books were also dirty stenciled brochures (p.111).

Margo escaped from Madiun and became a teacher in Pegaten. He was smart, brilliant and fond of reading any books or brochures related to his Communist party. He also subscribed to Harian Merah and was always proud of it. The name of “Harian Merah” (Red Daily Newspaper) actually refers to “Harian Rakjat” (People Daily Newspaper). “Harian Rakjat” was published for the first time in January 31, 1951. Formerly it was named as “Suara Rakjat” (The Voice of People)( Yulianti & Dahlan, 2008, 77).

His eyebrows looked like Lenin’s. Contrary to people’s expectations, he succeeded in organizing some people who were sympathetic to the party. The oldest one was a pensioner, a machinist, who was a loyal follower of Suryopranoto, a main figure of the Communist train workers’ movement. The other three figures were ex-followers of Serikat Islam (SI) Merah (Red Islamic Council). SI Merah was a political faction of Serikat Islam, which turned to the left because of the political influence of Alimin and Darsono (p.84). The “Red SI” was in line with the idea of secularism proposed by PKI. They came from some regions, but the most
influential was “Red SI Semarang”. Others came from Madiun, Cepu and Nganjuk (McVey, 2010, 242-245).

Margo deserved the praise he received. As a Communist cadre, his work could be measured from the results of the first general election of 1955. At that time there were only seven voters of his party. Surprisingly for the election of Contituante (parliamentary) member a year later, the voters for his party increased to 353 (p.112). This was in line with the result of national general election.

In Pegaten, one of aspects of Margo’s success was Karman as his young cadre. It can be seen from his political teachings to Karman, including his discussion about his love affair with Rifah who had just become a widow (p.114). Another plan to isolate Karman from Rifah and Bakir family was to let him visit Semarang, the capital city of central Java province, and sending another woman to accompany him; Suti.

A Communist Suti: the “wild” woman

Suti was a stereotypical representation of a Communist woman. Suti was thirty years old. She was described as a woman who had a “wild” attitude, and engaged in love affairs with other Communist activists. When she and her companion had a discussion in her house, she sent her husband to the kitchen to cook. After that discussion, they had “special” event that in the name of the party she must serve the Communist activists like Triman with her body because Suti was a special woman in the party. However, her husband did nothing as if there was nothing between her and her companion. Although most people did not notice this moral disaster, her mother-in-law knew and soon died, because of frustration and stress caused by that sinful act (p.121).

In Semarang, Margo and Triman left both of them. Karman was with Siti in a motel. They slept together. Karman was an unmarried man at that time. For the wild married Suti, it was a gift to have a new bachelor doll like Karman. In short, they satisfied their sexual passion (p.122). As stated before, it was Margo’s plan to make Suti a gift to Karman. However, this plan failed. For Karman, his love affair with Suti was only a mere sexual passion. In Pegaten, he was obsessed with his love for Rifah, who was now a widow. His dream of marrying Rifah rose again and he tried to make come it true. One night he went to Rifah’s house, spied on her and saw her in a silent and peaceful prayer. He could feel how peaceful the heart of a broken hearted woman who just lost her husband could be. Suddenly he remembered another woman who was exact opposite of Rifah. She was the wild Suti. He finally knew many differences between them, but could not count it one by one. There were too many to mention (p. 127).

From this point, it is very clear that the author tries to discursively compare between Suti as a representation of Communist women and Rifah as a representation of santri Islamic women: Suti was a wild, sex-oriented, and sinful wife, while Rifah was religious, God-oriented and devoted wife. From the description, it is clear that Suti was a representation of
most Communist women who became members of Gerakan Wanita Indonesia (Gerwani), the PKI’s *underbow* ['underground'] Indonesian Women’s Movement.

**Some Chinese Communists: Tan Oen Sok, Tan Cie Hong, Tan Liong Pek’s daughter and Oey Fen May**

*Kubah* creates the impression that all the Chinese characters were supporters of the Communist party. The first is Tan Oen Sok, a rich Chinese businessman who totally supported the political movement of Communist party. When the activists of the party needed a car, he let them borrow his car. When Margo and the companions went to Semarang, they rode his *Jip*. He was actually a member of Baperki—an organization of Chinese who supported Communism. As a rich businessman, he ran two tapioca factories in Kokosan. Most of the capital and trade circles in the region were in his hands. In fact, he was an illegal citizen because he was still a Chinese. He hadn’t changed his citizenship into Indonesian. By doing this, he actually broke the law that forbade foreign Chinese to live in the region. That was a government rule, PP 10/1985 that he broke (p.120).

The proof of his support for Communism became very blatant. It happened several months before the tragedy of October 1965. He sorted out an unusual trade. He bought *mancung* (young coconuts) and a large number banana trees in from the people. Later on, people knew that the activity was a part of a political act. Buying most of *mancung* had a big effect to the economics of the people, since their production of coconut sugar was primarily hooked on *mancung*. But why would farmers sell the young coconuts needed for sugar production to him? In the 1960s, it was understandable that as poor people they always needed money urgently.

Tohari described the economic-political act the Chinese had committed as “the politics of impoverishment”. The purpose of the act was so that the impoverished people would be easily agitated or provoked (p.120). The Chinese figure was described as an opportunist who lived in a pragmatic-economically oriented way. After the tragedy of 1965, he ran away from Pegaten and moved to Bandung leaving behind his wealth and all his belongings. It was not a big deal. In Bandung, the opportunist could live happily again (p.120).

The second Chinese character was Tan Cie Hong. He was not described as comprehensively as his big brother Tan Oen Sok. He was just a member of Baperki like his brother. Together with other official Communist activists, Margo and *si Gigi Baja*, with his companion Riwut, Cie Hong was buried by the policemen and the soldiers at the edge of Pegaten (p.152). Sadly he was not as lucky as his brother who ran away to Bandung and lived there happily.

The third Chinese was Tan Liong Pek’s daughter, who was a *ledhek* dancer and the fourth was Oey Fen May, who was a *ronggeng* (a traditional dancer). Both of them were described as bad dancers, who danced badly but very boldly. They invited the kampong youth to dance with them in erotic way (p149). The novel brings a message that traditional
dancers were used as a tool for political acts. Although it was not mentioned clearly whether these two dancers were official Communist activists or not, it was well-known that Communist arts organizations supported the traditional dancers of the people and used dancers as a tool to approach the people. The Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (LEKRA) (the Institute of People’s Culture) was an official cultural organization of Communist party and organized political activity in the field of culture. It included many institutes for traditional cultures, such as the Lembaga Senirupa Indonesia (the Institute of Indonesian Art), the Lembaga Film Indonesia (LFI) (the Institute of Indonesian Film), the Lembaga Sastra Indonesia (Lesra) (the Institute of Indonesian Literature), the Lembaga Senidarama Indonesia (LSDI) (the Institute of Indonesian Drama), the Lembaga Musik Indonesia (LMI) (the Institute of Indonesian Music), and the Lembaga Senitari Indonesia (the Institute of Indonesian Dance) (Yuliantri & Dahlan, 2008, 36-38).

Unlike the novel, the historian Onghokham has noted (2008, 2-3) that the heterogeneity of Chinese people in Indonesia was actually a historical and sociological fact. Chinese were rich, poor, Muslim, Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist and other religion as well. It can be said that Chinese people are as plural as Indonesian people. Like the original people of Indonesia, the Chinese in Indonesia were as plural as Indonesian. In this novel all Chinese characters are portrayed as supporters of or linked to the Communist party in some way or other. My analysis proves that the novel—intentionally or not—has established two ways of stereotyping Indonesian Chinese; (1) that all of Chinese were Communist supporters, and (2) all of them were the enemy of the people.

Conclusion

From the findings, it can be concluded that Ahmad Tohari’s Kubah, as a type of pesantren literature, strongly conveys a serious cultural critique of Communism. As shown in the beginning of the analysis, the pesantren native Tohari through the omnipresent point of view in the novel narrates the representation of Communist figures as “antagonists” and conversely narrates all Islamic pesantren natives as “protagonists”.

This analysis proves that, like many other literary works, pesantren literature naturally tended to be positional and “political” Works and that this forced them to support their own culture and ideology on one hand and to counter the oppositional ones on the other. In the context of the reconciliation of post-1965 tragedy, this novel totally contradicts its aim to reconcile the Muslims and the Communists as suggested by Abdurrahman Wahid in his endorsement of the novel and by Tohari himself in his vision to respond the 1965 tragedy. In fact, this sort of literary work—as well as many other literary and non-literary works written in the era of New Order power—ideologically constructs a stereotype of all Communist figures as criminals; the enemies of the nation. In this paper, I have argued that the ideological assumptions about Communism which predominated at the time the novel was written are embedded in the characterizations employed. They definitely work against
a reading of the works as an expression of reconciliation between Islam and Communism in the contemporary political climate.

References


