

A Critical Comparative Reading of Nationalism in Pramoedya A. Toer and Ngugi wa Thiong'o

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ABSTRACT

This article tries to explore how the conception, birth, and development of novel can become a tool to shed lights to our understanding of the conception, birth, and development of nationalism. The discussion departs from a powerful finding by Edward Said that prominent exiles he happened to know and befriend with had deliberately chosen to be novelists. According to Said, the choice to write novels was fueled by intense feeling of homelessness, which in turn took shape in dream of an imaginary homeland. Novel as a genre is in perpetual search for epic; and since that epic is elusive, what novel can offer is an imagined form. It is in this shared feeling, the same desire to imagine a perfect home, the constant fabrication of narratives of the epic past, the invention of quasi-sacred texts alongside with the heroes and enemies, the dynamics of including and excluding of people that novel and nationalism inform each other. As reader, we turn to postcolonial Kenyan Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* and Indonesian Toer's *This Earth of Mankind*. By commenting on the main characters of these novels we make intellectual exploration into the idea of nationalism. The results are two tentative conclusions regarding the relationship between novel and nationalism, i.e. (1) the pretense of novel to be epic is comparable to the claim of nationalism as the historically overarching set of identity of modern society, and (2) the dynamics of the characters in novel is a metonymy of the dynamics of nationalism *bildungsroman*.

Keywords: Identity; invention; nationalism; novel.

INTRODUCTION

Although at first glance and to eyes of many, there seems to be little relation between novel and nationalism, in fact there have been several studies on the relation between novel as a genre and nationalism. Most, if not many, of them depart or take inspiration from Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. One of such studies is by Pieter Vermeulen (2012) who wrote about the possibility of using David Grossman's novel, *See Under: Love* (1986), to understand Israel's national imaginary that operates along the lines of the tradition of "secular messiasism." A more recent study was conducted by M.J. Meyer who discussed the interconnection between nationalism and entertainment industry in contemporary Thailand (2014). Meyer argues how a novel, *Thawiphop* (1986), serves "a mirror of efforts by the Thai middle class to appropriate nationalism and reimagining the history of the late nineteenth-century Thailand" (p. 125). Both of the studies discuss how the characters of the novels-in-question could be used to understand the birth of nationalism. This article is an effort to explore how our understanding of the conception,

birth and development of a novel can become a useful tool to understand, reformulate, or even deconstruct the conception and the birth of nationalism and how the discourses around novels and nationalism inform and crisscross each other way. Through critical reading of the novels by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Pramoedya Ananta Toer, this article problematizes nationalism as an overarching set of identity. The character developments of the novels in question are used to expose how nationalism is not something that is solid and stable. It is something that is dynamic as metonymied by the characters of the fictions. The uniqueness of this article lies in the use of novel, both in its form and content, to critically see nationalism, particularly postcolonial nationalism.

I start this discussion by drawing our attention to Edward Said (1935-2003). In his *Reflection on Exile* (2000), Edward Said, among many other things, raised two points in his book *Reflection on Exile* (2000) that is worth careful reading for the sake of this article. The first point says, "Much of the exile's life is taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule. It is not surprising that

many exiles seem to be *novelists*, chess players, political activists, and intellectuals” (p. 144). This was true of Said, who himself was an intellectual and politic activist. Several of fellow exiles he knew and befriended with were novelists. His second point is: “Indeed, the interplay between nationalism and exile is like Hegel’s dialectic of servant and master, opposites informing and constituting each other. All nationalisms in their early stages develop from a condition of *estrangement*” (p. 140, italics added).

Based on those two points, I argue that to Edward Said both novel and nationalism, at least in their early stage, share a common character: the feeling of estrangement, the experience of being (in) exile. Both novel and nationalism depart from a condition of being uprooted of the roots, the perceived “inherited land,” and the glorious, epic past. To support this assumption, Said explored into the origin of novels and nationalism and found that both novels and nationalism are products of modern era, which is an era generally characterized by the condition of being spiritual orphaned and alienated. Modern era is the age of anxiety and estrangement. To understand this we need to see the modernism historically. Two of the founding fathers of modernism are Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud. “Nietzsche taught us to feel uncomfortable with tradition, and Freud to regard domestic intimacy as the polite face painted on patricidal and incestuous rage” (Said, 2000, p. 137). Modernism is, therefore, characterized by constant suspicion toward any stable sense of rootedness. This suspicion leads to distrust of any authority, which in negative sense suggests unwillingness to be tied to “the tradition” anymore. But once someone learns to distrust, he is forever lost in the sea of unbelongingness. It is this unbelongingness that in turns makes people want another belongingness, even when this is not possible.

SENSE OF ENSTRANGEMENT IN NOVEL AND NATIONALISM

The sense of estrangement is also a very important notion in Georg Lukacs’s discussion of novels. Departing from a different perspective from that of Said’s, Lukacs’s discussion is somehow also historical. Here, Lukacs puts novel in dialectic with epic. According to him, novel is estrangement of estrangement; it is a representation of the representation of Reality. To make this point, Lukacs firstly proposes the existence of two natures. The first nature is the nature of epic. But of course, we have to keep in mind that by saying this Lukacs realizes that this first nature is not Reality (with capital R) itself, since it is an estrangement anyway. The first nature is, according to

Lukacs, “nothing other than the historico-philosophical objectivation of man’s alienation from his own constructs” (McKeon, 2000, p. 191). However, there is a sense that to Lukacs the representation in the epic world, i.e. the first nature, is light and more “wholesome.” It is a man-made structure where one can somehow feel more or less at home.

On the second nature, Lukacs writes that it is “different from the first nature not in its essence but in the self-consciousness in which it is conceived and which it therefore represents” (McKeon, 2000, p. 179). The Reality with capital “R” that the second nature tries to represent is still the same with Reality of the first nature, but the second nature is a yet another representation of the first representation. The second nature is a second representation of the Reality. This nature happens when the [objectivation or] projection of man’s experience of his self-made environment, the first nature, is understood as a prison instead of a parental home. Understood this way, the second nature is the situation of double estrangement from Reality. Lukacs himself, I must assert here, did not propose the term of Reality. It is my own term, following Lacanian concept of “Reality” in the Imaginary Order.

According to Lukacs, what novel, which in contrast to epic (the first nature) is the second nature, tries to do is transcending that experience of double estrangements—from which his famous epitaph of novel as a form of “transcendental homelessness” comes—to the point of pretentious totality. “The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality” (McKeon, 2000, p.186). Thus, while novel has to deal with and admit its own finiteness, it pretends that it is capable of talking about totality of experience. There is a lack of “epic” quality in novel, but it always tries to invent, reinvent, and imagine that it (once) owns it.

Interestingly, the concept of nationalism has also a root in the experience of estrangement. Nationalism, as Said suggested, is conceived and born out of the feeling of lack, or the experience of being in exile in its broad sense. Loosely following Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Community*, I argue that nationalism is not something that “naturally” exists as a mode of being and living in community. It is not a natural set of identity. In other words, nationalism needs to be invented and reinvented in the modern society. As such, nationalism—and its most visible manifestation: nation—is an act of collective imagining. And this act of imagining is something ongoing, in need of

constant fabrication, even after the process of inventing is formally over. Citing Pierre Bourdieu, the French sociologist, Said writes that one of the ways to create the look of “epic” condition of nationalism is by maintaining and emphasizing what he calls as *habitus*: “the coherent amalgam of practices linking habit with inhabitance” (2000, p. 140).

Nationalism, like novel, longs for form. Departing from the experience of lack, but also characterized by desire, or in my own term “pretense,” to be an overarching set of self-identification that encompasses all other identifications including religious and tribal ties, nationalism tries to invent a common past and a shared future for everyone it arbitrarily wants to include—while, with the same mode, exclude and condemn others to condition of unbelongingness. Nationalism even invents history, which it selectively strings together in a narration. That is why each and every manifestation of nationalism, i.e. modern nation, has its own founding fathers, its own basic and quasi-religious texts, its own modes of selection of national narration, its own historical and geographical landmarks, and its own perceived enemies and official heroes.

This article is a speculative effort to explore how the discourses of novel and nationalism inform and crisscross each other way. Novel functions as proponent of nationalism as well as its harshest critic. As a part of mass print media and popular literatures, novel is a powerful tool to spread the idea of nationalism among the subjects, to create a shared feeling where it did not exist as one imagined community in Andersonian sense. At the same time, novel can also be a great critic that suspects the exclusiveness and brutality of nation toward its subjects and, particularly, non-subjects. In my discussion, I will look at Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *A Grain of Wheat* (first published in 1967) and Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s *This Earth of Mankind* (the English edition was published in 1990). I choose these two novels because both narrate nationalism and the process of nation building.

HEROES OF THE NOVELS: MUGO AND MINKE

Mugo and Minke, respectively, are two main protagonists of Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *A Grain of Wheat* and Pramoedya A. Toer’s *This Earth of Mankind*. It is through the eyes of these protagonists that Ngugi (born in 1938) and Toer (1925-2006) voiced their critical narration on nationalism. It is true that Ngugi and Toer come from different cultural background—Kenya in Africa and Indonesia in Asia—but they

shared a similar concern, i.e. the postcolonial states that once had been imagined as an organic space for the colonized to liberate themselves from the oppression of Western colonizers turned to be as corrupt and exploitative as the regimes they replaced, if not worse. For these two writers, postcolonial Kenya and Indonesia are far from ideal; they are not less exploitative than European rulers when it comes to natural and human resources of the subjects. Ngugi and Toer saw how modern postcolonial states have been sabotaged to serve the interests of a small group of elite natives.

In *Ngugi’s Novels And African History: Narrating the Nation*, James Ogude (1999) writes how Ngugi uses novel to challenge the process of essentialization or the calcification of Kenyan identity and history by postcolonial state:

“Narrative, particularly the novel, has tended to provide Ngugi with the space to imagine Africa’s history which he believes had been repressed by colonialism. Ngugi has insisted, correctly, that his writing is very much part of Kenya’s (and by implication Africa’s) historiography and the theorizing of its political economy. Ngugi’s writing is not just laying a claim to the terrain of culture, but also to radically ‘revised visions of the past tending towards a postcolonial future, as urgently reinterpretable and redeployable experiences, in which the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory reclaimed as part of a general movement of resistance, from the colonist’ (Said, 1994, p. 256). Ngugi posits narrative here as an agent of history because it provides the space for challenging our notions of national identities, uses of history, and ways in which they are deployed in power contestation in modern Kenya and Africa in general” (Ogude, 1999, p. 2).

Similar to that, Pramoedya Ananta Toer wrote his novels, particularly those from the period during his exile in Buru Island from 1967-1979, in order to “help correct the accepted colonial version of the history of the rise of Indonesian nationalism” (Toer, 1999, p. 314). One of the masterpieces from this period is popularly known as the “Buru Quartet”, being the first in the tetralogy, *This Earth of Mankind*. Written after the onset of the despair at the betrayal of the Indonesian people by the elites who ran the postcolonial state during Suharto’s New Order Regime, in *This Earth of Mankind* Toer critically looks back into the history of Indonesia nationalism in order to go forward. Toer, according to Pheng Cheah,

“wishes to retrieve the forgotten ideals of a revolutionary past that had somehow taken a

wrong turn in political history—a past summoned up again in images, reincarnated through narrative fiction—and to implant seeds of change in the minds of his readers in the hope of reorienting the nation on its rightful path” (Cheah, 2003, p. 254).

Although most of Toer’s writings are political and critical as stated in the memoir of his exile, *The Mute Soliloquy* (1999), that a good writing should have a social aspect to it, and the greater development of the social aspect, the better the writing is—comparing an act of writing that is simply done for writing’s or enjoyment sake to masturbation—I would argue that this is not the only reason that makes novel a most powerful tool to see nationalism critically. The power also lies in the form of the novel itself as the freer genre, the genre still in the making. Novel provides more spaces than any other forms of art or writing (I speak of play and poem) which are more rigid in their conventions. A novelist has more rooms to express his or her voice—including more rooms to see the nationalism in a critical way. Both in form and spirit, novel is “revolutionary.”

Now, let’s take a more detailed look to the protagonists of the novels, the heroes, and how their being heroes, too, are a result of invention. This is particularly true to Mugo from *A Grain of Wheat*. Mugo is an introvert character who lives outside of the village, in a hut separated from other villagers. He does not feel comfortable to live among other villagers. It is in that hut, a shabby place, he lays down his head at night after a whole day of toiling, sweating in the small strip of land he owns—a hut he inherits from his late distant aunt, the only relative he has after both of his parents died when he was still very young—an aunt whom he never loved and who never loved him as he always wished. His hut is his home, “the only safe place” (Ngugi, 1967, p. 197). When his aunt died one day, Mugo somehow “wanted somebody, anybody who would use the claims of kinship to do him ill or good. Either one or the other as long as he was not left alone, an outsider” (p. 11). Mugo’s situation is an example of the condition of unbelongness. He is not connected to anyone and anything. We can say that he lives in “exile” both from the past (in the form of his relationship with his late aunt) and from the present (in the form of his fellow villagers).

And yet, all that Mugo wants is a peaceful life—a life that is far from troubles. So, when Kihika, the village’s “real” hero runs into his hut to seek for asylum after killing the District Officer (a colonialist’s agent), Mugo is scared to death. He does not want to accept Kihika, since this can mean big problem for him:

“[a]nd they’ll hang me. My God, I don’t want to die, I am not ready for death, I have not even lived. Mugo was deeply afflicted and confused, because all his life he had avoided conflicts: at home, or at school ... if you don’t traffic with evil, then evil ought not to touch you; if you leave people alone, then they ought to leave you alone” (p. 221).

However, in the dawn of Uhuru (the independence day of Kenya from British colonialism in 1963), Mugo—this shy, introvert, and “self-centered” man—is made hero. Simply because Mugo helps a Kenyan woman labor from being beaten by the white man, everyone sees him as a messiah, a hero that is capable of saving the whole nation. Mugo’s withdrawn personality only adds to his mysteriousness—making him a charismatic figure in the eyes of the crowd. A hero for the new nation is created, in an almost irrational way, and Mugo is that hero:

“Somewhere, a woman suggested we go and sing to Mugo, the hermit, at his hut. The cry was taken up by the crowd, who, even before the decision was taken, had already started tearing through the drizzle and the dark to Mugo’s hut. For more than an hour, Mugo’s hut was taken prisoner. His name was on everybody’s lips. We wove legends around his name and imagined deeds” (p. 232).

The process of inventing (and reinventing) of what we call national hero is a truly important aspect in the process of nation birth and building. With the (re)invention of a hero, one more reason to bind is created among people. The same act of inventing and reinventing hero, I would argue, also implies and, to some extent, emphasizes the creation of villain, of others who live outside of the Self. (Benedict Anderson [1991] argues that nationalism is a mode of identity with an exclusive nature: in order to confirm its own existence, nationalism needs to exclude others.) The need to always invent and reinvent hero is another evidence that nation is in fact an organic entity. Nationalism is, therefore, dynamic. In addition to hero and villain, nationalism also needs myth, i.e. perceived common past and shared dream or goal. Nationalism is, in short, something hollow in the inside that needs to be filled. It is an aspiration to be realized. That is why, in *A Grain of Wheat* one of the most significant questions people have on the day of Uhuru are: “[W]ould the government now become less stringent on those who could not pay tax? Would there be more jobs? Would there be more land?” (p. 245).

And, just as Lukacs had suggested that novel is a form of “transcendental homelessness,” because novel

takes the place of the epic of an age that is not the same as totality of experience but still thinks in terms of totality, so is nationalism that pretends to be the “epic” of identification. Nationalism pretends to over-arch any other modes of identification like race, gender, class, religion, etc. In the case of the invention and reinvention of national hero, Lukacs wrote something that resonates with the fact of Mugo’s being the hero:

“The epic individual, the hero of the novel, is the product of estrangement from the outside world. When the world is internally homogeneous, men do not differ qualitatively from one another; there are of course heroes and villains, pious men and criminals, but even the greatest hero is only a head taller than the mass of his fellows, and the wise man’s dignified words are heard even by the most foolish” (McKeon, 2000, p. 192).

The hero of nation, like protagonist of novel, is an everyday man. He is neither an omnipotent god nor a knight in shining armor or an all-powerful king of the epic. If that hero is then portrayed as a charismatic person, just like Mugo to villagers, there are two reasons as to why it is. First, it is a fabrication. Mugo, the hero and main protagonist of Ngugi’s *A Grain of Wheat*, is in reality an ordinary man desiring an ordinary life. But as an important part of narrative of nationalism, this poor and sad man must make himself a hero. When he is not one, “[s]tories about Mugo’s power” must be invented or created. It is, therefore, not an important thing whether Mugo, or Gikonyo, or Kihika, or a common villager is the real hero. Hollowness of the national epic must be filled by any means necessary, even with filling of superfluous heroism:

“Some people said that in detention Mugo had been shot at and no bullet would touch his skin. Through these powers, Mugo had been responsible for many escapes from detention of men who later went to fight in the forest. And who but Mugo could have smuggled letters from the camps to Members of Parliament in England? There those who suggested that he had even been at the battle of Mahee and had fought side by side with Kihika. All these stories were now freely circulating in the meeting. We sang song after song about Kihika and Mugo. A calm holiness united our hearts. Like those who had come from afar to see Mugo do miracles or even speak to God, we all vaguely expected that something extraordinary would happen” (p. 246).

That the hero of a nation must be charismatic—heroic, epic in its general sense—also suggests the

irrationality of nationalism. As a product of modern era, nationalism is signified by constant suspicion to tradition and the secure feeling provided by the feeling of connectedness to one’s traditional root. As such, nationalism, logically speaking, should base its existence on the reason. If nationalism should base its existence on reason, or on reasonable groundings, why does it need to assign charisma to its hero? Why does not nationalism admit that its hero is an everyday man, a little taller maybe, but in general a man of his people? Ernst Renan (1823-1892), the French philosopher and writer, in *What is a Nation* (1882), defined nation as:

“a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form. Man, Gentlemen, does not improvise. The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavors, sacrifice, and devotion. Of all cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate, for the ancestors have made us what we are. A heroic past, great men, glory (by which I understand genuine glory), this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea. To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more - these are the essential conditions for being a people” (Renan, 1882).

Renan’s definition of nation is a result of his historical exploration into European communities—implying the heavily use of reasoning and abstraction. Nationalism is the peak, the summit, of human experience. What can be more positive than that in modern sense? In reality, however, nation and also state is not fully created and based on rationality. Irrationality, that unreasoning process, heavily tainted the creation and development of nation. The example of Mugo is the *das ist* of nation, while Renan’s definition is its *das sein*. Building on this, I would argue, nationalism, particularly those invented by postcolonial regimes—just as novel—will never become epic. At best, it will be speaking with the pretense of totality of epic. Both novel and nationalism tell the story of ordinary, everyday human being; they deal with common people’s experience. If they talk about totality of experience, it is just because they think they are capable of transcending their own finiteness, their homelessness.

Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s *This Earth of Mankind* is also a novel that offers us light to understand, and

problematize, postcolonial nationalism. As mentioned, Pramoedya wrote this novel during his exile in Buru Island for more than twelve years, without trial. Meanwhile during the long period of 1966 to 1998, Indonesia was under Suharto's New Order Regime. It is an oppressive militaristic regime. Ruth McVey as cited by Tony Day and Keith Foulcher in the introduction to *Clearing a Space: Postcolonial Readings of Modern Indonesia* described as "perpetuating much of the symbolic trappings and organizational characters of the East Indies state at the height of Dutch colonial power." (Day and Foulcher, 2002, p.1).

In postcolonial Indonesia, particularly during the New Order era, nationalism underwent what I call as the process of calcification and standardization. Pheng Cheah suggests that there is something right about the course of Indonesia in the past that then was betrayed by Indonesian leaders of the later period (2003). These leaders led Indonesia to a different direction, supposed to be a wrong one, too—and that by writing this novel, Pramoedya Ananta Toer might want to correct this mistake. While Cheah might have a point here, I think first and foremost it is not the course of Indonesian nationalism that had been diverted. This kind of idea implies that Indonesia had a more or less clear conception or understanding of what actually makes it unique or special from the cases of other failed postcolonial states. In my own opinion, the wrong turn happened when Indonesian nationalism experienced the calcification and standardization, while in reality it is a dynamic, on going, and non-finite process.

Pramoedya Ananta Toer, through his novel, wanted to show the narrative story of Indonesia. Through the *persona* of Minke, the hero and main character of the novel, Toer wanted to make his case: that Indonesia was, is, and should be seen, as something dynamic, organic, in the making, just like Minke's character development in his novel. In this way, Minke's character development can be seen as the metonymy of Indonesian's *bildungsroman*. Minke develops from a naïve young man who admires everything about European modernity and all its achievements while, at the same time, despises his old traditional values to a grown-up man who is capable of transcending his hybrid identity (symbolized by his mother calls him 'brown Dutchman').

At the beginning of Toer's narration, Minke describes his admiration of European modernity like his craving for cotton candy and sweetmeat in a night market. Minke, is introduced to the sweet promise of European modernity: "I was still very young, just the age of a corn plant, yet I had already experienced

modern learning and science: They bestowed upon me a blessing whose beauty was beyond description" (Toer, 1990, p. 16). Because of this promise and being pushed by hatred of the feudalistic and paternalistic nature of his old Javanese identity, Minke feels that he is so ready to depart from his inherited values:

"What's the point in studying European science and learning ... if in the end one has to cringe any way ... Lost was the beauty of the world as promised by science progress. Lost was the enthusiasm of my teachers in greeting the bright future of humanity. ... I'm quite able even to leave behind this whole family" (pp. 121-122, 129).

Minke's "final" departure from his old Javanese identity—implying the experience of being uprooted, no matter if he does voluntarily move away from it—does not mean that he is able to arrive in the intended destination. In fact, he never reaches the point of arrival in his journey to embrace the European modernity. What he gets is a sad-but-true realization that he will never arrive there. He must cope with the reality: "[B]ecause you [Minke] wear European clothes, mix with Europeans, and can speak a little Dutch you then become a European? [No.] You're still a monkey?" (p. 47).

At this point, Minke realizes that he cannot go back to his old Javanese identity. It is true not only because he does not want to go back there, which, from our previous discussion, is an obvious fact, but also because he cannot do it. He has been banished forever from that identity by his own mother: "You're indeed no longer Javanese. Educated by the Dutch, you've become Dutch, a brown Dutchman" (p. 130). Thus, Minke must deal with these double experiences of loss: loss of his old identity and loss of his dream. He must be content with being in-between, being hybrid, being non-Javanese and non-European, being a little bit Javanese and a little bit European, being Javanese in all his physical aspects but also being modern in his thought just like most of enlightened Europeans. In short, Minke makes himself content with the new status of being a brown Dutchman.

Minke's hybrid identity entails two aspects. One is neurotic and nervous. This aspect is characterized by deep feeling of loss or lack, of being exile, of being banished—if we are to follow Lacanian perspective that says that the feeling of loss of the perfect blissful union with the mother in the Imaginary Order must be recuperated somehow in the Symbolic Order through the fulfillment of the desire for *objet petit a*—the longing for a reclaimed fixed identity. Minke's reluctance to stop writing in Dutch—and switching

into Malay, the new language and the language in the making—is a clear example of how he still clings on to his perceived perfect union with his dream of modernity.

The second aspect of Minke's hybridity is the creative force that might spring out of it. Let's go back to Edward Said. Said himself is an exile and he suggested how the world of hybridity, of exile, is "logically enough ... unnatural and its unreality resembles fiction" (Said, 2000, p. 144). The hybrid world is foreign; it is newness. Living a hybrid identity is like living in fiction world. You must make sense of it. You can also create and recreate things there. It holds unlimited of opportunities for them—hybrid people, exile, and refugee. On this creative aspect of hybridity, Salman Rushdie writes in *Imaginary Homelands* (1992):

"Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground maybe, it is not infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles" (p. 15).

It is in the act of straddling between two cultures—traditional and modern—in the efforts of making sense of his hybridity, that Minke comes to a realization of the need to create, or rather to formulate, the new identity: Indonesia. Indonesia, or nation-state in general, is therefore a dynamic process of writing and rewriting this newness. It is a "dynamic" result (for lack of better term) of an act of balancing all the tensions of being hybrid. When a postcolonial state calcifies and standardizes its history, its existence, its dynamic nature, its always-renegotiable standing, just like Indonesia during New Order era, there is no better way to criticize it than through a medium that has the capacity of seeking newness as such, always in the moving, always in the making, free from rigid regulations of fixed genres—I am talking here, of course, about novel. This is where novel and nationalism crisscross and inform each other way.

CONCLUSION

Although at a glance they are two separate entities, novel and nationalism can actually inform each other. Our understanding of one can be deepened by the exploration into the other. It can do so in several ways. The first is through the exploration into the main characters or heroes of the novel. The heroes of

the novel are different from hero of an epic because they mainly are consisted of common people, but then are made belief to be a "superhero." This is true with national heroes. National hero is the result of process of invention and fabulation. Stories and narrations are created to surround a national hero with charisma. The invention of hero can also become a dividing line to separate the Self from the others, the citizen of the nation and the banished.

The character development of novel, as being shown by Mugo and Minke of *A Grain of Wheat* and *This Earth of Mankind*, is also a metonymy to national *bildungsroman*. Hybridity as experienced by Minke is a nervous situation that leads him to create a new identity: his Indonesianess. From here, what we can see is that as novel and its main protagonist is a dynamic character, so is nationalism. Nationalism is something in the making, something going on and should not be seen and treated otherwise.

Novel as a modern form of art is way freer than those traditional genres in literature. As such, novel can be a tool to see nationalism critically. In form, novel is comparable to nationalism because it is not an epic, where the representation of Reality is still wholesome and "beautiful", but it pretends to become one, just like nationalism, is pretentious when it claims itself as an overarching mode of identity for the society. But as novel, which is lack of epic quality, is very creative, so is nationalism.

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