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Rape or Seduction?

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Abstract

This paper deals with the description of many kinds depictions of rape in Indonesian women popular fiction. First, the problematic interpretation of rape shows that many people, especially those working in legal institution, have spesific male interpretation of rape. Some feminists expose that rape, as defined in legal context, fail to determine whether a sexual affair is rape or not. The difficulty also lies in who is in a position to interpret the meaning of such sexual affair. In other words, the notion of who is looking at the case is very crucial. The 'truth' about rape depends on who interprets the situation. In the context of literary depiction of rape, the analysis shows that many women writers are reluctant to give clear picture of rape. Therefore, many "rape" incidents will tend to be interpreted as just a common sexual affair.

Keywords: Feminist Criticism, popular literature, politics

1. Introduction

Rape is usually interpreted as a forced sexual encounter. According to the male-dominated society, rape may be defined as "sex with a woman who is not yours, unless the act is performed so as to make her yours" (MacKinnon 1983:646).^[1] Thus, rape may be interpreted as an act of male seduction when the woman fails to show her refusal (MacKinnon 1983:651). Since the legal institution is mainly dominated by men, the definition of rape in the legal discourse will likely be perceived by men from their own position. This patriarchal perception of human sexuality, which is eventually believed to be objective, is apparently a matter of the social practice of, to use Kate Millet's term, "sexual politics" (1971).^[2] In regard to this matter, feminist critics question the patriarchal interpretation of rape, especially in the legal context. For example, Gunne and Thompson (2010:8) points out that "rape becomes an object of public consumption, especially when the witness suggests that it is not enough to tell the truth, but that she has the responsibility of convincing the audience/community of the truth of her experience."^[3] In this case, the victim feels that the act of the disclosure of the rape experience in front of the court turns out to be the second violation that she should bear under critical gaze of the court members.

Moreover, Buttler, as cited by Healicon (2016) states that individual who encounters sexual violence is legally categorized either as a “proper victim” so she is classified as the ‘rape victim’ or the story that she delivers is considered unbelievable that she is excluded from the categorization. The problem lies, as the critics maintain, in the difficulty of determining whether a sexual affair is rape or not (Healicon 2016).[4] The difficulty also lies in who is in a position to interpret the meaning of such a sexual affair (Itzin et.al. 2010).[5] In other words, the notion of who is looking at the case is very crucial (MacKinnon 1983). The ‘truth’ about rape depends on who interprets the situation.

In discussing the representation of rape Thompson and Gunne show that presentation of sexual violence in literature leaves the feminist critics with a dilemma that brings up the question whether rape narratives should be represented or analyzed (2010: 3). [6] The problem lies on the fact that the elimination of rape from the narratives will mark the veneration of patriarchal discourses of nobility and chastity, while on the other hand, showing rape will stimulate the male gaze and spreads the victim myth. In order to avoid the problem of exploitation and voyeurism, Thomson and Gunne expose the discussion of female writers in relation with rape narration. By re-theorizing rape, they aim “to incorporate arguments about trauma and resistance in order to establish new spaces for the subjectivity of the women who either have been raped or have been threatened with rape” (2010: 3).

Considering the concern of the feminist critics on the slippery position of telling and reading rape, I try to expose how some Indonesian women writers deal with the narration of rape in their novels. For this purpose, I observe popular novels written by three different writers, namely Marga T (1973)[7], V. Lestari (1986)[8] and Mira W. (1991)[9].

2. Methods

The woman's guilt feeling illustrated in the post-rape sub-scene indicates that the female character has internalised the patriarchal perception of sexuality. Those who disagree with such a patriarchal perception of sexuality may find it difficult to understand that a crime victim can have such a guilt feeling. Reasonably, it is the perpetrator who is supposed to feel guilty. In fact, the victim's guilt feeling is readily acceptable to most Indonesian women because they unconsciously have internalised the patriarchal perception of sexuality. Realising this misleading perception of sexuality and in order to survive the rape, Karmila strives to eliminate her guilt feeling. In fact, the poor victims in much of the women's fiction under study do not take any such action. For example, Karmila, in *Karmila*, neither prosecutes Feizal nor insists that he marry her. Rima, in *Mahligai Di Atas Pasir*, prefers to keep silent after being given financial compensation from the perpetrator in order not to jeopardise his family and social reputation. Kirana, in *Sekelam Dendam Marisa*, lets her child be adopted by a family and marries a man of her own social class.

To prosecute the rapist appears to be unthinkable to most Indonesian women. In actual practice, to file a suit against the rapist needs not only adequate funds but

also moral determination. A lawyer admits, as reported in *Kompas*, that the rape victim who brings her rapist to court often has to bear multiple pressures. The worst experience is that the rape victim has to undergo another "symbolic rape", prior to the trial.* She has to risk her own reputation before she is rewarded any justice at all. Karmila, like the other heroines, does not want to take the risk and she is, also, too proud to insist that Feizal marry her.

Karmila's pride and anger at the patriarchal perception of sexuality manifests itself in her soliloquy when Daud Gurong (Feizal's father) comes to visit her. Instead of sympathising with her anguish, Daud asks Karmila to forgive his son. Marga T., the writer, elaborately describes Karmila's pride and anger in a deliberate silence, in the form of a soliloquy, in order not to provoke anger to the respectable gentleman who represents the powerful hegemony of the patriarchal society. See the following excerpt:

Karmila serasa mau meledak. Dia gusar bukan main sampai-sampai bibirnya terkatup erat, tak kuasa bersuara. Belum pernah dia berjumpa dengan orang yang se-egois itu... Adakah di dunia ini orang semacam itu lagi? Tidak sedikitpun disadarinya betapa hebat akibat perbuatan anaknya yang jempolan itu pada diriku (*Karmila*, p. 27).

(Karmila feels as if she is about to scream. She is so furious that her lips clamp tightly, unable to say anything. Never had she found such an egoistic man.... Is there such another man in this world? That man does not even realise how badly his son has ruined me).

Although the writer possibly expresses the victim's anguish and anger at the perpetrator, her discourse has to be carefully represented in order not to challenge the masculine hegemony, otherwise she will provoke sharp criticism. This is probably the reason why the writer of *Karmila* prefers to describe the victim's anger in a deliberate silence in the form of soliloquy rather than to articulate her anger directly to her male interlocutor.

It is ironic that any female character, like Karmila, who is able to overcome her guilt feeling and be persistent in silently resisting the patriarchal perception of

* *Kompas*, a national quality paper, reports that a victim of rape is usually interrogated by the police, judge or journalists about what has happened to her (7 January 1990:1). This legal procedure will likely make the victim feel even more humiliated if the story of her private life is made public. It is what I mean by "symbolic rape". Moreover, the victim is in a disadvantaged position because the legal authorities, who are mostly male, will see the case from the patriarchal perception of sexuality so that the victim often fails to convince the authorities that she has been sexually molested, especially when she is regarded as a potential seducer. For the general discussion of the problematic legal discourse in regards to rape, see MacKinnon (1983), Gunne and Thompson (2010).

sexuality, is regarded as "passive" by a female critic (Hellwig 1987) and as "daring" by a male critic (Si Loengkang 1976).[11] [12] The former critic seems to be dissatisfied with the mild reaction of a victim to male violence, the latter appears to be very defensive against women's self-determination. Most probably, the reason is that both critics are exaggerating, from opposite perspectives, the sexual political aspects of this situation. Regardless of the comments of both critics, we can infer that there is a serious message in this piece of popular fiction. At least here, and also in some other cases, a woman writer has successfully made her readers question the validity of women's guilt feeling resulting from male sexual violation.

3. Results

3.1. The Implicit Description of Rape

The Indonesian women writers usually provide the readers with brief information telling that the victim is about to be, or has been, raped. The rape scene is usually divided into two sub-scenes. The first is to describe how the heroine is extremely frightened of the coercive molester who is about to rape her (see, for notable examples, *Karmila* and *Kekasih*). The second is to show how the victim suffers from psychological trauma. The actual action of rape itself is never described but the readers are able to infer that the rape has taken place between those two sub-scenes. To give some examples of the implicit description of rape, I will use the following novels (1) *Karmila*, (2) *Kekasih*, (3) *Mahligai Di Atas Pasir*, and (4) *Sekelam Dendam Marisa*. I select two excerpts from each novel. Each excerpt refers to either the first sub-scene or the second sub-scene. The first sub-scene is marked with (a) and the second with (b).

(1a) *Ada orang di kamarnya. Karmila berdiri kaku di samping tempat tidur... Tiba-tiba Karmila menjadi takut dan menjerit. Sebuah tangan yang besar, melayang turun dan menutup mulutnya... Tiba-tiba Karmila teringat Bunda Suci dan secepat kilat menggulingkan tubuhnya kesamping... Kalau si pemabuk itu maju lagi... Oh lebih baik dia jatuh ke bawah dan mati... -dan dia bangkit lalu pelan-pelan maju.....* (pp.17-19).

(There was a man in her room. Karmila stood still beside her bed... Suddenly Karmila felt so scared. She screamed. A strong hand covered her mouth... Karmila suddenly remembered the Virgin Mary and she tried to roll away from him... Should that bastard step forward... Oh, it would be better if she fell down and died... -then he rose and slowly stepped forward...)

(1b) *Tiga hari kemudian semua koran ibukota memuat berita itu dengan headline besar-besar... Karmila sendirian di kamar itu. Dia masih ingat pemeriksaan dua hari yang lalu. Memalukan dan terasa menghina. Meskipun ibu tidak menghendakinya membaca sebuah koranpun, namun dia tahu kira-kira apa yang ditulis disana... gadis K. sudah dinyatakan dengan visum dokter bukan gadis lagi... Aku akan tinggal seperti ini: ibu tidak, gadis pun tidak... Aku takut hamil... Aku tidak mau bajingan itu menjadi ayah dari anakku!* (pp.20-28).

(Three days later, all the newspapers in the city published that event on the front page... Karmila was alone in that room. She still remembered the examination two days ago. It

was shameful and degrading. Although her mother would not let her read any newspapers, she knew what was written.... a girl K, according to the doctor's examination, was no longer a virgin... I will be like this: neither a mother, nor a virgin... I'm afraid of getting pregnant... I do not want that bastard to become the father of my child!)

(2a) *Jantungnya serasa berhenti berdetak. Persis di depannya berdiri seorang laki-laki bertopeng.... Mulutnya dibekap sebelah tangan si laki-laki... Ia (Laksmi) memukul, mencakar, menyepak,... Tapi perlawanannya yang gigih bukan tak menimbulkan akibat. Si laki-laki pun semakin bertekad untuk menundukkaninya. Dengan berang ia mengayunkan tangan, menghantam kepala Laksmi. Sejuta bintang berkilauan di depan matanya. Ia pun lemas terkulai* (p.73).

(She felt her heart stop beating. In front of her, stood a masked man... One of his hands gagged her mouth... She hit, scratched and kicked him... But her struggle made the man even more aggressive. He was determined to conquer her. He hit her head real hard. She saw a thousand stars. She fell unconscious.)

(2b) *Sebentar-sebentar ia (Laksmi) mengejapkan matanya yang basah. Lalu mengigit-gigit bibirnya sampai terasa perih. Tadi ia sempat tertidur. Tapi sebuah topeng mengerikan muncul dalam mimpiinya. Ya, topeng orang itu. Yang diingatnya memang hanya topeng itu* (p.101).

(Once in a while she blinked her wet eyes. Then she bit her lips so hard that they hurt. She fell asleep once. But that horrible mask appeared again in her dream. Yes, the same mask. She could only remember that mask, nothing else.)

(3a) *Tetapi dia tidak sendiri lagi di kamar itu. Di hadapannya, tegak Pranata* (vol. 1, p.72).

(But she was not alone in this room. In front of her stood Pranata.)

(3b) *Pranata langsung terlelap sesudah memperkosa Rima dalam keadaan separuh mabuk. Dia merasa seluruh tubuhnya sakit. Tetapi lebih sakit lagi hatinya.... Rima tidak berani lagi meniduri kasur itu. Dia bahkan tidak berani melihatnya. Dia merasa jijik. Muak. Sakit hati* (vol.1,p.72).

(Pranata was drunk when he raped Rima. After that, he just slept soundly. She felt her body awfully painful. But her feelings were hurt even more....Rima was so scared to sleep in the same bed again. She was even too scared to look at it. She felt disgusted. Sickened. Deeply hurt)

(4a) *Dia membawa Kirana ke proyeknya...* (p.149).

(He brought Kirana to his project location)

(4b) ...*laki-laki terhormat itu merenggut kehormatannya* (p.149).

(... that respected man raped her)

Excerpts nos. (1a), (2a), (3a), (4a) represent the first sub-scene which informs the readers about the incident prior to the rape. We find the description of male violence against the female character in excerpts (1a) and (2a) is relatively longer than that in excerpts (3a) and (4a). The fact is that the former excerpts refer to a description of rape by a stranger, the latter excerpts refer to an acquaintance rape.

In describing a rape by a stranger, the writers usually show a fierce physical struggle between the perpetrator and the victim. Only after a long fight, the defenceless victim has

to surrender. Being too terrified, the victim usually falls unconscious so that she will not be able to remember what has happened to her. Even if the victim is reported to be fully conscious during the sexual violation, she will feel too scared to recollect what has happened to her. Excerpt (1b) best illustrates how the victim feels too "shamed" and "degraded" to tell about the rape. In describing a rape by an acquaintance, the writers usually do not need to show any physical struggle. Probably, the reason is that the perpetrator is often her own protector who is unlikely to threaten the victim's life.

In all the scenes of rape described in the above excerpts, except for excerpts (4a and 4b), the time interval between the pre-rape sub-scene and the post-rape sub-scene is significant. According to the chronological story, the interval between sub-scene (1a) and sub-scene (1b) is three days; between sub-scene (2a) and sub-scene (2b) it is one day; between sub-scene (3a) and sub-scene (3b) it is less than one day. The time interval between sub-scene (4a) and sub-scene (4b) is not specified because in this story the writer uses a flashback technique. The interval is used as a temporal boundary to indicate the shift of the narrator's viewpoint. In the first sub-scene, the narrator regards the female character as a defenceless victim, whereas in the second, the narrator intends to show that the female character has been aware of being victimised by not only the perpetrator but also the patriarchal perception.

Excerpts nos. (1b), (2b), (3b), (4b) describe the post-rape sub-scenes. Except for no. (4b), all excerpts contain a lengthy description of the victim's grief and her awareness of the social position of women. In other words, after being raped the female character is fully aware that women's position in a patriarchal society is very vulnerable so that she has to be persistent, self-determined and independent in order to survive.

In actual practice, however, such an attitude will jeopardise the patriarchal perception of women's social manners.[†] The social norms have it that woman ought to show guilt feeling. Realising this, it is understandable that women writers prefer to exploit women's guilt feeling after the rape rather than to show the women's anger or to argue strongly that rape is a crime. As Modleski maintains, it is unlikely that a man will have a

[†] The following quotation is a significant example of a patriarchal interpretation of women's self-determination to survive the rape. It is a comment of a male critic on *Karmila*:

Jadi dalam kejadian seperti ini sebenarnya kartu truf berada di tangan Feizal. Dia boleh bersiul-siul menunggu permintaan belas kasihan dari keluarga Karmila... Tetapi.. Feizal yang harus mencium kaki Karmila dan menjatuhkan martabat kelelakianya di muka Karmila, agar supaya Karmila sudi mengawini dirinya yang hina dina itu. Sepertinya Feizallah yang dibuntingi oleh Karmila (Si Loengkang 1976:p.763).

(Thus, in such a case, Feizal is actually to be the victor. He may whistle happily while waiting for Karmila to beg him to marry her.... Yet the story tells that it is Feizal who has to kiss Karmila's feet and disregards his own masculine pride before Karmila in order that Karmila be willing to marry him, in his humility. It is as if Karmila had made Feizal pregnant.)

guilt feeling as a woman does because a man will not be socially blamed for his sexual misconduct while a woman will likely be condemned for her sexuality alone (Modleski 1988:25).[10]

3.2. The Description of Rape

In respect of rape, I observe that the Indonesian women writers follow some particular patterns that can be listed as follows:

- 1)The female character is not aware of her sexually vulnerable position.
- 2)Her moral identity is questioned.
- 3)The male character is drunk, angry, or is consumed with the fantasy of his sexual desire.
- 4)The female character is shocked by the male character's attitude towards her.
- 5)The male character uses physical force to dominate the female character.
- 6)The male character (mis-)interprets silence as a sign of her consent.
- 7)The female character falls unconscious.
(It is usually indicated by a pause--when the male character is raping her)
- 8)The female character feels guilty and humiliated.
- 9)The male character is leniently punished or even let go free.

In line with the women writers, the readers will likely consider that an innocent heroine is raped by a villain when she happens to have sexual intercourse with a male (villainous) character without consent.

To avoid explicit discussion of rape, women writers commonly manipulate the victim's physical injuries. They seem to be constrained by the public notion that rape can be easily judged to be normal intercourse if the victim fails to show visible marks of physical injuries. To indicate the scene of rape, the writers often rely on the relatively lengthy description of the rapist assaulting the victim prior to the blackout of the scene. The assault itself functions to make the reader aware of the sexual attack so that she also has to conceal her sexual appeal in order not to provoke a potential perpetrator. Following this kind of violent scene, the writers usually allow the readers to have a time interval before the description of the victim's anguish. The hiatus indicates that the act of rape is not described. The story switches from the scene of the perpetrator's violent attack to the scene of the victim's grieving and the question of social ethics (Rooney 1983:1269).[13] In this way, the writers inform the readers that the act of rape has happened and that the female victim suffers from both physical and psychological injuries.

According to the perception of patriarchal society there are two major representations of women. Firstly, woman is represented as a "desexualized" figure

who is virgin, passive, innocent or inexperienced. Secondly, woman is represented as an "over-sexualized" figure who is demonic and seductive (Rooney 1983:1271).‡ Both representations are based on men's sexual fantasy. In terms of this patriarchal perception, women's consent in any sexual affair will be problematic. The reason is that the "desexualized" woman is perceived to be sexually inexperienced, which provokes the (male) perpetrator to try to engage in a sexual affair. When she hesitates not knowing how to resist, her hesitation is interpreted as a sign of consent. We can refer to *Kekasih* by V. Lestari. The story tells us about two sweethearts, Andre and Laksmi. One night, in a room in a boarding house, Andre cannot resist the desire to have sexual intercourse with Laksmi but she declines her lover's invitation. In fact, Laksmi's withdrawal is interpreted by Andre as a sign of disguised consent, as we can read from their dialogue that I quote from *Kekasih* (1986:68) below:

(Laksmi): "*Hei, Kamu mau memperkosaku!*"

(Hey, you want to rape me or what!)

(Andre) : "*Kau salah. Kau sendiri juga mau, tapi pura-pura saja tidak mau.*"

(You're wrong. You actually want it, but you pretend not to consent)

This excerpt gives an obvious indication that in attempted acquaintance rape, the woman's consent is problematic because her refusal is commonly interpreted by her male partner as a sign of disguised consent. If so, it will be quite difficult to point out who the seducer really is. Unfortunately, according to the patriarchal norms, the woman is always regarded as sexually seductive or, even worse, as *la femme fatale*.

The "over sexualized" woman who is sexually experienced is perceived by the male perpetrator as seductive so that her resistance is usually interpreted as a sign of disguised consent or merely pretence. In practice, any kind of women's resistance in order to object to men's intention to have sex is always moot. Men always regard women's reluctance as part of foreplay in normal sex so that a construction of rape cannot be justified on this ground alone (Wood and Rennie 1994:134).[14]

Most Indonesian women writers describe the perpetrator's perception of woman's manners in order to examine the cultural background of male sexual violence. According to patriarchal perception, women are commonly regarded as seductive. To

‡ The most notable example of men's perception of the "oversexualized" women is the image of Afro-American women during the time of slavery in the Southern part of the USA. These women were regarded as sexually permissive in contrast to the pious and virtuous white women (see Carby 1987).

illustrate this, it might be helpful to observe the way Feizal, the perpetrator in *Karmila*, regards himself as a person who is so popular that he thinks he can attract as many girls as he likes. Armed with this false belief, he is naturally quite furious when he finds that Karmila ignores him. He cannot resist demonstrating his masculine chauvinism by raping her. To understand Feizal's perception of women, we may recollect Rooney's two major categories of women as perceived by the patriarchal society, namely, the "over-sexualized" and the "desexualized" figures that I have mentioned a little bit in the beginning of this section. The former figure refers to the character of a whore, who is considered seductive so that her social behaviour alone is enough to provoke men's sexual desire. This figure is best represented by the *pèrèk*.[§] The latter figure refers to the character of a virgin, such as Karmila, who is naive and sexually inexperienced so that she may cause men to eagerly tease or rape her. Thus, according to Feizal, the macho man, both are simply seductive. Consequently, if the patriarchal perception is correct, to be a woman is in itself to be a potential seductress.

The patriarchal notion of a potential seductress is not only associated with being a woman alone but also with her social class. For example, many people used to assume that the Afro-American women slaves were sexually permissive, while the white ladies were virtuous (Carby 1987).[15] In Indonesian literature, there is a tendency for working class women to be represented as "easy marks" or "fallen woman", in the sense that they hold relatively loose sexual norms (Florida 1992:17).[16] These working class or village women are assumed to be easily seduced by high social class men. To resolve sexual dispute, the perpetrator, who is usually the rich men, simply provides the poor women with financial compensation. The "sexually permissive" working class women is represented by Rima, the heroine in *Mahligai di Atas Pasir*, a novel written by Mira W. (1991). Rima is depicted as a maid-servant who receives financial compensation from her master for her willingness to keep silent despite her being raped.

The upper class educated woman is regarded as morally superior in her virtue, but still has to be very careful in order to avoid men's mis-judgment that may lead her to be very vulnerable to male violence. The novel *Karmila* provides good evidence of this attitude in its account of Feizal's judgment of Karmila at the party where they meet. See what Feizal thinks of Karmila's manners as follows:

Gadis terhormat. Mahasiswi tingkat tiga. Mengapa dia pergi ke pesta itu! Mengapa dia tidak lebih teliti. Mengapa dia mau saja dansa bersamaku (*Karmila*, p. 37)

(A respected girl. Third year university student. Why did she come to that party? Why did she become so careless. Why did she want to dance with me?)

The excerpt above indicates that Karmila's behaviour is unthinkable for Feizal in the

[§] *Pèrèk*, an abbreviation of *perempuan eksperimen*, literally means "woman for (sexual) experiment". It is a term for a woman who is ready to become the object of male sexual experiment. In serious literature, Pramudya Ananta Toer (1987) presents how a *priyayi* (gentry) abuses a village girl as his sexual experiment (see *Gadis Pantai*).

sense that he believes that no naive virgin will be at that party because it deviates from the acceptable social manners. His prejudice motivates him to demonstrate his male-chauvinistic pride. He becomes furious when Karmila declines his invitation and the friendly interaction turns into a battle of the sexes. Feeling at a loss and being ridiculed by his friends at the party, Feizal is stirred to conquer Karmila by sexual force. In support of this idea, see the way Feizal defends his action in the following excerpt:

Dan kawan-kawanku mulai menertawakan aku. Aku harus kalah? Dengan seorang anak perempuan kecil? Aku menjadi gusar. Dan akhirnya kalap!! Mengapa aku mesti kalap?! (Karmila 1973:p.38)

(And my friends ridiculed me. Should I lose? Against a mere girl? I was furious. And I became extremely enraged. Why should I become so mad?)

3.3. Perceptions of Reading Rape

Some feminist critics theorise that, when reading fiction, women readers can be grouped into persons who act as either a "masochist" or a "transvestite" (Modleski 1984). By masochist here is meant that the readers identify themselves with the passive female character who becomes the victim of rape. By transvestite is meant that the women readers identify themselves with the active male character who rapes a naive woman and enjoys the erotic sensation of the rape scene (Modleski 1984). Later Modleski explicitly explains that the two major groups of women readers are based on the phallocentric viewpoint (Modleski 1988).[17] The consequence of adopting the phallocentric viewpoint is that we have to accept the prescriptive dichotomy, which can be man - woman, active - passive, perpetrator - victim, sadism - masochism, or violator - violated. Since the rape victim is generally defenceless, her defeat is usually interpreted as passivity. In practice, no person engaged in any kind of interaction, including sexual encounter, is totally passive or active. Consequently, if we interpret the act of reading as an interaction between the readers and the author (cf. Booth 1961)[18] or the text, we have to believe that no reader is totally passive or active either. Then, it is arguable that the women readers will identify themselves completely with either the passive or the active character. To be more explicit, it will be unreasonable to say that the women readers will constantly identify themselves with one particular character in the novel (see Gardiner 1982:188).[19] In actual practice, they also identify themselves with all kinds of characters, other than (and including) the rapist and the victim, when they find it agrees with their aspirations in a given context. Thus, we have to assume that the actual strategy of reading completely depends on the readers. They may read, ignore, skim, skip, re-read, or even stop reading whenever they like. Reasonably, they may also imagine acting as the "masochist", the "transvestite", both of them, neither of them, the narcissist, the macho man, or whatsoever. Like their strategy of reading fiction, their strategy of identifying themselves with the characters in the novel cannot be fixed, so that it may appear to be irregular, not-linear, or even anarchistic. Realising this actual strategy of reading, Gravdal calls it "violent" reading (1992:570).[20] It concerns a methodological issue which allows us to become the "resisting readers", instead of the passive readers (Flynn and Schweickart 1986, Winkler 1991:30).[21][22]

What I want to propose here is to regard the women readers as the "resisting readers" who are not completely passive and may disagree with the description of some characters in the fiction so that they may also disagree with the common notion saying that women are simply passive, docile and unquestioningly accept any kind of oppression, especially from men. In relation to rape scenes, for example, Modleski suggests that we need to be alert to the women readers' "anger" provoked by the writers when they try to understand the terrifying experience of the female character, although their "anger" is commonly repressed (1988:27).

4. Conclusions

In Indonesian women's popular fiction, the rape victim is usually represented as a naive woman who is totally defenceless. This, however, may stimulate women readers to question the patriarchal perception of male violence and at the same time to make themselves aware of their vulnerable position if they accept the patriarchal social manners. That the women readers become angry when reading scenes of rape, even though their anger is usually repressed, indicates that they acknowledge and sympathise with the hidden injuries of their fellow woman who suffers from humiliation and sexual harassment. Reading fiction may provide an outlet for anger which is otherwise suppressed. The readers may therefore be described as very active in the sense that they implicitly relate the description of rape to the hidden injuries of the women who are victimised by the male-dominated society.

The way Indonesian women writers address women's sexuality is to introduce their readers to the problematic cases of rape. It is not the explicit *modus operandi* of rape that they want to describe but the consequence of a romantic relationship between a man and a woman. Thus, no explicit description of rape or male violence is ever written by them.

According to the patriarchal society, a romantic relationship must be in accordance with the ideal norms which regard men as superior to women. The ideal hero explicates that ideally the man must be superior to his female partner in order to guarantee a harmonious romantic relationship. Since it is only an ideal, a woman writer is able to reveal some essential constraints on a woman attempting to realise her aspirations. In addition to the practice of the hegemonic patriarchal norms, the cases of rape and other kinds of male violence are effectively used by the women writers in order to make their readers aware of their vulnerable position as women living in a world dominated by the patriarchal society.

Finally, what we have learnt from this discussion is that women's popular fiction potentially accommodates the disguised intent of the writers to launch their aspirations into a wide reading public. The women writers' aspirations can be couched in the form of controversial arguments in relation to the current issues of the life style of modern women, of sexual harassment or male violence, or of the patriarchal practice of the double standard.

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