KEMANUSIAAN Vol. 31, No. 2 (2024), 21–40

Revisiting Chinese Indonesian Violence in Indonesian Post-New Order Fiction

JOKO WIDODO
*EGGY FAJAR ANDALAS
Department of Indonesian Language Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang,
Tlogomas 246 St. Malang, East Java, Indonesia
*Corresponding author: eggy@umm.ac.id

Published online: 30 October 2024

To cite this article: Joko Widodo and Eggy Fajar Andalas. 2024. Revisiting Chinese Indonesian violence in Indonesian post-New Order fiction. *KEMANUSIAAN the Asian Journal of Humanities* 31(2): 21–40. https://doi.org/10.21315/kajh2024.31.2.2

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.21315/kajh2024.31.2.2

Abstract. May 1998 saw one of the worst cases of racial violence in Indonesian history. During 13th to 15th May 1998, there were acts of expropriation, looting, arson and sexual assault targeting the Chinese community in Indonesia. Using two specimens of Indonesian post-New Order fiction, *Sekuntum Nozomi 3* (*SN3*) by Marga Tjoa and *Putri Cina* (*PC*) by Sindhunata, this study investigates how cultural memories of the May 1998 Tragedy were shared with the post-event generation. The method employed is a qualitative narrative with a narratological approach. The results showed that literary works function as a medium for the spread of memory. Through *SN3* and *PC*, the memory of violence against ethnic Chinese Indonesians between 12th and 15th May 1998 is transmitted, especially for the post-event generation who did not experience it firsthand. Despite the differing representation strategy, there was substantively one voice to be conveyed, namely that of "discrimination, violence and human rights violations" against Chinese Indonesians. Memories are institutionalised and distributed as part of the national memory in these works. Both works mediate the politics of cultural memory to memorialise the past "sins" of the Indonesian people. These literary works can be viewed as tools for minorities to articulate discrimination.

Keywords and phrases: cultural memory, discrimination, ethnic minority, May 1998 Tragedy, violence

Introduction

The Chinese ethnic community has existed in Indonesian territory long before the country's independence. Chinese Indonesians constitute one of the numerous ethnic minorities among over 600 ethnicities in Indonesia (Arifin et al. 2016).

© Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2024. This work is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

There are various dynamics that influence the experiences of this group. One significant event occurred during the transition from the New Order government to the Reformation Era. This period saw the outbreak of riots from 13th to 15th May 1998, known as the May 1998 Tragedy. During this tragic event, acts of violence were perpetrated against Chinese Indonesians. Tempo, one of the Indonesia's largest mass media, called this event as one of the most significant human rights violations of that time (Andryanto 2021).

The May 1998 Tragedy stands as one of the most egregious cases of racial violence in Indonesian history. From 13th to 15th May 1998, there were acts of expropriation, looting, arson and sexual assault targeting the Chinese community in Indonesia (Anggraeni 2010; Gumelar 2016; Ritau'din 2017). The victims included men, women and girls of Chinese descent (Pattiradjawane 2000; Tan 2008). This event occurred massively and spread in several major cities in Indonesia (Alamsyah and Purwaningsih 2019; Aziz 2013). More than two decades later, there has been no legal remedy to prosecute the perpetrators or provide redress for the victims. The tragedy is taboo and rarely discussed in Indonesia (Strassler 2004; Winarnita and Setiawan 2020).

Although it is rarely discussed in public spaces, several studies have been conducted. For example, several studies seek to understand the events of May 1998, especially the existence of the Chinese after the New Order in Indonesia. These studies have examined the long-term psychological effects on the victims (Winarnita, Chan and Butt 2020), changes in Chinese state policies aimed at protecting Indonesian-Chinese citizens (Zha 2000), the persistence of Chinese stereotypes in Indonesia post-New Order (Kuntjara and Hoon 2020), the politics of multiculturalism and ethnicity towards the Chinese community in post-New Order Indonesia (Hoon 2006) and changes in post-New Order political regulations and their influence on Chinese identity in Indonesia (Freedman 2003).

Although several studies from various disciplines have tried to understand the events of May 1998, a critical question remains unanswered: how are these events remembered in the cultural memory of the Indonesian people? Unlike previous studies, this study seeks to address this question from the perspective of cultural memory. It endeavours to understand the author's strategies in describing the Chinese experience in the May 1998 Tragedy after the New Order Era, as a shared form of memory with the post-event generation (Frosh 2019; Hirsch 2008; 2012). Assman (1995; 2010) shows that memory is not final but is always influenced by external conditions. Therefore, an exploration of how the events of the May 1998 Tragedy is remembered by the current generation can be understood through literary works (Erll 2006; 2012). Memory is consistently reproduced and transmitted

across generations over time (Andalas and Qur'ani 2021). This study can explain how Indonesian authors viewed these events and how they are remembered in the cultural memory of Indonesians post-New Order (Kusno 2010; Ribeiro, Vecchi and Ribeiro 2012).

Using two Indonesian post-New Order fictions that revolve around the May 1998 Tragedy, namely *Sekuntum Nozomi 3* (*SN3*) (2006) by Marga Tjoa and *Putri Cina* (*PC*) (2007) by Sindhunata, this research seeks to highlight how the cultural memories of the May 1998 Tragedy are shared with the post-event generation. Departing from prior studies, this research will obtain the concepts of representational strategy and narrative construction that work through the mechanism of cultural memory.

Sekuntum Nozomi is a series of novels, with the third series describing the May 1998 Tragedy that befell Chinese Indonesians. The events are described as occurring on 13th to 15th May 1998. In the story, the perpetrators of the riots are depicted as thugs organised by government officials. On the other hand, the ethnic Chinese are the victims. The riots occurred in Jakarta, with venues in markets, malls, roadsides and banks.

In this third series, Marga T. also talks about several characters appeared in the previous two series. The author describes the phases of these figures in the face of discrimination, looting, arson, mass rape and premeditated murder of ethnic Chinese. However, the author also outlines indigenous and non-indigenous groups seeking mutual assistance. The reader is also left pondering the question of who is guilty, with the mastermind behind the riot remaining a mystery for the reader to unravel.

The novel *PC* by Sindhunata also describes the May 1998 Tragedy. The author disguises the depiction of the Mei tragedy with references to a bygone royal era in Indonesia. The narrative unfolds around the transformation of the new Medang Kemulan kingdom into the Pedang Kemulan due to escalating conflicts and violence. The author highlights the cunning nature of the ruler in maintaining his power and accumulating as much treasures as possible. The fate of the people was unexpected, leading to numerous rebellions. The king of Pedang Kemulan kingdom, Prabu Amurco Sabdo, made the Chinese people scapegoats to quell the rebellion. He pitted the people of Java against the Chinese, resulting in the inhabitants harbouring hatred and perpetrating violence against the Chinese people residing in the territory.

The violence committed by the Javanese against ethnic Chinese is depicted, such as the destruction of settlements, the burning of trading places, the looting of property and the rape of Chinese people. The perpetrators of violence against the Chinese were the government, the figures like Prabu Amurco Sabdo, Patih Wrehonegoro (prime minister of the Pedang Kemulan kingdom), the Dutch company and Joyo Sumenggah. These figures symbolise the government. On the other hand, the victims were the people, enslaved people, porters, labourers and most Chinese people.

Literature Review

Chinese Indonesians and the May 1998 Tragedy

Chinese Indonesians constitute one of the ethnic minorities among more than 600 ethnicities in Indonesia. The exact number of ethnic Chinese Indonesians remained unknown until 2010, as the government prohibited collecting and publishing ethnic data during the New Order period. According to research conducted by Arifin et al. (2016), Chinese Indonesians make up 1.2% of the total population in Indonesia. This means ethnic Chinese are among the top 15 out of 600 ethnicities. This indicates a significant presence of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia and in the history of the Indonesian nation, they have played an essential role in economic development.

Historically, the Chinese in Indonesia form a heterogeneous group originating from various ethnic backgrounds: Hokkien, Teochiu, Hakka and Cantonese (Turner 2003). Each group possesses its own language, economy and culture. For instance, Hokkien is a group that initially lived in Indonesia, residing in the eastern regions of Indonesia, Java and Sumatra. Teochew communities inhabit the regions of Sumatra, Riau Islands and Kalimantan, while Hakka communities are found in Kalimantan and Cantonese communities are spread throughout Indonesia (Arifin, Hasbullah and Pramono 2017; Schwarz 1994; Turner 2003).

The lives of some Chinese Indonesians have closely resembled those of local ethnic groups. For example, ethnic Chinese living in Java often adopt behaviors akin to the Javanese (Arifin et al. 2016). Although in some ways, there are also Chinese people who maintain distinct cultural practices, different from the local ethnic group. Chinese ethnic groups have assimilated to the extent that Chinese physical characteristics have diminished due to intermarriage with local ethnicities.

Sentiments towards the Chinese came to the fore due to political issues. During the time of President Soeharto, the term *orang Cina* (Chinese) was popularly used as an "insult" to Chinese citizens (Tan 2008). This term gradually fell out of favour and during President Habibie's time, the term *Tionghoa* was officially used as the state's designation.

At the end of the New Order government towards the reformation period, many important events became part of the history of the Indonesian nation's journey. The riots on 13th to 15th May 1998, known as the May 1998 Tragedy, received much attention from researchers because they allegedly caused violence against ethnic Chinese in Indonesia.

Incidents of racial unrest against ethnic Chinese occurred in almost all major cities in Indonesia, namely Jakarta, Medan, Palembang, Solo, Surabaya and others. The riots occurred due to anti-Chinese sentiment, which was exploited by some parties to incite violence during the monetary crisis. The May 1998 riots in Jakarta resulted in the deaths of 1,000 people, with most of them being rioters trapped in burning buildings (Aspinall 2008).

The collapse of the authoritarian New Order regime marked a "tipping point in modern Indonesian history" (Bertrand 2004). One of the causes of the mass riots was the New Order's policy of economically favouring the Chinese identity politics, group anxiety, power struggles and the politicisation of religion, which led to attacks on Chinese property and Christian churches (Bertrand 2004; Davidson 2009). Chinese Indonesians, as the wealthiest ethnic minority in Indonesia, became scapegoats for the accumulated problems at that time, especially the economic crisis.

During Suharto's reign, the government tried to force ethnic Chinese to assimilate politically and institutionally. However, they were simultaneously identified as "different" from the indigenous Indonesian group (Freedman 2003). This situation changed when President Habibie enacted a law allowing Chinese people to use Chinese surnames, publish Chinese-language books and magazines and have identity cards marked as Tionghoa.

The dominant discourse for accommodating ethnic Chinese in Indonesia during the Soeharto regime was assimilation, forcibly aimed at absorbing this minority into the national body. However, persistent official discrimination against Chinese people placed them in a paradoxical position, making them easy targets of racial and class hostility. The anti-Chinese riots of May 1998 proved the failure of assimilationist policies. The democratisation process has led to the proliferation of

identity politics in post-Suharto. The policy of multiculturalism has been supported by Indonesia's current power holders as the preferred approach to rebuilding the nation, following the national motto: Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (Unity in Diversity) (Hoon 2006).

The legal construction of Chinese Indonesians in post-independence Indonesia, especially during Soeharto's New Order period, is reflected in the so-called SBKRI (proof of citizenship of the Republic of Indonesia). The certificate reproduces colonial racism that divides the population of the Dutch East Indies into three racial categories: Europeans at the top, Foreign Orientals (Chinese, Indians and Arabs) in the middle and Inlanders (or natives) at the lower end.

The May 1998 Tragedy caused trauma for Chinese Indonesians. There are quite a few who went abroad to save themselves. Some have not returned until now because they would feel traumatised if such an event were to happen again. Unfortunately, after more than two decades, there has been no legal remedy to prosecute the perpetrator or compensate the victims. Tragic events are taboo and rarely discussed in Indonesia (Strassler 2004; Winarnita and Setiawan 2020).

Cultural memory: Representation and construction of identity

The term "cultural memory" can be traced back to the ideas of Maurice Halbwachs. He was the first explicitly and systematically write about it. Halbwachs (1980) views memory not as a purely individual phenomenon but as something that must be seen in its collective and fundamental dimension. Individual memory is inherently shaped and is often triggered by socio-cultural context. This is because there is a significant influence in the formation of individual memory from socialisation and cultural influences. Each individual becomes part of smaller groups, such as families, religious communities, ethnic groups and so on.

As explained by Jan Assman, one of the characteristics of cultural memory is its role in concretising the identity of an individual or group (Assman 1995). The manifestation of cultural memory is defined through a kind of identification, determining "we are this" (in a positive sense) or "it is our opposite" (in a negative sense). Based on this, literary texts serve as cultural memory by working through representation systems to establish identity. Memory and the process of remembering have always been important topics in the study of literature (Neumann 2008). Understanding the cultural memory of the Chinese in the May 1998 Tragedy requires understanding how events are represented and the construction of identity embedded within them.

Representation culturally imparts meaning through a linguistic system (Hall 2003). That is, representation is an active process rather than a passive one. This is because humans, through language, assign meaning to various things and each meaning will differ among individuals and the cultural context behind it. Representation becomes a medium that operates in creating past events in literary works. Astrid Erll points to the concept of "collective memory rhetoric" that can be utilised in analysing literary texts to examine how they portray past stories (Erll 2004; 2006; 2012). She defines this concept as "a narrative form that provokes the naturalisation of literary texts as a medium of memory". This is because remembering different events will be closely related to the way of representation used by the author in their work. Further, she explains that changes in the form of representations can influence changes in the type of memory we have stored from the past.

There are several possible ways of representation, namely: (1) experiential mode, which is a literary form that represents the past as an experience lived with the characteristics of the autobiographical memory of the witness or perpetrator, using the "first person," greeting the reader in a familiar way, almost the entire section is centred on the narrative of "I experience" to convey the firsthand experience, providing circumstantial realism, offering a detailed depiction of daily life in the past and using colloquial language (sociolect, slang and so on), (2) antagonistic mode, which is a literary form that elevates one version of the past while rejecting another, characterised by tending to instill works that represent identity groups and past versions, using negative stereotypes, displaying the most correct and other false versions of the memory of certain groups, as well as using "we" narratives and (3) reflexive mode, i.e., a literary form that allows the reader a wide range of possibilities, characterised by giving the reader the freedom to reflect on and critique depictions, juxtaposing various versions of the past, using metaphors and employing experimental narrative forms such as historiographical metafiction works.

Representation can help us understand identity. The idea that identity has to do with people who look and feel the same is invalid. As a process, understanding identity needs to be put with the other (Hall 1991). To understand identity, it is necessary to highlight the dialectic between how we see ourselves and others. In understanding identity, what needs to be put forward is "identity in whose eyes?" (Hall and Gay 1996). Identity checks should begin with the dynamic between "How we are represented and the subsequent impact on our self-representation". Hence, identification and representation can be seen as different sides of a currency.

The framework is the cornerstone of this study because it assumes that cultural memory does not describe all manifestations of memory in culture but represents part of the social construction of the normative and formative versions of the past (Erll 2012). In other words, the memory construction built in post-New Order novels is a picture of the memory construction that is trying to be built and transmitted in the present.

The trauma of the May 1998 violence needs to be seen as a collective trauma because it has a psychological impact on all Indonesian people (Hirschberger 2018). This trauma becomes a collective memory, not only generating events but also reconstructing trauma as part of the effort to understand it. In other words, the collective memory of traumatic events is a dynamic social-psychological process aimed at reconstructing meaning (Hirschberger 2018). The re-narration of the May 1998 violence as a literary work aims to reveal past wounds and present the possibility of new social meanings, both for the generation that experienced it and the succeeding generation. *SN3* and *PC* became sites of memory for victims or witnesses to the May 1998 violence. Through changes in the country's political system, from the New Order to the Reformation, it is possible to guarantee freedom of speech to reveal dark events in the past. Edkins (2003), in her study, shows the strong influence of politics in regulating and disciplining memory in society. Nevertheless, even under these conditions, there will always be marginalised narratives endeavouring to counter the narratives built by those in power (Andalas and Qur'ani 2021).

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach because the research data is verbal (Cresswell 2014; Sugiarti, Andalas and Setiawan 2020). The method used is content analysis, involving the following steps: (1) close reading to find themes/patterns in the text, (2) coding themes based on patterns in the text, (3) analysing texts that show specific themes/patterns (tones, narrators and literary tools) and (4) developing an initial thesis.

The perspective used is narratology. In this perspective, the researcher looks for the totality of "internal laws" in literary texts, referred to as narrative potential. The narrative potential of a fictional text is "the effect of a narrative strategy that composes and organises the content of a literary work and exerts influence on its meaning" (Erll 2011). Using this model entails acquiring an understanding of the reconfiguration of the text, its realisation, effects and functions in culture. The interpretation of the text needs to be supported by historical (contextual) knowledge.

Adapting Erll's views (2004; 2006; 2011), the narrative data used in this study encompasses the experiences of characters narrated by the author in their work. Narratives within literary works are understood as "collective memory rhetoric" (Erll 2004). The rhetoric of collective memory is a way for literary texts to transmit past verbs to be socially shared with their readers. Literary works become a medium for memory.

The data analysis technique of this study adapts the model of Miles and Huberman (1994). This model involves presenting data on identity representation and construction strategies, reducing the presented data, interpreting it and drawing conclusions. The strategy of representing and constructing Chinese identity in the Indonesian novel post-New Order is seen as a form of cultural memory for the post-event generation. This view suggests that when past events are elevated into literary works, the primary goal is not merely to reminisce, but to share experiences, either directly or indirectly, with subsequent generations (Erll and Rigney 2006; Hirsch 2008; 2012). This frame of thought also implies that memories of the past that are re-shared in the aftermath are not final but are consistently reproduced under external conditions (Andalas, Anggraini and Widodo 2022). Therefore, an understanding of the texts of Indonesian novels after the New Order was carried out to see the process of reproduction and intergenerational transmission of the May 1998 Tragedy experienced by ethnic Chinese Indonesians.

Creswell's (2014) model is used to check data validity, which involves: (1) independently checking the data, (2) discussing it with reviewers and (3) discussing with experts. These three validation steps are carried out to check the accuracy of the theory, methods, results and conclusions of this study.

Results and Discussion

Strategies for representing Chinese Indonesian ethnicity in post-New Order Indonesian fiction

The representation strategy pertains to how a memory is represented to the reader. It is closely related to how the author views an event and how the readers interpret the work. Therefore, to understand how the memory of the events of the May 1998 Tragedy is shared with the reader, the first step is to understand its representation strategy.

Erll (2006) says that "Understanding the past involves placing events in temporal and causal sequences, understanding them from a certain angle and condensing complex processes into appropriate metaphors and symbols". Therefore, the

representation of an event in a literary work serves as a strategic approach to presenting events. Based on the analysis, differences exist in the strategies of representation used, influencing the reader's experience and comprehension of the shared memory.

Marga Tjoa's *SN3* employs a myth-making approach (monumental mode). The monumental strategy envisions the past as a myth (Erll 2006), turning historical events into myths that contribute to the collective cultural memory. In *SN3*, the events of May 1998 refer to actual occurrences during that period. The narrative commences with the tragic shooting of Trisakti student, Hery Hartanto, on Tuesday, 12th May 1998. Then, followed by the looting of ethnic Chinese Indonesian shops. Acts of arson, looting, murder and rape targeting the Chinese people became a series of events in the May 1998 riots. Characters like Om Lim, Mathilda and Sinta serve as representations of the Chinese Indonesian experience during this tragic period. Several events confirm the myth of "discrimination" against Chinese Indonesians by non-Chinese in Indonesia in May 1998.

> "The situation was already last severe Sunday when some people came to the shops," said Om Lim. "Two came with me. They asked for 10 million guard money! It turned out that all the figures were asked for money. Some pay 20 and some pay 30". They said, "If you want to be safe, you must pay!" He's like a thug. (Tjoa 2006, 232)

The quote shows discrimination against Chinese Indonesians. In May 1998, acts of extortion action were perpetrated against Chinese business owners in Indonesia. The representation of extortion against Chinese Indonesians is also described as being carried out by non-Chinese individuals (Tjoa 2006, 232). The looting of ethnic Chinese shops is described as a widespread occurrence. These acts of looting were not isolated incidents, but rather, were perpetrated by groups (Tjoa 2006, 239). The novel also portrays the riots that took place in May 1998. Ethnic Chinese were victims of injustice perpetrated by members of other ethnic groups, despite both groups being Indonesian citizens. Chinese shops were looted and subsequently set ablaze (Tjoa 2006, 232).

In addition to looting and arson, this work also delves into the investigation of rape incidents involving Chinese Indonesian women.

> The second thug appeared beside his comrade, clinging to the girl and then grabbing her hair, and… the girl was slammed to the ground, covered with a lot of back, missing from his sight… He saw three people in school uniforms even though they were twice the age of high school children! They're having fun looking at the girls' clothes. (Tjoa 2006, 248)

In the events of May 1998, many Chinese girls fell victim to rape, occurring in public places. In this novel, the rape incident is described as follows: "Another giant reached out and grabbed a girl's hair … while his other hand pulled at her blouse … eventually, the T-shirt tore and split, blood dripping from the scratched skin. 'Open your panties!' he harped" (Tjoa 2006, 249). This quote describes the brutality and savagery of people who raped Chinese girls. They are innocent victims subjected to barbarity solely due to their ethnicity. The event is described with cruel precision: "But he managed to see those smooth white arms being ambushed by two giant tails and dragged to the edge, his body shaking like a malaria fever person… Like a sheep being herded to the arbour, the girl is silent. It is just the shaking that appears from behind" (Tjoa 2006, 249).

The criticism of Chinese Indonesian discrimination depicted in the *SN3* novel extends beyond the events of May 1998. This work also emphasises several "discriminatory" myths against other Chinese Indonesians. Chinese Indonesians are considered "foreigners" in their own country. This can be observed in the disparity of costs that Chinese Indonesians must incur in managing bureaucratic administration. This is to be expected due to the societal stereotype that considers Chinese Indonesians to be of a different class, specifically, the upper-middle economic class. Therefore, they consistently receive different treatment. In the bureaucracy, discrimination against Chinese Indonesians is blatant. For example:

> Making an ID card costs five times the official price mentioned in the newspaper, while Mr. Sam is only asked twice as much. When I protested, the village clerk said to his stomach, "Then, why don't you make it to the newspaper? Want to make a family card. The cost is also double the cost for local". (Tjoa 2006, 238)

Ethnic Chinese Indonesians experience different treatment compared to other ethnicities. Although corruption in state administration has become common at this time, ethnic Chinese still receive more discrimination than other ethnicities. Another discrimination among Chinese Indonesians is that descendants cannot use their real names and must adopt local names. Even though they have adapted to the local name, they still feel discrimination in treatment. This practice is quite familiar to the Indonesian people, particularly during the New Order period, due to a prevailing stereotype that Chinese Indonesians do not belong to the indigenous Indonesian people.

Discrimination in accessing education is also evident. For example, Chinese citizens are denied entry to public universities (Tjoa 2006, 238). Many Chinese Indonesians (descendants) cannot obtain the same educational rights as indigenous

people. It is pervasive in practice that public schools do not accept Chinese Indonesian communities. Finally, many people of Chinese descent in Indonesia are unable to pursue higher education due to the costs incurred in private schools are not affordable.

Discrimination also extends to personal identity, particularly in obtaining identity cards. The dichotomy between indigenous (local) and non-indigenous (hereditary citizens) is highly detrimental, as it creates a distinction in rights and obligations for both hereditary and other ethnic communities in Indonesia (Tjoa 2006, 369). As a result, they are often harmed in many ways. Both Chinese and other ethnic citizens are equally Indonesian citizens. Yet, this distinction is made blatantly (Tjoa 2006, 292).

Another myth perpetuated in the *SN3* narrative revolves around the disappearance of the identity of Chinese Indonesian ancestors. Chinese Indonesian must change Chinese names to Indonesian (Tjoa 2006, 330). Through this data, it appears that efforts to eliminate ancestral identities occurred. Chinese Indonesians were disconnected from the roots of their ancestral identity through the prohibition of learning Chinese. The disconnection of the roots of identity is a serious problem, as it restricts the understanding of national identity solely to language usage. This may appear as jealousy over the exclusiveness that occurs among Chinese Indonesians. To eliminate such jealousy, restrictions on the use of Chinese were imposed as official rules. Of course, this form of discrimination occurs against Chinese Indonesians.

Unlike the novel *SN3*, the strategy of representing the events of May 1998, particularly the discrimination against ethnic Chinese Indonesians in the *PC* novel by Sindhunata, is depicted through an indirect strategy. This strategy uses the analogies of places, figures and events from entirely different regions to refer to the events of discrimination against the Chinese in Indonesia during the New Order period.

This work describes the events of 1998 through an analogy of events that refer to the kingdom of Medang Kemulan Baru, which later transformed into Pedang Kemulan. It is believed that this change in name was a result of numerous conflicts and widespread violence, including mass killings. During this time, the author also tells how the leader of the Pedang Kemulan kingdom employed cunning tactics to maintain his power and get as much treasure as possible. The fate of the people seemed to be largely disregarded, leading to numerous rebellions against the government. Ultimately, the king of Pedang Kemulan, Prabu Amurco Sabdo,

redirecting issues towards the Chinese people, fueling hatred and violence against them. The act of brutality depicted in the *PC* novel is as follows:

> In 1946, west of the Tangerang River, there was a massacre in which hundreds of Chinese accused of cooperating with the Dutch, were ruthlessly slaughtered. Their bodies were piled up, their property looted and their houses burned… In the same year, in Lawang, the houses of the Chinese people were looted and burned. (Sindhunata 2007, 84)

The above quote serves as an analogy the author uses to describe the events of the 1998 "massacre". Although the author escapes the story about events that occurred during the Indonesian kingdom, it serves as an analogy to the events of May 1998 during the New Order period.

The *PC* novel depicts discrimination and violence against Chinese Indonesians, similar to the *SN3*. Various forms of discrimination and violence occur against the Chinese. For example, "They invaded the settlements of the Chinese people, damaged their establishments, looted their property and slaughtered them" (Sindhunata 2007, 107). The looting and burning of Chinese shops in 1998 are well-documented historical events. This novel's imagery confirms the depiction in the *SN3* novel. In addition, the rape of a Chinese woman is also depicted in this work (Sindhunata 2007, 150). This novel exposes the atrocities committed by the perpetrators. The Chinese woman, who was innocent and bore no fault, became a victim to ethnic sentiments in May 1998.

The similarity in representations of May 1998 that befell Chinese Indonesians is also found in the destruction of Chinese business places (Sindhunata 2007, 107). Even the removal of the identity of Chinese ancestors, carried out by the New Order government, was cloaked under the policy order of the Pedang Kemulan kingdom (Sindhunata 2007, 110). Chinese people living in Indonesia were forced to change their Chinese names to local ones. In addition, the use of Mandarin for Chinese citizens living in Indonesia was prohibited. This policy aimed to uproot the cultural identity of people of Chinese descent living in Indonesia.

Narratively, there is a different focus within the *PC* in depicting the events of 1998. In this work, it is highlighted that the ruler is responsible for the violence against the Chinese. Prabu Amurco Sabdo is an imaginative figure who refers to President Soeharto, the leader of Indonesia during the New Order period. This statement is supported by the evidence in the work which states, "They also demanded that Prabu Amurco Sabdo should abdicate from his throne today" (Sindhunata 2007, 118). The author describes the power of leading the land: "He no longer controls his country with power based on his clear mind, but on his supernatural powers" (Sindhunata 2007, 101).

In this strategy of indirect representation, several key points emerge throughout the novel namely: (1) The king used his power to increase wealth without considering the fate of his people, (2) The voice of the people in Java at that time was either never heard or ignored by the ruler of the Pedang Kemulan kingdom, (3) A substantial amount of violence was committed against the people for the personal benefit of the king of the Pedang Kemulan and his aides, (4) The king of the Pedang Kemulan and his cunning patihs incited conflict between the people of Java and the Chinese to divert attention from the abuse of power committed by Prabu Amurco Sabdo, (5) Numerous massacres were carried out by the king of the Pedang Kemulan against the people in Java, (6) Many rebellions were launched by the people in various corners of the city, (7) The people lived in suffering and violence, (8) Slaves and poor labourers were rounded up by the company, (9) Chinese settlements were vandalised and their trading places were set ablaze, (10) Chinese people were raped and killed, (11) Chinese property was looted, (12) Chinese people were intercepted, persecuted and their vehicles were burned and (13) Chinese people were forbidden to worship in temples and celebrate the new year.

The findings in the *PC* novel regarding the violence in May 1998 align with the findings of Hikmawati (2017) and Himawan, Pohlman and Louis (2022). In the events of May 1998, the Chinese ethnics were the victims who suffered the most from this incident. The May 1998 violence event is considered the central occurrence, providing the raw material for creating works (mimesis). The analogy between the events that occurred in the Pedang Kemulan kingdom and the May 1998 Tragedy is built through the interaction of text prefiguration (Ricoeur 1984). Events in the Pedang Kemulan kingdom refer to the extratextual world, namely the May 1998 Tragedy, identified as Mimesis 1, the depiction in the *PC* novel as Mimesis 2 and the prefiguration by readers as Mimesis 3. The *PC* novel is built through an active and constructive process that does not merely re-describe events but blurs them into a work of fiction.

This representation strategy believes the existence of references to actual events in everyday reality, treating them as if the author is obscuring them as events happening elsewhere. This narrative style requires an explicit reading about events within a literary work with reality. The effect leads to several possibilities: (1) the reader understands the context of the reference and interprets it as a form of disguising the event or (2) the reader fails to understand and perceives it as another event. In this context, understanding the reference becomes the key for the reader to understand the symbolic meaning embedded by the author in their work.

Chinese Indonesian violence in Indonesian post-New Order fiction

The results of this study show that literary works serve as a medium for the spread of memory. Through the novels *SN3* and *PC*, the memory of violence against Chinese Indonesians during the period of 12th to 15th May 1998 is transmitted, especially for the post-event generation who did not experience or were unaware of this event (Frosh 2019; Hirsch 2008; 2012). Based on the depiction of the story's content, this study supports the conclusions of Ahmadi (2021), Hilman, Tjahjandari and Untari (2003), Pattiradjawane (2000), Wahyuni (2015) and Wibowo and Lan (2010), all of whom confirm that there was oppression against Chinese in May 1998. In the aspect of narrative strategy, this study unveils new findings not previously discussed in previous studies, specifically, the diversity of narrative strategies used in depicting the events of May 1998.

The strategy of monumental representation was used in the novel *SN3* to describe the historical events of the May 1998 Tragedy. This strategy confirms the "discrimination" against the Chinese community, a topic that is no longer widely discussed in the public sphere. Past ethnic trauma must be shared with a broader audience, including post-event generations, to reminisce and take lessons from these events. In addition, another narrative strategy used in *PC* novels is the indirect mode. In this work, the author describes the May 1998 Tragedy through analogies to events unrelated to the modern Indonesian period. The author escapes the reference to events into a distant imaginative realm. However, a reader with a repertoire of events can still understand the author's intentions. The author uses an analogy strategy of dispositions, events and tragedies of violence against ethnic Chinese in Java during the royal period.

Both strategies need to be understood as a form of the author's strategy in compiling the narrative, enabling the reader to discern the purpose behind writing. Erll (2006) says that "Understanding the past involves placing events in temporal and causal sequences, understanding them from a certain angle and condensing complex processes into appropriate metaphors and symbols". Therefore, the representation of an event in a literary work is a strategy for presenting events. Although there appeared to be differences in strategy, there was substantively one voice seeking to be conveyed, namely "discrimination, violence and human rights violations" against ethnic Chinese in May 1998.

The picture of events in the literary work must be considered as part of the truth. According to Gaskin (2013), Sirridge (1975) and Weitz (1955), literary works contain truth. Some aspects presented in literary works are not found in other forms of media, such as mass media or television. Works of fiction have become

symbolic forms of cultural memory (Erll 2011) because they record events that may not be documented in historical archives (Kansteiner 2002; Taylor 2003). Through literary texts, the community's response to the events of May 1998 is revealed and re-offered as an experience lost to the historical archives of society. In other words, literary texts provide spaces for minority voices that may not find a place in mainstream discourse (Hirsch 2012).

In Indonesian fiction about the May 1998 Tragedy, it is necessary to see it as a collective memory. Memories are institutionalised and disseminated in these works as part of the nation's memory (Erll 2018). Through works of fiction, we know the past atrocities against ethnic Chinese Indonesians. Works of fiction that talk about the discrimination faced by ethnic Chinese during the New Order period can at least be seen as a means of restoring the collective memory (Wuriyanto and Andalas 2020). Through this narrative dismantling, the text ideology is deconstructed, fostering cultural awareness of the importance of seeing history through fiction as a learning medium for future generations.

Conclusion

Textual research shows that both literary works depict the events of violence against ethnic Chinese individuals in May 1998. They employ different narrative strategies to recount these events. Nozomi's novel uses a monumental strategy: turning history into myth. The *PC* novel, on the other hand, uses an indirect strategy to disguise the events of May 1998 to the time of the Indonesian kingdom. Nonetheless, at their core, both works highlight the same thing, namely: (1) looting, (2) arson, (3) murder and (4) rape of ethnic Chinese Indonesians in May 1998. Both works mediate the politics of cultural memory to commemorate (remind) the "sins" of the Indonesian people in the past that have not yet been completed. Representation strategies that are not "vulgar", such as those found in the post-New Order work *Perempuan Bersampur Merah* by Intan Andaru (Andalas and Qur'ani 2021), who is more courageous to speak openly about the Tragedy of the Banyuwangi witch massacre, should be suspected because of the situation that is still "transitioning" from the New Order to the Reformation that guarantees freedom of expression.

This research shows that analysis of literary works can serve as an alternative medium for understanding the experiences of discrimination voiced by minorities within certain groups. As an interdisciplinary study, it introduces a new perspective to ethnic studies, particularly in works of fiction, using ethnic and cultural memory perspectives. Even so, this study has not been conducted comprehensively. Further research is still needed to complete the evidence that has been presented. The

source of research data is limited to only two novels. In addition, the study is textual. Contextual literary research is needed to be able to confirm or compare fictional images with the realities existing in society.

Further research is needed using more data sources to comprehensively look at the events of May 1998 in Indonesian fiction. In addition, contextual research can be carried out to gain a deeper understanding of the ethnic Chinese discrimination event in May 1998. However, this study can be used as a comparison material regarding discrimination against ethnic Chinese in other regions.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Rector of the Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia, and the Directorate of Research and Community Service, Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, who have financed this research under grant number E.2.a/334/BAA-UMM/IV/2022.

References

Ahmadi, A. 2021. The traces of oppression and trauma to ethnic minorities in Indonesia who experienced rape on the 12 May 1998 tragedy: A review of literature. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studie*s 8(2): 126–144. https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/744

Alamsyah, D.A. and Purwaningsih, S.M. 2019. Harmonisasi hubungan antara etnis Tionghoa dengan etnis lainnya di Surabaya pada masa kerusuhan Mei 1998. *Avatara* 7(1): 1–9.

Andalas, E.F., Anggraini, P. and Widodo, J. 2022. Memori terorisme: Memori traumatis dan strategi mengatasi trauma korban Bom Bali I dalam teks sastra Indonesia. *Satwika: Kajian Ilmu Budaya dan Perubahan Sosial* 6(1): 167–179. https://doi.org/10.22219/satwika.v6i1.20347

Andalas, E.F. and Qur'ani, H.B. 2021. Remembering the 1998 Indonesian sorcerer's massacre: Memory of tragedy and trauma in Intan Andaru's *Perempuan Bersampur Merah* (*Woman in Red Scarf*). *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 13(1): 1–13. https://doi.org/ 10.21659/rupkatha.v13n1.23

Andryanto, S.D. 2021. Kerusuhan Mei 1998, sejarah kelam pelanggaran HAM di Indonesia. *Tempo.co*, 14 May. Retrieved from https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1462239/kerusuhan-mei-1998-sejarah-kelam-pelanggaran-ham-di-indonesia (accessed 4 May 2022).

Anggraeni, D. 2010. *Mereka bilang aku China: Jalan mendaki menjadi bagian bangsa*. Yogyakarta: Bentang Pustaka.

Arifin, E.N., Ananta, A., Utami, D.R.W.W, Handayani, N.B. and Pramono, A. 2016. Quantifying Indonesia's ethnic diversity: Statistics at national, provincial and district levels. *Asian Population Studies* 11(3): 233–256. https://doi.org/10.1080/17441730.2015.1090692

Arifin, E.N., Hasbullah, M.S. and Pramono, A. 2017. Chinese Indonesians: How many, who and where? *Asian Ethnicity* 18(3): 310–329. https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2016.1227236

Aspinall, E. 2008. Ethnic and religious violence in Indonesia: A review essay. *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 62(4): 558–572. https://doi.org/10.1080/10357710802480766

Assman, J. 2010. *Cultural memory and early civilisation: Writing, remembrance and political imagination*. New York: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511996306

_____. 1995. Collective memory and cultural identity. *New German Critique* 65: 125–133. https://doi.org/10.2307/488538

Aziz, M. 2013. Identitas pemuda Tionghoa pasca reformasi: Nasionalisme dalam transformasi kepemimpinan pada organisasi sosial di Lasem Jawa Tengah. *Jurnal Studi Pemuda* 2(2): 117–128. https://doi.org/10.22146/studipemudaugm.32042

Bertrand, J. 2004. *Nationalism and ethnic conflict in Indonesia*. New York: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511559341

Creswell, J.C. 2014. *Research design: Pendekatan kualitatif, kuantitatif, dan mixed*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar

Davidson, S.J. 2009. Studies of massive, collective violence in post-Soeharto Indonesia. *Critical Asian Studies* 41(2): 329–349. https://doi.org/10.1080/14672710902809450

Edkins, J. 2003. *Trauma and the memory of politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511840470

Erll, A. 2018. Homer: A relational mnemohistory. *Memory Studies* 11(3): 274–286. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698018771858

_____. 2012. Cultural memory. In *English and American studies: Theory and practices*, eds. M. Middeke, T. Muller, C. Wald and H. Zapf, 238–242. Heilderberg: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-476-00406-2_15

_____. 2011. *Memory in culture*. 1st Ed. Hampshire/New York: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230321670

_____. 2006. Re-writing as re-visioning: Modes of representing the "Indian Mutiny" in British literature, 1857 to 2000. *European Journal of English Studies* 10(2): 163–85. https://doi.org/10.1080/13825570600753485

_____. 2004. Reading literature as collective texts: German and English war novels of the 1920s as media of cultural and communicative memory. In *Anglistentag München 2003: Proceedings*, eds. C. Bode, S. Domsch and H. Sauer, 335–354. Trier, Germany: WVT.

Erll, A. and Rigney, A. 2006. Literature and the production of cultural memory: Introduction. *European Journal of English Studies* 10(2): 111–115. https://doi.org/10.1080/13825570600753394

Freedman, A. 2003. Political institutions and ethnic Chinese identity in Indonesia. *Asian Ethnicity* 4(3): 439–452. https://doi.org/10.1080/1343900032000117259

Frosh, S. 2019. Postmemory. *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 79(2): 156–173. https://doi.org/10.1057/s11231-019-09185-3

Gaskin, R. 2013. *Language, truth and literature: A defence of literary humanism*. Oxfordshire, UK: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199657902.001.0001

Gumelar, M.S. 2016. Napak tilas marginalisasi berbagai etnis di Indonesia dalam hubungannya dengan Bhinneka Tunggal Ika. *Jurnal Studi Kultura* 1(2): 70–78.

Halbwachs, M. 1980. *The collective memory*. New York: Harper & Row.

Hall, S. 2003. *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. New York: SAGE Publications Ltd.

_____. 1991. Old and new identities, old and new ethnicities. In *Culture, globalisation and the world-system: Contemporary conditions for the representation of identity*, ed. A.D. King, 41–68. 1st Ed. New York: Palgrave in association with Department of Art and Art History, State University of New York at Binghampton.

Hall, S. and Gay, P.D. 1996. *Questions of cultural identity*. New York: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Hikmawati, C.L. 2017. Opresi berlapis perempuan etnis Tionghoa: Pemerkosaan massal terhadap perempuan etnis Tionghoa dalam tragedi Mei 1998 di Jakarta. *Jurnal Politik* 2(2): 4. https://doi.org/10.7454/jp.v2i2.76

Hilman, L., Tjahjandari, L. and Untari, R. 2003. Toleransi dalam interdiskursus teks sastra dan teks non-sastra. *Makara Human Behavior Studies in Asia* 7(2): 58–64. https://doi.org/10.7454/mssh.v7i2.54

Himawan, E.M., Pohlman, A. and Louis, W. 2022. Revisiting the May 1998 riots in Indonesia: Civilians and their untold memories. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 41(2): 240–257. https://doi.org/10.1177/18681034221084320

Hirsch, M. 2012. *The generation of postmemory: Writing and visual culture after the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press.

_____. 2008. The generation of postmemory. *Poetic Today* 29(1): 103–128. https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-2007-019

Hirschberger, G. 2018. Collective trauma and the social construction of meaning. *Frontiers in Psychology* 9: 1441. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01441

Hoon, C.-Y. 2006. Assimilation, multiculturalism, hybridity: The dilemmas of the ethnic Chinese in Post-Suharto Indonesia. *Asian Ethnicity* 7(2): 149–166. https://doi.org/10.1080/14631360600734400

Kansteiner, W. 2002. Finding meaning in memory: A methodological critique of collective memory studies. *History and Theory* 41(2): 179–197. https://doi.org/10.1111/0018-2656.00198

Kuntjara, E. and Hoon, C.-Y. 2020. Reassessing Chinese Indonesian stereotypes: Two decades after Reformasi. *South East Asia Research* 28(2): 199–216. https://doi.org/10.1080/0967828X.2020.1729664

Kusno, A. 2010. *Glodok* on our minds: Chinese culture and the forgetting of the May Riots. In *The appearances of memory: Mnemonic practices of architecture and urban form in Indonesia*, 101–124. New York: Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822392576-007

Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. 1994. *Qualitative data analysis*. New York: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Neumann, B. 2008. The literary representation of memory. In C*ultural memory studies: An international and interdisciplinary handbook*, eds. A. Erll and A. Nünning, 333–343. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110207262.5.333

Pattiradjawane, R. 2000. Peristiwa Mei 1998 di Jakarta: Titik terendah sejarah orang etnis Cina di Indonesia. In *Harga yang harus dibayar: Sketsa pergulatan etnis Cina di Indonesia*, ed. I. Wibowo, 213–252. Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama.

Ribeiro, M.C., Vecchi, R. and Ribeiro, A.S. 2012. The children of the colonial war: Post-memory and representations. In *Plots of war: Modern narratives of conflict*, eds. I.C. Gil and A. Martins, 11–23. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110283037.11

Ricoeur, P. 1984. *Time and narrative*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ritau'din, M.S. 2017. Teologi politik berbalut SARA antara ambisi dan konspirasi. *Kalam* 11(1): 85–106. https://doi.org/10.24042/klm.v11i1.1087

Schwarz, A. 1994. *A nation in waiting: Indonesia in the 1990s*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Sindhunata, S. 2007. *Putri Cina*. Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama.

Sirridge, M.J. 1975. Truth from fiction? *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 35(4): 453–471. https://doi.org/10.2307/2106747

Strassler, K. 2004. Gendered visibilities and the dream of transparency: The Chinese Indonesian rape debate in post-Suharto Indonesia. *Gender and History* 16(3): 689–725. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0953-5233.2004.00361.x

Sugiarti, Andalas, E.F. and Setiawan, A. 2020. *Desain penelitian kualitatif sastra*. Malang, Indonesia: UMM Press.

Tan, M. 2008. *Etnis Tionghoa di Indonesia: Kumpulan tulisan*. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia.

Taylor, D. 2003. *The archive and the repertoire: Performing cultural memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11smz1k

Tjoa, M. 2006. *Sekuntum nozomi 3*. Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama.

Turner, S. 2003. Setting the scene speaking out: Chinese Indonesians after Suharto. *Asian Ethnicity* 4(3): 337–352. https://doi.org/10.1080/1343900032000117187

Wahyuni, D. 2015. Probing the reality of riots in May 1998 in *Sapu Tangan Fang Yin*. *Salingka* 12(1): 1–16. https://doi.org/10.26499/salingka.v12i01.28

Weitz, M. 1955. Truth in literature. *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 9(31): 116–129.

Wibowo, I. and Lan, T.J., eds. 2010. *Setelah air mata kering*. Jakarta: Kompas Gramedia.

Winarnita, M.S., Chan, C. and Butt, L. 2020. Narratives of exile twenty years on: Long-term impacts of Indonesia's 1998 violence on transnational Chinese-Indonesian women. *Global Studies in Culture and Power* 27(2): 191–209. https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2018.1537639

Winarnita, M.S. and Setiawan, K. 2020. Commemorating gendered violence two decades on. In *Gender, violence and power in Indonesia: Across time and space*, eds. K. McGregor, A. Dragojlovic and H. Loney, 119–142. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003022992-6

Wuriyanto, A.B. and Andalas, E.F. 2020. *Post memori Tragedi 1965 dalam karya sastra Indonesia modern: Kajian terhadap novel mutakhir Indonesia*. Malang, Indonesia: Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang.

Zha, D. 2000. China and the May 1998 riots of Indonesia: Exploring the issues. *The Pacific Review* 13(4): 557–575. https://doi.org/10.1080/095127400455323