Kritika Kultura, No. 29

Interrogating Indonesian New Order’s Narrative of Gestapu: The Leftist Nobles and the Indonesian Communist Party in Umar Kayam’s Stories

Paulus Sarwoto

Abstract

Although the atrocity around the 1965 coup—better known as Gestapu, Gestok or G 30 S PKI in Indonesia—has been continually on the international humanitarian spotlight, its literary representation in Indonesia has been minimal. The stronghold of the New Order regime and their residue in the current political system must have something to do with this. Among a few vernacular writers coping with the aftermath of the tragedy but is less discussed as such is Umar Kayam. The four texts analysed in this article, “Bawuk,” “Musim Gugur Kembali ke Connecticut,” Para Priyayi and Jalan Menikung: Para Priyayi 2, interrogate the complexity of Gestapu victimization and narrative set by the New Order. The texts reflect the failure of the Javanese nobles (priyayi) in revitalizing their role as political leaders in the face of corrupt political system. Instead of resisting the corrupt regime, they play along in the political game to gain personal benefits. The Javanese nobles siding with the oppressed by joining the Communist Party’s affiliated organizations are ostracized and marginalized. Despite Kayam’s sympathetic representation of some communist figures in his fiction, his general representation of communist ideology ambivalent. His figuration of communist poets simply as uncritical serfs of ideology, for example, shows his bias toward accepting the New Order cultural narrative. Despite his sympathetic description of those innocently accused of treason following Gestapu 1965, Kayam still portrays communism as an evil and foreign ideology much in the same way that the New Order regime had been narrating it.