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THE ACTIONS OF WOMEN IN OKKY MADASARI'S THE YEARS OF THE VOICELESS

Silvia Dwi Nuranggraeni

Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta

slviadw@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study discusses women's actions toward oppressions. Women's actions in many societies, including in Indonesia, have often been limited, partly due to the prevalent patriarchal culture. Women, as well as men, should have the same right to improve themselves without any restraint from their surroundings. The research aims to investigate how women's actions in Okky Madasari's *The Years of the Voiceless* bring impacts on their surroundings. There are two research questions formulated in this study: 1) How do the actions of Sumarni and Rahayu in this story affect their surroundings? and 2) How do Sumarni and Rahayu respond to the oppressions from the society they live in? This study used a psychological critical approach, and employed library research as the data gathering method. The primary source of this study is the novel by Okky Madasari entitled *The Years of the Voiceless*. The first finding reveals that the actions of Sumarni and Rahayu can be categorized as responses to situational demands, manifestation of attitude, and testing new attitudes. The first finding also shows how other women around them are affected by the main characters' actions. The impacts of Sumarni and Rahayu are manifested in three central features of attitude, based on Kelmen's theory of the role of action in attitude change: first, attitudes are functionally based, second, attitudes are socially shared and third, attitudes represent a range of commitment to the attitude object. The second finding shows that both female characters showed two kinds of reactions toward oppression. The reactions can be categorized as responses to situational demands, adherence to new policy, manifestation of attitude, and testing new attitudes.

Keywords: social psychological approach, women's actions, women's struggles

Introduction

Women's actions in each era bring progress for women in society. Women's roles have been shifting from decade to decade. Women are usually associated with housewives and stay at home mother. They are expected to maintain the house and take care of the children. Nowadays, women have the freedom to work outside their home or take education. Both traditional and modern female roles are assumed to

give positive and negative impact to the family. Traditional women roles are considered something normal that all females should be able to conduct. Married women should be able to be the foundation of the house by doing the house chores and educating the children. However, they are expected to fully obey their husbands. It gives a barrier for women to choose what they really want. On the other hand, the shifting from old roles of women gives women their independence to choose what they prefer to do. Society believes that freedom for women makes them neglect their family to satisfy their own achievement in life. In fact, worker women also have multiple roles, as a mother or an employee. They work at their workplace and still have to take care of the household chores when they get back home.

Patriarchal Culture

Indonesia is one of the countries with a patriarchal system. Patriarchy makes man the dominant in the family. They are supposed to be the ones who take control in the family. Females, as soon as they are born, should obey their father. When they become a wife, they should be able to agree on their spouse. Women's lives have always been in control since they are young. This mindset puts women in a lower position than men as they are consistently ruled by men. Cultural value deliberately changes into a man's perspective. The result of this change is shown in people's expectations toward women. Females in their young age are prepared to fit in the role of a wife. They are also encouraged to get married before they reach a specific age. Women in higher positions of job or higher education are also considered undesirable for man with lower positions than them. These stereotypes do not work for another gender. Cultural value has created women to be powerless human beings. Society offers freedom for women but judges them for not being able to fulfil their expectation of how women should be.

Women's Actions

Women's action for a lot of time is seen as something insignificant to society. They appear to be less important and less impactful. Judgement and prejudice given for women have suppressed them to express their thoughts. They have no free room for them to be heard. However, women, just like another gender, should be able to seek their independence as simply as voiced their concern. Women's actions are needed for women to be able to represent other women's needs or matters. Barriers for women only make more women to live in suffering for not being able to speak their worry.

To live in oppression from society makes it hard for women to act their thoughts. This also creates less women to be seen as role models. Their thoughts are buried to the assumption of women they saw in daily life with not much breakthrough action. Thus, women who decide to show their actions are considered extraordinary. Little did they know, their actions inspire society, especially women, to act as they do. This study aims to show the action of the main characters, Sumarni and Rahayu, influencing others to take actions. They live in an Indonesian new order era where oppression from the authorities is still happening. They have no right to speak but they dare to try.

This study uses the theory of attitude change by Kelmen (1979) entitled *The Role of Action in Attitude Change*. Kelmen divided actions that may provide a context for attitude change into 4 categories.

1. **Response to Situational Demand**

The actions in this context are taken when someone expects to be engaged in an action due to particular situations, such as social pressure, role requirement, or demands in their society.

2. **Adherence to New Policy**

This action encouraged attitude change because there is a new policy that should be obeyed. The context is usually rigid and has consequences when it is not done properly.

3. **Manifestation of Attitude**

Someone has a personal attitude toward a specific object but sometimes it is not shown. The actions may appear when there is an increased commitment to the object. The attitude that used to be hidden then exposed.

4. **Testing A New Attitude**

There is a process of reconsidering due to a change of prior attitude. Interaction toward an attitude object may trigger the change of attitude.

Those context of attitude changes are used to describe how the main characters take their action and react to the oppression. To explain how they are influenced by their action, Kelmen`s theory about three central features of attitude.

1. **Attitudes are Functionally Based**

Attitude change is a dynamic process where it keeps changing due to interaction of attitude objects. Someone may have one attitude they like to keep but it may change as they get more new information about it from their surroundings.

2. **Attitudes are Socially Shared**

A human being is linked to many social groups or communities. As someone interacts with their groups, they may or may not realize that they are slowly influenced by how they do things. This kind of actions are socially shared by those in the same community and may change their prior attitude.

3. **Attitudes Represent A Range of Commitment to the Attitude Object**

Someone has their own range of commitment preferable toward some objects. It may increase or decrease based on the interaction they get from the surroundings. The change might happen willingly or the other way around.

Method

This research used qualitative research. Qualitative research is suitable because this type of research uses description to analyse the data. The data of this research was taken from a novel entitled *The Years of the Voiceless* by Okky Madasari. The secondary data taken from other sources to support the analysis, including scholarly journals, books, and online articles.

Finding and Discussion

The main characters named Sumarni and Rahayu have their own way to reach their own definition of success. They both live in an oppressed environment when their action oftentimes is underappreciated. Despite all of that they have proven to be impactful for others.

1. The Influential Action of Sumarni

a. Breaking Existing Standard of Job for Women

Women in the story are expected to be paid only by cassava. No matter how hard they work, they have to realize that they will not get money from that. Rahayu, as a young girl, needs to buy herself a bra. She tries to figure out how to get money in a market where other women just simply accept the tradition that only men will be able to gain money for their work.

Sumarni does not want to accept the market rules. She believes that she will gain money if she does what the man does. So, she dares herself to work in the men fields as a porter:

"But it's just not done, Ni. At this market, no woman works as a porter."
"But I want to, Kang. I need the money. I don't want to get paid with cassavas anymore." (p.30)

According to Kelmen's theory, this action happens due to manifestation of the attitude. There is an increased commitment toward specific attitude objects. The increased commitment is her need for a bra. She changed her attitude in order to gain money instead of cassava. However, the idea of gaining money from the work has lingered in her mind even before she started working. The attitude change that soon changed into action is relatively new but the idea about doing the action has grown long before.

Sumarni was the first female porter supported by some of the people there. This is shown by how they willingly to use her service:

There was Dikun, the school teacher, who always came with his wife, and also the Singget ward chief. It wasn't very difficult carrying their shopping because they mostly just bought vegetables or cassavas. They preferred getting me rather than the other porters to help them. (p.35)

Those who supported Sumarni explained three central features of attitude by Kelmen. Their attitude changes due to attitude represent the range of commitment. They may prefer to have women to carry their stuff. They might want to have women as their porter for quite some time but the market does not provide porter women. Sumarni being a porter woman is seen as the opportunities that encourage those women's minds to get influences.

b. Setting Up Her Own Business

Sumarni realizes how easy her life is when she gets money. So, she starts to open one business to another business. She keeps innovating new things that have never before existed in her village. Sumarni becomes a money lender when she faces a demand and she sees it as a new opportunity:

As more people came to her asking for money, she set a limit on how much she expected back. It was no longer based on the profit that she made from selling pans or cloth. For the loans, she decided she would take a profit of a tenth of the value of the sum handed out. If someone borrowed 5,000, Mother would make a profit of 500. So the borrower would have to pay back a total of 5,500. (p.64)

Started by one person who wants to borrow her money, she can expand new business. Sumarni's action that saw the demand as opportunity described as response to situational demands. She has to deal with her own feelings to agree or disagree to the demand. Her final decision showed how she managed to fulfil the demand but gain profit for herself.

Sumarni used to be the only one who loans her money to others. New things can be accepted easily. Oftentimes, Sumarni is judged by the society for taking profit from the loans. However, as time goes by many people also seek for her to borrow money. They use her service after all the judgement they gave. Even worse some of them try to open the same business:

It wasn't just my income from the sugarcane that was going down. Fewer people were taking out loans. People called me a loan shark, a moneylender, a bloodsucker, yet more and more people were starting to lend out money. At ten percent too. They were all newly rich people from around the sub-district. They owned orange groves that in a single harvest could net them ten millions. Then they sold money to others.(p.242)

Kelmen (1979) described this attitude in central features of attitude theory. One of the central features of attitude is that attitudes are functionally based. Attitude is a dynamic process and people keep changing their attitude when they interact and find more information about the attitude object. Sumarni's business may be different or they may find it wrong but on the other hand it gives her more money. Those people saw that moment as an opportunity for them to gain money as well. Thus, their attitude changes when they see what Sumarni can achieve more money from the things they never thought before.

2. The Influential Action of Rahayu

a. Having Confidence in One's Capabilities

Rahayu is Sumarni's daughter. Rahayu has the opportunity to be educated compared to her mother. She has easy access to education and is fully supported by her mother. She was even successfully accepted into a state university. She realizes the suffering of the people of her village because of the oppression. She wants her village to grow and will be able to develop the economy in the village. So, she studies hard for that to be happen:

I'm studying agriculture. I started out with the noble intention of helping the people in my village improve their fields. So that they could prosper from their increased profits, But after almost two years of studying, agriculture no longer interests me. (p.128)

Rahayu does not finish her studies but she will not stop helping others. How she wants to reach for higher education because of her attitude. He mentioned that an

increase in commitment triggers the action. Rahayu triggers hate towards soldiers who oppress poor people and this is also the reason she wants village people to be empowered.

Rahayu keeps helping others by teaching in a house managed by a Kyai. She uses all the knowledge she knows to teach many useful things for the children there.

From the moment the sun begins to show when the drum is beaten and the prayer call echoes, we carry out our tasks. We teach everything we know to these hundreds of young children. Amri, in the room next door. looks over a sea of young heads wearing skull caps. I am here, with a white a chat covering my bosom, treading the path to heaven with the young girls. (p.200)

The impact of Rahayu's knowledge may not be immediately seen but it keeps growing in the children's minds. Attitudes are socially shared and the children who share the knowledge together in that class may be influenced by that later. They will find it important for their future as time goes by. The impact to each student can also be varied.

b. Women Awareness of Her Impact

Rahayu is surrounded by nice people who are willing to do anything to fight for justice. She also has enough resources to fight the soldiers who oppress them. She has spent all her life in a nightmare due to the oppression from time to time. She realizes no one can help them from being oppressed. Rahayu uses that opportunity to burn the spirit of her students. Her student is the children who have to lost their school because their village is about to be demolished:

In their young eyes, I saw passion and anger, even vengeance, flare up. Yes, fight them, my children. Only you can do it. Not your fathers, who are frail, much less your ancestors, who are dead. Only you can seek retribution for the grief. (p.222)

Rahayu is the source of information for the children about things that happen in their village. Rahayu actually does not want to tell bitter truth to her students but many cruel events have happened in their village. She cannot hold it back anymore. Rahayu changed her behaviour because of an event that affected her. Kelmen's theory classified this action as testing new attitudes. To categorize as testing a new attitude, there should be a triggered action that correlates with the attitude object. The triggered actions are the back to back suffering in that village. Attitudes are socially shared suitable to describe this context. Many students have realized what happened in their village. They shared the same fear and anger. This encouraged a girl named Ndari to come to Rahayu and tell about sexual assault happen to her:

I patted her on the shoulder. "What's wrong, Ri? If there's something you want to say, you don't have to be afraid."

Ndari still didn't answer. Instead, I heard her sniffing. I hugged her. I stroked her hair and her back. "Why are you crying? Come on, you can tell me. It's OK.

There's no need to be afraid."

"It hurts, Miss."

"What hurts, Nduk? What is it?" I asked as I tried not to think the worst. "It" hurt. Was "it" what I thought she meant. Allah, what more trouble is this?

"My thing... my thing... it got poked with a finger.."

"It" was what I thought. Ndari was still crying. I held her tighter. "Who, Nduk? Who poked you?"

"Uncle..." (p.222)

Ndari probably will try to forget that tragedy and never talk about it. But Rahayu helps her to realize that they have the same attitude toward those people who suppress them. Ndari changes her attitude because she realizes that she might get support from Rahayu.

3. The Reactions Toward Oppression from Sumarni and Rahayu

a. Surrender to the Oppression

Both Sumarni and Rahayu live under control of the authorities. They realize they cannot fight back because they have no power to do that:

The people with the tall boots are back again. They're dressed in their camouflage uniforms, with pistols hanging on their hips. One, two, three, four, five. There are five of them. I count silently. My mother welcomes them in front of the door with a smile. Well I know it's fake. She's not really smiling. She's afraid. They shake hands. The men laugh, their pot bellies heaving up and down. My mother laughs too.. but I know she's sick of it all. (P.46)

Sumarni realizes every time they come, she has to give them security money. There is no written rule about it is their demand and should be obeyed. Kelmen (1979) explained this phenomenon as Response to Situational Demand. The demand is coming from the soldier's expectation about money people have to pay them. She has her own opinion about that but she still has to do the demands. She has no power to fight back and she will be oppressed even worse when she fights them.

Rahayu surrenders to the oppression unconsciously. She believes what she does is good for the country. She never knew that what she gets from school is also a kind of propaganda:

In class, Mrs. Lastri told us that there would be an election. She said it would be the first election in the country since the unrest. This would be a proper election, one that would finally bring order. Mrs. Lastri was showing a yellow sheet with a picture of a banyan tree, just like on the banners along the village gate and outside the village hall. (p.56)

Rahayu kind of action is categorized into adherence to new policy. She changes her attitude due to her education in her school. For the same reason, she forces her parents to just do what the teacher said to her.

b. Stand Up for Their Right

Sometimes when Sumarni and Rahayu have enough power, they will try to fight for their justice. Rahayu with enough knowledge makes her actions more visible when the result can be seen and the impact can be felt. Sumarni's actions are less vivid and more hidden since the impact only affected her personal life. Sumarni's actions tend to be modest due to less resources she has to back her up. Rahayu fights for justice when she helps a pedicab driver who has been beaten by the soldier. She wants the story to be heard and action to be taken:

"There's no trouble, sir. We just want to hear your story and write about it in the newspaper, so that those men get what they deserve. They should be fired if

necessary"

"Enough, Miss.. I've already accepted it. I don't want trouble. No. anything more to do with them."

"It's not a matter of accepting it or not. It's about right and wrong. You can accept it now, but what if the same thing happens to someone else later on" (p.145)

Kelmen (1979) confirmed this action as a manifestation of attitude. Rahayu is looking for an opportunity for her to be able to fight the oppression. She has not enough evidence to take bigger action. When she sees injustice, she realizes the opportunity for everyone to see how unfair the authorities appear. There are some increases of commitment that trigger the action to show up and take the momentum. Rahayu also has enough knowledge to fight, so the action happens. Sumarni's fight for their right is shown when she tries her best to stand for what she believes is right. Someone named Endang tries to take her properties. Sumarni refused to stay silent and use her ability to take down Endang's action:

I went to see Commander Sumadi at his base. Who else was more powerful than those ward chiefs? Only these people, the men in the uniforms, the men of the state. I told everything to this man who had already taken a hectare of my land. I asked him to ensure justice for me. (p.186)

Sumarni realizes how the authorities never really bring justice in her life. However, she knows she just has to pay them some amount of money for them to be by her side. This attitude is considered new in her life. Thus, Kelmen's categorized her action as testing a new attitude. She is trying a new attitude to be able to get the result that she wants.

Conclusion

From the finding can be concluded that Surmarni and Rahayu action happen due to response to situational demands, manifestation of attitude, and testing new attitudes. The first finding also shows how other people around them are affected by the main characters' actions. The impacts of Sumarni and Rahayu are manifested in three central features of attitude, based on Kelmen's theory of the role of action in attitude change: first, attitudes are functionally based, second, attitudes are socially shared and third, attitudes represent a range of commitment to the attitude object. The second finding is about Sumarni and Rahayu's reactions to the oppression. Their first reaction is to surrender to oppression and the second one is to stand up for their rights. Their reactions can be categorized as responses to situational demands, adherence to new policy, manifestation of attitude, and testing new attitudes

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