



Conflict analysis in mother-daughter relationship in Okky Madasari's *The Years of the Voiceless*

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ABSTRACT

Conflict is an inevitable event that always occurs in human life as well in literary works. Okky Madasari's *The Years of the Voiceless* shows conflicts that happened to a mother and a daughter who need to fight for women's rights in the male-dominated world in the post-colonial era in Indonesia. They live based on their faiths and beliefs that are different due to the generational gap. By using the perspective of New Criticism, this study aims to investigate the sources of the conflict between them, how the conflicts are resolved, and how the conflicts affect their relationship as mother and daughter. The result found that the conflicts that affect the mother-daughter relationship originate from external and internal conflicts. The conflicts are resolved through changes in the daughter's character. This study proves that the generational gap, society, and characters' personalities are the main causes of conflict in the mother-daughter relationships.

Keywords: Conflict analysis, New Criticism, Mother-daughter relationship, *The Years of the Voiceless*

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INTRODUCTION

Every child in the world is born from the womb of a woman called a mother. The child and the mother eventually interact with each other to create a bond of relationship between them. Nevertheless, similar to other types of relationships, the relationship between mothers and daughters is also a complicated relationship. It is one-of-a-kind, with a strange mutually influencing dynamic in which each individual's creation of a relationship story is invariably shared (Rich, 1976; Bujold, 2004). Both in real life and fiction, it is common to see daughters and mothers who hate each other but on the other hand, they are always longing for each other's presence. They want to receive and give love from and to each other. According to Rich (1976), no matter how complicated their relationship are, mothers and daughters belong to each other and have a strong bond. So, the relationship is not simply between mothers and daughters but between mothers and grown-up daughters which means both are two adult females. Thus, different desires and opinions toward the things they do may provoke conflicts in the mother-daughter relationship.

Conflict is something that will always appear as a part of a human's life. It is inevitable and gives a big impact on both personal development and social structures (Jeong, 2008). In terms of conflict that

happens between two persons or more, the interpersonal conflict will not only affect one's mind and personality but also give impact to the dynamic of the relationship. Not only does conflict happen in real life, it is also one of the important elements that are needed in every literary work. There is at least one conflict in its plot to make an emotional ride that will arouse readers' interest to continue reading the work. Without conflict, a narrative will be flat, dull and lifeless. Abbott (2002) mentions that in ancient Greek work, conflict is called as the *agon* or the spine of any Greek tragedy. Corresponding to the term 'the spine', conflict is considered as one of the most powerful elements in a narrative because a narrative will arise when there is a conflict. There may have been several conflicts in a literary work; however, there is usually only one that is dominating and becomes the center of the work (Lamb, 2008). There are two basic types of conflict: internal and external. The former happens when the conflict takes place in the characters' inner-self while the latter is the clash that happens between characters and actual person or thing.

Besides conflict, plot and characters are also important elements in the narrative. Plot, different from the 'story', is the most essential component of a story that shows how the event in the story is delivered, packaged, and presented in the narrative (Barry, 2009; Lodge, 1992). To expand the plot,

characters that could be any person, identity, or entity are needed to guide readers through the stories and to help teach a lesson, entertain, and give a broader understanding of the storyline (Roser, Martinez, Fuhrken, & McDonnold, 2005).

Okky Madasari's *Entrok* which is translated into English version with the title *The Years of the Voiceless* tells a story of the struggle that Marni and Rahayu, a mother and a daughter who come from two different generations, need to face in fighting for women's rights in the male-dominated world in the post-colonial era in Indonesia. In the novel, both the mother and the daughter have their own ways and perspectives which lead them into conflict and affect their relationship. However, corresponding to Rich's theory (1976) that says mother and daughter will always long for each other's presence because of their strong bond, at the end of the novel the daughter character in *The Years of the Voiceless* comes back to her mother and wants to atone for all of her wrongdoings to her mother.

There have been several research that analyse conflicts in literary works. A study by Bulu (2018) aimed to analyse the conflicts that happen to the main characters in three short stories written by Edgar Allan Poe using Miles and Huberman's theory. Using the theory of conflict and looking into psychological aspects, Dewi, et al. (2019) found out the sources of internal conflict and the external conflicts that happen to Hannah in the movie *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher. There is also research done by Sipayung (2016) that analysed the conflicts that happen in Okky Madasari's *Maryam* from sociological aspects.

Most of the research on Okky Madasari's *The Years of the Voiceless* focuses on the gender role and discrimination towards women, using a feminist approach. However, to the writer's knowledge, there has not been any research on this novel that focuses on the conflicts in terms of the mother-daughter relationship between Marni and Rahayu.

This research focuses to analyse the conflicts that happen between Marni and Rahayu, a mother and a daughter, in Okky Madasari's *The Years of the Voiceless*. This study also analyses how the conflicts are resolved and how is the effect to the mother-daughter relationship. By using the close-reading method, this research is conducted within the framework of New Criticism, which emphasizes analyses based on the text's intrinsic elements such as plot and characters to convey the text's meaning (Bressler, 2011; Tyson, 2006). Hopefully, the results will be useful and contribute to the literary world in the field of conflict analysis in the mother-daughter relationship.

METHOD

This study is a textual analysis, therefore it is a study with a qualitative approach. Creswell & Creswell

(2018) and Denzim & Lincoln (2005) stated that the qualitative method is usually used for anthropological research as well as research that uses feminist perspective, racial discourse, critical theory, queer theory, and disability inquiry which involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach. It means that a qualitative method can be used to explore, analyse, and understand literary texts such as novels, poetry, film, and others. The data for this research were taken by doing a close reading of Okky Madasari's *The Years of the Voiceless* and focuses on the dialogue, monologue, and narration that consist of the conflict that happen between Marni and rahayu.

The data for this research is taken from an English version of an Indonesian novel written by Okky Madasari, *The Years of the Voiceless*. It is originally written in Indonesian with the title *Entrok* and was first published in 2010 by Gramedia Pustaka Utama. Meanwhile, the English version was published in 2013 by Gramedia Pustaka Utama and was translated by Nurhayat Indriyatno Mohamed. From henceforth, the novel is referred to by its English title, *The Years of the Voiceless*. This young-adult novel consists of 264 pages in the English version and 280 in the Indonesian version. Both in the English and Indonesian versions, this novel is made up of eight (8) chapters. What makes this book interesting is that each chapter has its own period of time in the postcolonial until the New Order era in Indonesia, from 1950 to 1999.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on Freytag's five-act structure (1894), there are five structures of a story in Okky Madasari's *The Years of the Voiceless* which consist of introduction, rising movement, climax, falling action, and catastrophe. In the introduction, the main characters or Rahayu and Marni are introduced as well as the setting which mostly takes place in Singget. Then in the rising movement, Rahayu's character starts to change because she wants to achieve her goals which is accepted by the society. The plot, conflicts, as well as Marni's and Rahayu's characters develop in this part. They start to grow apart as conflicts always appear between them. After that, the climax happens when Rahayu wants to marry a married man (pp. 156-158). However, when Marni's husband, Rahayu's father, pass away, Marni tries to look for her again despite the fact that Rahayu cannot be found anywhere (pp. 165-166) and they dream of each other (pp. 197- 198 & pp. 217-218). This part is considered as falling action as the plot devolves and leads to the final suspense of the story (Freytag, 1894). Even though Rahayu and Marni face several conflicts, the conflicts finally resolved in the catastrophe part in which the final outcome of a story is resolved by the choices the characters made

(Freytag, 1894). It happens when Rahayu is faced with a matter that force her to pray like what her mother always do (p. 237).

The research finds that the conflicts between Marni and Rahayu in *The Years of the Voiceless* originate from the man against man and man against self conflicts. The conflicts are resolved through Rahayu's character transformation in the story. It is also proven that the conflicts have affected the mother-daughter relationship between Marni and Rahayu. The conflicts are depicted in dialogues between Marni and Rahayu and each narration in the novel.

The sources of conflicts

There are two sources of conflicts found in *The Years of the Voiceless*. They are man against man conflict and man against self-conflict. According to Frey (1987), man against man conflict happens between characters due to different goal that the characters have. On the contrary, man against self conflict is a conflict that a character has and causes worries in themselves.

Man against man conflict between Marni and Rahayu in most cases happens due to different beliefs. Marni and Rahayu have different beliefs of faith and norms. Marni's and Rahayu's different faith is first mentioned early in the novel. Marni believes in animism and prays to the ancestors while Rahayu adheres to Islam as she is taught at school. Marni is taught by her mother to praise the ancestors, Gusti *Mbah Ibu Bapa Kuasa* (pp. 38-39). When Marni was young, she was taught by her mother that as long as she prays to Gusti, she will get everything that she wants. Nevertheless, Rahayu thinks that the traditional faith that her mother holds does not make sense to her because she has to pray outside at midnight and they have to do offerings when they want to thank Gusti for what they get. This happens because Rahayu is a Muslim who believes in Allah. She is taught by the religious teachers at school to only pray to Allah. Their different faith may happen due to the generational gap between them. The society in which they belong to has changed.

The conflicts between Marni and Rahayu that are caused by their different faiths are mostly triggered by society. At school, Rahayu gets mocked by her religious teacher and her friends because her mother prays to the ancestors.

I went into my room and waited for Mother to get back from the market. Then I heard her shriek from her room. She called Tonah and asked her where the rice cone and the grilled chicken were. I came out of my room.

"I threw them away. It's not right, it's a sin. You're a heretic." I was crying.

"Who says it's a sin?"

"Mr. Waji said so," I said, still crying.

She got even angrier. "Nduk, Rahayu! Your mother never killed anyone, never stole anything, never cheated anyone. I grilled my own chicken and cooked my own rice. How have I sinned?" (Madasari, 2013, pp. 52).

The excerpt happens after Mr. Waji, Rahayu's Islamic teacher at school, said that Marni is a sinner who does not have a religion. So, when Rahayu gets back from school, she immediately confronts her mother. Rahayu said that Marni is a heretic who worships the ancestors and does offerings. As Rahayu is taught to believe in Allah, she thinks sending prayer to Allah is sufficient. It does not need offerings for ancestor. However, Marni still believes in the ancestors' blessings. Marni does not really care about what people say about how she shows her gratitude. All that Marni cares about is that she does not harm anyone. On the contrary, Rahayu cares about what others said about her.

Frey's (1987) , states that a conflict will affect characters' personalities in a story. However, this man against man conflict only changes Rahayu's character while Marni stays the same from the introduction until the catastrophe. It is found that Rahayu is a dynamic and round character who goes through changes in the story. Rahayu's character that is round dynamic then affect the plot in *The Years of the Voiceless*, equivalent to Arp & Johnson's (2006) and Rimmon-Kenan's (2005) arguments that says a dynamic character usually goes through changes that are caused by their experiences and the changes will become an important turning point in the plot.

When Rahayu graduated from high school, Marni feels happy and grateful. As a mother, Marni never thinks that an illiterate person like her could have an educated daughter that is as clever as the children of the ward chief and teachers. Thus, she wants to make an offering but Rahayu is against it.

Marni wants to make an offering because according to her belief, Rahayu's success to graduate from high school is because the ancestors and Gusti have helped her. On the contrary, Rahayu thinks that she is able to graduate because she has worked hard for it and she gets help from Allah. The sentence "*It's embarrassing*" (p. 117) shows that she does not want her mother to make an offering as it will only make her get mocked by her friends and her teachers at school. However, the sentence "*But why was she growing even more distant?*" (p. 116) shows that Marni has already felt there is something bad going on between her and Rahayu. She felt their relationship had changed. Despite the fact that Rahayu has changed, how Marni treats her does not change even a little bit.

Their conflicts of different faith show a different attitude between the mother and her daughter. While Marni is unwavering in her belief,

she always has Rahayu in her best interest. In contrast, Rahayu's criticism of her mother's belief is often blurted out in anger or impatience, insisting on her mother's error in believing the ancestors.

The different faith that Marni and Rahayu embrace then affects their belief in norms. While Marni respects the norms in the society, Rahayu tries to live her life based on the Islamic teachings that she believes. Marni's and Rahayu's different beliefs are mostly exposed in the climax where Rahayu wants to marry a married man, but Marni is against it (p. 156-158). Marni thinks that it is wrong and such a shame to get married to a man that already has a wife. Moreover, she thinks that becoming a wife of another woman's husband could only be understood if the woman comes from a lower-class family, while Rahayu is educated and is not poor. On the contrary, Rahayu argues that a man can have up to four wives as it is allowed in the Islamic creed (pp. 157-158).

In the novel, Rahayu says "We don't want crowd" (Madasari, 2013, p. 156). It shows that Rahayu feels guilty to her mother for wanting to get married to a married man. However, it seems that Rahayu hides behind the compulsory of Islamic wedding vows rather than the wedding celebration, hoping that people will not notice that she is married to a married man. She does not want her mother to be embarrassed because people in Singget will consider Rahayu as a husband stealer.

Another source of conflict that appears in *The Years of the Voiceless* is the conflict of man against self that happens to both Rahayu and Marni. The internal conflicts then causes worries in both Rahayu and Marni, in accordance to Lamb's theory (2008) that argues the same.

For Rahayu, the internal conflict happens because she is not sure whether what she has done to her mother is right or wrong. Meanwhile, Marni's internal conflict revolves around her questioning why people in Singget, including her daughter, always go against her faith.

Rahayu's internal conflicts happen because she does not understand why her mother keeps worshipping the ancestors while people have already told her that it is wrong (Madasari, 2013, p.50). In addition, Rahayu questions her decision of abandoning her mother for having a different faith from her. The sentence "*Am I an unworthy daughter? It's been a year since I last went home. They came to visit once and I didn't have enough time to swap stories.*" (Madasari, 2013, p. 128) shows that deep inside, Rahayu realizes that it is wrong for not coming home. Nevertheless, later on, she on thinking that her mother cannot understand her so that she will do the same. She wants to keep her gratitude towards her mother inside her heart. She is aware that if she comes home, only arguments and fights will happen between her and her mother. It indicates that she does

not want her relationship with her mother getting worse (p. 128).

Rahayu's internal conflict is also shown in part when she reflects on religious teaching she has had at school (pp. 53-54; 78) and when Rahayu gets mocked by her friend at school. Rahayu says "*I really hate mother.*" (p. 92) after getting bad treatments from her teacher and her friends. So, it can be interpreted that Rahayu's feeling toward her mother does not simply diminish on their own, but it is triggered by how society treats her and her mother.

In terms of Marni's internal conflicts, they happen because she does not understand why people in Singget, including her daughter, go against her just because she has a different faith. "I had been taught to worship Gusti, so how could I suddenly be expected to stop? Oh... Nduk, why has school made you less human?" (pp. 117-118).

Marni wonders why her daughter forces her to believe in Allah that she does not know about. She takes the blame on the school and the society that has made her daughter change. When Marni was young, there was no school to attend and no one tells her to learn about religion.

Regardless of everything, Marni keeps holding on to her faith because she always wants the best for Rahayu. Marni does not get bothered when people call her a sinner, but she gets hurt every time it comes to her daughter. She does everything because she wants the best for Rahayu, but in return, her daughter said that she is a sinner and always goes against her (p. 117).

Also when Rahayu wants to get married to Amri, a man that already has a wife, Marni gets confused and even more questions why her daughter wants to do such a thing.

Getting an education had made her even more stubborn. She always felt that she knew best and that she was always right. How was marrying a married man right? Rather than a sin, she said. She's the one to talk. Isn't it a sin to steal someone else's husband? Oh Nduk... stealing what belongs to another person is a sin. Oh, have a mercy on my child. (Madasari, 2013, p. 158).

The textual evidence above strengthen the fact that Marni and Rahayu have different belief on what is right and what is wrong. Marni holds firm to her belief in the norms that exist in the society while Rahayu always believes in what is taught in Islam. It can be said that different beliefs on faith and norms are the main conflict between Marni and her daughter, Rahayu.

Hence, the sources of the conflicts between Marni and Rahayu in Okky Madasari's *The Years of the Voiceless* are man against man conflict that happen due to different faiths and beliefs that Marni and Rahayu have, Rahayu's internal conflicts that

revolves around how she questions her decision, and Marni's internal conflicts that do not understand why people always go against her for having a different faith.

How the conflicts are resolved

It is found that the conflicts in *The Years of the Voiceless* are resolved after Rahayu accept her mother's belief. Even though at first Rahayu still feels wrong for accepting Marni's belief, in the falling action she can finally accept it fully because she loves her mother.

When Rahayu wants to help people whose houses are about to be evicted (p. 237). Rahayu has done everything that she can including going against the government. However, everything that she has done does not change anything. The government still wants to evict the region. Thus, people in the region pray to the ancestors together and make an offering. Here, it shows how Rahayu who always does not want to do what her mother does, praying to the ancestors, starts to do the same thing. Rahayu realizes that it is a sin but she cannot stop and cannot think about any other thing to save her people. So, she gives up and does the same thing as what people in the place she currently lives do. She says,

Oh Allah, I would sin once again. But what was the bigger sin— letting them just die, or letting them pray to the gods that they believed in? Mother, you would surely laugh if you could see what your daughter was doing. (Madasari, 2013, p. 237).

The reason Rahayu finally chooses to pray to the ancestors is because she wants to save people whose houses are going to be evicted. Another reason is that she has lost her loved one, Amri, who always guides her on the right path which is believing in Allah. This event then leads her to understand, respect, and accept Marni's belief fully.

Thus, it can be said the conflict between Marni and Rahayu happens because they have different beliefs can be finally resolved and their mother-daughter relationship becomes stronger again.

Mother-daughter relationship

It can be assumed that in *The Years of the Voiceless*, the mother-daughter relationship between Marni and Rahayu is dynamic. Even though it is not mentioned in the novel, it is implied that the relationship between Marni and Rahayu at first is good. Nevertheless, it starts to get worse after Rahayu is taught to praise Allah and her religious teacher says that her mother is a sinner. As mentioned in the novel, "Mr. Waji, my Islamic studies teacher in primary school said that what Mother did was a sin. In front of the whole class he said that Mother didn't have a religion." (Madasari, 2013, p. 52). After that happens, Rahayu's attitude towards her mother has changed.

She always goes against her mother and does not want to pray the way her mother does.

In spite of the conflict, the strong bond in the mother-daughter relationship between Marni and Rahayu is shown through how they dream about each other. In Marni's dream, Rahayu is crying on the bank of a river (pp. 197-198) while Rahayu is dreaming about seeing her mother at her father's grave (pp. 217-18).

Their dreams about each other can be understood that Marni and Rahayu, as a mother and a daughter, still loves each other and gets worried because they have not met for a quite long time. Their dreams happen when they lose their husbands which explain that subconsciously when they experience a bad thing, they are longing for each other's presences.

Marni's and Rahayu's dreams of each other imply that they have a strong emotional bond as mother and daughter even though they have been separated for a quite long time. In accordance with Fischer's (1991) theory that says mother and daughter may share the same feelings as they have a strong emotional bond. At the end of *The Years of the Voiceless*, Rahayu can finally accept her mother's belief and her relationship with Marni gets better. Hence, the mother-daughter relationship between Marni and Rahayu is dynamic as it is affected by conflicts that happen between them.

CONCLUSION

This research aims to see the sources of conflict and how they are played out and resolved in the mother-daughter relationship in Okky Madasari's *The Years of the Voiceless*. The findings show that the conflicts in the novel originate from external and internal conflicts. The external conflicts happen between Marni and Rahayu which is considered as man against man conflict while the internal conflicts come from Marni's and Rahayu's self-conflict.

Both the internal and external conflicts happen due to different beliefs of faith and norms that Marni and Rahayu have. The external conflicts appear every time Rahayu gets a lecture from her teachers at school about religion or when Marni wants to do the prayer as what she has taught by her mother when she was young. As for Marni's internal conflicts, they revolve around her questioning why her daughter cannot accept her faith while she does everything for Rahayu's sake. On the other side, Rahayu's internal conflicts emerge every time she starts to remember her mother and question whether what she has done to her mother is right or wrong. It can be said that most of the conflicts that happen between Marni and Rahayu are triggered by society.

Hence, conflicts that happen between mothers and daughters are usually caused by the generation gap that leads to the emergence of different

perspectives and lifestyles. While mothers stay the same based on what they have learned when they were young, their daughters are exposed to new perspectives that come from society. In this novel, Marni is a static character who does not change through the story while Rahayu is a dynamic character who receives various perspectives from society. So, it affects how she chooses her life path and how she treats her mother.

While the cause of conflict in *The Years of the Voiceless* is the daughter is a dynamic character, other literary works may have different findings on what are the sources of the conflict. Other literary works may find the mother is a dynamic character who ignites conflict in the story.

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