

**A LACANIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTER KARMAN
IN AHMAD TOHARI'S *KUBAH***

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Abstrak

Teori psikologi postruktural Jacques Lacan sudah memiliki pengaruh besar dalam pengertian cara pikir manusia. Hal ini nampak dalam ilmu sastra, di mana beberapa peneliti — termasuk Lacan sendiri — sudah menerapkan teori ini untuk lebih memahami karya sastra. Salah satu karya yang dapat dibedah dengan teori ini ialah Kubah karya Ahmad Tohari, sebuah novel yang terbit pada tahun 1982 dan membahas penebusan dosa seorang mantan komunis yang telah ditahan dua belas tahun. Artikel ini menggunakan teori psikoanalisis Lacan untuk menunjukkan bagaimana tokoh tersebut, Karman, merasa didorong untuk menemukan keutuhan yang telah hilang, serta bagaimana dorongan ini menyebabkan dia untuk masuk Partai Komunis lalu memeluk kembali agama Islam. Meskipun novel ini berakhir dengan harapan untuk masa depan, artikel ini akan membuktikan bahwa Karman belum menemukan keutuhan yang dicarinya.

Kata kunci: Psikoanalisis Lacan, Kubah, Ahmad Tohari

Abstract

Jacques Lacan's poststructuralist theories of psychology have greatly affected modern understandings of the human psyche. This is evident in literary studies, where numerous thinkers — including Lacan himself — have applied these theories to better understand works of literature. One work which benefits from such an application is Ahmad Tohari's Kubah, a 1982 novel on the ex-communist Karman's seeming redemption after spending twelve years as a political prisoner. This paper will use a Lacanian psychoanalysis to show how Karman's need to find wholeness, one which has been lost since before his birth, led to his various activities, including the joining of the Communist Party and his return to Islam. Although the novel ends on a hopeful note, it will be shown that Karman has not truly found the wholeness for which he has searched.

Keywords: Lacanian psychoanalysis, Kubah, Ahmad Tohari

Background

Any well-developed literary character will, like a real life person, undergo a series of trials and tribulations which leads him or her to change: to adapt to new circumstances, to overcome personal shortcomings, or to grow in maturity owing to unforeseen challenges. A serious character may learn how to laugh, while a bully may learn the consequences of violence. Even those characters who do not appear to change may have, in fact, attained a broader understanding of why their own character traits are important, and thus achieved a greater understanding of their own position within society and the community. These changes often are a driving force behind a story-line, and when they are not, they serve to shape the plot as it unfolds.

Character development, if handled by a skilled author, will be presented organically, as occurring naturally, with a logical basis which can be tracked. As such, the psychological development of a character—and, thus, the reason why a story develops in a certain manner—can be tracked as a logical progression and can conform to established models,

particularly theories of psychology. As evidence, in this article we discuss *Kubah*, a novel by Ahmad Tohari which was published in 1980.

The book *Kubah* is the story of Karman's fall and retribution, emphasizing his search for fullness. Karman first attempts to find completeness through religion, family, and romantic love, before turning to the semblance of completeness presented by the Indonesian Communist Party and its ideology. However, his religious wife destabilises this self-identity and, when the Party is annihilated, Karman's communist identity is destroyed with it. By the end of the novel Karman has seemingly found completeness, once again, in religion. This study will explain, as comprehensively as the imperfect means allow, Karman's development and show how his renewed "wholeness" is just as fleeting as it was when he was younger. For this we turn to psychological theory.

Literature Review

Various theories of psychology have long been applied to literature. Wellek and

Warren (1949: 75) found four major types of psychological approaches: the psychology of the writer (the oldest, having been recognised since the Classic Age), of the creative process, of one or more characters within a work, and the audience. Later writers have provided subdivisions of the above typology: SuwardiEndraswara (2008: ix–xii), for instance, divides the creative process into both the creativity of writers and of readers. The psychological models used by such studies can be based on the work of several thinkers, most often that of Sigmund Freud.

Another possible psychological approach to literature is that of Jacques Lacan, which is based on an understanding of language as something which cannot provide an absolute meaning, a primordial sense of belonging which humans crave but are unable to obtain. Though Lacan promoted several ideas pertinent to psychological development, only a few key points, derived from (Sarup, 2011: 5), will be brought up here.

Lacan finds that humans become aware of their need for, and lack

of, wholeness during the mirror stage, when they recognise their individual bodies and begin creating a self-image which they perceive as lacking. They attempt to formalise said image after learning language, but soon recognise that language is incapable of fully expressing their libidinal desires. Around this time the recognise a controlling force, termed the “Name-of-the-Father”, to which they must defer; this event is termed the Oedipus complex.

As a result of the Oedipal event, humans no longer identify themselves as part of a primordial whole, but as individuals defined in terms of their linguistically¹ formulated relationship with others. As language provides no absolute meaning or understanding, it follows that a conscious framing of the relationship between individuals cannot be absolute. However, they long for the sense of wholeness which was—in Lacan’s theory—only present in the womb, before sexual differentiation. They seek it, at times manipulating others to selfishly obtain a semblance of it, only to be further disappointed when wholeness

is not found. The Real, an extra-linguistic entity which *is*, is inconceivable. A post-Oedipal individual is only capable of framing an individual understanding of the Real through the visually-based Imaginary (that which appears to be true) and the linguistically-based Symbolic (that which is formulated as true); neither is capable of revealing the Real. A true understanding of one's self is thus unobtainable.

Analysis

Kubah does not show Karman's psychological development as he experiences it, introducing the reader to the character after he has already spent 42 years searching for an unattainable sense of wholeness. This search is linguistically formulated through flashbacks, allowing readers to begin to perceive (but never really understand) it. For the purposes of this paper, Karman's search will be explored chronologically, as he consciously experienced it, thus illustrating the causes and effects of various stages in Karman's development.

Karman was born in 1935, but he is only discussed as a subject sometime near

the beginning of the National Revolution, when he is about ten years old (61). By this time he has undergone Lacan's five stages of self-loss: he has become sexually-differentiated, received differentiated libidinal urges and realised that they cannot be fulfilled, begun differentiating himself with the Other and recognised his inherent lack of wholeness, language, and authority in the Name-of-the-Father. By the time he is introduced as a subject in *Kubah*, Karman is already on his quest for wholeness.

At first Karman attempts to satisfy his libidinal desires through Rifah, a girl several years his younger. Karman and his family live on almost nothing but cassava, owing to their state after since the death of Karman's father. Rifah, meanwhile, has been spoiled by her rich father, Haji Bakir. In order to obtain rice, and thus satisfy what he understands his libidinal desires to be, Karman makes use of the Imaginary and Symbolic truth that Rifah enjoys playing with whirligigs, and will thus do anything to obtain one. He makes a whirligig from coconut leaves, and is seemingly able to satisfy these libidinal urges: Rifah takes the whirligig

and, in return, Karman and his brother are offered plates of rice with side dishes, which the two eat gluttonously.

Karman is then brought to work for Haji Bakir's family, doing various household chores and babysitting Rifah. His goal is not to help the family, but rather to fulfill his needs for food and shelter. They provide both, as well as three quintals of rice for his family. This is likewise selfish; Karman subconsciously craves the positive reception that such actions will bring, allowing him to seek a sense of wholeness through his family and the community. Karman identifies his benefactor as the Name-of-the-Father. His deference is manifested in his diligence and, ultimately, his stand against the crazed goat that attacks Rifah. This is likewise not an action borne of respect, but a selfish act meant to avoid negative consequences which would damage whatever sense of wholeness he has developed.

Throughout his childhood, Karman does not realise that the Imaginary and the Symbolic which he uses to understand what he experiences do not reveal the

truth. He does not realise that what he imagines, what he consciously formulates, and what is Real are disparate. He is thus fortunate that his fellow villagers, though driven by their own selfish desires, do not manipulate Karman into actions which are overly damaging to his own self-image. Karman is instead able to construct a positive view of his relationships with others, generating a semblance of wholeness in which he can develop as a subject. Although he eventually becomes aware that there is something he is lacking, including a job and romantic love, he imagines that it can be easily fulfilled. He believes that he will find a job easily and that Rifah will be ready to become his wife.

However, this unfounded belief opens Karman to more malevolent manipulation, noted by the narrator as inherently selfish and sparked in part by Karman's gullibility. Members of the local branch of the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, or PKI) consider Karman to be an "excellent seed" ("bibitunggul"; 86) which can be exploited for the importance of the Party and, more importantly, for

their own personal goals. Thus, the civil servant Triman and teacher Margo approach Karman, subtly forcing the youth to consciously recognise his lack of wholeness and thus driving him away from those who could mitigate the Party's influence, including Haji Bakir.

The PKI begin the process by addressing one of Karman's needs. Triman, who is known as a member of the Indonesian National Party despite his affiliation with the PKI, manipulates Karman's uncle Hasyim into sending the youth to his home to discuss employment. Karman, in a selfish act of searching for the wholeness he believes a job will provide. Karman gives his application to Triman and is told that, as payment, he need only show gratitude to Triman, a condition which Karman accepts immediately. This defines their relationship. Triman, and by association Margo, have asked to become identified with the Name-of-the-Father, a status which Karman grants by accepting their terms. Karman accepts these terms for selfish reasons: he subconsciously fears losing their support if he refused to show gratitude, which would bring back the

lack of wholeness he felt without a job. He believes this act to have been a minor one, which benefited him more than Triman. "His eyes sparkled, his heart filled with hope"² and he dreamed of climbing through the ranks because of his superior education (95). However, this imagined truth is not the Real: by recognising Triman and Margo as the Name-of-the-Father, he has recognised their power over him and implicitly promised to defer to their wishes. His own subconscious desires have been subjugated to theirs, which are not meant to benefit him. He becomes further from the sense of wholeness he has craved, "not in the least bit aware of the human hands now pulling him"³ (96)

The manifestations of the Name-of-the-Father, Triman and Margo, help Karman gain employment at the *camat*'s office. They then further manipulate Karman's need for employment, telling him that he must pass a test to become a full-time employee and giving him reading material which they state will help him pass. This material, including "theories of class conflict, stories of collective farms in Russia, and even

theories on the history of materialism”(96),⁴ is meant as an indoctrination into communism and consciously formulated to make Karman more malleable. Unaccustomed to being manipulated by persons with selfish drives which are irreconcilable with his own, Karman studies diligently, viewing the readings, which are ultimately detrimental to his own goals, as aiding his search for the wholeness.

Karman’s sense of wholeness is further manipulated by the PKI after the test: he is failed by the “steel-toothed man” (laki-laki bergigi baja putih), a high-ranking PKI member and government employee. This destroys Karman’s sense of wholeness, leaving him especially vulnerable. Three months later, after receiving further indoctrination, he believes that he has found some wholeness in communism.

By this time Karman’s sense of wholeness has taken another blow: he has learned that Rifah, whom he had thought would be his wife if he asked, is to be married to another man. Rifah being unable to fulfill Karman’s desire for a wife makes Karman aware that the

Imaginary is not the Real, leading Karman to question his understanding of himself and his relationships with others. He is at first unable to accept this condition, thinking “If I were richer than Abdul Rahman [Rifah’s fiancé], perhaps Haji Bakir would erase the word ‘too late’ and I’d be accepted as his son-in-law”⁵ (100), a symbolic formation of the situation that is heavily influenced by the PKI propaganda he had read, but ultimately this loss of wholeness leads to a “feeling of disappointment, anger, and shame mix[ing] in Karman’s heart. As a result, he began to feel vengeance and hate towards Haji Bakir,”⁶ and ultimately religion.

Karman views Haji Bakir as a metonym of Islam: “Haji Bakir had a mosque, and for Karman, that old man was a religious figure. And the worldly incarnation of religion in Pegaten was Haji Bakir!”⁷ (101). In order to exact his revenge on Haji Bakir, Karman abandons Islam, hoping to assert power over the manifestation of the Name-of-the-Father to which he once deferred and reclaim his individuality and sense of wholeness. This effort is supported by Trimman and

Margo, both of intend to bring Karman closer to the PKI and thus increase their own standing. They drive Karman's hatred by emphasising Haji Bakir selfish manipulation of Karman, especially in light of the rich man's ownership of land which had once belonged to Karman's father.

Their linguistic formulation of Haji Bakir's selfish needs are effective. Karman's perceived increase in his standing with Margo and Triman, and the accompanying sense of wholeness, drives him his hatred and metaphoric revenge further. He no longer goes to Haji Bakir's mosque, and eventually stops his mandatory prayers altogether. This abandoning of religion takes its ultimate physical manifestation when Karman destroys the small vessel meant for holding ablution water ("penampung air wudu"; 104) behind his home. The vessel, a symbol of Islam because of its use for prayer, is likewise representative of Haji Bakir. Thus, the destruction of the vessel becomes the metaphoric destruction of Haji Bakir as a realised form of the Name-of-the-Father. Karman believes himself to have

reasserted his power over his own body, rejecting the manifestation of the Name-of-the-Father which disappointed him and giving a semblance of wholeness. It becomes an "actual sign of the shifting values which had enveloped him"⁸ (104)

This sense of wholeness, however, does not last long, as Karman's action separates him from his family. Karman's uncle Hasyim, a former Hisbollah⁹ fighter, attempts to tell him that "disappointment [over Rifah] should not affect [Karman's] relationship with God"¹⁰ (105). Karman, in return, argues that he has not forsaken Haji Bakir – and thus Allah – only because of Rifah, but because Haji Bakir owns land which was once his father's, which Karman perceives to have been taken unjustly. The two argue, until Hasyim futilely orders "at least, return to your God"¹¹, to which Karman answers "Let me be myself, Uncle".¹² The two separate in anger, Hasyim thinking "if I were still part of Hisbollah, if I still had a pistol in my hand, a single bullet would be enough to shut the mouth of that forsaken child"¹³ (110).

Karman linguistically rejects Hasyim as a manifestation of the Name-of-the-

Father, asserting himself to be an individual whom Hasyim cannot control. This has two subconscious explanations. Firstly, by insisting that Karman return to the mosque and make peace with Haji Bakir, Hasyim casts himself as a cohort of Haji Bakir, working – in Karman’s understanding – to subjugate Karman. In response, Karman’s metonymy of Haji Bakir as a face of Islam expands to include his uncle. The second, more selfish reason, is related to Karman’s self-image. By confronting the youth and attempting to assert his influence over him, Hasyim has damaged their relationship and, as a result, Karman’s self-image. He considers the value of his relationship with his uncle less than the loss he has incurred, focusing instead on his perceivedly more beneficial relationship with Trimman; which he subconsciously considers more likely to lead to wholeness.

Karman’s relationship with the PKI is tested after Rifah’s husband dies in a motorcycle accident, leaving her a widow – and, thus, available. Karman has been unable to forget Rifah, despite having become interested in another

woman, Marni. His need for the wholeness which he believes Rifah capable of providing is enough to overcome his hatred of Haji Bakir, allowing him to visit their home during the dead husband’s viewing. There Karman realises that “every part of Rifah’s body still had its charms”¹⁴ (116) and once again attempts to understand Rifah through the Symbolic, formulating in his mind a belief that she would gladly marry him so that she could be introduced to the important people in the area. He selfishly desires her, subconsciously believing that she can fulfill his needs, while continuing to hate Haji Bakir. These conflicting needs, the need to resist the old manifestation of the Name-of-the-Father and the libidinal need for Rifah’s companionship, confuse him.

Before Karman can act, Trimman intervenes. His own subconscious desire for power, as well as the Steel-Toothed Man’s linguistically-formulated instruction, leads him to take Karman to the provincial capital at Semarang. Karman agrees, but he is unable to consciously formulate his reason for coming. He only recognises

that he has been unable to refuse Triman. In context, Karman may have subconsciously viewed the trip as an escape from his confusion, and thus a path to a more stable identity.

Karman and Trimango to Semarang with Margo and Suti, a woman who “used the party for her lust, or channeled her lust for the party. Same difference”¹⁵ (122) and had been consciously chosen to divert Karman’s libidinal urges. This she does skillfully. When Karman is car sick, she rubs “Karman’s nape, chest, and stomach with Tiger brand balsam oil. Her touch showed her skill. Sometimes she pinched Karman’s thigh”¹⁶ (121). She manipulates him, awakening his sexual drives and making him increasingly conscious of his lack of wholeness. To aid her manipulation, Triman and Margo soon return to Pegaten, leaving Karman and Suti alone. “In a lodgement which prioritised the number of guests, [Suti] had found a new toy. Fresh and virginal, too”¹⁷ (122). Karman’s sexual urges, once awakened, become subconscious needs which must be fulfilled to find a sense of wholeness, and lead him to have sex with

a woman he has just met, an act which society disapproves.

At first this does not affect Karman’s conscious mind. He defines his actions with Suti as “nothing but lust”¹⁸ (123) and focuses his thoughts on Rifah, attempting to find the courage to face Haji Bakir and receive permission to take Rifah as his wife. This internal tumult only worsens after he sneaks to her home late at night and she orders him return in the morning. This response, which once again shows Karman that the Symbolic is not the Real, dashes his hopes of uniting with Rifah without having to confront the man whom he hates. He feels like “a small animal. Ashamed and sad”¹⁹ (128), and when he returns home he dreams that he fights Haji Bakir’s goat while his PKI comrades “clench their fists and yell like crazy people”²⁰ (129). The fight against the goat becomes a metaphor for winning Rifah’s love. Karman subconsciously senses that the PKI is hindering him, and that Rifah— although she needs him - will not accept him as her husband, but has yet to be able to linguistically formulate and understand this.

Karman is unable to “overcome the doubt which has been wrestling with him”²¹ (132) and does not approach Rifah. While he avoids her, the PKI sends Suti to act as his lover, coming early in the morning so she can be seen leaving at sunrise. Karman’s reputation is put under the shadow of fornication (*zina*), a sin in Islam (Al-Quran 17:32). The community “accuses Karman of living a life tainted by fornication”²² (133), and although he denies it, his protests fall on deaf ears. His reputation within the community, and thus the self-image he derives from it, is destroyed. It is then that the PKI pushes Karman to propose to Rifah.

The Party perceives that Haji Bakir will likely refuse Karman’s proposal, and their Imagined truth is fulfilled. Haji Bakir rejects Karman, saying he wants Rifah to marry “a man who can counsel her on Earth and in the afterlife”²³ (133): a devout Muslim, unlike Karman. For the second time, Karman’s hopes are dashed, and “his hatred for Haji Bakir has become complete”²⁴ (134), a situation desired by the PKI for its own selfish needs. Karman attempts to find a sense of wholeness by abusing his position and asserting himself

over the man who he once recognised as the manifestation of the Name-of-the-Father: when gangs of robbers attack the village, Karman has Haji Bakir arrested and held for a month as a conspirator in the robberies.

While taking his revenge on Haji Bakir and attempting to assert himself over the Name-of-the-Father, Karman marries Marni as a replacement for Rifah. She is expected to provide what Karman is lacking, a wife, and thus give Karman the sense of wholeness which he lost after being rejected by Haji Bakir. This situation shows another degree of selfishness in Karman’s choice: he hopes to convert Marni’s family to Communism – “Karman could surely make Marni’s family into people who think ‘progressively’” (141) – and thus increase his standing with the PKI. He likely expects to be able to raise the couple’s children to be communists as well.

However, this symbolic representation is not realised. Karman’s sense of wholeness which he derives from his relationship with Marni is more than he is willing to risk by forcing her to abandon religion. He does not dare do it

(143), subconsciously feeling that he will lose too much of the wholeness he needs. As such he is ridiculed by the PKI – especially Margo, who challenges Karman at a PKI meeting and accuses the younger man of “allowing his wife to smoke the opium [of religion]”²⁵ (143). In response, Karman asserts himself, using the ideology taught by Margo and Triman; he uses the ways of the Name-of-the-Father to assert himself over it. Although in the end Margo praises Karman for his debating skills, Karman – angered by the debate – has suffered a blow to his sense of wholeness because of his lost standing within the PKI. Despite this, over the following five years he fully supports the party’s programmes in Pegaten and the surrounding area.

What sense of wholeness Karman has found with the PKI is nearly annihilated following the PKI-sponsored 30 September Movement coup in 1965. The backlash against the movement means that Karman’s membership is no longer a positive asset, but a liability which can lead to his death. He becomes a shadow of a man, using his relationship with other people to self-identify as somebody who

is going to be killed any day, subhuman and without standing. He is no longer confident, but easily surprised: “a spoon falling from the table was enough to make him jump. Someone knocking on the door was enough to make Karman faint from fear”²⁶ (150). He recognises that the PKI, a manifestation of the Name-of-the-Father, must answer to yet another, more powerful manifestation of the Name-of-the-Father: the people and the government.

In a selfish attempt to save himself while finding a sense of wholeness in his relationships with others, Karman joins other PKI members in “suddenly learning to pray again”²⁷ (151), an act which pleases Marni. This is, however, not enough. He feels that he is in danger and flees his home in Pegaten in order to ensure his own continuance. He hides in a neighbour’s yard and sees that what he Imagined has come true: there are men coming to kill him, dragging Triman along. Once they pass, Karman escapes and hides at a nearby cemetery in LubukWaru, sleeping in the sand like an animal. He has abandoned everything to ensure his survival: his home, Marni,

their children, and the PKI. He is left with only himself, and thus cannot feel whole. He attempts to consciously formulate his situation, one which his subconscious has already recognised: “isolated, hunted, and not knowing what would happen to him tomorrow or the next day”²⁸ (159). The question of his upcoming death, and what he has done, hangs over Karman like a “giant, frightening ghost”²⁹ (159).

Karman begins to consciously recognise how he has been manipulated, aided by his subconscious (taking the form of a pro-communist shadow). Although this Symbolic realisation cannot fully convey the Real, it helps Karman become aware of his flaws. He begins to recognise the consequences of his actions, and does not resign himself to fate like the shadow suggests: he insists that he is, at least partially, responsible for his fate. He linguistically recognises how he became a communist, how he had searched for wholeness in the PKI, although he does not understand the Reality of the situation nor the future:

“[I began following Margo] first, because of heartbreak. I was

irritated because Haji Bakir wouldn't let me marry his daughter. Second, I was irritated because my parents' rice fields were unfairly being run by Haji Bakir. By joining Margo I wanted to take vengeance for this pain. Or, if possible, I wanted to take back the rice fields. Ah, I didn't know that I would be brought into this frightful situation. I didn't understand.”³⁰ (160–161)

“[Karman's] soul was shaken”³¹ (168) by the events following the 30 September movement and his exile. Without another person to talk to, a relationship through which he can understand himself, he suffers “extreme torture”³² (170). By recognising his situation and how he has arrived there, Karman enables himself to search for wholeness in a place other than the PKI – assuming he survives.

When Karman meets a simple rafts-and fisherman named Kasthagethek, he is able to find some semblance of respect, and thus build up his own self-image. Kasthagethek has not heard that Karman is a wanted man and still treats him as a civil servant, asking questions like “would Mr Karman be willing to eat the rice of a raftsman?”³³ (174) and showing his deference. Karman is also startled by how the man seems to have found

wholeness in Islam, praying diligently and later stating that his wife is never alone, but “always together ... with God”³⁴ (176). Karman is struck by this, and fondly recalls his childhood and the time he had spent at the mosque, one of “peace and constancy” (“kedamaian danketeguhan”; 170). This gives Karman belief in a future, a hope that his selfish goal of self-preservation can be realised. He has begun to imagine that he may find wholeness in Islam, like Kastagethék, but is unable to reconcile this with the teachings of the PKI. He does linguistically formulate that he was wrong to join the Party, thinking “if I had known from the beginning that the party could launch such a bloody attack as a few months ago, I would never have wanted to be a member”³⁵ (179) but cannot abandon their teachings. He can thus not reach a semblance of wholeness.

As dawn breaks, Karman must ensure his own safety and leave Kastagethék. He uses his status as a manifestation of the Name-of-the-Father, spurred from his recognition as a civil servant, to ask Kastagethék to “keep their meeting a secret”³⁶ (181). The raftsmen agree, and

Karman departs, full of hope. He finds a new hiding place, at the Astana Lopajang cemetery, where he is able to hold out for thirty-four days. In this time he is able to “continuously develop an escape plan, full of optimism”³⁷ (184), but he soon falls ill, having consumed nothing but raw meat and dirty water. In this condition he is captured and sent to Buru Island, lacking even a semblance of wholeness.

In isolation Karman’s sense of wholeness implodes, falling even further after Marni must divorce him to ensure her and the children’s continued wellbeing. After reading her letter, he thinks “but ... Marni is my wife!”³⁸ (183), consciously defining her as his possession and not an individual; as such, her leaving is not understood as being for her own good, but as part of him being taken away. This destroys what is left of his sense of wholeness, of his understanding of himself: he only has the PKI, which now disappoints him. As a result of the uncertainty over his own identity, Karman’s body becomes “thin and weak. His gaze cannot be understood except as total despair. His brows descend,

molded in the shape of his bones. His moustache and whiskers make Karman's pale face seem a mess"³⁹ (17).

Karman has become dishevelled, his unkempt body reflecting the struggle within; he feels no need to better himself as he sees no need to live. The imam who is meant to bring the prisoners back to religion takes an interest in Karman's health and tells Karman he must return to religion to fill the emptiness in his heart. Karman states that he still believes in God. This, however, does not offer him even a semblance of wholeness: he is "ashamed to admit" it, having been indoctrinated against religion for so many years (27). However, to selfishly ensure his own continuance – and thus continue his own search for wholeness – Karman agrees to the imam's terms, though they do not immediately bring a sense of belonging.

After he is released from Buru, Karman's sense of wholeness and view of himself remains decimated. He finds himself confused by the changes in society. He no longer considers himself one with society, and thus cannot imaginarily or symbolically judge his

relationships with others to establish his own identity; there is "clearly a sharp dividing line between him and the world around him ... [As such] Karman feels so small; nothing. Not even an ant."⁴⁰ (7). This feeling of nothingness, a loss of identity, leads Karman to position himself as less than everyone else, always wondering how they will accept him; as a result, he is unsure where he should go: "does my village, especially its people, want me back?"⁴¹ (31) he asks. After praying at a mosque, but not feeling comfortable there, Karman visits his cousin Gono's home. He is unsure if Gono still lives there. "In confusion and nervousness, Karman begins to turn around ... he once again feels like a foreign object on Earth."⁴² (32)

When he meets his son Rudio at Gono's house, Karman is unable to make the first move: considering himself less than an ant, he does not have the confidence to act. Even when Rudio greets him, there is silence as Karman attempts to "swallow the feelings which were about to erupt"⁴³ (34). Slowly he recognises that he will be well received. Gono's wife hugs Karman tightly and

asks him to live with them (35), Karman's mother and uncle welcome him back with open arms, as does Haji Bakir. Even his ex-wife Marniis pleased to see him, saying "I know you never wanted us to separate, and I didn't either"⁴⁴ (198). This allows Karman to perceive that others still considered him important, and thus begin to rebuild his sense of identity and wholeness.

Karman's sense of wholeness, or more precisely his *perception* of wholeness, reaches its ultimate textual realisation after the community trusts him to build a dome for the mosque. As he looks at it, he hopes to "find what was lost"⁴⁵ (210), a loss of which he became consciously aware while in exile. He seemingly finds recognition, and thus a more positive identity, through this task: his uncle sells three goats to fund the project, and the villagers praise Karman's craftsmanship. He feels as if "he has seen the route to return to togetherness and equality ... from which he had been excommunicated"⁴⁶ (211). The dome, and the community's reaction to it, overwrites Karman's sense of loss with a semblance of wholeness and a positive identity.

This dome should not, of course, be understood as a mere dome, but as a metaphor for Islam, one which Karman understands at a pre-linguistic (subconscious) level but dare not express. He finds the dome to be a crown for the mosque, the place where he and his fellow Muslims can pray unto Allah. It serves as the highest point of the mosque, as Allah is omnipresent in Islam; all were created to serve Allah, and Allah controls everything; thus, all must bow to Him (Al-Quran 51:56). The dome also has another physical property which runs parallel to Karman's understanding of Allah. It has no start and no end, but is a complete circle. There is no breaking of this link, and no matter how it is viewed the dome is perceived as maintaining this unity. Likewise, Allah does not have a beginning nor end, nor is He broken; He is one (Al-Quran 112:1-4).

The dome, like Allah (and, by extension, Islam), does not differentiate between those of different backgrounds, so long as they find respite within the established boundaries; it protects everything from perilous conditions which may cause suffering. More

explicitly, the dome will protect all those under it from the elements, and Allah will protect Muslims who repent their sins (*tawbah*) and take responsibility for their actions. Just as nobody is unfit to find protection under the dome, so it is taught that Allah forgives all, bar idolatry (Al-Quran 4:48; 39:53). This includes Karman.

However, as Karman is merely human, whatever sense of belonging he has found in his understanding of Islam will, ultimately, not be permanent. He will continue to search for further gratification, such as in his libidinal urges. Karman's former wife, Marni, has remarried, and though he has verbally reneged any claim to her as his wife, he has also reminisced of her beauty. Karman feels himself to love her: when she divorced him while he was in prison, Karman fell deeply ill, feeling that she had betrayed his love. Marni herself, likewise, has stated that she cannot forget Karman and that their divorce was only because of their situation (188). She has consciously formulated an understanding of her feelings towards Karman and, upon meeting, formulated a rejection of him,

emphasising that she now belongs to Parta. Despite this, their libidinal drives remain evident. Upon their first meeting after his release from prison, Karman feels his heart beating more quickly than usual. Marni, already torn between Karman and Parma, feels herself increasingly drawn to Karman during Tini's engagement ceremony.

Another possible source of temptation is Karman's one-time sweetheart, Rifah. Separating from her, led Karman to realise that he could never find a sense of wholeness in her, despite his libidinal and conscious urges. However, he still has feelings for her, as evidenced by his treatment of Marni as a replacement for Rifah, linguistically comparing the two. Although Rifah's feelings are not explicitly stated, she is implied to have loved Karman as well: Jabir tells Tini "did you know my mother almost became your father's wife?"⁴⁷ (187), suggesting that, had conditions been different, she would have accepted his proposal. Their feelings for each other afterwards are not made explicit in *Kubah*. However, most likely they subconsciously retain vestigial libidinal drives. Unlike Marni, Rifah has

not remarried since she became a widow, allowing her greater freedom in her interactions with Karman.

By the time Karman has completed the dome, neither Marni nor Rifah are discussed. They are, however, still expected to have a role in Karman's life. He will continue to be involved in his children's lives, and can thus be expected to frequently meet Marni. Rifah, meanwhile, has become his sister-in-law, and thus they will often interact. Their libidinal drives and individual needs for wholeness will thus have time to develop and be expressed pre-linguistically. At first, they may stand closer together or unknowingly spend more time in each other's company. By the time they begin to consciously understand the significance of their actions, their libidinal drives shall have been concretised and thus more difficult to control.

The implications are clear. Karman will find himself lacking a partner, be it romantic or sexual, as will Rifah; Marni will likewise perceive (a necessarily false) wholeness which can be obtained through Karman. In the end, Karman's

sense of wholeness which he found in his understanding of Islam will be challenged, as the required celibacy cannot fulfill his libidinal needs. Any attempt to find wholeness in Marni or Rifah is likewise doomed to failure: neither woman can fulfill or understand all of Karman's needs, and likewise Karman cannot give them a true sense of wholeness. Like all humans, Karman must continue in a state of flux, continuously searching for a way to fulfill his libidinal urges and desire for wholeness until his death.

Conclusion

A Lacanian psychoanalysis is a powerful tool in explaining and forming an understanding of a literary character's developments, both to give motives for actions taken and to extrapolate a character's future developments. Applied to Karman, such an analysis has shown, firstly, that Karman has been searching for a part of him which he subconsciously aware that he is missing—a primordial sense of belonging. This he seeks through ideology and his various relations in Pegaten and beyond, ultimately finding what he considers a sense of wholeness in

the local mosque's dome. Lacan's psychoanalysis shows how this semblance of wholeness is not the Real, and thus can predict Karman's further deviations once he realises that Islam alone does not provide the wholeness he needs.

This last observation, one which may prove controversial among religious communities, may shed light on other religious works both in Indonesia and abroad. However, though there is no worldly respite from the continuous searching for wholeness that is life, this is not to say that Lacanian psychoanalysis intends to show that there is no god. A theologically-grounded Lacanian analysis—one which recognises that there is no language in the state commonly referred to as death, and thus understands “death” as delimiting mankind and providing a return to the primordial wholeness—may be possible, and may even provide similar results to those above. It is possible that wholeness cannot be found in life but in death (a “heaven”, though one which is not one linguistically defined). It may be beneficial to explore such theoretical questions, which are

certain to involve expansive theological discourse, elsewhere.

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¹ In this paper, *linguistically* and *consciously* are used interchangeably, as to become consciously aware of something is to linguistically formulate it in one's mind. Unless otherwise noted, all citations are to *Kubah*.

² Original: “Matanya bersinar-sinar, hatinya penuh harapan.”

³ Original: “Sedikit pun ia tidak sadar adanya kekuatan tangan-tangan manusia yang sedang menariknya.”

⁴ Original: ... teori-teori tentang pertentangan kelas, cerita tentang pertanian kolektif di Rusia, bahkan teori-teori tentang sejarah materialisme?”

⁵ Original: “Seandainya keadaanku lebih baik daripada Abdul Rahman, barangkali Haji Bakir akan menghapus kata ‘terlambat’ dan aku akan diterima menjadi menantunya.”

⁶ Original: “Rasa kecewa, marah, dan malu berbau di hati Karman. Akibatnya ia mendendam dan membenci Haji Bakir.”

⁷ Original: “Haji Bakir mempunyai masjid, dan bagi Karman, orang tua itu adalah tokoh agama. Dan wujud nyata agama di desa Pegaten adalah Haji Bakir itulah!”

⁸ Original: “... perlambang yang nyata atas pergeseran nilai yang telah melanda dirinya.”

⁹ One of the *lasykar* (paramilitary groups) active during the Indonesian national revolution. Hisbollah was rooted in Islamic belief, unlike many other groups, which were split along party lines.

¹⁰ Original: “... kekecewaan ini seharusnya tidak mempengaruhi hubunganmu dengan Tuhan.”

¹¹ Original: “Paling tidak, kembalilah pada Tuhanmu.”

¹² Original: “Biarkan aku pada diriku sendiri.”

¹³ Original: “Misalkan kamu masih menjadi Laskar Hisbollah. Misalkan masih ada bedil di tanganku, sebutir peluru cukup untuk menutup mulut anak durhaka ini.”

¹⁴ Original: “... pesona masih terkesan kuat pada tiap bagian tubuh Rifah.”

¹⁵ Original: “... menggunakan partai untuk berahinya, atau ia menyalurkan berahi demi partai. Sama saja.”

¹⁶ Original: “Perempuan itu mengolesteng kuk, dada, sertaperut Karman dengan balsam cap Macan. Rabaannya menunjukkan keahliannya.”

¹⁷ Original: “Di sebuah losmen yang hanya mementingkan kebanyakan tamu, ia dapat mainan sebuah boneka. Segar dan perjaka pula.”

¹⁸ Original: “... berahi semata-mata”

¹⁹ Original: “dirinya susut menjadi binatang kecil. Malu dan sedih.”

²⁰ Original: “... mengepalkan tinjunya sambil berteriak-teriak seperti orang gila.”

²¹ Original: “... mengatasi keraguan yang menggelut dirinya.”

²² Original: “... orang-orang menuduh Karman telah menempuh hidup perwarnaperzinahan.”

²³ Original: “... laki-laki yang dapat membimbing Rifah di dunia sampai di akhirat.”

²⁴ Original: “Sempurnalah kebenciannya terhadap Haji Bakir...”

²⁵ Original: “... membiarkan istrinya menjadi pengisap candu...”

²⁶ Original: “Sebuah sendok yang jatuh dari atas meja sudah cukup membuatnya terperanjat. Pohing yang datang mengetuk pintu hampir saja membuat Karman pingsan ketakutan.”

²⁷ Original: “... tiba-tiba belajar sembahyang kembali...”

²⁸ Original: “... terpencil, diburu, dan entah apa yang akan terjadi atas dirinya besok atau lusa.”

²⁹ Original: “... hantu besar yang amat mengerikan.”

³⁰ Original: “Pertama, karena sakit hati. Aku jengkel karena Haji Bakir tak rela anaknyakukawini. Kedua, aku jengkel karena sawah orang tuaku dikuasai oleh Haji Bakir dengan cara yang tidak adil. Dengan masuk ke lingkungan Margo aku bermaksud membalaskan sakit hatiku. Atau kalau bisa, aku mendapatkan kembali sawah itu. Ah, aku tidak mengerti bahwa akhirnya aku harus terbawa ke dalam situasi yang sangat menakutkan ini. Aku tak mengerti.”

³¹ Original: “Jiwanya telah terguncang...”

³² Original: “... sungguh amat menyiksa.”

³³ Original: “... apakah Pak Karman sudi makan nasi seorang tukang rakit?”

³⁴ Original: “selalu tinggal berdua ... sama Tuhan”

³⁵ Original: “Andaikanejak semula aku menyadaribahwapaartaibisa melakukan makar yang begituberlumurandarahseperti yang terjadi kemarin, sekali-kali aku tak ingin menjadi anggota.”

³⁶ Original: “... kumintakamurahasiakan perjumpaan kita.”

³⁷ Original: “Rencana pelarian Karman terus dikembangkan dengan penuh optimisme.”

³⁸ Original: “Tetapi masalahnya, Marni adalah istrinya!”

³⁹ Original: “Badannya kurus dan lemas. Pandangan matanya tidak bisa diartikan lain kecuali keputusan yang mendalam. Alisnyatur dan masuk ke dalam cekung antun g. Kumis

dancambahnyamenambahkesanberantakan
pada wajah Karman yang sudah amat pucat.”

⁴⁰ Original:

“Sangatjelasterasakanadagarispemisah yang
tajam antara dirinya dengan alam sekitar. ...
Karman merasa dirinya begitu kecil; bukan
apa-apa. Semut pun bukan.”

⁴¹ Original: “... apakahkampungku, terutama
orang-orangnya, maumenerimaakukembali?”

⁴² Original: “Dalamkeraguankegagapannya,
Karman bahkaninginberbalik. ... Karman
kembali merasa sebagai benda asing di bumi.”

⁴³ Original: “... menelan kembali perasaan yang
tiba-tiba akan meledak”.

⁴⁴ Original: “... aku tahu kamu tak pernah
menginginkan perpisahan. Aku pun tidak ...”

⁴⁵ Original: “... memperoleh apa yang hilang itu.”

⁴⁶ Original: “Karman sudah melihat jalan
kembali menuju kebersamaan dan kesetaraan
... yang hingga hari-hari kemarin terasa
mengucilkan dirinya.”

⁴⁷ Original: “Lalu kamu juga
tahuduluibukuhampirjadiistriyahmu?”