
THE INDONESIA AND WEST RELATION IN *TEMPO* MAGAZINE IN THE BEGINNING OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

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Abstract

In *Tempo* Magazine 2000–2007 edition, postcolonial themes are found in some articles of book reviews in literature which discuss: (1) the stories about the East, (2) the stories about colonialism, (3) western literary works (including those of the Indonesian translations), (4) the literary works focusing primarily on the postcolonial problems. Besides, postcolonial themes revealed in the book reviews are: (5) the Indonesian literary works which are published (translated) in English, (6) the contact between the West and the East in several stories, and (7) Islam in the West. The depiction of the inferior East is not explicit but it can often be found in several books, fictions or semi-fictions, written by western authors who describe the Indonesians or the country's nature. The postcolonial constructs of the West (as dominant and superpower countries) should be critically studied in order to avoid or free from the new modes of practices of Western imperialism.

Keywords: postcolonial, Indonesia, superiority of the West (Europe), book reviews in literature, *Tempo*

1. Introduction

European culture that belongs to the ex-colonizers is often regarded as a trend by the Indonesians in the fast developing world of digital and virtual age as stated by Yasraf Amir Piliang (1998:1–35) in his book *Dunia yang Dilipat*. The western postcolonial point of view is still rooted in the references (translated western literary and philosophy books) in Indonesian universities.

As proposed by Raymond Williams (1988:88–93), literature, philosophy, text books, works of arts, schools, and other cultural institutions are hegemonic sites, i.e. battle places of ideologies. In Gramscian's view, works of literature, philosophy books or other university handbooks can be the area reflecting the society's world view as well as the medium for constructing the society. A world view, ideology or society's life style are often constructed by the hegemonic sites and spread through hegemonic institutions, such as schools, media, churches, religious preachings, and others. In this battle of ideology, the postcolonial constructs in Indonesia are observed. In this article the observation is focused on the postcolonial themes found in *Tempo* Magazine distributed in Indonesia, which are discussed under the rubric of book reviews in literature and western philosophies.

The acculturation of western (European) culture can lead Indonesian people into the trap of

postcolonialism that preserves the domination of European values over the Indonesian nationalism. As stated by Benedict Anderson (2002:1–15), nationalism is an imaginary community that has to be constructed and maintained by its supporters. Concerning Indonesian nationalism, the western postcolonial constructs need to be critically studied so that the Indonesians will not be trapped in the new modes of western imperialism practices.

This piece of writing discusses the articles of book reviews of western (European) literary works which are published in monthly magazine *Tempo* of 2000–2007 edition (representing the development of Indonesia-West relation at the beginning of the third millennium) to find the development of their relation in the current decade, whether Indonesia is inferior in viewing the West, especially western literary works.

2. Discussion

In *Tempo*, the postcolonial themes found in articles of book reviews in literature are: (1) the stories about the East, (2) the stories about colonialism, (3) western literary works (including those of the Indonesian translations), and (4) the literary works focusing primarily on the postcolonial problems. Besides, this piece of writing uncovers subjects concerning (5) the Indonesian

literary works that are published (translated) in English, (6) the contact between the West and East in several stories, and (7) Islam in the West.

The stories about the East from western point of view exist in some literary works which are reviewed. *Spice Garden* written by Michael Vatikiotis talks about some events in Indonesia, particularly Maluku (*Tempo*, 01–07 March 2004). In her review of the novel, Dewi Anggraini says that the sequence of bloody events happening in Maluku since 1999 is recorded in newspapers, magazines, televisions, and radios. However, the Indonesians soon forget it all. Vatikiotis brings us to the horrible events in Maluku by presenting virtual events. His novel *The Spice Garden* brings us to a fictitious island, not far from Ambon, and a factual time, the bloody period of 1999. It is interesting to analyze such a description since it is not impossible that Indonesia (East) is often described as a country with violence, chaos, and rage.

The reviews of fictions depicting Indonesia from western people's or expatriates' point of view have been published in *Tempo* 26 March–1 April 2001. Those fictions mostly talk about Indonesia with its political background, which is perceived as an exotic and new place that attracts wanderers' attention. Current situation in Indonesia is discussed in this book but the history of Indonesia viewed by the French is talked about in another book.

A book entitled *Orang Indonesia dan Orang Perancis dari Abad XVI sampai dengan Abad XX* written by Bernard Dorleans, is reviewed by Jean Couteau (a French who is teaching in Denpasar). The review is published in *Tempo* 11–17 December 2006. It is clearly seen in the book that the French regard the Indonesians as primitive and uncultured, a typical assumption of the westerners who feel superior when viewing the inferior easterners. Such a description is restated by the reviewer who quotes one of the writings compiled and editorialized by Bernard Dorleans. The description is seen below.

ORANG-ORANG pribumi berperawakan cukup tinggi, beberapa di antaranya bertubuh sempurna sedangkan yang lain tidak. Mereka tak sehitam orang Guinea, hidungnya pun tak sepesek mereka. Mereka berkulit kuning atau cokelat, penipu dan pembohong besar.

Penjelajah Perancis Francois de Vitre menggambarkan orang Sumatra dalam tulisannya pada 1602. Tiga ratus tahun kemudian, Cabaton, penjelajah Perancis yang lain menulis dengan nada yang sama terhadap orang Jawa. "Orang-orang Jawa bukan pekerja, cukup segenggam nasi dan beberapa buah untuk hidup yang mereka dapatkan tanpa usaha.

Semua itu mereka peroleh hanya karena kesuburan tanah saja...."

It seems that Jean Couteau as a reviewer realizes the bias of colonial perspective when reviewing the book. It is stated in other part of his essay that the meetings between French and Indonesian figures in the book are a compilation of facts and data lacking of empathy. They are not described as the meetings between people. The emotion, friendship or love are not seen.

What are mostly described in the book are satire, rejection, and justification of the behaviour of the local people or information based on pragmatic interests as if the French and Indonesians are connected only because of interests, almost not because of humanity. It can be stated that the relation between the Indonesians and westerners is due to imperial expansion interests with misunderstandings between them. This is a naive stereotype presented by Dorleans.

The reviewer, then, enquires the title of the book. He thinks that the title reflects the idea that the relation between the French and Indonesians lasts for less than four centuries. Mentioning formerly the word "Indonesians" in the title gives an impression that the Indonesians' point of view is the main focus of the book. As a matter of fact, the Indonesians only become the objects (in the edition of original language, the word "French" comes the former and "Indonesians" the later).

The depiction of the East seen in *Orang Indonesia dan Orang Perancis dari Abad XVI sampai dengan Abad XX* which focuses on the factual aspects rather than fictional shows how the West views the East that is considered inferior. The inferiority is pictured implicitly in several aspects. Such a picture is often found in several fictional (or semi-fictional) books when the Westerners write and describe the Indonesian people or the nature of Indonesia.

Books such as *Kuasa Kata: Jelajah Budaya-budaya Politik di Indonesia* authored by Benedict Anderson (*Tempo*, 19–25 March 2001), *Surat-surat Adik RA Kartini* editorialized by Frits G.P. Jaquet (*Tempo*, 20–26 June 2005), *Sumber Terpilih Sejarah Sastra Indonesia Abad XX* by Ulrich Kratz (*Tempo*, 27 March–2 April 2000), Amin Sweeney's books concerning the biography and bibliography of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi (*Tempo*, 1–7 August 2005), Ulrich Kozok's book about the oldest Malay book (*Tempo*, 7–13 August 2006) reflect the westerners' perception of Indonesia which should be learnt and understood. This is the continuance of what is previously named orientalism studies.

Orientalism studies can be seen in Prof P.J. Zoetmulder who has conducted researches on Javanese literary works. In *Tempo* (20–26 February 2006) it is informed about the

biography of this scientist who comes from Netherlands and becomes the citizen of Indonesia and his contributions to overcome and report Javanese literature. What has been done by figures like Zoetmulder is often connected with orientalism, which is directly or indirectly related to colonial practices.

Besides Zoetmulder who has collected and analyzed the old Javanese scripts, Jaap Erkelens has looked for and collected Indonesian books but for the sake of KITLV Netherlands. What Erkelens has done is his effort to get information about Indonesia. This fact is explained in *Tempo* 11—17 August 2003 edition.

Besides the description of the East from the standpoint or interests of the West, other postcolonial constructs are also found in the description of the colonial history from today context. It means that the colonial practice that has ended is discussed and analyzed in several books. This is called the reproduction of colonial stories through literary works.

A work that presents events of the colonial period in Indonesia is entitled *Jalan Raya Pos, Jalan Daendels* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer, which was published in 2005. The book is reviewed by Nurdin Kalim and Evieta Fadjar in *Tempo* 17—23 October 2005 edition. The description of building the road during Daendels period is a bitter memory of the colonial practices. Such a writing, either the book or its review, is the reproduction of sad stories of colonialism. Pramoedya is an Indonesian who is against Dutch colonialism in Indonesia as stated in his biography. His depiction of the colonial practice in his work can be seen in the following citation.

MATI. Mereka meninggal karena kelaparan, kelelahan, atau terserang penyakit. Yang membangkang digantung di pepohonan di sepanjang ruas jalan.

Inilah kisah pembangunan jalan sepanjang 1.000 kilometer, dari Anyer di Jawa Barat hingga Panarukan di Jawa Timur. Kisah yang berawal dari imajinasi seorang Gubernur Hindia Belanda, dalam perjalanannya dari Buitenzorg atau Bogor ke Semarang dan Oesthoek alias Jawa Timur. Dalam bukunya yang terakhir, *Jalan Raya Pos, Jalan Daendels*, Pramoedya Ananta Toer mencatat perjalanan itu tertanggal 29 April 1808, dan si pemilik imajinasi itu adalah Herman Willem Daendels.

Imajinasi yang cepat menjadi ambisi buta. Ya, proyek raksasa itu menggunakan kerja rodi, tanpa bayar—kalaupun ada, upahnya sudah disunat oleh mandor baik berkulit putih maupun cokelat, atau keduanya, tulis Pramoedya.

Korban semakin banyak, ”ribuan orang kecil di Grobogan, wilayah Keresidenan Semarang, berkaperan tak terkuburkan,” tutur Pram (hlm. 22). Tapi angan-angan sang Gubernur Jenderal tak kunjung kendur.

Such a sad story with colonial background is also found in another Pramoedya’s work entitled *Cerita dari Digul* published in 2001. Digul is a place in Papua to exile the rebels against the Dutch in colonial period. The review of the book is written by Wilson in *Tempo* 25 June—2 July 2001. Other story about Digul is found in Marco Kartodikromo’s *Pergaulan Orang Buangan di Boven Digul: Kisah Nyata*. Originally it is a serial story of *Pewart Deli* Daily from 10 October—9 December 1931. The book is reviewed by M. Fauzi in *Tempo* 26 May—1 June 2003. Pramoedya’s or Marco’s description of Dutch colonialism reflects the negative sides of the period, which are often connected with today as the post-colonial period.

The dark trail of colonialism reflected in contemporary literary works as the reproduction of colonial discourse is also written in three articles of book reviews in *Tempo* 19—25 September 2005 edition. The three articles entitled ”Bila Sang Meneer Melukis Indonesia”, ”Menunggu Komik Asli Indonesia”, and ”Membuka Jejak Hitam Kolonial” are about comics and related to the history of Dutch colonialism.

Besides the sad stories regarding the Dutch colonialism as previously discussed, there are writings about slices of colonial history as nostalgia, sweet memories from the past. A book consisting five short stories entitled ”Tukang Gambar” (1970), ”Kucit” (1970), ”Sekar Emas” (1970), ”Katemu ring Tampaksiring” (1972), and ”Suaran Asu” (1972) written by an old Balinese author, Made Sanggra, reflects the nostalgia. The book is reviewed in *Tempo* 8—15 August 2004 under the title ”Potret dari Jejak Masa Lalu”. As Sanggra’s masterpieces, the five short stories originally written in Balinese are translated into Indonesian and English.

One of Sanggra’s short stories is about a plan of the Dutch Queen, Juliana, to visit Tampaksiring Palace in Gianyar, Bali. The queen who had never visited Bali was planned to arrive in 1970. Made Sanggra, as a Balinese man, intended to express his friendship to the queen of a country which once colonialized his nation. He, then, wrote his short story ”Katemu ring Tampaksiring”.

Since the visit was cancelled, the short story was not finished. Sanggra once forgot the story and turned his attention to write other works, some of which are ”Tukang Gambar” and a Balinese modern poem ”Suara Saking Setra.” Both works won the Balinese literary writing contest in 1970. The achievement encouraged him

to finish his poem "Katemu ring Tampaksiring," which also won the 1972 writing competition.

Remains and influence of the West on Indonesia can also belong to other constructs of "colonialism". One of the examples is the influence of Portuguese culture in Indonesia as written by Antonio Pinto da Franca. The book is reviewed by Ign. Haryanto in *Tempo* 12—18 March 2001.

Other constructs of post-colonialism are also found in the reviews of literary works published by the West or their Indonesian translations. The constructs cannot be classified as superiority of the West nor the inferiority of the East. Rather, they can be classified as the influence to imitate western culture or mimicry in literature or life styles. Besides, abrogation and appropriation are also seen in the use of language, especially when using English as well as reading English writings are regarded as reflecting upper social class.

A number of western literary works are reviewed in *Tempo* during eight years of this 21st century, some of which are (1) *Interpreter of Maladies* (Jhumpa Lahiri), (2) *Berahi* (Jean Baudrillard), (3) *Kitab Lupa dan Gelak Tawa* (Milan Kundera), (4) *Sabda Zarathustra* (F.W. Nietzsche), (5) *Kekekalan* (Milan Kundera), (6) *Out of Place* (Edward W. Said), (7) *Eragon* (Christopher Paolini), (8) *The English Roses* (Madonna), (9) *Va' Dore Ti Porta Il Coureor Pergilah ke Mana Hatimu Membawamu* (Susanna Tamaro), and (10) *Ikan Tanpa Salah* (Alfred Birney).

Besides, there are still other books reviewed in *Tempo*: (11) *Insiden Anjing di Tengah Malam yang Bikin Penasaran* (Mark Haddon), (12) *Negeri Bahagia* or *City of Joy* (Dominique Lapiere), (13) *Leo the African* (Amin Maalouf), (14) *The Dante Club* (Matthew Pearl) (15) *The Kite Runner* (Khaled Hosseini), (16) *Baudolino* (Umberto Eco), (17) *The Historian* (Elizabeth Kostova), (18) *Blindness* (Jose Samarago), and (19) *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hollows* (J.K. Rowling). The reviews are not only about books, but also about an event or news related to books as seen in an article "Sebuah Buku, Pesaing Harry Potter" which discusses *The Da Vinci Code* written by Dan Brown (*Tempo*, 04—10 April 2005 edition).

Among the nineteen books previously mentioned, six talk about post-colonial problems, they are *Interpreter of Maladies*, *Out of Place*, *Ikan Tanpa Salah*, *Negeri Bahagia* or *City of Joy*, *Leo the African*, and *The Kite Runner*. The problems are faced by the characters of the stories who have to cope with West-East clashes in their lives. They are rooted out from their original culture. The characters experience hybridity or diaspora that lead them to the conflicts of identity or nationality.

In a review of Alfred Birney's *Ikan Tanpa Salah* (*De Onschuld van Een Vis*), Nurdin Kalim

discusses the problems of mixed-parentage (hybrid) people like below citation.

Darah campuran Indonesia-Belanda mengalir dalam tubuhnya. Ia pun terombang-ambing antara dua dunia dan penuh ketegangan akibat paradoks dalam dirinya. Malangnya, pribadinya lemah dan labil, tak pernah bisa bersikap. Ia tinggal di Nederland, tapi cara hidupnya Indonesia. Pola pikirnya tetap dibawa ke masa ketika ia masih di Indonesia sebagai perwira Belanda yang menginterogasi para pejuang Indonesia. Tubuhnya di *Barat*, jiwanya di *Timur*.

Dunia indo memang dunia simalakama. Mengutip Jakob Sumardjo, yang menulis pengantar novel ini, di luar kemampuannya, seorang indo terjebak dalam dunia yang saling bertentangan. Seorang Indo-Belanda bukan orang Belanda dan bukan orang Indonesia. Ia berada di mana? Berdiri sebagai orang Belanda, ia akan dicurigai dan dimusuhi orang Indonesia. Begitu pula sebaliknya. Posisi itu memunculkan sosok yang paradoks yang hidup dalam kegelisahan.

The above quotation pictures the post-colonial world that brings about the split of identity of those mixed-parentage (hybrid) people. Besides commeting the problems experienced by the characters, Nurdin Kalim (*Tempo*, 11—17 October 2004 edition) justifies that Birney is equal with other trans-national writers as his appreciation to Birney's closeness to the East rather than the West as seen in his statement.

Novel ini menyejajarkan Birney dengan penulis transnasional lainnya seperti Salman Rushdie, yang menggambarkan India dari kediamannya di Inggris, atau Amy Tan, yang melukiskan Cina dengan warna Amerika. Penulis transnasional lebih cenderung menyuguhkan *setting* yang serba *fragmented* dan simbolis, tidak utuh dan realistis. Dari sisi ini, harus diakui Birney telah berhasil.

The reviews in *Tempo* are not only about the post-colonial themes found in the stories as in the above discussion, but also about literary works which introduce Indonesian literature to the West. The writings can be categorized as abrogation and appropriation when considering English (as a language of the West) as a means to introduce Indonesian literary works to the West. The Indonesian literary works written in or translated into English which are reviewed in *Tempo* during

2000—2007 are: (1) *Paris la Nuit* (a collection of poems by Sitor Situmorang), (2) *Snake* (a novel by Dewi Anggraini), (3) *Goenawan Mohamad Selected Poems* (edited by Laksmi Pamuntjak), (4) *The Rainmaker's Daughter* (a novel by Richard Oh), (5) *Ellipsis* (a collection of verses by Laksmi Pamuntjak), and (6) *The Diary of R.S.: Musings on Art* (a collection of short stories by Laksmi Pamuntjak).

Sitor Situmorang can be categorized as a writer of diaspora due to his writing that reaches France and other European countries although he finally returns to his country and still exists as an Indonesian writer. Unlike Situmorang, Sobron Aidit, that can also be categorized as a writer of diaspora, can reach France but he does not hold an Indonesian citizenship anymore. Such a writer is popularly called *exile*, which is also experienced by Utuy Tatang Sontani (*Tempo*, 25 February—3 March 2002). One of Sobron's works is *Memoar Sobron Aidit: Gajah di Pelupuk Mata* reviewed by Putu Oka Sukanta (*Tempo*, 22—28 April 2002). Some of Indonesian writers who have transnational view are Goenawan Mohamad, Laksmi Pamuntjak, Dewi Anggraini, and Richard Oh.

Other postcolonial themes found in *Tempo* are those regarding the contacts between the West and East, which focus on the efforts to recognize and understand both to create a harmonious and conducive situation. One of the examples is found in two articles on the review of "Ubud writers & readers festival" in *Tempo* 25—31 edition 2004. Besides, a review of "internasional literary biennale 2005" taking place in TUK Jakarta as a meeting for international writers is found in *Tempo* (12—18 September 2005). The review consists of three articles discussing the works of Antjie Krog (South Africa) and Ramsey Nasr (a Palestinian-Dutch descendant).

The contacts between the West and East are not only seen in the events mentioned above, but also in novels, one of which is *The Historian* by Elisabeth Kostova who reveals the origin of Dracula. The description of Dracula in the novel breaks the stereotype that Dracula has two long sharp teeth and drinks blood. Kostova traced the origin of Dracula who actually is Vlad Tepes, the master of Wallachia. In his review (*Tempo* 12—18 February 2007) Seno Joko Suyono says that Kostova has written the novel based on her research on the history sources of 1460s (the period of Sultan Mahmud II) which are kept in Istanbul. It proves that the history of the East (Turkey) is acknowledged and understood.

The East-West contact is also seen in Annemarie Schimmel's book (*Tempo*, 6—12 June 2005) of the ideas of a Pakistani religious figure, Muhammad Iqbal, and the Islamic mystic poems. Islamic figures and their thoughts are not broadly known in the West. With stereotypes and suspicion

some Islamic figures are known. Islam in western countries is often considered a sensitive post-colonial problem. It is discussed in the final part of this writing.

Themes on Islam in the West become problematic when western figures write about multiculturalism since they tend to discriminate and suspect the development of Islam by labelling terrorism or fundamentalism. The themes can probably be regarded the most current post-colonial ones. Islam sometimes represents the ex-colonialized countries although not all of the countries or the East belong to the Muslim countries. Islam is a problem for the West in the beginning of 21st century. It can be stated that United States of America is the last colonizer having a number of colonized Muslim countries. *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East* by Rashid Khalidi is a non-fiction showing the similarity between the aggression of America in the Middle East with the European colonialism in the past (*Tempo*, 1—7 November 2004).

Problems of Islam in America are recorded in Captain James Joseph Yee's biography *For God and Country* reviewed by Akmal Nasery Basralin (*Tempo* (15—21 May 2006). Yee is a West Point graduate who is jailed because of silly accusations. He is almost sentenced to death just because of embracing Islam. In his review Basral says:

Siang itu, ketika menginjak Jacksonville, ia baru saja meninggalkan Guantanamo. Di kompleks penjara dengan pengamanan maksimum yang dijuluki Amnesty International sebagai "Gulag Zaman Kita" itu, alumni West Point 1990 ini lebih populer dengan nama Islamnya, Ustad Yusuf. Ia menyandang tugas yang hanya bisa dipenuhi sangat sedikit orang Amerika: ulama militer (chaplain).

Sebagai chaplain, Yee bertugas memberikan layanan keagamaan kepada para "pejuang musuh"—istilah yang digunakan serdadu Amerika untuk sekitar 700 tahanan muslim dari berbagai negara. Pengetahuan keislamannya yang luas, dan bahasa Arabnya yang fasih, membuat Yee akrab dengan para tahanan.

Sejak kedatangan Yee, pada November 2002, aura keagamaan semakin terasa, misalnya dengan penyelenggaraan salat Jumat di kalangan para tentara muslim Amerika dan para penerjemah. Rupanya, hal-hal seperti ini justru dipandang negatif oleh beberapa petinggi militer di Guantanamo.

Dan siang itu kerinduan Yee terhadap keluarganya kandas. Pihak

militer Amerika menuduh Yee kaki tangan Al-Qaidah, melakukan kegiatan penyadapan dan mata-mata, dan tak mematuhi perintah atasan. Dengan tuduhan "maksimal" itu, Yee dijebloskan ke penjara Angkatan Laut di Charleston, South Carolina, dalam sel isolasi dengan tangan dan kaki digari. Jika semua tuduhan terbukti, Yee akan menghadapi hukuman mati.

In the review, it is also stated that four days after Yee is captured, an article by an anonymous government officer is published in The Washington Times, which says that terrorism has infiltrated the American military structure. Mass media then respond the sensational news without verification.

Basral adds that some people call Yee "Taliban Cina" or "Chinese Taliban," a double mockery. However, those accusations are not proven. American military then charge him with new accusations that Yee has committed adultery with his three colleagues at Gitmo and downloaded obscene pictures in his computer, which are not proven either in the court on 19 March 2004. Afterwards, Yee works at American military as a captain until January 2005. His experience is written meticulously in his memoir (the English version was published in October 2005). He also writes about American soldiers' deviation in Guantanamo, his ancestors, and his early interest in Islam. His book is one of the representations of Islam in the West, which reveals problems about the post-colonial syndromes in the West, the suspicious and frightening syndromes to Islam.

3. Conclusion

As a hegemonic site voicing the Western domination over the East which is subordinated, the rubric of book review in literature in *Tempo* can be a battle place of postcolonial themes. Such a site is often regarded as a means of legitimizing western domination. In fact, the battles between the West and East not only happened during the colonial period, but also continue until today. Essentially colonial practices remain going on although in different modes.

Note:

This article is part of a research of *Hibah Kompetitif Penelitian Sesuai Prioritas Nasional*, which is entitled "Bentuk-bentuk Dominasi Barat Mutakhir di Indonesia: Kajian Poskolonial Terhadap Teks Book Universitas, Karya Sastra, dan Pemikiran Barat" by Iman Santoso, Nurhadi, Dian Swandayani, and Ari Nurhayati in 2010.

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