
The Contrapuntal Reading of Colonial Logic and the Play of Caricature in “Houseboy + Maid” by Pramoedya Ananta Toer

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Abstract

Pramoedya Ananta Toer's works are highly distinguished for their strong realist characteristic and profound analysis of interactions among pre- and post- colonial human beings and their place in society. One of the works that portray such characteristics is “Houseboy + Maid”, the first story in Toer's collection *Tales from Djakarta: Caricatures of Circumstances and Their Human Beings*. In this research, post-colonialism and contrapuntal reading proposed by Edward Said are used as methods to interpret a literary work whose narration is about two characters who live in post-colonial Indonesia, or rather post-revolutionary Indonesia. Their unfixed identities which are interrelated through the changing event of the plot indicates that their very destiny cannot be separated from the “politicality, sociality, and historicity” of much bigger entities.

Keywords: post-colonialism; contrapuntal reading; identity; post-colonial Indonesia; post-revolutionary Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

One of the most prominent Indonesian writers is Pramoedya Ananta Toer. His works are highly distinguished for their strong realist characteristic and profound analysis of interactions among pre- and post- colonial human beings and their place in society. Belonging to the tradition of social romance, Pramoedya's narrations portray real and true aspects of daily life without adding aesthetic make-up or exaggerated fantasy. Largely indebted to realist legacy of Western works such as Gorki's Tolstoy's and Steinbeck's, Pramoedya's works also show a Naturalist tendency of profound historical research and vast use of documentations in order to maintain its faithfulness to the so-called reality. Though they are trying to be as “objective” as possible, there is still prominent debate whether to consider them as versions of history, or merely as historical fictions. Nevertheless, according to Teeuw (2003, p. 192) there is no absolute realism in any roman, therefore historical narrative can only be considered as social document, but not as historical truth.

In understanding Pramoedya's social documentation we have to keep in mind his activism in Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (Lekra) which

apparently was supported by Soekarno and was in antagonistic term with people who signed *Manifesto Kebudayaan* (Manikebu). During revolutionary period of guided democracy, President Soekarno insisted on the use of art as propagandist media for governance pursuit like those in China in Russia. As a consequence, Lekra was established to serve national interest on socialism, if not social realism. On the date of May 8, 1964, 16 writers, 3 painters and 1 musician signed a cultural manifesto that claimed resistance against the tendency of social-realist-ness which they considered as limiting people's freedom of expression, especially in art (Mohamad, 1993).

It is this political positioning that get him imprisoned during Suharto's authoritarian reign in late 60s to 70s. The fact that his works offers his readers the, then, “subversive” version of looking at Indonesian history and social condition caused the banning of their distributions. The long sufferance that he has to undergo during his imprisonment, instead of crippling him, enables him to curiously delve into fundamental questions of being human. His strong empathy for humanity is thus manifested through social realist depiction of the characters in his works, sustained by detailed socio-economic setting and moving plot. Pramoedya's roman can, hence, be

perceived as a social documentation of life. According to Richard Hoggart (in Teeuw, 2003),

...good literature recreates the sense of life, its weight and texture. It recreates the experiential wholeness of life [...] Good literature recreates the immediacy of life (pp. 194-195).

Reading Pramoedya's full-of-immediacy-of-life narration in "Houseboy + Maid", one can feel how crafty Pramoedya is in playing with the notion of caricature to portray an earnest side of life: a deep sense of despair and loss which is elaborated in the theme of the wretchedness of the poor, fading hopes for change, and those who find ways to profit from a state of flux (Vatikiotis, 2001).

The question of whether literature is a social, political, or historical practice has been prominent (Felski, 2011; Guillory, 2013; Rancière, 2004; Shapiro, 1984), especially in the post-colonial period of twentieth century. Responding to the concept of modernism, some thinkers begin to question the possibility of literary works as others than just a product of creative or interpretative imagination. Edward Said (1993), for example, opened the possibility to relate work of literature with the shaping of culture and the inherent idea of empire. As a consequence, a narration can be analyzed not only as an arrangement of signification process that constitute the whole structure of the story, but also as a significant element of political quest. This paper will try to look at the significant role played by the narration of a short story by Pramoedya Ananta Toer, entitled "Houseboy + Maid" in such structural and political quests. Being put in the political setting of post-revolutionary Indonesia, the social realistic portrayal of the story enables one to approach the narration in the frames of post-colonialism. Such method, in the end, is aimed to posit the sociality, politicality, and historicity of the story, in which themes such as hierarchical notion of human being, contrapuntal reading of narrative structure, interpellated subject as well as the concept of hegemony, and the use of caricature form a matrix of identity politics. In this matrix, one never has fixed identity because individual, family, and institutions (such as servitude and a nation) are always constituted of diverse political, economic, social as well as historical importance. It is the contrapuntal reading and play of caricature that made possible the ambiguous, if not ironical, positioning of identity.

METHODS

Although up to now post-colonialism is

a subject of an ongoing debate, we can at least define the term in connection to colonialism. According to Loomba (1998) the term post-colonial is difficult to define because it includes and excludes, at the same time, too many entities that always refuse to be categorized within simplistic groups. Some definitions, however, can be posed here as frame of reference. Foulcher & Day (2006) in their introduction to *Clearing A Space: A Postcolonial Readings of Modern Indonesian Literature* stated that post-colonialism is a strategy of reading that inquires on the identification process of colonial traces in literature as well as criticism in order to evaluate the nature and significance of their textual effects. In the meanwhile, Gandhi (1998) defines postcolonialism as "a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath" and thus "emerged both as a meeting point and battleground for variety of disciplines and theories" (pp. 3-4).

In this writing, post-colonialism is used as a methodology to interpret a literary work whose narration is about two characters who live in post-colonial Indonesia, or rather post-revolutionary Indonesia. Their unfixed identity which is interrelated through the changing event of the plot indicates that their very destiny cannot be separated from the "politicality, sociality, and historicity" of much bigger entities. The history of the nation-state Indonesia, the social system of post-revolutionary Indonesia, the economic condition of the family's ancestor, the political stance they take despite their being uneducated and under-privileged; all of them constitute incorporated colonial subjects. It is at the very point that the postcolonial analysis of textual narrative begins its inter-disciplinary crossing of theories. To understand how they subjects in the story are incorporated or rather interpellated is to reveal how the dominant group in society executes power over the subordinated group.

There are many ways of disseminating an ideology. According to Althusser (in Hawkes 1996), power is established through two types of apparatuses: Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA) which works by violence, and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) which works by consent. The repressive apparatuses such as "the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons" work in the domain of the public, while the ideological apparatuses such as religion, family, school, arts, media, sport work in the domain of the private (pp. 121-123). Although the ISAs appear to be quite disparate, they are unified by subscribing to a common ideology in the service of the ruling class' common ideology.

In Pramoedya's short story, "Houseboy + Maid" what unequivocally appear is not the RSA, but rather the ISA. The ideology of colonial knowledge is disseminated not so much through literal violence but through systematized "force" as well, such as social interactions, family, circulation of knowledge and one's economic position in society. The two characters of the story, Sobi and Inah, are always already an ideological subject in a sense that their daily-life-choices, whether they admit it or not and whether they are aware of it or not, show the particular ideologies they follow. Nevertheless, it is faulty to think of them as completely victims of ruling class' common ideology. Although coming from under-privileged class of society, they give their consent not always necessarily out of their ignorance. Sometimes they, consciously or not, grow to be important agents of effective resistance. Such subtle resistance can only be theorized through the contrapuntal awareness of text analysis.

Even though, in Althusser's conception ordinary folks seem to be the victim of ruling power, it is useful to look at the very matter from opposite view point. In post-structuralist understanding of a text, the building of narrative meaning always have unfilled spaces from which counter-ideology can always corrupt the established signification. In other words, the anti-theses are always already subverting from within the building of a theses.

In addition, Edward Said (1993) made use of this post-structuralist logic to reverse the colonial hierarchy by proposing what he calls contrapuntal reading. Borrowed from the Western classical music, contrapuntal is a concept which put two or more melodies together and then analyse the their relationship (de Groot, 2010). The idea is not to form a harmonious synthesis, but to see and to find the uniqueness of each melody and to compensate the gaps between the two by reading in conjunction one with another. It is not only about adding outsider 'vernacular' perspectives to insider 'mainstream' interpretations, but it is also about valuing both and not assuming one is privileged as primary or foundational and the marginal an optional extra (Sugirtharajah, 2007, pp. 153–165).

Broadly speaking, such reading method could envision us to political and also social reform (Bartine & Maguire, 2010). Regarding this, Mushakavanhu (2017) even suggested that the reading method can also help us understand the suppressed views and experiences. What most interesting and important when applying contrapuntal reading is not finding the similarities between two or more voices (also texts), but the

contrast that can help us see things that may be implied. This is the goal of a contrapuntal reading: to identify the gaps or things that may be overlooked in one text that the other text suggests? (Cronshaw, 2016).

Therefore, in conclusion, we can more or less understand the contrapuntal reading as reading a text with an understanding of what is involved when an author shows something, of the historical context beyond its formal limitation.

We must read a text with an effort to draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented. Only by reading this way can we discuss the subtle operation of subordination of any entity in the text. We must keep in mind that each cultural work is a vision of a moment, and we must juxtapose that vision with the various revisions it later provoked. By pondering into what is not said by a text, instead of what it says, we will come to an even more critical awareness of the ideology as well as identity politics being displayed by the author. Even if the author is being witty and conceal his real intention in the mode of parody or caricature, a critical reader will be able to grasp the politics of identity operated in the text.

The theme of identity politics can be manifested in several techniques, one of which is through the use of caricature. Fowler (1987, p. 173) sees caricature as "a distorting mirror up to life". Caricature is almost the same as parody in which it searches out any weakness, pretension or lack of self-awareness in its original by means of subversive mimicry. In Pramoedya's short story, what are being caricaturized, as presented in the subtitle of the book, are "the circumstances and their human beings." It means that what is portrayed in the story is a ridiculed, if not burlesque, situation in which human being ceases being human once he is amount to unrenewed essence. It is through caricature that Pramoedya is able to mock the existential reduction and social segregation that low class, colonized Indonesians have to undergo. And such circumstance continues even during post-revolutionary period with its promised "freedom". It is also through caricature that the disillusioned post-revolutionary Indonesians question the fundamental principle of being. Are being colonized means being inhuman? The notion of what is human and what is inhuman are profoundly explored through the burlesque revealing of dehumanized effect of colonialism. By giving his characters lack of awareness of identity, Pramoedya posit them as truly actual agents of colonial criticism. Consequently, self-identity becomes the site of political contestations among

conflicting ideologies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

“Houseboy + Maid” is the first story in Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s collection *Tales from Djakarta: Caricatures of Circumstances and Their Human Beings* (2000). All the stories in that collection realistically portray the condition of post-revolutionary Indonesia in 1950s. Before we go with the analysis, it is important to look at the plot of the story in order to have a spatial-temporal context of what would be the object of analysis. In so doing I will maintain the caricature atmosphere by keeping some direct quotations since the strength of this book lies in the ironical language, cleverly arranged by Pramoedya. “Houseboy + Maid” is a story about two young siblings named Sobi and Inah. All their lives, they both always work as servants. There is no way that they can work as other than servants. It is said from the very beginning that

Ever since the time of Jan Pieterszoon Coen, this family had servant’s blood – from generation to generation. Servant without reserve! Loyal down to the last hair on their bodies. [...] Had god remained as kind-hearted as he was in the old days, and willing to extend further this servant lineage, the thirtieth generation would certainly no longer be human, but – worms wriggling about in the dirt. And this was only logical (Toer, 2000, p. 17).

Sobi and Inah are “doomed” to be servants but they are both satisfied, if not proud, with their servitude: “A houseboy and a maid of the highest grade, they felt tortured if they were not taking orders. And their lives’ happiness depended upon the receipt of such orders” (Toer, 2000, p. 19). By serving others, by taking orders they feel that their life is meaningful.

This period of servitude brought [Sobi] the greatest happiness in his life. Especially when he was able to propose an improvement for his employer’s household—the ultimate satisfaction attainable for a houseboy (Toer, 2000, p. 20).

They always try their best to improve their service. During the Dutch colonial period, Sobi and Inah served Dutch. Like their mother, they paid faithful service to their *tuan*. However, as the Japanese occupation came, they became to despise Dutch. Sobi, for example,

[j]ust like the others [,] hated colonialism—Dutch colonialism, that is. What colonialism really was, he didn’t know. But to hell with it, he hated it too. Whatever issued from the mouth of the Japanese was the voice of truth. And eve-

ryone was obliged to believe it. Luckily, he could be sincere in this. If not, his rank as houseboy would have been eliminated, like the lives of the romusha (Toer, 2000, p. 19).

For the sake of their “servitude”, they swallowed everything “taught” by their new *tuan*. For them life is so simple: they just did whatever they could do to survive. When the Japanese withdrew from Indonesia, they once again served the Dutch. “Sobi was once again a houseboy—a houseboy for a white people who, during Japanese occupation, had had no value, no value greater than their own fingernails” (Toer, 2000, p. 20). In the mean while Inah who previously worked as an assistant of a laundry maid was now looking for a *tuan*. Like her mother, she wanted to become a *njai*.

The story goes by the conversation between Sobi and Inah who were exchanging their life experience. Sobi is enjoying his life as a houseboy in a Dutch family, especially because the daughter seems to “like” him. Inah is not as “lucky” as her brother because the *tuans* she met are never faultless. Sobi try to help his sister by arranging to meet his sister with *tuan* Piktör. The story ends with Sobi’s dream of becoming a brown “Dutch” and the coming of *tuan* Piktör, Inah’s potentially-would-be *tuan*.

The Colonial Logic: A Hierarchical Determinism

One of the problems posed in the story is the question of the possibility of living. For Inah and Sobi, the possibility of living seems to be limited into becoming servants. As typically found in realist stories, there is a kind of determinism in “Houseboy+Maid”. The determinism works in the notion of presence, and is believed as always already decide the two characters’ destiny. Complexion is one of the most significant factors that build the story’s determinism. It is suggested that complexion determined people’s fortune. Inah and Sobi’s continued existence, for example, is made possible by their “fair” complexion, inherited from *empok* Kotek.

The complexion of this family lineage is a story in itself. [...] all of the descendants had ugly complexions. It never changed. Until one of the umpteenth generations, when *empok* Kotek was born. Blessed with tuberculosis, she developed a lovely glow. And she was considered beautiful (Toer, 2000, p. 17).

The lines suggest that even the possibility of having better complexion (which also means better life) can only occur through tuberculosis. The words “it never changed”—which goes in

accordance with the unchangeable fortune of its descendants—indicates the powerlessness of the individual as a subject. Alteration is something given, rather than created. In this sense, an individual is an animal-like personae in this determined world; he can only wait and accept whatever comes to her/him.

The determinism in the story develops from complexion, involving the issue of race. It is interesting to note that the race with “fairer” complexion will privilege over other race with “darker” complexion. The story shows, for instance, that the whites always have better position, better fate. That is why both Inah and Sobi want to become Dutch, because by becoming Dutch, all the white man’s privilege will immediately come upon them.

“When someone becomes Dutch,” he [Sobi] said, full of self-confidence, “those scars and blotches disappear automatically! When did you ever see a Dutch person with blotches? Only Indonesians get scabies. People like us, Nah” (Toer, 2000, p. 22).

Here we see that the determinism always involves a fundamentally essential binary logic, in which the Dutch has the privilege over the Indonesian. The binary logic that determines the principle of presence is of course metaphysically hierarchical: one is privileged over the other, one is re-presenting the other. Therefore, it is just logical that Inah, who has internalized the essential logic, prefer to become Dutch:

“Tuan Piktör must have a radio. Maybe six radios. Wouldn’t it be nice if he played them all at once? Then lots of people would gather in front of my house to see. And I’ll be standing on the verandah. They’ll all whisper: ‘Wah, Inah is really Dutch now,’ They’ll die of envy! Really! But it’s their own fault if their skin is black and if their nostrils are an old way. My skin isn’t so black, it’s white and my nose has class”. She smiled happily. (Toer, 2000, p. 24).

The compartmentalization follows what, in reference to Fanon (1963), is called traditional Marxism, in which “economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich” (p. 32). If we look at the story, the social realist aspect of traditional Marxist clearly dominates the story. There is a strong sense of economic determinism in which economy (material basic needs, capital) becomes the motor that determine the superstructure (principle, human value, cultural identity). The Marxist model has penetrated deeply into the character’s mind, that it continuously strengthens

the colonial myth in the story. Not only Inah, but also Sobi admit and internalize the logic:

And he [Sobi] could now feel superior within the circle of houseboys who had merely Indonesian employers. He had learned to separate himself from those houseboys who worked for the Chinese and Indonesians. He had learned how to sing: “yua olwees in mai haat” softly and out of tune (Toer, 2000, p. 20).

Sobi’s white employer and ability to sing in broken English has posed him in a higher position in houseboy-hood. This adds to the list of binaries in which language becomes a determining factor. Anyone speaking in English, in the language of the whites will immediately get the privilege over others. At this point the Logos has indeed become “a historically constructed inaugural metaphor of presence” (Spanos, 2000, p. 7). Such metaphysical view suggests that the end is already there from the beginning, and this is of course relevant with the story lines suggested by the plot: the beginning determines the end. Since the time of Jan Pieterszoon Coen, the family’s ending has been known: it resides in the servitude, no matter what complexion that they have. Here, the metaphysical principle of presence seems to strongly shade the whole story: in its plot, theme, and character(ization).

The Contrapuntal Reading of Colonial Language

To see how the metaphysical principle of presence shades the characters, it is important to see how Inah and Sobi come to that binary logic, or say, how the hierarchical principle of presence manifest itself in the body of the two characters. To be able to pose any possibility to this problem, we have to read the story contrapuntally. According to Edward Said (1993), contrapuntal reading means

... reading a text with an understanding of what is involved when an author shows something, of the historical context beyond its formal limitation. [It] can be done by extending our reading of the text to include what was once forcibly excluded (pp. 66-67).

Cultural identity is a building that cannot exist by itself. It must be understood “not as essentializations but as contrapuntal ensembles, [which] can never exist by itself and without an array of opposites, negatives, oppositions” (Said, 1993, p. 52). Therefore, to see Inah and Sobi’s cultural identity, we must also focus on the opposition offered by the binary, which means to talk about the dark colored, we have to talk about the white colored; when we talk about the Indonesi-

an in the story, we cannot release ourselves from the Dutch. What is more interesting from contrapuntal reading is it allows us to see how the opposition constitutes the sociality, politicality, and historicity in the story.

Inah and Sobi are the product of the social formation of that time. Looked from the setting of the story, which most probably in 1950s (that is the period when the Japanese withdrew, Indonesia declared its independence, and the Dutch was trying to re-occupy the land), Indonesia was still in its revolutionary state. The post-colonial enlightenment brought in itself a problematic conflict: the possibility of discarding the colonial identity, and at the same time the possibility of creating new identity which usually resides in national identity. However, it is not easy to build national consciousness, because the colonial past will still be haunting the social consciousness of the colonized.

The meaning of imperial past [...] has entered the reality of hundreds of millions of people, where its existence as shared memory and as a highly conflictual texture of culture, ideology, and policy still exercises tremendous force (Fanon, 1963, p. 12).

This is precisely what's shown by the story. Pramoedya's post-revolutionary Indonesia shows how the shared memory of imperial past still resides in people's, like Inah's and Sobi's, mind. It shows how the two characters still bear the inferiority inflicted by the colonial logos. Inah and Sobi become interpellated subjects who don't have to consciously understand the ideology, but practicing it anyway, inscribing it in their body. A good example is when they

... suddenly felt disgust for the Japanese. Along with many others they felt they'd been tricked, even though they did not understand how the trick had worked. And white skinned people once again loomed large their estimation (Toer, 2000, p. 20).

They don't necessarily understand the sudden hatred they felt for Japanese, they just know that "they'd been tricked". Sobi and Inah's lack of conceptual understanding shows that the colonial logic has successfully manifested itself in all fields of political bodies that it has become an absolute "truth," taken without further questions.

He was happy if he never had to hear the word "politics". Because, in his estimation, politics covered every type of sin. His tuan had also told him so. And everything his tuan told him was a law, no less important than the law instituted by any government anywhere. The voice of tuan was the voice of God (Toer, 2000, p. 20).

The "truth" is even accepted transcendently, because it has powerfully manifested itself as the social, economic, and political forces: as long as Sobi and Inah are socially, economically and politically safe they will surely do anything (chasing the Japanese, avoiding practical politics). However, what determine the condition of "safe"? What is the ruling class that controls over the socio-economic-political power in the story? Being set in post-revolutionary Indonesia, such question is really problematic, first because during 1950s the Japanese had just left, second, Indonesia was just beginning to stand on its own, and third, the Dutch was still trying to re-occupy the land.

In such chaotic transitional period, it is of course difficult to precisely locate the dominant power of the society. Even though historically Indonesia won the de facto authority, the story shows that Indonesian nationalism does not even affect Sobi and Inah. If indeed Indonesia has won its independence, then why cannot Inah and Sobi liberate themselves from the Dutch colonial logic? Does it mean they have instead chosen to have Dutch nationalism? What about when they devotedly served the Japanese ("Whatever issued from the mouths of the Japanese was the voice of truth")? Does it mean that they also keep Japanese nationalism in their heart?

Nationalism, Identity, and Politicality of "Houseboy + Maid"

Through the characterization of Inah and Sobi, Pramoedya gradually makes the notion of identity politics become problematic in the story. If we are to perceive Inah and Sobi in terms of national bond, then the story seems to build its own discourse of nationalism (the one without capital N). Here we cannot understand nationalism in a patriotic kind of sense, since Inah and Sobi definitely do not have such feeling. Then what makes nationalism in this case? Is it a shared memory as proposed by Benedict Anderson (1991)? What kind of memory? It seems that the only memory Sobi and Inah have is the "glorious" era of their mother, Rodinah, the time when they have "a house with stucco walls and filled with [...] two radios and a gramophone". The only attachment that they have is reduced not to a grandeur, idealistic conception of imagined community (be it in the form of clientship or kinship) but simply to the basic material need. It is difficult, for example to derive any comradeship from the characters, not even a sense of belongingness to their Javanese ancestor, Mpok Kotek.

Here Sobi and Inah become just individu-

als with free-floating identity, depending on the possibility of survival offered by the identity. However, even though their identity is free-floating, Sobi and Inah are not necessarily free subjects, they are in fact interpellated subject, or to pose Althusser (1978)'s thought that individuals are always-already ideological subjects. Here ideology must not be perceived in a kind of doctrine or principle in traditional Marxist sense. By breaking the base-super structure model, Althusser brings ideology (which previously occupies super-structure) to the everyday, to its material existence (also occupies base-structure). For example, the "ideology" that interpellated Sobi and Inah can be traced in the story, not only coming from the ruling class with its violence imposition (as in the case of the Japanese with its Romusha) but also from their mother (institution of family):

"Any time now you'll be a Dutch. After all, I'm not a Djakartan, I am not an Indonesian. Mama always told me that. In fact, in the Japanese time, Mama even said that Sobi and I were at least as respectable as the Japanese. How nice it will be to be Dutch" (Toer, 2000, p. 24).

The citation shows that Rodinah has always inflicted to her children that they are not really Indonesian. If we are to assume that the ruling class and dominant culture in this context is Japanese, then Rodinah can be considered as part of the subordinated class who has been interpellated and become the colonial ideological agent. As an ideological apparatus, Rodinah passes on dominant culture's ideology to her children, until they inscribe the same ideology in their bodies.

However, it will be too simplistic to see Inah and Sobi as completely giving themselves up to the colonial logic. The subject-object relation between the dominant culture and the subordinated culture is more of dialectical bases rather than of deterministic one. Here we can refer to Gramsci (in Strinati 1995) who suggest that

... subordinated groups accept the ideas, values and leadership of the dominant group not because they are physically or mentally induced to do so, nor because they are ideologically indoctrinated, but because they have reason of their own (p. 166).

Thus, Inah and Sobi do not necessarily give their spontaneous consent to meet the dominant group's ideas or ideology, but rather for their own safety. They don't necessarily hunt the Japanese for the hard life that the Japanese have caused, or hating the Dutch colonialism for the sufferance that they bear. Although they want to be Dutch, they don't necessarily give their consent for any nationalist ideas, just like when they refuse to be

Indonesian. Also, the need of becoming Dutch does not necessarily come out of the thought that the Dutch has all the quality of being human. It can also emerge out of their inhuman sides.

"When we're Dutch, we can't be embarrassed. We have to be bold enough to be naked. We have to be bold enough to get drunk. We have to be old enough to snarl godperdom at people. And we should always say things like: 'After all, the Japanese are animals, they're bastards.' My tuan does all these things. I watch everything he does and then I memorize it. It seems very easy to become Dutch. If one's clever enough like me to watch carefully and imitate, one can become Dutch in one week." (Toer, 2000, p. 24)

Sobi's naïve point of view portrays how his political consent can be given for a completely different ideal of dominant culture. Also, if we get back to what Rodinah has inflicted upon Inah, we see that the ideology worked in Rodinah's mind—as well as Sobi and Inah's—is not out of Japanese nationalism. What is important for them is the privilege result of the nationality: other people's respect. Such importance on social status is a strong characteristic of Javanese culture. In Java there is a culture called *teposlirio* which is awareness social station based on its hierarchy, from life within the family to the highest level of power (Toer, 1995).

Within this culture, people are very much aware of their stand in society, and the hierarchical social place informs them of the power and position that one has. Therefore Rodinah's, as well as Sobi and Inah's, attachment to Japanese Nationality, instead of showing her consent of Japanese Nationalism, reveals her unconscious bond to Javanese culture. We argue that this is exactly where the politicality of the story resides: it shows the dialectical hegemony of power. We cannot easily locate the "power" only within the dominant group, because the imposing dominant power almost always immediately followed by the power of resistance by the subordinated group.

The Use of Caricature: Showing the Irony of Colonial Logic

The use of caricature really helps to show the irony, or rather the inhumanity of colonial logic, because it enables one to play with the deterministic binary logic. It is interesting to note that in order to show the resistance of the subordinated culture, the writer does not use a character who can intellectually reveal the colonial myth. Instead, Pramoedya uses the myth itself to subvert from within the building of colonial logic. When Sobi says that by becoming Dutch

all blotches will automatically disappear, we are shown the power of myth that has successfully penetrated into the colonized mind, however at the same time the immense power of the myth reveals its own flaw: the myth has cruelly and inhumanly ranked human being merely on the basis of (vague) Nationality (or, perhaps, should we say biological complexion).

Pramoedya does not only play with the social identity of the two characters, but he also goes further, questioning the fundamental possibility of identity: the identity of human being. What are the possibilities of being human? What make the identity of human being? That is more or less the questions posed by Pramoedya in his story. As shown in the previous analysis, his story shows how history has rendered human being into an animal like personae, captured in the natural forces of hereditary and environment. This reminds me of naturalistic approach of the modernist realists who tend to picture human being that inherits personal traits and instinct in which s/he is a subject to social, economic forces in the family, the class, and the milieu into which s/he is born (Abrams, 1957, p. 142). Considering that Pramoedya is very much influenced by Zola, it is understood that his story shows such strong biological and environmental determinism. However, within Pramoedya's naturalistic picture we can still find his play of the notion of human identity.

Through the almost static plot of the story the third person narrator presents us one possibility, after another, of living, of existing, of Becoming in this world. In Inah's and Sobi's world, Becoming is simply eating and shitting. In that matter, the possibility of living is reduced to its most basic material value.

"How simple life is [...] you're hungry and you eat, you're full, and you shit. Between eating and shitting, that's where human life is found. And each new life moves from hunger to shitting. And other lives then follow" (Toer, 2000, p. 25).

Hunger and defecation seem to be the only possibility of living for Inah and Sobi. Ironically such possibility renders them to be inhuman, to be like animals that simply react to the call of nature: life goes on around gratifying hunger and emptying the bowels (Hua, 2000). The characters in the story seem to be lack of human qualities; they have neither emotions nor ambitions, empathy nor sympathy, dignity nor desire. The tough life that they have makes even the possibility to have some possibilities almost impossible—dignity rests not in the possibility of being "full," liberated human, but in a simple "humane" ambition

of becoming "half" human, that is to say of becoming "brown Dutch". In such hard life, they are "losing their 'milk of human kindness', to borrow from Shakespeare's Macbeth, in the face of a tough life in the capital city. Demoralized by their bad lot, they turn into inhuman beings. They no longer have any sympathy nor empathy (Hua, 2000).

Being colonized as long as their life time, they lose the possibility of having human qualities. The hierarchical principle of presence locates them as the inhuman. Ironically, however, by looking into their historical identity as the colonized, and their social identity as the oppressed, we see that Sobi and Inah are just "human" victims of the "inhuman" colonization and social oppression. By caricaturizing this identity politics, here Pramoedya again play with the problematic binary opposition. Sobi and Inah are rendered to be inhuman by not having human qualities such as desire and ambitions. At the same time it is such lack of desire that differentiates the characters from their colonizer and oppressor. They are not "inhuman", they are not colonizing others because they are just "human" who don't have ambitions over others. Thus, by lacking the human qualities of having ambition (over others), they maintain the human quality of not colonizing others. To make it clear, let us look at Rodinah's view of ambitions:

"What's the point of living, if one cannot be happy and take pleasure in one's birthright? And ambitions only produce anxieties among humankind. That is why she remained a maid" (Toer, 2000, p. 18).

Her striking choice of remaining to be maid, of choosing to remain "inhuman" are based on an ironically profound perspective toward humankind. Therefore, it is careless to think of under-privileged people as lacking human qualities.

CONCLUSION

The "Houseboy + Maid" is set in post-revolutionary Indonesia, a period of transition from colonialism to post-colonialism. Such transition enables Pramoedya to play with the colonial logic that set a segregated and hierarchical social system between the colonized and the colonizer. However, the colonial logic persists even after Indonesia achieved its independence: the segregation among the privileged and the under-privileged refuses to go away even in post-revolutionary Indonesia. Where does the place of human being, then, among those hierarchical social system?

That is more or less what Pramoedya questions through his use of caricature in his short story.

Nevertheless, though colonial logic seems to be so persistent, it does not mean that it is irresistible. Through the contrapuntal reading of its textual structure, the building of its logic can be subverted and corrupted from within. By focusing on its own unfilled space, the binary logic can fruitfully be deconstructed. By playing with the binary of identity politics, Pramoedya successfully displays the work of "Caricatures of Circumstances and Their Human Beings." His choice of using people without history in his story poses a kind of identity which is not based on limiting national or social boundary, but more of liberating humanity. In his caricatures, Pramoedya "shows unflinching respect for human beings whatever their cultural origins" (Mandal, 2000).

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