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LOCATIONS OF THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN INDONESIA

A Postcolonial Literary Offer in *Max Havelaar*[1]

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Abstract

Colonization takes over many dimensions of life, e.g., theology, economy, history, and the idea of humanity itself (anthropology). In Indonesia, colonization by the Dutch Empire has been determining the life of the Indonesian people since the eighteenth century. The twin gazes, namely of the European orientalists and of the colonized natives, have colluded to maintain certain ruptures in the mentality of the common Indonesian person, including how they treat other human beings. Such a malforming situation is obscured from historical analysis, given what history's very construction owes to colonial influence. To retrace a more affirming and dignified history, I look elsewhere than the formal record and, by doing so, propose that such a decolonial task lies in availing contemporaneous literary works. In this essay, I present an analysis of the colonial-era novel Max Havelaar, wherein I parse the hidden historical archive offered both in and by the text. Through this analysis, I consider how such an alternative archive affects one's theological imaginary and promotes the (re)construction of a theological anthropology that escapes the confinement of the white Western orientalist gaze.

Keywords: Max Havelaar, literatuary criticism, orientalism, postcolonial/decolonial analysis, theological anthropology

[1] Multatuli, *Max Havelaar*, trans., Ingrid Dwijani Nimpoeno (Bandung: Qanita, 2019). This book was written originally in Dutch and published as *Max Havelaar, of de koffi-veilingen der Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappy* (Amsterdam: J. de Ruyter, 1860). Later, it was translated to English by Baron Alphonse Nahuÿs, appearing as *Max Havelaar: Or the Coffee Auctions of the Dutch Trading Company* (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1860). This essay relies on Nimpoeno's Indonesian translation of Nahuÿs' work.

Abstrak

Kolonisasi mencakup banyak dimensi kehidupan, seperti teologi, ekonomi, sejarah, dan ide tentang kemanusiaan itu sendiri (antropologi). Di Indonesia, kolonisasi oleh Kerajaan Belanda telah memengaruhi kehidupan orang-orang Indonesia yang dijajah terutama sejak abad ke-18. Pandangan ganda dari kaum Orientalis dan orang-orang lokal yang dijajah telah mengganggu mentalitas orang-orang Indonesia, termasuk juga cara mereka memperlakukan sesama manusia. Situasi ini tidak dapat terlihat dengan mudah karena konstruksi sejarah itu sendiri telah dipengaruhi oleh para penjajah. Untuk melakukan penjejakan ulang sejarah agar sejarah dapat lebih diterima dan bermartabat, saya mencari catatan sejarah yang ada di luar ruang lingkup formal. Dengan demikian, saya mengajukan sebuah pandangan bahwa tugas dekolonial hadir di dalam pemanfaatan literatur sastra yang terkait dengan masanya. Dalam tulisan ini, saya menganalisis sebuah novel era kolonial, yakni Max Havelaar, di mana saya mengurai arsip sejarah yang tersembunyi yang ditawarkan baik di dalam maupun oleh teks. Melalui analisis ini, saya mempertimbangkan bagaimana arsip alternatif tersebut dapat memengaruhi imajinasi teologis seseorang dan mendorong (re-)konstruksi sebuah antropologi teologis yang dapat terlepas dari belenggu cara pandang orientalis Barat kulit putih.

Kata-kata Kunci: Max Havelaar, kritik sastra, orientalisme, analisis poskolonial/dekolonial, antropologi teologis

Introduction

An inherent problem in the experience of colonization is the danger of *inheriting* what Walter D. Mignolo calls the "coloniality of power" in all aspects of life, including theology.[2] The relation of power between the colonizers and the colonized results in an entrenched colonial mentality in both, particularly to demean people unfortunate enough to have been colonized in the first place. Within the historical context of the Indonesian people, the very presence of Dutch colonial power did (and does) shape their lives, including life within ecclesial communities. To understand how dangerous is this situation, we need to avail of postcolonial theories that raise our own awareness of imperial power.

[2] Walter Mignolo adapts this term from Anibal Quijano. According to Mignolo, "coloniality of power" is a "conflict of [i.e., between] knowledges and structures of power." Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 16. This idea closely relates to the notion of knowledge/power, namely, how power exists in every relationship and how power comes from everywhere, as articulated by Foucault. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Vol. 1 (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 93.

Unfortunately, the history of colonialism in Indonesia —the erstwhile Dutch East Indies—has shown that the "masters" (i.e., those more powerful in relation to the colonized) have been able to conceal facts from public scrutiny. This creates the condition of *postcoloniality*, namely what Leela Gandhi terms "a condition troubled by the consequences of a self-willed historical amnesia" that drives the post-colony's impulse to retrieve its own forgotten memories.[3] Today, Indonesia's historical recall is both a question of *what* and a problem of *how*. This article asserts that such recollection must consider more than merely the formal, colonial record; in looking elsewhere, the paper argues for a theological anthropology that is (re)constructed by (re)tracing a more affirming and dignified historical account of the once-colonized person.

The argument of this essay relies on the notion of "postcolonial remembering," which can be traced back through Homi Bhabha, who in turn owes the idea to Frantz Fanon.[4] Building on Fanon's oeuvre, Bhabha considers the trauma and pain of *re-membering*, or the work of putting together the dismembered past.[5] The memory that forces one to retrieve one's own subjectivity, therefore, is a painful memory. Precisely the traumatic nature of this act of retrieval makes history even harder to write, since one needs a creative way to re(-)member it. As such, prior to the prospect of decolonizing of theologies (e.g.) within Indonesian ecclesial communities, we need to gain access to retrace and reread (colonial) history. Such access to colonial history, I assert, can be located within creative writing, among other works of art. Postcolonial methodologies comprise a multiplicity of approaches, including analyses of creative writing like the one I offer here. In revisiting literary works like *Max Havelaar*, I aim to demonstrate that the act of reading with a postcolonial lens empowers a nuanced understanding of humanity (i.e., anthropology) according to theologically informed commitments; such a *theological anthropology* moves away from the established colonial mentality, to affirm the dignity of human persons.

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[3] Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 7-8. Gandhi acknowledges the danger of academic dogma in postcolonial*ism*. For the sake of the discourse—and to differentiate it from postcolonial*ity* as a situation—she chooses to maintain the term "postcolonial/ity." For the very same reason, I tend to use "postcolonial studies/lens/perspective" instead of "postcolonialism."

[4] Fanon mentions how the Black soul is (made to become) a white man's artifact. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 16. Referring to that idea in his foreword to the 1986 edition, Bhabha discusses how whiteness is then imprinted upon Black identity. The inscription takes place in the in-between space that forms the figure of colonial otherness. This liminal space, therefore, is the problem of colonial identity. Ibid., xv–xvi.

[5] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Abingdon, OX: Routledge Classics, 2004), 90.

There are several working examples of postcolonial Christian theology produced in and for Indonesia—such as Martin Sinaga's book on identity formation in the context of the Simalungun ethnic church (pioneered by Jaulung Wismar Saragih), and Ira Mangililo's biblically informed analysis of Indonesian women vis-à-vis human trafficking in Nusa Tenggara Timur.[6] On the other hand, not many theologians have offered a postcolonial analysis of Dutch colonial-era literature for deriving a theological anthropology for Indonesia, as I intend to do in this article. By way of introduction, I start with postcolonial literary theory to illustrate literature's importance for postcolonial studies, then I move to a critical analysis of how perspectives on colonialism are interlaced throughout *Max Havelaar*.[7] In response to those colonial elements, I register my own anti-imperialist contribution, by means of revisiting *Max Havelaar* in coordination with Ann Laura Stoler's work on sexuality and racism, in order to show that the power structure can be contested in the presence of people with liminal identities (as in the case of supposedy miscegenated people). Finally, I will conclude this essay with an example of theological anthropology that utilizes the postcolonial approach I outline below.

Postcolonial Literary Theory

Leela Gandhi reminds us how a text cannot be detached from its economic and political context. For instance, if I want to read a novel that was written during colonial times, I must be aware that it carries the colonial power within it. Indeed, there is some danger of examining a colonial-era text and of inhabiting and exploiting its assumptive world for (neo)colonial purposes. Nevertheless, Gandhi also asserts that within a given colonial text is its own double (meaning)—a postcolonial resistance. Her assertion I find to be compelling, according to which we see that the textual offensiveness of colonialism becomes challenged by an anti-colonial counter-textuality. Gandhi refers to Edward Said's pivotal study, *Orientalism,* to point out how the Orient was made

[6] Martin L. Sinaga, *Identitas Poskolonial "Gereja Suku" dalam Masyarakat Sipil: Studi tentang Jaulung Wismar Saragih dan Komunitas Kristen Simalungun* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2004); Ira D. Mangililo, "Imago Dei: Sebuah Upaya Membaca Alkitab Sebagai Perempuan Indonesia dalam Konteks Perdagangan Orang di Nusa Tenggara Timur," *Indonesian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2017): 147-177, https://doi.org/10.46567/ijt.v5i2.23.

[7] Even my own work with this novel, in particular, indicates a strong colonial heritage. Yet, through a postcolonial approach, I argue that once-colonized peoples can start with mapping the problems of that colonialism first.

inferior through imperial textuality.[8] This is similarly expressed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who says:[9]

> Colonial Discourse studies [and literatures], when they concentrate only on the representation of the colonized or the matter of the colonies, can sometimes serve the production of current neocolonial knowledge by placing colonialism/imperialism securely in the past, and/or by suggesting a continuous line from that past to our present.

This operation is why the proliferation of English literature in India seemed innocent yet continued to prolong colonialism through a language that might hegemonize India.[10] Nevertheless, some anti-colonial counter-textuality will keep on emerging, similar to Bhabha's use of "hybridity" to explain the process of Bible translation, introduced by British missionaries as another instance of colonial textuality.[11] Furthermore, I submit that literary texts written by the colonizer carry different meanings for those in power than they do for the colonized. This is why I intend to bring to the surface this tension of textuality versus counter-textuality, to show how invaluable is the approach of postcolonial studies for doing anti-colonial work. These tensions I describe below, in my examination of the novel under investigation.

My analysis centers on a novel written by Eduard Douwes Dekker (1820–1887), a Dutch writer known by his pen name, Multatuli, which in Latin means "I have suffered much."[12] His novel, entitled *Max Havelaar*, was written in 1859. It follows the story of its titular character, a former Dutch official who is eventually assigned as an Assistant-Resident and dispatched to Java island–in Lebak Regency, to be precise, which is an area in Banten province on the westernmost end of the island. Havelaar is

[8] Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 141-144. As Gandhi also hints in her book, Said speaks more about how imperialism and the novel fortified each other. See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 71. Gayatri Spivak also reminds us that, in order to read 19th century British literature, we cannot forget the British imperialism that subsists within it. In her reading, British literature becomes England's social mission as "a cultural representation of England to the English." Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 113.

[9] Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 1.

[10] Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 145.

[11] Bhabha uses the example of when native Indians' demanded that the Gospel be Indianized. On one hand, any cultural adaptation that altered the text of the Bible was forbidden, yet, on the other hand, the argument was made that the Gospel would be better understood via a native language. Here we can see the notions of imperial textuality versus anti-colonial counter-textuality. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 169.

[12] From this point, I use "Multatuli" and "Dekker" interchangeably.

depicted as someone trying to manage one general yet significant issue: ongoing poverty, which was caused by abuses of power perpetrated by the two major parties in the area, viz. the Dutch government and the native regent. By the end of the novel, the author self-identifies with Havelaar. Given that this satirical novel was penned by a former civil servant of the colonial regime, one who remains celebrated as a nineteenth century luminary of Dutch-language literature, my analysis of *Max Havelaar* acknowledges the novel's critical, scathing anti-colonial perspective while also demonstrating that this novel, counterintuitively perhaps, cannot be considered a dependable, effective resource for doing decolonial work. To show this, I rely primarily on Said's theory of orientalism, in addition to availing some treatments of literarature, such as those offered by Spivak, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Mignolo. I contend that this kind of postcolonial analysis is crucial for decolonizing a theological anthropology that remains regnant in contemporary Indonesia. I start by recounting from the story several noteworthy instances that comprise Havelaar's critique of social injustice, as portrayed in the novel, with pages appearing in parenthesis.

Multatuli's Stories: Description of Colonial Textuality

The novel starts with the story of a coffee broker (17), named Batavus Droogstopel. He considers himself to be someone who loves truth and common sense (18). Depicted as an honorable man, Droogstopel knows a lot about the global coffee trade (39). He lives in Amsterdam (17), loves philosophy (36), and knows Latin (32). One day, he happens upon Scarfman (*Sjaalman*)—named as such for the stole he incessantly wears. Scarfman, who is later revealed to be Max Havelaar, is Droogstopel's childhood friend who in their youth once helped him in an incident involving a young, beautiful woman dressed like a Greek and the grown man who threatened violence. Havelaar aided Droogstoppel to get away and avoid a beating by that man (35).

The plot continues when Scarfman asks Droogstoppel to underwrite the publication of his manuscripts (41). In light of his own financial investments, the businessman is intrigued at first by the writings that concern the coffee trade, and he agrees to the request (56). Eventually, the manuscripts get reworked into a publishable book, with help from both a German apprentice, named Stern, and Droogstoppel's son, Frits (63). Within these compiled manuscripts, however, is Havelaar's critique of the Dutch government, which does not sit well with Droogstoppel who also agreed not to substantively alter the original material.

Covering a wide array of topics, the character Havelaar's manuscript—and, thus, *Havelaar* the novel—contains intriguing notes on the Book of Job, prison, the Dutch rebellion against

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Spain, civilization's decline after Christendom, the injustice of certain customs, Western civilization's dominance, the cost of coffee in Java, among other topics (54-56). Through a reading of these topics, I find that Havelaar's (and *Havelaar*'s) central critiques coalesce around six themes, indicting each as follows: the Dutch or Western world, race, orientalism, colonialism, capitalism, and "certain Christian doctrines." The remainder of this essay comprises a theological effort on my part to elaborate on these interrelated topics in turn, specifically as each theme relates to the historical work of (re)constructing a theological anthropology for Indonesian Christianity in our contemporary moment.

Western Civilization

In my reading of *Max Havelaar*, I find that the novel criticizes the Dutch lifestyle, which functions as a proxy for so-called Western civilization. Oftentimes, the criticism occurs by way of allegory, such as the breaking of a stall of *Aglaja* magazines, published for the vanity of Amsterdam's "stylish women" (60). Another allegorical incident is the encounter between Droogstoppel and Havelaar's Dutch wife, Tine, and the couple's older child, Max Jr. Her Chinese-style coiffure sends Droogstoppel into a state of culture shock, to say nothing of the way she was dressed—not in the typical Dutch style, but garbed in *sarung* or *kebaya*, a breach of customs he considers egregious (67).[13] Both Droogstoppel's scandalized judgment of Tine and the destructive incident involving the *Aglaja* magazines appear to suggest that the notion of beauty itself has been colonized—even commodified, in the case of fashion companies, in ways that deserve to be "broken."

The novel also makes note of how strange the name of the couple's daughter, Noni, sounds in the ears of Droogstoppel. Conversely, what sounds odd in *their* ears is the businessman's refusal to address the young girl's mother Tine as "Madam," opting instead to address her as "my good woman" (69). A couple of impressions are striking. First is the critique levied against Dutch social norms, apparently at the intersection of age and gender. For instance, even as a child, Max Jr. recognizes the difference between "madam" and "my good woman." Even though the boy insists that "madam" would be better suited for addressing his Dutch mother, the businessman whose very career would require deftness in such social conventions plainly refuses to address her as such. Second, the parental choice of Max Sr. and Tine—and, by extension, the authorial decision made by Dekker—to name the girl "Noni"

[13] I believe the author meant to say that Tine was wearing *Kebaya* (as the upper part) and *Sarung* (as the lower part). Both are considered traditional Javanese outfits, although nowadays this outfit is also worn by many non-Javanese people as well.

further challenges norms relating to progeny in Dutch society.[14] The sobriquet *nonnie* (or *noni*) within the context of colonial and post-colonial history in Indonesia often carries the connotation that a girl or young woman is of Dutch-Indonesian descent (just as *sinjo* often connotes for a boy or young man of similarly "mixed" progeny). It is somewhat unclear whether the epithet is commonly known by the novel's original Dutch-speaking readership or in the setting of its plot (e.g., around Havelaar's neighborhood), yet Droogstoppel clearly regards it as an odd moniker for the girl. If we assume that the "mixed-blood" connotation of this appellative was well-known to Multatuli's Dutch-speaking audience, then the authorial decision to spotlight Droogstoppel's reaction can only be undersood as centering the contradictory social status of this young girl and, more to the point, the rationale of her Dutch parents to name her Noni (*nonnie*). In the context of the plot, therefore, the girl's name seems to signify a desire on the part of her father—a former imperial officer—to somehow associate himself and his family with the colonized peoples of the Dutch East Indies.

Beyond the family's apparent blurring of cultural boundaries, Havelaar also makes notable distinctions between Orient and Occident. The reader is told repeatedly how he contrasts European and Indonesian ways of life, in ways that suggest or insinuate the colonized might not be so inferior to their Western occupiers. Case in point is how the rougher road conditions throughout Java compare to the smoother roads found in many regions across Europe. In this comparison, Havelaar lauds the necessary skill of the coachmen in the colony and the performance of their horses; it is as if he is attempting to demonstrate ways in which a (colonized) Java is superior to the (colonizer) Netherlands, with implications for other European powers more generally (74-75). Another facet of this subversively comparative work can be found in European tales of medieval kingdoms and bygone battles, the legendary feats of which tend to be well known and widely regarded. As it turns out, the ordinariness of life in Java may even understate the everyday feats of Javanese people, e.g., the indigenous, colonized coachmen, whose skillful mastery of their horse carts, strikes Havelaar as eminently notable. Even in terms of housing construction, Havelaar mentions how houses in Europe are constructed upward, due to the lack of open space, whereas houses in the Indies expand sideways, given the broad landscapes available there. Havelaar regards European houses as strange, rather than the houses in the

[14] It is interesting to note that, while the name of "Max" is a fictive departure from the real name(s) of the elder Dekker (Eduard) and his own son (Edu), "Tine" is derived from Everdine Hubertine van Wijnbergen (the author's separated spouse) and that "Noni" recalls the couple's other child, Nonnie. To my knowledge, the precise etymology of "nonnie" or "noni" remains uncertain.

Indies (268–269). The way Havelaar pits European and Indonesian cultures against one another might demonstrate how the colonized in the story—and in reality—retain their own power to resist whatever the colonizers insist is normative.

Race: Blood, Color, and Language

Another interesting detail in Multatuli's story is how pale Havelaar looks. While he is depicted as looking like most European people, it is indeed not a positive connotation; still, Multatuli mentions that Havelaar's look is not considered unhealthy (109). It seems Multatuli is quite aware of race discourse in his novel. On one page, he describes a billboard that portrays a Black African man who sits under a white European man smoking cigarettes, and the author goes on to specify how billboard was taken down (121). Another part of the tale mentions Madam Slotering, who is called an *indigenous woman* since she can only speak Malay; she is implicitly portrayed as mixed-race, however, with Javanese and Dutch parents (130-134). Even though Madam Slotering present as white and thus looks more like a Dutchwoman, Havelaar oddly enough, also calls her a "Native woman," which is inconsistent with his purported views about equality in race relations (262). As this apparent contradiction may have something to do with her being a woman, a feminist critique would be helpful, and I say more about such a reading strategy later.

The normativity of embodiment, which finds focus in the notion of blood purity, figures strongly in how *Max Havelaar* conceives of race discourse. Derogatory terms exemplify these norms, such as the epithet *liplap* for a mixed-race (European and indigenous) to show how that liplap person is lacking the status of being a "pureblood."[15] By meditating on the circumstances of the liplap, Multatuli registers an important critique of the supposed equality between these children and other Europeans. Since most liplaps do not receive adequate education, that inequity has brought about inequality. One laudable liplap, whose excellence clearly exceeds that of "certain" Europeans, is subjected to deep discrimination as "he is kept down on account of his origin"—yet, even when access to good education is not here at issue, his linguistic facility connotes a certain deficiency, namely when this liplap is told "not to confound the 'h' and 'g'" in the words "*hek*" (hedge) and "*gek*" (fool) (131-133). Here we perceive a shift that transcends embodied norms like lip shape or even skin color (e.g., a mixed-race person who presents as European), which are typical

[15] Liplap also refers to a child with protruding lips (a *raglip*) (131 n.36).

distinctives Mignolo describes as "a coloniality of difference."[16] This shift to cultural forms like language draws yet other sets of classification, through which variant forms of colonizing tend to occur. If we are to believe Multatuli's adulatory prose, however, the very experience of struggling since childhood against the pretext of such ascribed inferiorities, in effect, subverts those claims. In such moments, Multatuli's pen celebrates the value of hustling and striving in the case of those who are underprivileged and struggling to overcome such perceived *colonial difference*.

We the readers see that Havelaar's manuscripts had been written in German and published mostly in Dutch by Stern and Frits. Since Havelaar is Dutch, I infer that the character's use of German is being deployed as a symbol of resistance against colonial power.[17] In context of the plot, to be more precise, the main power (i.e., Dutch) is undermined by other powers, such as the German Stern's knowledge of both the German and Dutch languages; the apprentice's bilingual abilities are required to express Havelaar's thoughts publicly. However, we recognize Stern to be a polyglot, having published the prepared manuscript in French and English, as well (64). Thus, the notion of cultural and colonial superiority becomes problematized by the dynamics of language, which indeed is the case beyond mere commercial concerns. For instance, the parts of Havelaar's manuscripts written in Javanese or Malay are difficult for Stern, Frits, and Droogstoppel to understand (65). The linguistic opacity these three Europeans face, in turn, masks the erstwhile hegemony of other empires and regimes, even as these now non-imperial languages—Javanese, Malay, Sanskrit—may serve as current discursivities of resistance. This multilingual fact mocks the mistake of imperial thought that protects the privilege of being monolingual, denigrates the rest of the world's languages, and reserves the empire's speech for use by its own legitimated and empowered people, namely the colonizers. Such lopsided dynamics also reveal themselves in the plot—for instance, when the character Duclari speaks to Verbrugge in Dutch within the presence of the Javanese Regent (103–105), or when Stern satirically asks how many Dutch governors consider other languages important enough to learn them and, in turn, gets criticized concerning his own grasp of the Dutch language (357). Droogstoppel, who does not

[16] Coloniality of difference as a classification that is made by enacting coloniality of power within the modern/colonial concept. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 13.

[17] It is true that Germany as a nation is established in 1880, while this book is written in 1860. Therefore, it is expected that Stern can be an objective figure in this novel. See Carl Niekerk, "Rethinking a Problematic Constellation: Postcolonialism and Its Germanic Contexts (Pramoedya Ananta Toer/Multatuli)," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 23, No. 1 & 2 (2003): 61, https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-23-1-2-58.

appreciate his German apprentice's comments, exercises his privilege as a true Dutchman to point out what he perceives (or purports) to be lacking in Stern's linguistic mastery. Interestingly, earlier in the narrative, Droogstoppel questions the importance of studying Ecclesiastical Latin. He reasons that it would be better to understand that "God is Good" in one's own tongue, such as Dutch for him, than in Latin (32–33). In addition to the possibility of Protestant-Catholic polemics, these details might hint at how the Dutch think themselves superior to other powers, whether European or ecclesiastical.

Race and Orientalism

Pivotal in the development of postcolonial studies is the othering concept of *orientalism*. According to Said, the approach leverages a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."[18] Orientalism, which cares not how peoples in the so-called Orient see themselves, ironically says more about Westerners who employ it, specifically how (e.g.) European people in the "Occident" (the West) claim to understand "Oriental" people, culture, values, and even the "Orient" itself. To say it differently, orientalism evacuates the "Orient" of subjectivity, thereby depriving peoples of the dignity to understand and articulate their own identities. According to Said, this is even accomplished through artwork, which re(-)presents the "Orient" as inventions that, in actuality, are starkly different from the "real Orient."[19] This method has come to be known as "(dangerous) representation," which extends beyond the geospatial confines of what may lie to the East.[20]

One example of this contradiction can be seen in Droogstoppel's brief comments about the Greek girl with the very dark eyes, which I read as an instantiation of objectifying representation, both in and through the tale being told (33). It invents interest in a girl or young woman with eyes like obsidian, a comparatively rare feature in lands predominantly inhabited by blue-eyed people, such as the Netherlands. Droogstoppel, Havelaar, and their friends share interest in the girl's "exotic" look, insofar as they feel invited to partake in the "colonial/sexual

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[18] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 3. Although the Orient, which literally means the East, in Said's book correlates with the Arabic people and extends as far as to India, the notion is quite similar to how Europeans approach peoples throughout the rest of Asia.

[19] Ibid., 22. The nuance between *real* and *actual* need not detract us here.

[20] Stuart Hall explains that meaning is determined by language and that language is described through media, such as photography and music, which are predicated upon notions of "representation." See Hall, "Introduction," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed., Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1997), 5.

difference" that determines in what sense this girl ought to be objectified by their gaze.

A similar, orientalist gaze operates in the lumping together of peoples, if not also the fetishization of their flattened similitude. We see in the later section on Saidjah and Adinda that, as their story is introduced, the reader is met by stereotypes comprising an attempt to generalize all people in Java—such as the depiction of the Europeans who misunderstand the Javanese by conflating peoples from different ethnicities. The notion of how diverse are the cultures across this heavily populated island, let alone the Dutch-controlled area of the impossibly sprawling Malay Archipelago, seems to have eluded the attention of these Europeans (346). In other words, their false knowledge of the "Orient"—itself an invention by the West—fashions an equally fictive identity that they then push onto the people of the "Orient." Lamentably, those colonized might even come to accept such manufactured knowledge about them as the "truth," over against what they actually know about themselves.[21] This operation, to say nothing of the mentality it installs, is *truly* colonizing to its core.

Colonialism in Java

Despite Havelaar's many critiques directed primarily toward the colonial government and local regency, he still ascribes to the Javanese the status of being Dutch "citizens" and subjects of the Dutch Empire; Holland's king is also their king (80). On the one hand, it seems that Havelaar honors the lowly and overlooked Javanese people, trying to make them equal to the Dutch citizenry in Europe. On the other hand, Havelaar quite clearly still supports the Dutch Empire's colonial rule over the East Indies. Prescient of today's cliché humanitarian conglomerate or compassionate capitalism, Havelaar thinks the conditions of occupation need only to be improved. For instance, not much was expected of the *babu* (female servant) in his employ, as he chooses not to assign her very many tasks (121). Later below, I develop this line of critique to include gendered intersections more prominently.

Throughout the East Indies, as on Java Island, the Dutch demonstrated their superiority in military power. Although the colonial system had been installed since the eighteenth century, the common folk still respected highly their local feudal rulers. Since the Dutch occupation would always require human resourcing to maintain control of these territories, the Dutch were compelled to work together with its feudal lords, who were then dubbed "regents" for the empire. According to Havelaar, the importance of these regents could not be overstated, given how close these local rulers were to the people. Because these feudal lords were

[21] Said, *Orientalism*, 40.

held in such great esteem—more so than the people had regarded their imperial overlords—the collusion of powers becomes vital for the empire to avoid unnecessary rebellions (85). Moreover, while the regents live like princes and are much wealthier than their counterpart imperial officials per Havelaar's account, the regents also need more resources to maintain their intermediary situation (86-87). Abhorring the abuses of power and the exploitation of the local people, Havelaar goes so far as to blame a famine in Java on the colluding local regents and Dutch colonial officials (88-91).

Havelaar's aphorism, that it is "crime that brings shame, not poverty," demonstrates how critical he is of the corrupt imperial-fuedal arrangement.[22] Multatuli portrays his titular character as a generous soul who is in perennial need of money, in light of how often he gives it away to help other people. As he becomes destitute through his largesse, Havelaar quite literally stands with the poor—a fellow "citizen" and subject of empire.

Irony of Capitalism

The novel's clearest critique of capitalism is personified in the looming figure of Droogstoppel. Dekker purposefully casts this would-be coffee baron as a major figure in the plot, portraying him as a lover of truth and philosophy, ever reliant upon his precious rationality. By no means a completely sympathetic character, Droogstoppel deplores complainers as a detestable lot whom he regards as incapable of ever being satisfied (70). For Droogstoppel, the complaint of underprivileged people is non-sensical, as culpability always lies with the poor (14), while anyone who gets political enough to criticize the government deserves no quarter (364). Such sentiments extend to the Dutchman's perception of Tine and Max Havelaar.

The former colonial officer Havelaar criticizes unjust labor practices for fomenting poverty, in particular, comparing work without pay to the specter of cancer (292). Havelaar points out that, while the government is never blamed for poverty, natural disasters somehow often end up the presumed cause (303). The distribution of rice, for example, is always an uneven flow. The supplies of rice extracted and exported to Europe far outweigh the rice apportioned for Java, according to Havelaar (306). So then, what is nonsensical about farmers rebelling? At the same time, when the Dutch undertake infrastructure projects, the colony pays in both monetary costs and forced labor; the cultivation system (*cultuurstelsel*) is put forth as the civic solution, though the machinations only benefit Dutch officials and local regents, not the people (324). Havelaar's clever but powerful commentary on the

[22] *Le crime fait la honte, et non la pauvrete,* on p. 251, my translation.

matter comes by way of narrating the aforementioned story of Saidjah and Adinda (366-402 or chapter 17).

Havelaar writes of Saidjah, a young man whose one buffalo had been stolen by a district official and the other buffalo killed for food. Saidjah's mother dies in sorrow, which causes his father to run away to find a different job in another city, as he could not pay the land tax alone. Caught while evading these taxes, Saidjah's father is punished with lashes; he is arrested and eventually dies in prison. This leaves Saidjah to make his own dangerous way to a big city to make a better living. In 36 months, he saves enough money to return to his village and to buy three buffalos. After years apart, Saidjah had looked forward to being with his childhood love, Adinda. Unfortunately, their reunion was not meant to be, as Saidjah discovers that Adinda has died at the hands of the Dutch army for her part in a resistance group in another province. Adinda's family fled to Lampung Province only a few months earlier, along with others whose buffalos had been similarly commandeered by the district official; they all went into hiding since they, too, could not pay the land taxes. Upon finding her dead body, Saidjah thrusts his own belly onto a soldier's bayonet to kill himself.

In provocative fashion, Havelaar hopes to place before his white, European audience (as Dekker apparently does, too, for his) a challenging tale that checks their lack of empathy specifically in light of the sufferings of colonized people. With scathing satire, Havelaar criticizes the Dutch people and even the king, himself (464)—as does Dekker. But Multatuli himself, in the novel, admits that he is unsure whether the story Saidjah and Adinda is even true (399). Nevertheless, he emphasizes the importance and usefulness that even fictional stories point to general truths, and there exist many stories he could tell that would be similar to this one of Saidjah and Adinda. According to Multatuli, whose mind evidently is fixed upon the unjust theft and extortion running rampant in the colony, the addition of some embelishments, if not downright lies, perhaps, might still be acceptable, in light of the lesson to be extracted from the narrative. In other words, as long as the story provides entré for channeling his criticisms of a callous European elite who treat their colonial subjects with excessive malice, then there is justification for fabricating a tale that has them rethink their treatment of locals as if they were mere machinery for processing Europe's precious coffee and sugar (399–401). The irony here, namely of values (and valuables) extracted from rationalized fabrications of pretext, is curiously lost upon Dekker, whose *nom de plume* is itself an ironic paradox: Who, exactly, has suffered much?

Against Christian Teachings

In the present effort to locate theological anthropology by means of historical (re)construction, the final thematic area in *Max Havelaar* I identify is—Christian doctrine. The novel, which does not shy away from criticisms of Dutch society and politics, is similarly unafraid of controversy concerning the other hegemon that made colonialism possible at all, namely a Christianity that taught might, subjugation, supremacy, and prosperity. In this section, I treat three *topoi* that reveal deep wounds in the spirit of a conquering Christianity.

Colonizing Both Bodies and Souls

By affirming the exclusivist, racist sermonizing of Dominé Wawelaar, the like-minded coffee merchant Droogstoppel shows himself to be the minister's confrère in white Christian supremacy (361). Pastor Wawelaar expresses his distaste for the "Native" beliefs found across—i.e., both throughout and on the other side of—the Indian Ocean, even taking issue with various Christian denominations in their beliefs and practices (361). We readers learn in an earlier sermon that the minister considers dark-skinned people to be descended from the biblical Ham and, as inheritors of Canaan's curse, are destined for hell (191-192).[23] The preacher argues that God has appointed Holland to "bring civilization, religion, [and] Christianity" to the Javanese, whom the minister characterizes as "unfortunate creatures"; Wawelaar goes as far as to insinuate that this civilizing mission rationalizes the opium trade, justifying the financial support of missionaries with the mandate of forced labor and illicit trade (193-195).

Toward the end of his sermon, Wawelaar stresses the Javanese need for salvation, which, in order for them to achieve, necessitates the islanders work as coffee farmers. By consigning the Javanese to labor on Dutch-owned coffee plantations, Wawelaar articulates the Dutch belief that they can conquer "the Javanese souls to the kingdom of God" (195). It comes as no surprise, then, why one hegemon colludes with another, i.e., why Europe's Christian missions were so intertwined with capitalist colonialism. To extract and acquire wealth from these lands, the imperial powers need to conquer bodies; to conquer the body, in turn, invites conquest of the soul—many souls for many peoples. Christian missions may target the soul, tacitly suggesting the rest of a person belongs to the empire, but no—Christian missions can lay claim to bodies, too, conscripting labor forces through the state in

[23] Known as the "the curse of Ham," this false interpretation is often used to legitimize the practice of American slavery in the past. See Haynes' investigation in Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

order to underwrite its ventures and legitimizing the embodiment of colonial practice by casting civilization as ostensibly salvific. Yet, as these colonial practices extract and siphon wealth away to the empire, the European motto "Gold, Gospel, and Glory" is interlockingly reified in terms of capital, dogma, and nationalism. Evoking Said's *Orientalism* to aid in the analysis, however, we might also recognize that the Javanese people are subjected to the Dutch gaze, lost souls "condemned" as unworthy of their own subjectivity as Javanese people. In body and sould, the Javanese are colonized as commission.

Revisiting Eschatology

Just as the foregoing decolonial analysis does not resolve any (e.g.) metaphysical questions concerning realities corporeal (colonized bodies) or psychological (colonized souls and minds), my analysis below is trained on the manner in which *eschatology* gets deployed rhetorically. In other words, my aim is not to articulate how the end times should unfold, as it were, but rather to note the ways in which the "doctrine of last things" has been availed by white Christian supremacists as cover for their unjust exploitation in Southeast Asia—as it has in Africa, the Americas, Oceania, and to the ends of the earth. To help frame my concerns in Indonesia, by way of analogy I appeal to the more widely known historic institution of US chattel slavery and, in particular, to the theological opportunity emerging from the pain, loss, suffering, and trauma of (ongoing) racialized and militarized dehumanization. In this brief section, the vaunted father of Black liberation theology, James H. Cone (1938–2018), instructs us. But first, back to *Max Havelaar*.

The confluence of Christianity, capitalism, and race can be found in another interesting passage, wherein Havelaar encounters Upik Keteh, the young daughter of a *datuk*, i.e., head of a family clan, and tells her the story of a power-hungry stonecutter who complains about wanting a better life (231-234). Convinced that he would attain satisfaction when an angel of the Lord fulfills his wishes, he undergoes several transformations yet is met each time with a sense of dissatisfaction with every granted vocation. Only when he ends up being transformed into a stonecutter again is the man finally satisfied. Havelaar then asks Upik, were an angel to do the same for her, what would the young girl request? Upik simply responds that she wants to go to (Christian) heaven.

Whence did the *datuk*'s daughter arrive at this desire, and is there nothing else in her world worth striving (living and dying) for? In his time, Cone directed his fair share of criticism against ill-conceived eschatology. If Christianity has often put too much emphasis on heaven or the end of days, it is so *because* of the present. Concerning the struggles of Blacks as the US paradigm of underrepresented and underprivileged people—and this, in spite of

the land's traditional connection with the Indigenous and First Nations peoples—Cone wonders about the proper place of eschatology. In *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone asserts that, if eschatology is about preparation for another world, as many white theologians argue, then Black Theology is not eschatological; instead, it is an earthly, this-worldly theology concerned not with last things but with white things. Black Theology's hope is for this life; in fact, hoping for some next life reveals the lack of hope. As such, Black Theology refuses to embrace any doctrine or dogma that casts Black suffering as the will of God.[24]

Cone goes further, however, saying that heaven is irrelevant. With no otherworldly place for reward, there ought to be freedom to live with and as neighbors in the here and now. Therefore, for any eschatology to be properly oriented towards Black Power, the "last things" must entail confronting and ending present injustices and current circumstances corrupted by racism; a "Black Eschatology," then, means the realization of the hope for justice, the humanizing of humanity, the socializing of society, and a peaceful flourishing that is for all creation. Our future expectations must be turned into present realities, just as eschatology empowers an emancipatory analysis of and liberationist intervention in the world. According to Black Theology, eschatology is practical and deals with the reality of the world.[25] For those bereft of social capital and societal privilege, like Upik Keteh in novelized colonial Java, reaching heaven is perhaps its own good reward.[26] The life of the marginalized and downtrodden is by no means any less worthy here and now—on earth, so we are taught to pray, as it is in heaven.

Regarding Christian Ethics

A story about Mary, who suddenly stopped reading the story of Lot, also implies how Mary, Droogstoppel's daughter, might reject the idea of being an "obedient wife" (357). That idea of being "obedient," at least, is shown in how Droogstoppel's wife tried to persuade Mary. Droogstoppel tried to discipline Mary to be upright according to his understanding of morality. Moreover, since Mary also learned to sing a French song about an old beggar and, during breakfast she did not wear a corset, Droogstoppel thinks she has been led astray (358). A similar concern happens to Frits.

He was in a catechism class with Wawelaar, and the pastor talked about Stephen, who was stoned to death. Interestingly, Frits

[24] James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 3rd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), 139-140.

[25] Ibid., 141-142.

[26] A daughter of a head clan, a woman, especially in a patriarchal society, is unable to determine her own future.

thought it would have been better if Stephen had thrown the stones back. Frits later was "threatened" with the reward of hell, but he did not care and laughed instead. Droogstoppel, seeing this, expressed his concerns to Frits because he believes Frits' salvation is much more important than the Javanese people who lost their buffalos (360). In fact, he believes what Wawelaar said about Holland's wealthiness is because of the orthodox faith. Wawelaar compared it to France, which has daily murder cases, because of the presence of Roman Catholicism, and to Java which has all the poverty, because of the presence of many Pagans. Adding Jew's experience of bankruptcy, Wawelaar's explanation left a strong impression on Droogstoppel, who found Wawelaar's explanation true also in his experience. He adds that to "pray and labor" means that those who know God have to pray, while others who do not know God, need to do the labor. He then indicates the problem of the scarfman, with all miseries he has, as a result of the scarfman's own mistakes, and he must not support the scarfman to keep doing his mistakes (361-362). This idea of "pray and labor" shows how pray and labor are often separated into two contradicting and disintegrated things, as if praying means not to labor. If this persists, then a borgeouis community can always exploit the low wage laborers while being legitimized by the church. This understanding also will benefit people like Droogstoppel who thinks that his "charity" can proof how good he is, just like Christians who only do the "prayer," but no labor.

Droogstoppel always gives money to the poor and the church (363). I argue this is indeed an oxymoron since a church should exist for the poor. It is as if Droogstoppel is justified through this act, for he never really cared about the poor. Further, he chooses to listen to a story of a successful neighbor, a woman, whose cousin has a store in the East Indies. Her cousin has a nice life story and never complains. Likewise, he also hears of another rich man in Java who thinks the Colonial government has been so generous. Thus, he believes those stories represent the Truth in the East Indies, and he rejects the scarfman's account (364). For Droogstoppel, one has to work. If one does not want to work, the person will be poor and will stay poor. He also thinks the reason for Havelaar's writing on the Book of Job is because Havelaar is starting to experience God's punishment. These excerpts turn out to be problematic in Christian Ethics with a postcolonial lens. Poverty is created and maintained by structural injustice, not by individual responsibility (365).

Toward the end, Havelaar decides not to stay silent and complains about the unjust situation created by the Regent and reports it to the Resident whom he regards is too busy in reporting the "tranquil tranquility" of the area (413). For Havelaar, he cannot stand to wait for a better situation while the people have to eat sand

(444). He even goes out to seek the General Governor though his search is futile (456-457). At the end of the book, Multatuli takes the pen, discloses that he is Havelaar, and expresses all his critiques to King William the Third, bringing all attention to the people in the colonial land (460). He criticizes the sermon orators like Wawelaar, who created their own theologies, those involved in coffee trading who only think of benefits like Droogstoppel, and the flatterers like the Resident Slijmering who only flatters the General Governor but kept silent about the injustice that Havelaar tried to report (465).

An Initial Postcolonial Offer: Counter-textual Remarks

An exemplar in the canon of Dutch literature, *Max Havelaar* is literary art "that killed colonialism," in the words of celebrated Indonesian essayist and social critic, Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1925-2006). Toer, whose career spanned the late colonial period until the *Reformasi* era, reads the novel through postcolonial lenses to find incisive commentary on the coffee trade, in particular. Such exploitation relates historically to the expedition for spices that instigated European interest in the archipelago centuries ago. Toer explains that the global phenomenon of Western expansion owes its ventures to[27]

> the search for spices by Western countries, which brought alien nations and cultures into contact with one another for the first time; [yet] the expansion of educational opportunities . . . returned to the colonized peoples of the world a right they had been forced to forfeit under Western colonization—the right to determine their own futures.

Toer reports that several key figures during the Indonesian National Revolution (1945-1949) came to their platforms and positions of prominence—namely, after reading *Max Havelaar*.[28] The revolutionary spirit of the novel showcased for the luminaries just how Havelaar (and, therefore, Multatuli) dared to protest both

[27] Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Best Story; The Book That Killed Colonialism," *The New York Times Magazine*, April 18, 1999, 112.

[28] For example, Indonesia's first ambassador to Great Britain, Agus Salim, was known to read *Max Havelaar*, as was Romo Mangun (Fr. Yusuf Bilyarta Mangunwijaya), a Catholic priest, architect, and writer. Ibid., 112; Darren C. Zook, "Searching for Max Havelaar: Multatuli, Colonial History, and the Confusion of Empire," *Comparative Literature Issue*, Vol. 121, No. 5 (2006): 1182, doi:10.1353/mln.2007.0021.

extractionist colonial policies and corrupt indigenous power structures, alike.[29]

Multatuli's descriptive efforts in tandem with Toer's insightful appraisals, together, tell us several things about how colonialism works. First, colonialism thrives in accordance with the spirit of capitalism, which seeks the commonweal of empire at the neglect of the colonies. The natural and human richness of the Dutch East Indies was proffered as tribute to a merchant empire.[30] Second, colonialism retains exclusive power over racialized identities, exerting its undeniable influence to define social values like colorism and discourse. Keeping the Dutch language on reserve for use by only the "pure" (and properly phenomtypical) Dutch citizen shows how colonialism leverages differences to dictate what is a *human being* as well as rules to govern *being human*—and the colonizer's skin or tongue are the paradigm. Third, colonialism assumes the master-slave binary, even dressed in paternalistic garb. Such a dynamic is even conveyed, for example, in the historical actions of the Dutch governor-general, Van der Capellen, who in 1824 had implored Indonesian natives to exercise their Dutch *citizenship* more fully, namely to regard the Dutch king as their own father who wishes to care for his "children."[31] Fourth, the imperial system perpetuates its own approaches to control. As (Dutch) colonialism tries to control the very structurations of society, its *modus operandi* has been to monopolize commercial flows to maintain and reify (neo)colonial logics.[32]

In light of what I observe, above, I concur with other postcolonial thinkers and assert that such a mode of analysis would assist those on the underside of history to contend that the methods, machinations, and madness of colonialism. In the context of the Dutch East Indies/Republic of Indonesia, such subversive strategies run—both implicitly and, often enough, explicitly—throughout *Max Havelaar*. With postcolonial analysis, we can elucidate the conditions of the colonized as well as of the racist, imperialist, and ethnocentrist colonizers within its multi-layered stories of the literature (the novel). Nevertheless, this initial

[29] The bevy of charges includes "unpaid labor, theft, and murder," even on the part of native authorities in colonial collusion. See Niekerk, "Rethinking a Problematic Constellation," 60.

[30] Reinier Salverda, "The Case of the Missing Empire, or the Continuing Relevance of Multatuli's Novel *Max Havelaar*," *European Review*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2005): 128, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798705000128.

[31] The event does not escape Havelaar's attention as I have mentioned under the section "Colonialism in Java." Spivak criticizes the shift in terminology, from colonial subject to citizen. For her, postcolonial performativity is to be located in subalternity, not in being part of a citizenry or the citizenship process. Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 141.

[32] Salverda, "The Case of the Missing Empire, or the Continuing Relevance of Multatuli's Novel *Max Havelaar*," 128-129.

offer is not without a cons, especially knowing that it is written from a Western author. In my second offer below, I point out crucial points that need to be addressed.

Another Postcolonial Offer: Alternative Counter-textuality in Revisiting *Max Havelaar*

A second offer is in order, namely to read the initial offer (above) with a grain of salt. Although *Max Havelaar* is the vaunted novel *that killed colonialism*, in my reading of the novel it remains a literary work that is written from—and therefore imbued with—a white Western perspective. In other words, it still lacks any native voicings or indigenous intonations. In the following section, I articulate an alternative offer, demonstrating where the text's perspectival lack could have been parlayed into showing its underlying decolonial pulse. This exemplary novel's major disadvantage, therefore, is the neglect of actual indigenous and native vantages, which I submit would be a better approach and an *advantageous* feature for reading this text from and with an (or my) Indonesian perspective, among other possibilities.

Orientalist Gaze

Besides all the noteworthy critiques implied in all of Multatuli's words, Multatuli unfortunately could not escape the tendency to employ an orientalist gaze himself, thereby implicating him as a colonizer.[33] Dekker's work is problematic, not only when seen through the lenses of feminism and anti-capitalism, but also even when seen through the lens of anti-colonialism. Beekman explains how Havelaar (or Dekker) was not psychologically stable, such as being portrayed as a gambler and a womanizer.[34] In addition, as we see throughout the novel, there is no indication by the author that suggests Havelaar's wife Tine criticizes him for being close to Arles' women, or even compared her beauty to theirs (210-221). Judith Gera has claimed that the novel focuses on masculinity, because so many male voices dominate it. The only female voices that readers hear in the novel belong to Tine and Madam Slotering, who often enough become defined by the perspectives of Havelaar and Droogstoppel.[35] On another occasion, Multatuli is seen as someone who fought for the rights of the poor natives. His suggestions, however, were not to obliterate the colonizing structure but instead to improve

[33] Cited in Niekerk, "Rethinking a Problematic Constellation," 59.

[34] E. M. Beekman, *Troubled Pleasures: Dutch Colonial Literature from the East Indies 1600–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 222. Cited by Niekerk, "Rethinking a Problematic Constellation," 60.

[35] As cited in Salverda, "The Case of the Missing Empire, or the Continuing Relevance of Multatuli's Novel Max Havelaar," 131.

conditions within that system.[36] Case in point, Havelaar did not want to abolish the *Cultuurstelsel* so much as to point out the managerial lack in the number of Dutch officials needed to oversee its colonies everywhere.[37] Furthermore, his targeting the native regencies to saddle them with increased responsibility, in comparison with the burden Dekker ascribes to the Dutch Empire, is tantamount to blaming the local social hierarchy for the colony's ills.[38] Multatuli's protests were more about injustices done to him the colonial officer, not to the colony's inhabitants. Darren Zook has argued that Dekker increasingly desires absolute power, namely to determine the life of the native people.[39] For example, how Havelaar only focuses on one notion of justice as based on the Dutch judicial system reveals his (and, so, Dekker's) lack of interest in how the native societal system might reveal key correctives and alternatives.[40] Drawing upon Beekman's and Zook's critiques propels us back to Said's theory of orientalism.[41] In the end, Dekker's orientalist gaze perdures in the very impulse to rescue the natives by means of his own colonial/imperial knowledge.[42]

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[36] Niekerk, "Rethinking a Problematic Constellation," 60.

[37] Zook, "Searching for Max Havelaar," 1173.

[38] Niekerk, "Rethinking a Problematic Constellation," 61.

[39] Zook, "Searching for Max Havelaar," 1172-1173. I agree with Zook, insofar as it is difficult for me to condone the local hierarchical system in Javanese society. But if Dekker wanted to truly improve the quality of life for the natives, he could have expressed his concerns and criticisms toward colonialism more directly. He mentions how some have died for expressing their protests, which suggests how impossible it (ostensibly) would have been for him to lob such direct critiques in his own time. Nevertheless, he did not write this book in Holland, nor was it initially penned in the Dutch language, as suggested by Dekker in the story of Havelaar's manuscript. The book is originally published in Amsterdam (Holland), but through the story explained in *Max Havelaar,* I assume the book was written by Dekker in German first as separate manuscripts. Recall the story in the novel that the manuscripts were written in German, but then composed in Dutch by Stern. These locational and situational details he could have leveraged in his favor.

[40] Ibid., 1176.

[41] Another noteworthy discourse that is used by Beekman is the notion of heteroglossia, introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin. Although it is worth another article, in short, Bakhtin argues that every text has double if not multiple meanings (polyglossia). That *polyglossic*, or what he tends to call later heteroglot nature (as in his preferred notion, heteroglossia), has a sort of consciousness that "aimed sharply and polemically against the official languages of its given time." M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), 61, 273. To relate his "heteroglossia" to this novel and to what Gandhi has mentioned in the beginning of this article, *Max Havelaar* indeed has multiple meanings. For example, it can be used as an anti-colonial counter-textuality, and it can also be used as a promotion of colonial textuality. Above all, I reaffirm the postcoloniality of the text that needs postcolonial studies to unveil that ambiguity. For that exact reason, postcolonial perspective is needed to retrace the forgotten (colonized) history and to reconstruct our thoughts.

[42] Zook, "Searching for Max Havelaar," 1177.

Multatuli also juxtaposes Droogstoppel's truth claims with Havelaar's own in a quest for what Multatuli believed as the ultimate Truth. Havelaar the protagonist often rebuts and clashes with Droogstoppel's sense of principles, but *Havelaar* the novel conveys these within a singular system of Truth, thereby forcing an impression of how that Truth ought to be claimed and ultimately controlled. Havelaar did leave his compound (garden) to be disarrayed as compared to other officials' well-manicured garden (270-272). His "anarchy" (leaving his garden unattended), as an example, represents a superiority of Truth against the bonafide empire that is always be ordered and in order—an empire without anarchy.[43] Nevertheless, it means, Droogstoppel's, the other Dutch officials', and Havelaar's own concept of truth is understood in a single (uni-) verse of truth. I argue this last comment is debatable because, in the end, the "Truth" in this novel is depicted through the eyes of the colonizers.[44]

To understand the literary writings of colonial-era European authors, we of the post-colony need to pay attention to their orientalist gaze—especially whenever these writers have a vested interested or are involved in the imperial administration of the colonies, such as Dekker. Said mentions how the "Oriental" is often depicted as "irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different,'" while in contrast the European effuses more positive traits; in other words, "the Oriental is always *contained* and *represented* by dominating frameworks."[45] The depiction is conveyed particularly through the arts to create the images, rhythms, and

[43] Ibid., 1179-1182. Zook's analysis is indeed convincing up to this point, despite some concerns I have about his interpretive claim that this novel somehow shows absolute Truth as knowable and as factually represented in literary art.

[44] Hence why Mignolo opines it better to arrive at European writings rather than starting from them, so that readers are aware of any regnant or remnant Eurocentrism in these. In other words, decolonial works should start from the experiences and narratives of former colonies. Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 229. Why, then, toil with *Max Havelaar* here, since it may seem as if I start from a European frame of reference? Indeed, I promote a decolonial act in my analysis, by showing how this so-called "radical" European novel, i.e., *Max Havelaar*, still carries the danger of a European orientalist gaze. Yet, I contend, working on *Max Havelaar* gives us a bridge to connect Indonesia and the Dutch Empire as a postcolonial transition—not necessarily in a way that makes sense to modernity. Rather, the point is to retrace history in ways that go beyond European sensibilities (e.g., regarding Indonesian novels, such as example is found in the writings of Pramoedya Ananta Toer).

[45] Said, *Orientalism*, 40. Emphases original. Christians colonizers far too often consider themselves to be the mature/adult ones who know better and should therefore guide the colonized, considered immature/childish. This thoroughgoing paternalism can be seen in how Havelaar keeps repeatedly refers to the Dutch empire and its representatives as the older brother(s) of the East Indies (Indonesia).

motifs of the *orientalized* people, for instance, within exoticized travelogues and novels.[46] These novels become testimonies to define the "Oriental" and so often are filled with Romantic restructuration, which restructures its readership in different ways.[47] For European readers, the fictive accounts of the novel are taken to represent the "Oriental" as if in actual fact. For the *orientalized* readers, the fictive accounts of the novel reshape their imaginaries, infecting them with a Western-esque consciousness in relation to empire.[48] In other words, reading such literature informs both sides of the readership, schooling colonizers and colonized alike according to a Western normative imaginary, such that tragedy occurs primarily in the "Orient" or that locals need some Western savior to rescue them from their problems. He unfortunate natives are to be restored and their societies reconstructed by the divinized power that gazes upon their sad lot and has come triumphant from the West.[49]

Romanticism and Regeneration

Developing the notion of "natural supernaturalism" in the context of a two-way regeneration, Said argues that the regnant expectation upon many romantic novels written by Europeans about Asia ought to show how Europe can become a better place with Asian values. In this configuration, Asia is depicted as a kind of savior of a regenerated Europe.[50] Unfortunately, such imaginings of Asia as the ones sketched in these novels are naught but an image (re)constructed according to the European gaze.[51] Thus, there is always Western ego and presumed authority in the burden of (Europe's) defining the subaltern and the orientlalized, theorized as "Asia." At the same time, the case of India points to

[46] Ibid., 22.

[47] Ibid., 158. The Romantic novel often is filled with stories that emphasize romantic feelings, emotions, exoticism, and individual sensuality (as in, pertaining to the senses). Other characteristics of romantic literature include heroism and tragedy. Encyclopædia Britannica, "Romanticism," https://www.britannica.com/art/Romanticism. Given such a taxonomy, I argue that *Max Havelaar* fits this genre.

[48] Said, *Orientalism*, 203.

[49] Ibid., 168. For the idea of "natural supernaturalism" (reconstituted theology), see next section, as well as M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973).

[50] Spivak says that "the colonizer constructs himself as he constructs the colony." Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 203. Moreover, the ouevres of Spivak, Said, and other postcolonial thinkers and activists show that the constructs of the colonizer come at the expense of the colonized, one's construction for another's destruction, or a building up through a tearing down.

[51] Said, *Orientalism*, 115.

how the British understood their task as being (also) to regenerate India.[52]

The syndrome of romanticism infects and informs Multatuli's novel, precisely in the salvific figure of Havelaar, replete with all of his (Havelaar's? Dekker's?) idealism to "save" the natives. Thus, the savior-complex and notions of divinized heroism perpetuate and persist within the novel's orientalist gaze. In a postcolonial reading of colonial art forms, the sense of irony devolves into tragedy, as certain peoples (non-Europeans) are believed—theologized, even—to be outside of any romanticized, salvific regeneration; these "Oriental" Arabs are, then, considered incapable of being regenerated.[53] Using Said's theory on orientalism, and looking at how often the colonized people are painted in the literatures by British colonizers while acting as the savior, the colonized will always be treated as less human or not fully human. This devolution invites us to rethink the theological anthropological difference(s) between Western and indigenous literatures, among other frames of reference.

The Literature and "the literatures"

In locating a theological anthropology, this essay has argued for the retracing of history. According to Spivak, literature can supplement the task of history.[54] What is crucial, however, is the act of reading with suspicion to understand that literature is a part of knowledge production; we need to read critically if we wish to point out who might be involved in that very production. As mentioned earlier, in particular, British literature has had significant impact on prolonging colonialism (and neocolonialism). Let me now emphasize the fact that the reading of literature is by no means deterministic, ergo literatures can also lure their readers toward different concerns.

Concerning the East Indies (Indonesia), the eponymous protagonist of *Max Havelaar* problematizes the local feudal system as being tainted by the Dutch colonial system. The story describes the transition from mercantilism to capitalism, whereby the imperial monopoly of trades and gross accumulation of wealth replaces any limited, localized agency on the part of the native regencies operating in conjunction with the Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie.[55] But Dekker cannot fully dismantle capitalism by blaming feudalism and overlooking local wisdom—a point on which Beekman, Niekerk, and Zook agree, as we saw

[52] Ibid., 154.

[53] Ibid., 308.

[54] Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 205.

[55] A similar dynamic Spivak observes in the writings of Karl Marx. Ibid., 290.

above. Thus, we must take great care not to default to revering the morality of Havelaar (or any other figure, including Dekker) without considering how and why the text was composed as it was. Even if we are amenable to good intentions, there is ever the danger of ascribing some kind of moral superiority to European peoples or cultures—once again, imagining them as heroic figures. We must take into account that Havelaar shows no due reverence to any specific native figure in the novel, despite whatever stature the Dutchman might prefer.

According to Mignolo, certain motivations (and their attendant domains) animate European imperial projects—which includes literary art—such as the liberating of non-Europeans from the Devil (theology), lifting them out of barbarism (civilization), and curing the condition of underdevelopment (modernization).[56] In the face of these concerns, however, I avail of Chakrabarty's strategy of *provincializing Europe*, with intent to revise our understanding of its literature, *literati*, and (ergo) ourselves.[57] For European imperialism to relinquish control and depart from some small part of the globe, modernity is disproven as a universal category; given this, all must acknowledge that these other parts of the world retain their own sovereignty, dignity, and normativity apart from the West. Mignolo, an Argentine literary theorist of renown in his own right, borrows insight from the Martinican literary luminary, Edouard Glissant, concerning the terminology of *literature(s)*. If European imperialism brought with it the power of European literature as (The) Literature, then the implicit challenge must be to think of (European) Literature as but one of many *literatures*. In addition, non-European literatures—namely, the writings of underrepresented countries—reflect decentered positions.[58] In other words, non-European literatures are also important, in and of themselves. For the same reasons, according to Mignolo, does Chakrabarty call for the "provincializing" of Europe as a subalternization of its knowledge; such is the

[56] Mignolo mentions a fourth project (and domain) that is especially relevant to the US context, namely to liberate from terrorism (globalism). This later preoccupation does not relate directly to the Dutch Empire vis-à-vis Indonesia, although the contemporary narrative of any global war on terror—particularly as exported and enforced by the US—deserves attention in its own right. See Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 230.

[57] Chakrabarty criticizes the assumption of Europe being *the* modern culture among and above other nations in the world. Such an assumption, which could reasonably be extended to the entire so-called Global North, implies that other nations outside of that bloc have no claim upon the character of "modernity." In fact, that idea of the *modern* is one aspect of European global imperialism, while other countries in the "third-world" or Global South particpate paradoxically in constructing *modernism*. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 43.

[58] Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 205.

subversive use of English—Chakrabarty's dilemma, as it were—in the writing of postcolonial works and contributing to decolonial discourses.[59] Although the "coloniality of power" will not fade away with only the production (or retrieval) of indigenous and/or underrepresented literatures, these literatures can become previous sources upon which we can draw in order to deconstruct colonialist structures even in the so-called modern, so-called post-colonial era. It then is necessary to sustain the production of these subaltern knowledges.[60] Drawing upon another literary luminary of the majority world—Indonesia's own Toer—I contend that we of the post-colony nevertheless must not overlook how such a complicated (and implicated) text as *Max Havelaar* has influenced at least the earliest generation of prominent Indonesian authors, having imprinted its own ambiguated sensebilities upon a reconfiguring and emerging literati. Yet these are indigenous writers and thinkers, poets and activists, theorists and critics, who are constructing their own political stances and thus challenging European colonial mindsets when they deploy Bahasa Indonesia—in addition to whenever they avail the hegemon's tongue—to convey their local wisdoms, knowledges, logics, and truths. A theological anthropology that is worthy of Jesus of Nazareth requires such insights.

Who Is My Neighbor?

The condition and quality of being *human* is, indeed, open to critical approaches. Within traditional (read: heavily Latinized and subsequently Westernized) Christian systematic theology, this *anthropological question* is so often attached to the person of Jesus Christ as the perfect model of humanity.[61] At the same time, since Trinitarian theologies take Jesus to be the incarnate revlation of God, theologians in these systems would do well to be careful how Jesus represent humankind with respect to its perfection. Western contemporary representations of Jesus—as manufactured in movies, the arts, or even in church missions—quite often produce and reproduce Jesus as a white man. This human (mis)representation plants a colonial imaging of God that results both in the reverence of white men as reasonable facsimiles of perfection and in the alignment of divinity with whiteness. The fact is that, when the Western, white colonizers arrived at—and

[59] Ibid., 207. It is also the reason why I can use English for this essay.

[60] Ibid., 276.

[61] For example, see Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 145; see also Serene Jones and Clark M. Williamson, "What's Wrong with Us? Human Nature and Human Sin," in *Essentials of Christian Theology*, ed., William C. Placher (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 134—and note the very title of this collection, which seemingly purports to disclose what is "essential" concerning (e.g.) Christian theological anthropology.

invaded—lands filled with non-white peoples, the assumptions of this indoctrination seep into subaltern ways of life, namely through a so-called Christian understanding of the *human* (and the ostensibly *non*-human) or, in other words, through a theological anthropology that would be spread by missionaries implicated in imperial expansion. It is the unfortunate truth that many churches in Indonesia, including indigenous and locally inflected congregations and denomenations, emerged from this context of misrepresentation and miseducation. And so, we ask, Who is my Neighbor?

By reading *Max Havelaar* and availing postcolonial hermeneutics, I want to tackle precisely the issue of the imperialist, racist, patriarchal, and *orientalizing* manner in which the West has answered the question of who or what is human—and at a Christological intersection, who or what is God/divine. This *white Jesus*, we of the post-colony must remind ourselves, has been exerting control over our ecclesial communities, particularly in the way they understand themselves as human beings—but not quite white(/male/etc.). In my critical reading of the novel, the character of Havelaar tries to challenge the superiority of Western culture, namely by criticizing its architecture, the skill of their ground transport labor, its fashion styles and sensibilities, and the reputation of tongues aside from the non-imperial language. Whether fictitious or factual, the story unavoidably discloses another reality that its cast of characters might have considered—even if the Dutchman penning the tale has overlooked that fact. To imagine that the white Western world might not be so superior or "universal" is truly a subversive, horizon-expanding act—for which Dekker has received his reward. Contesting perfect images of an idealized white Western civilization is not only possible, but if people would see, think, and act under that knowledge what else might be possible? To acknowledge that certain inequalities and inequities ascribed to human beings have been manufactured by the colonizers, themselves, means that Jesus, Godself, may be saved from a masculinist white Western colonization—and perhaps from a similarly imperialist Christianity, besides. By saving and healing the truly fallen image of Jesus in our own minds and hearts, first; by proclaiming the multiplicity of the images of the human and the divine, second; and by provincializing European Christian teachings as one of many doctrines, dogmas, practices and beliefs, third, we might rescue our own humanity from the totalizing misperceptions, dehumanizing misrepresentations, and flagrant misunderstandings of coloniality. Henceforth a true post-coloniality may emerge. And so, we ask, Who is my Neighbor?

To rescue humanity, we need more than just a messiah or a paradise. In accordance with our true humanity, to evoke Cone again, we must focus on things that are related directly to human

needs—our daily bread, as it were. So, were the novel's Pastor Wawelaar to promise heaven as a reward yet, at the very same time, disdain Black skins and foment racist attitudes toward Black communities, then we would understand his contempt for them and his lack of care about their fate; it would reveal the preacher's detestable theological anthropology—among other doctrinal *topoi*. When in our minds or hearts heaven surpasses humanity in importance, akin to the empire monopolizing and objectifying the colonized, we must vehemently reject that colonial thinking as immoral and unacceptable. For God's will to be done on earth as in heaven means that suffering under discrimination here and now cannot align with the paradise where Christ promises to accompany his fellow condemned (Lk 23:44). Otherwise, I argue, it is neither a heaven worth living for, nor would it be a world worth dying for. Of the many prophets and apostles who died on account of their faith, we should recall, their deaths did not amount to an accepting, passive acquiesence of their fates here and now; rather, they died while resisting, organizing, and prophesying against the injustice of our world, namely by trying to re-make the earth to be "as it is" in heaven. And so, we ask, Who is my Neighbor?

The temptation is great to find a savior, since this is what we have been taught to do. Were that savior to convince us of our inferiority—in deference to the beliefs, race, language, culture, and civilization of another—then, just as we see from the irony of Dekker's celebrated novel, that chosen one we are ready to trust to colonize us, as well. Insisting on a savior assumes there is a power-complex at play, which can easily turn human beings into slaves, unworthy and less than human, thereby necessitating so-called salvation. Wawelaar, the minister in our novel, once again demonstrates this deplorable theological anthropology, when he simultaneously argues for the Javanese people's need for salvation and insists that such a method is served (literally) when the natives labor on his coffee plantation. It comes as no surprise, then, that wealth flourishes and flees to the West,[62] while those colonized suffer and are unable to enjoy the fruit of their own labor and lands. And so, we ask, Who is my Neighbor?

Indeed, the colonizers around the globe, armed with their theology, assume that their good fortune and amassing wealth are due to proper religion, cunning statecraft, developed societies, and the like—willfully ignoring that such resources are extracted by the sweat and blood of the downtrodden and oppressed. Theology cannot ignore capitalism without also neglecting liberation, and it really must pay attention to how its perspectives on humanity are

[62] Many Western colonizers became rich because of the native laborers who worked for them on sugar and many other plantations sought by European countries.

formed over time. If this critical issue—namely, a theological anthropology—is overlooked by the church, then such a compromised Christianity will only focus on a Jesus who promotes the "model minority" myth of white-adjacency and, thus, white supremacy. Such is no hope at all for our humanity. Fortunately, in my view, *Max Havelaar* helps us to ask, Who is my Neighbor?

Furthermore, by using postcolonial studies, we notice that we still need to be critical in understanding such a powerful novel like this. In the end, writing and acting in the position of a colonizer, Havelaar/Multatuli/Dekker is still promoting the structure of colonialism. He did not fully challenge it. On the contrary, as Toer hinted, the works of decolonization, even if they received many empowering drives from *Max Havelaar*, came from the colonized themselves and not from characters like Max Havelaar. Indonesian natives, in the end, were the subjects of reclaiming their own liberation, and they were and are the ones who will need to keep doing the decolonization process. I argue this is another form of theological anthropology that we can construct that deals directly with our bodies and our daily situations.

Conclusion

This essay locates a theological anthropology for Indonesia by examining a product of its colonial times, though not for its colonized people—a novel of biting satire, social critique, and ultimate irony. To make good on such a literary offering, I opt for an interpretive method that first traces the effects of colonialism, thereby (re)tracing a history of Indonesia as post-colony. This (re)tracing, by way of the colonial novel *Max Havelaar*, has shed light on the kinds of issues about which we of the post-colony ought to be critical—namely modernism/colonialism, race, capitalism, and aspects of Christianity itself. There is no universal theology created out of nowhere, as every theology is burdened with purpose to deal with/in a certain context. As a product of its times, theological discourse must always be determined by its context. Given such contingency, we must ask what has happened, who shares in a theology, and how any theology was created.

Addressing those questions is no easy task. With a postcolonial lens do we analyze issues such as those above, to offer an alternative view that discloses the subversive and the practical; another way is possible, i.e., possibly traced, instead of simply acquiescing to residual colonial effects that remain during these post-colonial times. A more liberating theological trajectory is, therefore, possible within the postcolonial impulse on offer, as this essay has shown in how *Max Havelaar* engages social justice ironically. From my reading of this story, I offered two ways of deriving a theological anthropology, thereby demonstrating how Indonesian readers can craft their own theology as that which

survives and outlasts the normativity and the confinement of our colonial heritage. By recognizing their own subjectivities and multiple identities, the Indonesian people can save the definition of being human itself from the domination of "white Western" colonizers.

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