

10-31-2009

**Keith Foulcher and Tony Day (eds), Sastra Indonesia Modern: kritik postkolonial; Edisi revisi 'Clearing a space'. With foreword by Manneke Budiman and translated by Koesalah Soebagyo Toer and Monique Soesman. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia and KITLV-Jaka**

Tommy Christomy  
*Universitas Indonesia*, [tommy.christomy@ui.ac.id](mailto:tommy.christomy@ui.ac.id)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/wacana>

---

## Recommended Citation

Christomy, Tommy (2009) "Keith Foulcher and Tony Day (eds), Sastra Indonesia Modern: kritik postkolonial; Edisi revisi 'Clearing a space'. With foreword by Manneke Budiman and translated by Koesalah Soebagyo Toer and Monique Soesman. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia and KITLV-Jaka," *Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia*: Vol. 11: No. 2, Article 11.

DOI: 10.17510/wjhi.v11i2.168

Available at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/wacana/vol11/iss2/11>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty of Humanities at UI Scholars Hub. It has been accepted for inclusion in Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia by an authorized editor of UI Scholars Hub.

needs. [...]” (letter to Lien van den Berge-Kelder, 6 December 1912). She was also the first to cease correspondence because she married a Wedana and did not want to oppose her husband’s politics. Besides corresponding with Rosita Abendanon-Mandri, she also corresponded with a same-aged friend, Lien van den Berge-Kelder, who was a teacher who had worked in Jepara and then moved to Padang with her husband.

Soemantri most reflected the modern side in her letters which ceased in 1936. She was the youngest of the sisters and lived in a different era than the others, especially Kartini. In 1936 there were Indonesian women who had become doctors and lawyers. She was most involved in public activities and the modern world, as though she no longer had to fight against the tradition that had enslaved her sisters, because she felt liberated. Soemantri’s husband also wrote letters so that they were seen as the representatives of a new middle class in Indonesia which developed in the first decade of the twentieth century (p. 238).

To close, I quote Joost Coté (p. 49), “Certainly in this early period, before the major geographical, cultural, and discursive separations hinted at in this correspondence became more evident, much still linked Javanese and colonial reformer, Muslim and secular nationalist”.

-----

Keith Foulcher and Tony Day (eds), *Sastra Indonesia Modern: kritik postkolonial; Edisi revisi 'Clearing a space'*. With foreword by Manneke Budiman and translated by Koesalah Soebagyo Toer and Monique Soesman. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia and KITLV-Jakarta, 2008, xxiii + 468 pp. [Original title: *Clearing a space: postcolonial readings of modern Indonesian literature*, Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002.] ISBN: 978-979-461-561-7. Price: IDR 85,000 (soft cover).



**Tommy Christomy**

Faculty of Humanities, University of Indonesia

Tsx60@yahoo.com

This book wants to say that critical thinking in literary analysis can begin by questioning forms of utterances in modern Indonesian literature as we have understood it so far. This, as cited by some of the writers in this book, poses “a potential for ambiguity”, “repeated restlessness”, copying of “stripes”, “rejection of old assumptions”, and “a hybrid identity”. All of this is an inescapable process caused by the direct confrontation of different races and their views when presented

in an unequal power relation of the dominated versus the dominator. This relation is reflected in many literary texts that provide a description of various modes of significance.

Postcolonial analysis, according to Tony Day and Keith Foulcher, explores the methods writers and critics on both sides of the colonial dividing line used in reproducing, contesting, or avoiding textual colonialism in their works. Following Tony Day and Keith Foulcher's exposition, postcolonial analysis not only focuses on colonial imprints but on colonial 'methods' and "effects" which arise in literature such as in the writings Barbara Hatley used about women in postcolonial discourse (p. 175).

The main pathway of this book is in questioning postcolonialism in Modern Indonesian Literature through two gateways: language (see works by Paul Tickell, Henk Maier, Thomas Hunter, Ward Keeler, Michael Bodden, Melani Budianta, Marshall Clark) and identity (as present in the writings of Tickell, Foulcher, Doris Jedamski, Hunter, Goenawan Mohammad, Day, and Hatley). All the editors published the fourteen essays because they all discuss the problems of language as it is being used with different motivations, full of problems (p. 9) that are sometimes used by dominated intellectuals as an area to "discard". Instead of directly facing the colonial discourse (Netherlands), the writers "open a field" to reconstruct themselves. Apart from that, the connecting ideas can be traced through the issues of contra-hegemony, authenticity, centre-regional, and global-local. When one race dominates another because two uneven worlds collide, the issue of identity becomes important. Generally, writers use the Indian scholar Homi K. Bhabha's perspective who argued the absurdity of the west and east dichotomy, and follow Edward Said in order to show the meeting points between the "oppressed" and the "oppressor".

In light of this, a language text, such as a translation, may be an imprint of colonialism that is rightfully open to interrogation, such as in the writing of Jedamski (pp. 24-60). The translators blatantly accepted the colonial assumptions and were consumed by the oppressed, by bringing a "double vision" of mimicry, as seen in the discussion about the translation of Robinson Crusoe. Moreover, the postcolonial analysis is also marked by the "silencing" of certain issues in literary works. The obliteration of a certain race in Indonesian literature, on one hand, seems to highlight a local perspective, but on the other hand, it confirms the separation of indigenous and non-indigenous the colonial government enforced. In this condition, Maier comfortably states that Malay postcolonial literature tends to reveal "stuttering voices" or the noise of a slowly closing squeaking door. Maier shows that Malay postcolonial texts are incapable of forming a self-reliant and confident entity, as opposed to texts that have an authoritative pretension and those belonging to the colonial discourse (p. 105). Maier is aware of the use of Malay which most Indonesians call "bahasa Indonesia". This is a serious problem for laymen, since Maier proposes that "bahasa Indonesia" is not established on permanent linguistics grounds but is understood as a variant of the Malay language. Manneke

Budiman, in the preface of the Indonesian edition, says that Maier's argument proves the vagueness of the "Malay" language, which he then uses to support his thesis. Therefore, it is relevant to study the existence of a *lingua franca* in the postcolonial context and the impact of capitalism in printed materials, which introduces new ways to use texts in the formation of hybrid culture.

Postcolonial critics are clear enough to mention that this binary opposition, which relates to the formation of identity, is not easily accepted. Nevertheless, it is important that postcolonial critics are more elaborate in defining contradictive assumptions in every literary text that, in the end, will lead to alternative ways to read them. Consequently, it is because of the works of the postcolonial critics that the literary canon becomes part of the vulnerable target. As it is being debunked, eventually the grey area and the more so, the taboo, will be brought out in the open and will be ready to questioning as Hatley exposes in "postcolonialism and women" (p. 175).

Definitely, according to Melani Budianta, besides breaking down canonization, postcolonial critics are eager to explain the relation of identity, production of meaning, and capitalism, as they feature in the language of "Si Doel". The relation between capitalism and identity is understood in the context of the juxtaposition of the city and the village. It is a dichotomy postcolonial critics question. The creation of spaces is not free from the indistinctness of the colonized to define themselves. Foulcher sees this effort of denial as eventually beneficial and confirms the assumptions of the colonizers about themselves. When the knowledge of the colonial is obtained, neutered, and reconfigured in the discourse of new cultural formations it is a sign of the crackdown of colonial authority and attention is directed to the antagonism of the colonized (p. 14).

I think that all writers have been successful in translating the postcolonial creed of Homi K. Bhabha (in *The location of culture*, 1994), who further develops the orientalism of Edward Said and V.S. Naipaul, raising issues that talk about the conflict between two different cultures, focusing on strategies to address dialogue, translating, negotiation, mimicry, and hybridity. Bhabha stated that in contemporary societies, the case of hybrid is likely to happen. It is a jargon that is not easy to translate and may mean "a mix" or "the mixture". It is important to notice a hybrid of these two modus operandi, one that is caused by a natural process, or organic hybrid, which merges different kinds of cultural elements to make a new one, or the intentional hybrid, which presents the two discourses pulling at each other, and pulling down the mask (p. 14). Hybrid is a key word for the postcolonial approach and used, consciously or unconsciously, to explain "indistinctiveness" or "camouflage".

The book clearly offers strategies for reading literary texts. Compared to previous literary criticism, which tends to consider aesthetics, tension, originality, and the functions of literature, reading postcolonial texts encourages new interpretations of buried un-canonized literary works, which have never been interpreted in the aspect of discourse addressing the creation and the meaning of a work. They are buried perhaps for reasons such as racial

premise, gender, or religion. The new way may consider the existing patterns of meaning in the colonial time or under authoritarian regimes.

This book is essential because nineteenth-century classics are encouraged to be currently read in a new way. Aesthetics alone are no longer the only important aspects of literary works that matters. Instead, it may give space to its context and its relation with other kinds of text. The book is not only useful for students of literary material, but also for history majors and researchers in other fields in the humanities who are intrigued by incomplete meanings and the operation of certain perspectives that produce certain strategic significance.

A more in-depth research needs to be conducted regarding the split in a single text and the emergence of hybridity, marginalization, dissipation, ambiguity, and restlessness. A question which might then be raised is whether this process of 'gado-gado' develops into certain patterns, so that there is a *gado-gado Jakarta*, a *gado-gado Solo*, or a *gado-gado Bandung* which adhere to their own, specific recipes. And, whether hybridity is considered a consequence which is always present when two domains of meaning clash in an unequal relation.

-----

Cora Vreede-De Stuers, *Sejarah perempuan Indonesia; Gerakan dan pencapaian*. Translated by Elvira Rosa, Paramita Ayuningtyas, and Dewi Istiani. Depok: Komunitas Bambu, 2008, xxvi + 322 pp. [Originally published as *The Indonesian Woman; Struggles and achievements*, The Hague: Mouton, 1960.] ISBN 979-3731-27-3. Price: IDR 67,500 (soft cover).



**Mina Elfira**

Faculty of Humanities, University of Indonesia  
 minaelfira@yahoo.com

When speaking of gender issues and their relation to the position of women in a country like Indonesia, it is usually important to discuss ethnicity and nationalism. Nira Yuval-Davis, the writer of *Gender and nation* (London: Stage, 1997) also recognized the strong relation between gender, ethnicity, and nationalism and she argues that "One of the most important differences among women is their membership in ethnic and national collectivities [...] these can affect [...] the status

and power of some women versus others" (Nira Yuval-Davis 1997: 11). It seems that Cora Vreede-De Stuers also uses this concept in her book *Sejarah*