



Universiteit  
Leiden

The Netherlands

**'Dummy Subjects' and National Heroes. Some Thoughts About Identity, Mimicry, (Auto)Biography, and the Novel in Indonesia**

Jedamski, D.A.

**Citation**

Jedamski, D. A. (2004). 'Dummy Subjects' and National Heroes. Some Thoughts About Identity, Mimicry, (Auto)Biography, and the Novel in Indonesia. *Tenggara*, (47/48), 9-37. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/16462>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License:

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/16462>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

## **THE CONCEPT OF THE INDIVIDUAL: IDENTITY AND MIMICRY**

## **'DUMMY SUBJECTS' AND NATIONAL HEROES**

### **Some Thoughts About Identity, Mimicry, (Auto)Biography, And The Novel In Indonesia'**

In the face of the recent developments in Indonesia it appears almost ignorant — and certainly very much against the trend — to undertake research on literature, even more so on literature that dates back to the colonial period. An appropriate reflection upon the past, however, remains essential when attempting to understand the present. This article is a cautious attempt to approach the understanding of the Indonesian individual and a self that has had to find its way between traditions and Western modernity; one that has had to overcome colonialism and neo-colonialism, and has been facing the claims of globalization. Despite a latent opposition to theory within Indonesian Studies, a rather broad theoretical frame, bridging various disciplines, will be applied to sketch 'Indonesian subjectivities' as they unravel their multi-coloured shapes, among others, through literature.

## **THE WESTERN SUBJECT AND COLONIALISM**

*There has been a veritable discursive explosion in recent years around the concept of 'identity', at the same moment as it has been subjected to a searching critique (Hall 2000: 1).*

The Western notion of the self has been central to philosophical, religious, political, juridical and linguistic reflection of all kinds ever since Christianity declared humankind to be at the centre of the universe.' Despite all attacks

---

' This article is part of a book project to be completed in 2003. I thank Henri Chambert-Loir and Keith Foulcher for their careful reading of an earlier draft of this paper and for their very helpful comments.

The terms self, identity, person, individual, individuality, and subject, all used in this article, are not synonymous but do all signify the same problem: the self-perception, self-reflection and self-representation of (wo)man. Depending on its historical context, each term took on its own connotation and interpretation and gained special popularity in one discipline or another. For an in-depth historical discussion of the subject see Heller (1986), Taylor (1994), Carrithers (1997) and Burger (1998).

and recurring displacement during its long history, the Western subject persistently clung to its self-defined – and repeatedly re-defined – privileged position. After Galileo, who had pushed humankind from the centre of the universe into the orbit of one solar system amidst billions of others, the Enlightenment came to elevate the individual to the level of a modern subject by declaring its emancipation from God on the basis of its cognitive capacities.

Epistemologically the subject is constructed as a knowing subject, in opposition to or before an 'object' that is to be known and controlled. The subject is also considered to be a causal and responsible agent, the 'ego' or 'self' that is supposed to be the centre and source of the world and his/her actions. [...] At once a legal, philosophical, and a psychic conceptual unity, the ego or subject finds its full meaning in this assumption of *autonomy* (Ye\_eno\_lu 1999: 4-5).

Descartes' postulate *cognito ergo sum* advanced to become the credo of the modern Western world and smoothed the way for the (male) Western subject and its conquest of the environment. The same powers of cognition led to the theory of evolution and another threatening discovery: Man is, instead of being the image of God, the descendant of apes. And, as if to top this blow, Freud postulated at the beginning of the twentieth century that no individual was ever *Herr im eigenen Hause*, 'master in their own castle', but rather that the presumably autonomous modern subject was continuously struggling with fears and drives and longings never to be entirely controlled. Twentieth century modernity has developed forms of self-reflection and self-representation that serve the rehabilitation and re-centring of the subject. In the course of all these 'compensation' processes, the central perspective in Fine Arts, the novel genre in literature and the film genre played a decisive role.

Whenever major changes occur in a society, when lifestyles, social classes or social structures are being modified or dissolving, the subject needs to be re-defined and re-positioned too. Referring to western histories, Luhmann (1994) identifies three ways to create and establish individuality and identity in a society. The first category is the copie-identity, the imitation of a supposed original, an idealized concept. In the course of history this dichotomy of copy and original has generated the notion of 'genius'. It is genius alone that can produce 'master copies' which are then to be copied by the 'masses'. The arts, in particular literature, came to play a crucial role in this process. Such understanding of individuality allows only a few to qualify as 'true individuals'. Modernisation and the splitting of the individual into various social roles brought along a plurality of selves which mocked the idea of a solid unity of the I; Luhmann speaks of the *divided individual* — a contradiction in terms, as he himself points out. Society can no longer offer solutions but only articulate

the problem: alienation and an identity in constant crisis. Attainment and maintenance of the consistency of these multiple selves has become the personal task of each member of society. Luhmann's third and last category defines the individual through its *career*: a biography no longer predictable in a (post)modern society, for it allows innumerable combinations of chance, opportunities, personal decisions, misfortune, or luck.

All three forms briefly depicted above gain special meaning when seen in the colonial context of the Netherlands East Indies where, represented through the colonizer's culture, they were the antitheses of the traditional forms of defining the self in society. Linked to the process of a however fragmentized modernization and Westernization under colonial rule, these Western ideas of identity had — not least through literature, theatre and film — great impact on the development of an 'Indonesian identity'. At the same time it became apparent what enormous bending the humanistic ideal of autonomy and self-responsibility was able to endure whenever political power or economic interests were at stake. Such a 'humanistic claim' also coined the discourse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the Netherlands East Indies where the 'secular notion of an individual 'I' as an abstract and universal consciousness free of all embodiment and locality' (Ye\_eno\_lu 1999: 5) transformed Dutch paternalism and diffuse humanitarianism into the so-called Ethical Policy. The declared objective was to educate the colonized (elite) to allow them to climb (the allegedly universal) ladder of evolution to become a more superior being, modelled after the Western subject — to become 'almost the same, but not quite'.

## COLONIALISM, MIMICRY, AND LITERARY IMAGINATION

*Nothing can be neatly imitated without any mark or shortcoming*  
(Ong Hap Djin 1929: 12).

This is — as if directly referring to Homi Bhabha — a remark made by an Indonesian Watson to an Indonesian Sherlock Holmes in one of the numerous indigenous adaptations of Doyle's famous short stories. In Bhabha's words this statement reads as follows:

Mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge. [...] colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed recognisable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite (1997: 153).

But Bhabha also points out the de-authorizing effect of mimicry:

The menace of mimicry is its *double* vision, which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority (1997: 155).

In this context the transfer of the Western novel has to be seen as a crucial event. The novel and its sub-genres were introduced to Indonesia by way of translations and adaptations, mostly by Eurasians and Sino-Malays. Other new media such as theatre, film and opera developed and disseminated the new narrative models further. Western heroes such as Monte Cristo, Sherlock Holmes and The Scarlet Pimpernel catalyzed the change from the traditional hero to the modern hero. It is therefore surprising that the text corpus at issue has been ignored or simply overlooked, not only by most Dutch colonialists, but also by most scholars in the field of Indonesian studies until very recently. A possible explanation for such negligence is the general misapprehension that translations and adaptations are no more than imitations of originals, fakes — *copies* — and as such are stigmatized as inferior. On top of that, the texts chosen for translation or adaptation are categorized as popular literature, with no purpose other than to entertain.

The Malay understanding of 'mimicry', however, is not at all a negative one. In fact, imitations and adaptations have been a crucial and highly regarded element in Malay literary traditions. This unintentionally created literary niche invited Indonesians to use the new medium to develop a hidden discourse, which can be seen as part of a decolonization process. As one possible variant of decolonization, Lo and Gilbert [1998] describe 'decolonization by producing creative texts that rework the discourses of the so-called "classics" in ways that identify and alter, often allegorically, their power structure.'

This is exactly what *peranakan* Chinese, and later Sumatran Malay, authors did when they picked Western texts, rearranging the plot structure and transforming Western heroes into indigenous, some even national heroes. To be in the position to 'rework' or 'alter' the discourse and power structure of a chosen text, the indigenous author first had to develop an awareness of a few – by no means universal – literary tools. This is, of course, not to say that these texts had to be studied in terms of literary theories. Rather, the authors had to spot the pattern of thought or the structure of feeling underlying the text. Comprehending and reworking a novel and its literary figures without having a certain (not necessarily precise) understanding of the Western concept of individuality would have been as challenging as trying to get an intellectual grip on the mechanisms of capitalism without being familiar with the concept of money. As long as the foreign narrative model was deemed incompatible with the local cultural context the understandable reaction was one of neglect or rejection. The moment the Western model was descried as a potential vehicle

to serve local cultural communication, the reworking and alteration of texts could take place. This helps explain why a novel like *Robinson Crusoe*, available in Malay translation since 1875<sup>3</sup>, did not, unlike other texts, provoke a wave of adaptations in the sense of indigenous re-writings or counter-discursive versions. The literary scene in Indonesia at the time, still dominated by Dutch and Eurasian authors and publishers, was only cautiously beginning to develop the indigenous novel. This kind of textual 'close-up' on one individual and their movements in a secular context still felt alien. The perspective chosen in *Robinson Crusoe* did not invite the indigenous reader to identify with Robinson or Friday. Only radical changes of the perspective or *Dispositiv*<sup>4</sup> of the text could have turned it into a counter-discursive means.<sup>5</sup> At this stage such drastic moulding of the text was still inconceivable.

The postcolonial debate of recent years has emphasized the dualism of Western thought as a major cause for the colonizer's need of the Other, of the object through which it constitutes and reaffirms the notion of one's own subjectivity. It is the colonized who fulfils this function. Only on the surface is Friday the long wished-for companion to release Robinson from his solitude. Friday's actual task is to be the Other, the opposite, desiring more than anything else to be like Robinson, but never entirely achieving this goal. The above quoted concept of mimicry, as Bhabha has coined it, describes this 'imitation' and its mechanisms as a principle element of colonial modernization and Westernization processes. But the ambivalence produced by these mechanisms has, to date, not helped revise the general perception of the colonized as passively receiving and imitating victims. In this context it is crucial to

---

The Eurasian A. von de Wall translated the novel into Malay to be used as a school textbook. See Proudfoot (1997) and Jedamski [forthcoming] for further details.

Initially coined by Foucault, the term *dispositif* has been reinterpreted, among others, by Baudry to become one of the most essential terms in the field of film theory. Manifold interpretations and inflationary use throughout diverse disciplines make it advisable to provide a definition here. Drawing on its cinematic meaning, I use the term to comprise all preconditions of perspective in its broadest sense, including technical prerequisites and situational elements. *Dispositiv* is thus an artificially created space of projection and perception. In the following I use the spelling *Dispositiv* to avoid confusion with the French term.

<sup>5</sup> Such a rewriting of the narrative model is exemplified by one of the numerous film versions of Robinson Crusoe, where it is Friday's perspective which is taken. By so-doing the (film)text makes him the superior figure in the story, while Robinson's eurocentricism and complacency is exposed and ridiculed. By re-adjusting the *Dispositiv*, this version sharply criticises the eurocentric belief in the superiority of Western cultures. It not only gives a voice to the 'object', but forces the viewer to take its position.

acknowledge that Westernness', too, is no objective, given or static form of being and belonging but, like Orientalism, a concept:

It [the category of Western subject] refers to a process of generation, to a process of coming into being, of invention and of fashioning of a place called 'Western'. [...] The operation I call 'Westernization' consists in the fashioning of a historically specific *fantasy* whereby members imagine themselves as Western. This engendering and fashioning of the Western subject thus has a fictive character. But the fictive character of this position does not mean that it is not *real*; on the contrary, it produces material effects by constituting the very bodies of the subjects that it subjects (Ye\_eno\_lu 1999: 3).

Besides the construct of the "Oriental", fabricated by Western cultures, there also exists one or more constructs of the West construed (and rejected or desired) by the colonized. An appropriate description of the complexity of the interaction between images and projections — partly self-designed and accepted, partly ascribed and imposed — goes, unfortunately, far beyond the capacity of this article. In the following I will therefore restrict myself to the endeavour to at least outline the traditional notion of the subject as I have come to understand it in twenty five years of contact and study of Indonesian cultures and languages, while being fully aware of the fact that this, too, remains a Western approach.<sup>6</sup>

---

Certainly since Said's *Orientalism* the question is whether a Western perspective is able to perceive any non-Western, traditionally generated, and thus 'authentic' understanding of the subject, or, rather, to what extent it is always a product of Western projections. In this context Hobart (1997: 157) directs harsh criticism towards Western anthropology. Referring to Balinese culture as his example, he argues that, in the confrontation with the Other, Western scholars ascribe all the power of decision and agency exclusively to the Western position: '[...] they have taken the capacity of being subjects, that is self-aware, self-critical, self-disciplining agents, away from Balinese. In place of historically situated agents, they have substituted fantasy projections of some unitary subject of predication, "the Balinese", or the abstract substances of "time", "culture", "conceptual structure", "symbol", "ritual" as imaginary discursive subjects. The subject, in the sense of self-critical agent, presupposed in these accounts is the anthropologist who is author of, and authorizes, the putative Balinese in her own terms'.



## TRACING THE INDIGENOUS SUBJECT — AND A HITHERTO UNNOTICED CONTRADICTION

*I am because of my relative age, status and gender to others*  
(see below).

Despite centuries of Western contact and domination, the traditional understanding of the individual as naturally subordinate to the interests and needs of the community is still predominant in most cultures in the Malay Archipelago. This admittedly rather general statement is confirmed by most predominant concepts that structure everyday life and which determine social, political or religious hierarchies. The indigenous notion of a subjugated subject finds reflection in cultural forms of expression, such as the Fine Arts', but most of all in language. Despite the best efforts of the colonizers to standardize and westernize the indigenous languages, all major regional languages and national languages in the Malay Archipelago still feature a subject conspicuously hiding between the words. The subject focus — active voice — is masterly avoided and any direct reference to the I is shunned. A complex system of personal pronouns helps to duplicate the complex societal order, in which the subject is allocated its position and is supposed to accept it. The subject is determined by its place in society and its relations to others, depending on age, social status and gender.<sup>1</sup> Unlike in most Western cultures, the individual is not expected to develop a personality or to uphold autonomy, self-realization and privacy as the highest values; nor is s/he urged to differentiate him/herself from others; nor does s/he have to — in fact must not — juxtapose her/himself as an autonomous unit to either the state or the public. Directed by the *kekeluargaan* spirit, the individual is subordinate to the family and the

---

<sup>1</sup> In Indonesian painting, for instance, the subject does not claim the central perspective so prominent in Western art and architecture as a symbolic compensation for (post)modern displacement. In a perfectly smooth transition the traditional two-dimensional style of painting has proceeded to modern abstract art, creating hybrid forms of both worlds but consistently neglecting the central perspective. For more information on Indonesian painting see Spanjaard (1998) and Wright (1994).

See also Tickell (1981: 5-8). He presumes that, due to the Indonesian concept of the self "based largely on ideas of social relativities," the propagated introduction of the 'neutral' personal pronoun *anda* (you) in the 1980s was doomed to fail.

family-like organization of community<sup>9</sup> as illustrated by the following passage from an article published in the journal *Pedoman Masyarakat* (5 June 1940):

A person may be living in seclusion, only seldom seeing other people, but in whatever remote a place s/he is, the family ties will never be broken. [...] We will not be separated from the family, we all are bound to it. That is the way of life of Eastern people. No matter if ill or well, sad or gay, it will always be a collective feel. [...] ' the household, that is the centre of our unity.

Both McVey (1967) and S. Shiraishi (1997) have explained how the almost god-like father image elevated politicians to powerful positions. The concept of *Bapakism* reaches up into the highest political strata of society. The Soeharto regime, in particular, built its power in large part on the intricate *Bapak-image* of the President, which was brought to perfection during his thirty years of power.<sup>10</sup>

Keeping the diverse concepts of subjectivity in mind, in Indonesia Descartes' postulate *cognito ergo sum* could only evoke the question *and where are you?*, meaning *locate yourself within the system!* Or, as Tickell (1981: 5) puts it:

[...] one is aware of one's identity and individuality more as a result of a relationship with other persons. Such a concept of self is therefore more difficult to reduce to a simple axiom. Briefly it may be formulated something like the following: 'I am because of my relative age, status and gender to others'.

It is now all the more surprising that the realm of literature suggests a very different position. It is the Western bourgeois novel which acted as a catalyst for the transgression from traditional to modern literature at the end of the nineteenth century and which, to date, defines the canon of 'modern Indonesian literature' — albeit though short stories and lyrics were far more popular. One of the most influential promoters of the Western notion of the individual, the 'psychological' novel, was highly favoured by the Dutch colonials. With the help of the colonial institution Balai Pustaka, they

---

\* 'Boleh djadi ada orang jang terpentjil hidoep sendiri, djarang berhoebong dg. orang lain. Tetapi, meskipoen terpentjil dimana djoeapoen, namoen orang tidaklah akan lepas dari ikatan berfamilie. [...] Kita tidak akan terpisah dari familie, semoea kita bertali dengan dia. Demikian tjaranja hidoep orang Timoer. Sakit dan senang, sedih dan gembira, senantiasa akan mendjadi perasaan bersama. [...] "Kefamiliean", keroemah-tanggaa, itoelah poesat persatoean kits'.

<sup>10</sup> Further research is needed to investigate if and in what ways the concept and the actual standing of the individual have been changing after Soeharto's fall.

endeavoured to design and establish some sort of 'mimic Bildungsroman' and make it the new form of (colonial) Indonesian literature (Jedamski 1992). It would be only half the truth, however, to postulate that the genre of the novel has been imposed upon indigenous writers and readers during colonial rule. In fact, a great number of Western novels were selected, translated and adapted by Eurasian, Malay and Sino-Malay authors, who then developed and actively used the literary models within various indigenous discourses of the time. Both Balai Pustaka and non-Balai Pustaka publications have turned the genre of the novel into an influential media of twentieth-century Indonesia. The concept of literary criticism, also introduced through the colonizer's culture, was soon embraced as an authority to judge literary values by applying specific criteria, among others the development and psychological depth of the characters, the introspective self-reflection of the protagonists, narrative realism, and the coherence of the chosen time and space frame. These literary elements all serve the sole aim of establishing the I in the centre of the (literary) world.

Identities are [...] constituted within, not outside representation. [...] They arise from the narrativization of the self, but the necessarily fictional nature of this process in no way undermines its discursive, material or political effectivity, even if the belongingness, [...] through which identities arise is, partly, in the imaginary (as well as the symbolic) and therefore, always, partly constructed in fantasy, or at least within a fantasmatic field (Hall 2000: 4).

The contradictory presentation of the subject in Malay cultures as depicted above allows the assumption that the traditional notion of the self has not remained untouched by Western values. The various products of indigenous literary imagination help trace traditional understandings of the subject and its resistance or transgression when confronted with modernity and Westernization.

At first sight the establishment of the novel alone can be taken as a clear indication of the inevitable Westernization of the concept of the self. According to Tickell, however, the genre of the novel in the Indonesian context has never been a suitable means for expressing subjectivity, in the modern sense. The Indonesian/Malay language, as discussed above, eschews the expression of subject-focussed action or introspective and psychological insights; in fact it renders them almost impossible. Using the example of the novel *Salah Asuhan*,<sup>1</sup> Tickell (1981) amplifies in a most impressive way the correlation

---

<sup>1</sup> This novel by Abdoel Moeis was published in 1928 by Balai Poestaka after some 'adjustments' had been made. It forms part of the literary canon to date.

of the modern concept of subjectivity, language, and the novel. In his analysis, Tickell compares the usage of certain grammatical elements (mostly verb affixation) in English and Indonesian narration. He comes to the conclusion that the '*differing emphasis between Western and Indonesian novels*' is the 'difference which may be expressed as individuals transforming their environment and personal situation versus situation determining the behaviour and fate of individuals' [...] (1981: 9).

Thus, the subject featured in Western novels tends to represent itself — at least linguistically — as being in control of his/her own actions and emotions. The Indonesian subject, on the other hand, is not even in a state — due to 'grammatical conventions' — to articulate such an idea properly.<sup>12</sup> At first sight a number of the classics of modern Indonesian literature appear to respond to the Western model. A close analysis, however, is likely to reveal that the structural components, the situation and the interconnectedness of the characters still prevail over the psychologization and literary imagination of an autonomous, self-defined individual.<sup>13</sup>

## THE OTHER DOMAIN OF THE SUBJECT: (AUTO)BIOGRAPHY IN INDONESIA

*Individuality was never a theme in traditional Asian biography [...]. The tendency in Asia was for biographies to stress the public roles their subjects played. What was important was merely the type, the model or the negative example* (Wang Gungwu 1975: ii).

In contrast to the novel, the genre of (auto)biography never flourished in Indonesia. It can be said to have been almost non-existent until the last decade."

---

<sup>12</sup> One among many convincing examples that Tickell quotes from the novel in question is the phrase *Di dalam kalbu seolah-olah timbullah jerit yang seni* (It was as if a high-pitched scream formed in [his] head). The protagonist, Hanafi, does not simply scream (like a Western subject performing an action), rather 'Hanafi does not control the scream-like feeling, it merely occurs of its own accord and is uncontrollable' (1981: 18).

<sup>13</sup> These observations may account for the fact that Western readers often find reading Indonesian novels less enjoyable. The form of the text seems familiar and prompts expectations which, in the end, are not met by the narration.

<sup>14</sup> Again I wish to point out that literary developments over the last ten years demand separate research. A great number of (auto)biographies are said to have appeared on the Indonesian book market since Soeharto's fall. I have not yet had the opportunity to examine them for myself.

Referring to Western research on Western autobiographies, Watson (2000: 14) states that in

writing about Indonesian autobiography, I find the usefulness of these approaches limited because there does not exist that corpus of autobiographies that exists in European literatures. Second, and closely related to this point, is that there was not enough time for an autobiographical tradition or a philosophical debate about the nature of the self to have developed within Indonesia.

'A lack of time' does not appear to be a strong argument here, due, among other reasons to the fact that Indonesians did develop all kinds of other genres, including that of the novel — and in an impressively short period of time. I am inclined to presume that it was the absence of the subject, or rather the absence of a sense of Western subjectivity that prevented the genre of the (auto)biography from fully blossoming in Indonesia. The genre's prime function, that is to provide a textual form of expression to present and reflect the self, could only work in the Indonesian context in connection with a public and 'de-personalised' subject. And indeed, the autobiography 'developed in the heady atmosphere of early nationalist thought' (Rodgers 1995: 37). At this point in Indonesian history, strong public subjects were in demand — leaders, role models, individuals with individual careers and individual performances who, at the same time, were not so individual as to obstruct the identification process." The emergence of indigenous (auto)biographies in the Netherlands East Indies does therefore mark a shift in self-presentation. Justification of power and social status no longer needed mythology but the constitution of a modern subject, and, as also described by Luhmann above, a subject defined by her/his career:

In Indonesia autobiographies are scarce, and the short biographical notices which pass by that name are hardly worthy of this designation. More often than not they are nothing but rather dry reports concerning the career of some well-deserving official, drawn up on his retirement and at best touched up with a few personal particulars and reminiscences (Drewes 1985: 399).

Most of the Indonesian autobiographies, in fact, only partly fulfill the criteria of the genre. Even crucial features of the genre are sometimes altogether

---

<sup>15</sup> For an intriguing discussion of identity and identification in connection with nation building and cultural identity see Hall and DuGay (2000).

missing. Kartini's 'autobiography', for instance, consists of a collection of her letters written to various addressees; in his *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup* (1951-52), Hamka refers to himself in the third person; Soetomo's memoirs entitled *Kenang-Kenangan* only conceal selected fragments of his early life story; and Tan Malakka's *Dari Penjara ke Penjara* consistently omits all personal and emotional aspects of his life.<sup>16</sup> If they are included, then, '[...] the episodes of personal life history are no more than entertaining interludes impeding rather than contributing to the narration of more important political and historical themes (Watson 2000: 87).

It is safe to assert that the (auto)biographies which appeared during the last decades of colonial rule served the sole purpose of establishing clear-cut role models in the context of the nationalist struggle. Their role was to provide new heroes for a modified historiography just being created. The following quote is one among many which illustrates this quest for 'secular heroes':

This biography has long been awaited, because the Indonesian people have begun to realise their need for life-stories of their 'big people', those who have become pioneers on the road to progress, intelligence and the awareness that is growing among the Indonesian nation. Dr. A. Rival is such a pioneer [...], a nationalist who sincerely loves his Fatherland and his people, although he is living a life in European style.<sup>9</sup>

The observations made above raise a number of questions. Bearing in mind that, to all appearances, both genres conflicted with the most essential values of the indigenous cultures, why was the genre of the novel so willingly absorbed by Indonesians, while the (auto)biography was only reluctantly and in a very limited context adapted?

---

<sup>16</sup> In general, no account was taken of private and personal aspects, because they were considered either inappropriate or simply irrelevant. In his impressive study of eight Indonesian, autobiographies' published over a period of about ninety years Watson, too, acknowledges this observation (2000: 14, 20ff, 76). Also see Rodgers (1995) for her annotated translations of two Sumatran memoirs and an overview of the research on Malay autobiographies.

<sup>17</sup> 'Biographic ini memang telah lama ditoenggoe-toenggoe orang, karena ra'jat Indoensia telah insaf akan perlunya riwayat hidoep dari orang besar-besar mereka, jang mendjadi peretas djalan bagi kemedjoean2, ketjerdasan dan keinsafan jang telah timboel sekarang dalam kalangan bangsa Indonesia. Dr A.Rivai, adalah salah seorang peretas djalan [...] seorang Nasionalist jang amat tjinta kepada tanah air dan bangsanja, meskipoen dia hidoep tiara Europa'. *Pedoman Masyarakat* (1 Febr 1939) 5: 96, review of the book *Biographie Dr. A. Rivai* by Parada Harahap (1939). Further examples of this kind of 'depersonalized' biography are Tamar Djaja's *Poesaka Indonesia (Orang-orang besar Tanah Air)*, which came out in 1940, and *Riwayat Penghidoepan Dokter Soetomo dengan Perdjoengannja* by Abd. Wahid Raja (1939).

In essence, how did these authors make sense of these alien discourses, what was dispensed with, what was included and what was modified by conscious and unconscious reference to non-European discourse forms in their attempts to come to conceptual grips with and in turn to use these ideas for their own cultural and political purposes (Tickell 1998: 4).

What needs to be examined here is what possible other functions the genre of the novel might have taken on. A grand scale examination of Indonesian literature researching the issue of subject constitution has yet to be undertaken. The following discussion will concentrate primarily on examples of indigenous adaptations of Western texts, as they provided pivotal models for indigenous literature. They form a significant part of early modern Indonesian literature.

## EARLY INDONESIAN LITERATURE AND THE DISCOURSES OF MODERNITY

Whatever, in the eyes of Westerners, looks good and sophisticated, and even to be 'art', in particular everything that refers to mind and soul, is not necessarily as precious to the Eastern eye ... yes, on the contrary, it may be considered poison (Ach sien 1940).<sup>18</sup>

The Sino-Malay publishers and authors who successfully put out prose during the first decades of the twentieth century approached Western texts, one might say, more pragmatically than 'respectfully'. Becoming more and more aware of the potential of these new narrative models, they selected texts for translation and adaptation following their very own criteria by which to judge the discursive relevance of a text. They also actively responded to the implied notion of the subject and did not hesitate to modify and alter whatever they considered an unacceptable proposition. Kwee Tek Hoay's Malay adaptation of Ibsen's drama *Ghosts* (*Mait Idoep*)<sup>19</sup> nicely illustrates these two major selection criteria, which can be labelled 'issue-relevance' and 'subject

---

'Apa-apa jang dimatanja orang Barat, teristimewa jang mengenakan hal 'batin' jang oleh mata Barat kelihatannja baek dan sopan, malah dianggepnja sebagai 'kunst' dimata Timoer belon tentoe begitoe, ja bahken bisa dianggepnja sebagai *ratjoen*'.

<sup>19</sup> This play was adapted for the *teater bangsawan* group *Dardanella* in 1931 and successfully performed throughout the 1930s.

representation'. The issue of interest to motivate an adaptation in the case of Ibsen's drama was apparently the disease syphilis. Ibsen's 'original' uses the disease merely as a vehicle for the disclosure of clerical hypocrisy. Kwee Tek Hoay entirely omits the clerical element and, instead, describes in full detail the consequences of the disease for the family and the community. While emphasizing in particular the responsibility of one generation to the next, he also 'corrects' the concept of the subject as presented in the Western text. When signs of dementia appear, Ibsen's main protagonist asks his mother at the end of the story to give him a fatal dose of morphine. The Malay protagonist, on the other hand, heroically kills himself, leaving a letter for his family and his fiancée Liesje, which reads as follows: 'For Liesje's best, in the interest of the community, for the progress of our society and the welfare (safety) of all people, I'm leaving this world'."

The interest of the community is therefore shown to stand above the interest of the individual, or, more precisely, the interest of the community IS the interest of the individual.

Modernity, rationalism, technology, and urbanization provided a wide range of issues considered so relevant that Malay and Sino-Malay authors created novels revolving around them. Three of these issues developed into discourses in their own right. Firstly, the concept of love, a distinct feature of the modern subject, gained specific meaning in the colonial context. The freedom to choose a partner came to represent the freedom to choose. It is therefore not surprising that the theme of love and (forced) marriage, also including the aspect of mixed marriage, attracted great literary attention. Writers of all ethnic groups and political nuances picked it up, but the emphases and imagined solutions would vary widely. Inter-ethnic relationships and the confrontation of two disparate cultures was a 'hot topic', especially in Sino-Malay literature. Neither did Sino-Malay authors shrink from portraying intimate relations between white men and indigenous women and even between white women and indigenous men. Not surprisingly, Balai Poestaka authors, but also many other Malay writers, tended to disregard the issue of mixed relations between colonizer and colonized.<sup>20</sup> the conflicts resulting from traditional values and forced marriage on the one

---

<sup>20</sup> 'Boeat goena kabroentoengan Liesje, kabaekannja maatschappij, kamadjoeannja kita poenja bangsa dan kaslametannja manoesia, saja menjingkir dari ini doenia' (74).

<sup>21</sup> A famous and often discussed exception is the novel *Salah Asoehan*, mentioned earlier, which conveys the message that a marriage between an indigenous man and a European or Eurasian woman unavoidably leads to disaster.



hand, and modern ideas on love and marriage on the other. The subject matter of love and (forced) marriage had first been popularised by the so-called *nyai*<sup>22</sup> stories, most of them newspaper reports fictionalised by Eurasians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The tragic heroine Madame Butterfly gave a new impulse to the *nyai* theme in the late 1920s.<sup>23</sup> Njoo Cheong Seng's adaptations of the story (of which there are at least four) demonstrate that both literary figure and *Dispositiv* have finally become tools in the hands of (some) indigenous writers. He experiments with new angles presenting a re-evaluation of this famous love affair between male colonizer and female colonized. Like adaptations of the theme by other authors, Njoo Cheong Seng's version similarly sounds out new views on the relation between colonizer and colonized, in this case linking it to the discourse of modernity, education and women's emancipation. This is not to say that any of these texts advocated feminist ideals. On the contrary, most (Sino)Malay men nurtured very little sympathy for women's emancipation in whatever form. As in other cultural and historical contexts, too, a however subtly changing image of women apparently provoked a whole surrogate discourse. Women and women's bodies functioned as a site for the projection of male power fantasies but also of male fears and uncertainties. As a warning to women, indigenous male writers regularly created heroines who endured misery and met a tragic end, because they would not or did not want to distance themselves from the 'evil' impact of Westernization. Many indigenous novels begin with a foreword such as the following:

This story appears to be a simple one. But it can be used as a mirror by all Asian women who are currently drunken with Westernness to make them see that there are good and nice European manners and customs all right, but that freedom according to the Western model, for the greatest part, is not appropriate for the Eastern woman whose mind is actually fine and gentle, so that she easily falls into any trap (Phoa Gin Hian 1936).

---

22 A *nyai* is the indigenous mistress of a Chinese or European man. Young indigenous women and girls were sold off by their fathers, more often than not out of poverty and despair, to become the *nyai* of a well-paying man.

23 An extensive article on the various *Madame Butterfly* adaptations is currently in preparation.

24 'Ini tjerita kaliatannja saderhana, tapi toch is bisa dibikin katja oleh kaoem prempoean Timoer, jang sedeng maboek Kabaratan, dan biarlah marika mengarti, bahoea atoeran-istiadat Europa memang ada baik dan bagoes, tapi kamerdikaan model Barat sebagian besar tida soeroep boeat prempoean Timoer, jang batinnja sabetoelnja ada haloes dan lemboet, hingga gampang terdjato dalem djebakan'.

Secondly, the issue of revenge and the right to take justice into one's own hands developed into a principle discourse. Accordingly, the word *pembalasan* (revenge/vengeance) decorated a great many titles, in particular during the late 1920s and the 1930s.<sup>25</sup> Self-justice was juxtaposed to the passive attitude of keeping up faith, either in God or the secular authorities, trusting that they would never fail to reprimand a wrongdoer and impose just punishment. The conflict that eventually leads to a revenge situation in a novel often springs from uncontrolled human emotions such as jealousy or greed. In a number of texts, however, it is explicitly the injustice of the colonial system itself that produces the conflict. The question of self-responsibility and agency, as it is repeatedly posed in these stories, forms a significant aspect of the constitution of the modern subject.

Thirdly, the monetary system and the seemingly unlimited and corrupting power of money provoked a wide spectrum of literary reflections.<sup>26</sup> Again the range of conflict constellations is broad. Sometimes corresponding to the worst clichés, Chinese and Arab merchants and moneylenders repeatedly represented the greedy and the ruthless. Texts also often implied a critique targeting Western ideas and their impact on indigenous society, though just as often the criticism was directed at other ethnic groups or even at segments of the author's own ethnic group. Despite all the criticism and negative connotations, prosperity was considered a crucial avenue to personal independence and freedom, freedom to be and to do what one desired. Thus, whenever not associated with any social group that was, for whatever reason, despised, then unquestioned opulence became a prime requisite for any successful indigenous hero — and avenger.

The novel *The Count of Monte Cristo* perfectly connects both the issues money and vengeance and can be regarded as the prototype of the modern avenger whose only but most effective weapon is unlimited wealth. Dumas' bourgeois superman provoked numerous Malay translations and adaptations and eventually became the blueprint of a new literary model in Indonesia. In

---

It is noteworthy that Sino-Malay authors more actively debated this issue through literature than other ethnic groups. Examples of Sino-Malay novels on the subject of revenge include *Pembalasanja saorang miskin* (Revenge of a poor man) by Soe Lie Piet (1934), *Bolas membalas* (Mutual revenge) by Njoo Cheong Seng (1931) and *Pembalasan haloes* (Refined revenge) by Madonna (1931).

<sup>26</sup> Titles such as *Oewang* (Money) by Chen Wen Zwan (1935), *Krintjingnja ringgit* (The Tinkling of Ringgit coins) by Koo Han Siok (1929) or *Satoe Millioen* (One Billion) by Soe Lie Piet (1938) can be noted here as examples of Sino-Malay novels.

contrast to books like *Robinson Crusoe*, the Count of Monte Cristo (and all following indigenous heroes of the same ilk, such as Elang Emas or Puma Malavaji) provided the (still-colonized) Indonesian with an attractive literary figure and a perspective that was easy to adopt and adapt. The bourgeois hero, once a maltreated and oppressed victim of foul play, is miraculously transformed into the ultra-rich nobleman Count of Monte Cristo who then makes his return as the omnipotent avenger. Identity and subject constitution are here reduced to a sheer matter of wealth and title, the latter also available for money. One of the indigenous versions translates this notion perfectly into the colonial context: the (poor and outcast) protagonist finds an enormous treasure, buys himself some Western clothes and applies for a Dutch passport — all it takes to become Dutch, 'white' and powerful.<sup>27</sup> Neither Dumas' protagonist nor the Malay hero is supposed to represent a character with psychological depth. On the contrary, they both embody the elusive and therefore invulnerable subject. This literary figure, however, did not yet reach beyond being a position within a pre-defined system (or plot), still waiting to be filled with the fantasies of the colonized and a national hero of their own, as will be shown below.

## THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL ALIAS PATJAR MERAH

We seek him here, we seek him there.  
Those Frenchies seek him everywhere.  
Is he in heaven? — Is he in hell?  
That demned elusive Pimpernel (Baroness d' Orczy 1905).<sup>28</sup>

The steadily growing nationalist movement generated a demand for role models and emblematic heroes, in particular after the failed rebellion of 1928. By then, literature had become an important medium within political and social discourse. It is the irony of history that the Dutch themselves provided the

---

<sup>27</sup> For further details and a comparative textual analysis of the Malay adaptation *Harta terpendem* by Juvenile Kuo (1928) see Jedamski (forthcoming).

<sup>28</sup> In the Malay version, published by Balai Poestaka, the verse reads as follows: 'Kan kemari kita tjahari —Dikedjar Didong setiap hari—Ditjari diburu disegenap tempat, — Heran si Patjar tidak terdapat!' (no year [1927]: 51.)

Indonesians with the perfect literary model to become one of the most influential national heroes: The Scarlet Pimpernel.<sup>29</sup>

Around 1927, the colonial institution Balai Poestaka brought out a (shortened) Malay version of Baroness Orczy's first novel *The Scarlet Pimpernel*.<sup>30</sup> Disguised as the mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel, the English Count Sir Percy risks his own life during the French revolution to heroically rescue French aristocrats from the guillotine. Pretending to lead the life of an ignorant dandy, the hero even fools his own wife who learns about his true identity only accidentally (and towards the end of the novel). The hero is not driven by any political conviction or ambitions but acts for the thrill of action only. Nonetheless, his loyalty to the ruling powers is beyond any shadow of a doubt. It is safe to assume that, by publishing this novel, Balai Poestaka was appealing to the readers' loyalty towards the Dutch in times of national awakening and communist upheavals. The novel *Patjar Merah* (Malay for 'Scarlet Pimpernel', the name of a flower) became one of the most borrowed novels in the Balai Poestaka library programme, though the consequences of this success were not quite what the Dutch had anticipated (let alone hoped for). For within only two years indigenous authors transformed the Scarlet Pimpernel into the mythical national hero *Patjar Merah Indonesia*.

In 1938 the Sumatran Malay writer Matu Mona (Hasbullah Parindurie) catalysed this transformation with his trilogy featuring the *Patjar Merah Indonesia*.<sup>31</sup> He made a distinct contribution to Indonesian literature when blending 'historical facts' with fictional elements in a way that foreshadows

---

<sup>29</sup> Baroness d'Orczy created one of the first masked avengers when writing her stage play starring the Scarlet Pimpernel in 1903. The novel appeared two years later and became a best seller in the Anglo-Saxon world (reaching its twentieth edition within one year). Movies, TV-productions and musicals to date attract large audiences.

One of Orczy's sequels to the *Scarlet Pimpernel* appeared in serialized form from early 1926 to July 1928 in the Malay journal *Pandji Poestaka*, a weekly also brought out by Balai Poestaka.

Oshikawa (1990: 22) subsumes three of Matu Mona's novels under the category of the *Patjar Merah* novel. He gives a comprehensive summary of both *Spionnage-Dienst (Patjar Merah Indonesia)* and *Rol Patjar Merah Indonesia* c.s.as the first and second volume. Surprisingly, he then contradicts his own listing when doubting that *Panggilan Tanah Air* in fact represents the third part of the series (or even a *Patjar Merah* novel at all). Based on my own records I am inclined to believe that Matu Mona's trilogy might comprise the following three titles: *Spionnage-Dienst — Patjar Merah Indonesia* (March 1938); *M. Joessjah Journalist* (before November 1938), and *Rol Patjar Merah Indonesia* [1938].

Pramoedya Ananta Toer's famous tetralogy." Pramoedya, however, wrote his novels from a historical distance of almost seventy years, while Matu Mona acted almost as a contemporary chronicler for the period from January 1930 to (early?) 1938. As a chronicler, however, he took the freedom to 'rearrange' historical events and data to make them fit in with the fictitious frame of his narrative. His *Patjar Merah Indonesia* is based on a prominent historical figure, the communist leader Tan Malaka, whose actual political impact had been diminishing after the failed communist revolt. In the mystification of *Patjar Merah Indonesia* he now saw a comeback as national hero. The literary hero became so popular that Tan Malaka himself repeatedly refers to him in his 'autobiography' (Tan Malaka 1991). Tan Malaka's political allies and other political prominence of the time, thinly disguised, also make an appearance in Matu Mona's trilogy. Their political struggle, exile, and hiding define the plot." Probably due to precaution and to avoid censorship or worse, both author and publisher never grew tired of asserting that *Patjar Merah* was, just like the Scarlet Pimpernel, a fictitious character (— though at the same time illustrations and photographs were added to underline the historical authenticity of the story). Apparently inspired by Matu Mona's success, the Sumatran Malay writer Yusdja (Yusuf Djajad) also produced two *Patjar Merah* novels which appeared in the 'novel journal' *Loekisan Poedjangga*.<sup>32</sup> In the same year, Tan Malaka (alias *Patjar Merah Indonesia*) reached the book cover himself when featuring in *Tan Malaka di Medan* by Emnast (Muchtar Nasution). In 2002, KITLV press in Leiden/Jakarta brought out a reprint of the first volume under the title *Patjar Merah Indonesia. Tan Malaka: Petualangan Buron Polisi Rahasia Kolonial*.

The political dimension and the historical details of Matu Mona's novels have been discussed at length elsewhere." What is of pertinence to this article is the step of literary re-personalisation which takes place in the work. In the course of the adaptation process of Western literature in colonial Indonesia, it was usually not so much the characters but the structure of the plot that was

---

<sup>32</sup> *Bumi Manusia* (1980), *Anak Semua Bangsa* (1981), *Jejak Langkah* (1985), *Rumah Kaca* (1988). All novels were first printed by Hasta Mitra and were (still are) banned in Indonesia.

<sup>33</sup> It is noteworthy here that Matu Mona also wrote the biographies of two nationalists, Muhammad Thamrin and W.R.Soepratman.

<sup>34</sup> The titles are *Tiga Kali Patjar Merah Membela* [Three times Patjar Merah comes to defend] (February 1940) and *Patjar Merah kembali ke tanah air* [Patjar Merah returns to his Fatherland] (May 1940).

<sup>35</sup> See Oshikawa (1990) and Poeze (1976: 482-9).

adapted or 'copied' by indigenous authors. Only a few Western heroes also generated indigenous 'follow-up heroes', heroes who were thus no longer tied to the original plot structure. Creations such as *Elang Emas* and *Mr. X* are such products of this 'literary evolution'. They represent, however, indigenous versions of a de-individualized (often masked) hero of the 'avenger with a thousand faces' or 'master of disguises' type that had been introduced by Monte Cristo, Zorro, Arsène Lupin, and also Sherlock Holmes. These heroes marked a disposition designed for a national hero — a 'blank' still to be filled. In the case of the Malay Scarlet Pimpernel, not only is the hero dissociated from the plot structure of the source text, but, on top of that, undergoes a 're-personalization' in that he is linked to the biography of an indigenous real person. The so-far empty formula or projection foil provided by the literary figure now seems to be filled with a real subject model. This, however, had very little to do with the real person of Tan Malaka and everything with the fabrication of a national hero and a symbol of the nation.

In the context of the nationalist struggle, one would now expect the proposed subject model to be a strong and self-assured one. It is, however, not without reason that Patjar Merah alias Tan Malaka is also labelled the *mystery man*. In fact, he is so full of mystery that in all Patjar Merah novels he scarcely materializes and hardly ever 'acts'. In his first appearance — on page 43! — he certainly does not strike the reader as the image of a strong heroic subject:

There on the bed was a man lying, his body wrapped in a thick blanket. The person was sleeping quietly, did not budge, although earlier on he had been restless and deliriously talking in his sleep. Only when Mlle. Ninon was almost close to him touching his burning forehead, did he open his eyes [...] they were red. The fever had exceeded 42 degrees, a moment when his illness was in a most unsettling phase (Matu Mona 1938: 34).<sup>36</sup>

His female saviour, Mlle Ninon — possibly the true hero in this story — appears on almost every page, whereas the presence of Patjar Merah in the text is primarily manifested by people talking about him, searching for him,

---

<sup>36</sup> Diatas randjang tadi, ada tergolek seorang laki-laki jang berseloebong seloeroeh toeboehnja dengan kain selimoet tebal. Orang jang tidoeur itoe terdiam sadj a, tidak bergerak-gerak; meskipoen tadinja ia gelisah dan mengigau. Ketika Mlle. Ninon soedah hampir kepadanja dan memegang pahinja jang panas itoe; baroelah ia memboekakan matanja jang berwarna merah. Panas badannja melebihi 42 graad; diwaktoe mana krisis penjakitnja sedang berada di phase jang mengoeatirkan'.

fearing, loving and admiring him. With the playful rhyme quoted above, Baroness d'Orczy indirectly revealed the true character of this hero; it is hardly coincidental that one of the numerous sequels she produced is entitled *The elusive Scarlet Pimpernel*. The nationalist idea impersonated by Patjar Merah was, after all, attached to the notion of an elusive and evading subject.

These [*Patjar Merah*] novels do not show Indonesians contending with Dutch; they show Indonesians evading them. The fight against the Dutch meant staying out of their sight. [...] What matters is coming to the attention of authorities and evading them. No matter how well known he [Patjar Merah] is, and he is world famous, he is unrecognizable by authorities when they search for him. [...] It is precisely this capacity to disappear into the image, to continue to transform oneself, and yet remain identical to oneself that is so wishfully portrayed in our novel (Siegel 1997: 171).

While Sino-Malay adaptations of, for example, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, began to present their heroes as very worldly but nevertheless strong subjects, the Sumatran Malay heroes are mystified, take on super-human features, and become so elusive that they seem to vanish into thin air. One possible explanation for this phenomenon could be that the nationalist writers, even in their imagination, were not yet ready to stand up against the Dutch colonizers. Consequently, they could not but put some kind of Scaramouche in the position of the hero. Another reading leads back to the title of this paper, the dummy subject.

## **THE DUMMY SUBJECT: OF SAMURAI AND KSAOTRIA (IN PLACE OF A CONCLUSION)**

In this concluding part I am drawing on an article that, at first sight, does not seem to bear much relationship to Indonesia, literature or any other aspect of my paper. On the example of the samurai, Yoshioka (1995) describes what he calls the self-colonization process in Japan. The author argues that,

even if modernization is undertaken merely as reproduction, reproduction itself is no simple question. Reproduction, copy and repetition (together with their doubtful opposition to originality) constitute a complex theoretical subject, and this becomes pertinent when we talk of colonization of culture. [...] Most countries that experienced colonization are suffering more or less from [...] a double identity, or inconsistency of two cultures (ibid.100-1).

Colonized Indonesia, too, was confronted with an insoluble dilemma. Fragmentized modernization swept through the Netherlands East Indies within a very short span of time, but access to modern forms of information, knowledge, or technology was limited. On the one hand, the need for a strong subject to confront the West in this situation was felt and articulated. On the other hand, the traditional cultural value systems seem to counter-act such a novel subject understanding. The colonial situation made it impossible for the colonized to contemplate and develop a self-defined modern ego. Thus, in order 'to grow into a modern state in a short period, it was more effective to give up striving to become the strong subject, and cultivate instead an amorphous subject and ambiguous identity' (Yoshioka 1995: 107) In other words: a dummy subject.

Some Western popular novels and their heroes provided models that introduced a modern ego and which could serve as a blueprint for a seemingly strong subject to confront the colonizer. Understandably, Robinson Crusoe was not chosen as one of these new heroes, for he narrates the Western subject in its purest form. Heroes such as Monte Cristo or Sherlock Holmes, on the other hand, were perfectly compatible, as their stories focus on the structure, not on the individual. In contrast to the Western novels, the Islamic and nationalistic Sumatran-Malay adaptations never intended to articulate the self-defined, self-reflective individual, but aimed at creating a 'collective ego' and a self-image of the national movement instead. Foreshadowing the postcolonial debate and voices such as that of Homi Bhabha, the popular Sumatran Malay novel writer and creator of *Elang Emas*, Joesoef Sou'yib (1939: 981) formulates that 'It will become clear that we are narrating a different society'.<sup>37</sup>

At the same time, traditional elements had to be re-interpreted and, in some sort of psychological defence, be used as a shield against processes of modernization and Westernization, as Yoshioka (1995: 102-3) underlines:

The samurai image functions as something to negate the radical transformation of culture caused by Westernization. [...] Like many other cultural stereotypes, it derives its totalizing effect from its vagueness, its lack of distinct content. [...] In other words, its functions almost as a pure signifier, by its very senselessness, provokes people's imagination strongly.

The Indonesian equivalent of the 'samurai' is the *ksatria*, the noble knight. The *ksatria*, too, stands for a value system as complex but vague as the one represented by the samurai. The indigenous novels under discussion here are

---

'Akan njatalah kita men"dongeng"kan, sate masjarakat lain'.



full of heroes compared and equated to *ksatria*. Some heroes even have the 'title' added to their name, such as Puma Malavaji alias *Pentjoeri Ksatria* (the *ksatria* thief). Matu Mona's *Patjar Merah Indonesia* is likewise elevated to the nobility and when he finally makes his appearance, the chapter heading announces him as *Ksatrya yang utama* — the first knight.

\* \* \*

From the observations made so far it already becomes evident that Sino-Malay and Islamic Sumatran-Malay literature advocated divergent concepts of the subject. Sino-Malay literature primarily focused on Western culture and its representatives as the indispensable Other. Accordingly, Indonesian protagonists are rarely used to constitute a principle difference, although they do play a considerable role in Sino-Malay novels. After the 'Oath of the Youth' in 1928 — One Nation, One People, One Language — Sino-Malay authors willingly used the *term Indonesier* for non-Chinese indigenous characters in their stories. They seemingly accepted not to be subsumed under this new category of 'Indonesians'. In fact, many Sino-Malay texts strongly suggest a stunning lack of eagerness to be wrapped into that new Indonesianess. At the same time they demonstrated a great interest in all interethnic relations, above all in the one between the colonized 'Indonesian' and the Dutch colonizers. A number of novels even feature various ethnic groups: Malay, Javanese, Eurasians or Dutch, but not a single Sino-Malay or Chinese. In contrast to Sino-Malay literature, (Sumatran) Malay authors sought the Other among the various indigenous ethnic groups, preferably Chinese and Sino-Malay. Further research on this issue is demanded, but, at this stage, I would tentatively conclude that due to the strengthening nationalist movement and the success of the Islamic Sumatran novels in the 1930s the perception (and construction) of the modern subject was pushed in a new direction — away from the subject model propagated by most Sino-Malay authors. The novels by most Sumatran Malay writers tend to negate the domination of the colonizing power simply by excluding the Dutch from their literary world. It is remarkable how many of the novels do not even mention the Dutch, let alone include Dutch protagonists in the plot — not even as the Other. Apparently, the authors could easily imagine a Netherlands East Indies without the Dutch in it, just like they could adapt Sherlock Holmes stories omitting their main protagonist. But the moment that the colonizer did enter this literary world — for instance in the *Patjar Merah* novels — the newly created 'strong subject' to represent the Indonesian nation seems to slip through the lines of the text.

Mimicking the Western novel, indigenous novels not only created the elusive hero but most of all, a dummy subject who masked the absence of an

autonomous and self-defined one. The constant change and disguise of identity, as pinpointed by Siegel above, was designed to **become** identity. Referring one last time to Yoshioka, the question to pose is: Was it a *kancil-like* strategy, a trickster's trick, to create a dummy-subject to survive and maybe defeat the enemy? Or rather, are we looking at a sad case of self-colonization as Yoshioka sees in the case of Japan?

## REFERENCES

- Achsien, A.A. 1940. *Kesopanan Barat. Foreword* [no page]. *Penghidoepan* XV(October) 190.
- Bhabha, H. 1997. 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', in: F. Cooper and A.L. Stoler (eds.). *Tensions of Empire. Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London. **Subjectivity**
- Burgin, P. 1998. *Das Verschwinden des Subjekts. Eine Geschichte der von Montaigne bis Barthes*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Carrithers, M., S. Collins and S. Lukes (eds.) 1997 [1985]. *The Category of the Person. Anthropology, philosophy, history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Drewes, G.W.J. 1985. 'The Life-Story of an Old-Time Priangan Regent As Told By Himself', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 141, 4: 399-422.
- Gungwu, Wang (ed.) 1975. *Self and Biography. Essays on the Individual and Society in Asia*. Sydney: Sydney University Press for The Australian Academy of the Humanities.
- Hall, S. and P. du Gay (eds.) 2000 [1996]. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Thousands Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Heller, T.C., M. Sosna, D.E. Wellbery 1986. *Reconstructing Individualism. Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Hobart, M. 1997. 'The Missing Subject: Balinese Time and the Elimination of History'. In: *RIMA* 31 (June) 1: 123-72,
- Jedamski, D. 1992. *Die Institution Literatur and der Prozeß ihrer Kolonisation. Entstehung, Entwicklung und Arbeitsweise des Kantoor voor de Volkslectuur/Balai Poestaka in Niederlandisch-Indien zu Beginn dieses Jahrhunderts*. Hamburg, Münster: LIT Verl.
- Jedamski, D. 1998. 'Mabuk Modern and Gila Barat — Progress, Modernity and Imagination. Literary Images of City Life in Colonial Indonesia,' in: H.A. Poeze and A. Liem (eds), *Lasting Fascinations. Essays on Indonesia*

- and the Southwest Pacific to honour Bob Hering.* Stein, pp.167-85. [n.p.]: Edisi Sastra Kabar Seberang Sulating Maphilindo.
- Jedamski, D. (forthcoming). 'Popular Literature and Postcolonial Subjectivities: Robinson Crusoe, the Count of Monte Christo and Sherlock Holmes in Colonial Indonesia'. In: K. Foulcher and A. Day (eds.). *Clearing a Space: Postcolonial Readings of Modern Indonesian Literature*. Conference volume. Leiden: KITLV Press.
- K[wee].T[ek].H[oay] 1931. 'Mali Idoep. Toneelstuk dalem anem bagian.' *Moestika Panorama* (Oct.) 22.
- Lo, J. and H. Gilbert 1998. 'Postcolonial theory: possibilities and limitations'. Paper presented at the International Workshop on Postcoloniality and the question of modern Indonesian literature. Sydney University, 29-31 May 1998.
- Luhmann, N. 1994. 'Copierte Existenz and Karriere. Zur Herstellung von', in: U. Beck and E. Beck-Gernsheim (eds.). *Riskante Freiheite. Individualisierung in modernen Gesellschaften*, pp.191-200. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag.
- McVey, R. 1967. 'Taman Siswa and the Indonesian National Awakening', *Indonesia (Cornell)* 4: 128-49.
- Matu Mona. 1938. *Spionnage-Dienst (Pacar Merah Indonesia)*. Medan: Centrale-Courant en Boekhandel.
- Ong Hap Djin 1929. *Kang Lam Yan ? atawa Si Boeroeng Walet dari Kang-Lam*. Soerabaia.
- P[hoa].G[in].H[ian] 1939. *Pembalesan dendam hati (Roman dari seorang prempoean Timoer fang telah djadi korban dari kamerdika'an Barat)*. Foreword [no page]. Penghidoepan XII (15 February 1936) 134. Surabaya: Tan's Drukkerij.
- Parada Harahap 1939. Biographie Dr, A. Rivai'. *Pedoman Masjarakat* V (1 Febr.) 5: 96.
- Pedoman Masjarakat 1940. (no author) 'Agama dan Masjarakat: Kepamilian', (5 June) 23: 451, 459.
- Poeze, H. 1976. *Tan Malaka, Strijder voor Indonesie's Vrijheid. Levensloop van 1897 tot 1945*. 'S-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Proudfoot, I. 1997. 'Robinson Crusoe in Indonesia'. *The Asia-Pacific Magazine* 6/7: 45-8.
- Rodgers, S. (ed., transl.) 1995. *Telling Lives, Telling History. Autobiography and Historical Imagination in Modern Indonesia. Aku dan Toba by P.Popos and Semasa Kecil di kampung by Muhamad Radjab*. Berkeley, L.A., London: University of California Press.
- Sa' doe' ddin Djambek 1940. 'Memperkatikan roman.' *Pedoman Masjarakat*. VI (24 Jan.) 4: 64-7.

- Shiraishi, Saya 1997. *Young Heroes. The Indonesian Family in Politics*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program Cornell University.
- Siegel, J. 1997. *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*. Princeton, New Jersey: University Press.
- Sou'yb, Joesoef 1939. 'Band\* Roman.' *Pedoman Masjarakat* V (13 Dec) 50: 980-1.
- Spanjaard, H.G. 1998. *Het ideaal van een moderne indonesische schilderkunst 1900-1995. De creatie van een nationale culturele identiteit*. Ph.D.thesis, Leiden University.
- Tan Malaka 1991. *From Jail to Jail*. Transl. and introduced by H. Jarvis. 3 vols. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies.
- Taylor, Ch. 1998 [1989]. *Sources of the Sell The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tickell, P. 1981. *Self, Modality and the Form of the Early Indonesian Novel*. Paper presented at the Conference on Multilingualism in Indonesia, Pacet, West Java, 19 — 22 August 1981.
- Tickell, P. 1998. 'Love in a Time of Colonialism: Race and Romance in an Early Indonesian Novel'. Paper presented at the AAS Conference, Washington.
- Watson, C. W. 2000. *Of Self and Nation. Autobiography and the Representation of Modern Indonesia*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Wright, A. 1994. *Soul, Spirit and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters*. Kuala Lumpur etc.: Oxford University Press.
- Ye\_eno\_lu, Meyda 1998. *Colonial Fantasies. Towards a feminist reading of Orientalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yoshika, Hiroshi 1995. 'Samurai and self-colonization in Japan', in: J.N. Pieterse and Bhikhu Parekh (eds.). *The Decolonization of Imagination. Culture, knowledge and Power*, pp.99-112. London/ New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd.