

Every Book has a Voice  
A Postcolonial Reading of Gadis Pantai and Larasati

Novita Dewi, Sanata Dharma University

Abstract

Albeit the Western domination of knowledge production in the world today, postcoloniality should be understood as an interaction between imperial legacy and local wisdom. Actively struggling to make meanings out of their colonial experience, the local people are not passive recipients of external influence and imposition.

QRWLRQV DV K\EULGLW\ DQG ERUGHU FURVVLQJ KDYH WKXV FKDOOHQJ  
The global scene of today is a conversation of many voices.

This chapter argues that Indonesia, as a member of postcolonial society, has its literature shaped by this global/local encounter during both colonial and postcolonial times. As it is, Indonesian literature has its role in having enriched the universal and local aesthetics in the formation of World Literatures. This argument is

FRQVROLGDWHG ZLWK WH[W XDO DQDO VADIS PANTAI (1987) DAN LARASATI (2000) D Q W D 7 R H  
Given the specific postcolonial conditions, the female characters

progresses, the narrative of the decolonized nation and its colonial Master has undergone radical changes?

Invoking this dissimilar reaction toward the death of the two postcolonial actors, separated for thirty-six years by time, I shall illustrate that notwithstanding contemporary globalization, postcoloniality has often continued to be understood in terms of Western conceptualization, neglecting as it does the possible interaction between the imperial legacy and local wisdom. Instead, it can be argued that the local people or the colonized were not merely passive receptors of external practices imposed by the colonizers. People like Sukarno and Pramoedya, for example, has always actively struggled to make meanings out of their colonial experiences, hence their proud, honorable, and nationalist sentiments. It is a hybridity and border crossing. The global scene of today is a conversation of many voices.

This chapter argues that Indonesia has its literature and this global local encounter and Larasati (1960) are cited as texts that prove the limitations of an essentialist category and/or identity such as Third World. In an article, Western feminist writings have often used their own yardstick for measuring the cultures of the indigenous women in relation to their Western counterparts (Mohanty 1988). Why should the experience of women in the West become the models for emulation by Third World Women, i.e. educated, liberated modern women versus unlearned, oppressed traditional women? Similarly, Gayatri Spivak further challenges liberal Western assumption.

estrangement from people of her own class, including her family members, as well as her own newly born baby girl. Derived partly from the story of the loveless arranged marriage of 3 U D P R H G \ D ¶ V R Z Q U H E H O O L R X V J U D Q G P R W K H U W K H Q R Y H of submissive women in patriarchal society.

Similarly, Larasati undercuts the conventional notion of gender roles in the ~~times~~, as Larasati (Ara), the popular film star character in the novel, creates her own way to defend the L G H D O V R I 5 H Y R O X W L R Q 7 K H K H U R L Q H ¶ V H Q W D Q J O H P H Q W the otherwise politically biased portrayal of ~~the~~ Indonesian armed struggle of the 1940s.

In these stories, institutions, be they family or state, are the sites of patriarchal oppression and a social unit that must be defended against class discrimination.

Condition of Postcoloniality: Theory and Practice

1975 for example, is a case in point until Indonesia finally agreed in 1999 to let the East Timorese voted between independence and local autonomy by 2002 this youngest province declared its independence as Timor Leste

This paper argues that there are at least three conditions upon which postcolonial discourse can stand, namely positioning marginality, struggle for resistance and creation of space In light of these three conditions, the two novels by Pramoedya are examined with a specific focus on the female characters. An analysis of the process of growth and maturation

UHIOHFWHG LQ WKH FKDUDFWHUV KHOSV UHYHDO WKH Q  
ex

As if the fear of incomprehensiveness was not enough, being taken to town the next day after the wedding day<sup>2</sup>, the young woman was also to endure fear of place: W K H % H Q G R U R ¶ V orderly, sacred house along with the family intrigues there. She found it hard to understand why even her father, who was never afraid of sea, was now afraid of the Bendoro, giving away his daughter to the noble man. The narrator evokes \* D G L V 3 D Q W D La\$ V o l l o w s : ] O H P H Q V

Is the Bendoro more powerful than the sea, inasmuch that her father ran away? Two other brothers died taken by the sea, yet they never ran away from the sea. Neither did her father run away. But why did he run away this time? She herself is never afraid of sea. But why afraid of the Bendoro? Why? Her father is sturdier and stronger than the Bendoro. The Bendoro is slim, pale, his skin is too soft, he has no muscle. Why is it that everyone fears him? Fear him too. (Gadis Pantai 34)

Here, t K H I H D U S U R Y L G H V P X F o l i t e a l c o m m e n t a r y t a r g e t i n g i s s u e s F L R such as class, power, and hypocrisy. Yes, the story goes, the young woman managed to encounter all adversity with courage.

That marginality is approached with new positioning is also evident in *Ara*. Despite the female F K D U D F W H U \$ U D ¶ V R W K H U Z L V H Y X O Q H U D E O H S R V L W Z L W K μ P D V F X O L Q H ¶ S X U V X L W V V K H F - R i p e d , a n d f i d y a r t t o t h e D V X Q X ideals of the war and revolution. Naturally, Ara is subject to male domination, for example, she provides sexual entertainment to the Dutch Jusman so that she could escape the Dutch D U P \ ¶ V D U t h e n a r r a t o r t e l l s u s , J u s m a n l o v e s A r a , h e n c e a r e p o s i t i o n i n g o f h e r marginality. The fact that she finally marries the man of her choice ± a man who does not E H W U D \ W K H Q D W L R Q ¶ V p o s t - c o l o n i a l i z a t i o n b a c k t o t h e d e t e r i o r a t e .

Struggle for Resistance 37KDQNV WR WKH SKDOOXV ' \$FKLOOH  
 colRQLJHU¶V FUXHOW\ FDQ VWDQG TXLWH QDNHG HUHFW ' another key site in postcolonial discourse. Writing about colonialism and its lasting impact on the African experience, Mbembe is convinced that the colonized is a corporeal object of fascination and fear. Thus, even up until the post (GSHQGHQFH SHULRG WKH D term) act as colonizers who seduce and coerce their own people. This newly emerging form of colonialism is perpetuated by the imbalanced structure of the pallocratic-enolony, as well as through continual oppression of women and the underprivileged by powerful male (government) administrators. Complicity towards colonialist thinking, likened by Mbembe to the male private organ and its vulgarity, is often interrupted, though not always successful, by threats of oppositional forces.

Postcoloniality in Gadis Panta operates through this mode of resistance. Here, moments of postcolonialism thus commence once resistance to the dominant takes place. The notion of practice wife reproduces the gendered role of female passivity, but Pramoedya presents WKLV 3WUDGLWLRQ´ DV D FRGH RI FRQGXFWDW UHYHDO ZRPHQ¶V VXE MHFWRQ for and of Zne. Ho So Dongy the Author F mocks the corrupt colonial practices that tend to privilege men by ignoring the meaningful presence of women. , VKDOO TXRWH JHQHURXVO\ WKH QDUUDWRU¶V DFFRX to take her new BUQ EDE\ JLUO ZLWK KHU DV VKH ZDV GLVFDUGHG house.

3, DP WKH PRWKHU RI WKH EDE\ ,I KHU IDWKHU KDV U ORRN DIWHU KHU WKHQ ,¶G EHWWHU WDW wriggle KHU ZLWK get up from his rocking chair. He stood up to look at Gadis Pantai who wore her head GRZQ VWDUUL Qe buke, Bendero. Bar infant is not jewelry, not a ring, QRW D QHFNODFH WR WKURZ DW DQ\ER Ge to flee with H \RX S the child then" ´ \*DGLV 3DQW Dhead OLLWLGJ XSHU KHUHV DW WKH %H VKH VWRRG HUHFW ZLWK WKH EDE\ LQ KHU DUPV 3(YHC %HQGRUR 6R DP , D KXPdq EHLG JR DDQKQXWKH¶¶ PRVQ 3\*R DZD\ ´ \*DGLV 3DQWDL WXUQHG KHU EDFN DW WKH ZDONHG TXLFNO\ WRZDUG WKH GRRU inging h@ 36W VRS KHU Like a platoon of soldiers the male and female servants to stop and ambushed Gadis

3DQWDL <sup>3</sup>, DP QRW D WKLHI' \*DGLV 3DQWDL FULHG  
HYHU\WKLQJ LQ P\ URRP 7KLV LV WKH RQO\ WKLQJ , V  
away a servant but the rest comes squeeze KHU <sup>3</sup> 7 KLBndoroWscolded her.  
<sup>3</sup>4XLFN /HidantHighway 'R \RX ZDQW PH WR FDOO WKH SR  
my own possessionA baby. ThebabyI myself delivered to this worldShe is mychild;  
KHU IDWKHU LV D 6DWDQ D GHYLO /HW PH JR '

For Pramoedya for example, no knowledge has m d H SRZHU WKDQ RQH ¶ V RZG which in this case includes his entanglements with the women in his life, as well as understanding what these women had experienced throughout their lives. As Hellwig shows, the characterization of the unnamed girl in *Gadis Pantai* LV PRGHOOHG DIWHU WK JUDQGPRWKHU 6DWLPD DQG KLV PRWKH-sufficient Gedes ZKR D (Hellwig 1994: 82-95). It appears that there is continuity of the presence of the female FKDUDFWHUV LQ 3UDPRHG\ D ¶ V RZQ VW he looks no further for his model of (female) hero in his books:

Neither my grandmother nor my mother are [sic] forgotten. The literal meaning of the Indonesian word for hero, pahlawan, is ~~is not~~ not someone necessarily grand, just regular person whose life benefits others. My grandmother and mother benefited me. They are my role models. They live in all the people who have ever had to fight to be themselves. (Toer 2002: 46)

In the novel discussed, we see that Mother is the source of solace and advice for *Gadis Pantai* and *Larasati* % XW 3UDPRHG\ D ¶ V Dede Heru. His *Kartini* is recycled as the model for his female characters could have been Kartini, about whom Pramoedya has written the two-volume biography *Panggil Aku Kartini Saja* [Just Call me Kartini] (1962), thus revealing this writer HPDQFLSDWRU ¶ V UROH LQ HGXFDWLQJ WKH QDWLR Pramoedya writes:

Thus far, Kartini has been mentioned in various commemorations as a mythological figure instead of an ordinary human being. This inevitably undermines the greatness of Kartini as to position her in the realms of deity. The less knowledge about her there is, the stronger her status as a myth stands. Her portrayal is thus distorted. As people ignore truth, they consume only the opium of myth. Indeed Kartini is far greater than the total sum of myths about her. (Toer 1962: x) [My Translation]

3UDPRHG\ D WKHQ FRQLQXHV in *Wahana* [Korset] Heru's *Kartini* from the %UDKPDQ FODVV WR XVH WKH +LQGXFVDVH V\VWHP´ LQ H (Toer 1962: xii). In my interview with him on 18 September 2002, for example, Pramoedya reiterated his admiration of *Ka* WLQL DQG KH DSSHUHG WURXEOHG E\ when they opt instead for myths.



I believe that it is a woman like Kartini that Pramoedya used invariably as a template for Gadis Pantai and Larasati, as well as the supporting female characters individuals capable of becoming instigators for society at large. In various episodes in the novels, women figure significantly. The mothers in both novels through their daily lives inspire their children to be tough and self-sufficient. Lara's daughter has learned about difficult life in time of war. Meanwhile, the tough world of women in traditional society is depicted effectively by the author through all working women in the fishing community. Especially in Gadis Pantai, besides the mother figure, also included in the picture of resourceful women is the sympathetic servant.

Gadis Pantai and Larasati however deserve more mention than other characters in the respective stories as these two novels locate the main characters in positions of power. Both novels thus offer the possibility of global design from the

women in such diverse postcolonial conditions by providing each character with her own distinct experience depending on the respective power relation and its ensuing negotiation. What may come as a comfort in marriage for the young woman *Garis Pantai* may be an ordeal for *Ara*, and none of them would have conceived the idea of self-are-oppressors. Given the specific postcolonial conditions of the women in both novels, their individual voices cannot be reduced

LQWR RQH VLQJOH YRLFH DV WKDW RI WKH 37KLU@ :RUOG  
ZRPDQ¶V H[SHULHQFH ZRPHQ KHL[SWKUL@QFH

--. Gadis Pantai Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 2000.

-- 3: K D W 7 K H \ ' L G Z L W I M E, 7 A P R I L 2 9, 2 0 0 2. Y 4 4 7. '

Spivak, Gayatri & D Q W K H 6 X E D T O P O S T C O L O N I A L S T U D I E S ' R e a d e r ' ( E d s . ) B i l l A s h c r o f t , G a r e t h G r i f f i t h a n d H e l e n T i f f i n . L o n d o n a n d N e w Y o r k : R o u t l e d g e , 1 9 9 5 . 2 4 2 8 .

#### Biodata

Novita Dewi is a lecturer at the English Language Studies, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. She earned her Master of Science degree at Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia (1990); Master of Arts (Honours) at the University of New South Wales, Australia (1998); and Doctor of Philosophy at the National University of Singapore (2005). Her research interests include language education, postcolonial literature, and popular culture.