

Anti-Imperialism in “Max Havelaar”

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes how Multatuli shows anti-imperialism through the characters of Max Havelaar and Stern in *Max Havelaar*. The aim of the thesis is to prove that Max Havelaar and Stern embodies anti-imperialism from their author, Multatuli through their actions, ideas, and commentaries. The analysis of the characters uses theory of imperialism and anti-imperialism. The analysis of the characters is then connected to the real-world perspective of social, culture, and economy that happened around 1850s, by using the theory of new historicism. The results of the analysis show that Max Havelaar and Stern proved their anti-imperialism by fighting against economic, cultural, and political imperialism.

INTRODUCTION

Multatuli is seen as a revolution icon by Indonesians. His name and *Max Havelaar* are well known in the country, but are underappreciated and forgotten by the Indonesians. His works are more famous and appreciated in the European countries, especially the Netherlands. Although he had never got merits for his works, his name is used for many institution and museums in honor for his work against colonialism, for example Multatuli Museum and Multatuli Hotel in Netherlands. Darren C. Zook, in his journal titled Searching for Max Havelaar: Multatuli, Colonial History, and the Confusion of Empire, argued that *Max Havelaar* is only written under Multatuli’s bitterness of his removal from his position of Assistant Resident and not because that he really fought for the native Indonesians. Whether it is true or not, *Max Havelaar* has inspired anti-imperialism movements around the world. Indonesian famous political writer, Pramoedya Ananta Toer said that *Max Havelaar* is the book that ended colonialism (Pieterse, 2010). *Max Havelaar* triggered educational reforms and was in turn responsible for the nationalist movement that ended Dutch colonialism in Indonesia after 1945, and which was instrumental in the call for decolonization in Africa and elsewhere in the world. This book is very influential for in the world during the Dutch Colonization era. It helped ceasing Dutch’s grip on Indonesia little by little. Despite its history and influence, only a few Indonesians have read this book. Another reason why I am interested in *Max Havelaar* is that *Max Havelaar* is almost forgotten by Indonesian people themselves. During the 150th anniversary of *Max Havelaar*, Dutch literature professor, Marita Mathijsen said that this book is forgotten by the literature world. *Max Havelaar* was so influential during the colonialism era, it is even included in all of history school textbook in Dutch colonization chapters (150th anniversary, 2010). Despite its popularity and effects, the book *Max Havelaar* is only known by the name, but still not read by the people of Indonesia.

The story of Max Havelaar is set in 19th century in Banten, Indonesia during the colonization of the Dutch. The Dutch system made the indigenous people of Indonesia work under a forced cultivation system or *cultuurstelsel* which required them to plant commodities like coffee and cinnamon that sold well in European market. The text is about showing the abuse of colonialism by the Dutch by *cultuurstelsel* and the suffering of the Indonesian people at that time. The story revolves around three characters, Droogstoepel, who has a traditional Dutch businessman point of view, Stern, which is a German born Dutch and Droogstoepel’s apprentice. and Max Havelaar, who wants to stop the injustice to the indigenous people. Droogstoepel’s character is an arrogant coffee trader who liked appropriateness and wanted to be respected. Droogstoepel’s character is a depiction of an average Dutch man in Indonesia during the colonization era. Max Havelaar is the opposite of Droogstoepel and main protagonist who wanted to end the corrupt regime of the Governor General who is a Dutch and the local lord or called “Adipati.” Stern is the neutral voice between the aristocratic Droogstoepel and the pro-indigenous Max Havelaar. The story ends with Max Havelaar’s

failure to remove the corrupt officials and ended up being fired himself. Max Havelaar's firing happens because he has a different ideology from his fellow Dutch. Different people have different ideologies, including the characters in *Max Havelaar* novel. There are some conflicting ideologies in the novel, like imperialism and anti-imperialism. Ideology is a systematic body of ideas articulated by a particular group of people. For example, a person born in the Dutch culture, like Droogstoepel, will have the ideology of imperialism. The interesting character in Max Havelaar is his anti-imperialism ideology, which he has despite his Dutch background.

There are some unique cases in which ideologies are represented by Multatuli in the novel. Multatuli uses Droogstoepel, the coffee businessman as the embodiment of imperialism in this novel. Droogstoepel is a hypocritical businessman that has no respect for the native culture, always boasting his love towards truth and religion, and always talk about how bad his competitor is. Even, the local Residents that are supposed to be the representatives of the native Indonesians are imperialists. The Residents are corrupt, vicious, and do not care about the wellbeing of their people. However, among the Dutch imperialists, there are characters who are not like the stereotypical imperialists. Max Havelaar and Stern stand out with their anti-imperialism. Edward Said notes, the nineteenth-century Dutch writer Multatuli does not share this prevailing imperialist vision. "In fact, Multatuli's Max Havelaar denounces that vision as the justification for the oppression of the natives of Indonesia. (Feenberg, 1997)" This is an interesting case of a man from the colonizer and imperialist country turns out to be an anti-imperialist. The novel is written based on Multatuli's experience as a civil servant in Java. Moreover, Max Havelaar's character is based on Multatuli himself. Also, the events surrounding Max Havelaar are also based on Multatuli's experiences. Max Havelaar and Stern's anti-imperialism, inherited from Multatuli, is unique, given that they are both born and raised a Dutch in the era of European imperialism. However, unlike the other Dutch characters in the story, Max Havelaar shows compassion and empathy towards the indigenous people. He even put his mind, body, and money on the line for the indigenous Indonesian slaves. He has a right to act like an imperialist from an imperialist country, but he does not use that right. Stern, even though he never sees Java or the indigenous people of Indonesia, defends the rights and culture of the indigenous people, because he is inspired by Havelaar. These two characters are the unique ones among the Dutch imperialists.

In *Max Havelaar* the imperialism ideology is very strong. Most of the Dutch characters in the story has the imperialism ideology. Imperialism, according to conservative theories, is necessary to preserve the existing social order in the more developed countries. It is necessary to secure trade, markets, to maintain employment and capital exports, and to channel the energies and social conflicts of the metropolitan populations into foreign countries (*Theories of Imperialism*). The Leninist views of imperialism addresses the economic dominance and exploitation of a country, not only colonizing a country by military power. The primary purpose of imperialism is economic exploitation, rather than mere control of either a country or of a region. According to Johan Galtung, there are five types of imperialism: economic, political, military, communication, and cultural. Galtung explains that in every type of imperialism there are several things that the center nation/colonizer provides and demands. In the analysis, I only use three types of imperialism which are the economic, political, and cultural imperialism. Economic imperialism is a type of imperialism where the colonizers provide the process or means of productions (system, blueprints, knowledge of productions), while the colonized country provides raw materials or new markets for the colonizers. Political imperialism is a type of imperialism where the colonizers make decisions and provide models of how to behave. The colonized are expected to be obedient to the decisions/law of the colonizers and imitate how the colonizers behave. The last type is the cultural imperialism. Cultural imperialism is a type of imperialism where the colonizers provide teachings and means of creation. The colonized are expected to learn, give validation, and become dependent to the teachings.

The word imperialism comes from the term empire. Imperialism refers to the practice of domination of one country by another in order to expand territory, power, and influence. It usually carries with it the idea of cultural superiority on the part of the imperialist, judging the way of life, traditions and beliefs of those colonized as inferior and worthy of replacement (*Imperialism and Socialism*, 2011). Therefore, anti-imperialism is all actions that is hostile towards domination of other country and seeing that country as inferior.

FIGHTING AGAINST ECONOMIC IMPERIALISM

First of all, Multatuli expresses his anti-imperialism ideas by writing against economic imperialism. Economic imperialism is a form of imperialism where the colonizer provides the means of productions and demands raw material from the colonized. Multatuli uses the character of Max Havelaar to show his anti-imperialism ideas. Among the imperialist Dutch, Havelaar is a character that represents anti-imperialism. The events that Havelaar encountered in the story is also based on Multatuli's experience as a Dutch civil servant in Indonesia. Havelaar is a character that Multatuli uses to break the Dutch stereotype of imperialists. In the novel, Havelaar, with his position of Assistant Resident, could do the same like his colleague. However, Havelaar did not do so. In contrary, Havelaar was an anti-imperialist by criticizing the *cultuurstelsel*. Havelaar criticized *cultuurstelsel* by sending a letter of criticism to the Dutch Governor General.

However, Your Highness HAS MADE RIGHT OF THE SYSTEM OF POWER ABUSE, ROBBERY, AND MURDER OF THE POOR PEOPLE OF JAVA, and I am lamenting about that. That is what I am lamenting about. There is blood on the received money of your thus received wages of the Indies, Your Excellency! Once more I beg you for an audience, a short moment, this night, tomorrow morning. (Multatuli, p. 459)

By criticizing the system, Multatuli through Max Havelaar shows his anti-imperialism ideas because he criticizes the system that makes his country rich. The theory of economic imperialism states that the country that is the colonizer provides the means of productions which is the system itself and demands raw material, which are various crops and spices. At that time, the Dutch tend to overlook the *cultuurstelsel*'s broken system because the products from the system were so profitable for the Dutch, it made almost 20% of the Dutch's public revenue. Normally, a Dutch, working as a government official would not care much about injustices as long as he got paid, However, Havelaar is not like the stereotypical Dutch. In the letter, Havelaar criticized *cultuurstelsel* directly, by stating that it was a form of robbery.

Another evidence that Multatuli expresses his fight against economic imperialism through Max Havelaar is that Havelaar was paying his servants accordingly. As said earlier, the Dutch needed commodities for the European market and some of the workers were not paid. However, Max Havelaar as a Dutch civil servant, did not treat his servants poorly. Max Havelaar practiced justice towards his slaves and treated them like proper human beings. The first proof that Max Havelaar treated his indigenous servants well is by not forcing his slaves to do jobs for free.

However, there was a condition in Lebak that made Tine (Max's wife) sad: little Max (Havelaar's son) could not play in the yard because there were so many snakes. Knowing this, Tine explained the situation to Havelaar, her husband then promised wage to his servants for every snake they could catch. However, on the first day he already paid so much that he had to pull his promise back; because, even under normal circumstances, without having to save money strictly, the wage he paid would have gone over his earnings. (Multatuli, p.292)

It is not easy for Havelaar to pay his servants accordingly. The maximum wage of an assistant resident during the colonialism era was 500 Guilders. Assuming Havelaar is located in a remote and small district, but is experienced as an assistant resident, his pay would be more or less 350 Guilders per month. The wage of his servants, assuming they are considered slaves, is worth three meals a day with white rice. The price of white rice was 0.75 Guilders per kg (Zanden, 2012) It is enough to feed a person and his family for a day. In the novel, it is not mentioned how many servants did Havelaar have. Assuming that he had at least ten servants, to manage and clean his mansion, cook, and watch after his wife and kids, he had to pay (0.75 x 10 x 30) 225 Guilders per month. It was already 65 percent of his wage, spent on feeding his servants, not including the bonus his servants got for catching snakes in his yard and his own family's expenses for food and clothes. Because of that, the simple act of paying servants accordingly is considered an anti-imperialist action, because it is against the definition of imperialism that states that one of the perks of imperialism is economic exploitation. By acting unlike his fellow Dutch who do not pay their servants, Havelaar showed that he was an anti-imperialist.

FIGHTING AGAINST CULTURAL IMPERIALISM

Besides fighting against economic imperialism, Multatuli also criticizes the cultural imperialism practiced by the Dutch through Havelaar and Stern. Cultural imperialism is a condition where the colonizer provides teachings or ideologies while demanding the colonized people to practice the teachings and ideologies and become dependent to the colonizer's culture. In the context of the Dutch colonization era of Indonesia, the Dutch provided their language and religion to Indonesia. Droogstoopel's view that the European culture and Christianity is superior than other culture and religion is considered European general opinion towards imperialism at that time. The European countries colonized countries in Asia, Africa, and America with the same ideological understanding that the Europeans are the superior ones, compared to other culture and beliefs. However, Havelaar does not share that point of view, even though he is also a Dutch. Unlike his fellow Dutch, Havelaar respected the indigenous culture by using local language. Usually, the Dutch use the Dutch language in formal and public speeches. It shows the Dutch's superiority over the locals. It is also a form of imperialism which is thinking one's culture as better and superior over the colonized people's culture. However, Havelaar shows his respect of the Indonesian culture by using Malay language, the local language during one of his speeches. "His speeches to the chiefs of Lebak was in Malay, of course, and this made it even more peculiar, since the simplicity of the eastern languages give many expressions a power which is impossible in our idioms." (Multatuli, p.153) In the quote, it is written that the use of local language, which is the Malay, in a formal speech was scarce. Stern, the narrator of that part used the word "peculiar" to describe Havelaar's use of the Malay language during a speech to the local leaders. At that time, the Malay language was considered a market language that were used only in daily communication, while in formal speeches, the Dutch used the Dutch language which was considered the better language from the colonizer's culture. There were separations and classifications of social class, the first-class people were the Dutch/Europeans and the second class were the Asians, however, there were also classifications among the Asians, Chinese traders and the locals. The locals were considered the lowest class because of their status as the colonized. Because of that, the Indonesian culture and language were also considered the low culture and not used during speeches. Despite of that, Havelaar used the Malay language during his speech, therefore, showing that he was an anti-imperialist. By using the Malay language during his formal speech, Havelaar showed that he did not think like his fellow Dutch who thought the Malay language as the inferior language.

Not only using the local language, Havelaar respected the local religion, which was Islam, during his speech. In his speech, Havelaar used the word "Allah" to refer to God. "For I know that Allah loves the poor and that He gives wealth to anyone He wants to test. But the poor. He sends to speak his word, so that they erect themselves in their Misery. (Multatuli, p.154)" At that time, the Europeans were very proud of Christianity to the point of cultural imperialism, seeing other religion as wrong and the people worshipping different God than theirs were seen as blasphemers. During the Dutch colonization era, Islam was seen as a superficial version of Christianity and Catholicism.

In the course of the 19th century more became known about Islam in the East Indies. The Dutch, however, continued to view Islam as merely one among several composite layers of indigenous culture. European scholars were inclined to highlight the syncretic, superficial or derived nature of Southeast Asian Islam. (Maussen, 2019)

The imperialist way of thinking that Havelaar fought was shown by Droogstoopel, the coffee broker. Droogstoopel said who the indigenous people were right to be oppressed because the indigenous did not worship God. His logic was that God blesses and loves the people that worship Him and hates the people who worship other gods. Therefore, the Dutch with that logic, would never refer to God as Allah or other religion's way of calling God. Using the word "Allah" in a formal speech is a proof that Havelaar is an anti-imperialist. Normally, the imperialists would see their religion and God as the right one, in this context, Christianity and Jesus, and would denounce the colonized people's religion and gods. In the speech, Havelaar specifically used the word Allah, which refers to how the Moslem say "God." It was rare during the Dutch colonization era, for a Dutch to say "Allah" instead of "God." By using the word "Allah," Havelaar proved that he did not see other religion as false beliefs that had to be purged and replaced with Christianity. Unlike his fellow Dutch, Havelaar was able to respect the colonized people's religion in the same level he respected his own religion. Furthermore, Havelaar did not just use "Allah" to speak in private, but in a public speech where

everyone could see him. It proves that Havelaar was brave enough to show his idealism of accepting and respecting the colonized people's religion in public, not just using it for political purposes. Therefore, Havelaar proved that he is an anti-imperialist by respecting the colonized people's religion.

Besides Havelaar, Multatuli also uses Stern to show his criticism against cultural imperialism. Stern is the fictional narrator of the story, and could be considered Multatuli's voice throughout the story. His fight against cultural imperialism can be seen by his comment on the Javanese people and their culture. "However, the inborn politeness of the Javanese – even the lowly Javanese is much politer than his European peer – makes this apparently complicated relation more bearable than it would otherwise be. (Multatuli, p.86)" During the colonialism era, the Dutch saw the Javanese people's politeness in disgust. "Perhaps the reader will, after reading this letter, change his opinion about his contempt for the slavish submission of the Javanese who, in presence of his chief, withdraws his accusation like a coward, although the accusation was correct. (Multatuli, p.331)" Multatuli criticized the thought that the Javanese people were cowards who were not brave enough to confront problems. The European culture were more straightforward and focuses on the business at hand. On the other hand, the Javanese culture were timid. The Javanese people did not like to address problems directly. The Javanese people have had a culture of accepting the mistreatment they suffer, rather than confronting the object or people who cause their mistreatment. However, Stern's ability to see that the Javanese culture also contributed to the relationship between the Dutch and locals, Multatuli expresses his idea of opposing cultural imperialism by respecting other people's culture Stern also criticized the Dutch, being the imperialists could not see the politeness and timidity of the Javanese as a culture, passed down from the Javanese people's ancestors. The Dutch were blinded by their blind faith in their religion and blind pride in their culture. Unlike the Europeans, Stern was able to see the colonized culture as equals to the colonizer's culture.

Moreover, Stern did not only defend the Javanese culture, he also criticizes the Dutch culture who saw the native Indonesian as the people who were right to be oppressed. In his comment on the story of Saidjah and Adinda, Stern said "Very few Europeans will take the trouble to bend down and watch the problems of the told of coffee and sugar which are called "natives". (Multatuli, p.401)" In the quote, Stern criticizes the European people who only saw the native Indonesian as machines to gather coffee and sugar. Stern, unlike the other Dutch was able to see that the European culture the Dutch had was not the perfect culture and the polite Javanese culture was not the lower culture.

FIGHTING AGAINST POLITICAL IMPERIALISM

Another type of imperialism that is criticized by Multatuli in the novel is the political imperialism. Havelaar's actions in the story shows that he fights against political imperialism, representing Multatuli's ideas. Political imperialism is a type of imperialism where the colonizer, here the Dutch provides decisions and models, while in return demands the colonized people to be fully obedient to the colonizer. The goal of political imperialism is to make proxy countries with local leaders that will submit to the colonizer. Multatuli first shows Dutch's neglection of the corruption through Resident Sliming, Havelaar's senior officer. While Havelaar tried to arrest the regent, Sliming only came to Havelaar and asked him to let the regent go. "After reading the letters the Resident said that it would please him if Havelaar took the letters back, as if they had not been written. Havelaar refused politely. (Multatuli, p.432)" Not only did Sliming ask Havelaar to let the regent go, the resident also met with the regent and asked if the regent had problems with Havelaar and then proceeded to give the regent a bribe. Through Resident Sliming, Multatuli wanted to show the corrupt politics that were practiced by the Dutch government and local leaders. Multatuli also criticizes the apathy of the other Dutch officials through Verbrugge. Verbrugge shows that not every Dutch official was corrupt. However, most of them were too afraid of the Government to even criticize the corrupt politics practice. Havelaar's controller, Verbrugge, was also concerned about the situation of oppression, However, he did not do anything. Verbrugge was too afraid of the system. While meeting with Resident Sliming, Verbrugge even urged Havelaar to obey the resident. By comparing Havelaar with Verbrugge and Sliming, Multatuli shows his anti-imperialism ideas. Like Verbrugge and Sliming, Havelaar is also one of the civil servants in Indonesia, however, unlike the

other civil servants, he was not corrupt. Havelaar even tried to end corruptions in Lebak, the area where he was posted. In the story, Havelaar's fight against political imperialism are mainly shown in his letters. There are several letters that Havelaar wrote regarding several cases in the region of Lebak. The Regent of Lebak is an old civil servant whose corruptions are overlooked by the Dutch government. The Regent had been oppressing the villagers and robbing them from their possessions. After doing some investigations, Havelaar sent a letter to the Resident of Banten, stating that he was going to arrest the Regent of Lebak according to his accusations, here is a part of the letter.

In order to be able to instruct both cases, I suggest that you order me:

1. to send said Regent of Lebak, with most hurry, to Serang, and taking care that he will neither before his departure, nor during the journey, be in the opportunity to, by bribing or otherwise, influence in the testimonies which I shall find;
2. to take the Dhemang of Parang-Koedjang in temporary incarceration;
3. to apply the same measures on persons of lower rank, who belong to the Regent's family and can be expected to influence the quality of the required investigation;
4. to make sure that the investigation will take place immediately and to send an extensive report of the results. (Multatuli, p.411)

Havelaar's fight against corruption is shown by the content of the letter here. By trying to arrest the corrupt resident, Havelaar shows that he fought against political imperialism. Arresting the corrupt resident means that Havelaar is working opposite of the Dutch system of proxy leaders. However, Havelaar was not like the other Dutch. By refusing to let the regent go unpunished, Havelaar had shown that he fought against the political imperialism.

Havelaar was not the only character who fought against economic imperialism. Stern also fought against it. Stern's fight against political imperialism. In the story Stern was considered the second fictional writer of Max Havelaar's story. Stern is also considered Multatuli's own voice in the story. When Multatuli took up the pen and spoke with his own voice in the ending of the novel, he did not use Stern as a medium anymore. In the ending, Multatuli acknowledged that Stern was only his creation and not a real person. "It is enough, my good Stern! I, Multatuli, take up the pen. You were not called to write Havelaar's life history. I called you to life. (Multatuli, p.460)" If Stern is the medium of Multatuli's voice, therefore, Stern also has same goals with the real writer, Multatuli. Stern's goal was to fight imperialism in Indonesia by showing the European leaders and the Dutch government of the injustices suffered by the people of Java. Stern also wanted to show the corrupt colonial system the Dutch practiced and so, Stern's fight against political imperialism could be seen in his act of including Saidjah's story in the book. Saidjah's story is about oppression from the local indigenous leaders, suffered by the native farmers. Saidjah's story showed the injustice suffered by the natives and the corrupt Dutch system. Stern's goal was Multatuli's goal. Therefore, by including Saidjah's story, Multatuli, through Stern, wanted to show the European people and Dutch government the corrupt political system that the Dutch practiced.

Stern did not only include Saidjah's story into the book, Stern also commented on the story and criticized the Dutch. "No, Minister of Colonies, no, retired Governors-General, I do not ask you to prove that! You should prove that the population is not mistreated. (Multatuli, p.402)" In the quotation, it can be seen that Stern's criticism was directed towards the government officials like the Minister of Colonies and Governor General. Stern criticized the Dutch Government for their system of proxy leaders in Indonesia. Stern also criticized the Dutch government for allowing the proxy leaders to oppress the native without consequences. Stern pointed out that the Dutch government had done nothing to prove that the native population is not mistreated. By asking the government officials to prove that the population was not mistreated and pointing out the allowances of crimes, Stern also criticized Dutch neglect of the crimes of the proxy rulers the Dutch installed in Java.

CONCLUSIONS

In sum, Multatuli succeeded in his effort of showing the ideas of anti-imperialism in the form of Max Havelaar and Stern in the novel. Multatuli expresses the anti-imperialism ideas through Havelaar and Stern's actions, commentary, and opinions throughout the story. Max Havelaar and Stern are anti-imperialists because they acted unlike the stereotypical Dutch imperialists and fought against several types of imperialism. Havelaar fought against economic imperialism by paying his servants, unlike the other civil servants who did not pay their servants, and by criticizing the

cuulturstelsel or the forced cultivation system which was a very profitable system for the Dutch. They also fought against cultural imperialism. Havelaar did it by using the Malay language during his formal speech, while Malay language was considered the low-class language at that time. Havelaar also used "Allah," an Islamic term, in the speech to refer to God, unlike his fellow Dutch who believed that Christianity was the only right religion and looked the other religions as the wrong ones that needed to be annihilated. Stern fought against the cultural imperialism by defending the Javanese culture by pointing out that the polite Javanese culture was the factor of why there was only a little tension between the local Javanese leaders and the Dutch government officials. Stern also fought against cultural imperialism by his opinion that showed respect towards the Javanese people. Stern stated that the Javanese people are also human beings with rights and are equals with the Dutch. Besides economic and cultural imperialism, Havelaar and Stern also fought against political imperialism. Havelaar tried to arrest the corrupt regent despite the Dutch government officials dissuaded him and worked against his will. Stern fought against political imperialism by including Saidjah's story and by criticizing the Dutch government and their system of proxy leaders, which lead to the corruptions and oppression of the locals.

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