

# Social Changes in Economy and Politic During the National Movement Period in Indonesia (1900-1942) from the Historical Novels Perspective

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**Keywords:** Imagination, a historical fact, the Indonesian national movement.

**Abstract:** Historical novels help fill some shortages in exploring social facts or mental facts which are not recorded in the document sources. The macro formulation of this study is “*How was the narration of national movements in Indonesia (1900-1942) in the field of economic and politic from historical novels perspective?*” The researches chose historical method as the research methodology and literature study as the research technique. The finding of the study showed that: *First*, The described economic setting was about: industrialization, regents’ tyranny, anxiety of China’s arrival, jealousy of indigenous economy, as well as capitalism octopus in the Indies after the enactment of the Agrarian Law 1870. *Second*, Political setting described in historical novels themed Indonesian national movement, were: the emergence of educated class, the emergence of various national movement organizations, revolutionary awareness, the struggle of educated class towards Indonesian’s political rights, the appearance of *volksraad*, left ideology, the authority of Netherland queens, indigenous’s conflicts and their invaders, concerns about the yellow’s dangers (China and Japan), the expansion of Japanese Military, stratification in politics, and the bureaucracy of colonial government. The implication of this research is that the historical novel has its own narrative of history that enriches the knowledge of Indonesian history.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Stories can give meaning to various experiences in social and cultural setting systems and various other abstract things. Furthermore, stories can sound unheard voice in the historical pattern which is said “*Grand History*” (Hertz, 2009). The use of historical novels, as long as used together with text books and primary sources, have made history more pleasing and correlated to the students’ life (Lindquist, 2008). The researchers found that the setting where people enjoy history is in the form of story whether family history story, electronic cinema or historical novels. Novels are useful to rectify the past because the story can help “*others*” in the history so it can be felt to be real and present in the class (Lindquist, 2008).

The historical novel is one of a kind of complex novel as it is one of complex genres because it includes both fiction and nonfiction (Barone, Oswalt, Barone, 2014). The historical novel lies at the crossroads between fiction and nonfiction. The readers would likely experience some difficulty in comprehending the complexity in historical fictions

and this is also experienced by the students who face some obstacles in understanding the duality of historical fiction (Barone, Oswalt, Barone, 2014). Historical novels are included into two broader forms, they are; those which tell about various events in a historical or periodic setting; and those which use historical “facts” to tell the story. Each of these genres and approaches will have certain forms (Young, 2011)

Novelists construct society’s culture through their literary works. Every novelist pictures and interprets the life around him which is then expressed through their literary works. Henceforth, every literary work, produced by anyone, is very important, regardless of whether the literary works are considered to be serious literary works or popular ones. It is because every novelist has a unique and diverse perspective and way of speaking.

The macro formulation of this study is “*How was the narration of national movements in Indonesia (1900-1942) in the field of economic and politic from historical novels’ perspective?*” Given the vastness of the formulation study, the writers stacked in

several research questions as follows: How was economic setting described by historical novel during Indonesian national movement period (1900-1942)? How was political setting described by historical novels during Indonesian national movement period (1900-1942)?

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Hertz (2009) defined a historical novel as an amalgamation of historical facts with imagination and creativity to show its art elements and the use of public figures and events occurring in the past and the social conditions which are based on historical facts and historical novelists therefore should not distort from historical data in favor of literary-related formats.

When literature and history are simultaneously discussed, it immediately arises a question, is there any fiction in the history and is there any fact in the literature while fiction cannot simply be rigidly associated with only one of the two; only related to literature or only related to history (Purwanto, 2006). Purwanto further revealed that literature is generally associated to an imaginative fiction while history cannot be separated from facts to discover the truth of the past and as a conceivable reality. History and literature are often considered to be in the same level (Purwanto, 2006). Kuntowijoyo (1995) is however different from his previous opinion stated that history is different from literature in case of: work, truth, overall result, and conclusion. Literature is the work of imagination, the truth is in the hands of the authors; in other words, it is subjective. Literature can end with a question while history should provide as much information as possible.

Regarding the positioning of novels and history, Sugito (2008) stated that if a novel is used as a historical source in a historiographic work, the data used is usually not concerned with the details about the description of the place, time, or the chronology of the events (5W+1H) but it is used to get a picture of the awareness of the era or spirit of the era growing at the time. A novel which is able to depict the spirit and situation of an era (and not its 5W+1H accuracy), it is something enabling us to get the picture of the era (not the accuracy).

To be considered a qualified novel in this genre, an author must share accurate time details, including artifacts and beliefs about the world at that time. A novelist should own mannered realistic character and speak as if they were living at the time. Writing expectations for historical fiction are so great that

authors must create a credible story that accurately reflects the time-period in thought, action, trust, artifact, and language (Barone, Oswalt, Barone, 2014).

The historical narrative uses evidence, manuscripts and testimonies that build the past as a representative framework. As a form, it cannot be said to compromise the legitimacy of the past, because the story is not fiction - this is a "true" representation of a time or an event that refers to a different form in the final work. The historical narrative distinguishes itself from the history being studied, or "right", by making its form known - openly imposing the narrative tool in the past, highlighting its discursive function and providing a series of chronological events solely with the necessary continuity (Young, 2011). Through the application of various approaches and strategies, teachers then bring historical novels to their classes. Teachers' guidances are needed if they are going to use hisctorical novels in learning process because these genres are complicated, through the intersection between nonfiction and fiction (Barone, Oswalt, Barone, 2014).

## 3 METHODS

This study applied a qualitative approach, which starts from data and leads to conclusions. The researchers' objective of using qualitative approach was to find out complex and holisitc pictures of the subject matter investigated, in this case about the Narrative of the National Movement in Indonesia (1900-1942) from the Historical Novel Perspective.

The researchers chose the historical method as the research methodology and literature study as the research technique. Historical method is a method of research which is commonly used in historical research because the problem being studied was one of events that was the object of historical research. According to Gottschalk (1986:32), "The historical method is the process of critically examining and analyzing the records and relics of the past".

The historical novel themed national movement of Indonesia is the main instrument in this study which theoretically can be categorized as a document while another instrument used in addition to a novel as a document is an interview. The purpose of the interview is to explore how the novelists' views on historical events during the national movement. The data used was in the form of text or historical narrative in a historical novel. The applied data processing and analysis is through content analysis towards the text

## 4 DISCUSSION

This section would describe the political and economic settings on the novels that are themed or appearing during the national movement of Indonesia. The novels that describe the atmosphere of the national movement era are: *Tan* (Hendri Teja), *Max Havelaar* (Multatuli), *Bumi Manusia*, *The Earth of Man* (Pramoedya Ananta Toer), *Anak Semua Bangsa*, *The Children of All Nations* (Pramoedya Ananta Toer), *Salah asuhan* (*Wrong Care*/Abdoel Moeis), *Layar Terkembang*, *Expanded Shade* (Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana), and *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wijck*, *The Submersion of Van Der Wijck Ship* (Hamka).

### 4.1 The Overview of Historical Novels about Economic Settings during the National Movement Period

The arrival of modernization in the East Indies region accompanied by industrialization was followed by the entry of various western insights into the land of the Indies through ethical politics. It brought a lot of changes to the Dutch Indies society at that time, one of them was that women started to enter industrial occupations.

There were some new jobs emerging in 19-20<sup>th</sup> century which were considered to be prestigious among the indigenous, one of them was a paymaster or a cashier. People preferred being civil servants to entrepreneurs. At the Dutch period, stratification level and status as a civil service was much higher than that of wealth, and so is in the present time that the level of stratification is considered to be something important. In addition to civil service, another honorable job in the early days of the national movement was to become a teacher. However, the most prestigious occupation for indigenous people at the time was a position relating to the feudal power maintained by the Dutch for the benefit of the economy. One of them was the position of a regent.

In Max Havelaar's novel, regents were depicted to be very bad figures because their position was made to be their primary source of income of indigenous officials by exploiting society's potency and property arbitrarily. According to most Asian's common sense, people and their possessions belong to the prince. The descendants or relatives of former princes were fond of exploiting people's nescience, who hadn't yet understood that their recent "tumenggung", "duke" or "prince" were the paid-officials who had sold their own rights and people's rights in order to earn fixed income, henceforth the tax they paid to their master or leader had changed to be low-paid jobs in coffee or sugarcane plantation. Then, it was not strange that

hundreds of families were called to work in remote places, without being paid in regents' fields. It had been too common to see that free of charge stuff was provided for the regents' palace necessity, and it was known that the regents were fond of a horse, a buffalo, a girl, or a wife of a poor man, whoever the owner had to submit the desired things or persons unconditionally. Fortunately, there were still regents who used their authority wisely, and they didn't take beyond what they really needed to maintain their position while some regents did more than their authority, then injustice happened here and there.

Nevertheless, it was difficult or even impossible to abolish such arbitrariness as it was the nature of the inhabitants themselves that constituted or created arbitrariness. The Javanese were known to be very generous, especially when they had to prove their loyalty to their master, to the descendants of those who had been obeyed by their ancestors. They even regarded themselves to be unrespectful to their master, from generation to generation, if they happened to come to the "palace" without bringing any gifts. These gifts were often so insignificant but refusal would be regarded as a humiliation. This custom is more likely the respect of a child who seeks to express his love by giving a small gift to his father, and not a tribute to a despicable and despotic ruler (Multatuli, 2016).

Economic progress in the early 20th century was also marked by the emergence of indigenous workers' anxiety towards the arrival of foreign workers, especially from China (Toer, 2009). In addition, the economic life of society also showed the emergence of the indigenous's economy jealousy toward the Dutch and the foreign east's economy.

The life dynamics of society in the plantation could not be separated from various descriptions. In the novel of *Anak Semua Bangsa* (The Children of All Nations), forceful effort of Dutch Indies' entrepreneurs in order to make the farmers submit their agricultural land to be made as plantations. Due to the pressure of the Nederland politicians, forced cultivation system and corvee labor had long been abolished and recently, the companies have to hire their workers officially, voluntary basis, by not forcing as they had ever done before. Nonetheless, it didn't mean that the life of workers was much better in the Indies period. In the novel of *Tan* (2016), *Goed Bericht* plantation was described. This tobacco plantation company was a company whose capital was owned by foreign bourgeoisie of Europe-America and China. There were also from indigenous people, Sultan Serdang and Sultan Deli, and as for honor, they obtained a number of empty shares. No wonder that Geod Bericht plantation area was so vast that it had to employ thousands of the Indies.

Novel *Tan* also described the plantation entrepreneurs' ignorance of their laborers' welfare, education, and health. Even when vomiting epidemic happened in their laborers' settlements, those entrepreneurs almost did nothing for their workers' recovery. Meanwhile, novel *Max Havelar* described about the famine hitting Java island.

Novels taking national movement theme described a lot about capitalism chain in the Dutch East after the enactment of Agrarian Law 1870. The economic conditions in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were marked by the high spread of rampant poverty, misery and famine which caused Indonesian to suffer a lot of misery and death. This arose as a result of the massive degradation of human and natural wealth done by the Dutch Colonials. The peak of Indonesia suffering occurred when *cultuur stelsel* or forced cultivation System was enacted which was then continued during the era of liberal economic system (Teja, 2016)

In *Max Havelaar*, the economic policy of the colonial government during forced cultivation or *Cultuur Stelsel* period was described detailedly. The writer of *Max Havelaar* (2016) accused that Lebak regent, Raden Adipati Karta Natanegara, abused his authority by illegally exploiting his people's manpower, and suspected the regent to have extorted people while asking for crop *in natura* without payment or by randomly fixed prices. *Demang parang Kujang* (Regents' son-in-law) participated in those arbitrariness.

## 4.2 The Overview of Historical Novels about Political Setting during National Movement Period

Ethical politics provided opportunity for Indonesian youth to attend education, although they were still very limited in number; as a result, there arose educated class among Indonesian people. The emergence of the Indonesian educated classes at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked the new history of the Indonesia. They started to realize the misery, poverty, and stupidity befalling their nation and then they started to have strong desire to improve the fate of their people. They did not fight only for the welfare of their people but also for the independence of Indonesia. Novel *Tan* (Teja, 2016) described further about ethical politics:

*"The honorable Mr. Van Kol. I was deeply inspired by the Green Roof Tent Bate van Nederland movement which became the forerunner of the Ethical Policy. Now, what do you think, Sir? Has the government's education policy towards the Indies people suited to what you previously imagined?" (Teja, 2016: 97)*

In novel *Tan* (Teja, 2016), it was also described that ethical politics made Indies impossible to study in Netherland and it impacted on the emergence of various nationalist movements such as *Jamiatul Khair*, *Jamiatul Al-Irsyad*, the organization of Arabs, Budi Utomo as the gathering place for Javanese *priyayi*, Muhammadiyah with Islam its puritans, as well as the Indies Social Democratic which struggled for socialism. In addition, *Tan's* novel also described the emergence of revolutionary consciousness for educated class.

In addition to talking about ethical politics with its various consequences, Novel *Tan* (Teja, 2016) also spoke about the struggle of the educated class for Indonesian's political rights. One of the discourses recorded in the novel was the debate about the proposed emergence of the *volksraad*:

The reactions of the students' proposals were also elaborated in novel *Tan* (Teja, 2016), one of which was from Pieter Brooshooft, a noted Journalist of the Netherlands, offering a win-win solution so that the educated class of Indies endured until they grew in number to be three to four fold, then the new policy was enacted. Meanwhile, according to D.M.G. Koch (the Dutch bourgeoisie), the increasing number of civil organizations in the Indies was a sign of political literacy. This phenomenon must be supported by the presence of an aspiration agency. Reactions to the political right proposal of Indonesian proposed by the students sheltered under was revealed in *Tan* (Teja, 2016), i.e. PPHN has done two fatal mistakes: *First*, PPHN was a group which was ignorance for favor as it had slandered *onderrneming* entrepreneurs who had been major supporter of ethical politics this long. Thanks to the entrepreneurs' contributions that irrigation infrastructure and highways were built, common schools were established, and transmigration programs were carried out; *Secondly*, PPHN had committed a grave sin to have doubted the good faith of the Queen (*Sri Ratu*), who promised to give autonomous government to the people of Indies when the time came. The last, In the end, the *Volksraad* was still formed, but its formation still attracted criticism from Indonesian students.

The description about the organization of national movement could not be separated from novels themed national movements. Nonetheless, only *Tan* novel described much about the of national movement organizations found both in Indonesia and in Netherland. In *Tan* (Teja, 2016), the much-exposed organizations were *Indische Vereniging*, *Indologie* Students and Indies Union, The Islamic Union (*Syarikat Islam*), and PKH (Indies Communist Party).

Left ideologies, such as Marxism and socialism along with their leaders were much exposed *Tan's* novel. In fact, in *Tan*, it was claimed that the birth of national movement organizations such as Railway



Laborer Unions and Arabic Descent Association, *Budi Utomo*, Association of Chinese descents, *Indische Partij*, Islamic and Muhammadiyah Union was inspired by the 1905 Revolution in Russia.

In the novels of *Anak Semua Bangsa* or The Children of All Nations and *Tan*, the a Dutch's perspective about the high price of colonialism was depicted in the Dutch East Indies which depleted the government's savings and the blood of soldiers who died because of the war and malaria that they had to be defended furiously:

The novel of *Anak Semua Bangsa* captured the situation of inner spirit of Indonesian society and the government in the late 1930s which was the anxiety of yellow dangers (China and Japan). *Anak Semua Bangsa/Children of All Nations*, (2009: 56) recorded Japanese military expansion in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century which did not want to be left out of the white nations: to share the world for themselves. Japan began to invade Mancuria, attacked China and its regions. And the Dutch, the Indies by itself, declared neutral to the war happened. Neutral! The neutrality that really helped Japan.

The historical novels taking national movement theme also reviewed the stratification of politics. The consequences of the political stratification in the colonialism system had resulted in some things which still find in Indonesian society, they were: People's general assumption which judged that the Europeans occupied a higher position than that of the indigenes. This assumption led to inferior feeling in our society to whether high officials or ordinary people. Even in the current development process, we tend to use western concepts and methods with the assumption that they are developed nations which are appropriate to be imitated. Thus, the process of modernization is only the process of westernization.

*Max Havelaar* novel (Multatuli, 2016) gave some notes about the political stratification during colonial administration, i.e.:

- a. The Javanese were Dutch citizens. The King of the Netherlands was their King. The descendants of former princes and Javanese aristocrats were the Dutch officials. They were raptured, transferred, promoted, and fired by the governor-general who ruled on behalf of the king.
- b. They were not only made up of tribes whose kings and princes acknowledged by the Dutch authority, but also retained by direct rule where authority was in their hand, whether small and large degrees.
- c. Criminals were prosecuted and punished under the laws made in *Den Haag* (The Hague). Taxes paid by the Javanese flowed to the treasury of the Netherlands.

- d. All those residents were the representative of the Dutch rule in the eyes of the Javanese - who did not know the governor-general, the members of the Indies council, nor the directors in Batavia; They only knew the residents and the officials who ruled below them.

- e. Residency (some of them with one million populations) was divided into three, four, or five departments or districts, where each of which was headed by a resident assistant.

- f. Dutch politics did take advantage of princes' ancient feudal influences, generally vast in Asia and it was regarded as a part of their religion by most of the tribes. Because, by appointing them as paid employers, a hierarchy was created which was headed by the Dutch government and viced by the governor-general.

The complicated relationship between the assistant resident and the regent, between European officials and indigenous officials was best illustrated in *Max Havelaar's* novel. *Max Havelaar* (Multatuli, 2016) also provided a detailed description of the indigenous rulers, the bupati. The description was as follows:

The regent's wealth is much greater than that of European officials; and this is indeed the case.

The Europeans, if called to govern a province whose surface area is equal to that of owned by German Dukes, were generally middle-aged or older, married and they have children; and he worked for a living, and they were usually paid mediocrely which was not sufficient to buy what his family needed. A

regent was a "tumenggung", "duke", yes, even a "prince", that is "prince of Java". The problem is was not how to earn a living; but the way he must live according to his position.

It was depicted a little bit different in the novel of *Anak Semua Bangsa* (The Children of All Nations) where the real power in the land of the Indians was the capitalists, and one of them was the owner of the sugar plantation. It was they who actually controlled the residents' assistant, the residents, including the regent. In addition to providing an overview of the colonial government bureaucracy, the novel-themed national movement also contained many critics of bureaucracy, especially on *pangreh praja* as follows:

- a. The bureaucratic behavior that justified everything only to fight for and defend the position. In the Children of All Nations, positions are valued higher than property, family, and even name. The *pribumi* or the indigenes would fight hard to get a position in the European government era.

- b. *ABS* bureaucratic style (just to make father happy) contained fraud and data manipulation in order to get a praise from superiors or just to survive from superior's anger. Shortly, the functionaries' official reports to the government and official reports sent to the Dutch government were mostly unreal or incorrect (Multatuli (Max Havelaar), 2009: 303-304).
- c. Residents' behavior which used to defend the regent in case of people's complaint of his arbitrary acts. The worst, the complaint must end with a whip.
- d. Residents' behavior which seemed to allow the regent's arbitrary acts to his own people. It even made the writer, *Max Hevelaar*, confused, why it happened?
- e. The regent's lavish and luxurious way of life, including in the case of visits among regional officials. The description was clear in *Max Havelaari* below:
- f. Max Havelaar criticized frontally the Governor-General behavior who was in fact his own boss.
- g. Criticism on the performance of the Dutch East Indies Policy.

*Bumi Manusia* (The Earth of Man) and the Children of All Nations gave a picture of the indigenous view of the Dutch colonialism.

- a. The novel compared and questioned the Dutch colonization with British colonialization (2008: 177).
- b. Europeans were regarded as money-servants (2008: 490)
- c. The occupying nations would never care about the importance of the country they colonized. The Dutch were considered being afraid of China and being jealous to Japan's advance. (2009: 127).

Facts in politics and economics, for example, were found in the *De Winst* novel, i.e. the economic gap, the hard politics of *de Jonge*, and the fact of ethical politics in *Bumi Manusia* (The Earth of Man). The Submersion of Van der Wijck's Ship on October 28, 1936 was a fact found in the novel of The Submersion of Van der Wijck's Ship. The facts in the cultural phenomenon were depicted from the hierarchically bureaucratic culture in *Gadis Pantai* (The Coast Girl) novel and the influence of western education on the social life of the Minang people was depicted in *Salah Asuhan*.

Facts and fictions can also be distinguished from the authors' notes (footnotes) which in some novels are always made. In the novel of *Di Bawah Lindungan Kabah* (Under the Shelter of Kabah), the students found some facts for example about the hajj pilgrimage of Hamka in 1926, the hajj Cokroaminoto and Mas Mansur and the power transfer in Mecca

from the hands of Sharif Hussein to the hands of Ibn Saud who made the pilgrimage more secure so that the number of pilgrims increasingly boomed.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

A historical novel is a romance which tells about a period in a history and tries to present the spirit of the era, manners, and social conditions of a past by describing in detail the historical facts so as to seem realistic. A good writer of historical novels tries to recreate the past as well as to provide historical explanations with no haste and not a mere fiction. Thus, the novelist is expected to have a perspective in explaining the reality described in his novel.

Economic settings depicted in historical novels themed national movement of Indonesia were about: industrialization, women who had begun to get into industrial work, new jobs emerging in 19-20th century which were considered to be prestigious among indigenous people, the regents who were depicted as very bad figures as to be the main source of income for indigenous officials, the emergence of indigenous workers' anxiety on the arrival of foreign workers mainly from China, the jealousy of the indigenous economy to that of the Dutch and the foreign east, the forced attempts of Dutch colonial exploitation so that peasants rented their agricultural land for plantation, the ignorance of plantation entrepreneurs on the welfare, education and health of their workers, and the octopus of capitalism in the Indies after the enactment of the Act Agrarian 1870.

Political settings depicted in historical novel themed Indonesian National Movement were: the emergence of educated class of Indonesia, the emergence of various national movements, the emergence of revolutionary awareness in the educated class, and the educated class's struggle for the political rights of Indonesian society, the debates about the proposed emergence of the *Volksraad*, left ideology like Marxism, socialism along with their figures, the role and authority of the Dutch queen in the colonies, indigenous conflicts and their colonists, the Indonesian's inmost atmosphere and their government's in the late 1930s due to the anxiety of the yellow's danger (China and Japan), Japanese military expansion in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, stratification in political sphere, as well as an overview about the colonial government bureaucracy.

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