

Mary E. Donnelly



Teaching Pramoedya Ananta  
Toer's Tales from Djakarta in the  
Literature Classroom

A Curriculum Unit for Cornell University  
Southeast Asia Program Outreach Office, c 2003.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Notes on Teaching Tales from Djakarta .....	5
Biography .....	8
History .....	11
Critical Lenses .....	18
Social Realism .....	18
Colonial and Postcolonial Theory.....	21
The National Allegory .....	26
Nostalgia .....	30
Study Guide .....	33
Bibliography & Resources .....	43

## List of Images

1. Pramoedya, 1950's  
From A Teeuw, *Modern Indonesian Literature*. Courtesy of KITLV . Used by permission
2. Pramoedya, 1990's  
From *Indonesia*, 1996.Courtesy of Benedict R. O’G. Anderson and Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications. Used by permission.
3. Indo-European woman and her children, presumably in Bandoeng  
Courtesy of KITLV. Used by permission.
4. Ketjapi player in Jakarta  
Courtesy of KITLV. Used by permission.
5. G.E. Raket and his girlfriend, presumably in Batavia  
Courtesy of KITLV. Used by permission.
6. Prostitute with child camping in and underneath old railway carriages at Koningsplein-Oost [East King's Square] in Jakarta  
Courtesy of KITLV. Used by permission

## Introduction

Pramoedya Ananta Toer has long been one of the most articulate voices coming from decolonized Indonesia. A prolific author, Pramoedya has written short fiction, novels, histories, and social and cultural commentary about his native land. He is frequently mentioned as a leading candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Pramoedya's perennial candidacy for this award is almost certainly based on his epic tetralogy about the birth of Indonesian nationalism, the Buru quartet. In these novels, which tell the story of Raden Mas Minke, a native journalist and founding member of several political and social organizations in the Indies, Pramoedya draws a vivid picture of the colonial period: approximately 1900-1915. The first three books (*This Earth of Mankind*, *Child of All Nations*, and *Footsteps*) are told from the point of view of Minke, as he grows from Dutch-identified high-school student to political activist. The last (*House of Glass*) is told from the point of view of the secret police agent Jacques Pangemanann, who simultaneously investigates and admires the young nationalist. The novels present nothing less than an intellectual history of the nation, and have dominated the critical attention paid to Pramoedya's work.

This unit deals with a far more modest (and somewhat more pedagogically manageable) text from Pramoedya's *oeuvre*, the collection of short stories entitled *Tales from Djakarta*. These stories, which date from the era of the Indonesian revolution and early independence (1948-1956), focus on individual characters and character types in the capital. Many are concerned with the lowest levels of society: prostitutes, criminals, and the poor.

The role of the realist short story in the decolonizing process has been insufficiently theorized. Like James Joyce's *Dubliners*, however, the simple vision of the nation through a

series of desperate and destitute characters vividly presents both the economic and psychological effects of the colonial situation. *Tales from Djakarta* identifies a certain cultural and historical moment, an interstitial space in which the colonizer has largely ceased to have influence, and yet the new nation too young and weak to exert any real force.

For the undergraduate student who is not expert in Indonesia, the collection presents many challenges: social, cultural, and linguistic. The excellent English translations of the Nusantara Translation Group, along with the glossary of Indonesian terms, address the last of these challenges. The others can be addressed by the instructor with the help of these materials.

## Notes on Teaching *Tales from Djakarta*

I taught *Tales from Djakarta* in an introductory course on the short story at Ithaca College, a small undergraduate liberal arts college in upstate New York, in the spring semester of 2003. It followed a broad array of stories chosen to illustrate various literary devices (metaphor, setting, etc.), and preceded the last book in the course, James Joyce's *Dubliners*.<sup>1</sup>

I began with a one-day lecture on Indonesian history and the life of Pramoedya. Because this is a history with which not many of my students were familiar, I thought it was important to give them a grounding in the world Pramoedya addresses here. Particular attention was paid to the various transition points covered by the stories: colonialism, the Occupation, the Revolution, and independence. I also referred to Pramoedya's eventual imprisonment, and asked them to think about why the author of these stories might be considered an enemy of the state.

The first week, my students read three stories, "Houseboy+Maid," "News from Kebajoran," and "Stranded Fish." In these lessons, we talked about the failure of the revolution to substantially improve the lives of the citizens of Indonesia, particularly in terms of economics. We talked about the servant mentality of Sobe and Inah, and discussed the social role of the *njai*. The role of the concubine leads easily into a discussion of prostitution, the fate of Aminah, and so we were able to raise the question of women's sexual capital. "Stranded Fish" offered a number of useful conversations, too, including the sometimes

---

<sup>1</sup> On further consideration, I would probably recommend doing *Dubliners* first and then *Tales from Djakarta*, as that would put the books both in chronological order, and correct the order of the colonial and postcolonial texts.

vexing nature of friendship, the pressures of abject poverty, the role of crime, and the fate of the decommissioned revolutionary soldier.

In week two, they read the next five stories: “My *Kampung*,” “Maman and His world,” Gambir,” “Miscarriage of a Would-Be Playwright,” and “House.” My students were particularly attracted by “Maman and his World,” which they felt was one of the few stories in the book which “wasn’t depressing.” Their aesthetic judgments aside, it did offer us a useful lens into a productive way to handle the loss and suffering presented in such a deadpan way in “My *Kampung*.” “Miscarriage of a Would-Be Playwright” led to a day-long discussion of the material and social conditions necessary for creative work, the role of the artist in the new state, and allowed me to remind them of the question I asked them to consider: how the author of these texts could be considered an enemy of the state. “House,” a somewhat unusual story in the collection, was discussed primarily as allegory (see *Critical Lenses: National Allegory*), with the house itself treated as a metaphor for the nation of Indonesia.

The third week was occupied mostly with tying the later stories in the book into the earlier terms of discussion we’d set up. “Creatures Behind Houses,” “No Resolution,” “The Mastermind,” “Mrs. Veterinary Doctor Suharko,” and “Ketjapi” formed the reading assignment. “Creatures Behind Houses,” really a set of character sketches of the servant class in the city, gave us another lens into the nature of the postcolony, as these are servants, not of the Dutch or the Japanese, but of the new, urban *prijaji* class, the indigenous bourgeoisie. Conditions under their fellow countrymen are not better for these maids, and in some cases may be worse. “No Resolution,” one of the finest stories in the book, offered scope for discussing the colonial/Occupation/revolutionary period, the role of women and sexual

capital, and the national allegory. It focuses on the character of a *kampung* girl who becomes a prostitute for the Japanese, then a refugee, then sacrifices her spouse to the soldiers of the new state, ending mad. “The Mastermind” offers a similarly debased vision of the revolution, focusing on a karate champ turned politician and his fatal flaw: attraction to his young maid. “Mrs. Veterinary Doctor Suharko” allowed us to discuss the role of modernity and nostalgia in terms of the national allegory as well: the stable, tasteful, prewar wife being replaced in the postrevolutionary period by a trashy, expensive, and criminal wife. “Ketjapi” brought us back to “News from Kebajoran,” as the fundamentally similar characters and decisions are separated by the crucial trait of gender.

My students found *Tales from Djakarta* difficult and a little sad, but they did well with the material by and large, and were able to draw useful connections between the stories in the volume. In their papers, they also generated some useful comparisons between this text and others in the course. One paper which struck me as particularly apt compared the choice facing the title character of Joyce’s “Eveline” with the choice already made by Aminah in “News from Kebajoran,” suggesting that Eveline’s paralysis may in fact have protected her from a much worse fate.

Integrating the work of Pramoedya into this introductory genre course took a fair amount of preparation, but it allowed my students to appreciate both the connections between first and third world narratives, and retain a sense of cultural distinctiveness of the text.

## **Biography of Pramoedya Ananta Toer**

Pramoedya was born in East Java on February 6, 1925. His father, a nationalist and a schoolteacher in Blora, was a tough intellectual taskmaster for his son; his father's insistence that Pramoedya excel academically ironically delayed his education. After graduating from primary school, he went on to Radio Vocational School. The death of his beloved mother and a younger sibling in May 1942, just two months after the Japanese invasion, closely coincided with his removal to Jakarta (Batavia) at the age of 17. He had already seen the dark side of the Occupation in Blora, having his own bicycle and watch stolen by Japanese soldiers; in Jakarta he would see even more.

During the War, Pramoedya worked at Domei, the Japanese News Agency, and pursued his education. Despite the appearance of collaboration, his job merely hardened his opposition to the Japanese. Moved from department to department, he eventually quit and returned briefly to Blora. When the news came that the Japanese had surrendered and the Indonesian nation had been proclaimed, Pramoedya returned to Jakarta and joined the Revolutionary forces. He was soon disenchanted with military life and resigned in early 1946, but continued to work for the Revolution in print. Imprisoned by the Dutch as a rebel in mid-1947, he was not released until December 1949 when the cease-fire was declared. (see History) During this internment, he read widely and wrote his first novel, *The Fugitive*, and several short stories, including "Houseboy+Maid" from *Tales from Djakarta*.

With the achievement of Indonesian independence and his release from jail, Pramoedya immediately began to take an active role in the intellectual life of the new nation. He published novels, novellas, and short stories, including many of those from *Tales from*

*Djakarta*. He also worked as a prominent editor and publisher on several projects. In 1953, he received a grant to travel to the Netherlands for a year, but came home long before his time was up. Returning to the desperate poverty and inequality of Sukarno's Indonesia, his politics moved further to the left; many of the later stories in *Tales from Djakarta* specifically address the failure of the Revolution to improve the status of the lower levels of Indonesian society (e.g. "Creatures Behind Houses," p. 106). He also wrote copiously on social issues and Indonesian history.

Though he was appointed to the Institute of People's Culture and continued to play a prominent social role, he was nevertheless briefly imprisoned again in 1960 for his criticism of the government's treatment of the Chinese minority. Upon his release, he continued his role as public intellectual, editing the weekly magazine *Lantern*, teaching, and helping to found the Multatuli Literature Academy, named for the pseudonym of Eduard Douwes Dekker, the Dutch civil servant whose 1860 novel *Max Havelaar* was the first real indictment of Dutch colonialism in the East Indies (and one of the earliest for any nation). Pramoedya also began doing a tremendous amount of research on the birth of Indonesian nationalism, collecting notes about the life and career of journalist and nationalist Tirta Adi Suryo (1880-1918).

1965 changed Pramoedya's life, as it changed the life of his nation (see History). He was arrested barely two weeks after the September 30<sup>th</sup> killings, and all his books and papers were destroyed. He was never charged with or tried for any crime, though presumably, given the political climate, he was thought to be a Communist sympathizer. For the next fourteen years, he remained in government custody in several prisons, spending the longest time (1969-1979) on the prison colony of Buru Island. Denied the materials he needed to write, he

began to recite his epic series of novels known as the Buru Quartet (*This Earth of Mankind*, *Child of All Nations*, *Footsteps*, and *House of Glass*) to his fellow prisoners, some of whom helped him to clarify various points in the story. The narrative, loosely based on Tirta Adi Suryo, told the story of Minke (Dutch for “monkey”) an Indonesian native intellectual whose sense of Indonesian identity develops in a parallel fashion to the sense of nationalism burgeoning in his nation. In 1973, Pramoedya was given a typewriter and began the long process of recreation.

By the time he was released from Buru (though not from police custody) in 1979, he had a great deal of work done on the manuscript and was able to bring out the four novels in less than ten years, over the 1980s. (They were translated into English in the 1990s.) All four were celebrated and then banned, and Pramoedya found himself in the peculiar position of being the most famous Indonesian writer no one in his homeland was allowed to read. He remained in custody, under city arrest in Jakarta, for another 13 years. In 1992, on U.N. Human Rights Day, he declared that he would no longer report to his detention center. So far, there have been no repercussions from this announcement, and with the fall of the Suharto government in 1998, there are unlikely to be.

In recent years, Pramoedya has been frail and hard of hearing, though still outspoken, calling Indonesia “a continent of corruption” on his eightieth birthday, and vowing to fire his doctor if he suggested that Pramoedya quit smoking *kreteks*, the Indonesian cigarettes which combine tobacco and cloves.

Pramoedya died in East Jakarta on April 30, 2006.

## **A Brief History of Modern Indonesia**

It is impossible to understand the work of Pramoedya without understanding its social and historical context. Indonesia is a nation of many thousands of islands, each of which have distinct histories and cultures. Java is not Bali, Bali is not Borneo, Borneo is not Sumatra. These variegated and sometimes conflicting cultures have been absorbed into one nation, unthinkable complex and due almost entirely—as is so often the case in the third world—to the divisions of European colonial administration.

The term Indonesia primarily refers to those islands of Southeast Asia which were colonized by the Netherlands and known as the Dutch East Indies. The Dutch attempted to establish their presence in this verdant region quite early, in the seventeenth century. The earliest adventurers were not representatives of the Dutch government per se, but of the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC), like many Europeans who traveled the world looking for trade. Their interest was based primarily on the remarkable fecundity of the land, which produced spices that had been very expensive or even unknown in Europe. (The extraordinary wealth produced by sugar and coffee would come later.) Of course the Dutch were not the only European nation with such an interest; challenges to Dutch power arose from Britain and Portugal, particularly. Military force at this point was primarily used to protect Dutch trade from these incursions, not to subjugate the peoples of the Indies.

The various rulers in the various polities of the region did not see themselves as the Europeans did, as suppliers of European consumer goods. From their perspectives, the new force on the region was a tool with which to gain power over local competitors. Certain rulers sided with the Europeans when it was convenient, but these rulers did not feel obligated to the Europeans, and would attack them if the political climate changed. Gaining

control of Indonesia, then, meant a series of conquerings, and even regions won in battle could not necessarily be considered “held” in the usual sense of the word. The Europeans wanted local rulers to grant them exclusive trading rights, which some did, but there was also a flourishing piracy trade.

The Dutch, who had set up their headquarters at Batavia (present-day Jakarta [Djakarta]), on the northern coast of Java, were less distracted by colonial ventures elsewhere, and established a significant presence in the region. By the end of the eighteenth century, they had begun the process not just of bringing local rulers into the fold as exclusive trading partners, but of establishing a military and administrative presence throughout the Archipelago in order to make Indonesia a Dutch possession, the process known as colonialism. Under the Dutch, most of the disparate islands of the region were collected under one umbrella, sowing the seeds of the nation to be born in the aftermath of colonialism. In addition, the native products of the islands began to be largely displaced by two commodities in great demand in Europe: coffee and sugar. These crops ushered in an age of larger (and largely European-controlled) agricultural units, and many native peoples were displaced or made wage workers on land they had formerly owned.

Dutch control of the Archipelago was not really solidified until the mid-nineteenth century, and we are fortunate to have a vivid, though admittedly Westernized, portrait of that era in the Multatuli novel *Max Havelaar, or The Coffee Auctions of the Dutch Trading Company*, an important pretext for Pramoedya’s work. Written in 1860, set only a few years earlier, the novel was written pseudonymously by Eduard Douwes Dekker, who had served for nearly twenty years in the Dutch Civil Service in Java, rising steadily in rank though he was disgusted by the brutality and excesses of the colonial system. Eventually, he resigned

from government service, spending many of his remaining years in poverty. The novel suffers from many of the same flaws as Joseph Conrad's more famous *Heart of Darkness* (which it predates by almost forty years): a focus on the European colonizers and a lack of attention to indigenous peoples, the latter of whom are either colorfully exoticized and orientalized, or represented as subhuman. Nevertheless, it also critiques the brutality of the colonial system, a risky gesture at a time when colonialism was still expanding globally.

Partly as a result of *Max Havelaar*, partly as a result of economics, the colonial administration began, toward the end of the nineteenth century, to see their role in the Indies differently. One force at play was a growing sense that if the Dutch merely exploited Indonesia, without advancing the native population, they were no better than the civil servants Multatuli had described. Their idealism led to a fundamental shift in colonial policy. The other major force was the increasing role of private capital, which demanded new markets. The Indies, then, could no longer be merely a source for raw materials and foodstuffs, but needed also to provide a market for manufactured goods. Together, these forces were responsible for the development known as The Ethical Policy (approx. 1870-1900), through which some natives received educations, in order to qualify them for jobs which would grant them the status of consumers.

The Ethical Policy accomplished only part of its lofty goals. Education, in addition to training the native intelligentsia to follow in the Dutch path of civil service and consumer capitalism, also began to foment a growing sense of nationalism. This new national spirit ironically brought to an end The Ethical Policy, in practice if not in name. As it grew, the Dutch began to feel increasingly embattled, and reacted with repressive new maneuvers.

Though the early decades of the twentieth century saw a veritable explosion of native organizations, these movements were divided by region, language, religion, class, even profession. It was not until the late 1920s, with the rise of Sukarno (1901-1970), that these divisions began to be bridged. He posited a nationalism which could be adopted by all the native inhabitants of the Indies, regardless of the factors which had divided them in the past. With the European-educated Mohammed Hatta and Sutan Sjarir, the necessary elements fell into place for a modern, secular nationalist movement. As noted, the Dutch responded with increased repression.

In the end, however, the Dutch imperial era ended not because of native nationalist movements, but because of World War II. Indonesia was invaded by the Japanese in 1942, and, like many other European powers, the embattled Dutch, fighting for their own sovereignty in Europe, had no resources to assist their colony, leaving the Indonesians to fend for themselves. The Japanese Occupation was a time of great suffering in the Indies, of poverty and violence. Nevertheless, there were some Indonesians who welcomed their new leaders; as fellow Asians, the Japanese restored to Indonesia a sense of regional pride and promised eventual self-government, a promise the Indies had never managed to extract from the Dutch. As their fortunes in war grew more desperate in the summer of 1945, the Japanese granted the East Indies more and more autonomy, with the result that when the Japanese surrendered unconditionally on August 15<sup>th</sup>, the Indonesian Declaration of Independence was only two days away.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, Indonesia was left to its own devices. The Dutch were in no position to reassert colonial power, and the British were sent in instead. The British officer in charge of the region, Lord Mountbatten, in order to stabilize the area,

dealt with the government he found operational: the government of the new Indonesia. The Dutch, however, insisted on a reassertion of their sovereignty, and the years 1946-1949 saw a bitter war of rebellion between the new Indonesia and their former colonizers. Due largely to international pressure, the Dutch finally ceded control of the islands to the rebels in December 1949, and in July 1950, the Republic of Indonesia was officially recognized.

The immediate post-independence period was dominated by President Sukarno, who, though he had not been elected, had a powerful influence on all factions of Indonesian society. In the wake of independence, divisions which could be ignored in the face of anti-colonial sentiment reasserted themselves, and the new nation found itself split into the traditional factions noted above, with the crucial addition of one other: the nationalist military.

This period represented a more or less democratic society, though elections were not held until 1955. In the 1955 elections, the surprisingly strong showing of the Communist Party (PKI) demonstrated the frustration of many Indonesians with the grievous economic inequities which feature so prominently in *Tales from Djakarta*. At the height of the Cold War, the attractiveness of Communism was perceived as an immediate threat by the Western powers upon whom Indonesia depended for financial and political support. In 1957, Sukarno, who had been elected formally in 1955, responded by introducing a system he called "Guided Democracy," which was intended to balance the competing claims of nationalism, militarism, and communism by concentrating government power in his own person, a move which made him look like a not entirely benevolent despot (or an ancient Javanese king, which was more to the point). Even the formidable personality and power of Sukarno was

insufficient to manage the increasingly hostile factions of the nation, however, and it was only eight years later that a decisive blow was struck, changing the nation irrevocably.

On September 30, 1965, several top members of the Indonesian military were abducted and murdered by a group calling itself the September 30 Movement. They claimed that the generals were pawns of the American CIA, and that they had murdered them in order to protect Sukarno from a coup. With many of his colleagues dead and others in hiding, the military was seized by General Suharto, a Javanese career military man. The murders were soon pegged on the Communist PKI (a charge which, from the beginning, was seriously questioned), and a wholesale slaughter of the PKI and suspected sympathizers ensued over the next several months. The numbers of dead vary, but the lowest estimates are around 500,000, and some generals claim as many as 3 million. In addition, tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, were arrested and held without trial for years, Pramoedya Ananta Toer being only one of these (see Biography). The real numbers may never be known. It was not long before Sukarno was removed from office and Suharto became the political as well as the military head of the nation.

Suharto's rule, begun in such brutality, continued until 1998. In this era, known as the "New Order" to distinguish it from the rule of Sukarno, the military ran almost unchecked. Human rights abuses were shockingly common, and largely overlooked by the West, which considered that Indonesia owed Suharto for its rescue from Communism. The press was tightly controlled, and many books (including Pramoedya's Buru quartet, which has been posited as an allegorical representation of the New Order) were banned. Economically, Suharto opened the nation to foreign investment, a move which might have been considered wise had its chief beneficiaries not been limited to his own friends and family. As Suharto's

rule began its fourth decade in 1995, it seemed as though he controlled every aspect of political, social, and economic life.

In 1997, however, the Asian economy, which had been expanding for nearly twenty years, suddenly collapsed. The various social revolutions which had been simmering under the surface of Indonesian society erupted, and Suharto resigned amid rioting and public reprobation.

By 2003, only five years since the fall of Suharto, Indonesia had had three separate presidents, more than it had in the fifty years preceding. Abuses such as the military and paramilitary attacks on East Timor in 1999 and Aceh in 2003—attempts to control regional separatist movements—suggest that the human rights issues are not entirely solved for the nation (though some members of the Indonesian military have been convicted for their actions in East Timor). Indonesia's current president, Megawati Sukarnoputri, the daughter of Sukarno, was a legislator during the New Order, and some, including Pramodya, have suggested that she is thus stained by her silence during that period. This troubled land, then, continues to try and define its identity beyond colonialism, beyond militarism, and hopefully beyond factional violence.

### **Critical Lenses**

Several critical lenses can help us to envision the connections between the stories in *Tales from Djakarta* in useful ways. This list is by no means exhaustive, but it can offer the educator a starting place for the consideration of the collection.

### **Social Realism**

One of the most striking features of the stories, particularly for students who may have a limited exposure to the third world and its endemic poverty, is the abject conditions under which many of the characters function. Several are homeless (“News from Kebajoran,” “Gambir”), others live in squalor (“Stranded Fish,” “My Kampung,” “Maman and his World,” “Ketjapi”). Even those of relative wealth live may turn to crime (“Mrs. Veterinary Doctor Suharko”) or find themselves facing financial difficulties because of the poverty of others (“House”). Their professions vary widely, but many are manual laborers, prostitutes, and criminals.

One of the truly desperate characters is Aminah, the protagonist of “News from Kebajoran.” A prostitute, homeless, ravaged by disease, “She and her kind” live in Fromberg Park, within view of the Presidential Palace (27), though they are the most debased members of society. They bathe in public and sleep on benches.

Similarly, stories like “Stranded Fish,” “My Kampung,” “Maman and his World,” “Gambir,” and “Ketjapi” all feature scenes of destitution and what an ordinary Western reader might consider unlivable conditions.

Indeed, the economics and society of early post-revolution Indonesia were ravaged by poverty. The Dutch Ethical Policy, which was intended to return the wealth of the East Indies

to the people of the East Indies, had succeeded for a brief period (and for a small number of natives) in the late nineteenth century, but the early decades of the twentieth saw much economic injustice return. The cease-fire negotiated in late 1949 made the new Indonesian government responsible for the debts of the Dutch colonizers, including those accrued fighting to retain control of the Indies. The Dutch also retained control of much of the income-producing land of the islands, particularly the sugar plantations (which were specifically protected by the new constitution). Therefore, poverty was quite widespread, and the resources available to fight it inherently limited.

Combined with these peculiarly Indonesian features was the global movement in the late 1940s and early 1950s toward the urbanization of poverty. Of course, there has always been urban poverty, but the immediate post-World War II era saw massive numbers of rural poor in many nations moving to the cities, where they were more visible and often had less of a community support structure upon which to depend. (“News from Kebajoran” and “Ketjapi” specifically address this phenomenon.) The social problems of overcrowding and disease were exacerbated by these new arrivals, many of whom lacked skills for city living.

We should be inclined, then, to take Pramoedya’s representations of urban poverty more or less at face value.

The purpose of social realism as an aesthetic form has traditionally been critical. That is, it draws attention to social problems as the means to the end of correcting such problems. American writers such as Upton Sinclair and John Steinbeck, who drew attention to the problems of the traditionally unrepresented lower classes, are useful comparisons in this regard. (Pramoedya was a self-conscious follower of the latter, particularly his novel *Of Mice*

and Men, the central relationship of which can be seen echoed in both “Stranded Fish” and “Gambir.”)

It should not, however, be confused with *socialist* realism, for though both came out of the same reformist instincts of the early twentieth century, socialist realism became the official (indeed only acceptable) aesthetic of the Soviet Union, and much work in this mode is merely propagandistic, taking as its sole purpose the elevation of the proletariat, rather than realistic representations of that class. Some socialist realism transcends its political purpose, of course (e.g. Maxim Gorky), but its purpose and execution are distinct from social realism.

Social realism, on the other hand, tends to focus on individuals and offers an unromanticized version of the conditions under which these characters function. The subtitle of *Tales from Djakarta* declares that these are “Caricatures of Circumstances and their Human Beings,” which suggests that the focus will be on the situations such characters negotiate. The structure of the stories, often essentially character sketches, increases the sense of them as case studies or illustrations of specific issues. But responsibility for their circumstances rests partly on the characters and partly on society, not wholly on either one. As such, social realism identifies both political and personal causes for these impossible situations and begs for them to be rectified on both counts.

### **Colonial and Postcolonial Theory**

Colonialism is quite possibly the most potent political force of the last five hundred years. Its effects, both intended and unintended, continue to reverberate, though its hegemony is largely ended.<sup>2</sup> The third world provided the resources which make the modern age

---

<sup>2</sup> I do not address here the effects of neocolonialism, a primarily economic effect of globalization which has done as much or more to undermine the specificity of local cultures than the political system of colonialism.

possible, including rubber and oil, as well as foodstuffs, spices, and other consumer items. In exchange, the politics and cultures of the third world have been irrevocably changed by their encounters with Europe. Such changes have not only social, but personal implications. In other words, the identity of the colonized subject is never wholly his or her own, but a product of traditional cultures, education, and imposed European laws and values. The extent to which a colonized person will capitulate to or resist these forces depends upon their local circumstances, but all are part of the negotiations creating the consciousness of the colonized.

Many theorists have addressed the question of colonial consciousness, but I will focus here on only a few. Octave Mannoni, the European commentator on the psychology of colonialism, argues that both the colonizer and the colonized are at fault in the colonial encounter. Taking his terms from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Mannoni argues for both a Prospero Complex and a Caliban Complex, suggesting that the colonial encounter is inherently neurotic. Franz Fanon, the Martinican psychologist who became an anti-colonialist while working with French soldiers during the war for Algerian independence, has made many useful observations about the effect of colonialism on personal identity, particularly insofar as race is concerned. More recently, Homi Bhabha has suggested a variety of useful tools for analyzing the colonized identity, many of which point to the necessary divide between perception and reality in the colonial situation: mimicry and hybridity being only two of these. I will address each of these three thinkers in turn.

For Octave Mannoni, stationed first in Madagascar and then in Martinique (where his students included the poet and critic Aimé Césaire, who in turn taught Fanon, below), the colonial encounter was inherently neurotic. The colonizer, he argued, did not and could not fit into European society, maintaining an essentially preoedipal and narcissistic sense of

himself as a god, a self-image which could only find fulfillment in a colonial setting, where his racial difference assured him a privileged position and he was surrounded by a population of whose desires and identities he need pay no heed. “What happens to the European when he goes to the colonies is a result of unconscious complexes....a person free from complexes—if such a person can be imagined—would not undergo change as a result of being in the colonies. He would not, in the first place, feel the urge to go to the colonies, but even should he find himself there by chance, he would not taste those emotional satisfactions which, whether, consciously or unconsciously, so powerfully *attract the predestined colonial.*” (98, emphasis added) These satisfactions include residence in a world in which the needs of others cease to have reality-value, and the native population can be divided into the angelic (Ariel) and the demonic (Caliban), often turning on the issue of sexuality (remembering that, in *The Tempest*, Caliban was cursed to servitude only after he attempted to rape Miranda). This process of splitting reduces the native population to caricatures, leaving the colonizer as the only functioning human consciousness. According to Mannoni, the fantasy of the desert island is essentially a misanthropic, preoedipal fantasy.

More controversially, he also argued for a Caliban complex, in which the essentially infantilized native needed, indeed looked for, the white man to give his life structure and meet his needs.<sup>3</sup> (Consider in this regard the title characters of “Houseboy+Maid,” for example.) He identifies the complex as a development of an Adlerian inferiority complex, involving the dependence of the colonized without gratitude toward the colonizer and a sense of possession on the part of the Malagasy (Mannoni says the Malagasy conceives of the relationship as “*my white man*” [80, original emphasis]). Ultimately, his most controversial

---

<sup>3</sup> Such a structure has much in common with the Hegelian concept of the master and the bondsman, though a discussion of Hegel is beyond the scope of this work.

assertion, is that “It cannot have been force alone which vanquished Madagascar; force would not have conquered the kept the island had not the Malagasy people, long before our arrival, been ready for our coming.” (86)

While we may (and should) critique Mannoni’s perspective on the indigenous natives of colonized countries, it is important to note that he was one of the first psychological commentators to identify the colonial situation as something other than a healthy transmission of Western values to native peoples, to recognize that the situation itself was inherently damaging.

Frantz Fanon, a second-generation descendant of Mannoni, found his assertions about the Caliban Complex completely absurd. In his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, he argues against “the so-called dependency complex of colonized peoples.” Fanon, a psychoanalyst, is perfectly willing to believe that some form of neurosis drives Europeans to colonize (“I can subscribe to that part of M. Mannoni’s work [shows] that the white colonial is motivated only by his desire to put an end to unsatisfaction,” [BSWM 84]), but places no blame on the colonized, who, after all, were just living in their native land. “The reactions and the behavior patterns to which the arrival of the European in Madagascar gave rise were not tacked onto a preexisting set.” (BSWM 95) Instead, any inferiority complex has been created by the colonial situation: “The feeling of inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the European’s feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say it outright: *It is the racist who creates his inferior.*” (BSWM 93, original emphasis)

Fanon does argue, however, that there is an unintended psychological effect of colonialism which is specifically racial, and which happens when a colonized person encounters the white world. “A normal Negro child, having grown up in a normal family,

will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world.” (BSWM 143) According to Fanon, this contact, the concreteness of the racial categories which tell the Antillean that, despite his excellent French, despite his tailored clothes, and despite his (sometimes even French) education, he is still irretrievably a colonial subject, and can never hope to become French. This assertion, of course, belies the ideology of colonialism, which promises to develop a native meritocracy once the land was effectively colonized. The disjunction here creates a neurotic affect.

Additionally, we owe Fanon for his crucial articulation of the social category of the native intellectual: “We find intact in them the manners and forms of thought picked up during their association with the colonialist bourgeoisie.” (WE 48) The native intellectual, because European educated and identified, is a dangerous citizen, particularly in a newly decolonized nation like Pramoedya’s Indonesia, where, Fanon argues, “they use today’s national distress as a means of getting through scheming and legal robbery, by import-export combines, limited liability companies, gambling on the stock exchange, or unfair promotion.” (Consider in this respect the title character of “The Mastermind,” or, perhaps more ominously, the actions of the Suharto government [see History].)

Homi Bhabha’s contributions to the field of postcolonial theory are too complex and numerous to fully discuss here, but I will focus on two crucial articulations of the processes of colonial consciousness: Mimicry and hybridity.

Mimicry can be briefly defined as the repetition of European values, behaviors, and modes of communication by indigenous peoples of the colonies. According to Bhabha, “the menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority. And it is a double vision that is a result of what I’ve

described as the partial representation/recognition of the colonial object.” (LOC 88) In other words, by mimicking the manner of the colonizer, the colonial subject forces the colonizer to consider him/her in a new way, forcing the representation/recognition which ideological colonialism tries so desperately to elide in the name of control. Acknowledging the humanity of the colonized complicates the processes of colonial administration. Sobi’s plaintive song “*yua olwees in mai haat*” (21), does not necessarily cause the disruption Bhabha suggests, but it certainly points to the impulse toward mimicry which could, in the proper context, cause such a disruption.

Hybridity, a more important concept in the postcolonial context—because its effects do not disappear with the direct confrontation of colonizer and colonized—addresses this same ambivalence of colonialism. “[T]he colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its presence as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference” (107). In other words, the colonialist position that the native is inherently inferior and in need of the guidance of the colonizer is complicated by the fact that the colonized becomes part colonizer in the process, and the colonizer, perhaps more frighteningly, also becomes part of the colonized. “Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority—its rule of recognition” (114). Thus, the role of the *njai* as a structural figure in the Indonesian context calls the concrete social and racial categories into question as the intimate relationship between the *tuan* (master) and the *njai* means that there must be an exchange. In “Maman and His World,” this process is relatively benevolent, as the entrepreneurial Maman heals his heart and finances by making dolls; encouraged by his former boss, he then offers

this same boss a position in his new factory. They have become like each other, hybrid in a positive sense (though of course their equality is assured only by the former employer's economic dependence on Maman). Other characters, such as the *prijaji* of "Creatures Behind Houses" adopt only negative European qualities.

### **The National Allegory**

Another useful conception of these stories of individual troubled characters is as allegorical representations for the nation of Indonesia, through consideration of what Frederic Jameson has called "the national allegory." Jameson suggests that third-world literature, by which he means the literature of "countries which have suffered the experience of colonialism and imperialism" (67), posits a different relationship (or "ratio") between the personal and the political.

Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic—necessarily project a political dimension in the form of a national allegory: *the story of a private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.* (69, original emphasis)

Jameson can be (and frequently has been) called to task for his lumping together of all colonial peoples and experiences, and for his oversimplification of the complexities of the aesthetic forms found in the postcolonial world. Nevertheless, his formulation deserves to be considered in regard to *Tales from Djakarta*, because it clarifies the situations in so many of the stories.

A straight allegorical reading can profitably be applied to “House,” which tells the story, overheard by a young man in a gathering of devout Muslims, about an Arab who owns an upscale rental property in Jakarta upon which he never can collect the rent. The house was first occupied by a Dutch soldier, who had to be thrown out by force. The next tenants were Chinese; a threat was enough to get rid of them. After that was an Indonesian family: getting rid of them required an expensive court case, and the house, at the time of the story, is inhabited by another set of nonpaying Indonesians. If we see the house as the nation, the parade of tenants tells a story of increasing frustration on the part of the foreign investor with political shifts in Indonesia, though we later find out that he’s very prosperous anyway.

A more direct example of the national allegory can be found in “Houseboy+Maid,” which describes the story of a family who first accidentally, then intentionally, utilize their sexual favors to acquire social and economic power. Kotek, the first member of the family whose story is described in some detail, comes from a family of servants. She is ill, weakened and made pale by tuberculosis, and it is precisely this weakness which makes her appealing to her Dutch master. She becomes his *njai* (concubine) without really understanding what’s happening to her, then gives birth to Rodinah, whose mixed blood is openly declared by her European features and lighter brown eyes. Rodinah also becomes a *njai*, but with skillful management of her multiple lovers manages to build up a small living for herself and her children from the many potential fathers. Then she ceases to be attracted to Dutch men, but craves a Japanese lover in her last days. Her children, Sobi and Inah, are left destitute by the death of their mother and the poverty of their sixteen potential fathers. Sobi goes to work for the Japanese, learns some Japanese phrases, and longs to become Japanese. Meanwhile blue-eyed Inah wants only to return to the Dutch, to have a blue-eyed

Dutch *tuan* all her own, a gift her brother, after the war also firmly Dutch-identified, provides for her. They believe that by becoming the lovers of the Dutch, they themselves can elide their own Indonesianness.

It isn't too difficult to see the allegory here. The East Indies, accustomed to servitude (by the traditionally strict Javanese hierarchy), is weakened, and it's precisely this weakness which makes it attractive to the European lust for power. Then the Indies become a mixed place, Indo-European, but manage, by selling themselves, to prosper somewhat. When the Japanese come, the nation desires them, though their longing for the Europeans never really ceases. After the war, the Dutch return to their central position for those for whom colonial servitude has become a way of life. In this sense, the *njai* herself can be seen as an allegory for colonialism, and the desire to become a *njai* an example of colonized consciousness.

Indeed, this story focuses our attention on a particular portion of Jameson's assertion. Jameson emphasizes that this allegorical structure holds true "*even* [for] those [texts] which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic," (69, emphasis added) suggesting that these are the texts most likely to be excluded from such an allegorical structure. Just the opposite, however, seems to be the case, particularly when dealing with female characters.

First, nationalism often conceives of the nation itself as a woman, sometimes a mother, and colonialism as a sexual (i.e. libidinal) relationship. (Nineteenth century British representations of Ireland, for example, often showed the relationship explicitly as a Victorian marriage with a wise but firm *paterfamilias* guiding his wayward, but ultimately grateful, spouse.) When the men of the nation rise up, as soldiers and statesmen, to free her, they rescue her, fairy-tale fashion, from a cruel oppressor and restore her to her rightful

position as their possession, not the hostage of a foreign force. (These representations are occasionally, though not always, explicitly Oedipal.)

Second, when female characters do express erotic choice, their decisions are often made between lovers who represent different political paths for the nation. For example, in “News from Kebajoran,” Aminah’s wartime abandonment of the flawed but essentially decent Saleh for the literally trashy Diman is disastrous not just for her, but for the rapidly urbanizing nation.

For most female characters in *Tales from Djakarta*, however, erotic shifts are less the function of personal choice than of cultural and political situations. Nana, the prostitute in “No Resolution,” first is a sexual slave to the Japanese, then briefly weds an idealistic devout Muslim from her own *kampung*, who she destroys before going on to a Revolutionary soldier she meets in prison. In this reading, the nation moves from slavery to idealism to militarism, poverty, and eventually madness.

The national allegory does not work with every story in the text, but it is useful to note that political transition points in the life of the nation become personal transition points for the lives of its citizens. Though there is undoubtedly a certain amount of verisimilitude in this representation (i.e. people’s lives certainly changed between colonialism and Occupation, Occupation and Revolution, Revolution and the postcolony), an allegorical component can also be distinguished in these tales, and the vision of the nation put forward should be considered closely.

## Nostalgia

It should not perhaps surprise us to find several stories in a newly postcolonial text suffused with the idea of nostalgia; after all, the colonial experience (and the peculiar pattern of Indonesian decolonization, with its series of discrete political shifts) is fraught with change, and change always necessarily implies loss. The most common pattern of nostalgia in colonial and postcolonial literature is nostalgia for the lost (precolonized) nation, or for the lost (colonized) nation, depending upon the position of the author.

The stories which seem most useful to me in these terms from *Tales from Djakarta* are two which provide several useful parallels: “News from Kebajoran” and “Ketjapi.” Both center upon characters who leave their rural homes for the capital city, and who experience there a crushing failure of idealism and hope.

The word nostalgia comes from the Greek *nostos*, a return home and *algos*, pain, and means a painful longing to return home, or more generally, pain caused by loss of the past. The desire for the past, for what was once and is no more, echoes the psychoanalytic crisis of the Oedipal split, but is not necessarily (or at least not solely) a development of it. Similarly, the Judeo-Christian and Islamic worldviews represents Eden as a lost paradise from which humanity has fallen. (In Islam, Eden is also promised to the virtuous dead, akin to the Christian heaven.) These two examples merely illustrate the prevalence of loss as a structural experience, and nostalgia as deeply rooted and almost instinctual, especially in a circumstance where present reality seems to have fallen from the idealized state.

In the two stories under consideration, the nostalgic gaze looks back across not only a historical divide, but also a rural/urban divide and a personal erotic divide. In other words,

both Aminah and the unnamed protagonist of “Ketjapi” change partners and homes at the same time as their nation changes governance.

Aminah comes from Kebajoran, where she was the wife of Saleh, who she abandoned for Diman at some point preceding the story. Her current situation—as a homeless prostitute—is eased only by thoughts of home. “Once again—as usual when night arrives—her thoughts go back to Kebajoran.” (27) An encounter with her younger sister, in town to buy clothes for her wedding with Aminah’s former husband, shows her how far she has fallen from that state, and in her dying moments, she fantasizes about returning home.

The protagonist of “Ketjapi” comes from the “Land of Valleys and Mountains,” where he was “an industrious farmer,” though “his plot of land was too small and the *sawah* couldn’t bring prosperity all year round” (138). He blames his lack of prosperity, however, not upon the land itself, but upon his wife, Si Tjitjih. He believes that if he changes his woman, his luck will change, and so he seduces *si djangkungkongeng*, a tall, beautiful, fair skinned virgin. Leaving his wife and daughter, he and his son and his new wife go to Djakarta, “the land of the runaways” (138), to start a new life. In Djakarta, he finds work, but is not well paid, and lives in squalor while his new young wife grows fat and takes in a street child. He plays his *ketjapi* to passing girls, trying to recapture both his lost home and his lost youth.

The function of nostalgia in these stories seems clear enough, and the sense of loss the parallel narratives imply heartbreaking. Pramoedya’s view of the new nation, then, is more or less explicitly critical, though there is no parallel romanticization of the colonial period. Instead, the romanticized losses are those of the rural world and the first, pure spouse.

**Study Guide, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *Tales from Djakarta***

Title: "Houseboy+Maid"

Date & Place: Bukit Duri Prison, 1948

Characters: Kotek, Rodinah, Inah, Sobi

Plot: The family have been servants as long as anyone can remember. One day Kotek, a fair-skinned (because tubercular) young woman attracts the attention of her master (*tuan*). He sleeps with her, and eventually she bears a daughter, Rodinah, with light brown eyes and European features. Rodinah also becomes a maid, but when she becomes pregnant, she has had several lovers, all of whom she forces to acknowledge her offspring. The money each pays her allow her to live in relative wealth. Eventually her lovers go broke and she dies, leaving two children, Sobi, who wants to become Japanese, and Inah, who wants a blue-eyed *tuan*. Much of the story focuses on the aspirations of the two young people, both of whom want to become concubines in order to make their fortunes.

Major ideas: Servitude as an attitude rather than a situation, mindset of colonized peoples, sexuality as capital, racial identity

Useful Comparisons: "Creatures Behind Houses," "No Resolution"

Title: "News from Kebajoran"

Date & Place: Djakarta, January 1950

Characters: Aminah, Diman, Chatidjah, Saleh, Mama

Plot: Aminah has left her husband Saleh in the small town of Kebajoran to live with Diman, who has become a garbage collector. She has become a prostitute. They are very poor,

homeless, and Aminah is sick, probably with tuberculosis. Diman is rarely there, coming very late at night and leaving very early in the morning. One morning, Aminah sees Chatidjah, who has come to Djakarta to buy clothes for her wedding; she is marrying Saleh, with whom she now runs a business. She is very uncomfortable when Aminah approaches her, and clearly does not want to talk to her. Diman later tells Aminah that he has met Saleh and that his wife is pregnant. He tells her he has been promoted and that they can get a home now and have a child. She tells him to leave her and find a better woman. He never returns. As Aminah's health declines, she is reduced to giving oral sex for money, and as she slips into death she dreams of being rescued by everyone she has alienated: Saleh, her parents, and Diman.

Major ideas: urban poverty, sexuality as capital, nostalgia

Useful Comparisons: "Houseboy+Maid," "No Resolution," "Ketjapi"

Title: "Stranded Fish"

Date & Place: Djakarta, July 1950

Characters: Idulfitri, However

Plot: Idulfitri and However are two former revolutionary soldiers who live by their wits, meaning that they're criminals. However, the less motivated of the two, is content with their situation and does not dwell on the past. Idulfitri, on the other hand, cannot stop thinking of himself as a good person and a hero. He is essentially a communist, and has been mustered out of the military on that basis. They are not particularly successful criminals; only recently they stole a jeep and failed to sell it. Idulfitri clings to his ideals, considering, for example, joining a political party. He is willing to sell his shirt for food, but However talks him out of

it. Eventually, they sell However's empty wallet for fat less than it's worth, but it doesn't matter because they're going to rob the buyer later that night anyway.

Major ideas: urban poverty, idealism, friendship, failure of politics, role of the Revolution

Useful Comparisons: "Gambir"

Title: "My *Kampung*"

Date & Place: Djakarta, July 1952

Characters: No named characters, except for Djibril (Gabriel), the Angel of Death

Plot: A resident of a small *kampung* (neighborhood or ghetto) near the Presidential Palace describes his home, where there is little fresh air or sunshine, and a lot of shit. The main part of the story discusses the frequent visits of Djibril, who comes to the *kampung* to take lives, particularly those of children and officeboys.

Major ideas: urban poverty, demeaned value of human life

Useful Comparisons: "Maman and his World"

Title: "Maman and his World"

Date & Place: Amsterdam, May 1953

Characters: Maman, his baby sister, Pa, Ma, the mute maid, the (Dutch) employer

Plot: Maman is accustomed to stealing eggs to trade for treats for his little sister, who he loves to tickle. One day the chicken cage is locked, and shortly thereafter his sister dies. His parents are not moved by this news, and it is only Maman who grieves. Later, he becomes a street sweeper, where he is jeered, but only by people who like him and want to see him smile. He longs for someone to love him as his sister did, and eventually meets a mute maid.

Her employer offers him a job and a new home, and they get married. Eventually, his Ma becomes ill and he and his wife return to the *kampung*. Still trying to recapture his lost sister, Maman invents a doll which flails its arms and legs when tickled. The toy becomes very popular, and he makes enough money to hire craftsmen, then to start his own factory. When his former employer's business fails, Maman hires him, too.

Major ideas: urban poverty, importance of love, nostalgia

Useful Comparisons: “My *Kampung*”

Title: “Gambir”

Date & Place: Amsterdam, August 1953

Characters: Hasan (Scarface), Otong, the cake-vendor, Sidik, police commander, Intjup, Djuned, Bibé

Plot: Some time before, the newly married Hasan was approached by Intjup, a henchman for the criminal Djuned. Because Djuned desired Hasan's wife, they destroyed his house, kidnapped her, and left him scarred. At the time of the story, Hasan is working as a coolie at the Gambir railroad station. He is rumored to have saved thousands of rupiah, though he is homeless like the other coolies. His friend Otong protects him from another coolie, Sidik, who is planning to rob him. Eventually, Hasan borrows a gun from the police commander, bribing him with 1600 rupiah. That night, Sidik comes to rob Hasan. They fight, and Hasan stabs Sidik, killing him. He then disappears. All the coolies, including Otong, are arrested, but the cake-vendor knows it must have been Hasan, and why Sidik was probably killed. Some time later, Hasan comes back to return the gun to the police commander, telling the

cake-vendor that the thugs who took his wife are dead. The cake-vendor warns him that he is wanted, and he disappears again.

Major ideas: urban poverty, friendship, revenge, nostalgia

Useful Comparisons: “Stranded Fish”

Title: “Miscarriage of a Would-be Playwright”

Date & Place: Amsterdam, October 1953

Characters: Hamid, Kila, Mardi (short-story writer), another friend, Gomanitsar (girlfriend), the literature teacher, the playwright

Plot: Hamid wants to write a play, though his knowledge of literature is limited to Indonesian literature and a few Western writers. He really enjoys and is inspired by *lenong*, the Indonesian dramatic form performed by wandering troupes of actors. But he seeks advice from a number of friends and experts, all of whom tell him that he sounds like other authors, or that he should read other authors before writing. He begins a play set in his own world, borrowing forms from *lenong*, but abandons it when his friend critiques it. Eventually he ends up at Mardi's house, where an intellectual friend of Mardi's reads the one page Hamid has written, praising it, but guessing that audiences aren't ready for its form. He and Mardi discuss modern drama, driving Hamid away. He returns to his own books, but decides even they cannot help him. He falls asleep deciding to write for himself alone.

Major ideas: creativity, role of the artist, post-Revolutionary society, friendship

Title: “House”

Date & Place: Djakarta, 1955

Characters: the narrator, the neighbor, the Arab, *ustad* Amir (Mr. Dumpy, an Islamic teacher)

Plot: The narrator, bored, goes to the house of his neighbor, who lives near the mosque. His house is full of people coming from the services there. They sit and eat, discussing mostly Amir's four wives, and the legal difficulties of the Arab. He owned a house and rented it to a Dutch captain who didn't pay rent. The Arab had to challenge him to a fight, and the captain paid his back rent when he was released from the hospital. Then a family of Chinese squatters moved in. Again, the Arab had to threaten violence to remove them. Finally, an Indonesian moved in, and it took fifty thousand rupiah to get him out. The Conversation switched to Arabic, which our narrator didn't understand, and eventually the others leave. The neighbor tells the narrator that the Arab was once a moneylender and owns many valuable properties, but he can't help telling the story of his one failure.

Major ideas: wealth/poverty, Islamic culture

Useful Comparisons: "Gambir," "The Mastermind"

Title: "Creatures Behind Houses"

Date & Place: Djakarta, December 1955

Characters: Miss Two; the pretty, educated virgin; Mrs. Newlywed; the overworked maid who stopped eating; the old maid who once got a raise; the young maid who went to work in a factory

Plot: More a series of character sketches than a story. These maids are mostly rural girls who have come to urban Jakarta to work. Miss Two is young and cries for her parents. Eventually she runs away and tries to kill herself, then she's returned to her parents. The educated virgin is sent home when she begins to mature and is seen as a threat by her mistress. The

overworked maid who stopped eating had to follow her mistress's commands about only cooking a little rice at a time, and so had to cook all day and do her other work after dark. She stopped eating because she had no time, then developed a disease, possibly beri-beri. Eventually she went mad and was sent home. The young maid had one pretty dress and read movie magazines; at the factory she met a young man. Mrs. Newlywed is the figure for the *prijaji*; she is lazy and makes her maid do all the work in order to preserve her position.

Major ideas: class, gender, poverty

Useful Comparisons: "Houseboy+Maid," "News from Kebajoran," "The Mastermind"

Title: "No Resolution"

Date & Place: Djakarta, February 1956

Characters: the narrator, Nana, Chalil

Plot: The narrator lives in a *kampung* where he sees Nana, a young, beautiful woman. She is a hostess at the Concordia, a club for Japanese officers, and works as a prostitute there. Some prostitutes need to be forced, but not Nana. The poverty and hunger of the Japanese Occupation did not affect her; she was wealthy and shared food with the narrator when he came to visit. He loves her and thinks that if she ever stops being a prostitute, maybe they can be together. When the Revolution breaks out, he becomes a soldier, and meets her in his camp, where she tells him she's a refugee. Shortly thereafter, he hears that a young woman has been kidnapped: Nana. Her kidnapper had been caught and beaten; now he's in prison. Visiting Nana, the narrator thinks she seems reduced, withered somehow, and he no longer wants to marry her. Later he hears that her kidnapper has the same name as one of his childhood friends: Chalil. He visits the kidnapper in prison, and it is his friend, who tells him

he'll be shot the next day, and that he's been slandered. The narrator tries to intervene, but cannot, and Chalil is shot, reciting the Koran. Later he encounters the executioner, who tells him Chalil was defending himself right up to death, saying he only traded for his wife and his child, and that he would live forever in the hearts of all who knew him. When the narrator goes back to the *kampung* to see Chalil's parents, they confirm that Chalil and Nana were married, and that they were raising Nana's half-Japanese child. Nana herself married a soldier from the Revolution and has had several more children, but she is insane.

Major ideas: gender, poverty, sexuality as capital, the role of the Revolution

Useful Comparisons: "Houseboy+Maid," "News from Kebajoran"

Title: "The Mastermind"

Date & Place: none given, but post-Revolution

Characters: Tuan Kariumun, Mrs Kariumun, the maid, her three brothers

Plot: Kariumun was a martial arts champion before the Occupation, and very popular. He was a civil servant for the Dutch, but easily served the Japanese as well when they took over. He distributed patronage jobs and accumulated wealth for himself. But his marriage was terrible and he showed no interest in his children. During the Revolution, he became a successful soldier, and afterward was made a bureau chief in Djakarta. But he always knew that martial arts were his only real skill, and that everything else depended on his popularity alone. One day he accosts his young maid, who becomes pregnant. Her brothers tell him he must marry her, but he sends his gardener in his place while he gives a speech. The brothers come to the speech and make him so nervous that he passes out. They kidnap him and take

him away, possibly to marry their sister. He is given a medal because he has worked himself so hard.

Major ideas: power/politics, the role of the Revolution, public/private split

Useful Comparisons: "House," "No Resolution"

Title: "Mrs. Veterinary Doctor Suharko"

Date & Place: none given, but post-Revolution

Characters: Suharko, Mrs Suharko 1 (Corry), Mrs Suharko 2 (Kiki)

Plot: The narrator's friend buys a small motorbike, and another friend warns him that he will soon get a visit from the title character, offering an IOU for the bike. Veterinarian Surharko studied hard and prospered, eventually marrying a young Eurasian girl, Corry, who bore him three children and filled his beautiful home with beautiful things. And he seduced some of his Dutch patients. During the turmoil of the war and the Revolution, Corry died. Her belongings and her children make him remember her, though. His business fails, but he gets a job in the government and goes into politics. Eventually, he remarries to a young woman, the daughter of the woman his parents had wanted him to marry. She begins to sell off Corry's belongings and to fill the house with new, modern furniture, and a motorcycle. For her husband, this violation of his memories is unacceptable and he kicks her out, telling her to find all Corry's belongings and restore them to him. So she retrieves the items, giving people IOU's in her estranged husband's name, then reselling the objects.

Major ideas: gender, class, nostalgia

Useful Comparisons: "News from Kebajoran," "Maman and his World," "Ketjapi"

Title: "Ketjapi"

Date & Place: Djakarta, 1956

Characters: the debt collector, Tjitjih, the *djankunkoneng*

Plot: The debt collector was once a farmer in the Land of Valleys and Mountains. He was industrious, but not always prosperous; he had two children, and a wife who he blames for his unhappiness. His roving eye settles on a young woman with long legs, a *djankunkoneng*. His marriage breaks up and he moves to Djakarta with the young woman and his son. He rents a sort of shanty and goes to work as a typesetter, an inherently limited job, because he's illiterate. Eventually, he becomes a debt collector. His new wife does not have children, but she gets fat and eventually adopts a child from the street. Their house leaks and has a dirt floor. He is rarely home. His only happiness comes from playing his *ketjapi*, the instrument of his homeland, which he uses to comfort himself when he is sad, and to make suggestions to young women passing by. He tells the narrator, his neighbor, that he was happy before, it's now that he is miserable.

Major ideas: urban poverty, nostalgia

Useful Comparisons: "My Kampung," "News from Kebajoran"

## Bibliography and Resources

### *Works by Pramoedya in English*

- The Fugitive*. (1950) Penguin, 1992.  
*This Earth of Mankind*. (Buru Quartet, book 1) Trans. Max Lane. Penguin, 1996.  
*Child of All Nations*. (Buru Quartet, book 2) Trans. Max Lane. Penguin, 1996.  
*Footsteps*. (Buru Quartet, book 3) Trans. Max Lane. Penguin, 1996.  
*House of Glass*. (Buru Quartet, book 4) Trans. Max Lane. Penguin, 1997.  
*Tales from Djakarta: Caricatures of Circumstances and their Human Beings*. Trans Nusantara Translation Group. Cornell SEAP Publications, 1999.  
*The Mute's Soliloquy: A Memoir*. Trans Willem Samuels. Penguin, 2000.  
*The King, the Witch, and the Priest*. Equinox 2001  
*Girl from the Coast*. Trans. Willem Samuels. Hyperion, 2003.  
*All That Is Gone*. Trans Willem Samuels Hyperion (forthcoming 2004)

Several of Pramoedya's short stories and reminiscences have also been published by *Indonesia*, the semiannual journal of Cornell University's Southeast Asia Program Publications.

- "It's Not an All Night Fair." Translated with an Introduction by William Watson. *Indonesia* 15 (April 1973), pp. 21-80.
- "Revenge." Translated by Benedict R. O'G. Anderson. *Indonesia* 26 (October 1978), pp. 43-62.
- "Mrs. Veterinary Doctor Suharko" (*Nyonyo Dokterhewan Suharko*). Translated by Benedict R. O'G. Anderson. *Indonesia* 34 (October 1982), pp. 65-74.
- "Perburuan" 1950 and "Keluarga Gerilya" 1950. Translated by Benedict Anderson. *Indonesia* 36 (October 1983), pp. 25-48.
- "Times." Translated by Daniel T. Sicular. *Indonesia* 47 (April 1989), pp. 19-24.
- "Blora." Translated by Harold Merrill. *Indonesia* 53 (April 1992), pp. 51-64.
- "My Apologies, in the Name of Experience." Translated with afterword by Alex G. Bardsley. *Indonesia* 61 (April 1996), pp. 1-14.
- "House" (*Rumah*). Translated with note by Sumit K. Mandal. *Indonesia* 61 (April 1996), pp. 15-24.
- "My Kampung" (*Kampungku*). Translated with note by Sumit K. Mandal. *Indonesia* 61 (April 1996), pp. 25-32.
- "Flunky + Maid" (*Djongos + Babu*). Translated by James T. Siegel. *Indonesia* 61 (April 1996), pp. 33-42.
- "My Cell Mate." Translated by James T. Siegel. *Indonesia* 64 (October 1997), pp. 1-8.

### *Works on Pramoedya in English*

- A. Teeuw. *Modern Indonesian Literature*. Dordrecht, 1986. (distributed through KITLV)

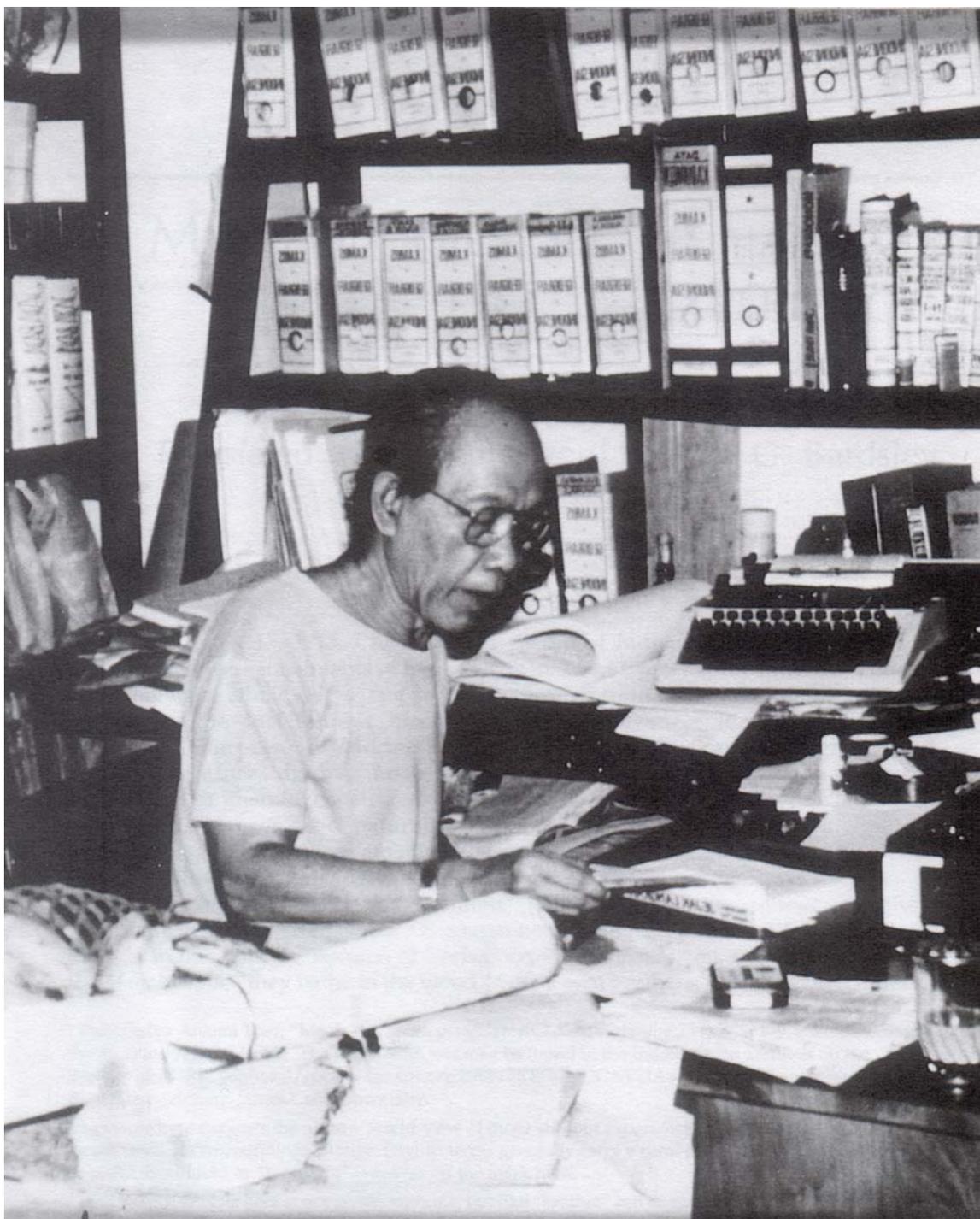
- Abel, Ben. "Beholding a Landmark of Guilt: Pramoedya in the Early 1960s and the Current Regime." *Indonesia* 64 (October 1997), pp. 21-28.
- Bahari, Razif. "Remembering History, W/Righting History: Piecing the Past in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru* Tetralogy." *Indonesia* 75 (April 2003), pp. 61-90.
- Foulcher, Keith. "*Bumi Manusia* and *Anak Semua Bangsa*: Pramoedya Ananta Toer Enters the 1980s." *Indonesia* 32 (October 1981), pp. 1-15.
- Foulcher, Keith, trans. "Art and Entertainment in the New Order's Jails," by Hersri. *Indonesia*. 59 (April 1995), pp. 1-20.
- Heinschke, Martina. "Between Gelanggang and Lekra: Pramoedya's Developing Literary Concepts." *Indonesia* 61 (April 1996), pp. 145-170.
- Liu, Hong. "Pramoedya Ananta Toer and China: The Transformation of a Cultural Intellectual." *Indonesia* 61 (April 1996), pp. 119-144.
- Oetomo, Dédé, comp. "Modern Indonesian Literature in Translation I." *Indonesia* 29 (April 1980), pp. 91-110.
- . "Modern Indonesian Literature in Translation II." *Indonesia* 30 (October 1980), pp. 125-162.
- Quinn, George. "The Case of the Invisible Literature: Power, Scholarship, and Contemporary Javanese Writing." *Indonesia* 35 (April 1983), pp. 1-36.
- Shiraishi, Takashi. "Reading Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Sang Pemula* [The Pioneer]." *Indonesia* 44 (October 1987), pp. 129-140.
- Siegel, James T. "Commentary: 'Flunky + Maid.'" *Indonesia* 61 (April 1996), pp. 43-50.
- . "Revolutionary Stink and the Extension of the Tongue of the People: The Political Languages of Pramoedya Ananta Toer and Sukarno. Commentary on 'My Cell Mate.'" *Indonesia* 64 (October 1997), pp. 9-20.

#### *Theoretical Works Referenced in This Unit*

- Homi Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders" and "Of Mimicry and Man." *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.  
Selection at <http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/bhabha/mimicry.html>
- Frantz Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Markmann. Grove, 1991.
- Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington. April 1986.
- Frederic Jameson. "Third World Literature and the National Allegory" *Social Text* 17 (Fall 1987).
- Octave Mannoni. *Prospero and Caliban: A Psychology of Colonization*. Trans. Pamela Powesland. University of Michigan Press, 1991.



Pramoedya in the 1950's.



Pramoedya in the 1990's.



Indo-European woman and her children, presumably in Bandoeng  
Courtesy of KITLV. Used by permission.



Ketjapi player in Jakarta  
Courtesy of KITLV. Used by permission.



G.E. Raket and his girlfriend, presumably in Batavia  
Courtesy of KITLV. Used by permission.



Prostitute with child camping in and underneath old railway carriages at Koningsplein-Oost [East King's Square] in Jakarta