

Echoes of the Past: Collective Memory of Dutch Colonialism in Three Indonesian Fictions (1990-2023)

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Abstract—The extensive history of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia has resulted in complex traumatic memories. These practices include the deprivation of land rights, forced labour, and excessive taxation, which contribute to this narrative of conquest. The resultant trauma is not solely experienced on an individual level; entire societies can experience similar disruptions to their sociocultural fabric. By analyzing three cross-generational Indonesian fictional works (1990–2023)—Mayon Soetrisno’s *Banda Neira* (1995), E.S. Ito’s *Rahasia Meede: Misteri Harta Karun VOC* (2007), and Iksaka Banu’s *Rasina* (2023)—this study examines how the trauma of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia is preserved in the collective memory of Indonesian society. This research employs a close reading technique within a psycho-historical framework. The findings indicate that all three authors portray Dutch colonialism in Banda as genocidal. This genocide is framed as a systematic process in which colonial powers perpetuated cruel practices to dominate, exploit, and oppress the local population. These novels function as sites of memory, transmitting the legacy of colonial genocide in Indonesia. They symbolically reconstruct and disseminate the memory of the VOC’s centuries of brutality and cunning, enabling comprehension as the trauma is deeply embedded in cultural structures and transmitted across generations. Collectively, these works illustrate the role of literature in mediating past trauma to subsequent generations removed from direct experience of these events.

Index Terms—Dutch colonialism, Dutch East Indies Company, collective memory, collective trauma, postmemory

I. INTRODUCTION

Colonisation has profoundly and enduringly affected societal structures, health, identity, and psychological well-being across generations. This traumatic influence extends beyond the individual, impacting entire nations by disrupting their sociocultural fabric (Ezepue & Nwafor, 2023). Such collective trauma manifests in diverse psychological states, including systemic violence, loss of cultural identity, and disconnection from ancestral practices (Riley et al., 2022). Research indicates that the psychological distress experienced by colonised populations is closely tied to historical contexts of oppression and violence (Kirmayer et al., 2014). This trauma is transmitted intergenerationally, shaping contemporary behaviours and perspectives toward historical injustices (Jeong & Vollhardt, 2021). Khan (2024) argues that memories of colonial oppression exert enduring socio-psychological effects by reshaping collective identities and narratives of resistance in the present. Far from a static historical artifact, this trauma persists as a dynamic force that continues to influence cultural expression and community resilience.

The historical narrative of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia is largely defined by the influence of the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC). Scholarship documents the colonial period in Indonesia as spanning approximately 350 years, from 1596 to 1945, though Dutch governance fluctuated in intensity and was interrupted by the Japanese occupation during World War II (1942–1945) (Amemiya et al., 2023). For many Indonesians, the legacy of Dutch colonialism is synonymous with VOC dominance. Significant interactions between the two nations emerged after 1619, when Jakarta (then Batavia) became the VOC’s primary trading post in Southeast Asia. From this hub, the VOC managed its commercial operations and expansive networks across Asia and Europe. Over time, the VOC transformed into a formidable entity, redefining maritime power to serve not only military but also economic objectives, thereby reshaping the maritime domain itself. Moreover, the VOC sought to consolidate disparate socioeconomic interests across Asia and the Atlantic into a unified enterprise designed to suppress competition (Raben, 2020).

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The extensive history of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia has resulted in complex and enduring traumatic memories. A range of oppressive and violent practices, including land dispossession, forced labour, and exploitative taxation, epitomize the narrative of Dutch colonial conquest in Indonesia (Itawan, 2023; Weststeijn, 2014). Systems such as the coercive cropping regime not only disrupted the socioeconomic landscape of agrarian communities (Octifanny, 2020) but also triggered immediate stress and intergenerational trauma, as subsequent generations inherited the emotional and socioeconomic burdens of their ancestors (Tilley, 2020). This systemic harm was exacerbated by deliberate cultural dislocation during the colonial period. The promotion of Dutch language and education functioned as tools of assimilation, eroding local traditions and identities (Surya & Fikriya, 2022). Similarly, repressive policies under the VOC regime instilled widespread fear and instability within society (Subari & Anwar, 2024). The VOC's legacy—defined by economic exploitation, sociopolitical subjugation, and cultural erasure—persists as a formative influence on Indonesia's collective identity and historical consciousness. This legacy of historical trauma resonates in contemporary Indonesian society, shaping national identity, community relations, and cultural narratives.

Dutch colonialism in Indonesia has profoundly influenced the nation's social, cultural, and legal systems. Ongoing debates within Indonesian historiography reflect the enduring impact of this colonial past and its ongoing role in shaping post-independence national identity (Itawan, 2023). This topic has attracted interest from researchers across disciplines. Scholarly works explore Dutch colonialism through the VOC's trade practices and resource exploitation (Itawan, 2023; Surya & Fikriya, 2022), its effects on education and cultural exchange (Thang et al., 2024), and its contribution to modern national identity formation (Purnomo et al., 2024). Other studies analyze colonial representations in Indonesian literary texts (Protschky, 2008) and Dutch literature, where narratives of conquest dominate (Sneller, 2019). Researchers have further investigated colonial memory through cultural artifacts: tombstones of lesser-known VOC figures reveal colonial legacies (Sunjayadi, 2024), collective memory of colonial violence in late 19th-century Dutch upper-middle-class discourse (Hermkens & Venbrux, 2023), and archival traces of VOC officers' histories (Kang & Moon, 2017).

Although numerous interdisciplinary studies have examined Dutch colonialism in Indonesia, the role of aesthetic products in shaping collective memory of colonial trauma remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by analyzing how Indonesian literary works encode and transmit memories of Dutch colonialism to postcolonial generations. Building on Assmann's assertion that memory is dynamic and continually reshaped by sociocultural contexts (Assman, 1995, 2010), the research investigates how literature mediates intergenerational memory transmission (Hirsch, 2008, 2012). Specifically, it interrogates how Indonesian authors reconstruct colonial trauma as a shared collective memory, bridging historical experience with contemporary understanding (Erlil, 2012; Ribeiro et al., 2012).

This study examines the representation of colonial trauma in Indonesian collective memory through an analysis of three Indonesian fictional works published between 1990 and 2023: Mayon Soetrisno's *Banda Neira* (1995), E.S. Ito's *Rahasia Meede: Misteri Harta Karun VOC* (2007), and Iksaka Banu's *Rasina* (2023). These novels were selected for their notable engagement with the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and their publication across three distinct decades, offering insight into the persistence and evolution of collective memory. By spanning nearly thirty years, the texts reflect relatively stable yet dynamic narratives of colonial trauma, resisting significant historical revisionism. This research investigates how fictional narratives of colonialism are shaped by collective memory and trauma, revealing the mechanisms through which literature mediates historical consciousness across generations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in Indonesian Collective Memory*

The role of the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC) in Indonesia's collective memory of Dutch colonialism represents a multifaceted narrative encompassing historical events, cultural identities, and sociopolitical transformations. Historical records indicate that the early 16th century was marked by significant European expansion into Eastern Indonesia (Knaap, 2022). During this period, traders and colonizers targeted regions rich in cloves, nutmeg, and mace—spices of immense value—sparking competition among European powers such as Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands.

By the early 17th century, trade dynamics in Eastern Indonesia shifted dramatically as the Dutch East India Company (VOC) eclipsed Portuguese and Spanish influence (Hägerdal, 2022). From the 1660s onward, the VOC consolidated control over spice-producing regions, enforcing a regime that relied heavily on slavery (Schrikker, 2024). The VOC's dominance in Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, stemmed from its ability to manipulate local economies, societal hierarchies, and governance structures (Hasan et al., 2023).

A persistent thread in Indonesia's historical memory is resistance to Dutch colonialism, reflected in narratives of liberation movements and the 1945 proclamation of independence (Purnomo et al., 2024). Indonesian founding leader Sukarno embodied this anti-colonial struggle, framing it as central to national identity. Anti-Dutch sentiment thus transcends mere historical recollection; it is woven into Indonesia's sociocultural fabric, symbolizing both past injustices and enduring resilience (Purnomo et al., 2024).

The VOC's legacy in Indonesian history remains contested and multifaceted. Oral and written sources reveal competing efforts to reconstruct colonial narratives (Bijl, 2012). While many accounts emphasize oppression, others, as

Lyna (2023) notes, highlight cultural hybridity—such as exchanges between Dutch officials and local women. The VOC's infrastructural projects, like Semarang's Vijfhoek Fort (now a national heritage site), further complicate collective memory. Colonial-era urban planning is celebrated as cultural heritage, yet its origins evoke ambivalence, blending nostalgia with critical awareness of colonialism's violence (Dameria et al., 2023). This duality underscores Indonesia's complex negotiation of pride and trauma in its colonial past.

The VOC's economic exploitation, notably through forced cultivation systems, reshaped Indonesia's agrarian economy, entrenching socioeconomic disparities that persist today (Siregar, 2023). While colonial structures offered limited economic opportunities, their brutality also galvanized anti-colonial solidarity, reinforcing national identity. Indonesia's educational system plays a pivotal role in shaping collective memory. School curricula emphasize colonial oppression and resistance, fostering national consciousness across generations (Purnomo et al., 2024; Thang et al., 2024).

Cultural products—films, literature, and art—actively reinterpret colonial narratives. Works critiquing or reimagining VOC legacies, such as novels depicting resistance and adaptation under Dutch rule, serve as vehicles for intergenerational memory (Wedhowerti, 2023; Yapp, 2020). Dutch colonial studies reveal additional layers: narratives of Dutch-Indian societal inferiority (Paasman, 1996), travelogues promoting colonial investment (Zuiderweg, 2006), and literary accounts that mitigate Dutch culpability for violence (Pagee, 2023). Such aesthetic products mediate historical consciousness, reconstructing the past for generations without direct colonial experience.

Collectively, these studies illustrate the nuanced duality of Indonesia's memory of the VOC: it acknowledges systemic oppression while grappling with colonialism's transformative legacies. Literature, as a medium of intergenerational memory, occupies a critical role in shaping these narratives. By reaching diverse audiences, Indonesian literary works preserve and challenge colonial histories, necessitating rigorous analysis of how they memorialize Dutch colonialism.

B. *Collective Memory and Intergenerational Trauma*

Collective memory and intergenerational trauma are interconnected phenomena crucial to understanding cultural identity in fiction. Memory is not an individual construct; rather, it is collectively shaped, providing identity and continuity across generations (Halbwachs, 1992). This collective memory preserves marginalized histories, enabling groups to contest dominant narratives. As McGregor (2013) argues, literary memory studies foreground the temporal and political dimensions of the past, compelling scholars to confront historical injustices and their traumatic legacies. Within this framework, literature functions as embodied cultural memory, preserving knowledge absent from official archives (Erl, 2011b). Such works often serve as counternarratives for marginalized voices (Andalas & Qur'ani, 2021; Widodo & Andalas, 2024), offering critical insights into how present identities are shaped by the past and fostering cross-generational learning (Hamdan, 2021).

Collective memory—or public memory (Assman, 1995)—encompasses historical events institutionalized through cultural practices and communication. It transcends familial boundaries, becoming a shared sociocultural resource.

Hirsch's concept of postmemory (2008, 2012) clarifies how trauma is transmitted intergenerationally through cultural artifacts like literature. Postmemory bridges the gap between direct survivors and later generations, enabling collective trauma to resonate through symbolic representation (Lantaffi, 2021). Literature thus perpetuates narratives of resistance, loss, and injury, forming a collective response to colonialism's tangible and psychological violence. Crucially, literary studies avoid romanticizing the past; instead, they interrogate its traumatic realities (McParland, 2021).

Post-event literature often seeks to articulate the suffering of those who endured historical trauma. For example, Palestinian refugee narratives use storytelling to document collective memory and sustain resilience (Hamdan, 2021), while Native American literature grapples with generational trauma from colonial violence (Cromer et al., 2017). Similarly, national memory is not monolithic but a polyphony of voices that coalesce into shared identity (Eyeran, 2019).

Collective memory shapes how communities navigate trauma, informing narratives that either reinforce or dismantle systems of oppression. Studies on racial capitalism, for instance, reveal how trauma memories perpetuate racial hierarchies (Bryant, 2024). These narratives demand acknowledgment of historical injustices while offering pathways to healing. In colonial contexts, survivors and descendants alike condemn systems like the VOC's atrocities. Indonesia's colonial trauma mirrors that of other former colonies, such as Ireland's literary reckoning with the traumatic legacy of the Anglo-Irish War (Chang, 2017).

Dutch colonialism in Indonesia constitutes collective trauma, its impact reverberating through sociocultural structures. The three novels—Mayon Soetrisno's *Banda Neira* (1995), E.S. Ito's *Rahasia Meede: Misteri Harta Karun VOC* (2007), and Iksaka Banu's *Rasina* (2023)—reconstruct colonial trauma as shared memory, transmitting it to postcolonial generations. These narratives generate new social meanings for those without direct experience, transforming literature into sites of memory that preserve the legacy of 350 years of Dutch rule.

III. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, psycho-historical approach to analyze the representation of collective memory and trauma in Dutch colonial narratives across three Indonesian novels: Mayon Soetrisno's *Banda Neira* (1995), E.S. Ito's

Rahasia Meede: Misteri Harta Karun VOC (2007), and Iksaka Banu's *Rasina* (2023). These works were selected for their thematic engagement with the VOC and their publication across three distinct decades (1990–2023), a timeframe posited to reflect stability in collective memory construction. The research aims to elucidate how colonial trauma is narrativized through the interplay of collective memory and intergenerational transmission.

A content analysis framework was adopted, structured as follows: Close Reading (identification of recurring themes, symbols, and patterns related to colonial trauma and memory); Thematic Coding (categorization of themes into codes reflecting narrative strategies (e.g., tone, perspective, metaphor)); Textual Analysis (interpretation of coded themes through Erll's (2011a) concept of narrative potential—defined as the impact of narrative strategies that structure literary content and shape meaning); Synthesis (formulation of a thesis grounded in the “rhetoric of collective memory” (Erll, 2004), whereby texts mediate historical events through socially shared representations); Historical data external to the novels contextualized literary interpretations, ensuring alignment with documented colonial practices. This approach acknowledges that authors of colonial trauma transcend mere recollection, instead articulating injustices to provoke readerly engagement (Hirsch, 2008).

Data validity was ensured through Creswell and Creswell's (2014) tripartite model: Researcher Reflexivity (iterative self-checking to mitigate interpretive bias); Peer Debriefing (discussions with interdisciplinary reviewers to challenge assumptions); and Expert Consultation (feedback from scholars in postcolonial studies and memory theory). This validation process strengthened the credibility of the study's theoretical alignment, methodological rigor, and conclusions.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Mayon Soetrisno's *Banda Neira* (1995) stands as one of the earliest postcolonial Indonesian novels authored by writers born between the 1950s and 1980s to explicitly engage with the VOC's collective memory. The novel's second section (Soetrisno, 1995, pp. 161–508) chronicles the European struggle for spice monopolies in the Maluku Islands, while its third part (Soetrisno, 1995, p. 324) centers Indigenous voices through a harrowing narrative of colonial violence. Among the many characters, Nicolaus Speelman, who evokes memories of the 14th Governor-General of the VOC, Cornelis Speelman (1681–1684), Pieter Van Hoorn, who also recalls the 16th Governor-General of the VOC, Willem van Outhoorn (1691–1704) or the 17th Governor-General Joan van Outhoorn (1704–1709), Paderi Argensola, Pandhora, Cornelia, and Prince Jayacatra are the most frequently present in the story. It can be said that “*Banda Neira*” is a tale of contestation between VOC ship captain Nicolaus Speelman and junior merchant (*onderkoopman*) Pieter van Hoorn, assisted by Portuguese clergyman Paderi Argensola.

Banda Neira serves as a vessel of collective memory, reconstructing the trauma of the 1621 Banda massacre—the slaughter of tens of thousands—and the forced enslavement of survivors in Batavia (modern-day Jakarta). This trauma, canonized in national consciousness through official historiography, is transmitted intergenerationally via postmemory (Hirsch, 2008). The novel's narrator anchors this traumatic memory within its narrative, mediating the brutality of colonial violence for generations removed from the event.

The 1621 Banda genocide traces its origins to 1609, when the Dutch East India Company (VOC) launched a full-scale military campaign to expel rival European powers—including English merchants—from the Banda Islands. Despite initial success, the Bandanese people, allied with English forces, mounted fierce resistance. During these clashes, VOC officials were killed, prompting Jan Pieterszoon Coen to retreat to Batavia. Appointed Governor-General in 1619, Coen returned to Banda in 1621 to exact retribution. Under his orders, 40 Indigenous leaders were arrested, subjected to summary trials, and executed. Approximately 800 Bandanese men, women, and children were forcibly transported to Batavia as enslaved laborers, while only around 1,000 of the archipelago's original 15,000 inhabitants remained (Carlson, 2013).

The novel's protagonist, Nicolaus Speelman, serves as a literary personification of Jan Pieterszoon Coen (1616–1623), the VOC's 4th Governor-General. Speelman is granted the rank of kapitein general—the highest military authority in the VOC fleet at Banda Neira—a position historically reserved for commanders overseeing colonial campaigns (Soetrisno, 1995). This rank amplifies his unchecked power, enabling systemic violence emblematic of Coen's governance.

Speelman embodies sadism and authoritarianism, enforcing policies marked by brutality. His tyranny extends to the sexual exploitation of his stepdaughter Cornelia, whom he imprisons as a captive aboard his ship. To conceal his atrocities, he murders Valentijn, the VOC scribe, fearing historical accountability: “The General Captain who killed Valentijn... feared his vile deeds would be recorded in the History book” (Soetrisno, 1995, pp. 260–261). Speelman further retaliates against the Bandanese resistance—led by the wealthy Orantatta faction—with collective punishment: mass imprisonments, island-wide destruction, and executions (Soetrisno, 1995, pp. 280–281).

The wife of Orantatta, a wealthy Bandanese leader, was ensnared in a fabricated conspiracy involving the arson of a VOC nutmeg storage facility—a stockpile destined for export to the Netherlands. Her associates were systematically accused and executed, culminating in the massacre of 40 elites. Japanese samurai mercenaries, employed by the VOC, carried out the killings through public beheadings and dismemberment, their severed heads mounted on bamboo poles as a terror tactic against the Bandanese populace (Soetrisno, 1995, p. 487).

The massacre persisted daily, systematically targeting individuals accused of complicity in the conspiracy (Soetrisno, 1995, pp. 488–490). Speelman's cruelty and brutality come to an end when Pieter van Hoorn and Padre Argensola, assisted by Cornelia, resist and manage to dismember Speelman's body. However, by then, thousands of lives had already been lost and rivers of blood had been spilled (Soetrisno, 1995, p. 507).

Nicolaus Speelman's death complicates his symbolic identification with Jan Pieterszoon Coen. Historically, after orchestrating the Banda genocide, Coen returned to Batavia, where his death in 1629 remains shrouded in ambiguity. Official records attribute his demise to a cholera epidemic, yet oral traditions allege assassination by a Mataram female warrior dispatched by Sultan Agung. This historical indeterminacy mirrors the novel's deliberate blurring of fact and fiction, reflecting how collective memory grapples with colonial perpetrators whose legacies evade definitive judgment.

The narrator of *Banda Neira* frames the genocide as Jan Pieterszoon Coen's dual legacy of vengeance and defeat, embodied in the fictionalized cruelty of Nicolaus Speelman. This retributive violence—a source of intergenerational trauma—is reinterpreted through a psychohistorical lens as symptomatic of colonial pathology. The novel posits that such atrocities could only be perpetrated by individuals afflicted with psychopathological sadism (not masochism), reframing Coen/Speelman's brutality as a manifestation of systemic colonial derangement rather than mere individual malice.

The narrative of *Banda Neira* functions as a literary allegory, refracting the systemic violence that permeated Indonesia in the decades preceding its 1995 publication. Historical context is critical here: the 1990s witnessed state-sponsored repression of political dissidents, systemic gender-based violence, and sectarian conflicts targeting religious minorities—all echoes of colonial-era brutality. By transposing these contemporary traumas onto the 17th-century Banda genocide, the novel critiques the cyclical nature of power and violence in Indonesian history. Speelman's sadism, for instance, mirrors the impunity of authoritarian regimes, while the mass executions allegorize the silencing of marginalized voices. This interplay between past and present underscores literature's role in mediating collective memory, as the novel becomes a site of postmemory (Hirsch, 2008) where unresolved historical trauma converges with modern sociopolitical struggles.

E.S. Ito's *Rahasia Meede: Misteri Harta Karun VOC* (2007) explicitly engages with the collective memory of Dutch colonialism through its titular focus on the VOC. The novel reconstructs historical episodes such as the VOC's exploitative debt systems, the massacre of Pieter Erberveld (Ito, 2007, pp. 177–179), and the authoritarian ambitions of Governor-Generals Jan Pieterszoon Coen (Ito, 2007, p. 129) and Hendrick Zwaardcroon. These narratives underscore the intersection of colonial greed, violence, and collective trauma.

The collective memory of Jan Pieterszoon Coen and Hendrick Zwaardcroon crystallizes their legacies as ruthlessly authoritarian leaders, emblematic of the VOC's systemic violence. Coen, driven by imperial ambition, pursued monopolistic control at any cost. After establishing Batavia (formerly Jayakarta) as the VOC's Southeast Asian headquarters in 1619, he targeted the Banda Islands, the epicenter of the global nutmeg trade. Coen imposed extortionate trade demands on Bandanese growers, mandating exclusive sales to the VOC. When met with resistance, he orchestrated the 1621 Banda genocide, slaughtering thousands and displacing survivors into slavery—an act of colonial terror etched into Indonesia's historical consciousness (Ito, 2007, p. 129; Carlson, 2013).

Meanwhile, Hendrick Zwaardcroon, the VOC's 19th Governor-General (1720–1725), remains etched in Indonesian collective memory as equally ruthless as Coen. His infamy stems from orchestrating the 12 April 1721 execution of Pieter Erberveld, a wealthy mestizo of German and Siamese descent (modern-day Thailand was then Siam). Erberveld was accused of conspiring with Javanese nobles to assassinate VOC officials during New Year celebrations in 1721 (adjusted for timeline consistency). Historical accounts suggest Zwaardcroon's motives were twofold: suppressing dissent and seizing Erberveld's vast landholdings, inherited from his parents (Horton, 2003). This confluence of political paranoia and personal greed underscores the VOC's systemic exploitation.

Despite lacking credible evidence, Erberveld and his allies were condemned to death. As the alleged rebellion's leader, Erberveld faced public quartering—a gruesome spectacle where horses tore his limbs apart (Lohanda, 1994). This ritualized violence served dual purposes: eliminating dissent and terrorizing the colonized populace. The VOC erected a monument at the execution site, inscribed with a ban on construction and cultivation, transforming the space into a permanent symbol of colonial domination. More than a memorial, it functioned as a visceral warning against resistance, reinforcing the VOC's authority through collective trauma.

The narrator—likely channeling the author's voice—draws a provocative parallel between the VOC's Jan Pieterszoon Coen, Hendrick Zwaardcroon, and Indonesia's second president, Suharto. While Suharto's actions diverged in method and context, his regime, like the VOC's, relied on state-sanctioned violence to consolidate power. This analogy underscores a continuity of authoritarian logic across colonial and postcolonial eras. Suharto's rise to power was catalyzed by the 1965 “30 September Movement”, in which six anti-communist generals were killed—an event allegedly attributed to the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Exploiting this pretext, Suharto orchestrated a nationwide purge of alleged PKI sympathizers upon assuming power in 1966. Historians estimate 500,000 to two million deaths during 1965–1966, marking it as one of the 20th century's most devastating anticommunist massacres (Roosa, 2008). Like Coen's genocide in Banda or Zwaardcroon's execution of Erberveld, Suharto's violence served dual purposes: eliminating opposition and terrifying the populace into submission. This structural kinship reveals how

colonial-era tactics of control—spectacular brutality, fabricated conspiracies, and collective punishment—resurfaced in modern authoritarian governance.

In *Rahasia Meede*, the novel's narrator—arguably channeling E.S. Ito's critique—draws a provocative parallel between Suharto's New Order regime and the VOC's colonial governance. This analogy is crystallized in the character Cathleen's visceral reaction to stories of Suharto's rule: “*She tried to imagine the New Order, and what crossed her mind was the VOC. She recalled Suharto's face... and pictured the sketch of JP Coen's face*” (Ito, 2007, p. 129). This moment exemplifies postmemory in action (Hirsch, 2008), where the trauma of colonial violence (embodied by Coen) bleeds into the collective consciousness of later generations, shaping their understanding of modern authoritarianism. Cathleen's mental superimposition of Coen's image onto Suharto's underscores how Indonesia's colonial past haunts its postcolonial present, blurring temporal boundaries.

The comparison between Suharto and the VOC's Governor-Generals hinges on their shared reliance on authoritarian governance to maintain power. Suharto's regime (1966–1998) exemplified this through systematic repression: political opponents were silenced, dissenters were imprisoned or disappeared, and ideological movements challenging his authority—notably the 1965–1966 anti-communist purges—were met with state-sanctioned extermination campaigns (Roosa, 2008). Like Coen's genocidal tactics in Banda or Zwaardcroon's orchestrated executions, Suharto weaponized violence not merely to eliminate threats but to terrify the populace into compliance, ensuring political quiescence. This pattern aligns with what Indonesian scholars term “modern neofascism”: a system where centralized power, militarized governance, and pervasive surveillance converge to stifle dissent.

The novel stages a dialectic between contrasting views of Indonesia's authoritarian past. While one character equates Suharto's New Order with the VOC's colonial brutality, another counters that all leaders are flawed, asserting that Suharto's actions mirror global patterns of power. This character provocatively claims: “*The reform generation should be grateful to Suharto, just as the 1945 generation [was] to the Dutch and the 1966 generation to Sukarno*” (Ito, 2007, p. 125). This argument hinges on moral relativism, positing that historical progress—whether independence from the Dutch (1945), Sukarno's (1966) ouster, or post-Suharto reforms (1998)—is paradoxically indebted to the very systems it overthrew. The assertion that “there is no leader without mistakes” universalizes authoritarianism, diluting the specificity of Suharto's crimes, which included the orchestrated killings of up to two million alleged communists (Roosa, 2008).

Iksaka Banu's *Rasina* (2023b) reinterprets the collective memory of Dutch colonialism across sixteen episodic chapters, focusing on two VOC figures: Hendriek Cornelis Adam, a low-ranking clerk, and his superior, Lieutenant Nicolaes van Waert. While the narrator critiques the VOC's oppressive tactics through Van Waert's comparative reflections—contrasting Dutch brutality with the ostensibly more accommodating Portuguese and English (Banu, 2023, pp. 271, 389)—Hendriek emerges as the narrative's central lens. As Van Waert's assistant, Hendriek's proximity to colonial violence—cataloguing atrocities, witnessing massacres, and confronting his complicity—amplifies his moral reckoning. His prominence underscores the novel's focus on individual agency within systemic oppression, positioning him as both witness and reluctant participant in the VOC's genocidal machinery. Through this duality, *Rasina* interrogates the complexities of colonial memory, balancing institutional critique with intimate human drama.

Through the character of Hendriek Cornelis Adam, the narrator condemns the VOC's violent monopoly enforcement in the Banda Islands. Under Jan Pieterszoon Coen and Governor Sonck, the VOC systematically terrorized Bandanese communities to coerce compliance with exploitative policies. This culminated in a retaliatory scheme: the VOC staged the arson of a mosque they occupied, fabricating a rebellion pretext to justify massacring Bandanese civilians (Banu, 2023, p. 442). The indiscriminate slaughter, framed as punitive action against alleged insurgents, underscores the VOC's ruthless manipulation of power to suppress resistance and consolidate control, resulting in mass casualties.

Hundreds of survivors, including Banda's elite, were forcibly relocated from the hills, with many sold into slavery in Batavia (Banu, 2023b). Among the captives, Hendriek recognized Kalabaka Maniasa—a respected, intelligent figure he admired—and lamented the VOC's unjust detainment of innocents (Banu, 2023b). The following day, Japanese samurai employed by the VOC executed Banda's wealthy on a bamboo-fenced stage. The massacre, overseen by J.P. Coen, involved beheadings and dismemberment: victims' heads severed, torsos slashed, limbs severed at the waist and hands (Banu, 2023, pp. 510-511). Witnessing this brutality, Hendriek cursed Coen, confronting the moral bankruptcy of colonial violence.

When Kalabaka Maniasa faced execution, Hendriek intervened impulsively, assaulting the Banda Governor until struck unconscious by a blunt object (Banu, 2023, pp. 518-519). The novel concludes with a fragmented 1621 postmemorial letter from Hendriek to his son, Gijsbrecht. Dated 2 June 1621, it condemns the VOC as “the bloodiest war machine in the world” and implores his son to reject colonial service. Hendriek further demands accountability, urging Gijsbrecht to confront the Netherlands' arrogance and its sin of denying “an entire nation its right to live” (Banu, 2023, pp. 557-558).

The novel *Rasina* reinforces Indonesian postcolonial collective memory of J.P. Coen's genocidal retaliation against the Bandanese, affirming the Banda massacre's enduring trauma within intergenerational consciousness. It solidifies the VOC's legacy as a ruthless entity that deployed mass violence to secure colonial dominance. This memory, however, transcends mere historical indictment: by memorializing the VOC's atrocities, the narrative inspires postcolonial writers to reclaim agency, foregrounding themes of justice, anti-colonial resistance, and the sanctity of human dignity.

Through the characters of Hendriek and Van Waert, the narrator complicates monolithic portrayals of VOC officials, revealing that some resisted the organization's systemic brutality. Defying both colonial leadership and institutional norms, these dissenters prioritized humanitarian ethics over compliance, even at the cost of persecution or death. Their moral defiance—refusing to participate in atrocities against indigenous communities—underscores the possibility of individual agency within oppressive systems, challenging reductive binaries of colonial guilt and innocence.

Analysis of the three novels (1990–2023) reveals a cross-generational consensus among Indonesian authors: Dutch colonialism in Banda, spearheaded by the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), is unequivocally framed as genocide. This interpretation defines genocide as a systematic campaign in which colonial authorities deployed institutionalized brutality to subjugate, exploit, and erase Indigenous communities—a pattern inextricable from broader colonial efforts to entrench power. Scholarly research corroborates this literary critique, with Setyawan et al. (2023) documenting how colonial intrusions into local governance and extractive economic policies incited widespread resistance (Atikurrahman et al., 2021). The enduring societal fissures caused by these injustices persist in postcolonial Indonesia, underscoring colonialism's lingering structural legacies. By memorializing such events, these novels crystallize Dutch colonialism's traumatic imprint, ensuring its atrocities remain a visceral, unresolved chapter in Indonesia's collective consciousness.

These three novels—*Banda Neira* (Soetrisno, 1995), *Rahasia Meede: Misteri Harta Karun VOC* (Ito, 2007), and *Rasina* (Banu, 2023)—function as sites of memory (Hirsch, 2012), preserving and transmitting the trauma of Dutch colonial genocide in Indonesia to postcolonial generations. Their role is critical in countering divergent national memories: while Indonesian narratives frame the Banda genocide as a cornerstone of colonial malevolence (Banu, 2023a), Dutch collective memory often sanitizes colonialism, relegating it to a marginal, misunderstood chapter. In the Netherlands, history education reduces colonial violence to a superficial footnote (Maas, 2023), fostering a generational naivety that overlooks the VOC's systemic atrocities (Wekker, 2016). This dissonance is compounded by the Dutch self-perception as WWII victims, a narrative that obscures their colonial crimes and delays accountability for historical injustices. The novels thus embody Assman's (2010) "counter-memory", dismantling Dutch historical amnesia by intergenerationally reconstructing the Banda genocide through literary aesthetics. By forcing readers to confront colonial trauma, they bridge past and present, transforming passive remembrance into an active reckoning with Indonesia's—and the Netherlands'—unresolved legacies of violence.

The three novels exemplify cultural trauma—a collective experience that reshapes group identity through indelible marks of violence (Alexander, 2016). Jeffrey C. Alexander defines cultural trauma as arising not from inherently traumatic events, but from their *symbolic reconstruction* into shared narratives that bind communities to a stigmatized past. In these works, the VOC's genocide in Banda is rendered traumatic through iterative discourse, transforming historical atrocities into a "shared truth" of Dutch colonial malevolence. This process, mediated by literature, performs mnemonic labor: it crystallizes marginalized suffering into collective identity while imposing a moral imperative to redress historical wrongs. By framing colonial violence as a structuring force in postcolonial Indonesia, the novels demand accountability, positioning cultural trauma not as passive inheritance but as an active call to confront unresolved legacies.

V. CONCLUSION

The three Indonesian novels collectively frame Dutch colonialism in Banda as a systematic genocide, defined by the VOC's institutionalized brutality to dominate, exploit, and erase Indigenous communities. Functioning as sites of memory, these works transmit the trauma of colonial violence across generations, symbolically reconstructing the VOC's deceit and cruelty to embed this trauma within Indonesia's cultural fabric. Yet their narratives transcend mere historical indictment: allegorically, they critique authoritarian regimes, past and present. Pre-reform era texts often obscured critiques through pseudo-historical ambiguity, while post-reform works explicitly parallel colonial oppressors with modern autocrats, unmasking systemic injustices. This shift reflects a broader postmemory anxiety—a generational reckoning with mass atrocities, both colonial and contemporary, which underscores the cyclical nature of unchecked power.

The study demonstrates literature's capacity to mediate traumatic history through aesthetic forms, enriching humanities scholarship by bridging historical analysis with cultural memory studies. While textual analysis illuminates narrative strategies, contextual research is needed to juxtapose fictional portrayals with sociohistorical realities (e.g., archival records, oral histories). The framework offers a model for cross-contextual studies of colonial memory, particularly in examining Dutch colonialism's divergent legacies in Indonesia versus the Netherlands. Future research directions include Genre and Regional Expansion (incorporate diverse genres (e.g., poetry, film, visual arts) and regional narratives beyond Java-centric perspectives to capture the archipelago's heterogeneous colonial experiences); Reception Studies (investigate how these texts influence public memory in Indonesia and the Netherlands, assessing their role in education, political discourse, and identity formation); Transnational Postcolonial Dialogues (explore intersections with Global South literatures (e.g., Caribbean, African, South Asian) to identify transnational patterns in representing colonial trauma, resistance, and repair); and Interdisciplinary Synthesis (combine literary analysis with anthropology, sociology, and digital humanities to map how trauma circulates across media, generations, and geographies).

By transforming colonial genocide into a lens for interrogating power, these novels exemplify literature's dual role as witness and provocateur, demanding accountability while challenging historical amnesia. Their analysis not only deciphers the past but also equips societies to confront recurring cycles of oppression.

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