

E-ISSN : 2962 - 8199

P-ISSN : 2961 - 7502



MUSLIM ENGLISH LITERATURE

Vol 5, Number 1

2026

Published by English Literature Department
Faculty of Adab and Humanities
Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta
Indonesia



Jl. Tarumanegara, Pisangan, Ciputat, Tangerang Selatan, Banten 15419



<https://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/mel/index>



melsasing2023@gmail.com



Muslim English Literature

Vol 5, Number 1, 2026

E-ISSN : 2962 - 8199

P-ISSN : 2961 - 7502

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Vol 5, Number 1, 2026

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Muslim English Literature is a double-blind peer-reviewed open access journal published by the English Literature Department, Faculty of Adab and Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. It specializes in Muslim World Literature including US-Muslim, British-Muslim, Asian-Muslim, and other Muslim cultures and literature; and is intended to communicate original research and current issues on the subject. This journal warmly welcomes contributions from scholars of related disciplines, including Linguistics and Cultural Studies related to the Muslim world.

Editorial Office:

Muslim English Literature, English Literature Department,
Faculty of Adab and Humanities, Syarif Hidayatullah State
Islamic University of Jakarta. Jl. Tarumanegara, Pisangan,
Ciputat, Tangerang Selatan, Banten 15419.

E-mail: melsasing2023@gmail.com

Website: <https://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/mel/index>

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Unmasking Indonesian Neo-Orientalism in Kipandjikusmin's *Langit Makin Mendung*

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Abstract

This research aims to unveil colonial discourses in the *Langit Makin Mendung* (LMM) works. To achieve this, it employs Orientalism concept and incorporates Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), initially using the deconstruction method. Through the concept and methods, colonial ambivalence is revealed through the perspective of God, Muhammad, Gabriel, and his family in narrating the boundary between heaven and earth. Heaven as a place of wealth and intelligence, while earth is portrayed as a place of laziness, ignorance, and moral decay. This dichotomy reflects colonial attitudes, positioning heaven as the superior colonial space and earth as the inferior colonized space. The story's ironic elements highlight the undecidability and delayed meaning in the identity of earth's inhabitants. By deconstructing these binary oppositions, the study reveals the persistent influence of colonial discourse in shaping Indonesian literature and society. Additionally, the findings reveal neo-orientalism symptom, where colonial identities and perspectives continue to adapt and re-emerge in new forms, reinforcing dominance through subtler and more covert mechanisms. Ultimately, this study contributing to the field by expanding orientalism concept to Indonesian literature and highlighting the persistence of colonial discourses within postcolonial narratives, filling a critical gap in the understanding of neo-orientalism beyond Western or Middle Eastern contexts.

Keywords: *Colonial Ambivalence, Critical Discourse Analysis, Langit Makin Mendung, Neo-Orientalism, Orientalism Concept*

Introduction

Langit Makin Mendung (LMM) is a work written by Kipandjikusmin, a pseudonym for Soerdihartono (Dahlan and Hermani). This short story once caused a significant uproar within the Indonesian society when it was published in *Majalah Sastra* (Vol. VI, No. 8, August 1968 edition), under the editorship of H.B. Jassin (Gaus). The controversy arose due to its content, which characterised God and the Prophet Muhammad, an act long considered taboo in Islam (Deakin; Wahyuningtias and Alrianingrum). Ultimately, the work was deemed blasphemous towards Islam (Nurhayati et al.) and was officially banned from publication and mass distribution (Kemendikbud).



LMM narrates the journey of the Prophet Muhammad, who wishes to closely observe contemporary life on Earth. With God's permission, the Prophet Muhammad accompanied by his companions, flies down to Earth on a buraq, escorted by an aged and sluggish Angel Gabriel. During their journey, Muhammad's buraq and a Russian Sputnik rocket collide violently, casting Muhammad and Gabriel onto a dense cloud. From this vantage point, Muhammad and Gabriel converse about the occurrences in Jakarta and its inhabitants, even wandering closer to investigate by transforming into eagles. From their perspective, they perceive life in Jakarta as a living hell, representing an Indonesia increasingly entangled in vices and political intrigues. This condition is depicted as the influence of a false prophet, the Great Leader of the Revolution, who disseminates the heretical ideology of Nasakom (Nationalism, Religion, and Communism) to the Indonesian people. Ultimately, however, the narrator concludes that the predicament also stems from the Indonesian public, who complacently embrace the errors and falsehoods of their leaders.

Based on the aforementioned synopsis, these work can be assumed containing social criticism, particularly when viewing the social and political context of the Indonesian Old Order era (Alsyirad and Rosa; Firmiani; Hakim). Consequently, the work infuriated Sukarno (Almahdi and Kartikasari). Furthermore, several reviews characterise it as a critique of the Muslim community. These assumptions are considered to align with some of the facts present in LMM, especially if the work is merely skimmed, interpreted, and evaluated superficially. However, we need to defer the totalisation of meaning within the work, by examining other elements that are implied to present alternative meanings of LMM. If the existence of this work just constitutes a socio-political critique, a critical question then arises: why—beginning to end narration—Kipandjikusmin does appear predominantly inclined to depict the Indonesian people as uncivilised and weakness, doing so through the perspective of characters entirely foreign to Indonesian soil? Furthermore, the inhabitants of Earth, and Indonesians in particular, are constructed as the other through a narrative dichotomy of "us" and "them", which is delineated along imaginative-geographical boundaries within LMM.

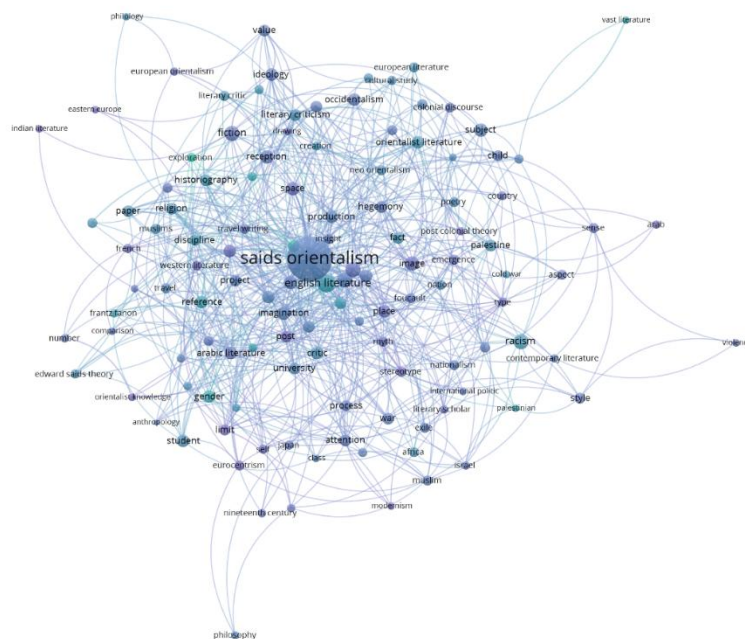
These implications present an anomaly, as well as an issue that necessitates further investigation and interpretation. A conceptual framework that facilitates such an interpretation is Edward W. Said's theory of Orientalism. This concept provides the foundational assumption that the emergence of an imaginative and geographical discursive dichotomy between "us" in heaven and "them" on Indonesian soil within LMM is a consequence of the demarcation constructed by colonial discourse. The presence of this discourse is undeniable, as colonial compositions, positionings, and formations remain highly influential in shaping Indonesian literature (Faruk, *Beyond Imagination, Sastra Mutakhir Dan Ideologi*). This condition that persists even to the present day. Consequently, the underlying colonial discourse renders the work inherently ambivalent.



This ambivalence does not arise because LMM explicitly narrates the dichotomy between the West and the East, nor does it position the East as the exotic 'other' from a Western vantage point, like classical Orientalism characteristic (see Said, *Orientalism*). Rather, the text is situated within the nuances of neo-Orientalism. Authored by a native writer, LMM seemingly functions as a work of socio-political critique, but it unconsciously reproduces hierarchical positions of superiority and inferiority. In this context, neo-Orientalism operates as a system of knowledge that continuously produces the 'Other' through ostensibly emancipatory narratives, whilst retaining the unveiling of coloniality shadow (Morey; Tuastad; Mangurun; Behdad and Williams Juliet; Kumar). It is upon this premise that LMM is postulated as a text perpetuating neo-Orientalist symptom through its central narrative dichotomy of heaven and earth.

Orientalism has long been established as a key concept in literary criticism. Based on research conducted using the keywords ‘orientalism’, ‘literary work’, ‘Edward Said’, and ‘literature’ for the period 2014–2026 in Publish or Perish (PoP), there are 930 articles and books that employ the concept across various objects of study. However, when the data corpus is analysed in depth using the VOSviewer tool, most research conducted between 2021 and 2025 (Figure 1) focuses on ‘English literature’ and explores topics related to the discourse of ‘discipline’, ‘comparative literature’, and the genre of ‘travel literature’.

Figure 1. Orientalism studies on literary works in 2016-2025



A closer review of selected studies reveals diverse approaches to examining orientalist perspectives. For instance, Lau and Mendes conduct a comparative analysis of the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and its film adaptation, exploring how the adaptation functions as a space to hegemonise Pakistani society. Similarly, Mtairi

examines Rudyard Kipling's orientalist perspective in *Kim*, particularly in his representation of Indian women, while (Iqbal) critiques Joseph Conrad's orientalist views in *Almayer's Folly*. Furthermore, Kasimbara as well as Nalurita and Apriyani highlight the presence of orientalism in short stories. Moreover, they exhibit certain limitations, such as a failure to comprehensively deconstruct the formation of discourse within their respective material objects (e.g. Iqbal; Kasimbara; Nalurita and Apriyani). Consequently, the justification for identifying the forms of orientalism is often weak and lacks a methodologically robust interpretation of the material objects in question. In contrast, the present study adopts an interpretive method grounded in Derridean Deconstruction and Michel Foucault's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a frameworks consistently utilised by Edward Said to dismantle the discourse of Orientalism.

Furthermore, whilst the concept of Orientalism has been widely utilised across a large body of prior research, neo-Orientalism in literary analysis remains highly limited. A search within the Scopus database 2021–2026, targeting titles, abstracts, and keywords using the query TITLE-ABS-KEY (Neo-Orientalism OR Neo Orientalism) AND (Literature OR Fiction), yields only 16 works. These retrieved studies are highly diverse, ranging from literary works and fiction studies (Hai; Morey; e.g., Altwaiji; Altwaiji and Alwuraafi; Kaushal; Nazari; Al-wazedi), translation studies (Qi), media studies (Tombul and Sari; Wahid), and film (Fattoumi et al.). Collectively, these studies puting neo-Orientalism as a discourse emerging from the post-9/11 era, the inception of the 'War on Terror' narrative, and the after 1979 Iranian Revolution. Meanwhile, Said (*Orientalism*) in the preface to his book, had already introduced the term well before these geopolitical events surfaced.

These studies remain confined to tracing the hegemony of neo-Orientalism within works produced after these milestones, whilst the literary representation of neo-Orientalism predominantly revolves around diaspora and non-diaspora writers in the Middle Eastern (Morey; Hai). Furthermore, interpretations in preceding research have not yet been to comparatively analyse distinct works in terms of both form and conceptual ideas. Although Qi touches upon this aspect, the study is strictly confined to the translation process of works from the domestic context outward adapting them to a global language. Consequently, the limitations lie not only in the spatial and temporal contexts of the analysed works but also in the analysis of their intertextual forms. This is the precise gap explored further through LMM. Although this short story emerged as early in 1968, the implications of neo-Orientalism are already discernible through both its poetics (form) and its deeper structure.

Based on these explanation above, this research aims to unveiling colonial discourses through Edward W. Said's concept of Orientalism, as reflected in the textual formation of *LMM*. This objective leads to two key research questions: (1) How does Kipandjikusmin represent the meaning of heaven and earth in *LMM*? and (2) How does the discourse of meaning shape the identity of the Heaven people and the Earth people?



These two questions will dialectically determine Kipanjikusmin's position. Said's conceptual framework of Orientalism is utilised in this study because neo-Orientalist epistemology still relies on the epistemological framework of classical Orientalism to dismantle prevailing discourses within society.

Method

This research adopts a qualitative method. This method was used because the data primarily consists of verbal textual elements, such as words, phrases, clauses, and sentences (Bogdan, Robet, Biklen; Moleong 3). In the context of this research, text is regarded as a medium for transmitting representations of perspective (Ballinger), generating meaning as discourse or relating to the relational meaning of Said's orientalism epistemology.

The data are categorised into primary and secondary sources. The primary data are derived from *Langit Makin Mendung* (LMM), while the secondary data come from other references from Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, Research Gate and so forth—including intertextually related literary works, previous studies, or sources that support the primary data. The data retrieval method uses close reading technique (see Mardiani and Rustan; Faruk, *Metode Penelitian Sastra: Sebuah Penjelajahan Awal*; Phelan; Wolfreys). Close reading is essential for identifying textual data in detail and depth, making it a process of deep and slow reading (see Gordon). This approach involves noting down concepts relevant to the research.

In analysing the data, the researcher adopts an interpretive methodology grounded in Derridean Deconstruction (see Keskes and Martin) and Foucauldian's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Within the context of this investigation, deconstruction is applied to destabilise and invert the binary relations manifested as signifiers within the discursive structure of LMM. The deconstruction of binary oppositions within discourse aims to uncover a more equitable and balanced relational pattern, thereby facilitating the disruption of entrenched assumptions of representation (Derrida and Attridge 57). CDA is conducted to examine the ramifications of colonialism within the text and how they shape subjective identity (Allen; Foucault; Foucault and Gordon). This perspective aligns with the idea that Orientalism is an attempt to reveal aspects of a verbal text or as discourse that the author may have unconsciously embedded as ambivalence, even as neo-Orientalist subject.

Results and Discussions

Orientalism Discourse in *Langit Makin Mendung*

The short story *Langit Makin Mendung* (LMM) was written by Kipanjikusmin, set 23 years after Indonesia declared its independence. Although the period of European and Asian (Japanese) colonialism has passed, the presence of LMM may still crystallised colonial discourses, as previously suggested. In this context, the concept of



postcolonialism does not refer to the end of colonial rule, but to the ongoing colonial issues that persist as effects still present in a particular culture or society (Ashcroft et al.; Nurhadi), even after the colonial period ended. Furthermore, these effects can endure and shape the existence of aesthetic objects, including literature, through their discourse formations (Said, *Culture and Imperialism*). The presence of colonial discourse formations—especially the discourse of orientalism—is what is assumed to be present in *LMM*.

LMM stems from the narrative of the living conditions of the prophets who experienced boredom in Heaven, as if the happiness they received was like torture. This condition makes them protest to God through a petition signed by the prophets—including Muhammad. From this narrative, a dialogue takes place between God and Muhammad in Heaven.

In their dialogue, God describes the existence of heaven through several images attached to it. These images are expressed explicitly:

Millions of beautiful angels, rivers of milk, and lakes of honey. Golden apples and silver lime trees. Platinum deer and birds of a feather adorned diamonds [...] emerald grass, pearl blossoms, [...] silk tapestries, cashmere robes and turbans, and Aladdin's flying shoes (Kipandjikusmin 1).

When referring to these signifiers or images of heaven, their existence conveys the concept of abundance and luxury. The function of these signifiers further distinguishes them from other geographical features. In other words, the form of Heaven's existence directly opposes certain functions of other signifiers, which are associated with non-luxury and scarcity. The presence of opulence and abundance is, in fact, produced by God, who labels it in contrast to the existence of the Earth.

In addition, several signifiers are explicitly revealed as God narrates the earth to Muhammad., "What exactly are you seeking on Earth? Immorality, hypocrisy, hunger, sorrow, and hatred are running rampant," (Kipandjikusmin 1). The Earth, as described by God, is deterministically and predominantly portrayed as a location with geographical conditions that are "tropical [...] the drought has long passed there. The scorching sun sears their foolish minds for far too long," (Kipandjikusmin 2).

These descriptions are part of God's interpretation of the Earth. Some signifiers, such as 'tropical', 'the drought', and 'the scorching sun sears [...] for far too long', serve as geographical markers. However, these signifiers also relate to the conditions within them, such as the traits of 'immorality, hypocrisy, hunger, tears, hatred, foolishness, and the presence of clowns', which are inherent in the people of the Earth. This certainly constructs the existence of an Earth that is impoverished (lacking abundance and luxury) and destitute.

The discourse has indirectly shaped both the actual and imaginative geography of Heaven and Earth. In the other words, imagination is part of God's knowledge, which



distinguishes between the entities of Heaven and Earth. In this context, God functions as the power that produces knowledge through the process of representation. This process serves as a form of verification of the social conditions that occur on Earth, or as a verification of truth.

From Said's perspective, Heaven can be identified as a representation of the Western world, while Earth can be seen as a representation of the East. This identification aligns with Said (*Orientalism*) view, where several terms are consistently attached to Eastern people through the Western lens: irrational, morally depraved, childish, and disabled. This, in turn, indirectly affirms the existence of Western people as rational, virtuous, mature, and normal. Although these attachments are merely arbitrary or fluid constructions, they involve an awareness with certain motives (see Gramsci; Moore-Gilbert; Said, *Orientalism*).

In the context of *LMM*, God's position certainly represents the existence of the West (Heaven) and thus can be identified as Orientalist. This identification is inseparable from the very existence of orientalism itself, which is descriptive, practically applicable, and can be applied universally (Said, *Orientalism* 201; Setiawan 20). In this regard, the discourse network extends to several former European colonies, including South Africa, Latin America, and Indonesia—regions that continue to experience Europe's influence on this day (see Moore-Gilbert 56). Said (2003, p. 205) clearly and firmly asserts that Western European nations treat orientalism as a homogeneous process of shaping the cultural identity of the 'Other' by associating it with the West. Such identities often lead to the formation of values that are embarrassing, disheartening, and practically result in life anomalies (Gandi and Abdullah). This typically implies a binary oppositional relationship, through which orientalist imaginative knowledge is produced into a discourse—an intermediate knowledge that is both brought into being and excluded by God through his identification of Heaven and Earth.

The purpose of orientalist discourse is to discipline and shape the East. The existence of this discursive formation ultimately establishes a relationship between the two, characterised by power, domination, and various levels of complex cultural hegemony. This relationship forms a binary and oppositional identification, as previously explained, where 'them' (Earth) is distinguished from 'us' (Heaven), abundant from non-abundant, and rich from poor. The existence of this identificatory discourse is constructed through a set of media, one of which is through community figures—such as Muhammad—and its investment is not carried out in a dominant or totalitarian manner, but rather hegemonically (Said, *Orientalism*).

The portrayal of God in *LMM* suggests a figure who is perceived as distant from earthly affairs, detached in the sense of being neither directly engaged with nor repressive towards humanity. Despite this apparent detachment, God assumes the role of a judge, evaluating humanity from afar. Said's critique highlights this dynamic as characteristic of Orientalism, wherein Orientalists position themselves as spectators,



judges, or juries, while Eastern individuals are relegated to the role of spectacles. Although God is depicted as distant, his dominant position enables him to exert hegemony over humanity through his connection with Muhammad, particularly given Muhammad's origins in Medina.

In heaven, Muhammad is characterised as an inferior figure, while God is superior. Although God says that everything in heaven "All are yours together, all are equal!" (Kipandjikusmin 1), these words are contradicted by His superior existence and absolute ownership of everything in heaven. This is explicitly evident from the narrator's description of Muhammad's position during the dialogue with God:

Muhammad bowed down, feeling that human life was merely a tangle of almsgiving from God. How despicable is the party that constantly hopes for mercy. He remembered that when he ascended to heaven, he was only a naked soul (Kipandjikusmin 1).

This description is a response to all of Muhammad's affirmations regarding God's position. He referred to God as 'Almighty rich' for what he possesses in heaven, and 'Omniscient' about the true conditions on Earth. Furthermore, he joyfully prostrated himself before God. These affirmative statements convey the notion that humans, referred to as 'earth people', are mere creations of God. Additionally, Muhammad, as a representative of the earth people, is depicted as distinct from the Indonesian earth people, yet described as 'a naked soul', a phrase signifying the absence of any identity attached to him. From this viewpoint, God emerges as the sole entity capable of defining the existence of Earth people. It is only through submission to God that humans can attain heaven or experience abundance. This positioning suggests that earth people resemble the subaltern, incapable of identifying or representing themselves without external validation.

The existence of this affirmation, of course, succeeded in hegemonising Muhammad by making him a lens through which to view other people on earth. According to Said (*Orientalism*), hegemony solidifies and sustains the idea of orientalism in the subject or macro-subject (society) that is formed. Although the language spoken by God in *LMM* is subtle and alluring, God can negotiate His ideas so that they are affirmed by Muhammad. This influence acts like glasses that cover Muhammad's eyes, so that he adopts the same subjectivity as God when he descends to earth. In this position, Muhammad becomes part of the colony itself—even colonised by God. In this regard, Setiawan notes, a colony is essentially a group of people who are not independent, but whose bodies are controlled by a party that is far away and separate from them. As previously mentioned, this separate and distant party is God.

The story in *LMM* implicitly rejects the discourse of new colonialism (neo-colonialism) manifested in the form of moral and political degradation and dependence on foreign ideologies after independence. Although better known for sparking religious polemics (Heboh Sastra 68), this story uses a critical perspective to challenge Indonesia's



socio-political reality at the end of the Old Order era. In LMM text, at Muhammad's request to conduct research and with God's permission, Muhammad descended to earth with Gabriel. In his plan, Muhammad was going to Medina, where he was buried, to see how many people were visiting his tomb to Cairo. When Muhammad left from Heaven to Earth on a Buraq, it turned out that during their journey, they had an accident caused by a collision with a Russian Rocket. Their vehicle was destroyed into dust, and they were thrown down, caught in a cloud of clouds. In this cloud, Muhammad and Gabriel discussed a special area, namely Indonesia, or especially Jakarta.

"Gabriel, how many layers of hell are there?"

"My Lord, you are mistaken. It is not hell, but the most lawless part of the earth, Jakarta. The capital of a country with a hundred million lazy and stupid people. Yet it claims to be free of illiteracy" (Kipandjikusmin 4).

They identify Jakarta with several markers such as 'hell', 'the most lawless part of the earth', and 'the capital of a country', while involving the identification of its people as 'lazy' and 'stupid'. They even slightly equate the uncleanness of the earth with "Sodom and Gomorrah," (Kipandjikusmin 4). Their identification contrasts with their own existence as intelligent, diligent, and obedient figures. Furthermore, in *LMM*, they also describe the people on earth as 'infidels', 'freaks', 'lunatics', 'diseases', 'drunkards', 'perverts', 'dogs', 'vagrants', and 'beggars'. This indirectly opposes the identities of Muhammad and Gabriel, who are portrayed as being nothing like that. Muhammad and Gabriel's views are orientalist ideas that have been shaped by God's hegemony, so that these views ultimately become a means of verifying the existing truth. In other words, Muhammad's views represent a reflection of the representation he receives from God.

Basically, what God, Muhammad, and Gabriel signified to the people of Earth Jakarta (Indonesia) was an experience of their knowledge of the socio-political conditions in Indonesia. This was then repeated several times by Kipandjikusmin through *LMM*, indicating that people like that were the result of being intoxicated by the *Nasakom* teachings, brought by the false prophet Great Leader of the Revolution (Kipandjikusmin 2–6). Furthermore, these teachings had infiltrated Muhammad's clerics on Earth (Kipandjikusmin 8). This is what made Muhammad seem to want to free society from the shackles of these teachings. However, if examined further, it is not that Muhammad and the people of heaven want to free them, but rather they want to herd them into another prison, namely placing colonial discourse into the people of Earth Jakarta. However, in *LMM*, not a single native person from Jakarta—particularly the people—has a say in identifying themselves; all identification is made by the colonisers, namely God, Muhammad, and Gabriel. This condition aligns with one of the concepts in the existence of orientalism, which emphasises orientalism as an authoritative process in assessing Eastern nations through the manipulative and persuasive intellectuality of



Western nations (Said, *Orientalism*). As a result of its manipulative nature, its depiction of the East sometimes leads to clashes within its own framework.

Neo-Orientalism Symptom in *Langit Makin Mendung*

In *LMM*, there are paradoxical and ironic arguments within several of the markers, which lead to the rejection and delay in assigning an Eastern identity. This is expressed through the narrator's voice,

The average Indonesian is indeed forgiving and kindness. The lies and mistakes of their leaders are always met with open hearts. Their hearts remain searching, for no matter how cloudy the sky may be, its rays still long to touch the earth (Kipandjikusmin 17).

This narrative associates the Indonesian people with qualities of 'forgiving' and 'kindness', which results in a complete delay in the meaning of their identity. This delay leads to an undecidability in the identity of the people of Earth. Conversely, the identities of Muhammad and Jibril also undergo a similar process, as seen in the following dialogue:

"Why did you choose this eagle form and not a human? Surely, we would be able to do much more for my ummah!"
"Please remember, In Jakarta, every nose must have a resident card, My Lord. Get it wrong, and you'll be scraped by the homeless!"
"It's better to be a spirit, free and safe."
"For earthly matters, we must be part of the Earth."
"Why?"
"So that the truth is not laid bare before us."
"But still outside of human beings?"
"Yes, it is difficult to follow the hearts and minds of people when you are one with them."
"I understand!"
"And in our current form, our eyes are sharp. Our movements are swift!" (Kipandjikusmin 8).

In the dialogue, they effectively become part of the identity of the earth people, specifically adopting the form of an 'eagle'. This bird, by its nature, positions itself as an animal and is identified in contrast to the 'dog', a label associated with the earth's people. The adoption of this form appears to serve the purpose of ensuring that the truth they perceive is not entirely exposed, which can be interpreted as preserving the hegemonic ideas of God (the Orientalist) within their minds.

From this undecidability, the narrative ultimately presents an inversion of meaning in the identities of earthlings and heavenly beings. On one hand, earthlings acquire certain traits associated with heavenly beings, while heavenly beings adopt some characteristics of earthlings. This shift blurs their hierarchical positions: earthlings are not entirely inferior, and heavenly beings are not wholly superior. However,



Muhammad's position in this dynamic is shaped by his initial status of inferiority—as part of the colonised. This contrasts with Gabriel, who is portrayed as an angel presumed to embody the original identity of the heavenly beings—like to the orientalist God—who initiates this inversion of identity.

The overturning of meaning in identity serves as a counter-resistance to the discourse of orientalism, which implies the stability of meaning produced authoritatively. In other words, this act of deconstructive resistance introduces undecidability to the discourse of orientalism in *LMM*. However, Said critiques the concept of deconstruction as reactionary and naive. While it can methodologically aid in dismantling the binary opposition between the West and the East, it perpetuates the ambiguity of identity (see Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 340). This ambiguity allows orientalism to remain strong and adaptable, thereby continuing to dominate broadly (Rahman). As such, deconstruction cannot be regarded as a political instrument (Spivak and Harasym). Consequently, the counter-resistance presented in *LMM* is merely a temporary delay. The undecidability caused by the overturning of meaning in identity, within the context of *LMM*, is likely to evolve into a new stability with the emergence of a fresh form of orientalist perspective.

The implications in *LMM* are certainly inevitable. Neo-orientalism, according to Said (*Orientalism*), will emerge through a new identification process with mechanisms that cannot be further recognised. The existence of neo-orientalism can even exploit the personal experiences of colonised subjects (the East) and present itself as though it seeks to liberate them (Ullah and Rahman). In *LMM*, several efforts made by Muhammad and Gabriel, when they refused to leave the sky of Jakarta and were willing to transform into 'eagles', served as a camouflage to observe more keenly the behaviour of the Earth people and judge them. This is also reflected in Muhammad's behaviour, which seems to aim at freeing the Indonesian people from the shackles of the *Nasakom* teachings, but at the same time still perceives the people's existence as inferior. This type of behaviour places orientalism in a position where its undecidability becomes a new strategy for colonising the Indonesian people in *LMM*.

Kipanjikusmin as Neo-Orientalist (?)

The existence of classical orientalist discourse and neo-orientalism in *LMM* cannot be separated from Kipanjikusmin's position. According to Wahid, neo-orientalism continues to rely on binary logic as the foundation of its thinking. However, this logic operates and is produced broadly, encompassing both Western and Eastern thinkers. The discussion of Kipanjikusmin's figure in the history of Indonesian literature is limited, with little focus on his contributions. The analysis in *Pelidoi Sastra Kontroversi Cerpen Langit Makin Mendung karya Kipanjikusmin* by Dahlan and Hermani offers only a brief note on his trial process at the Attorney General (*Kejaksaan Agung*) and H.B. Jassin's defence in the courtroom.



However, ideologically, its existence can be viewed as part of the contributions of figures such as Mochtar Lubis, H.B. Jassin, Zaini, Taufiq Ismail, Arief Budiman, and D.S. Moeljanto, who actively promoted the tradition of democratization in Indonesian literature. This encouragement was realised through the establishment of the *Majalah Horison* in 1966 (Erowati and Bahtiar). The aim was to give Indonesian literature a diverse range of perspectives and to foster relationships between people around the world. This approach seems progressive and shares similarities with the spirit of the Cultural Manifest (*Manifesto Kebudayaan*). Upon closer inspection, the presence of this concept cannot be separated from the influence of past cultural polemics, notably those triggered by Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, who expressed high regard for Western culture, particularly in his desire to internalise the spirit of the European Renaissance into Indonesian culture (see Alisjahbana). The polemic created by Alisjahbana led to a renewed discussion of Indonesian culture, which continued to influence the period of Kipanjikusmin and beyond (see Erowati and Bahtiar).

Democratization is essentially a spirit that has been developing rapidly in the Western world. Indeed, the West itself considers itself to be the pinnacle of democracy and modernisation (see Keskes and Martin). This perception is what leads the West to view democracy as the commanding force in liberating the East—in this context, referring to the Middle East. Neo-orientalist scholars argue that, within a democracy, a country's national development heavily depends on strong social groups, and they perceive this phenomenon as absent in the East (Sadowski). This notion is also related to the ideas of the founders of *Horison* magazine. However, it does not emphasise the role of religion in shaping Indonesian society but rather highlights the issue of culture and its relationship with artistic works, such as literature and art, in shaping the mindset of various communities. The issue lies in the fact that democratization is often used to advance the hegemony of Western knowledge over the East, which can, in turn, shape the perspective of Indonesian society.

Through *LMM*, Kipanjikusmin criticised the monolithic power of Great Leader of the Revolution, which resulted in the people experiencing ignorance. The aim was certainly to initiate a discourse of liberation for the people. However, in this criticism, Islam was placed in a different light, such as by personifying Muhammad, God, and Gabriel (see Erowati and Bahtiar), even portraying the Indonesian (Earth) people as the passive other. It was as if Islam and all the people in Indonesia were depicted as weak, uncivilised, and inferior. However, this depiction does not necessarily affirm such inferiority as an accepted truth. As part of the very society he critiques, Kipanjikusmin positions himself as an insider who exposes—rather than reinforces—this condition of subjugation; the passivity portrayed thus functions as a narrative strategy intended to provoke readerly unease and prompt critical interrogation of the power structures that perpetuate it. Furthermore, the considerable controversy that erupted following *LMM*'s publication—including vehement protests from religious scholars and subsequent legal



action—serves as empirical evidence that Indonesian society, particularly its Muslim community, was far from the passivity depicted in the text. Rather it actively reclaimed the narrative and rejected representations deemed demeaning to its dignity. This, of course, positions Kipandjikusmin as a neo-orientalist. The existence of neo-orientalists who narrate the East is not limited to the West but also emerges from the East itself.

The colonial perspective in literary works remains inevitable to this day, as Indonesian literature was born from a discourse and society that was colonised (see Faruk, *Belunggu Pasca-Kolonial: Hegemoni & Resistensi Dalam Sastra Indonesia*. ; Mardiani and Rustan). The existence of Kipandjikusmin's work appears to have an aesthetic strategy linked to the story *Robohnya Surau Kami* by A.A. Navis, which also portrays God and Ajo Sidi as orientalists (see Kasimbara). Even within the context of the discourse of liberation, it shares an aesthetic strategy with the novel *Max Havelaar* by Multatuli. It seems to offer anti-colonialism but further strengthens colonialism through a new guise—such as Kipandjikusmin did through *LMM*.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion above, the short story *Langit Makin Mendung* (*LMM*) demonstrates the manifestation of an Orientalist discourse through the binary opposition between heaven and earth. Nevertheless, this binary opposition is, from the outset, constructed upon a divine authority that is satirically personified, rendering the very validity of the sky-earth hierarchy questionable. The *LMM* narrative deliberately constructs this binary opposition in a tidy manner—rich-poor, intelligent-foolish, civilized-savage—only to subsequently dismantle it through irony and paradox, prompting readers to apprehend this hierarchy as a discursive construction rather than an inherent, natural truth. Accordingly, the Derridean indeterminacy that emerges at the story's end is not a narrative failure but rather constitutes the very form of this challenge: by refusing to assign a final identity to the inhabitants of the earth, *LMM* resists the fixing of orientalist stereotypes as something stable and conclusive.

From this undecidability, *LMM* ultimately introduces an inversion of meaning regarding the identities of both earthly and heavenly inhabitants. At this juncture, the earthly people acquire facets of the heavenly identity, whilst the heavenly beings simultaneously assume traits of the earthly identity. This shifts their hierarchical positions; the earthly population is no longer entirely inferior, nor are the heavenly inhabitants completely superior. Consequently, this subversion of identity acts as a counter-resistance to the discourse of Orientalism, which inherently presupposes the stability of authoritatively produced meanings. Nevertheless, this emancipatory process remains confined within the shadows of colonialism. Whilst the character of Muhammad in *LMM* seeks to liberate, he paradoxically continues to view the Indonesian people as inherently inferior. It is precisely at this juncture that the symptoms of neo-Orientalism emerge as a discursive strategy of colonisation within the text.



The emergence of these symptoms is inextricably linked to Kipanjikusmin's socio-political positioning and the historical context of the 1960s, a decade marked by socio-political efforts to promote the democratisation of literature in Indonesia. Kipanjikusmin was among the authors who capitalised on this literary democratisation. However, the underlying democratisation issue is frequently served as a conduit for enacting the hegemony of Western knowledge. Consequently, Kipanjikusmin, through LMM, becomes ensnared within an Orientalist lens, positioning his own national identity as a passive and inferior subject. This narrative strategy exhibits a structural continuity with landmark earlier works, such as A.A. Navis's *Robohnya Surau Kami* and Multatuli's *Max Havelaar*, which ostensibly offer anti-colonial critiques but ultimately reinforce colonialism under a new guise.

These findings have been successfully address a significant research gap by demonstrating that symptoms of neo-Orientalism had already surfaced within Indonesian literary discourse long before the post-9/11 era, the inception of the 'War on Terror' narrative, or the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian Revolution as milestones that typically form the primary locus of prior studies. Furthermore, this study offers critical recommendations for future study to re-examine Indonesian literature, thereby dismantling the entrenched implications of the Western imagination that continues to govern the cognitive paradigms of the Indonesian people. Only through such intellectual endeavours can the decolonisation of Indonesian literature be genuinely achieved as a foundational phase.

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