

# What's Left From Max Havelaar's Failures: Max Havelaar's Failures in Improving the Indigenous' Life in Multatuli's *Max Havelaar or the Dutch Coffee Auctions of a Dutch Trading Company*

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*Yes, I will be read! When this object is attained, I shall  
be satisfied. For it was not my intention to write well...I  
wanted to write in such a way as to be heard.*

*(Multatuli, Max Havelaar or the Coffee Auctions of a  
Dutch Trading Company)*

**Abstract:** This paper tries to pinpoint three main reasons why Havelaar's struggles in improving the life of the indigenous can be said to be failures, namely Havelaar's misinterpretation of the exploitation, his misguided perception, and his uncommitted consciousness. Apart from the failures of Max Havelaar, this novel leaves a rich record of the complex relation between the indigenous and their rulers, the indigenous (rulers) and the Dutch, and between the Dutch themselves.

**Key words:** exploitation, misinterpretation, misguided perception, uncommitted consciousness, historical perspective, New Historicism perspective.

The epigraph is taken from the final pages of Multatuli's *Max Havelaar*. That quotation has become the "landmark" for *Max Havelaar*. It is because in the quotation we can see that Multatuli expresses not only his literary style but also his ideals/objectives in writing the book. He forces himself to appear in his work to speak up his voice as if his trumpet character, Max Havelaar, were unable to represent his ideas.

*Max Havelaar or the Coffee Auctions of a Dutch Trading Company* records Multatuli's experiences as a young civil servant in the Dutch East Indies. It also presents the condition of the indigenous' life under the Cultivation System, which obviously bears a consequence of its recognition in public as a political novel. Since his first post in Natal, in the west coast of Sumatra, Multatuli already applied his strong feeling of humanism in his duty.

In a biographical novel such as *Max Havelaar or the Coffee Auctions of a Dutch Trading Company*, Multatuli clearly, according to Van Niel (1989), "embellished and interlaced" his story with "good accounts of the sanctimonious Dutch bourgeois merchant class" (p. 1) that makes a comfortable living upon the misery of the indigenous. Williams (1999) points out that while reading the biography of a selected individual, one does not only "see the author's individual and development but also a more general development" of the author. Thus, through biographical novel, the author directly shares with the readers his/her subjective thoughts on him/herself and surroundings. Pierre Bourdieu (as quoted in Dhakidae, 1995) interestingly explains his idea on the relation between the author and the reality through the concept of "the genesis of the producer's habitus", in which a writer takes his stand, determines his character and in turn, chooses a literary genre, which is considered as the best medium in conveying his thoughts. This habitus, derived from the actual reality, will sustain the author's creativity, since this habitus is the manifestation of the "conjunction between the author's experiences and the author's creativity" (Dhakidae, 1995, p. 90). Consecutively, the work of the author will function as a reflection of the society (p. 77).

The elements that gave birth to the *Max Havelaar or the Coffee Auctions of a Dutch Trading Company* for instance, are not only Multatuli's confiscation and his contemplation concerning the condition of the indigenous, or his relation with his surroundings, but also the historical circumstances where he lives in. The clear check point which explains the attachment of literary works with reality can be derived from the opinion of Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1995, ¶ 10), a famous Indonesian novelist:

That each work of literature is the autobiography of its author at a certain stage and in a certain context. Hence it is also the product of an individual and is individual in character. Presenting it to society is no different from contributing to the collectivity. Also in regard to the relations of power, and to the prevailing standard of culture, the writer's attitude as an individual is disseminated, aware of it or not.

It is clearly shown then, that Multatuli has somewhat fulfills what Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1995) mentions about the author's duty, that is, "to make an evaluation and reevaluation of the establishment in every walk of life" (1995, ¶ 11).

Multatuli, reared in the bourgeoisie family, reacts against the oppression of the indigenous of the Dutch East Indies. Under such a circumstance, Multatuli as a part of the bourgeoisie shows his ambiguity; on the one hand, he expects their social status remain in its place, yet, on the other hand, he also "aspire[s] to be the supreme mediators and mediators of class conflict" (Novack, 1997, p. 21) which occurs in the society, as exemplified in the oppression of the indigenous of the Dutch East Indies.

This complex situation later on develops Multatuli as a distinct individual. Engels argues that human beings derive their moral ideas "in the last resort from the political relations on which their class position is based" (Novack, 1997, p. 4). Therefore, two different individuals from different class positions will develop their own distinct ideas on society, or even contradictory ideas and action. However, Max Havelaar makes himself an exception. The cause of his being distinct individual is based on the fact that the majority of Dutch or Westerners who live in the Dutch East Indies are not able to see the Dutch East Indies society comprehensively. Their perception of their social surrounding is blocked by a superstructure that places the exploitation behind the curtain of salvation of the indigenous from their crude rulers. Max Havelaar is the person who sees what is behind the curtain. Karl Marx's well known *adagium* on such a matter will give us a clearer view, as he states "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" (Eagleton, 1976, p. 4). If we relate this *adagium* with Max Havelaar's experience, we can see that Max Havelaar's consciousness about the perceived exploitation is molded by his social surrounding. It is not that Max Havelaar has already had the pre-conceived concept of exploitation and then he tries to change his social surrounding guided by such a consciousness.

Through his work, Multatuli has become the spokesperson of the mute indigenous for the exploitation done by the Dutch Colonial government. Interestingly, although he recognizes the exploitation experienced by the indigenous, and how the exploitation operates, he cannot do much in helping the indigenous to improve their life. Multatuli's unfruitful attempts to improve the indigenous life hence can be

viewed as failures. In this article we are interested in analyzing the causes of Max Havelaar's failures in improving the indigenous' life.

## **THE FAILURES OF MAX HAVELAAR**

The failures of Max Havelaar in improving the indigenous' life are layered in three levels which happen concurrently one following another. First, Max Havelaar misinterprets the exploitation which happens before him. This is the initial phase of Max Havelaar's failures in his later concrete attempts to change the condition of the indigenous that he perceives to be under exploitation. This misinterpretation is the root of his failures. Max Havelaar's second failure is his misguided perception in his struggles to fight against the exploitation. Finally, Max Havelaar's third failure is his uncommitted consciousness.

### **THE FIRST FAILURE: HAVELAAR'S MISINTREPRETATION OF THE EXPLOITATION**

The exploitation toward the indigenous faced by the main character, Max Havelaar, is known as *Cultuurstelsel* (Cultivation System). What is Cultivation System actually? According to Kartodirdjo (1999), the essence of Cultivation System is that the indigenous, as a substitution for land taxes, should provide a sum of crop in the same value as the land taxes (p. 13). Starting in 1830, Cultivation System (*Cultuurstelsel* in Dutch) is employed as a means of covering the high cost of colonial administration in Java due to "Diponegoro" war (1825-1830) and bolstering the Netherlands' weak financial condition following the Napoleonic Wars and a civil war with Belgium (Kartodirdjo, 1999, p. 23).

In restoring their political authority and financial security, the Dutch retain the main outlines of the indigenous hierarchy system of Residencies, Regencies, and lower administrative divisions though they do not follow exactly the attempts of Daendels and Raffles to turn the Regents into salaried officials, specifically responsible to the Residents. Only in the period of 5 years since the resistance of Prince Diponegoro (Diponegoro war, 1825-1830) is ended, Cultivation System has caused millions of Javanese to lose their lives just for the sake of the Dutch financial recovery. The Dutch was also able to earn 800 million gulden of surplus from the Cultivation System (Toer, 2002, p. 4). Moreover, the Governor General of the Dutch East Indies, Van den Bosch, who believed

that peasants in the Indonesian archipelago were fundamentally lazy and needed to be taught work discipline, decided to make the Dutch East Indies colonial government as the promoter and organizer of this agricultural enterprise. The combination between the indigenous' hierarchy and the Dutch colonial structure created a strong social structure, which, as I have explained in the previous part, becomes the curtain of the exploitation.

We will trace the form of exploitation which takes place in the Dutch East Indies society and shows Max Havelaar's misinterpretation about the exploitation. The 1851 Memorandum issued by the Dutch colonial government evidently defined the objective of the Dutch politics in Dutch East Indies at that time, that through the Cultivation System (Cultuurstelsel) "the conquered areas must hand in material profit for the Dutch, the profit which is the true intention of the conqueror" (daerah-daerah taklukan harus memberi keuntungan materiel bagi Belanda, keuntungan yang memang menjadi tujuan penaklukannya) (Kartodirdjo, 1999, p. 6).

From his notes which record his observation upon his new post in Bantam Residence, Max Havelaar describes his social surrounding well enough, but he misinterprets it. There, he emphasizes his notes on the existence of the indigenous rulers and their relation with the people of Bantam:

But alongside this *Alun-alun* [square], or elsewhere, lie *sawahs* [rice paddy] that are waiting for the plough, or for a channel to bring the water to them, often to till or irrigate his fields, he [the Regent] summons the populations of whole villages, whose own *sawahs* are just as much as of being worked...therein lies the abuse. (p. 75)

It is clear from the quotation above that Max Havelaar is trying to capture the relation between the indigenous rulers with their people, that is, the people are under the *exploitation* of their own rulers. Yet, if we analyze the quoted text above once again, there is an interesting point to be discussed. The interesting point here is that although Max Havelaar comes to Lebak as a Dutch colonial official (as Assistant Resident), he still considers that it is the Regent who abuses the people. At this Havelaar misinterprets the relation between the indigenous people and their rulers.

In Max Havelaar's eyes the indigenous people are exploited. Yet, the exploitation in Dutch East Indies is done in a complex structure. To decode this relation, it is not enough to discuss exploitation by definition

only. This relation must be explained through a historical perspective. Historically, before the Dutch arrived in Indonesia, the traditional status hierarchy was structured as follows: on top of the social structure was hereditary ruling class formed by the kings' family group, then followed by the ranking of officials, invested with legal powers and the people on the bottom of the social structure. (Kartodirdjo, 1988, p. 110). Furthermore, according to Kartodirdjo (1988), after the decline of the traditional power and their isolation from the centers of international trade, Indonesian kingdoms tended to have agrarian character where the bases of the acquisition and distribution of goods were relatively stable and stratification by status was favored (p. 112).

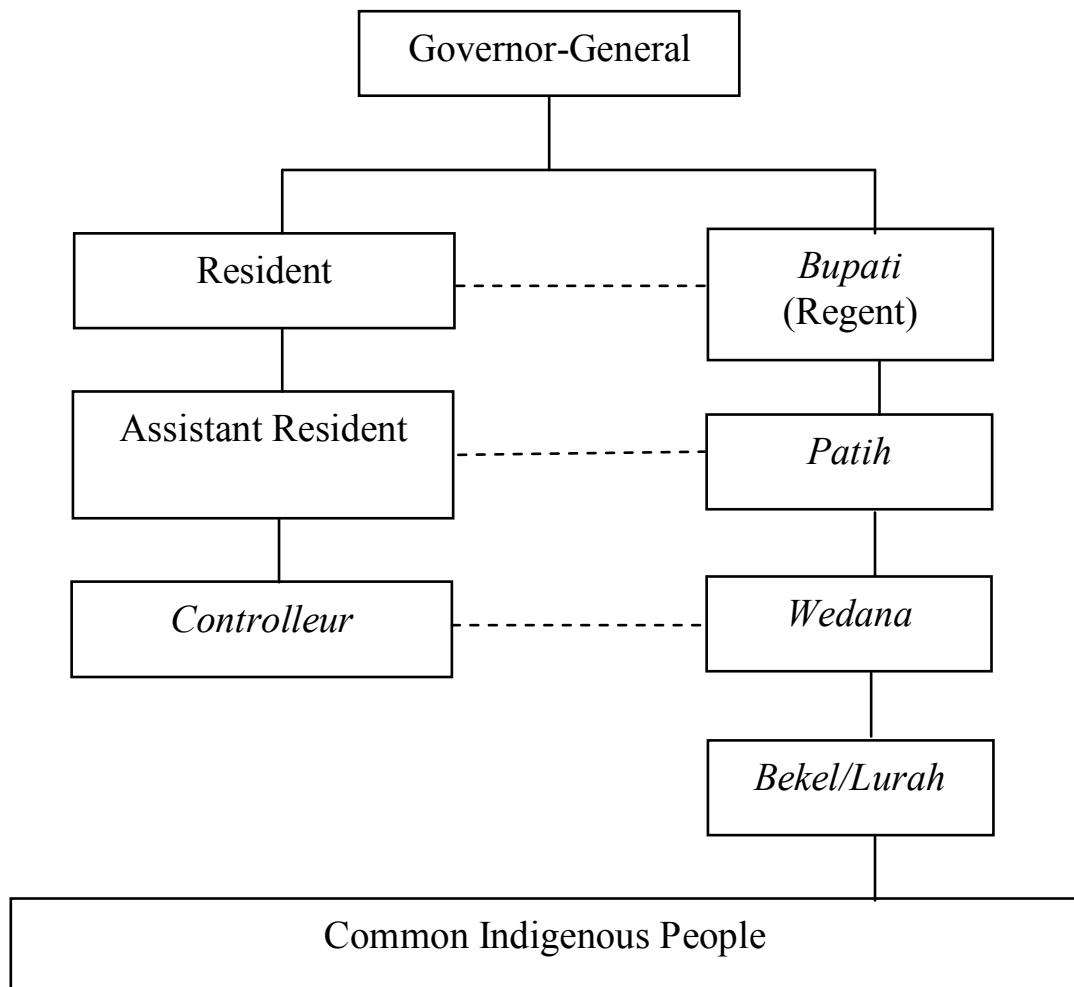
After the arrival of the Dutch in Indonesia, this social structure is manipulated to support the exploitation. The exploitation is maintained through a system known as the Cultivation System (*Cultuurstelsel*). In order to manage the Cultivation System, the Dutch East Indies government makes the indigenous nobility employees of the Dutch East Indies government. These Regents are given back their hereditary rights and are also given indigenous assistants to manage the production of crops, namely *Wedonos* or district heads and assistant *Wedonos* or assistant district heads. Each month, every Resident "renders a return of the amount of rice imported into or exported from his residency" (Multatuli, 1987, p. 213).

It is Governor-General Van den Bosch who initiates the implementation of *Cultuurstelsel* (Cultivation System) in the Dutch East Indies (Kartodirdjo, 1999, p. 34). The idea is based on the principle of forced labor and monopoly. However, the implementation of this system still relies heavily on "the traditional hierarchy which still persists among the indigenous" (*struktur hirarki tradisional yang masih hidup di masyarakat pribumi*) (p. 36). This decision explains why the Dutch Colonial government, instead of abolishing the traditional hierarchy system, prefer to maintain and manipulate it for their own account and benefit.

Havelaar contrasts his position as an Assistant Resident and the Regent as follows:

The assistant resident of a Division is the responsible person. He has his [the Dutch colonial government, the Resident in particular] instructions, and is considered to be the head of the Division. Yet in spite of the Regent, by virtue of his local knowledge, his birth [the Regent's nobility], his influence on the population, his financial resources and corresponding way of life, is in much in higher position (p. 70).

It is true indeed that as an Assistant Resident, Max Havelaar has less power and influence over the indigenous compared to the Regent. According to Simarmata (2002), although in that structure the post of assistant resident still exists, it is not intended to be served as a balancing power nor an act of reducing the political power of the Regent (Kendati dalam struktur tersebut jabatan asisten residen masih diadakan, tapi bukan dimaksudkan untuk mengimbangi atau mengurangi kekuasaan politik Bupati) (p. 183). This means that Max Havelaar's position is equal only to the Regent's lesser officers. Even the Resident is only equal to the Regent in terms of administrative matters. In terms of influence over the indigenous, the Regent is over the Resident. The following diagram (Simarmata, 2002, p. 178) will help much in understanding the distribution of power between the Dutch colonial government and the indigenous rulers, the solid lines indicate the direct relation and the dotted lines indicate the indirect relation:



However, the power of the indigenous rulers over their people is still left unexplained. How do the Regents manage to draw total obedience from the indigenous?

During the first days of his posting in the Bantam residency, Max Havelaar notes that “the government would rather dismiss ten Residents than one Regent” (p. 214). The combination between these two structures, the modern one organized by the Dutch colonial government and the traditional hierarchy run by the traditional rulers, becomes the main apparatus of the principle of forced labour, from which the Dutch colonial government are able to impose forced labour on the indigenous.

The advantage for the Dutch colonial government from employing such system is that their power is *hidden* behind the power of the indigenous rulers so that the indigenous are not aware of being exploited. The Dutch colonial government are fully aware that they need to maintain the legitimacy of the *Bupati* (Regent) in the eyes of their subjects, the indigenous. The relation of the indigenous rulers and the subjects is based on a mystical concept of union between the rulers and the ruled.

Mystically, the goal for the servant is to achieve union with God, better known as the concept of *Manunggaling Kawula* (people) – *Gusti* (King/God). On a more practical level it is a concept that “outlines the relationship of the king with his subjects and, more generally, between superiors and inferiors”. This traditional perception develops a sense of devotion of the people toward their rulers. Therefore, the combination between the Dutch colonial government’s power and the indigenous’ ruler’s power forms strong hegemony over the indigenous and also creates a gap between the Dutch colonial officials and the indigenous. Marx and Engels (2000 ¶ 18) in their work, *the German Ideology*, eloquently provide theoretical explanation of the combination between the Dutch colonial government and the indigenous rulers:

The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.

As a result, due to the existence of the traditional concept of *Manunggaling Kawula-Gusti* and the structure of hierarchy, the indigenous people do not realize that they are under the exploitation. In the eyes of the indigenous people, these rulers are only maintaining the



traditional concept of *Manunggaling Kawula-Gusti* in order to keep the cosmos and the social order working well under the guidance of their rulers (Koentjaraningrat, 1994).

Nevertheless, the exploitation can only possibly appear in the eyes of the Dutch colonial official such as Max Havelaar

No, no, the official's duty is not an easy one! This is already evident from the fact that everyone knows that every native chief oversteps the limit of permissible use of the labour and property of his subjects...that all Assistant Resident take the oath to combat this... (Multatuli, 1987, p. 77).

The oath mentioned above by Havelaar is taken only by the Dutch colonial officials. This oath is taken when a new colonial official is posted in his new office in a certain area and uttered in a formal welcoming ceremonial where the local Dutch colonial officials and the local indigenous rulers, along with the indigenous people stare at this "grand" ceremony from a distance. Through this oath, the Dutch colonial government seems to provide a huge trap in which the colonial officials are illusive in their role as protector of the indigenous against the evil indigenous rulers. This is done in order to keep the colonial officials away from the big scenario of the exploitation and also to make the colonial officials persistently misinterpret their social surrounding, just as what Max Havelaar does. It is obvious that the reason of the Dutch colonial government to work with the indigenous rulers is to accomplish efficiency of the exploitation. The role of the Regent is a middleman or "mediator" between the local realm of the indigenous and the larger realm of the current colonial system of the Dutch East Indies (Kartodirdjo, 1988, p. 150).

To conclude this part, the kind of exploitation appearing in the novel is a combination between feudal power of the indigenous rulers and the Dutch colonial government. This kind of exploitation subordinates the indigenous under the hegemony of their rulers with the traditional concept of *Manunggaling Kawula-Gusti* as the means in maintaining the exploitation, and also this kind of relation in this social structure is unknown to Max Havelaar. Max Havelaar's misinterpretation of the relation molds his consciousness to change the condition. This will become the basis of his later actions. Because his future actions are based on his misinterpretation, then this can be said as his initial phase of his failures, that is the failure to have the appropriate interpretation.

## THE SECOND FAILURE: MISGUIDED PERCEPTION

The second failure derives from the fact that Havelaar misguidedly perceives himself as the liberator of the indigenous from the exploitation. When he sees the relation between the indigenous people as the exploited and the rulers (both the indigenous and the Dutch government) as the exploiters, he cannot keep quiet. Although the structure of the exploitation is proven to be complex, it does not prevent Max Havelaar from being critical and upset about the exploitation, however limited his understanding is. It is due to his close acquaintance with his surrounding and his experience in facing the exploitation right before his eyes.

Famine? In rich, fertile, blessed Java –famine? Yes, reader. Only a few years ago, whole districts died of starvation. Mothers offered their children to obtain food. Mothers ate their children... (p. 74)

Such horrible experience finally leads Max Havelaar's anger toward the exploitation to get mounted. He directly notices how the indigenous undergo poverty and starvation while the indigenous rulers live in comfort.

After seeing such a horrible condition, Max Havelaar does not only stop at being angry but he identifies himself with the indigenous people. This can be seen from the following quotation:

There's where the scoundrel lives who's supposed to protect us! There he sits peacefully with wife and child, drawing embroidery patterns...and we lie starving in the road with our children, like outcast dogs! (p. 307)

When he addresses himself as "us" or "we" who live in starvation, he actually tries to put himself in the same class as the people's. Unfortunately, this attempt will not bring any fruits as he belongs to a different class from the people. The impact of the difference is that he will not get support both from his own people and from the indigenous people when he takes action against the exploitation and aims his anger both at the indigenous rulers and the Dutch colonial official. He directs his anger toward the indigenous rulers because the people of Lebak live under poverty and starvation in contrast to the luxurious life of Raden Adhipati Karta Nata Negara (the Regent).

The lack of support, especially from his own surrounding to face the exploitation and to improve the life of the indigenous, comes from his wife, Tina.

“Everything will come right, Max! even if you had to go away from here now, you would still be able to help Lebak later, when you're Governor-General.”

“Curse it! Do you want those poor wretched to starve for so long? Can you live on sand?” (p. 306)

Tina's opinion represents the prevailing (though reluctant) acceptance of the exploitation as she realizes the power relation being involved in it. Only those who have such a power as the Governor-General can change the situation. She only hopes that life will become better (consciousness) without the real effort (praxis) to make the change. The change will come by itself *later*, not now, and by somebody else not by Havelaar unless he becomes the Governor-General. In the New Historicism perspective, she agrees with the *subversion* only that she delays it, and at the same time she *contains* the exploitation.

Furthermore, Max Havelaar misguidedly believes that the indigenous rulers will help him to take an action to improve the life of the indigenous. In his speech Max Havelaar openly addresses the indigenous rulers to work along with him to improve the life of the indigenous:

Well, then, gentlemen, Chiefs of Bantan-Kidul, let us rejoice that our division is so backward and so poor. We have noble work to do. If Allah preserves our lives, we shall see to it that prosperity comes. The soil is fertile, and the people are willing. If everyone is left in enjoyment of the fruit of his labors, there is no doubt that in a short space of time the population will increase both in numbers and in possessions and culture, for these things generally go hand in hand (p. 124).

Despite the fact that Max Havelaar has already recognized the structure of exploitation in Dutch East Indies, he still believes that the indigenous rulers can still be reliable partners in taking an action against the exploitation. In his speech mentioned above, he tries to appeal to the innermost feeling of the indigenous rulers' religion by addressing 'God' as 'Allah', which is closer to the faith of the indigenous rulers, Islam. As we know, Christians will usually address God as 'Lord' or 'Father'. Max Havelaar seems to realize that by involving and acknowledging the indigenous rulers' faith, it will be easier for him to incite the indigenous rulers to improve the life of their people.

Shortly after his speech, not even a day after his speech, Max Havelaar has to face the hard reality that the indigenous rulers cannot be relied on improving the indigenous' life.

“Verbrugge, I'll tell you why I'm doing this! The Regent hasn't a penny in the house, his clerk told me so, and besides...look at the brusque way he asked! It's as plain as pikestaff. He wants that money himself, and the Collector is willing to lend it to him” (p. 124).

During the time of the Dutch East Indies, the Regent was nothing other than the performer of the task imposed on them from the Dutch colonial government (Simarmata, p. 178). Besides, they also had to fulfill their needs as nobles. The money was asked by the Regent to Max Havelaar in order to fulfill this nobility's needs such as giving gifts to the priests and doing a pilgrimage to Mecca. Therefore, it is not surprising then when we see the Regent who comes to Max Havelaar asking for money instead of discussing the condition of the people in Lebak. Also, it is not surprising to see that Max Havelaar's action in considering the indigenous rulers as his companions in improving the indigenous' life finally fails.

The nobility status of the Regent actually burdens the Regent. This burden comes from his family. As the highest officer in the indigenous hierarchy, the Regent must not only make himself reliable to his lesser officer, but also to his big family in particular.

“When he [the Regent] wanted to build a new mosque, which called for a lot of money. Besides many of his family...do you know?”

“Yes I know”

“Many members of his family –who actually don't belong in Lebak, and so aren't looked up to by the people either –swarm around him like a gang of thieves, and squeeze money out of him. Is this true? Or am I wrong?”

“It is the truth, “said Verbrugge

“And when his coffers are empty, which is often the case, they [the Regent's family] rob the people [of Lebak] in his name of everything that takes their fancy. Is this so?”

“It is“ (p. 127)

This burden of familial piety is then transferred to the people of Lebak in the form of exploitation, since the salary from the Dutch colonial government is not sufficient enough in fulfilling the Regent's family

needs. Besides, the Regent never perceives this as exploitation. Instead, he perceives this exploiting relation as a manifestation of the traditional *Manunggaling Kawula-Gusti* concept. This traditional concept is never acknowledged by Max Havelaar in perceiving the exploitation.

As a conclusion for this part, Max Havelaar has misguidedly put himself as the liberator of the indigenous people by indentifying himself as being in the same class as the indigenous people's. By doing this, he expects to get support from the people, which he fails to gain. To make things worse, he also gets resistance from his own people, in this case as represented by his own wife because in fact he is from a different class from the indigenous.

### **THE THIRD FAILURE: UNCOMMITTED CONSCIOUSNESS**

Havelaar's third failure is his uncommitted consciousness, which can be seen clearly in his action in facing the risk of his action (accusing the Regent). The term of "uncommitted consciousness" here is employed in order to show Max Havelaar's attitude which separates his consciousness from the action which must be taken. In other words, Havelaar is not ready to take action to the extent he is not willing to bear.

The first evidence of Havelaar's uncommitted consciousness can be seen when the Dutch colonial government responds to Havelaar's request to the Resident to accuse the Regent. As a response, Max Havelaar is transferred to Ngawi. In the letter from the Governor-General to Havelaar, the Governor-General expresses his confusion since Havelaar refuses to cooperate with the Resident to have a further examination on the Regent and the people of Lebak to follow up the accusation.

When the Resident showed himself indisposed to give immediate effect to your proposals (the accusation of the Regent of Lebak), you refused to comply with the reasonable demand of your Chief, that you should make a full disclosure of all that was known to you regarding the actions of the native Administration in Lebak (p. 309)

Actually, it is not only the Governor-General who is confused with the critical attitude of Havelaar, but also Havelaar himself. That letter marks a new phase of Havelaar's effort in improving the indigenous' life, a phase where Havelaar should take the fruit of his consciousness. Havelaar is facing the condition where he must make a choice between these two following options, each with its own consequence. First, to

accept the demand of the Resident for having a “full disclosure” toward the exploitation, this means that Havelaar has to stay longer in Lebak. Meanwhile, the Regent is still in Lebak. Second, to accept the removal, this means that Havelaar has to stay in the Dutch colonial government with the risk of working under strict control of the Dutch colonial government.

Nevertheless, it is strange to see how Max Havelaar never verbally exposes the exploitation by the Regent as the previous Assistant Resident does. On his secret letter to the Resident, he explains why accusation toward the Regent is the only way of treating the Regent. This letter is sent shortly before the Resident comes to Lebak to have an audience with the Regent.

I had taken care to let you know that I have tried, by exhortations and warnings, to save the old Regent from misfortune and ignominy, and myself from the deep sorrow of being the cause of it (p. 295).

It is obvious that this secret letter is sent by Havelaar in order to secure his position in front of the Regent. Havelaar wants to escape the risk of his consciousness in case the Resident really has an audience with the Regent. There, he employs terms such as “to save” the old Regent from “misfortune” and “ignominy” as a means of decreasing (the height of) the conflict which can possibly erupt between him and the Regent, as the previous Assistant Resident has. Kartodirdjo (as quoted from Hartoko, 1985) comments that Max Havelaar’s action is basically a demonstration of the lack of understanding about the background of the Javanese patrimonial bureaucratic structure (p. 102). Later on, Havelaar confesses his fear of taking the risk of his action:

I cannot but admit to you that even your sudden arrival, in connexion with the special messenger I sent to Serang yesterday, makes me fear that the guilty party [the Regent of Lebak], who has hitherto refused to yield to my admonitions, will now awake too soon, and do what he can, be it ever so little, to exculpate himself (p. 297).

From the evidence of Max Havelaar’s uncommitted consciousness shown above, we are shown how Havelaar separates his consciousness from the necessary action. In facing the situation which results from his misinterpretation and his misguidance, Havelaar chooses to separate his consciousness from the necessary action in fighting the exploitation. He does not want to take the consequences of his action in improving the

indigenous' life. Havelaar does that in order to secure himself from the vengeance of the Regent and also to reflect his ambiguity as a bourgeoisie.

### **WHAT'S LEFT THEN FROM HAVELAAR'S FAILURES?**

However, Max Havelaar's (or Multatuli himself, since this work is a biographical novel) failures cannot be easily acknowledged as total failures. It is because Max Havelaar's failing effort in improving the indigenous' life (which represents the failure of the author, Multatuli) sparks a process of a long struggle against the exploitation of the indigenous in the Dutch East Indies.

As a matter of fact, Multatuli has actually accomplished his "objective." Rob Nieuwenhuys (1985), notes that as a colonial official Multatuli fails in perceiving his social surrounding and fulfilling his ideal/objective. However, with his work (*Max Havelaar*), he does succeed as a writer. It is because Max Havelaar not only deconstructs the superstructure of the Dutch East Indies but also the superstructure in the Netherlands (p. 106). Multatuli even lights up a new horizon in the spiritual perspective of the Netherlands society, as Multatuli himself notes:

No, you kind-hearted Christians, I am not far away from you. How could I be far away from you...I who have described Havelaar who sacrificed himself, from you who have based your faith on the altar of a sublime self-sacrifice? (Multatuli, *Volledige Werken II*)

We are fully aware that this analysis on Max Havelaar sometimes incites confusion since the border between the worlds of the main character (Max Havelaar) and the author of the novel (Multatuli) is very thin, both of them have the same reality and experiences. We know that an author sometimes mixes fact with fiction, but here in this novel we seem not to find any fictional elements, everything seem so vivid and real especially when we contrast the life line of the main character (Max Havelaar) and the author of the novel (Multatuli). In the New Historicism perspective, this novel is blurring the boundaries between the literary and history. According to Greenblatt (as quoted from Bertens, 2001, p. 176):

The work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator or class or creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society.

Greenblatt shows us how Max Havelaar does not only contain the inner state of the author but also the exterior of the author; his social surroundings, his interconnectedness with the elements of the preceding society. As a result, Max Havelaar greets us in the present time not only as a mere work of art but also as a historical account.

In the end, it is proven that only history which has the power in absolving Multatuli's struggle. His work which contains his failures is widely read among the Dutch colonial officials and Indonesian's early nationalists. After the publication of this work, the struggle against the exploitation is continued through other individuals under Multatuli's influence such as Roorda Von Eysinga or Eduard du Perron (Hartoko, 1985, p. 107). This work also sparks the beginning of a Dutch East Indies literature which pays more empathy to the exploited indigenous rather than to focus only on the life of the Dutch society in the Dutch East Indies. Through the novel's rich historical accounts and insights, we can find cultural explanation on our nationality and historical root on our national identity in this kind of literary work.

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