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A Literary Crossroads: Colonial Anxiety and Ecological Imperialism in *The Tale of Saidjah and Adinda*

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Abstract

This article examines the concepts of ecological anxiety and imperialism through the prism of colonial literature, with the aim of contextualising them alongside the broader theory of colonial anxiety. The study examines The Tale of Saidjah and Adinda, contained in Max Havelaar, as a case study. The text was investigated in order to identify key signifiers of anxiety, with the buffalo being the strongest signifier identified for discussion. The premise is that colonial and ecological signifiers can be seen in the narrative containing the buffalo due to the exploitative imperial process at work and the anxiety experienced by characters such as Saidjah and Adinda when buffalo were stolen. This approach is well suited to the current study due to the way in which Multatuli has used the buffalo, both symbolically and as a major part of the narrative, to demonstrate the damage done to the Javanese people and the environment by the colonial-imperial process. This study demonstrates that colonial and ecological anxiety are closely allied fields that can be used to expand on literary works and analyses dealing with the colonial-imperial era. So too, it is argued, that Indonesia has a key role to play in future debates of both colonial and ecological anxiety.

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Introduction

In Multatuli's (1860) *Max Havelaar*, the theme of empire and its impact on societies, nations, and individuals is explored. This places it firmly within the canon of colonial literature, with a clear message and call to action regarding the colonial reality being present. Such a call to action can also be seen in the ecocritical field (Estok, 2009). In the context of ecological imperialism, the text also provides an insight into the ecological impact of the colonial–imperial process. Ecological consciousness has become an important part of ecological criticism and serves to interpret the relationship between authors, actors,

literature, and the environment. This is a key consideration for the present study, as the reactions and experiences of characters linked to their environments are a lens of investigation. All of this is also firmly wrapped up in the broader canon of colonial anxiety.

Ecological imperialism is an evaluative concept in the field of environmental history, first developed by Alfred Crosby in the 1970s and 1980s in his seminal works *The Columbian Exchange* (1972) and *Ecological Imperialism* (1986). Crosby's thesis argues that the introduction of alien animals, plants, and pathogens by Europeans unwittingly contributed to the success of their colonial mission. Ecologically speaking, the colonial spaces then became similar to Europe, allowing for a newly-dominant ecosystem to thrive. In such a vision, imperialism may be seen as more an ecological matter than a geopolitical one, which in turn had unintended and unforeseen consequences (Palacio, 2012). The anxiety, in colonial terms, arising from these consequences is what primarily interests this study. Crosby's foundational work in the field has been built on and critiqued in the years since by scholars such as Mariko Frame (2022), Eric Pawson (2017), and John Foster and Brett Clark (2004). In discussing the broader canon of environmental history, Vandana Swami (2003) has highlighted its role as providing a niche to discuss the importance of reintegrating the concept of nature into theoretical discussions of Western social thought. Here, she notes that the concept of environmental colonialism serves as a distinction through which to critique modern colonial–capitalist actions in terms of empire.

In terms of colonial anxiety, at base a deviation or development of the root form of anxiety itself, it is important to pin down exactly what it is when we discuss it in terms of empire and the colonial process. In the Lacanian interpretation, anxiety is something unpleasurable, the object of which is known to the subject. It is the sudden appearance of this object that causes the phenomenon we understand as anxiety. Anxiety is, therefore, not the unpleasantness or danger itself; rather, it is the warning signal that the individual experiences as a result of the appearance of the object of anxiety (Lacan, 2016). Some of the most common definitions of colonial anxiety, in turn, refer to it as being tied to uncertainty, fear, and panic on the part of Europeans in empire when they encountered diverse others and unfamiliar places, sights, and experiences. The assertion of this study, however, is that the search for a suitable definition will take time and much further debate due to the myriad ways in which the phenomenon may present itself. Beyond the ecological element discussed below, aspects such as dreams, migration, gender, and ethnicity also have a key part to play in this (Teggin, 2020).

Colonial anxiety, like ecological anxiety, is concerned with humanity discomfort with the possibility of danger. They are united by the common structure of anxiety in its root form, as per Lacan's (2016) anxiety graph in terms of locomotion and severity. There is a useful comparison here with Simon Estok's (2018) thoughts on ecophobia, his definition placing it as a phobia derived from modernity's irrational fear of nature, which has created an antagonism between humans and their environment. Estok describes this phobia as existing on a spectrum. This spectrum, similar to the Lacanian anxiety chart, includes aspects such as fear, contempt, and indifference. Whereas the commonly understood meaning of colonial anxiety has sought to describe feelings of unease or distress on the part of European colonial servants in the face of indigenous lands, cultures, and peoples, this study will place the indigenous population, contextualised against the backdrop of colonial subjugation and the despoilment of their natural environment, at the centre of discussion.

This study builds on the foundations already laid by recent work into the fields of ecocriticism and colonial anxiety. Estok's (2009, 2011, 2018) body of ecocritical work has provided a groundwork which has been added to in recent years by studies such as those by Caesarine et al (2024), Ryan (2020), Dillon (2022), and Tandayu and Wijanarka (2023). This innovative trend has also been evident in the field of colonial anxiety, with recent studies by the likes of Leonard (2023), Brown (2024), Palmer (2022) and Teggin (2022). Where the present study finds its niche and unique approach, however, is in combining thoughts

and tools from both strands of investigation in order to view texts in a novel fashion.

Multatuli's (1860) *Max Havelaar* addresses ecological concerns within the context of Dutch colonial power in the Dutch East Indies, discussing the exploitation of the Javanese population by a combination of both the Dutch colonial officers and the indigenous landed aristocracy. A direct engagement with the process of the exploitation of people and resources can be seen, critically engaging with the cultivation system, and drawing attention to both the stealing of property and the forced labour enacted by the landed aristocracy. The cultivation system, an induced artificial cultivation practice in which a percentage of land was to be used for the cultivation of cash crops such as coffee, or unpaid labour was to be due to the state, is a good example of an ecological transformation wrought by colonial intervention. Cultural transformations, as noted by Izzah, Sulistivono, and Birnie (2020), were of course also tied up in this process. In this study, *The tale of Saidjah and Adinda*, a story told within the main narrative of *Max Havelaar*, will be the centrepiece for dissemination. The narrative follows the protagonist, Saidjah, a young Javanese villager whose family farms the land, and Adinda, his love interest from the same village. *The tale of Saidjah and Adinda*, in a way, revolves around the focal point of the buffalo since it was the confiscation, several times over by the local chief, of Saidjah's family buffalo, which led him to flee his village (Multatuli, 1860).

Methodology

Approaching the concept of colonial anxiety through an interdisciplinary context involving ecocriticism provides us with a unique opportunity to interrogate sources in an innovative fashion. *The Tale of Saidjah and Adinda* within *Max Havelaar* is the case study used in this article. As Estok (2009) has pointed out, ecocriticism, by its nature, fashions itself as distinctly activist. As a result, many of the critics and theoreticians may think of themselves as activists in turn. The existence of an activist element to such scholarship confers a sense of urgency upon the subject matter. Incorporating colonial anxiety, itself a concept from postcolonial thought, brings with it the potential, and indeed the obligation, to consider the two in like fashion. The postcolonial arena has, over a number of years, successfully challenged cultural norms associated with colonialism and empire, drawing attention to the inherent contradiction and injustices which the colonial state promulgated (Estok, 2009). The postcolonial and the ecocritical may, in a fashion, thus be thought of as potentially allied fields. Empty theorizing between the two fields, however, cannot be successful, so there must be a common thread and concept which can marry the two together in specific studies. This, it is opined, can be found within the concept of colonial anxiety for the purposes of the present investigation.

It is important to also underline that while the text discusses ecological themes, it does so within the distinct colonial context in its respective country. This paper will examine the case study through the lens of ecological anxiety and colonial anxiety. The prism of this will be the use of the buffalo as a symbol of ecological disruption and colonial domination. The buffalo has been chosen due to the presence of the animal in the text, its importance in symbolic terms in the narrative, and the vital role which the animal played in indigenous and colonial societies. Multatuli's use of the buffalo as a symbolic element in the narrative also makes the collection of data in the form of literary signifiers a very apt method for identifying colonial and ecological anxiety. Through this study, it is hoped that these twin concepts of ecological imperialism and anxiety may be more fully drawn into the literature surrounding the history of Indonesia and provide the means for future debate.

Results and Discussion

1. Anxiety and the Ruling Class

In taking a literary text such as *Max Havelaar* as our case study, we must acknowledge that it is a work of fiction that we are attempting to incorporate into a wider theoretical discourse. The ecocritical field has been expanding in recent years to incorporate a plethora of related subjects whenever they appear (Kerridge, 1998). As a result, boundaries between disciplines have perhaps become more blurred. This has placed an onus

on the scholar to underline relevance and connectivity, and to provide an objective context. This, in Estok's vision, is essential if ecocriticism is to evolve into anything more than intellectual posturing. The grounding example he has provided is that of Shakespeare's *King Lear*; Estok (2011) argues that whilst the play is indeed about power, wealth, and inheritance, it is no less to do with the dangers of an unpredictable natural world.

A similar case is presented with the example of *Max Havelaar* and its ostensibly anti-colonial theme. Such a stance may be seen interpreted as Multatuli drawing attention to colonial abuses not to seek the abolition of colonialism, but rather as a rallying call for a reinvigorated and reformed colonial state (Zook, 2006). The suffering of the Javanese people under the cultivation system, told via *The Tale of Saidjah and Adinda*, clearly provides signifiers of colonial anxiety through the abuses that the Javanese suffered, but also in respect to ecological anxiety via the environmental damage wrought on the country. The forced cultivation of cash crops under the cultivation system is a powerful example of this since it provides context for the interconnected colonial anxiety as well. In this manner, we seek to grapple with the field's need for connectivity and theoretical clarity. The nascent suggestion of this article is already that *Max Havelaar* presents us, as readers, with a negative vision of empire and the colonial process, somehow designed to elicit our sympathy and revulsion. What is important to bear in mind, as noted above with anti-colonial thought, is that criticism of empire may be carried out for a variety of reasons, not simply moral indignation.

In critiquing *Max Havelaar*, Darren Zook (2006) has observed that Multatuli's understanding of colonial injustice was very closely tied up in his own sense of the injustice done to him in his colonial career. As a result, Multatuli's condemnation of the cultivation system might perhaps be seen in the vein of anti-colonial thought (Zook, 2006). This presupposes that the system that was in place prior to the alleged fostering of abuses, explicitly highlighted by Multatuli, was vastly different and represents a sea-change in terms of structure. This tallies with the introduction of the cultivation system in 1830 (see Fasseur, 1986). As Timothy Silver (2007) has discussed, the great challenge facing historians and scholars of the global south is to develop a meaningful understanding of life before colonialism. To this, one might also add the need to frame it in the relevant context(s) and give agency to the historical actors. This is something that the present article will attempt to grapple with by viewing the situation through the lens of anxiety, both colonial and ecological, thus also providing context for indigenous voices in a debate that all too often only gives reference to the colonisers.

In *Max Havelaar*, buffalo act as a symbolic representation of their local environments, with the subsequent subjugation of that sphere by colonial actors demonstrating both ecological imperialism and affiliated anxiety. This may be colonial, as noted above, or ecological. Ecological anxiety in the present colonial context refers to the psychological distress experienced by individuals due to the breakdown of their established environments by the colonial process. Individual stressors may be the presence of an alien invading force; the introduction of new customs, agricultural practices, or species of flora and fauna; or the breakdown of established societal norms. It is a specific form of anxiety that arises from the recognition, subconsciously or otherwise, of changes wrought on a populace or environment during the colonial encounter. As Daniel Faber (1992) has noted in his discussion of Latin America, the rapid growth of capitalist export agriculture in rich raw-material zones pushed subsistence farming onto marginal, more fragile lands. This is a part of the reason why he highlights the importance of ecological crises being contextualised with modern-day postcolonial events in Central America. A similar method of action was witnessed in the Dutch East Indies, for example, with the above-mentioned cultivation system forcing poor farmers to cultivate cash crops on the most fertile land, whereas basic subsistence farming was carried out in the margins in a secondary fashion to crops such as coffee.

In *Max Havelaar*, and particularly via *The Tale of Saidjah and Adinda*, the pressure exerted on Javanese farmers is exacerbated by

forced unpaid labour and the confiscation of buffalo. In a broader sense, buffalo also play a significant part in representing the Javanese link to their home and way of life. Whereas the buffalo are treated as commodities ripe for pillaging by the local chiefs in *Max Havelaar*, they are an essential tool for farming communities such as the one Saidjah and Adinda belonged to. Without a buffalo to plough the fields, a farming family would be unable to cultivate the land in order to produce sufficient crops to both feed themselves and to submit as taxes. In this way, the loss of a buffalo can be said to represent the loss of the ability to live. In ecological terms, this also disrupts the balance of the Javanese environment in the pursuit of financial gain by the diarchy of the Dutch empire and the indigenous elite landed aristocracy. In drawing attention to the degradation of the ecological setting, Multatuli critiques the destructive consequences of colonial rule and sharply brings into focus the unsustainable nature of the cultivation system.

This unsustainability is something which can be seen particularly well in the below extract, with Multatuli's (1860) narrative also suggesting that in one month, 36 buffalo were stolen for the use of the regent. As can be seen, Javanese farmers are powerless to resist the rapine of their local lords as the system of abuse is portrayed as endemic in Dutch colonial society. This also presents us with a situation of anxiety experienced by the suffering Javanese population; since discussions of colonial anxiety often focus on the coloniser instead of the colonised, this is an opportunity to elaborate on an understudied aspect of the phenomenon. Whereas traditional understandings place colonial anxiety as an interlocutor for colonisers encountering unfamiliar surroundings and suffering from fears of imagined attack from the indigenous populace, with the lack of knowledge in terms of anxiety being the *who* and *when*, this case is rather different. Instead, we can see that the Javanese farmers are distinctly aware of who is stealing from them and at what time of the year it occurs, but it is the *what* and *how* of their future that may act as the object of their anxiety or, indeed, colonial anxiety.

> *And it was not buffaloes alone; nor was buffalo-robbing the main thing. A somewhat less degree of shamelessness is required – above all in India, where state-labour is still lawful – to summon the people unlawfully for unpaid labour, than is necessary to take away property.*
>
> *It is easier to make the population believe that the government wants labour without wishing to pay for it, than it should claim the poor man's buffalo for nothing; and even if the timorous Javanese dared to investigate whether the statute-labour required of him agreed with the regulations on the subject, even then it would be impossible to succeed, as the one had nothing to do with the other, and he cannot therefore calculate whether the fixed number of persons has not been exceeded ten or fifty times.* Multatuli (1860, p. 301).

This may be readily understood in terms of what they will do to secure enough food and how they will provide for their families. This element of uncertainty, what we call *the lack* in Lacanian (2016) terms, satisfies the criteria for a case of anxiety in structural terms. By extension, through discussion in this study, we may term this also as colonial anxiety. However, since we are also speaking of the wholesale change of a nation's agricultural practices and control of resources, it appears that another moniker may be applied; namely, ecological anxiety. Recent debates have predominantly applied this concept in modern contexts of uncertainty, guilt, and loss due to climate change and the irreversible damage wrought on our planet (see, e.g., Dodds, 2021; Kurth & Pihkala, 2022). Nevertheless, the term should not be understood as absolutely fixed in definition. Instead, this study sees the term as an understanding of ecological foundations being in the process of collapse. Moreover, it is seen as a concept which can be felt at the local and global levels.

Taking our example of the Dutch cultivation system, it may be said that the forced cultivation of cash crops and the confiscation of draught animals contributed to the breakdown of established agricultural practices and necessitated the usage of previously uncultivated or less suitable lands.

Long-term alterations to soil conditions and environmental variables, as noted by Dazzi and Lo Papa (2015), are also considerations in terms of the ecological damage wrought by such anthropogenic activity (see also Indriyanto, 2023). This in turn connects to the anthropogenic paradigm, emphasising that advances in science, technology, and human activity have caused irreversible transformations to the natural world. As a result, humanity has positioned itself, willingly or not, as a species which has had a transformative impact on a global scale (see Caracciolo, 2022; O'Riordan, 2007).

The specific anxiety suffered may be best contextualised by differentiating the ruling and labouring classes. The wealthy elite, in this case the colonial administrators and indigenous chiefs, had, much like in our modern times, scant regard for the ecological damage caused by their actions and had a far greater impact upon the environment than the populace at large via their actions. This is similar to the present day, with the ultra-wealthy and powerful often accounting for many times the carbon footprint of the less affluent (Barros & Wilk, 2021). They flourished and became wealthy, so there was no need to suffer anxiety because of it. Conversely, if we take the labouring classes next, a great deal of anxiety may be perceived due to the inextricable connection between their environment and their future prosperity. Again, in considering the present day, those most concerned about the effects of ecological damage are those whose livelihoods depend on it, as well as the young who will shoulder the consequences in the future (Pereira & Freire, 2021). This is something which Multatuli has captured particularly well in the below excerpt. The description is of a father brought to despair at the realisation that he can no longer provide for his family and plagued by the knowledge that he also has no recourse to seek justice for the crime. There is an intersection here between the concepts of colonial and ecological anxiety, with the two independent concepts seemingly combining to act in unison upon the farmer and his family.

> *Yet my confidence in your sympathy with the Javanese does not go so far as to make me imagine when I tell you how the last buffalo has been carried off from the enclosure, in broad daylight, without fear, under protection of Dutch power, when I cause the cattle to be followed by the owner and his weeping children, and make him sit down upon the steps of the robber's house, speechless and senseless, absorbed in sorrow to be chased away with out rage and disdain, menaced with stripes and prison…* Multatuli (1860, pp. 308–309).

In terms of this study's aim of tackling the dichotomy of colonial and environmental anxiety in empire, one of the most potent examples can be found in the young Saidjah's relationship(s) with the family's buffalo. Saidjah is presented as having a natural gift in working with buffalo, symbolising his strong ties to the land and his natural environment. This is very well demonstrated in the next excerpt, whereby Saidjah befriends his family's new buffalo following the seizure of the former animal. Already, the fact that this is a replacement buffalo after theft points to the abuses of the colonial state, discussed above. Saidjah's distress at the loss of the former buffalo and his supposed superior ability to befriend buffalo, in comparison to the other children of the village, can be seen as a symbol used by Multatuli to tie the fate of Saidjah to that of the surrounding environment. It is a method designed to elicit the sympathy of the reader and to make the point that there can be no profit for the Dutch in Java if rural communities are driven to destitution. As Feenberg (1997) has highlighted, this was also an attempt to justify his own former criticism of the Dutch colonial service, as *Max Havelaar* is loaded with digressions from the central plot about Dutch colonial policy.

The subject, Saidjah, is a child, suggesting innocence, which also serves to draw orientalist comparisons between East and West, particularly with regard to manufactured discourses designed to control narratives (Said, 1979). In this case, the false narrative is that all Javanese were rural dwellers dependent on subsistence farming. The ability of Saidjah to control the movements of the buffalo with a single finger, combined with his collaboration with it to work the land, points to a close affinity with nature. When this affinity is sundered, as in the

case of the buffalo being stolen, the established discourse in his worldview is shattered and anxiety forms in the slippage that emerged. Ironically, this is the same theoretical action that occurs in the case of orientalist discourses. The stereotype is the best example of this, with anxiety occurring between the creation of knowledge as authority and the breakdown of that authority to adequately explain or categorise the other. Every time the other is encountered and the supposed knowledge put to the test, and failed, the lack (of knowledge) on the part of the subject becomes apparent and anxiety can enter (Thakur, 2013).

> *Saidjah, who was then about seven years old, soon made friends with the new buffalo. It is not without meaning that I say "made friends", for it is indeed touching to see how the karbo is attached to the little boy who watches over and feeds him. The large, strong animal bends its heavy head to the right, to the left, or downwards, just as the pressure of the child's finger, which he knows and understands, directs.* Multatuli (1860, p. 321).

The below excerpt once again leans into the supposed connection between Saidjah, his childlike innocence, and the natural environment. He is described as working in tandem with the buffalo to cultivate the earth, as his contemporaries do, but he seemingly also has a special ability and link to the animal. Saidjah, in Multatuli's telling, knew how to 'speak' to the buffalo in order to coax the best possible service out of it. The suggestion of a natural bond to animals and the environment draws the comparison of Saidjah with an imagined orientalised understanding of the Javanese being a primarily rural and agricultural people who need protecting. This is another avenue for the fabricated discourse made by assumed knowledge to dominate the colonised (Said, 1979). It is a discourse aimed at making the reader feel a paternalistic duty towards children such as Saidjah, thereby also justifying the Dutch presence in Java as part of the wider so-called "civilising mission" (Kroeze, 2011, p. 176). In terms of the literary narrative, this presentation of rural innocence may also be seen as Multatuli laying the groundwork for the disaster which follows later in the text; namely, the murders of Saidjah and Adinda.

> *Such a friendship little Saidjah had soon been able to make with the new-comer, and it seemed as if the encouraging voice of the child gave still more strength to the heavy shoulders of the strong animal, when it tore open the stiff clay and traced its way in deep sharp furrows…But I believe that the buffalo of Saidjah was best of all; perhaps because its master knew better than any one else how to speak to the animal, and buffaloes are very sensible to kind words.* Multatuli (1860, p. 321).

Multatuli's aim in composing *Max Havelaar* was not, it must be remembered, a wholly benevolent one, with his anti-colonial stance amounting to a call for a renewed and reinvigorated colonial state (Zook, 2006). The anxiety he hoped to elicit was that of his readers in Holland, hoping that they would recognise the injustice and ecological damage being wrought and that it would lead them to act in pushing for a reformed colonial state. Crucially for this study, however, is the consideration that characters such as Saidjah and Adinda, and the people they represent, also have agency of their own and could also suffer from colonial anxiety. The volatile nature of colonial anxiety allows it to be presented in several different ways and upon both the coloniser and the colonised, drawing on the work of Albert Memmi (2021). It is a phenomenon that is strongly tied up in transformation; the individual or subject seeks stability and to understand of their surroundings, yet anxiety, by its definition, occurs at the point of acknowledging a lack, which in turn transforms the situation and comprehension. That is when the specific object of anxiety reveals itself and the full form of anxiety can take root.

This section has looked at the underpinning problem of the cultivation system and the abuses of the ruling classes, specifically through the confiscation of buffalo. This has been contextualised with the ecological importance and connection of the Javanese people, most notably Saidjah, to their land and environment, foreshadowing the colonial and ecological anxiety which could

emerge. The following section will take these concepts a step further and interrogate the narrative and phenomena in conjunction with the transformative nature of ecological imperialism and the resulting anxiety.

2. Ecological Imperialism and Colonial Anxiety

Ecological imperialism, following Oppermann's (2007) definition, can be defined as "the systematic exploitation and re-shaping of local ecosystems of the peripheries for the economic welfare of the centre" (p. 181; see also Foster & Clark, 2004). By introducing the concept of ecological imperialism into the discussion, we are also thus incorporating the niche strand of historical investigation known as environmental history. This is well suited to the present study since, as Tom Griffiths (2017) has noted, environmental historians and their studies often work in interdisciplinary settings, allowing for radical perspectives in debates which tend to be dominated by natural and social sciences. This, in turn, allows the scholar to engage with a society's perception of self and the pivotal relationship between people and the places that they inhabit (Rothman, 2002). There is a potential weakness, however, if the people under discussion are not given proper agency in that discussion. This is something that Gregory Maddox (2018) has also observed in terms of environmental history categorising Africans as "indigenous people," thus degrading them and treating them as part of nature. In turn, this enacts an assumption of the process of othering whereby the creation of a discourse surrounding "knowledge" of the colonised other is created by the European colonisers (Thakur, 2012). This study recognises this issue and seeks to provide indigenous peoples with agency in such discussions, specifically by elaborating upon colonial and ecological anxiety from their perspective rather than the commonly used European standpoint.

In his critique of Joachim Radkau, J. R. McNeill (2013) highlights that Radkau made the point that Crosby's *Ecological Imperialism* fails to appreciate reciprocal impacts; for example, potatoes and corn made their way to Europe. This is an apt point to have made, and it is also one which ties into the transit of people themselves suffering from colonial anxiety. This is ably demonstrated in Michael Fisher's (2006) *Counterflows to Colonialism*, in which he details the experience and fortunes of individuals travelling from the colonies to the metropolis. With this in mind, we must consider that the process of colonisation and empire had an impact on both the coloniser and the colonised, returning to the work of Memmi (2021). When discussing the concepts of colonial and ecological anxiety in tandem, there is also a case to be made for the acknowledgement of Estok's (2018) ecophobia argument. This, as noted above, may be taken as a recognisable contempt for the natural world, with the root cause(s) appearing on a spectrum. The desire of humanity to control and manipulate nature, similar to the desecration of colonies and their environments, is in itself contained in a symbolic structure held by the dominant party.

Just as Thakur has interpreted Bhabha's work to demonstrate how stereotypes became symbolic discourses to mask colonial anxieties, so too has Western culture sought to position itself as having divine ordination and mastery over nature (Estok, 2009). The latter, of course, is a thinly veiled narrative, as Neil Levy (1999) has pointed out, since humans are not in control of the non-human world and cannot predict its actions with any certainty. Herein lies the common link between our twin concepts: just as Europeans created negative stereotypes about indigenous peoples to give themselves cultural stability, they also deluded themselves into thinking that they were masters of the surrounding environment. Both discourses served to mask Europeans' concerns, and both discourses led to a specific form of anxiety when truth was acknowledged and the symbolic discourse was disproven. Again, returning to Estok's (2009) thinking, the advancement of ecocritical thought and its connections to the wider world is dependent on its theorists recognising and making an effort to conduct comparative studies and seeking to innovate.

The tale of Saidjah and Adinda portrays the tragic consequences of the cultivation system and the exploitative process of Dutch colonialism upon the Javanese people and

land. Against the backdrop of Dutch colonial rule and the cultivation system, the reader is introduced to the realities of colonial exploitation. For the purposes of this section, we shall focus on the transformative nature of the process on Saidjah as he strives to secure enough wealth to marry his love, Adinda. Buffalo again play a key part of this narrative since Saidjah's family had lost three of them to the local lord's "taxation." This amounts to a loss of status and prosperity for the family, causing Saidjah's father to flee the district in search of an escape. Effectively, he is driven away due to his anxiety at not being able to support his family.

Recognising that he cannot marry Adinda without the means to support them both, Saidjah ventures to Batavia to make his fortune. Saidjah does this with the promise that he will return to and marry Adinda. This mission, however, has a twofold transformative aspect. First, the loss of his home and security represents an anxiety caused by the aggressive extraction of the colonial state. On this point, the colonial state's actions were facilitated by both the colonial officials and the indigenous landed aristocracy. Second, the transformation that Saidjah personally undergoes as a member of a household staff in Batavia. This transformation ensures the alteration from rural father's son to urban tertiary worker, facilitating a change in prosperity as well as his environmental norm. Saidjah's situation is thus a point of intersection for the colonial and environmental forms of anxiety. This is further connected to wider theories of human security, particularly in colonial and postcolonial settings (see Eyita-Okon, 2022).

The environmental connotation of Saidjah's plan and circumstances is reinforced through two key ways in the narrative. First, his explicit intention to save enough money working as a carriage boy in a Batavia household to purchase two buffalo. Again, the economic and societal importance of the buffalo is highlighted, with ownership of two buffalo being a greater degree of wealth than his father had. Second, the symbolic nature of Saidjah's promise, as seen below. As we can see, Saidjah promises to reunite with Adinda under a specific ketapan tree on the outskirts of their village. The counting of lunar cycles, the use of notches cut on a rice block, and the symbolic meeting place at the heart of their natural environment speak to the great importance of the land and Javanese ecology. Most importantly, of course, is that Saidjah intends to return to this rural environment after his time in the urban colonial hub of Batavia, pointing to his true identity. Saidjah's treasuring of the flower which Adinda gave him upon his departure again points to the importance of nature in their relationship. The anxiety to be attributed in this case is clear, with his removal to the city and his hopes for an agricultural future with Adinda very much in focus.

> *Count the moons; I shall stay away three times twelve moons…this moon not included…See, Adinda, at every new moon, cut a notch in your rice block. When you have cut three times twelve lines, I will be under the Ketapan the next day,…do you promise to be there?* Multatuli (1860, p. 329).

As it transpires, Saidjah finds employment in Batavia and grows to be well-liked by his employer, saving enough money to buy three buffalo in the process. After three years pass, Saidjah leaves his employer to return to Adinda and to the ketapan tree. Upon returning to his village and waiting under the ketapan tree, Saidjah recalls the history of his locality and sings of nature and Adinda. In the below excerpt, we can see the vision of his love and his understanding of the natural environment as very closely linked. Saidjah's journey home also causes him to consider what would have become of Adinda if the buffalo had not saved him from a tiger when he was a child. Adinda and nature are bound into one meaning for Saidjah in this respect, as evidenced by "All that his senses could observe was called Adinda" (p. 341), and Multatuli uses this as a vehicle for the promulgation of his anti-colonial discourse.

> *He sat down at the foot of the 'Ketapan', and his eyes wandered over the scenery. Nature smiled at him, and seemed to welcome him as a mother welcoming the return of her child, and as she pictures her joy by voluntary remembrance of past grief, when*

> *showing what she has preserved as a keepsake during her absence….But his eyes or his thoughts might wander as they pleased, yet his looks and longings always reverted to the path which leads from Badoer to the Ketapan tree. All that his senses could observe was called Adinda…* Multatuli (1860, p. 341).

The buffalo, yet again, is to be a prominent signifier when Saidjah discovers that Adinda's father's buffalo has been confiscated, leaving their family destitute and forced to flee the district. Saidjah's father had also chosen to flee the district years before when his family's buffalo had been confiscated. This again strongly links buffalo to the land, the well-being of the environment, and the realities of colonial rule. Tales of the destitute and dispossessed fleeing to the forests and to nature to escape the brutality of colonial regimes are not uncommon, and there are historical examples from across geopolitical zones and eras. Sumit Guha (1999) has discussed this particularly well in the context of forest communities in South Asia, demonstrating the changing reality for both peoples and the environment from the early medieval era to the modern day. This connection to the forests and nature is also represented in José Rizal's (2006) *Noli Me Tangere*, with the insurgency and the character Elías operating from the hills and forests.

Multatuli's narrative then draws attention to an ongoing insurgency at the time of Saidjah's grief, encouraging the reader to link the taking of buffalo and the abuse of farmers to inevitable rebellion. As a result of witnessing the aftermath of battle, with his countrymen murdered and forced at bayonet-point into a burning house, and witnessing the mutilated corpse of Adinda, Saidjah confronts the Dutch soldiers and forces himself onto their bayonets to die. Seemingly, the loss of his love, his environment, and the consistency that these bestowed, also leads to a lack of desire to live. The aftermath of the massacre is ironically recorded by Multatuli below. This is important in terms of both the ecological and governance aspects of the colonial state since the Dutch were in Java to make a profit and to extract raw materials first and foremost. Without peace and the effective cultivation of crops, there could be no profit for the Dutch. This was Multatuli's aim, causing his readers to consider his anti-colonial sentiments and lend credence to his desire for a reformed and strengthened state in the Dutch East Indies (Zook, 2006). By suggesting that the king, the fount of law and order, was being misled by his governors and councillors, Multatuli is at once both denouncing corruption and imploring the king to order reform governance and signal an end to the cultivation system.

> *A little time afterwards there was much rejoicing at Batavia for the new victory, which so added to the laurels of the Dutch-Indian army. And the Governor wrote that tranquillity had been restored in the Lampoons; the King of Holland, enlightened by his statesmen, again rewarded so much heroism with many orders of knighthood.* Multatuli (1860, p. 350).

Conclusion

The investigation of a literary source such as *The Tale of Saidjah and Adinda*, found in Multatuli's (1860) *Max Havelaar*, allows us to interrogate ideas such as colonial and ecological anxiety in innovative ways. It provides a space for the theoretical experimentation that can be so valuable to the ecocritical field, yet it also serves to act as a guardrail and prevent the so-called fuzziness of the ecocritical movement from creeping in. The use of a well-known historical text in *Max Havelaar*, and the established theory of colonial anxiety from the postcolonial field, also give us sufficient cultural and historical context to develop new thought patterns or view our subject matter through a more focused lens. Of particular interest to this study, of course, have been the concepts of ecological imperialism and colonial anxiety. The central premise has been that they are potentially allied fields in discussing subject matter; this, we have seen used in the discussion of the environmental and interpersonal tragedies which befall Saidjah and Adinda.

As has been discussed throughout this piece, the buffalo is a prominent signifier in the discourse. This is because Multatuli's narrative of *The Tale of Saidjah and Adinda*, in many

ways, hinges on the idea of the buffalo as a visual signifier to tie his ideas together. Though the context of the cultivation system is incredibly complex, and this case study involving buffalo comes nowhere near to giving it a proper evaluation, the animal has nevertheless been effectively used by Multatuli as a signifier in the foreshadowed community and environmental collapse. This is particularly linked to Multatuli's own anti-colonial standpoint, lobbying for a reformed and reinvigorated colonial state. The collapse of Saidjah and Adinda's village environment also gives rise to another key point; namely, it is their village. Despite being fictional characters, it is important to bear in mind that they, and particularly the people they represent who suffered under the cultivation system, have an agency of their own. This is something that the present study has been acutely aware of, with the element of colonial anxiety studied focusing on the indigenous population rather than the European colonial servants.

It must also be highlighted that this study has proceeded with the explicit aim of drawing Indonesia more firmly into active debates on both colonial anxiety and ecological imperialism. Colonial anxiety, viewed through the European perspective, is most often considered in the British and French colonial empires for South Asia and North Africa. Not only can that field of scholarship be advanced by incorporating indigenous voices more fully, but also by giving a voice to oft-overlooked countries such as Indonesia. In a similar vein, the integration of Indonesia and Indonesian history into ecocritical discourses of empire, dominated by American examples from the Crosby academic lineage for so long, can provide new insights and further exciting avenues of investigation. It is hoped that this study, and others like it, can contribute to the widening debate in the ecocritical and postcolonial fields, opening up new research possibilities and giving voice to otherwise silent sources and groupings.

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