

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Nusantara (Indonesia) is known as the largest archipelago in the world which lies across the Equator and spans a distance equivalent to one-eighth of the Earth's circumference. Its equatorial position made Indonesia is covered by primary rainforests with a rich natural history. This circumstance provides optimum climatic conditions and geological feature that support floral species of tropical origins which includes all of the major spices such as pepper, capsicum, vanilla, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, and ginger. Therefore, Indonesia had been well known as the Spice Islands since thousands of years ago (Erwidodo, 2007). Moreover, located between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, Indonesia is considered as a strategic location for the trade route (Lauder & Lauder, 2016). Trading routes to and from Indonesia's Spices Islands are known by many names, namely the Spice Trail, the Spice Routes, or the Maritime Silk Road (Taufik, 2020). This condition of Indonesian wealth of spices and its strategic location for trade route then attracted western explorers' attention to come to visit Indonesia in which later became the root of colonialism.

Attracted to the spices, especially nutmeg, which was believed to cure the "sweating sickness" -the plague, western nations such as Portuguese, Dutch, and English came to settle in and possess Indonesia (Milton, 1999). The healing properties, unique tastes and aromas, as well as other benefits, and the high

demand and the price of spice commodity during 16th century in Europe became the reasons of why spices have been sought after worldwide (Taufik, 2020). The initial spice race had begun as Curtin (1984) wrote that in the 15th and 16th centuries, Europe was experiencing a period of maritime revolution. Western nations competed with each other in studying maritime strategy to find new areas to implement their mission to dominate the world's trade monopoly which known as gold, glory, and gospel. As Wratsangka (2020) stated, during the middle ages, spice trade powered global economy since it was a crucial and profitable commodity among European countries which also ruled the social classes. In this term, only people who belong to high society can afford the spices. This condition made Europe dreamed to find the spice resource.

From the late 1400s to the mid-to late 1900s, Murrey (2020) stated that European colonialism refers to the various formula of territorial domination upon non-European people as a result of European powers. Countries such as Belgium, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Russia, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, and the Netherlands colonized most of Africa, the Americas, Asia, Oceania, Middle East, and the Arctic. This colonialism is shaped by frictions and power struggles between European powers as well as colonial subjects to control over territory, markets, labour, and ideology.

For hundreds of years across the world, western colonialism was objectively harmful and also subjectively illegitimate (Gilley, 2017). Said (1979) stated, "It is Europe that articulates the Orient; this articulation is the prerogative, not of a puppet master, but of a genuine creator, whose life-giving power

represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries.” Thus, in order to make colonialism works, western nations practiced brutality, oppressed the indigenous people, or even slaughtered their subordinate to create Eurocentric belief that western is superior and most powerful nations while the rest of the world is inferior (Spivak, 1988).

Eurocentrism contains a binary way of thinking which constructs a white, progressive, modern, and civilised European identity and contrast it to a black/indigenous, underdeveloped, traditional, and barbarian Other in the colonies (Franzki, 2012). Eurocentrism shapes the production of knowledge and its proliferation beyond Europe and the western hemisphere. European experience is declared to be universally valid and applicable, independence of place (Chakrabarty, 2000). In brief, Eurocentrism is a concept about upholding power structures that legitimatise the devaluation of ways of living, belief, and attitude, and the oppression of non-European people who do not conform to European norms and ideals.

One of substantial critiques of Eurocentrism is Edward Said. Said (1979) focused on the production of Eurocentric knowledge through Europe’s encounter with and construction of the Orient as distinct entity. Said (1979) coined the term Orientalism to describe a concept constructed by the West to differ themselves from the East. Orientalism constructs binary oppositions between the Orient and the Occident, where the Occident or the West support the idea of western position as the superior race and create an image that the Occident is in power (Said, 1979). In *Orientalism*, Said (1979) showed how certain stereotypes about East and

the Orient are expressed. The West is considered as a place of scientific progress and development, while the Orient was deemed remote, unchanging, primitive, or backward. The Orient is strange, fantastic, bizarre, while Occident was rational, sensible, and familiar (Praveen, 2016). Thus, all of the influences constitutes acts of oppression and were not simply one-way, but cross-cultural in the life of the oppressed people.

Egan (2011) delivered four focused readings of the presence of Eastern “issues, ideas, and images” in poems by Anne Bradstreet and James Kirkpatrick, and in oriental tales penned by Benjamin Franklin and Edgar Allan Poe. He charted how these writers fantasized a “figurative kinship” with the East through fabrications of oriental gentility and refinement that Americans sought to emulate as distinctive markers of their aspirations for cosmopolitan worldliness. It is found that the East formed a “symbolic spatial economy” that American writers deployed to address anxieties about being peripheral and inferior to a world older and more civilized than either America or Europe.

Shabanirad & Marandi (2015) found that George Orwell’s *Burmese Days* shows how Orwell repudiated his own views and treats foreigners as “Others”. The portrayal of Oriental female subjects shows Orwell’s traditional view of a European middle-class man towards Oriental women. Orwell as a European writer follows the tradition of portraying Oriental women as mistresses and sexual objects, submissive and voiceless.

Shafie & Aljohani (2019) analysed orientalism in Elsa Marston’s stories, *Santa Claus in Baghdad* and *Other Stories about Teens in the Arab World*. The

analysis of both stories confirms that Arab and city families are classified based on culture, social class, and education. The city families are represented as civilized, rational, and developed. Their advancement is attributed to their interaction with the western society, which reflects the West's superiority over the East. In contrast, the village families who remain loyal to their native culture and lack connection to the West are represented as uncivilized, irrational, and undeveloped. Giving such extreme oppositions indicate that the Orient has no middle grounds. The analysis further engages the author's use of language, which implies a negative attitude towards Jordanian and Egyptian villagers.

In the study of West vs. East in post colonialism, Spivak (1988) attacked the Eurocentric attitude of the West. Spivak joined Said in order to criticize the way western writers represented the third world (subaltern) in their discourse (Praveen, 2016). Spivak (1988) borrowed and used the term Subaltern from Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, which means 'of the lower rank'. In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", she exposes the irony that the subalterns have awakened to a consciousness of their own rights by making practical utterances against unjust domination and inequality.

Spivak's argument in her post-colonial theory of the subaltern is fundamentally predicated on the margin which she refers to as the silenced centre. Spivak (1988) viewed that subalterns are marginalised people who have no voice, people who find it difficult to speak. She argues that subaltern is oppressed and divided. Spivak (1988) observed the fate of the subaltern subject and how it can be destroyed by the politics of representation. Since representation can be made

by only privileged people in the society, effective representation of the subaltern subject can be a futile venture. This will always keep the subaltern in the terrain of margin, the silent centre, the centre of voicelessness.

In studying Spivak's subaltern, Ross (2010) found that Indian women such as Daisy in R. K. Narayan's *The Pointer of Signs* seem unavoidably housebound. Narayan describes the women at the lawyer's house as hidden away: 'several women emerged from various corners of the house'. Similarly, Sohini in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, although not housebound, she makes the fire, collects water, and cooks. Just as the woman is unable to escape the expectation of their gender, so too is the untouchable unable to escape his caste, it being acquired at birth and non-changeable making them as the subaltern.

Bahardur (2017) studied subalternity in three Indonesian novels such as *Orang-orang Blanti* by Wisran Hadi, *Maya* by Ayu Utami, and *Gadis Pantai* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. It is found that colonialism caused indigenous women experienced subalternity. The subalternity is implemented through the marginalization, impoverishment, stereotyping, and sexual harassment. However, they fight this subalternity by maintaining the traditional and cultural values through modern education.

Using the Spivakian logic to study *Hard Ground* by Ahmed Yerima, *Dance on his Grave* by Barclays Ayakoroma, and *Sweet Revenge* by Irene Salam, Binebai (2015) found that the texts expressed voice and also failed to speak for the subaltern, which is the silent centre despite their privileged position as writers who speak for the society. The suppression of women's voice in *Dance on his*

Grave by Barclays Ayakoroma and the voice of the freedom seeking Niger Delta people in Yerima's *Hard Ground* are clear cases of voice suppression. Irene Salami, who is a female dramatist, wrote in her text *Sweet Revenge* to restore the dignity of the African woman. She salvaged the Africa woman from patriarchal subjugation, made her overcome her frustrations and trials, gave her a new image and voice which ended her subalternity in a male dominated world.

In the book entitled *Nathaniel's Nutmeg* written by Giles Milton, Eurocentrism is reflected by the way of how Dutch and English's Trade Company, namely East India Company and Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie or known as VOC, oppressed and marginalized the indigenous people as their subaltern. The book tells a journey of how Dutch and English tried to dominate the world's spice trade and colonized Indonesia as the source of the spices. Milton (1999) described how Dutch and English competed with each other to take over Run Island. Moreover, the book also shows what Dutch and English have done to some regions in Indonesia such as Banda, Banten, Batavia, and Java.

Throughout the book, Dutch and English oppressed the indigenous people to work tirelessly, dredged their natural resources, and marginalized their existence. It is narrated that although the English seemed to treat their colonized better than the Dutch, the Dutch and English had caused the indigenous people to suffer in their homeland. Milton (1999) showed that the Dutch and English tend to describe the East as their subordinate by using the word peevish, preserve, diffident, and perfidious people. It is certainly a practice of how they planted Eurocentrism to their subordinate (the East).

Although the practice of colonialism is ended, the effects of colonialism still linger in the live after that. Therefore, this book is important to be studied as Farid (2020), the director general of culture of Ministry Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, said that the topic of colonialism should not be ignored because it is important to remember that spices existed before colonialism. Moreover, he also added that we have to find a way to face the painful past and sublimate it. All of the suffering, bitter experiences, and stories full of losses should become something useful.

Differing from several previous studies above, this study analyses how Dutch and English as the West Country colonized Indonesia as the East and their subordinate from the postcolonial perspective. The concept of Said's orientalism and Spivak's subaltern is used to uncover the application of Eurocentrism and the oppression and marginalization of indigenous people as its effect on being a subaltern.

1.2 Research Question

How does Eurocentrism of Dutch and English oppress and marginalize the indigenous people of Banten, Bali, Banda, Run, Ai, Rozengain, Ambon, Ternate, Tidore, and also southern Africa and Japan as the subaltern?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to analyse how Dutch and English as the West Country colonize the East as their subordinate from the postcolonial perspective. The

concept of Said's orientalism and Spivak's subaltern is used to uncover the oppression and marginalization of indigenous people as the effect of Eurocentrism and subalternity.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on words, clauses, phrases, and sentences that display the Eurocentrism and subalternity utilising Said's orientalism and Spivak's subaltern concept to uncover the oppression and marginalization of indigenous people in Milton's *Nathaniel's Nutmeg*.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study aims to contribute to postcolonial studies, specifically in the discussion of orientalism and subaltern concept. This study is also expected to give an example of the application of Said's orientalism and Spivak's subaltern concept in academic writing.