
If I Was The Director: Breaking the Eurocentric in Postcolonialism and Transnational of Film *De Oost* (*The East*)

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Abstract

De Oost was a film about the war in Indonesia between Netherlands and Indonesia after World War II created by Holland's Director. This film brings issues about the harmful impact of battle like a usual film with genre postcolonialism or war with some adding stories on romance and betrayal. The director of *De Oost*, uses his white perspective to explore the war experience in a colonized country. He released this film in 2020 and screened at the Netherland Film Festival, also taken by OTT Prime Video and MolaTV to screening internationally. Sadly we think the plot and the execution do not tell us how the actual war between Indonesia and the Netherlands happened in the past. Also, there is much stereotyping about how Western and Europe see Indonesia. The different viewpoints become our base problem in starting this research. By content analysis, I will describe how *De Oost* theoretically linked to Postcolonialism and Transnational critic's perspective in the twenties century when the migration of content cinema was effortless and how it can influence the global audience in creating their view of colonialism that happened in Indonesia and how diasporic society affect the process production until the meaning framing of the film.

Keywords: *De Oost*, Film, Transnationalism, Postcolonialism

Abstrak

De Oost adalah film tentang perang di Indonesia antara Belanda dan Indonesia setelah Perang Dunia II yang dibuat oleh sutradara dari Belanda. Film ini mengangkat isu tentang dampak buruk pertempuran seperti biasanya film dengan genre postkolonialisme atau perang dengan beberapa tambahan cerita tentang romansa dan pengkhianatan. Sutradara *De Oost*, menggunakan perspektif kulit putihnya untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman perang di negara terjajah. Dia merilis film ini pada tahun 2020 dan diputar di Netherland Film Festival, juga diambil oleh OTT Prime Video dan MolaTV untuk diputar secara internasional. Sayangnya menurut saya plot dan eksekusinya tidak memberi tahu kita bagaimana sebenarnya perang antara Indonesia dan Belanda terjadi di masa lalu. Juga, ada banyak stereotip tentang bagaimana Barat dan Eropa melihat Indonesia. Sudut pandang yang berbeda menjadi dasar permasalahan saya dalam memulai penelitian ini. Melalui analisis isi, saya akan memaparkan bagaimana *De Oost* secara teoritis terkait dengan perspektif Postkolonialisme dan kritik Transnasional di abad ke-20 ketika migrasi konten sinema dapat dilakukan dengan mudah dan bagaimana hal itu dapat mempengaruhi khalayak global dalam membentuk pandangan mereka tentang kolonialisme yang terjadi di Indonesia dan bagaimana masyarakat diaspora mempengaruhi proses produksi hingga pembedakan makna film.

Kata Kunci: *De Oost*, Film, Transnasionalisme, Poskolonialisme

INTRODUCTION

I was watching a film about war in Indonesia after World War II created by Holland's director, and I was stunned by how his film used a white perspective from the opening until I finished it in my spare time 2 hours. *De Oost* (*The East*) is a film directed by *Jim Taihuttu*, a born and raised Holland director film and music DJ who was originally a Maluku descendant. He released this film in 2020 and screened at Netherland Film Festival, also taken by OTT Prime Video and Mola TV to screening internationally. *De Oost* gives the audience the harmful impact of war wherever you are and what motive you have at first.

Sadly, the plot and the execution do not tell us how the actual war between Indonesia and The Netherlands happened in the past. Also, there is so much stereotyping about how Indonesia is seen by Western or Europe as the first country that does not go along with how theoretically postcolonialism and transnationalism tell the scholar to have perspective about literature or cinema bringing issues about the war that are related to the postcolonial era. This research aims to explain how postcolonialism and transnationalism are linked and presented in *De Oost* Film without using a western viewpoint.

Before we talk about *De Oost*, at first postcolonial critics come from the concept of global relations that has gone too radical (Dirlik, 1997), postcolonial is closely related to history because it is the era or time when an enormous country or first world colonized a country. This means that postcolonialism intersects with Marxism about how capital and class created and impacted the relationship between two countries colonizing and colonized, albeit postcolonialism does not talk specifically about Marxism in its theory.

Scholars need help mapping postcolonialism from a global perspective because it seems too big a definition if we talk only about the relationship between the two countries. It will apply to all societies who have experienced colonialism from Africa, even until the United States, because the British also colonized the US before the US became the first world country.

METHODS

Film *De Oost* become an interesting object to explore because it bring a postcolonialism genre about Indonesian war when the director is a diaspora from Indonesia that was born and grow in the Netherlands. The research was conducted by content analysis which is not a standardized instrument that always remains the same, it must be fitted to suit the particular object or material in question and constructed especially for the issue at handwhere.

The definition of content-analytical units should in principle be retained also in qualitative analysis. This entails deciding in advance how the material is to be approached, which parts are to be analyzed in what sequence, what conditions must be obtained in order for an encoding to be carried out. In the process of inductive category formation it can be useful to keep such content-analytical units very open-ended (Mayring, 2014).

Qualitative content analysis is one of some qualitative methods that has function to interpreting the meaning and analyzing data (Schreier, 2012), a prerequisite for successful content analysis is that data can be reduced to concepts that describe the research phenomenon . In qualitative content analysis, the abstraction process is the stage during which concepts are created. Usually, the aspect can be described, but it also depends on the researcher's insight so it may lead to very difficult to describe to others (Elo & Kyngas, 2008), (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

Even though content analysis mainly talks about text analysis, I explored more the definition of text to the extent of how this film visual can be interpreted as text. The visual part that is coding into text is the *mise en scene* or all of the aspects that are recorded by the camera visually like cinematography, color grading, shots, etc. Besides the visual aspect that has been coded into text and interpreted to define the meaning of the visual in the communication context, I also add the textual content through the dialogue or script. All the content above, visual and textual, is analyzed scene by scene about the meaning and the construction delivered by film *The East*. After that, I described the result in this paper linked

with postcolonialism and transnationalism theory.

RESULTS

Postcolonialism in Film

By title, *De Oost* (The East) points out how the director views Indonesia as an exotic object or area with little information. Somewhere far from the west, where the director was living, and when the familiar western scholar defined something else from the West as an area that did not have civilization or culture.

Postcolonial studies usually revolved around two complementary approaches. The first is understanding how empire constructed external territories as objects of knowledge to be explored, investigated, and ultimately conquered. Second, studying how colonized and subaltern classes disrupted colonial discourse and wrote back against the empire, creating a complex, hybridized culture. Colonial history has been defined by the clashes between multiple competing empires and the local populations who have attempted to manipulate or been trampled by these conflicts (Joyce, 2018).

In the first scene, *De Oost* plays a man named Johan de Vries sitting on a ship where going to Hindia (Indonesia) together with another army from the Netherlands, and he is told by them how to behave in a tropical country that has a very different culture and nature from their home in Netherland. They also said that the humidity in Hindia is out of the rationality they can think of, for sure not as good as their native climate. For the first time, we offered the complex emotions on de Vriest's face when he thinks he will do something practical to help Hindia after colonialization by Japan.

This narration about how the Netherlands come to Hindia to help the locals is repeated in many scenes, like when the director plays the prayer scene; the narration goes on.

“Our father who is in heaven”
“Your kingdom comes, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”
“Give us the daily bread.”
“and forgive me for our sins.”
“Because we forgive them who offend us.”

“We ask for your strength to carry out our task.”

“We are here to help Christians and idol worshippers.”



Figure 1. Screenshot worship scene

The narration on their want to help Indonesia is also portrayed in a scene where de Vriest interrogates the farmer and says he wants to help them catch the rebel and thief who terrorize people in a village in Semarang.



Figure 2. Screenshot ricefield scene

It is a contrast to how the history of the Netherlands' colonialization of Indonesia is written history. However, the director seems to implement his discourse about the actual motive of the Netherlands to come to Indonesia before the war happened was to help us, who, in their assumption, was left behind by other countries. It is shown in how the scene between the two armies speaks and comments on why the Netherlands army did not use the best weapon from Russia. The conversation went by

“We fight the farmers with swords and spears.”
“The ideas of these monkeys can run their own country.”
“is the only thing we can shoot”

This scene stated how the west looked down on Hindia people only because the majority of Indonesian work as farmers, whom they classified as a lower job or unskilled labor with low salaries. In another scene, where the

prostitute worker gets to date the protagonist because he is simply falling in love with her, he asks the woman how much her daily salary and he then gives her some money enough to live for one week without the need to work as a prostitute. It was mentioned as a small amount for them in Holland.



Figure 3 Screenshot monkey scene

Another criticism of the director of how he set this film with his too much eurocentricity was when he defined a little boy who climbs coconut trees as a monkey. Also, he writes in the script that Indonesia is an uncivilized society because they always fight with other Indonesians like Muslims and Christians, Javanese and Chinese, and communism with capitalism as if the same problem did not happen in the western or first country.

Besides the narration, how this film was created aesthetically with a yellowish tone also implies that Indonesian is a third country in a dry area like many American films portraying the condition in an African background set. The yellowish color in the cinematic is close to how they want to tell us the poor condition of some areas without mentioning that. Also, I noticed that throughout this movie, I cannot see the resistance from Indonesian people who happened and coordinated with whom we know as national heroes and noblemen. All the Indonesian people in this film created us as marginal people, laborers, unskilled people who do farming and sell food or simple things in traditional markets. At the same time, the women became the temporary wife of the army from the Netherlands and the British or became prostitutes.

For sure, in human rights discourses, telling victim stories through a medium like “testimonials,” interviews, documentaries, and photo journalism remain the most effective methods to bring the issues about human rights violations and abuse. Therefore, for case fiction, retelling the issues will not be

straightforward. Every act of retelling, whether fictionalized or not, contains the matter of subjectivity, albeit testimonies from the victim will spark controversy regarding their adherence to facts, the role of memory, and the reliability of the narrator (Raines, 2021).

Wisely, Jim Taihuttu can do proper research before he writes the script for the film because even though this is a fictional film where the reliability did not must be transferred to the audience, he can use it as a weapon to voice the voiceless about how colonialism in Indonesian impact nowadays generation by use the fictional character and tell the truth to all the world also correcting the western perspective on Indonesia as “The East” with their exoticism gaze. In another case, the fictional journalist highlighted the profession’s limitations and the challenge to represent reality instead of being misrepresented by the west (Fadla & Shaheen, 2022). It is in the literature created by Jamal Mahjoub’s *Travelling with Djinn*s, who successfully tell the world about the reality and the challenge their journalist must face.

Diaspora Director

De Oost has a different perspective on how postcolonialism films created by Indonesian directors such as Hanung Bramantyo give us the perspective about the relationship between colonized and the colonizer, Hindia Belanda, and the Netherlands. The interesting point is, if I talk about the background of the film director, it cannot compare face to face because De Oost has a difference in the general war film genre in Indonesia, that is, the Diaspora Director.

The emergence of postcolonialism also increases the visibility of the term “diaspora” because diaspora is a part of the results of cultural mixing and relations in post-colonialism. Diaspora is a complex social group because it contains many people who range inside them like political refugees who come for the economic necessity to highly educated and wealthy professionals and outlook their ability to use cultural space (Dirlik, 1997). Transnationalism, or the movement between nationality and area, have made the diaspora populations increase highly, and they have collected together national allegiances and intensified ethnic and also cultural encounter that cut across national boundaries. They come to challenge the question of the homogeneity of

national cultures between both societies they originally came from.

Edward Said explained. First, liberation is an academic mission that comes from the resistance and opposition to the confinements and ravages of imperialism. At the same time, now it is shifted from the settled, established, and domesticated dynamics of culture to its unhoused, decentered, and exilic energy in now day is migrants. Shifting in the diaspora is closely influenced by the structural transformation in global relations, so it also means a global economy that will raise the third country in this discourse about post-colonialism. The highlight that earlier focus on Euro-American capitalism and we who come from the third country being objects of exploitation and marginalized now become the key player in global relations. We can find highly educated laborers who work and live as a diaspora in the first country who come from the colonized country.

Jim, the director, was a diaspora Maluku descendant born and raised in the Netherlands. Only a little information about him, but he was going to a prestigious university in America and stayed in Bali for some years. The minimal experience he has living in a third country or as a postcolonial person was the biggest reason De Oost has a white perspective because Jim is white. It is the most reasonable to accept why this film is going like that if I keep talking about how he did not do research properly and leaving his western perspective when he tries to bring the issues about postcolonialism in his film. Albeit, there is another diaspora figure who is successfully placing himself not to set the Eurocentric in his works that Jim failed to do in his film.

Kazuo Ishiguro is one of the most intriguing international figures in writing and literature. His works bring the tension between cultural specificity and universalism into sharp relief. His works are often read as exemplifying a brand of cosmopolitanism, seemingly unyoked from particularities, nation, language, race, and history; even his narratives hitched to these issues. The settings of his novels shift across the continents and periods (Tan, 2021)

Ishiguro mentions he has been creatively exploiting his double cultural positioning, so he

can produce texts that look at broad human concerns in significantly different ways from the kind of world literature discussed by the scholar. As an immigrant child in the victorious post-war UK, Ishiguro proves a unique challenge to modes of categorization in postcolonial theory and world literature (Suter, 2020).

Transnational Film

Talking about cinema and postcolonialism, we must separate it from how global bring impacts the cinema industry and postcolonial studies. Transnationals have emerged in film studies for some time in diverse and dynamic progress. Postcolonial is likely related to transnational cinema for at least two reasons. The film's first postcolonial and transnational discourse is concerned with fixed problems, and the Eurocentric and cultural identity of a nation. Second, a postcolonial film mostly has a global circulation of people and cultural goods in a mediated and interconnected world (Higbee, 2007).

The scholar often dismisses the relationship between transnational and postcolonial. For example, Higson focuses on production (the movement of filmmakers between different film cultures and national cinema), distribution (global circulation of the film as cultural commodities), and reception (how the audience receives and interprets the film differently depending on their cultural background) (Hjort & MacKenzie, 2000), has missed the critical point of his results of thoughts that it all part the dimension of postcolonial and the derivative of it, diaspora. Postcolonialism nowadays describes or understands to globalization context, not only because it is revealing and make us question the visibility of inherited boundaries, the fluidity of the concept of home, and the intersection between the global and local, but also because understanding how local communities and minority groups achieve agency under the pressure of global hegemony (Ashcroft, 2001)

Postcolonial experiences are similar to a transnational well reflected in films about colonial history, diaspora, and exile (Higbee, 2007). There is a way to the classification of postcolonialism films created by Naficy. Exilic cinema is determined by how the "there and then" of the filmmaker's homeland is removed.

Diaspora cinema will negotiate the vertical relationship between the homeland and its lateral ties to the diaspora community. The postcolonial film focuses on the experience of “here and now” of the adopted country where the filmmaker resides (Naficy, 2001). De Oost has proven the theory created by Naficy by portraying how the relationship between Indonesia and Netherlands is seen by western culture or by his Eurocentric behavior; even though he is a diaspora from Indonesia, the film he created was based on the country he resides.

The shift from national to transnational within film studies is firmly established and still gaining momentum (Higbe & Lim, Concepts of transnational cinema: towards a critical transnationalism in film studies. , 2010). The problem with transnational film is that films from Asia countries such as China are called orientalist by a scholar from western. Scholars will mostly assume that films from the West are universalist and that films should be made and received by all people. On another side, films from non-western country will be called particularism with the wrong impression (Berry & Farquhar, 2006). This is one example of Eurocentric culture in postcolonialism and transnational film. However, lately, we can watch many Asian films (as an example) spreading worldwide with their national language. The popular one recently is Parasite from Korea, and this film I talked about from the start, De Oost.

The situation in how the film De Oost created has happened before in postcolonial films. There was a reflection on how the potential for the popular postcolonial or the use of Hollywood aesthetics in postcolonial film effectively disrupts the dominant paradigm of knowledge. The audience can connect and become familiar with things in the movie, so it will disturb and remake the power relations between the two countries (Hastie, 2021). There is another biased perspective from the literature about postcolonialism in the Palestine-Israeli conflict named *Operation Shylock*, created by Philip Rots. He treated the relationship between them by silencing the Palestinian and giving voice to the Jews. In addition portrays the Palestinian as a terrorist who threatens Israel and intimidates its peace (Henni, 2022). Like De Oost, this agenda will quickly be supported by making it available on

OTT or online platforms like Netflix, Prime Video, Amazon, Disney+, Viu, etc., the impact of international film distribution.

CONCLUSION

Let us rethink the relationship between colonizers and colonized as the fundamental base of postcolonialism theory. Colonialism generally includes the interplay of competing and collaborating empires, and colonial people have often tried to play them against each other (Joyce, 2018). Imagine the colonial sphere as a complex matrix of forces. Interpreting text through an inter-imperial framework will recognize that subjects may collude with one empire to resist another. Most scholars who work on postcolonial studies focus on issues like social justice and defining the root cause of that also create a way for a better future. Unfortunately, this scholarly perspective will detain how literature people at most understand postcolonialism through texts and arts. Bringing new insights will open this issue for others to understand the structure, the emotions of endurance rather than resistance, and the art that emerges from such a tragic world.

The challenge of this postcolonialism is how to set the setting from Eurocentric become has an alternative culture that can globalize without literal change and disrupt the local culture or history.

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