

This earth of mankind by pramoedyya ananta toer essay sample

[Environment](#), [Earth](#)



Written during the climax of Indonesian ignominy, Pramoedya Ananta Toer's 1981 *This Earth of Mankind* regards the unjust colonial rule of the Dutch East Indies through the segregation of social groups between the Dutch aristocrats, Mixed Bloods, and Natives. Toer's commentary on the Natives' role during Dutch colonization is portrayed as a metaphor through Nyai Ontorosoh's experiences: her acceptance of European education, tolerance of promiscuous practices, and victimization in the corrupt law and justice system. Her greater purpose, to challenge societal degradation of the Native class, is articulated in Toer's message. As he discloses, "at the beginning of all growth, everything imitates" he suggests that the Indonesian natives should uproot from their inferiority and learn from modern teachings as an asset to declare independence, rather than be domineered by European colonization (Toer 208).

Toer highlights the significance of education—as one of the only markers of esteem—in Natives' pursuit of freedom. Nyai Ontorosoh's behavior does not abide with society's expectation of the Natives. Nyai's knowledge "more than just the world of her own village" differs from the norm (Toer 72). Her "courage to state her opinion" demonstrates that her indoctrination of modern ideas has molded her confidence to survive in the hostility of Dutch order (Toer 70). Pramoedya uses Nyai's intellect as an exemplar to inspire the 'typical' Native to follow. He conveys that the Natives should make good use of European education to aid in the development of Indonesia. The author expresses that the Natives, "dumb like river stones and mountains" have led Nyai into a fate of defeat (Toer 335).

The absence of education has caused them to suffer “ what [they] are now suffering” (Toer 335). Through Nyai’s resentment and individuality, Toer projects his ignominy towards the Natives’ feeble-mindedness to modern teachings. The Natives’ resistance to change and complacent traditionalism constrains them from progressing. The reluctance to learn and isolation from modern education portray the Natives dwelling in their own illiteracy. They dismiss educational opportunities that would enable them to rise from idleness, win victory in the war between European and Natives, and cause a reversal of roles. An exception of the Native’s complacency is Nyai Ontorosoh who represents the strong-willed and educated morale Native during Indonesia’s colonial state. Toer uses Nyai Ontorosoh to depict the possibilities one could achieve with a Western education to fight for Indonesia’s autonomy.

Natives, however, are tolerant to practices of prostitution illustrated by Nyai’s earlier surrender and automatic compliance when given orders. It is a metaphor to demonstrate that the Natives, with little to offer, would sacrifice their best merits to compensate for political progress. Nyai’s past as a Dutch administrator’s concubine supports Toer’s portrayal of the Native’s desperate search for respect. Nyai describes her ‘ purchase’ as a “ simple ritual whereby a child was sold by her own father”, a testament to the extremes a Native will succumb to in order to obtain some sort of recognition, regardless of committing acts of “ shameful behavior” (Toer 84, 80). She had been coerced as a product of her father’s trade, treated as a “ bought slave” and “ a piece of livestock” (Toer 88, 87). A concubine is a

nothing but a “ degraded woman, without value, no real will of her own”, manipulated in the hands and for the pleasure of the Dutch (Toer 88). Nyai’s submissiveness represents Toer’s implicit disapproval over the Native’s adopted negative tolerance; it would exploit a country’s nationalism and strip away the Natives’ self-respect. He introduces a way in which one should transform their ill-fated life of promiscuity with dignity with Nyai’s growth. Toer emphasizes his criticism of the Native’s accustomed tolerance to gain appraisal from the Dutch. He believes that passive submission is destructive to one’s nation, and it ought not be a way towards progression and true freedom.

Toer’s portrayal of the Natives bounded by the unjust Dutch justice system of underline Indonesia’s lack of right to free speech. He uses Nyai Ontosoroh’s defense at the court trial as an example of Dutch tyranny. Their preconceived notion that the Natives are unforgivably unworthy sets the tone of the trial, unmoved by promises that they utter. Despite her eloquence with several languages, her arguments are immediately disregarded by listeners clouded with vain. The Natives’, born as bastards and “ not considered legal”, reputation is further belittled by the judges’ perception and ridicule of their arguments (Toer 342).

The Dutch government scoffs at her educational and professional accomplishments, and takes away “ her child, her business, all the fruits of her efforts, and her personal property” (Toer 331). The persistent idea that anything non-European, is “ laughed at, humiliated, for no other reason than to prove the supremacy of Europe” (Toer 280). It is a matter of Dutch race “

swallowing the Natives”, rather than the division of assets (Toer 333). The belief that “ natives are the equivalent of children born of a concubine” and should therefore make amends in the relative severity of their punishments, highlight the discriminatory justice system (Toer 290). Where a non-Native would receive “ exile from the Indies”, a Native would “ lose his freedom altogether” and denounce the option of a trial to begin with (295). Toer’s overt demonstration of the justice system negligence and discriminatory conditions over the Natives acts show the readers that the Natives were denounced of their civil right but they themselves should address the bias against them in order to redeem their innate freedom.

This Earth of Mankind demonstrates the Natives’ inferiority during Indonesia’s colonial state under Dutch rule. Pramoedya Ananta Toer emphasizes the Native’s low rank through the women’s resigned tolerance of prostitution, the disposal of their dignity, and the Dutch partisan government, all of which could’ve been averted if the Natives had valor and courage to claim their rights. Toer uses This Earth of Mankind to vocalize the necessity for Natives to indulge in modern education during a time of inequity of law and order, and exploitation of prostitution, and instead use it to dominate over foreign powers.

Bibliography

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