

The Shackles Of Space And City In The Short Story *Iblis Paris* By Triyanto Triwikromo

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Abstract:

This study explores urban space in Triyanto Triwikromo's short story *Iblis Paris* from a post-colonial perspective, focusing on how spatial structures shape and constrain individual experience. Using qualitative methods and deconstruction, the research examines textual evidence of colonial and post-colonial hierarchies, power relations, and resistance. Applying Sara Upstone's typology of urban space, including utopian, desired, nowhere, and carnival cities, the analysis reveals how cities operate as sites of imagination, trauma, and negotiation. Paris and Lyon emerge as ambivalent spaces as they promise freedom and solace yet reproduce attachments and structural limitations. Similarly, cities in Bangladesh and border towns illustrate fluid, contested, and unstable post-colonial spaces where characters navigate uncertainty and displacement. The study demonstrates that urban space in literature is not a neutral backdrop but an active agent influencing identity, memory, and agency. By linking spatial theory with literary analysis, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how post-colonial dynamics and colonial legacies continue to shape the representation of cities in contemporary Indonesian literature.

Keywords: urban space, post-colonial, short story, *Iblis Paris*, spatial constraints, identity

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi ruang perkotaan dalam cerpen *Iblis Paris* karya Triyanto Triwikromo dari perspektif pasca-kolonial, dengan fokus pada bagaimana struktur ruang membentuk dan membatasi pengalaman individu. Menggunakan metode kualitatif dan dekonstruksi, penelitian ini menganalisis bukti teks yang menunjukkan hierarki kolonial dan pasca-kolonial, relasi kekuasaan, serta bentuk resistensi. Dengan menerapkan tipologi ruang perkotaan Sara Upstone, termasuk kota utopis, kota yang diinginkan, kota tiada, dan kota karnaval, analisis menunjukkan bahwa kota berfungsi sebagai arena imajinasi, trauma, dan negosiasi. Paris dan Lyon muncul sebagai ruang ambivalen karena menjanjikan kebebasan dan ketenangan namun tetap menghadirkan keterikatan dan keterbatasan struktural. Kota-kota di Bangladesh dan kota perbatasan menunjukkan ruang pasca-kolonial yang cair, diperebutkan, dan tidak stabil, tempat karakter menavigasi ketidakpastian dan dislokasi. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa ruang perkotaan dalam sastra bukan sekadar latar netral tetapi agen aktif yang membentuk identitas, memori, dan agensi. Dengan menghubungkan teori ruang dan analisis sastra, penelitian ini memperdalam pemahaman bagaimana dinamika pasca-kolonial dan warisan kolonial memengaruhi representasi kota dalam sastra Indonesia kontemporer.

Kata kunci: ruang perkotaan, pasca-kolonial, cerpen, *Iblis Paris*, keterbatasan ruang, identitas

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesian literary works, especially short stories, the problem of space and the city often arises through various themes such as locality, urbanization, limited residential space, and the phenomenon of urban villages. Some short stories present the city not just as a setting, but as a problematic and meaningful space. Triyanto Triwikromo, in the short story *Iblis Paris*, shows the dark side of the city through the experiences of migrants; Umar Kayam, in *A Thousand Fireflies in Manhattan*, depicts loneliness in the midst of the hustle and bustle of a global city; while other authors, such as Radhar Panca Dahana, Lamia Putri Dewi, and Raudal Tanjung Banua, also raise issues of density, space limitations, and the crisis of urban life. These stories show that the city has become an important field of reflection in contemporary Indonesian literature (Nurmalitasari et al., 2024).

Theoretically, cities are not merely geographical spaces but complex social, economic, and historical constructions. In Lefebvre's view, the city is a production space that gives birth to social relations, meaning, and power. In the post-colonial context, cities also keep colonial traces that continue to influence the spatial structure and social life of their people (Roy, 2011). Thus, the modern city is a layered space that brings together the colonial past with contemporary reality. The relationship between the individual and the city becomes increasingly complex because individuals not only inhabit space, but are also shaped by it. From the perspective of Michel de Certeau (1984), everyday practices such as walking, working, and interacting are forms of "spatial practices" that produce meaning over the city. This urban experience often presents alienation, identity negotiations, and tensions between private and public spaces.

This complexity is evident in the short story *Iblis Paris* by Triyanto Triwikromo, which tells the journey of the character Zita across various cities and regions from Dhaka, Chittagong, to the Thai-Burma border area and the dream of Paris. This spatial displacement is not just geographical mobility but also reveals the character's attachment to the global power network, colonial legacy, and illegal spaces that shape his life. The cities in this short story present a double face: a space of hope as well as a space of entrapment.

To understand these representations, this study draws on a post-colonial perspective and the concept of urban space from Upstone (2009), which views the city as a representational space that reflects geopolitical tensions and colonial history. Upstone also offers several city models, such as *utopian city*, *desired city*, *nowhere city*, and *carnival city*, which can be used

to identify spatial forms in literary texts, whether as ideal spaces, dystopian spaces, or fluid and hybrid resistance spaces. In this study, the typology is operationalized as an analytical tool to identify the forms of urban space in short stories and to examine how space functions as an arena of imagination, alienation, and resistance in the post-colonial context.

However, the study of the short story *Iblis Paris*, which specifically examines the representation of urban space through Sara Upstone's typology of post-colonial space, remains relatively limited. Most studies of Indonesian literature tend to discuss the social or psychological themes of characters without deeply linking them to the spatial dimensions and power relations that shape them. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by placing urban space at the center of analysis within a post-colonial framework.

In this context, the concept of "spatial shackles" is understood not only as a mere physical limitation but also as a form of spatial control produced by power relations, global illegal economic networks, and colonial traces that still operate in the urban spaces the characters traverse. This shackle is seen in the limitations of mobility, attachment to certain networks, and the character's inability to fully determine his own living space. Thus, urban space is not only the setting but also the mechanism that regulates, limits, and shapes the characters' identity and experience.

Based on this framework, this research focuses on two main areas: identifying the models of urban space represented in the short story *Iblis Paris* using Sara Upstone's typology, and analyzing how the shackles of urban space shape the experience and position of characters within it. This study aims to explain the construction of urban space, more specifically from a post-colonial perspective, while revealing the power relations that limit the subject within it. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the study of Indonesian literature by applying a more operational post-colonial space theory. In practice, this research provides a deeper understanding of how global dynamics and colonial legacies continue to shape the representation of cities in Indonesian literary works.

METHOD

The source of data in this study is the short story *Iblis Paris* by Triyanto Triwikromo, published in Kompas on August 3, 2008, and chosen because it addresses spatial and urban issues relevant to the study's focus. The research data is in the form of qualitative data, namely, language units in texts such as words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that contain themes, spatial structures, and social relations in the narrative. Data are identified, classified, and

selectively cited according to the needs of the analysis, considering their relevance to the formulation of the problem and to the descriptive and analytical interpretation of the text's meaning. The analysis was carried out using Upstone's theoretical framework on urban space and the body in a post-colonial perspective, through the identification of textual elements that represent urban spatial dynamics, power practices, marginalization, and identity negotiation in post-colonial contexts. Furthermore, data were analyzed to examine the influence of the conception of urban space and the body on the psychological, social, and cultural construction of the character, while considering the author's position and the socio-cultural background behind the work. In addition, this study also uses the deconstruction method as proposed by Faruk (2007) through two main steps, namely analyzing the colonized discourse that shows the dominance and hierarchy of colonial and post-colonial power, and examining the forms of post-colonial resistance that appear explicitly and implicitly to dismantle binary opposition and reveal possible alternative meanings in the text.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Cities in France

In the short story *Iblis Paris*, Zita's journey between the cities of Paris and Lyon not only marks a geographical shift but also forms a complex spatial dialectic among imagination, spirituality, and trauma. The two cities were initially represented as spaces full of religious and historical symbols: magnificent cathedrals, ancient buildings, and an aura of sanctity that promised tranquility. This image aligns with Zita's mother's long-held desire for a trip to Lourdes, a sacred space believed to offer forgiveness through Mary's love. Thus, the city in this short story was initially constructed as a spiritual heterotopia of "other" space, believed to be able to restore inner wounds and erase sin.

However, the construction soon undergoes a shift in meaning when read through Zita's subjective experience. Paris, which is also symbolically associated with the figure of Bernadette Soubirous as a representation of piety and wisdom, is precisely an ambivalent space: on the one hand, it promises tranquility, but on the other, it serves as an escape from trauma. For Zita, this city is not a neutral purification space, but a space that houses the residue of fear and violence that she experienced during her time as Khun Sa's mistress. Here, it appears that urban space is never completely sterile; it always carries "traces" of the body's experience. In other words, Zita's body becomes a medium that disrupts the illusion of the sanctity of the city, and personal trauma deconstructs the myth of the city as a space of peace.

In this perspective, Paris operates as a fractured post-colonial space: a space that is symbolically "central" (European, religious, civilized), but is instead presented through the point of view of fringe subjects that bring the experience of global violence (narcotics, power relations, exploitation of women's bodies). This tension suggests that urban space is not autonomous but is always negotiated through the body that occupies it. Zita did not just "visit" Paris; she rewrote the city's meaning through his wounds and fears.

Meanwhile, Lyon is presented as a continuation of a space escape, more aesthetically pleasing and calm after the trauma in Paris. However, the beauty of Lyon cannot be read naively as a resolution. Instead, it indicates a form of deferral: the calm Zita feels is not a final healing but a temporary respite from trauma that has not yet been fully unraveled. In a deconstructive framework, Lyon becomes a space that demonstrates how binary oppositions, such as peaceful or traumatized or sacred or profane, are never truly stable. The beauty of the city serves only as a surface layer that covers rather than erases the inner tension that continues to haunt Zita.

Thus, the two cities form a dialectical relationship: Paris as an ambivalent space that dismantles the illusion of purity through bodily experience, and Lyon as an aesthetic space that post-posts, but does not resolve, inner conflicts. Through this construction, Triyanto Triwikromo implicitly criticizes the idea of cities, especially Western cities, as ideal spaces that can offer universal safety. Instead, the short story asserts that space has always been political and subjective: it is shaped, disturbed, and negotiated by the body that carries it.

Kau mungkin menyangka setelah riwayat Khun Sa habis, berakhir pula nasib hotel tua dan sepasang perempuan yang kesepian. Oo, justru kini kehidupan yang sebenarnya sedang dimulai. Tak terikat pada siapa pun, aku justru berani berbisnis serbuk iblis kembali. (Triwikromo, 2008).

You might think that after Khun Sa's story is over, the fate of the old hotel and a couple of lonely women will also end. Yes, it is precisely now that real life begins. Not tied to anyone, I actually dared to get back into the devil powder business. (Triwikromo, 2008).

As cities dreamed of by immigrants, Paris and Lyon in the short story Devil Paris are not merely geographical settings but imaginary constructions that contain desire, escape, and illusion. For Zita, the two cities are represented as ideal spaces that promise tranquility and liberation from past traumas, especially the bitter experience of living in a situation of escape with the Shan people. However, this idealization contains a paradox: the imagined tranquility is not the result of reconciliation with the past, but rather a form of avoidance projected into another space deemed "more human".

Paris and Lyon, in this context, function as utopian symbols of a space that is not only geographically distant but also epistemologically separate from the reality Zita experiences. The cities are filled with images of cathedrals, ancient buildings, and a soothing, quiet atmosphere that symbolically represent stability, spirituality, and the continuity of history, qualities absent in Zita's life, full of dislocation and chaos. It is precisely because of their perfection that these cities become problematic: they are nothing more than fictitious constructions that cover up cracks in identity and unresolved historical wounds.

Thus, the representation of Paris and Lyon as cities of freedom and peace cannot be read literally as a "utopia" that actually offers a solution. Rather, it is more accurately understood as a utopian form of desire for an ideal space constantly created by the alienated subject. In this framework, Triyanto Triwikromo not only presents the city as a space of dreams but also criticizes the illusion that the modern city, glorified as a symbol of freedom for immigrants, is really just a fragile space of projection, incapable of completely erasing the traces of past violence.

Cities in Bangladesh

The cities in Bangladesh where Zita and her family live are depicted as places of natural and cultural beauty. In this short story, the author mentions two cities: Dhaka and Chittagong. The city of Dhaka is rich in a thriving Hindu culture. It is depicted in the music of Gombhira, Bhatiati, and Bhawaiya, and in the green Ganga-Brahmaputra Delta. The city has a cold, mild tropical climate in October-March and a summer climate in March-June. At the same time, Chittagong City is known for its longest coastline in the world and for beautiful colonial-era sites, such as Dakeshwari Temple, Bara Katra Palace, Hoseni Dalan, and Lai Bagh Fort.

Kami kemudian meninggalkan kota Dhaka. Meninggalkan alunan musik Gombhira-Bhatiati-Bhawaiya dan Delta Gangga-Brahmaputra yang subur. Belakangan aku baru tahu, kami juga harus menghapus kenangan pada angin tropis dengan musim dingin yang sejuk. ... dan yang tak mungkin kulupakan tentu saja musim monsun yang hangat dan lembab (Triwikromo, 2008).

We then left Dhaka. Leaving behind the music of Gombhira-Bhatiati-Bhawaiya and the lush Ganga-Brahmaputra Delta. Later, I found out that we also had to erase the memories of the tropical winds with the cold winters.... Furthermore, what I cannot forget, of course, is the warm and humid monsoon season (Triwikromo, 2008).

Cities in Bangladesh, such as Dhaka and Chittagong, cannot be understood as stable and established spaces, but rather as post-colonial spaces that are fluid, full of tension, and always in the process of negotiation. Upstone rejects the view that colonial space completely

determines the subject; Instead, he sees gaps in instability in the space that allow for resistance, ambiguity, and even disorientation. In this context, the colonial legacy, still visible in the spatial and urban structure, does not function in an absolute sense, but instead creates a space that is fragile and open to reinterpretation by the subject who experiences it.

Furthermore, the concept of *desire city* in this reading is no longer just a meeting between a colonial city and a utopia, but a manifestation of the instability of space itself. The natural beauty imagined by the characters is not a complete, structured utopia, but a form of spatial disruption that disrupts the rigid order of colonial space. In Upstone's (2009) perspective, utopia in the post-colonial context tends to be fragmentary and incoherent, often emerging as a momentary experience incapable of consolidating into a new order. Thus, the natural beauty presented by the characters cannot be read as a truly liberating alternative, but rather as a crack that reveals the colonial space is never completely stable.

In addition, the character's experience in the city reveals a condition of dislocation, a disconnection between the subject and the space he occupies. The city is no longer a space that can be identified in its entirety, but rather an alien, fragmented, and difficult-to-understand whole. In this sense, Dhaka and Chittagong serve as spaces that produce identity uncertainty, where characters are constantly moving between inherited structures and imaginations that are never fully realized. The inability to achieve a utopian city precisely confirms Upstone's thesis that the post-colonial space never achieves stability, but is always in a state of "becoming", which is characterized by constant shift, fragmentation, and tension.

Thus, Sara Upstone's theory-based analysis shows that cities in Bangladesh are not simply colonial product spaces opposed to utopia, but are inherently unstable post-colonial spaces. *Desire city* in this context does not refer to an ideal city, but rather to a spatial condition that continues to experience disruption, negotiation, and uncertainty, resulting in a fragmented existential experience for the character.

Border Towns and Forests

The existence of cities whose locations are not clearly described but are only mentioned by the forests on the Thai-Burma border is a form of depiction of *Nowhere City*. The forests used as gathering places for immigrants are a dystopia that does not exist in the past or the future. The Shan guerrillas formed a city whose members were all immigrants from various places. The city was hidden and did not receive political administrative recognition, so it was

also called an *underground city*, where drug smugglers launched actions and fled from the pursuit of the enemy. In terms of concept, the city in the forest is very different from the city Zita dreamed of when her father invited her to move. This is illustrated from the following narrative:

Rupa-rupanya ayah tak menduga setelah malam itu kami hanya akan hidup di hutan bersama pasukan bangsa Shan. Akan tetapi, jangan membayangkan dikelilingi pepohonan kami tak mengenal dunia. Khun Sa tak membiarkan putri-putri indah seperti kami tak bisa menghitung jumlah bintang di langit. (Triwikromo, 2008).

Apparently, my father did not expect that, after that night, we would only live in the forest with the Shan army. However, do not imagine being surrounded by trees; we do not know the world. Khun Sa did not let beautiful princesses like us go without counting the stars in the sky. (Triwikromo, 2008).

In the quote, it is clear that Zita is ambivalent towards the urban space she inhabits, an inner attitude that reveals the tug of war between hope and disappointment. On the one hand, the city he occupies is idealized as a space of liberation that is able to provide tranquillity and an opportunity to restart life. However, the reality it faces presents a contradiction: instead of being a healing space, the city becomes inhospitable, even tending to reproduce the isolation it sought to leave behind. This ambivalence asserts that the city is never neutral but rather an arena for the production of meaning, fraught with tension between imagination and concrete experience.

Furthermore, these non-ideal conditions do not necessarily place Zita as a passive subject. In fact, the gaps between expectations and reality give rise to various forms of resistance, both psychological and symbolic. This resistance can be read as Zita's attempt to negotiate her position in an unfamiliar space and as a strategy to maintain agency amid limiting structural pressures. Thus, the city in this short story serves not only as a setting but also as a dialectical field in which the subject confronts his own power, memory, and identity. The ambivalence experienced by Zita ultimately opens the possibility of reading the urban space as not just a place of escape but a space of conflict that constantly produces and challenges the idealized meaning of "freedom".

Carnival City, An Unattainable City Space

According to Upstone, the form of *Carnival City* is a *post-space* concept that transcends and exists before these boundaries appear, even without boundaries. In this short story, the concept of urban space is not found. Cities that emerge have a form of urban space that

describes the three concepts described above. This reality then also has an interconnection with the character of Zita. Zita, who had moved around, was still stunned by the cityscape she had visited. The cities visited are fixed and defined by colonial discourse. This condition suggests that this short story is still conceptually shackled to the colonial discourse on space, which ultimately colonizes Zita as a woman and an individual who travels across continents.

The shackles of urban space experienced by Zita and other figures are also evident in the inability to find a place to escape the colonial idea itself. Zita, who hopes to escape the past and find a fluid city space, moving and has no partitions or boundaries, must end up in a city space that ultimately makes her enter a city space that is still filled with colonial traces, even though it is precisely the city space that becomes the Utopian city she dreams of. Paris became the city Khun Sa mentioned as "*negeri yang hanya memberi keindahan*".

Keindahan, kau tahu, hanya muncul, sesaat ketika bulan seiris jeruk memancarkan sinar tepat di pucuk Katedral Saint Jean. Dan sayang, sebagai orang yang terpenjara oleh pekerjaan rutin sebagai pengelola hotel, sungguh tak mudah dan butuh perjuangan panjang agar sampai ke situs peribadatan tak jauh dari Fourviere itu. Paling tidak aku harus berjalan kaki dengan tertatih-tatih ke Stasiun Saxe Gambetta, berganti-ganti kereta bawah tanah yang disesaki para imigran, untuk pada akhirnya merangkak ke tebing yang nyaris tegak lurus dengan langit dengan funicular, dengan kereta yang lebih mirip sebagai ular melata menembus lorong-lorong gedung sunyi selalu kubayangkan penuh kelelawar itu. (Triwikromo, 2008).

Beauty, you know, only appears the moment when an orange-sliced moon shines right at the top of Saint Jean's Cathedral. And unfortunately, as someone imprisoned by a routine job as a hotel manager, it is really not easy, and it takes a long struggle to reach the place of worship, not far from Fourviere. At least I had to limp to Saxe Gambetta Station, alternating subways filled with immigrants, to finally crawl up the cliff almost perpendicular to the sky with a funicular, with a train more like a snake crawling through the hallways of the silent building I always imagined to be full of bats. (Triwikromo, 2008).

The quote confirms that *Carnival City* is not a truly liberating celebration space, but rather a space that promises an aesthetic experience but is structurally unattainable. The beauty of the city is only a fragile glimpse, while access to the space is marked by struggle, alienation, and mobility inequality. In this case, the city is not a space for the fulfillment of desires, but rather one that continues to delay and thwart their achievement.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the short story *Iblis Paris* shows that the city space is presented not just as a setting, but as a medium of freedom for the character Zita. Zita's journey to Paris and Lyon marks an attempt to find the ideal space that is believed to be able to free her from the trauma and limitations of the past. However, instead of offering complete liberation, these cities leave

behind new forms of attachment, showing that space is never completely neutral or liberating. This failure can be read as the narrative's inability to present what can be called post-space— that is, a space that is fluid, dynamic, and free of structural and symbolic boundaries. As a result, Zita's experience remains trapped in a rigid, restrictive logic of space, so that the dream of freedom is only an illusion not fully realized. Thus, this short story ultimately confirms that urban space is not the final solution to the liberation of the subject, but rather a complex arena that continues to produce tensions between hope, identity, and reality faced.

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