

The Survival Strategy of Diaspora Javanese Women in New Caledonia in the Novel *La Bayou de Djakarta à Nouméa*

Wening Udasmoro *

Department of Language and Literature, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

Setiadi

Department of Anthropology, Universitas Gadjah Mada Indonesia

Aprillia Firmonasari

Department of Language and Literature, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

Received on: 3-1-2022

Accepted on: 28-8-2022

Abstract

Liliane Saintomer is one of the few authors on Javanese women's diaspora in the Southwest Pacific region. In the late 19th to early 20th century, the Dutch rulers of the Dutch East Indies sent people from Java to work as contract laborers in French-controlled areas of the Southwest Pacific. This article explores the survival strategy of adolescent Javanese girls who became part of the historical events that unfolded in New Caledonia. The research used data from the novel *La Bayou de Djakarta à Nouméa* (The Older Sister from Jakarta to *Nouméa*) as the primary material. Using the textual analysis method, the story was analyzed by examining the words, sentences, and paragraphs in the novel, providing insight into the different aspects of the survival strategy. The findings show that the Javanese diaspora carried out individual and collective forms of resistance. The Javanese women experienced multi-layered oppression due to gender, ethnicity, social class, and age differences.

Keywords: Women; Diaspora; Javanese; New Caledonia; Survival strategy.

Introduction

Literary studies on the works of Javanese diaspora in New Caledonia, a collectivity of overseas (*Outre Mer*) France, are scarce. Research on New Caledonia have focused mainly on linguistics, history, and anthropology, carried out by predominantly Western, especially French, researchers. The Kanak people, the territory's indigenous ethnic group, have received the most attention (Connell 1987; 2021, 144-160). Moreover, those studies tend to be dominated by male narratives. Historical writings primarily tell of the conflicting ideas related to the political differences about the referendum between the Kanaks and the French in the colony (Chappell 1993, 307-324). Politics that are also related to conflicting ideas between the Kanaks and the French immigrants in control of the New Caledonian government, are of great interest to researchers as well (Connell 1987). One specific focus has been the 1987 referendum, which was a bloody event. Other referenda took place in 2018 and 2020, which have also become the

© 2023 JJMLL Publishers/Yarmouk University. All Rights Reserved,

* Doi: <https://doi.org/10.47012/jjml.15.4.18>

* Corresponding Author: udasmoro@ugm.ac.id

subject of many works of research (Connell 2021, 144-160). On the other hand, the Javanese diaspora community in New Caledonia is still a marginal subject in scientific studies. Rarer still are ones conducted by people from Java or Indonesia, the origin of the diaspora.

The most comprehensive research on the Javanese diaspora in New Caledonia, which looks at various aspects such as politics, economy, social condition, and culture, was carried out by Jean Luc Maurer in his book entitled *Les Javanais du Caillou* (Maurer 2006). The book also provides historical accounts of their life since their first arrival as contract laborers on February 16, 1896. Meanwhile, following a study that makes a nod to linguistics, Pamela Allen produced an article titled “Diasporic representations of the home culture: case studies from Suriname and New Caledonia.” It is a comparative study that discusses the cultural practices and the language of the Javanese diaspora in Suriname and New Caledonia (Allen 2015, 353–379). Javanese descendants in the territory have published writings of their own. These tend to focus on the immigration aspect, namely the history of their arrival on the islands until the final migration, which took place in the 1950s (Adi 2014; Muljono-Larue 2015). Meanwhile, studies by Indonesian researchers on the Javanese in New Caledonia are limited. There have been studies that look at the hybrid Javanese-French language in the linguistic practices of the Javanese there (Subiyantoro 2014, 43–55; Subiyantoro et al. 2017, 85–93). A study by Widyatka Ryananta looks at the sociological and political aspects of the Javanese in the territory (Ryananta 2017).

There has not been much attention on literary works produced by the Javanese diaspora in New Caledonia. This is unfortunate because, in the context of the Javanese people there, a fascinating development has come to light: The women have been more dominant in building narratives through literary works. They have produced literary works that talk about their origins, a feat that the men have not accomplished. The women have not simply written works of imaginary fiction but have imbued them with historical content, memories, and trajectories. It is reminiscent of the lives and struggles of the Javanese when they first arrived and how their children survived the harsh living conditions in the colony.

They have maintained their Javanese identity through a language that includes Javanese expressions in a society dominated by French culture. Their writings reflect a longing for their Javanese heritage and their pride as Javanese descendants. There is an apparent love for their current environment, but the adoration for Java as their place of origin remains. A Javanese life motto that their parents preserved, which has been adapted into French, reads: *Il faut connaître son passé pour aller de l'avant* (We must know our past in order to move forward). Their novels may be in French, but the narratives primarily convey the lives of the Javanese diaspora in New Caledonia in the past. The atrocity of colonialism, especially the treatment of Western individuals toward the Javanese, has not gone unnoticed. Some recognized women authors of the Javanese diaspora in New Caledonia include Liliane Saintomer (Saintomer 2001) with *La Bayou de Djakarta à Nouméa* (The Older Sister from Jakarta to *Nouméa*) and Ama Bastien with *Le Rêve Accompli de Bandung à Nouméa* (The Dream Comes True from Bandung to *Nouméa*) (Bastien 2008). Both are New-Caledonia-born writers of Javanese descent who learned about Java from their parents. Ama Bastien, for example, heard stories about Java from her father, while Liliane Saintomer owes her impressions of Java from her mother. Both talk about the Javanese who made the long journey to New Caledonia by boats as contract laborers in New Caledonia during the Dutch colonial

The Survival Strategy of Diaspora Javanese Women in New Caledonia in the Novel *La Bayou de Djakarta à Nouméa*

rule in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

Liliane Saintomer tells of a female character named Nadiem. Set primarily in the New Caledonian capital of Nouméa, the story follows Nadiem as she decides to leave Djakarta due to poverty and her dissatisfaction with living with her stepmother. She and her friend Savia get an offer to become contract laborers in New Caledonia. They leave by boat along with other contract workers. Nadiem gets a job as a housemaid, while Savia becomes a babysitter. The story then strongly presents the resistance of a young Javanese woman — Nadiem is 16 — in adapting to a new culture dominated by white men who are economically, socially, and politically much more powerful when compared with their Javanese subordinates.

The purpose of this study is to explore the descriptions of the struggle of Javanese women in New Caledonia as they carry out a survival strategy as imagined by an author of Javanese descent. “Survival strategy” here is, as defined by Bourdieu as a subtle fit between the trajectory of agents and the field (Gomez 2015). According to this definition, agents have achievement that they have to strive for but they must face the strong structure that they have to deal with in the field (in the arena). Another definition is defined by Beck who states that survival strategy is “the activities of poor people in times of stress which they see as crucial for the continued running of their household” (Beck 1989, 23–32). The poor realize the survival strategy in various ways according to their respective mechanism. It may manifest as a mechanism by an individual to survive different forms of oppression and exploitation in an economic context. It can also be collective, in which individuals within a group support each other to resist the oppressiveness and domination of others (Bell et al. 2019, 1–17). In the context of this article, it is the collective resistance of Javanese societies against colonial rule, both in Java (against the Dutch East Indies government) and in New Caledonia (against the French).

The novel analyzed in this paper is *La Bayou de Djakarta à Nouméa* (The Older Sister from Jakarta to Nouméa). Despite relying on memories transmitted by her mother, who experienced the past events herself, the historical content that comprises the Javanese women’s experiences remains strong in this work of fiction. The researchers chose this novel for its solid descriptions of a past setting that shapes the resilient agency of its lead female Javanese character in a new land. The young woman experiences multi-layered domination in an ethnically hierarchical structure of colonial society. A different kind of domination comes from her own kind, the Javanese. Thus, not only is she a survivor of the domination of Western males, but also that of Javanese males. In dealing with the other female characters in the story, she carries out yet a different strategy. To achieve an understanding of the narrative, a comprehension of the basic aspect of language is imperative. This study poses a couple of basic questions. First: What forms of survival strategy are carried out by the female Javanese character in the novel? Second: How does this literary work describe the hierarchies of power concerning gender, ethnicity, social class, and age?

This study employed textual analysis as its method. The data collection stage consisted of compiling words, sentences, and paragraphs in the story that reflect the survival strategy of the Javanese woman in

facing the Western-dominated social structure and her relations with the dominant forces within the Javanese group. The aspects of survival strategy were then incorporated into the data set, namely by identifying excerpts related to aspects of the survival strategy and placing them into corresponding patterns. The excerpts that had been placed within the patterns were then analyzed to get a comprehensive picture of the survival-strategy processes of the women in this novel.

The Javanese in New Caledonia

New Caledonia is an overseas (*Outre Mer*) French collectivity located in the Southwest Pacific. Its islands were already inhabited by the Kanak people, a Melanesian tribe, before James Cook landed on the main island on September 4, 1774 (Adi 2014, 19). In 1864, New Caledonia started to become a dumping ground for France's unwanted groups, mainly convicts, to be employed as farmers. However, with the discovery of nickel reserves on the islands, France halted its shipments of convicts and began dispatching contract laborers from other countries (Maurer 2006). In the late 19th century, the French government allied with the Dutch and asked for their assistance in sending people from Java to work as contract laborers. Regulations regarding the dispatchments of the Javanese were written in the 1880's Koeli Ordonantie. On February 15, 1896, the first contingent of 170 Javanese workers landed in New Caledonia. The date would be commemorated as the day of the first arrival of the Javanese in the territory (Ryananta 2017, 18). From 1896 to 1946, there were 87 voyages from Java to New Caledonia carrying contract workers sourced from various regions in Java, including Jakarta, Bekasi, Tasikmalaya, Garut (Java's western region) The male Javanese contract laborers mainly worked in the agricultural sector and as nickel miners. The women found themselves working mainly as housemaids. However, the period from July 1902 until July 1955 saw backflows of Javanese workers returning to Java. The contract laborers went back in waves on 183 ships carrying 15,873 adults and 3,323 children who had been born in the territory (Ryananta 2017, 18). Before World War II, these contract laborers received unfair treatment from the rulers of New Caledonia, who happened to hold important positions in the French government. Their submissive nature turned the laborers into dominated objects who received various forms of violence, either physical, verbal, or psychological (Muljono-Larue 2015).

Javanese Women between Escapism and Speculations

It has been mentioned above how the Javanese became objects of unfair treatment by the French in New Caledonia before World War II. *La Bayou de Djakarta à Nouméa* is also set before the war. However, if the Javanese are historically and culturally known to be obedient and thus easily dominated (Adi 2014), the narrative of the novel tells of a different notion. In it, the rebellious and courageous nature of the lead Javanese woman is apparent, painting a generally different historical picture. She is presented as having a high spirit of resistance in her struggle in the harsh new environment, as seen in this following quote.

The Survival Strategy of Diaspora Javanese Women in New Caledonia in the Novel *La Bayou de Djakarta à Nouméa*

“C’était la saison chaude et une épidémie de peste était déclarée. Chaque fois son patron pressait Nadiem de travailler. Elle refuse, butée. Elle ne voulait pas se nourrir non plus. Tant pis, qu’ils retiennent les frais de son séjour de prison sur son salaire!”
(Saintomer 2001, 68)

It was the hot season and an epidemic of plague was declared. Each time the boss urged Nadiem to work. She refuses, stubborn. She didn’t want to feed herself either. Too bad, they deduct the costs of his stay in prison from her salary!

The Javanese have a famous saying, which they pass down from generation to generation: *mangan ora mangan kumpul* (eat or not the most important is to be together) (Ida 2006). It implies a life philosophy that it is better for them to be poor but living together in harmony in Java than to be separated from each other (Udasmoro and Setiadi 2021, 237–252). The historical fact of the waves of Javanese sent to various places outside Java, both to neighboring areas and abroad, is a dilemmatic notion that contradicts this philosophy. Their mindset of harmony in a familial attachment under a social system that renders them economically and socially dependent on one another must have imbued their departure from Java with a deep sadness. Such a mindset led them to maintain their Javanese way of life, which included the preservation of their language (Subiyantoro 2014, 43–55). In every region of the Javanese diaspora, both in neighboring territories and abroad, the Javanese language continues to be used despite apparent vulnerability. In areas of Javanese diaspora in Sumatra, e.g. Lampung (one of several destinations for transmigration programs since the early 20th century), children of Javanese descent still maintain the language as part of their identity (Prihantoro 2016, 33–42). The Javanese language, for instance, is even still preserved by the Javanese diaspora living in New Caledonia and Suriname (Villierius 2017, 151–178). In New Caledonia, Javanese language’s vulnerability in the current decade has become more striking; the younger generation is no longer active in using the language despite practicing certain aspects of the culture, such as dancing and playing *gamelan* (Javanese traditional music instrument) (Ryananta 2017).

Nadiem, the main character in *La Bayou de Djakarta à Nouméa*, is described as being resistant against the Javanese attachment. Historically, the Javanese had various motivations in their decision to work abroad. The first is the reality of living as poor citizens in Java, which ultimately forced the Javanese, represented in the novel by Nadiem, to change their perspective. To those living in poverty in Java, the Dutch soldiers’ announcement that there were promising works in New Caledonia sounded like a way out. However, financial reasons were not the only issue. The second reason, clearly mentioned in the novel, was the uncomfortable social life they had to face due to power relations in their families. For Nadiem, such discomfort lies in the domination of her stepmother, whom she refers to as *l’autre* (the other). Her stepmother exerts economic domination over Nadiem by controlling her father’s property and making the sixteen year-old work in the fields. The unfair treatment resulted in Nadiem’s determination to leave. The third reason was the transmission of memory from a previous generation, which translated

into requests. In Javanese tradition, the unfulfilled wishes of one's parents before they die often act as a will. Historically, this would add to the complexity of anyone's decision to flee Java during that period.¹

“Nadiem, écoute-moi. Ce soldat vient de nous proposer un marché excitant. Devine quoi? La Nouvelle Calédonie! Souviens-toi de ce pays dont parlait l’ami de ta grand-mère qui en revenait. Ils demandent toujours des volontaires pour travailler leurs terres et mettre en valeur leur pays un peu sauvage. Or, leur sol est riche et ils manquent cruellement de main-d’oeuvre. On partirait un contrat de travail. On est logées, nourries, payées.” (Saintomer 2001, 18).

Nadiem, listen to me. The soldier just offered an attractive market. Guess where? New Caledonia! Do you remember the story of your grandmother's friend who came back from there? They always ask for volunteer workers to cultivate their lands and improve their slightly wild country. The land is rich but they lack labor. We will leave after being given a work contract. We will be provided with shelter, food and wage.

Nadiem's friend Savia is driven by economic necessity in her decision to leave for New Caledonia. Guaranteed food, housing, and wage become the primary considerations. However, knowing her friend, Savia realizes that money will not be Nadiem's main reason to participate in the journey. To get her to leave, Savia reminds Nadiem of her grandmother's message about New Caledonia as a destination that one can rely on to improve life. It is thus fascinating to see that the narrative of having the courage to leave Java is introduced by women, namely Savia and Nadiem's grandmother. In addition, the spirit of adventure has been instilled in Nadiem since she was a child by a matriarch — not her grandfather or father. In various immigration narratives, the courage to leave one's home and habitus lies more frequently in male characters. Moreover, the story's narrative presents another notion behind Savia's words: That she will no longer need to suffer from being exploited in her homeland by *l'autre*, her stepmother. From this, it is clear how two women — Nadiem's grandmother and her stepmother — provide the motivations for her escape. Her grandmother presents her with an inspiration, a new hope of future prosperity in a faraway land. In contrast, her stepmother has caused her enough trauma to push her into escapism and make her determined to leave. Nadiem's life strategy starts with the two women. It entails forgetting the past, namely the land of Java, and welcoming a new trajectory by heading to a land that she knows nothing about.

“Nadiem, c’est la chance de notre vie! Ici tu n’as plus rien à perdre. Plus de récoltes de riz courbées et trempées jusqu’aux os. Plus d’ampoules aux mains à force de raper le coco. Plus de brûlures à cuire ces horreurs.” (Saintomer 2001, 18).

“Nadiem, this is the chance of our lives! You have nothing to lose there. No more rice harvesting that breaks your back and gets you soaked to the bone. No more blisters on your hands from grating coconuts. No more horrific burns from cooking.”

The Survival Strategy of Diaspora Javanese Women in New Caledonia in the Novel *La Bayou de Djakarta à Nouméa*

Nadiem's decision to leave is a survival strategy — a determination imbued with various complex considerations of attaining hope for a better life at the expense of leaving the land she loves despite all the hardships. She needs that extra push to leave Java. This is where a collective survival strategy comes into view, shown by the solidarity of her friend Savia, who coaxes her into embracing a new fate by stepping away from the bleak situation of having to endure her stepmother's oppression and her poverty. Nadiem and Savia display strength in their willingness to succeed in life, namely by following simple strategies that may bring major consequences. The author then explains that only a few Javanese are willing to go. Even the men show little interest in the program. Many are curious but are too afraid to get out of their comfort zone. A male friend of theirs, Konjo, also chooses to stay put.

Konjo et sa femme restèrent. Les Javanais sont très attachés à leur terre ancestrale.

Or, ceux qui partaient n'étaient pas nombreux (Saintomer 2001, 22)

Konjo and his wife stayed. The Javanese are very attached to their ancestral land.

That is why, not many departed.

However, upon closer inspection, the two passages above also show that leaving Java is part of Nadiem and Savia's escapism. The term refers to a situation where a person becomes weary of their surroundings and tries to live up fantasies and experiences in a new environment (Cohen, 2010). Escapism in this novel presents itself through the characters' pragmatic attitude; they no longer see Java as a place of better opportunities. Poverty becomes the fundamental aspects behind this escapism. The new land is said to present hope despite the accompanying information that it is still wild and unmanaged. Their courage conquers their ignorance of what lies ahead. The two female characters have nothing but speculations, and yet their adventurous spirit readies them for the risks.

Nadiem et Savia avaient envie de découvrir autre chose et partaient à l'aventure.

Elles n'avaient aucune idée de ce que pouvait être ce pays qu'on disait superbe et sauvage. Était-ce un miroir aux allouettes? Elles ne le savaient pas mais elles étaient persuadées que le pire était ici dans ces Indes Néerlandaises. (Saintomer 2001, 22)

Nadiem and Savia wanted to discover something else and went on an adventure.

They had no idea what this so-called beautiful and wild country might be like. Could it be but a mirage of pleasantries? They did not know, but they were convinced that the worst was here in the Dutch East Indies.

In the context of life in the Dutch East Indies, to embrace escapism was not only to run away from problems but also part of the resistance to the structures and philosophy of Javanese society. In other words, historically, to escape was to be “disloyal” to the land of Java, especially if the structure being defied was one's own family. The two characters in the novel leave their homes without informing any of their family members, and no one sees them to the port. This is contrary to the Javanese tradition of *nguntabke*, or the practice of escorting a family member who is going away.

Another form of opposition to the Javanese way of thinking lies in their speculative endeavor. Their readiness to take risks is against one well-known saying in Javanese: *alon-alon waton kelakon* (slowly but surely), which implies the importance of being assured in one's actions, no matter how slow the execution. They are breaking away from such doctrine in their brusque readiness to face new challenges. Nothing is yet certain until they arrive in the land of hopes.

Javanese Women Fight for Private Rights

The novel proceeds to narrate the struggles of the two characters once they arrive in New Caledonia. Racial domination by white people quickly affects the Javanese women. Humiliation and cruelty have been apparent since their time on the ship although some white people have been empathetic towards both of them. On board, Savia meets a Dutch man named Joergen, and they both fall in love. However, she then has to wrangle with challenges from her own kind to be with the Western man. This is when readers become introduced to the exclusive politics of New Caledonia's Javanese community. One unwritten rule says that they can only trust their own kind, and therefore those who are married to non-Javanese, especially white French people, are considered traitors.

Nadiem has her own share of hardships. She has had to face harassment since she was on the ship. The ship's crews perpetrated the first one, but she managed to get past it,

Un matin, sur le point, Nadiem se trouve nez à nez devant un matelot vêtu d'une simple chemise. Il la portait grande ouverte et la deviait du regard. Jerry qui la rejoignait, ne le vit pas, il lui tournait le dos. Nadiem ne fit pas attention tout de suite. Réalisant soudain, elle s'enfuit à toutes jambes tandis que résonnait derrière elle le rire gras du matelot et de ses comparses venus le rejoindre. "Allons ma belle, on ne te veut pas de mal. C'était seulement un pari" lui cria-t-il en néerlandais. "Dégoutants, mal élevés," répondit-elle en javanais. (Saintomer 2001, 31–32)

One morning, on the ship, Nadiem found herself face to face with a sailor dressed in a simple shirt. He was wearing it in a revealing way while staring in a different direction. Jerry, who was with her, did not see him as he was facing away. Nadiem did not pay attention right away. Upon sudden realization, she fled at full speed as heavy laughter echoed behind her from the sailor and his cronies who had come to join him. "Oh come on, sweetie, we don't mean any harm. It was only a bet," he shouted at her in Dutch. "Disgusting, disrespectful," she replied in Javanese.

Nadiem's experience with the harassment takes place on the ship. Even though the sea captain offers his sympathy, Nadiem cannot approve of how he dismisses it as commonplace by saying that such incident happens often. She protests strongly against such normalization.

Upon arriving in Nouméa, Nadiem begins to feel the racial segregation imposed by the New Caledonian government, which regulates every aspect of life there. Laborers are assigned to different places according to race: The Arabs work at Col de Boghen, while the white and black workers go to Col des Roussettes. The government also regulates the workers' dress code: They must wear wide-brimmed

The Survival Strategy of Diaspora Javanese Women in New Caledonia in the Novel *La Bayou de Djakarta à Nouméa*

hats, plaid shirts, and long cloth pants. Each worker's ration depends on their contract; they may get rice, sugar, tea, salt, and meat. The novel then tells us that there are stereotypes regarding the different migrant workers in New Caledonia. Workers from Java are friendly, pleasant, and hardworking; the Japanese are difficult to approach, while the Indochinese are individualistic. Employers' relationships with Javanese workers tend to be better and closer than with workers from other corners of the globe. This is slightly relevant to historical narratives that tell of Javanese as being quite approachable. However, this amiable attitude became one of the reasons they often became exploited by white people (Ryananta 2017).

The novel zooms in on the past by explaining the behaviors of the Javanese who have lived in New Caledonia for some time.

“Les gens disent de nous que nous sommes un peuple docile, doux et travailleur; les Japonais étaient difficiles, les Indochinois particuliers. Là où j'étais engagé, les relations patrons/ouvriers javanais étaient bonnes.”(Saintomer 2001, 43).

People say that we are docile, gentle, and hard working people; the Japanese are difficult, the Indochines peculiar. Where I was hired, Javanese patron/workers relations are very good.

From the above quotes, the novel generally describes the Javanese as a cooperative lot; their employers find them easy to work with and open to collaborate on different jobs. Despite their agreeable qualities, some of the Javanese do face discrimination and harassment in the new land, and Nadiem is no exception. She works as a housemaid for a French couple, Monsieur Loulou and his mistrustful wife. Monsieur Loulou's wife despises Nadiem, and uses the term “*la bayou*” to mock her. The term is derived from “*mbak ayu*”, which in Javanese means “older sister”. However, the lady of the house gives the term a tinge of negative connotation, namely that of an unruly woman.

On a Sunday, which according to the contract is Nadiem's day off, her female employer tells her to clean up some spilled water in one corner of the yard. Nadiem refuses.

“Nadiem, viens voir par là. Essuie-moi cela tout de suite. Tiens, vas laver aussi ces vêtements.

-Mais Madame, c'est aujourd'hui dimanche et j'ai l'après midi de congé

-Et bien, tu récupérera sur ta semaine

-Non Madame, j'ai des choses à faire en ville et je me suis déjà changée (Saintomer 2001, 61).

“Nadiem, come and look over there. Wipe that off for me right away. Here, go wash these clothes as well.”

“But, Madam, today is a Sunday, so I have the afternoon off.”

“Well then you can make up for it on a weekday.”

“No, Madam. I have things to do in town, and I have already changed.”

Nadiem summons the courage to refuse her female employer's orders to defend her right to have Sundays off. She is steadfast in her conviction despite the lady's onslaught of orders. Out of spite, the lady slaps her.

Sa patronne descendait en hâte les marches qui les séparaient et la gifla à plusieurs reprises. Elle osait lui répondre ! Nadiem saisit un tison dans le feu resté allumé. Elle menaçait sa patronne. Nadiem en avait assez de ses agissements, voulait bien être puni si elle méritait vraiment. Mais là, sa patronne dépassait les bornes ! (Saintomer 2001, 61).

Her employer hurried down the steps that separated them and slapped her several times. She dared to answer her! Nadiem grabbed a brand from the burning fire. She threatened her employer. Nadiem had had enough of her actions, and she was willing to be punished if she really deserved it. But in this case, her employer had crossed the line!

This incident allows Nadiem's rebellious nature to resurface: She is not afraid to challenge someone who is structurally more dominant. Despite her lower status as a contract laborer, she dares to rebel against her white employer. It is at this crucial point of the story that the author turns Nadiem into a representation of the strength of Javanese diaspora women in New Caledonia in confronting the colonial injustice of the early 20th century.

Realizing that she cannot face Nadiem on her own, her female employer reports her to her husband. However, another strength that Nadiem is said to possess is her beauty, which has captivated her male employer.

« Loulou, viens voir ta « bayou », elle veut me taper dessus »

Son mari accourut. Il maîtrisa sans peine Nadiem.

Elle savait qu'elle ne ferait pas le poids et lâcha le tison.

« Va-t-en lui cria, on verra ce soir

-Loulou, elle m'a menacé, elle aurait pu me tuer »

Silences

“Loulou, come look at your ‘bayou’, she’s going to beat me.”

Her husband came running. He easily overpowered Nadiem.

She knew she was no match for him and let go of the brand.

“Go away,” he shouted, “we’ll see you tonight.”

“Loulou, she threatened me, she could have killed me.”

“Silence.”

The passage presents an unusual pattern in the relationship between the employers and the servant. In the context of colonialism, women and men who are slaves or employees in countries controlled by colonialism are socially under the domination of their employers (Kurniawan 2013, 30–38). Both white men and women would position themselves as rulers in countries where their race dominates (Bonds and Inwood 2015, 715–733). One of the reasons that makes the patrons position themselves as dominant is because of the desire to maintain the economic aspect.

The Survival Strategy of Diaspora Javanese Women in New Caledonia in the Novel *La Bayou de Djakarta à Nouméa*

“Ils étaient là pour travailler leur terre, cueillir le café entre autres choses. Ils ne voulaient pas ajouter d'autres dépenses en vue de leur éducation. "Gare à tes petits javanais, disait un ami de leur patron. Prends garde! En grandissant, ils prendront la place de tes enfants” (Saintomer 2001, 51)

The Javanese were there to work the land of the patrons and pick the coffee, among other things. The patrons did not want to add other expenses for their education.

“Watch out for your little Javanese, said a friend of Nadiem’s patron. Watch out!

As they grew up, they will take the place of your children.

However, in the case of Nadiem, when her right is violated, Nadiem fights back. She stands by her decision to have her day off even if it means experiencing verbal and physical abuse from her female employer. Nadiem goes even further by fighting back against her employer’s physical abuse. The use of the word “*bayou*” as an insult heightens the abuse to new levels. At one level, it is an insult to Nadiem as an individual, placing her in a dishonorable position as a woman. At the second level, the word mocks Javanese women in general. Uttered by a white person, the word puts Western people as a collective that degrades Javanese women as a whole.

In the novel, the author explains the meaning of the word “*bayou*” as “older sister”. The Javanese use this term when addressing a woman whom they consider a sister, or when referring to a woman slightly older than them. Another loan word found in the novel is “*kakane*”, from the Javanese “*kakang*”, which means “older brother”. However, Nadiem’s female employer uses the word “*bayou*” in a pejorative context to mock her out of jealousy. In contrast, in other instances, the male employer uses “*bayou*” in an affectionate fashion.

Another private right that the novel’s female Javanese characters, including Nadiem, fight for is their right to have romantic relationships with men. We have learned about Savia’s struggle with romance, but Nadiem’s is an entirely different story. Nadiem and her beloved Senen wish to start a family together. However, Monsieur Loulou disapproves of the idea. Nadiem and Senen eventually get married in front of a Javanese elder with traditional religious authority called Le Hadji. They choose not to marry before the official Dutch authority as a strategy so that the immigration authority will not be aware of it. However, Nadiem’s male employer finally finds out and becomes furious.

« Alors, comme ça tu t’est mariée avec un Javanais, un kakane ? »

Silences. En prononçant ce mot, il avait pris un ton méprisant. Il savait que cela voulait dire grand frère. Les Javanais s’appellent respectueusement entre eux comme cela.

« Réponds

-Oui monsieur

-Oui Patron ! Je te l’ai déjà dit

-Oui ... Patron.

-Je ne t'ai pas faire venir ici pour aller avec un Javanais. Tu es là pour travailler non pas pour batifoler

-Mais Patron tu t'es bien marié toi ? Alors pourquoi moi Javanais n'ai-je pas ce droit ?

-Il ne fait pas partie de mon personnel ! »

Elle fut sur le point de répondre, mais une gifle empêche toute tentative (Saintomer 2001, 66).

“So, you got married to a Javanese, a *kakane* (a Javanese man)?”

Silence. He said the word in a contemptuous tone. He knew it meant big brother.

The Javanese respectfully call each other that way.

“Answer.”

“Yes, Sir.”

““Yes, Boss! I've told you.”

“Yes, Boss.”

“I didn't bring you here to wander off with a Javanese. You are here to work, not to frolic.”

“But, Boss, are you not married as well? Why can't I, a Javanese, have the same right?”

“That's not my problem!”

She was about to reply, but a slap prevented the intention.

Nadiem is described as having the courage to defend her right, even though her marriage to Senen is eventually annulled by Monsieur Loulou. Without informing them, he makes the decision that the two are divorced. Nadiem is later brought to the immigration office to be arrested by the German police. They treat her like a farm animal, beating her up with a whip called *le nerf de bœuf*. She is then taken to another place called Quinné to be put in a cell.

We see from the above explanation that to their employers, especially the male patrons, the Javanese workers are nothing but properties. The foreign employers believe that they own the private rights of their Javanese workers, even the latter's right to marry, and that they can annul the marriages of these workers. The domination of other white males is apparent in how the German police officers reinforce the power of the French employer. There is a process in which exploitation and violence exist and multiply. As a Javanese woman, Nadiem is subjugated in terms of gender, ethnicity, and social class. By gender, she is the property of a man. Ethnically, she is a Javanese and is thus lower in hierarchy than a white person. In terms of social class, she is a mere housemaid under the control of people from the country's upper class. Nadiem represents “the other”, forced to submit to the power of “the selves”, namely white men and women. In historical context, the othering process took place through an institutionalization by an administrative system, underscored by the socially and politically formed colonial mindset that gave rise to an established hierarchy (Udasmoro 2017, 77–99; 2018, 1–9).

However, Nadiem is not about to give up. She puts up a fight through various forms of resistance.

Chaque fois, son patron pressait Nadiem de travailler.

Elle refusait, butée. Elle ne voulait pas se nourrir non plus. Tant pis, qu'ils retiennent les frais de son séjour en prison sur son salaire ! Son patron ne portait plus la main sur elle (Saintomer 2001, 68).

All the time, her employer told her to work.

She would stubbornly refuse. She also would not eat. Too bad, they had deducted the cost of her stay in prison from her wage! Her employer no longer laid a hand on her.

Nadiem's resistance finally pays off. The Javanese woman, subordinate in terms of ethnicity, social class, and gender in the social context of New Caledonian society, can rise above those who are superior. Her courage and resistance to protect her rights have become her survival strategy, despite all the consequences. Finally, due to the outbreak of the Second World War, Monsieur Loulou leaves New Caledonia and returns to France with his family.

The above explanation shows that the physical and psychological violence experienced by Nadwageiem as a woman comes not only from men but also from women. The men act in the name of contract agreement, an alleged violation of which makes them feel that they have the right to use physical violence. On the other hand, the first woman to cause Nadiem to experience physical and psychological violence is her stepmother. She exploits Nadiem in her youth with heavy work when she is still in Java. Nadiem's female employer also takes advantage of her, thinking that she gets to tell her to do anything she wants, even though it violates her rights as a worker.

Facing Ethnicity-Based Sexual Violence

During the Second World War, American troops began to enter New Caledonia. This part of history is also captured in the novel. Because of her good looks, Nadiem becomes the target of sexual harassment from several American soldiers. In one incident, while Nadiem is carrying water buckets, an American man suddenly appears and greets her flirtatiously.

-Laisse-moi te les porter Bayou. Ils sont beaucoup trop lourds pour toi.

- « Non, je suis capable de les porter seule ». Elle avait fini par connaître quelques mots d'anglais et s'adresser à lui avec un fort joli accent

-Regards tes petites mains, elles ne supportent même pas les rudes travaux que tu fais. » dit-il en la caressant et en insistant sur ses seins. Nadiem se raidit. Les enfants crièrent de peur (Saintomer 2001, 132).

"Let me carry them for you, bayou. Those are way too heavy for you."

"No, I can carry these myself." She had ended up knowing a few words of English and she addressed him in quite a pleasant accent.

“Look at your tiny hands, they can’t possibly stand the hard work that you are doing,” he said by caressing and emphasizing her breast. Nadiem stiffened. Her children cried out in terror.

The first thing Nadiem does is save her children. She tells them to go up to the house and sing loudly to get rid of their fear. She then manages to escape and locks herself in a room. The American man finally leaves.

Diaspora Javanese women who become contract laborers in New Caledonia end up experiencing various threatening situations. Their lowly status makes them easy targets for sexual abuse by men that happen to have power. Nadiem goes from one form of violence to another — from physical and verbal to sexual violence. However, in the various incidents, she is said to show no fear and instead look for strategies so that her children can learn to be brave in such situations.

One night, another attempt at sexual violence occurs. Two men bang on Nadiem’s door, threatening to force their way in.

« Bayou, ma jolie, on sait que tu es là. On vient boire un coup, ouvre-nous. On a vu ton mari à la laiterie, on vient te donner de ses nouvelles. » Nadiem ne répondit pas, réfléchissant à sa stratégie de repli. Elle réveilla ses enfants en leur demandant de se taire. Les hommes donnaient de grands coups contre la porte. Ils allaient tout enfoncer. Elle leur ouvre et dit d’une voix qui se voulait calme (Saintomer 2001, 134).

“Bayou, my pretty, we know you’re in there. We’re coming for a drink, let us in. We saw your husband at the milk house, we’re here to give you some news.” Nadiem did not reply. She tried to come up with a strategy for the plight. She woke her children up and asked them to be quiet. The men were banging hard on the door. They tried to force their way in. She opened the door for them and spoke in a calm voice.

The American men deliberately come to Nadiem’s house to hassle her, knowing that her husband is away. They have learnt that her husband is having an affair, so now they feel that they have a chance at harassing her. Here, it is apparent that Nadiem’s husband, whom she trusts, also commits violence by leaving her side and going to another woman for pleasure. He has placed Nadiem and their children in a dangerous situation without his protection, which culminates in threats of violence from other men.

The above situation shows an exercise of power by two American men to a woman whom they think will not be able to put up any resistance. They intimidate her by banging on the door and threatening to force it open. Here we see that Nadiem’s priority, once again, is her children.

Nadiem finally makes her way out with the help of a neighbor, Jerry, who is also Javanese. By helping her, Jerry himself risks being the target of violence. It is also Jerry who manages to return Senen to his wife and children. This kind of solidarity that seeps into the private domains of Javanese as neighbors shows a form of collective survival strategy.

Conclusion

From the above exposition, one can appreciate how the author of *La Bayou de Djakarta à Nouméa* has turned memory transmission from her mother into a historical, personal narrative that describes the position of Javanese women in New Caledonia's colonial society. The novel also paints a clear picture of the dilemma some Javanese women faced in deciding to leave their homeland. It presents the different processes of their survival strategy, carried out in various ways. In the case of Nadiem, the main character, the process, namely escapism, is seen in her considerations for leaving Java. She does love her homeland, but it happens to be riddled with trauma and sadness due to her poverty and the harsh treatment she has been receiving from her domineering stepmother. The escapism is carried out speculatively as she has no idea what lies ahead in her destination — a foreign country that is said to be wild but full of hope. This speculation is also a form of survival strategy: She would rather head into the unknown than live in a place where she is certain that nothing will change for the better.

In addition to escapism, the main female character in the novel, Nadiem, has to face the domination of race, gender, social class and age in her survival strategy. Resistance is one of the ways used by Nadiem to successfully fight for her fate. The more she resists, the more she gets challenges from other dominant figures. However, her resistance paid off in the end.

The survival strategies found in this novel translate into various individual mechanisms carried out by the woman on her own out of courage. Such mechanisms are rarely used in colonial history, where the lower classes, both men and women, commonly resorted to the strategy of submission. However, in this novel, the Javanese woman, a migrant who works as a lowly contract laborer, can fight back and manages to produce results each time. However, the novel also presents collective survival strategies. Some of the Javanese characters support each other to survive living through difficult situations, even though they all have risks to take in doing so.

Acknowledgment

We would like to thank The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Research (PD DIkti) for their support.

استراتيجية البقاء للنساء الجاوية في الشتات في كاليدونيا الجديدة
عبر رواية La Bayou de Djakarta à Nouméa

وينينج أوداسمورو

قسم اللغة والأدب، جامعة غادجاه مادا، إندونيسيا

سيتيادي

قسم الأنثروبولوجيا، جامعة غادجاه مادا إندونيسيا

أبريليليا فيرموناساري

قسم اللغة والأدب، جامعة غادجاه مادا، إندونيسيا

الملخص

تعد ليليان سانت أومير (Liliane Saint-Omer) مؤلفة من المؤلفين القلائل حول النساء الجاويات في الشتات في منطقة جنوب غرب المحيط الهادئ، في أواخر القرن التاسع عشر إلى أوائل القرن العشرين، أرسل الحكام الهولنديون للهند الشرقية الهولندية أشخاصاً من جاوة للعمل كعمال بعقود في المناطق التي تسيطر عليها فرنسا في جنوب غرب المحيط الهادئ، يستكشف هذا المقال استراتيجية البقاء للمراهقات الجاوية التي أصبحت جزءاً من الأحداث التاريخية التي تكشف في كاليدونيا الجديدة، واستخدم البحث بيانات من الرواية La Bayou de Djakarta à Nouméa (لا بايو دي جاكركتا أ نومييا أو الأخت الكبيرة من جاكركتا إلى نومييا) كالمواد الرئيسية. وحُلَّت القصة من خلال فحص الكلمات والجمل والفقرات في الرواية مما يوفر نظرة ثاقبة للجوانب المختلفة لاستراتيجية البقاء، وأثبتت نتائج الدراسة أن الشتات الجاوية مارست أشكالاً وأنواعاً من المقاومة الفردية والجماعية، وعانت النساء الجاويات من اضطهاد متعدد الطبقات بسبب الجنس والعرق والمكانة الاجتماعية والعمر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النساء، الشتات، الجاوي، كاليدونيا الجديدة، استراتيجية البقاء.

Endnotes

¹ The translations from French into English were done by the author.

References

- Adi, Catherine. 2014. *Orang Kontrak: Les Engagés Originaires de Java Vebus Sous Contrat en Nouvelles-Calédonie 1896-1955*. Province Nord: Editions de la Provice Nord, Koné.
- Allen, Pamela. 2015. Diasporic Representations of the Home Culture: Case Studies from Suriname and New Caledonia. *Asian Ethnicity* 16(2): 353–379. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2013.853544>
- Bastien, Ama. 2008. *Le Rêve Accompli de Bandung à Nouméa*. Nouméa: Anais Betam Editions.
- Beck, Tony. 1989. Survival Strategies and Power amongst the Poorest in a West Bengal Village. *IDS Bulletin* 20 (2): 23–32. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.1989.mp20002004.x>
- Bell, Finn McLafferty, Mary Kate Dennis, and Amy Krings. 2019. Collective Survival Strategies and Anti-Colonial Practice in Ecosocial Work. *Journal of Community Practice* 27 (3–4): 279–95. doi:10.1080/10705422.2019.1652947.
- Bonds, Anne, and Joshua Inwood. 2015. Beyond White Privilege: Geographies of White Supremacy and Settler Colonialism. *Progress in Human Geography* 40 (6): 715–733. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132515613166>
- Chappell, David A. 1993. Frontier Ethnogenesis: The Case of New Caledonia. *Journal of World History* 4 (2): 307–24. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20078566>.
- Cohen, Scott. 2010. Searching for Escape, Authenticity and Identity: Experiences of ‘Lifestyle Travellers’. In *The Tourism and Leisure Experience: Consumer and Managerial Perspectives*, ed. M. Morgan, P. Lugosi, and J.R.B Ritchie, 27–42. Bristol: Channel View Publications.
- Connell, John. 1987. *New Caledonia or Kanaky? The Political History of French Colony*. Canberra: National Centre for Development Studies Research School of Pacific Studies The Australian National University.
- Connell, John. 2021. The 2020 New Caledonia Referendum: The Slow March to Independence? *The Journal of Pacific History*, 56(2): 144–160.
- Gomez, Marie-Léandre. 2015. “A Bourdieusian Perspective on Strategizing.” In *Cambridge Handbook of Strategy as Practice*, edited by Damon Golsorkhi, Rouleau Linda, David Seidl, and Eero Vaara, 184–98. Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139681032.011
- Ida, Rachmah. 2006. *Watching Indonesian Sinetron: Imagining Communities around the Television*. Perth: Curtin University.
- Kurniawan, Bagus. 2013. Dominasi Penguasa Kolonial terhadap Bumiputra dalam Surat Kerajaan Pontianak Abad ke-19: Analisis Pascakolonial. *Poetika* 1(1): 30–38.
- Maurer, Jean-Luc. 2006. *Les Javanais du Caillou: Des Affres de l’Exil aux Aléas de l’Intégration*. Paris: Association Archipel.

- Muljono-Larue. 2015. *Histoire de l'Immigration des Javanais Sous Contrat en Nouvelle-Calédonie (1896-1950)*. Master Thesis. Paris: INALCO University.
- Prihantoro, Wawan. 2016. Diaspora Etnik Jawa dan Transmisi Bahasa Jawa Antargenerasi di Sumatra Utara. *Ranah: Journal of Language Studies* 5(1): 33–42.
- Ryananta, Widyarka. 2017. *Jejak Orang Jawa di New Caledonia*. Jakarta: Peniti Media.
- Saintomer, Liliane. 2001. *La Bayou de Djakarta à Nouméa*. Nouméa: Imprimerie Graphoprint.
- Subiyantoro. 2014. Survival Strategies of the Javanese Language in New Caledonia. *Humaniora* 26(1): 43–55.
- Subiyantoro, Subiyantoro, Marsono, and Wening Udasmoro. 2017. Integration of French Lexicons in New Caledonian Javanese. *Humaniora* 29 (1): 85–93. doi:10.22146/jh.22568.
- Udasmoro, Wening. 2017. The Language Construction of Muslims in French Contemporary Discourses. *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 7(1): 77–99. <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.7i1>
- Udasmoro, Wening. 2018. Othering and Selfing: Reading Gender Hierarchies and Social Categories in Michel Houellebecq's Novel *Soumission*. *Humaniora* 30(1): 1–9.
- Udasmoro, Wening, and Setiadi. 2021. Gender Discourses in Positioning Indonesian Female Migrant Workers. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik* 24(3): 237–252.
- Villierius, Sophie. 2017. Developments in Surinamese Javanese. In *Boundaries and Bridges: Language Contact in Multilingual Ecologies*, ed. Kofi Yakpo and Pieter C. Muysken, 151–178. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781614514886-006>