

Representations of Slavery and Colonialism in Iksaka Banu's Novel *Rasina*

Nur Sahidin* 

Indonesian Literature Study Program, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Jakarta 13220, Indonesia

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 06 January 2026	Slavery and colonialism profoundly shaped Indonesian society through systems of domination, exploitation, violence, and social inequality. These historical experiences continue to influence cultural memory and representations of the colonial past. This study examines the representation of slavery and colonialism in Iksaka Banu's novel <i>Rasina</i> , focusing on how the novel depicts oppression, dehumanization, exploitation, and colonial power relations. The study employed a qualitative descriptive approach using qualitative content analysis. Data were collected through repeated reading and note-taking and consisted of words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, narratives, and quotations related to slavery and colonialism. The data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, verification, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that slavery is represented through the treatment of enslaved people as commodities, including their sale, forced reproduction, exploitation, physical restraint, and sexual exploitation. These practices demonstrate the denial of human dignity and freedom under the colonial system. Colonialism is represented through the 1621 massacre of the Banda population by the VOC, the slave market where <i>Rasina</i> was sold, violence and intimidation by VOC officials, and the economic exploitation of indigenous resources. These representations demonstrate that colonialism operated not only through territorial domination but also through economic exploitation, violence, and the control of human bodies and social relations. The study concludes that <i>Rasina</i> functions as a literary representation of the historical realities and human consequences of slavery and colonialism in Indonesia. Through its historical narrative, the novel provides a critical reflection on oppression, inequality, human dignity, and social justice while contributing to the understanding of colonial memory in Indonesian literature.
Accepted: 13 February 2026	
Published: 01 March 2026	
Keywords: Slavery, Colonialism, <i>Rasina</i> , Iksaka Banu, Sociology of Literature, Historical Fiction	

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s)

Published by CV Wahana Publikasi.

This article is an open access article under the [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)

1. Introduction

Slavery and colonialism are two historical phenomena that have profoundly shaped societies, economies, cultures, and national identities, including in Indonesia. Their impacts extend beyond the end of colonial rule, continuing to influence perceptions of history, identity, power relations, and collective memory. Colonial experiences can be renegotiated through cultural and literary narratives that connect the past with contemporary social conditions (Burdett & Mancosu, 2024; Maricocchi, 2024). Therefore, examining slavery and colonialism remains relevant for understanding the historical dynamics that have shaped Indonesian society.

In Indonesia, centuries of Dutch colonialism left histories of oppression, exploitation, and inequality. Colonial domination transformed local social, economic, and political structures through the control of territories, resources, labor, and social institutions (Rochmiatun et al., 2023). Colonialism thus involved not only political and economic domination but also social experiences that produced trauma, inequality, and changes in identity. Literature provides an important medium through which these historical experiences can be represented and reconsidered.

Historical fiction can reconstruct the past through characters, settings, conflicts, and human experiences, allowing literature to question dominant historical narratives and present alternative perspectives (Alvarado, 2023; Boulanger, 2022). Literary narratives can also contribute to collective memory by shaping how readers understand historical events and the communities that experienced them (Plantinga, 2021). In this context, Iksaka Banu's *Rasina* offers a significant representation of colonial life and the interconnected experiences of slavery, violence, and colonial power. Recent research shows that the novel represents colonial space, slave trade, violence, maritime networks, and the relationship between colonial power and Batavian society (Ferdiansyah et al., 2025). Other studies have examined *Rasina* in relation to colonialism, subalternity, discrimination, and resistance (Bekkaoui, 2023).

Since the establishment of the VOC in 1602, military expansion became an important strategy for consolidating Dutch colonial power in Indonesia (Aman, 2014:19). This expansion served not only to control the spice trade but also to establish an economic and political system based on territorial domination, trade monopolies, armed conquest, and exploitation. Such domination produced long-term socioeconomic transformations in various regions of Indonesia (Rochmiatun et al., 2023). Slavery was an important component of this colonial system. Indigenous people were forced into labor, sold as commodities, and subjected to physical and psychological violence. In *Rasina*, slavery is not merely a historical background but an important element of the colonial social and economic structure. Ferdiansyah et al. (2025) demonstrate that the representation of slave trading in the novel is connected to maritime networks, ports, bureaucracy, and colonial mechanisms that reduced human beings to commodities. The brutality of the Banda conquest also became notorious in Europe (Banu, 2023, p. 581), demonstrating that colonialism involved systematic exploitation as well as territorial control.

Literature can document and humanize such historical experiences by connecting historical facts with individual characters, social structures, and conflicts (Ang, 2022; Alvarado, 2023). Through this perspective, *Rasina* can be understood not only as historical fiction but also as a cultural text that represents the relationship between individuals, society, and colonial power. Its representation of slavery and colonialism can also contribute to the negotiation of cultural memory, particularly because postcolonial memory involves tensions between dominant narratives, victims' memories, and previously marginalized historical experiences (Maricocchi, 2024). Literature therefore functions as a medium of social criticism, historical reflection, and reinterpretation of the past (Burdett & Mancosu, 2024).

This study aims to examine the representation of slavery and colonialism in Iksaka Banu's *Rasina* using a qualitative descriptive approach and the sociology of literature. This approach

enables literary texts to be examined in relation to their intrinsic elements as well as their connections with authors, society, and the social conditions underlying their production (Sapiro, 2023). The analysis focuses on representations of the 1621 Banda massacre by the VOC, the slave market where *Rasina* was sold, and the working conditions of enslaved people on spice plantations. These aspects are examined to reveal how the novel represents historical and social realities and how literary narratives reflect colonial power relations.

The study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to understanding how slavery and colonialism are reconstructed in Indonesian historical fiction, particularly through the narrative strategies used to represent oppression and marginalized experiences (Ang, 2022; Bekkaoui, 2023). Although previous studies have examined *Rasina* in relation to colonialism, discrimination, hegemony, subalternity, resistance, and hydrocolonialism, research specifically addressing the representation of slavery through the sociology of literature remains limited (Ferdiansyah et al., 2025). Second, applying the sociology of literature connects the novel with its broader social and historical context, allowing *Rasina* to be understood as both historical fiction and a cultural representation of colonial power relations (Sapiro, 2023). Third, the study has educational value because literary representations of historical violence can encourage greater awareness of justice, humanity, and human rights while contributing to collective historical memory (Plantinga, 2021; Burdett & Mancosu, 2024).

Therefore, this study is expected to contribute to Indonesian literary studies by examining how *Rasina* represents slavery and colonialism and how these representations reflect broader historical and social realities. Historical fiction provides a narrative space through which readers can reconsider the relationships among history, identity, and social experience (Boulanger, 2022; Hennessey, 2023). By examining these representations, the study also reinforces the role of literature as a medium for social reflection, historical learning, and critical awareness of past and continuing forms of oppression (Maricocchi, 2024).

2. Method

The method used in this study is qualitative content analysis. Qualitative research is an effort to understand phenomena concerning research subjects based on their experiences, including behavior, perceptions, motivations, actions, and other aspects. A qualitative approach is employed when researchers seek to gain an in-depth understanding of social reality based on the context and perspectives contained in the research data. This approach also enables researchers to systematically describe, interpret, and understand the meanings emerging from a phenomenon (Yadav, 2022; Zilber & Meyer, 2022). In this study, qualitative content analysis was used to identify, categorize, and interpret data in the form of words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, and narratives in Iksaka Banu's novel *Rasina* that are related to representations of slavery and colonialism. Qualitative content analysis enables texts to be systematically examined by considering the context, meanings, themes, and relationships among the categories emerging from the data (Byrne, 2022; Krikser & Jahnke, 2022).

The techniques used in this study were reading and note-taking. The reading technique involved carefully and repeatedly reading Iksaka Banu's *Rasina* to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the content and context of the story. Repeated reading was necessary to enable the researcher to identify data relevant to the research focus more accurately and consistently. The note-taking technique involved recording data relevant to the study, particularly quotations indicating forms of slavery, colonial practices, violence, exploitation, power relations, and their impacts on the lives of characters and society. In text-based qualitative research, the process of identifying and organizing data is essential to ensure that interpretations are grounded in relevant textual evidence (López-Deflory et al., 2022; Byrne, 2022).

The analysis of the collected data involved several interactive and continuous steps to

identify patterns, tendencies, and meanings that could support the development of the research findings and conclusions. The data were analyzed systematically through data reduction, data display, verification, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting, focusing, categorizing, and simplifying data relevant to the research focus. The reduced data were then presented descriptively and organized according to the categories or themes identified. Data display was intended to facilitate the identification of relationships among the data and patterns related to the representation of slavery and colonialism in the novel. A systematic qualitative analysis process is necessary to ensure that the interpretation is not merely descriptive but also generates meaningful insights supported by research data (Yadav, 2022; Krikser & Jahnke, 2022).

According to Miles and Huberman (1984, as cited in Sugiyono, 2017, p. 246), the analytical steps consist of (a) data reduction, (b) data display, (c) verification, and (d) drawing conclusions from the data analysis. In this study, verification was conducted by reexamining the consistency between the categorized data, the research focus, and the resulting interpretations. Conclusions were drawn after all data had been analyzed and verified to ensure that the findings were clearly related to the research questions. Thus, the analysis process was conducted cyclically and reflectively, allowing the researcher to return to the initial data when information required further examination or interpretation was identified. This procedure is important for maintaining the rigor, transparency, and reliability of the qualitative research process (Zilber & Meyer, 2022; Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Slavery

Slavery is a practice or system in which a person is treated as the property of another person, with their fundamental human rights denied, including the rights to freedom and dignity. In this context, a person referred to as a slave has no control over themselves and is forced to work or serve their master without adequate compensation or recognition of their basic human rights. Slavery has long been regarded as a violation of human rights and has been prohibited in many countries around the world. Slavery undermines human dignity, destroys individual freedom, and violates fundamental principles of human rights. It creates extreme social inequality and often has negative effects on the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of its victims. This is supported by the following quotation:

"Air muka mereka menggambarkan aneka perasaan: kemarahan, ketakutan, dan keputusasaan." (Rasina, hal. 130)

Slavery can also perpetuate cycles of poverty and social injustice and contribute to tensions between groups and social conflicts within society.

"Menurut Rasina, itu budak-budak resmi De Vries, bukan selundupan. Mereka tidak diperdagangkan untuk waktu yang lama. Mereka dikawinkan dengan sesame mereka dan diminta beranak banyak agar De Vries punya Cadangan budak di masa depan. Bahkan De Vries kerap menjadikan beberapa budak perempuan sebagai pemuas nafsu."

The quotation demonstrates how slavery perpetuates cycles of poverty and social injustice and maintains the institution of slavery by restricting individual freedom and dignity. In the quotation, Rasina explains that De Vries's official slaves are treated as property rather than as human beings with rights and freedom. They are used merely as objects for reproductive purposes. This practice not only economically exploits the slaves but also disregards their fundamental rights as human beings. Thus, the statement perpetuates cycles of poverty and social injustice by reinforcing and maintaining the system of slavery.

"tak berapa lama, muncul rombongan budak dari situ, enam laki-laki dan empat Perempuan. Kaki dan tangan mereka dirantai. Semuanya telanjang bulat." (hlm. 560)

Iksaka Banu explicitly depicts the cruelty and dehumanization that occurred during the

colonial era. This scene demonstrates how slaves were treated as being worth no more than animals, presenting a cruel yet realistic portrayal of the brutality experienced by many people during that period.

4.2 Colonialism

The following are several representations of colonialism in Iksaka Banu's novel *Rasina*. The Massacre of the Banda Population (1621) by the VOC (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie). This event represents the brutality of Dutch colonialism in its efforts to control the spice resources of the Banda Islands. The massacre demonstrates how colonial power was exercised through violence and domination to secure economic interests. The historical background of the novel confirms that the ancestors of Rasina were among the victims of the 1621 massacre of the Banda population by Jan Pieterszoon Coen and the VOC.

"Dari deretan rumah itumuncullah puluhan lelaki membawa bedil, tombak, dan parang. Mereka berlari menyongsong kami sambil berteriak. Ekspresi mereka sulit untuk di gambarkan." (hlm. 355)

The quotation illustrates the violent encounter between the colonial forces and the local population. The presence of firearms, spears, and machetes, followed by the aggressive movement of the men, creates an atmosphere of fear and violence. This representation reflects the exercise of colonial power through coercion and physical force. Previous research on *Rasina* also identifies European domination and colonial violence as important aspects of the novel's representation of colonial relations.

The Slave Market. Another significant scene occurs when Rasina is sold at a slave market. The slave market represents the widespread practice of slavery during the colonial period, in which human beings were treated as commodities that could be bought and sold. The novel depicts Rasina as a slave whose body and identity are subjected to the economic logic of the colonial system. This representation is consistent with recent studies showing that *Rasina* portrays slaves as commodities within colonial administrative and economic networks.

"Kurasa peletakan nomor urut itu bukan tanpa alasan. Rasina paling jelita di antara budak Perempuan lain. Tentu harga pembuka untuknya akan dipasang tinggi." (hlm. 567)

The quotation demonstrates the commodification of human beings through the slave market. Rasina's physical appearance is considered a determining factor in establishing her economic value. The use of a numbered system and the reference to an opening price indicate that slaves were treated as objects of trade rather than as human beings with rights and dignity. This scene therefore reveals the connection between colonialism and economic exploitation.

Violence and Economic Exploitation by VOC Officials. VOC officials are also represented as exercising cruel and inhumane treatment toward the Indonesian population. They used violence, intimidation, and political authority to maintain obedience and maximize economic benefits from the colonized territories. The economic exploitation experienced by indigenous communities was reflected in colonial policies that prioritized the extraction of local resources for the benefit of the colonizers rather than the welfare of the local population. Research on *Rasina* similarly identifies European domination as operating through political, social, and economic structures, including a colonial system in which legal and governmental institutions favored colonial interests.

Thus, the representation of colonialism in *Rasina* is manifested through physical violence, mass killing, the commodification of human beings, political domination, and economic exploitation. These representations demonstrate that colonialism operated not merely as territorial occupation but as a broader system of power that controlled bodies, resources, social relations, and institutions. The novel consequently presents colonialism as a system that produced oppression and inequality while prioritizing colonial economic and political

interests.

4. Conclusion

Iksaka Banu's novel *Rasina* clearly represents slavery and colonialism through various scenes and narratives that depict the cruelty, injustice, and dehumanization experienced by Indonesian society during the Dutch colonial period. Through the characters and events portrayed in the novel, readers are invited to understand the profound and widespread impacts of slavery and colonialism, which violated human rights and reinforced social and economic inequalities.

Slavery in the novel is portrayed through explicit scenes depicting how slaves were treated merely as property that could be bought and sold, married for reproductive purposes, and used to satisfy the desires of their masters. Quotations such as "Air muka mereka menggambarkan aneka perasaan: kemarahan, ketakutan, dan keputusasaan" and "tak berapa lama, muncul rombongan budak dari situ, enam laki-laki dan empat perempuan. Kaki dan tangan mereka dirantai. Semuanya telanjang bulat" demonstrate how slavery undermined human dignity and perpetuated cycles of poverty and social injustice.

Colonialism is represented in the novel through several significant aspects, including the mass massacre of the Banda population by the VOC in 1621, which demonstrates the extreme cruelty and violence committed to control valuable resources. The slave market and the treatment of Indonesian people by VOC officials depicted in the novel reveal the inhumane ways in which the colonizers treated the local population. The VOC's economic policies, which exploited natural resources without considering the welfare of the indigenous population, further demonstrate the oppression and exploitation experienced by Indonesian society during the colonial period.

In conclusion, *Rasina* not only depicts the dark history of slavery and colonialism but also highlights the psychological, social, and economic impacts of these systems on individuals and society as a whole. Through this narrative, Iksaka Banu addresses important issues of humanity and social justice while providing a deeper understanding of the complexity and brutality of colonialism in Indonesia. The novel can serve as a valuable reference for literary and historical studies, as well as an educational resource for understanding and appreciating the importance of human rights and social justice.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Authors' Contribution

Nur Sahidin: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, and Writing – review & editing.

Statement of the Use of AI

AI tools were used for proofreading and language editing. No AI tools were used in the research analysis, data interpretation, methodology, or formulation of the findings and conclusions. The author takes full responsibility for the content, analysis, findings, and conclusions of the manuscript.

References

Alvarado, C. (2023). On reading Mau Mau. *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*,

- 10(1), 37–56. <https://doi.org/10.1017/pli.2022.25>
- Aman. (2014). *Indonesia: Dari kolonialisme sampai nasionalisme*. Pujangga Press.
- Ang, A. (2022). Mobility as memory: Refiguring temporal and spatial mobility in Tan Twan Eng's *The Gift of Rain*. *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, 9(1), 26–41. <https://doi.org/10.1017/pli.2021.34>
- Banu, I. (2023). *Rasina*. Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia.
- Bekkaoui, H. (2023). Disorienting the native struggle for independence: A postcolonial reading of Leila Slimani's historical novel *The Country of Others*. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 5(4), 77–94. <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v5i4.1469>
- Boulanger, D. (2022). "In the centre of our circle": Gender, selfhood and non-linear time in Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda*. *Angelaki*, 27(3–4), 223–235. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2022.2093981>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 18(3), 328–352. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238>
- Burdett, C., & Mancosu, G. (2024). The dialectics of (post)colonial memory: Nostalgic representations of the imperial experience in contemporary Italy. *Italian Culture*, 42(2), 180–197. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01614622.2024.2424715>
- Byrne, D. (2022). A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quality & Quantity*, 56(3), 1391–1412. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y>
- Davies, D. (2022). All that is solid falls from the sky: Modernity and the volume of world literature. *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, 9(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1017/pli.2021.33>
- De Mul, S. (2011). *Colonial memory: Contemporary women's travel writing in Britain and the Netherlands*. Amsterdam University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048513857>
- Ferdiansyah, R., Ayun, K. Q., & Khasanah, S. U. (2025). Reading Batavia from the water: Canals, ports, and hydrocolonialism in Iksaka Banu's novel *Rasina*. *Poetika: Jurnal Ilmu Sastra*, 13(2), 83–93. <https://doi.org/10.22146/poetika.v13i2.112196>
- Hennessey, J. L. (Ed.). (2023). *History and speculative fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-42235-5>
- Kiger, M. E., & Varpio, L. (2020). Thematic analysis of qualitative data: AMEE Guide No. 131. *Medical Teacher*, 42(8), 846–854. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2020.1755030>
- Krikser, T., & Jahnke, B. (2022). Phenomena-centered text analysis (PTA): A new approach to foster the qualitative paradigm in text analysis. *Quality & Quantity*, 56(5), 3539–3554. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01277-6>
- López-Deflory, C., Perron, A., & Miró-Bonet, M. (2022). A methodological and practical guide to study peripheral voices in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221100639>
- Maricocchi, R. (2025). Reframing colonial amnesia: German colonialism and multilingual memory in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Afterlives*. *Atlantic Studies*, 22(4), 512–533. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2024.2328464>
- Plantinga, C. (2021). Collective memory and the rhetorical power of the historical fiction film. *Global Storytelling: Journal of Digital and Moving Images*, 1(1), 113–132. <https://doi.org/10.3998/gs.855>
- Quayson, A. (Ed.). (2012). *The Cambridge history of postcolonial literature* (Vol. 2). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9781107007031>
- Rochmiatun, E., Maryam, M., & Gusela, N. (2023). The impact of the Palembang war and Dutch colonial domination on socio-economic changes in Palembang in the XIX–XX century. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 10(1), 2188775.

- <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2023.2188775>
- Sapiro, G. (2023). *The sociology of literature*. Stanford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503637603>
- Yadav, D. (2022). Criteria for good qualitative research: A comprehensive review. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 31, 679–689. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-021-00619-0>
- Zilber, T. B., & Meyer, R. E. (2022). Positioning and fit in designing and executing qualitative research. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 58(3), 377–392.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00218863221095332>
- Zimmerman, T. (2023). *Matria Redux: Caribbean women novelize the past*. University Press of Mississippi. <https://doi.org/10.14325/mississippi/9781496846341.001.0001>