

TRAM AS COLONIAL MICRO-CITY IN IDRUS'S *KOTA-HARMONI*: MODERN TRANSPORT, SEGREGATED MOBILITIES, URBAN POWER RELATIONS

Trem sebagai Miniatur Kota Kolonial dalam *Kota-Harmoni* Karya Idrus:
Transportasi Modern, Mobilitas Tersegregasi, Relasi Kuasa Urban

Moh. Atikurrahman

Sastra Indonesia, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya

Kampus 2, Jalan Dr. Ir. H. Soekarno No. 682, Gunung Anyar, Surabaya, Jawa Timur 60294

Pos-el: atikurrahmann@gmail.com

(Naskah Diterima Tanggal 7 November 2025—Direvisi Akhir Tanggal 8 Desember 2025—Disetujui Tanggal 31 Desember 2025)

Abstrak: Penelitian ini merumuskan bagaimana narasi trem tentang bau, tempat duduk, tiket, dan interupsi merepresentasikan stratifikasi dan segregasi; bagaimana tatanan spasial internal trem mengonfigurasi ulang dan mengganggu ruang-waktu perkotaan; dan bagaimana representasi ini beresonansi dengan, atau memperumit, pola historis modernisasi transportasi dan diferensiasi sosial di kota-kota Indonesia. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan memperlakukan teks fragmen *Kota-Harmoni* sebagai arsip simbolis pengalaman urban pada masa penjajahan. Studi ini menggunakan tiga konsep, yakni (1) distansiasi ruang-waktu Giddens, (2) kompresi ruang-waktu dan urbanisasi kapitalis Harvey, serta (3) transportasi sebagai medan kecepatan yang terdiferensiasi Khusyairi dan Colombijn. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa kompartemen trem memadatkan berbagai hierarki—pembagian kelas formal, ekspektasi rasial, dan perbedaan status lokal—menjadi satu lokasi yang bergerak. Gesekan sehari-hari terkait terasi, tempat duduk, dan penundaan menampilkan rezim pemerintahan kolonial dan masa perang yang abstrak. Teks ini sekaligus menarasikan krisis ruang-waktu pada lingkungan perkotaan yang terkompresi, ketika sebuah perjalanan melalui trem menjadi medan stratifikasi sosial serta mengungkap akses yang tidak merata terhadap kecepatan, kenyamanan, dan kendali atas pergerakan.

Kata kunci: narasi transportasi; urbanisme kolonial; mobilitas segregasi; *Kota-Harmoni*; Idrus

Abstract: This article examines how tram narratives of smell, seating, ticketing, and interruption represent stratification and segregation; how the tram's internal spatial order reconfigures and disrupts urban time-space; and how these representations resonate with, or complicate, historical patterns of transport modernisation and social differentiation in Indonesian cities. The study employs a qualitative and sociology-of-literature approach, treating *Kota-Harmoni* as a symbolic archive of urban experience. Through close reading it mobilises three interlocking concepts: Giddens's time-space distanciation, Harvey's time-space compression and capitalist urbanisation, and Khusyairi and Colombijn's notion of transport as a field of differentiated velocities. The analysis shows that the tram compartment condenses multiple hierarchies—formal class divisions, racialised expectations, and local status distinctions—into a single moving locale. Everyday frictions over terasi, seating, and delay materialise abstract colonial and wartime regimes of governance. The text simultaneously narrates a crisis of compressed urban time-space, as formerly reliable journeys become precarious and stratified, and reveal uneven access to speed, comfort, and control over movement.

Keywords: transport narratives; colonial urbanism; segregated mobility; *Kota-Harmoni*; Idrus

How to Cite: Atikurrahman, M. (2025). Tram as Colonial Micro-City in Idrus's *Kota-Harmoni*: Modern Transport, Segregated Mobilities, Urban Power Relations. *Atavisme*, 28(1), 1-14 (doi: 10.24257/atavisme.v28i1.1041.1-14)

Permalink/DOI: <http://doi.org/10.24257/atavisme.v28i1.1041.1-14>

INTRODUCTION

Modern transport has become a crucial lens for understanding how colonial power, class, and race are inscribed in everyday urban life (Fan et al., 2025; Uteng & Turner, 2019), yet literary representations of transport in Indonesian texts remain understudied. Idrus's fragment *Kota-Harmoni*, set in wartime Batavia, stages a crowded tram as a miniature city in motion, where colonial hierarchies and Japanese militarism are negotiated through seats, smells, tickets, and bodies. The tram promises speed and efficient connectivity (Ortego et al., 2017; Pietrzak & Pietrzak, 2022), but its cramped compartments, racial insults, and arbitrary interventions by soldiers reveal mobility as a deeply stratified resource rather than a neutral technological benefit (Grusky, 2015; Kloppenborg, 2020). Read alongside debates on time-space compression and mobility regimes, the story exposes how access to transport infrastructures is central to the production of social difference in late colonial Southeast Asia (Harvey, 1989; Sheller & Urry, 2006). Writing about this text, therefore, is not merely an exercise in close reading; it addresses wider questions about how modernity's celebrated technologies sustain segregation and urban injustice in postcolonial contexts (Giddens, 1990; Sheller, 2018). Such a reading clarifies why mobility must be theorised as political today.

Within the canon of modern Indonesian fiction, transport technologies repeatedly mediate encounters with colonial modernity. Marah Roesli's *Sitti Nurbaya* hinges on journeys between Padang and Batavia by horse-drawn carriage and steamship, linking forced marriage to the geographies of trade and administration (Atikurrahman et al., 2021). Mas Marco Kartodikromo's *Student Hidjo* follows its Javanese protagonist onto a Dutch steamship bound for Europe, where the ship itself figures ambivalently as both

vehicle of emancipation and stage for racial humiliation (Sarifah & Safitri, 2023). In Hamka's *Tenggelamnya Kapal van der Wijck*, the eponymous steamship catastrophe literalises the collision between Minangkabau *adat*, Islamic reformism, and Dutch legal structures (Manugeran et al., 2023), while Budi Darma's *Rafilus* portrays trains and automobiles as predatory machines that maim bodies and compress urban distance (Atikurrahman, 2016). Across these texts, mobility is inseparable from gendered, racialised, and classed power and violence.

Transport infrastructures are not merely technical systems but socio-material assemblages that generate differentiated access to movement and, by extension, to opportunity and citizenship (Joshi et al., 2021; Sheller & Urry, 2006). Within Indonesian studies, Khusyairi and Colombijn's chapter on Surabaya in the 1920s demonstrates how tramways, buses, and private cars created "different velocities" for distinct income groups, reshaping the city's social geography without erasing colonial hierarchies (Khusyairi & Colombijn, 2015). In literary criticism, however, transport tends to appear only tangentially, as background to debates about nationalism, gender, or religious reform, rather than being a primary analytic category. Global scholarship has begun to trace railway or automobility imaginaries in European and American fiction, yet mobilisation of such insights for Southeast Asian texts remains sporadic. Consequently, there is still little research treating Indonesian narratives of modern transport as privileged sites for interrogating urban stratification and racialised power.

Responding to these lacunae, the present study investigates Idrus's *Kota-Harmoni* through three interrelated research questions. First, it asks how the story's tram episodes—ranging from quarrels over *terasi*, the eviction of a poor grandmother from first class, to soldiers'

commandeering of the carriage—represent stratification and segregation along axes of class, race, and colonial status in Japanese-occupied Batavia (Proudfoot, 2005). Second, it explores how the tram’s internal architecture and disrupted timetable configure the characters’ experience of urban time and space, revealing the ambivalent modernity of transport in a city that has changed rulers but not structures. Third, it compares the fictional tramworld with historical patterns of transport modernisation and social differentiation in Indonesian cities, particularly Surabaya and Batavia, to gauge convergences and dissonances within broader debates on mobility, colonial urbanism, and post-colonial memory.

This article argues that *Kota-Harmoni* converts the tram into a colonial micro-city whose everyday frictions crystallise the politics of movement in late-colonial Jakarta. The narrative suggests that promises of accelerated mobility and efficient circulation are consistently undermined by overcrowding, arbitrary violence, and the lingering racial zoning of the first and second class, so that speed itself becomes a privilege rather than a universal condition. In this sense, Idrus’s story engages with theories of time–space distancing and compression while simultaneously provincialising them, foregrounding how modernity is lived when imperial power is supposedly replaced yet is structurally continuous (Giddens, 1990; Harvey, 1989). More broadly, the reading offers a framework for approaching Indonesian literary texts as archives of mobility regimes, where infrastructures such as trams and ships help reveal how colonial and postcolonial subjects negotiate inequality, dignity, and small acts of resistance in motion.

Modernity rests on the stretching of social relations across extended spans of time and space, such that face-to-face encounters are routinely organised by distant, abstract systems of power

(Giddens, 1990). Local settings are therefore better described as *locales*: sites where disembedded relations (administrative, economic, military) are continuously “reinserted” into everyday practice (Atikurrahman, 2016; Gabbert, 2007; Lefebvre, 1990, 2013). In this study, Idrus’s *Kota-Harmoni* is read as the staging of such a locale. The crowded tram shuttling between Jakarta Kota (Batavia Old Town) station and Harmoni station during the Japanese occupation appears merely as a banal urban interior, yet it functions as a *phantasmagoric micro-city* in which colonial regulations, Japanese imperial ideology, and global capitalist circuits silently dictate who may sit, who must stand, who is expelled to second class, and who can stop the vehicle altogether. This article signals a concern for the tram as a condensed urban world. It anchors the overarching research questions and objectives: to probe how narrative representations of transport in *Kota-Harmoni* materialise the stretched relations of power, class, and race; how they configure ambivalent experiences of modern time and space; and how they dialogue with historical patterns of transport modernisation and social differentiation in Indonesian cities.

Operationalising time-space distancing in *Kota-Harmoni* requires attention to how multiple hierarchies intersect inside the moving carriage. Formally, the tram is organised through a visible division between first (*kelas satu*) and second class (*kelas dua*), codified in ticket prices and spatial partitions. Racial hierarchies overlay this structure: European and Eurasian passengers assert claims to olfactory and bodily privilege, while Chinese, Japanese, and “native” riders are differently positioned within colonial and coprosperity discourses. At the same time, intra-native distinctions emerge between the impoverished grandmother in tattered kebaya, the self-confident civil servant with English shoes, and the formerly affluent woman

whose private car has been requisitioned. Giddens's framework insists that such stratifications are not reducible to a single axis, but are articulated through the routine choreography of bodies within locales shaped by distant institutions (Cresswell, 2010; Giddens, 1990). The episodes of quarrelling over *terasi*, eviction from first class, and fearful deference to Japanese soldiers stage overlapping forms of classed, racialised, and colonial segregation within a tightly bounded mobile space.

The successive rounds of capitalist restructuring have been driven by the need to overcome spatial barriers and accelerate circulation, producing historical phases in which distances seem to shrink and temporal rhythms intensify (Harvey, 1989). Railways, tramways, and later automobiles do not merely connect pre-existing places; they reconfigure the geographical imagination by redefining what counts as near or far, fast or slow, central or peripheral. Building on this insight, mobilities scholars conceptualise transport infrastructures as material expressions of these compressive dynamics, which privilege certain flows and stall others (Sheller & Urry, 2006). In *Kota-Harmoni*, the tram that once promised a predictable fourteen-minute journey between the old port district (Batavia/Jakarta Old Town) and the elite European quarter becomes the vehicle through which the broken promises of modernity are experienced. The journey takes longer; stops are arbitrary; the smooth circulation of bodies and commodities is disrupted by overcrowding, requisitioned cars, and military interventions.

The tram is described as filled beyond capacity with humans, livestock, baskets, and smells, transforming a technology designed for rapid, hygienic movement into a space of enforced proximity and friction. A middle-class passenger nostalgically contrasts the former fourteen-minute schedule with the present twenty-minute ordeal, signalling the erosion of temporal reliability that once underpinned middle-

class urban life. Japanese soldiers halt the tram in mid-track, mount it from outside, and mark passengers' bodies with the hilts of their swords, demonstrating how sovereign power can override the abstract discipline of the timetable. These scenes align with Harvey's argument that phases of intensified time-space compression produce profound disorientation and class-differentiated vulnerability when infrastructural promises break down (Harvey, 1989, 2002). Within this article, the tram is therefore treated as a "micro-city" in motion, an urban node where market logics of speed and turnover collide with militarised interruptions, and explores the ambivalent modernity of transport experienced by variously positioned subjects.

Transport as a field of social differentiation in a colonial city demonstrates that the introduction of trams, buses, and private cars transformed the city's material landscape—through new roads, depots, and traffic regulations—while simultaneously creating distinct "speed regimes" for different income groups (Khusyairi & Colombijn, 2015). All residents were drawn into the orbit of modern transport, but not with the same vehicles, comfort, or safety; pedestrians and cyclists navigated perilous crossings amidst dense automobile flows, and accidents, congestion, and policing became routine features of urban life. This insight resonates with the broader "new mobilities paradigm," which contends that the politics of who moves, how fast, and under what conditions are central to urban inequality (Cresswell, 2010; Sheller & Urry, 2006). Transposed to Batavia/Jakarta, such patterns suggest that Japanese occupation modified, but did not erase, colonial infrastructures and the differentiated mobilities they enabled.

In light of Khusyairi and Colombijn's concept, Idrus's representation of the Batavia tram echoes or complicates these historical patterns of differentiated mobility. The categories of analysis here include not only the obvious contrasts between

those who can still remember owning a private car and those who have never left second class, but also the subtle differences between passengers who negotiate the crowd with bureaucratic authority, those whose movements are constantly blocked by bodies and baskets, and those who risk humiliation or violence when confronting Japanese riders. Idrus's satirical tone—mocking radio rhetoric of “glorious victory,” poking fun at middle-class obsessions with punctuality, exposing the tremor of fear beneath outward bravado—renders visible how modern transport infrastructures can simultaneously promise liberation and enact domination. By reading *Kota-Harmoni* as a literary counterpart to “moving at a different velocity,” the article aims to show how fiction can illuminate the lived textures of mobility regimes in a colonial city that has changed flags but not its fundamental hierarchies.

METHOD

The primary unit of analysis in this article is Idrus's short fiction fragment *Kota-Harmoni*, set almost entirely on a crowded tram in Japanese-occupied Batavia. Rather than treating the piece merely as historical documentation, the study approaches it as a literary construct in which language, spatial description, and embodied gestures condense wider relations of power. Within this confined mobile setting, seats, tickets, smells, uniforms, and scraps of dialogue become clues to how colonial and wartime hierarchies are reproduced, contested, or quietly endured. As literary sociologists argue, fictional worlds function as symbolic laboratories where social structures are tested and reshaped in narrative form (Cresswell, 2010; Damrosch, 2020). This tightly focused textual unit therefore offers an ideal lens for exploring stratified urban mobility.

This study adopts a qualitative design that combines interpretive literary analysis with sociological theories of modern mobility. It mobilises three interlocking

conceptual frames. First, Giddens's notion of *time-space distancing* foregrounds how abstract systems such as colonial administration, Japanese military rule, and capitalist markets structure everyday interactions in specific locales (Giddens, 1990). Second, Harvey's analysis of time-space compression and the capitalist production of urban space emphasises how transport infrastructures reorder distance, speed, and centrality within the modern city (Harvey, 1989). Third, Khusyairi and Colombijn's account of transport as a field of social differentiation in colonial Surabaya highlights how income, class, and ethnicity produce “different velocities” of movement for urban residents (Khusyairi & Colombijn, 2015). Taken together, these frameworks enable a multi-scalar reading of *Kota-Harmoni*, linking the micro-politics of the tram interior to regimes of colonial and postcolonial mobility.

The principal source of information is thus the written text of *Kota-Harmoni* itself, consulted in its Indonesian original (Idrus, 2011) and in a widely used English translation (Idrus & Hudak, 1988) for purposes of terminological precision. Treating the story as documentary evidence in a narrow sense would be misleading; instead, it is approached as what Damrosch (2020) calls a “structured archive of experience,” where historically specific practices and imaginaries of mobility are refracted through narrative form. Literary texts, as Cresswell (2010) notes, not only describe movement but also participate in the cultural production of what kinds of movement are thinkable, desirable, or threatening. To complement the close reading of Idrus's fragment, contextual materials on colonial Batavia and Japanese occupation are used selectively, yet the fiction remains the central analytical and evidentiary locus of the overall study.

Data collection follows established procedures in qualitative literary research, oriented toward systematic, iterative engagement with the text rather than

numerical sampling (Flick, 2018; Given, 2016). Passages in *Kota-Harmoni* that explicitly or implicitly concern transport, space, and embodied interaction are first identified through multiple full readings. These segments are then extracted into an analytic corpus that includes descriptive phrases, dialogues, and narrative commentary related to the tram's interior, its timetable, and the social composition of its passengers. Memos are written during this process to record emerging observations about hierarchy, emotion, and mobility, ensuring that initial impressions are documented while leaving room for later reinterpretation and theoretical refinement in dialogue with the chosen mobility frameworks. This study undertakes a multi-stage close reading informed by the sociology of literature and the new mobilities paradigm (Cresswell, 2010; Sheller & Urry, 2006). First, the tram-related corpus is coded for recurrent semantic fields—crowding, smell, gesture, violence, timing, and classed or racialised address—so as to map how the narrative organises perception of movement and stasis. Second, sequences of action are reconstructed to trace the choreography of bodies inside the carriage, asking who may sit, who is displaced, and who can interrupt or reroute the journey. Third, these patterned findings are interpreted through Giddens's, Harvey's, and Khusyairi-Colombijn's concepts in order to answer the stated research questions and refine the article's argument about segregated mobilities in Jakarta.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Time-Space Distanciation and Stratified Tram Space in Idrus's *Kota-Harmoni*

The fragment of *Kota-Harmoni* immediately frames the tram as a dense urban locale where heterogeneous bodies and objects are crammed together: people from different ethnic groups, baskets and tins, even goats and chickens, all packed into a sweltering compartment that smells of

sweat and pungent shrimp paste. Idrus opens with a cramped interior, "*trem penuh sesak dengan orang, keranjang-keranjang*" (Idrus, 2011), goats and chickens squeezed among passengers, while "*the tram stank from sweat and terasi*" (Idrus & Hudak, 1988). In the first-class section, a Eurasian woman complains about the smell, only to be mocked by a fat Chinese passenger who brandishes the offending *terasi* and reminds her that this is now the era of "co-prosperity" (*kemakmuran bersama*) not Dutch privilege, in Indonesian: "*Siapa lagi yang membawa terasi ke atas trem ... ini kan kelas satu,*" signalling how olfactory disgust and the label "kelas satu" become instruments of boundary-making. A fat Chinese man counters by displaying his packet of fermented shrimp paste and invoking the rhetoric of Asia-Pacific modernity, insisting that now is the different era.

In successive vignettes the narrative records a poor old woman evicted to second class, young Indonesians whispering that with the Japanese on board "first and second class are treated the same, like animals," and the sudden stopping of the tram in mid-track by three soldiers whose swords graze the arms of passengers. Japanese soldiers force their way in, and an Indonesian clerk with Western shoes and a *destar* obsessively times the journey, noting that what used to take fourteen minutes now takes twenty. These data points provide the textual basis for examining how time-space distanciation, in Giddens's sense of disembedded social relations organised by abstract systems such as clock-time, money and military power, is materialised within a moving locale (Gabbert, 2007; Georgantzias et al., 2010; Giddens, 1990; Werlen, 2009). These vignettes, briefly evoked in the anthology's paratext as scenes of a tram "crowded" and reeking of shrimp paste, already signal a locale where colonial hierarchies of race, class, and imperial power are staged in the

everyday choreography of getting from Kota station to Harmoni station.



The Overflowing Tram in Tanah Abang, Jakarta Year 1946
(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

Taken together, these scenes display a patterned configuration of hierarchies within the tram that speaks directly to stratification and segregation. The first pattern is formal and tariff-based: a conductor who polices the distinction between “kelas satu” and “kelas dua,” and who has the authority to expel the old woman whose kebaya is full of holes because she cannot pay the surcharge. A second pattern is racial: the Eurasian woman feels entitled to police smell and decorum, while the Chinese passenger recodes the same space using the new Japanese slogan of “kemakmuran bersama,” and the Japanese soldiers treat both classes as equally expendable by halting the tram and forcing their way in. A third pattern is class-local: an Indonesian middle-class man with *destar* and English shoes, used to a 14-minute journey, now finds it stretched to twenty minutes and feels authorised to lecture the conductor on efficiency, whereas the old woman experiences the same delay as a humiliating displacement to the rear. In Giddens’s terms, the tram functions as a locale where disembedded power relations (Giddens, 1990)—imperial racial codes, Japanese military rule, urban class distinctions—are continuously reinscribed and negotiated in the micro-practices of

sitting, standing, complaining, and being moved.

Interpreted through the lens of *time-space distancing*, the textual pattern suggests that the tram is not merely a neutral container for mobility but a nodal point where distant structures are folded into everyday routines. The Eurasian woman’s claim that “this is first class” draws on a longer genealogy of colonial regulations that once allocated European, “Foreign Oriental,” and indigenous bodies to different parts of the urban network, while the conductor’s insistence on supplementary fares enacts an abstract monetary logic tied to wage labour and ticketing systems whose origins lie outside the carriage. The Japanese soldiers, who can stop the tram mid-track, represent another layer of disembedded power: a military command structure that links this particular vehicle to the Pacific War. From a Giddensian perspective, the passengers’ nervous glances at uniforms and tickets exemplify how “the settings of interaction are penetrated by distanced social relations,” especially under late-colonial modernity where administrative, financial, and military systems reach deep into daily life. The tram’s interior is, therefore, a “phantasmagoric locale”: to the eye it

resembles an ordinary urban carriage; analytically, it is saturated with absent authorities—municipal boards, colonial police, Tokyo, and radio broadcasts—that dictate who is allowed to occupy which seat and at what cost.

The first set of Idrus's narrative discloses the continuity of colonial stratification under a new Asian ruler, showing that the Japanese takeover altered the visible faces of power but not the underlying hierarchy. The rhetoric of *Dai Tōa Kyōeiken* promises equality among Asian subjects, yet in the tram "co-prosperity" becomes a joke wielded by a Chinese passenger to legitimise the very smell that repels a Eurasian woman. The old woman's eviction from first class shows that classed and racialised scripts around dress, smell, and capacity to pay survive the switch from Dutch to Japanese authority. The whispered remark that Japanese troops now treat first and second class passengers "like animals" signals a perverse levelling: formal distinctions blur only in the experience of collective degradation. The implication is that modern urban transport, while promising accelerated movement, also operates as a technology for reproducing differential dignity and humiliation. Rather than depicting an egalitarian melting pot, Idrus's tram shows a colonial micro-city where every interaction rehearses a broader pattern of unequal recognition.

This pattern, as it emerges, requires situating the story in the longer history of urban infrastructure and colonial capitalism in the Dutch East Indies. Public transport in Batavia had been racially segmented since the late nineteenth century, with tram companies operating graded tariffs and spatial sections aligned with the tripartite racial order of "Europeanen," "Vreemde Oosterlingen," and "Inlanders." Studies of colonial urbanism show that such infrastructures were designed to separate elite European residential quarters from indigenous kampongs while enabling the rapid circulation of labour and commodities that

underpinned export-oriented capitalism. Under Japanese occupation, military requisitioning and wartime scarcity intensified both class differentiation and infrastructural breakdown, without dismantling the deep structures of racialised governance. Idrus's decision to stage his fragment entirely within a tram can thus be read as an aesthetic condensation of these sociohistorical processes. The narrative compresses decades of policy and economic restructuring into an ordinary ride, revealing how abstract structures—corporate ownership, fare systems, bureaucratic regulations, and war logistics—continue to organise perception, smell, and bodily proximity in ways that sustain inherited colonial orders even under new Asian rulers.

Broken Time-Space Compression and Ambivalent Urban Modernity

Idrus repeatedly foregrounds rhythms of acceleration and delay. The middle-class Indonesian passenger, dressed in Western shoes and a neat *destar*, calculates in irritation that the journey from Kota to Harmoni, which "used to take fourteen minutes," now takes twenty. Elsewhere a young couple speaking Dutch compare the carriage to "a chicken coop," their stylish clothing and wristwatch piercing the torn kebaya of a woman whose body is jostled by the crowd. The tram is forced to a halt in the middle of the track when three Japanese officers block the way, and later near Pasar Baru the flow of passengers is disrupted as men climb through the window rather than the door. Intercut with these interruptions are allusions to requisitioned automobiles—one woman grumbles that "they've taken away my car without even paying"—and to new war-time timetables that lengthen commuting time while raising fares. These data elements underline the degree to which the colonial city's circulation system has been both intensified and made precarious by war and occupation, rendering the tram a compressed map of urban crisis.

The pattern that emerges from these vignettes portrays the tram as a “micro-city” whose internal organisation mirrors and miniaturises Batavia/Jakarta’s broader urban contradictions. Within a few square metres one finds the sensory density of the market—smell of terasi, sweat, animals—alongside remnants of colonial respectability, indicated by the wristwatch, the Dutch conversation, and complaints about lost private cars. The carriage also condenses political forces: Japanese officers wield the power to stop the tram; rumours about *kenpeitai* violence circulate among passengers; and the rhetoric of “co-prosperity” travels from posters and radio into the joking speech of the Chinese man clutching his shrimp paste. Spatially, the division into first and second class reproduces urban zoning on a smaller scale: the front carriage is associated with higher fares and supposed cleanliness, while the rear of the tram hosts poorer indigenous bodies. Temporally, delays, forced stops, and overcrowding reveal a disruption of the promise of modern urban transport as efficient, predictable movement. In Harvey’s terms, the tram encapsulates a damaged form of time–space compression, in which the capitalist imperative to accelerate circulation collides with wartime requisitioning, scarcity of fuel, and over-crowding (Harvey, 1989, 1990).

Interpreting these patterns through Harvey’s framework shows that *Kota-Harmoni* critiques the ideology of speed that underwrote colonial and wartime urban planning. Time—space compression in capitalist modernity usually describes how technological innovations—railways, telegraph, motor vehicles—shrink distances and reorganise the geography of social life, allowing capital to turn over faster. Idrus’s text, however, dwells on deceleration: the middle-class passenger’s complaint about a twenty-minute journey where fourteen once sufficed indicates a felt betrayal of modernity’s temporal contract. The requisitioned car and halted

tram show that technological infrastructures are vulnerable to appropriation by state and military forces, which can suspend circulation for their own ends. The young couple’s comparison of the tram to a chicken coop suggests that the experience of compressed space is no longer associated with glamour or adventure, as in earlier travel narratives, but with degradation and loss of autonomy. By foregrounding jammed bodies and stalled motion, Idrus exposes how war and authoritarian rule can transform infrastructures of acceleration into instruments of confinement and control, complicating Harvey’s notion of compression with a counter-image of “congested modernity” in which speed is promised but rarely delivered.

The representation of the tram as a malfunctioning time-space compressor allows the story to articulate an urban experience distinct from the triumphalist narratives of technological progress. Rather than celebrating the shrinking of distance between Kota and Harmoni, the narrative ironises it: the technological apparatus that once symbolised modernity now figures as a site of slowness, breakdown, and arbitrary military interruption. For colonial subjects, acceleration was never evenly distributed; Idrus makes visible how delays are borne disproportionately by those who cannot withdraw into private cars or reshape their working hours. The tram’s constant starting and stopping, its over-crowding, and the extension of travel time evoke a pervasive sense of being stuck inside an apparatus that promises mobility but delivers only fatigue and humiliation. From the notion of *time–space compression* and the capitalist production of urban space, then, *Kota-Harmoni* reveals that modern urban transport is experienced less as liberation from distance and more as a precarious dependency on infrastructures controlled by distant powers.

At a structural level, these dysfunctional forms of time–space compression can be traced to the intersection of capitalist urbanism, wartime economies, and colonial governance (Harvey, 1989, 1990). The Japanese requisitioning of private vehicles, the redirection of fuel for military use, and the pressing of trams into service for troop movements all distort the original rationale of public transport as an instrument of commercial circulation. Historical research on Indonesian cities shows that modern roads and trams were introduced to facilitate the extraction and export of commodities rather than to serve indigenous mobility needs. In this context, the frustrations of Idrus’s middle-class passenger appear as a late recognition that the promise of speed was always contingent on external priorities—colonial profit, imperial war. The tram’s delays and overcrowding are thus symptoms of deeper contradictions in the colonial urban project, where infrastructures designed for circulation become channels of exploitation and control. Idrus’s narrative does not merely document wartime inconvenience; it hints at a systemic misalignment between the temporalities of everyday life and the temporalities of capital and empire.

Transport as a Field of Social Differentiation in Wartime Batavia

In *Kota-Harmoni*, transport as a field of social differentiation is staged through diverse passenger biographies. There is the destitute old woman in a tattered kebaya who cannot afford the first-class fare and is pushed to the rear; the neatly dressed Indonesian bureaucrat-type whose English shoes and *destar* signal new middle-class status; the woman who laments that the Japanese have seized her car without compensation; and the young Indonesian who risks scolding a Japanese passenger climbing through a tram window, only to later tremble when confronted by *kenpeitai*. The narrative closes with the narrator’s sardonic echo of radio

propaganda about a “kemenangan yang gilang-gemilang” recasting a minor incident in the tram—a Japanese reprimanded by military police—as if it were a great victory for the nation. These vignettes are saturated with markers of income, status, and vulnerability, and they present the tram not as a democratising device but as a moving stage where differences in comfort, security, and symbolic capital are continuously displayed.

The pattern that emerges aligns with Khusyairi and Colombijn’s argument that modern transport in colonial Indonesian cities generated “different velocities” for different social groups (Khusyairi & Colombijn, 2015). Those who once had private cars are now forcibly slowed down, compelled to share cramped space with the poor; yet even within the tram, not all passengers experience mobility in the same way. The old woman’s journey is one of exposure and shame, as fellow riders and staff treat her as out of place in first class. The middle-class man’s journey revolves around control and entitlement: he measures time, scolds the conductor, and implicitly imagines his own role within emerging Japanese-sponsored political institutions. The complaining car-owner, by contrast, experiences the tram as an involuntary downgrade in status. Meanwhile, the young Indonesian who rebukes the Japanese window-climber briefly enacts a fantasy of equality before law, only to realise that his personal safety depends on the whims of *kenpeitai*. The tram thus becomes a moving arena in which relative income, occupation, gender, and proximity to state power shape not only one’s speed and comfort but also one’s capacity to speak, complain, or remain silent.

Idrus’s fictional tram resonates with, yet also complicates, historical accounts of transport modernisation and social differentiation. Khusyairi and Colombijn (2015) show that, as Surabaya’s transport system developed—from trams to automobiles and motorbikes—colonial city

transportation enabled wealthier citizens to move faster and farther, while the poor remained reliant on slower, more crowded modes, producing layered “velocity regimes” within a single city. In *Kota-Harmoni*, this logic is echoed yet inverted: wartime requisitioning temporarily pushes some of the formerly fast (private car owners) into the slow, crowded domain of public transport, while military personnel gain the power to halt all movement. Idrus’s satire thereby reveals that differentiated mobility is not simply a function of income but also of shifting political contingencies. The young man’s fleeting “victory” when a Japanese is disciplined by *kenpeitai* underscores how symbolic capital—here, the feeling of national pride—may be momentarily redistributed even as material conditions of movement remain deeply unequal.

The story extends the Surabaya-based thesis of “moving at different velocities” into a wartime Batavia/Jakarta scenario, as a colonial city, where class, race, and political alignment intersect. While Khusyairi and Colombijn emphasise income as the key determinant of access to modern transport, Idrus’s tram narrative insists that ethnicity and colonial status also continue to matter. The Eurasian woman’s authority to police smell, the Chinese passenger’s strategic use of *kemakmuran bersama*, and the Japanese soldiers’ capacity to commandeer the tram all indicate that differential mobility is tied to racialised hierarchies and military status as much as to money. At the same time, the presence of the poor old woman and the disgruntled car-owner in the same carriage highlights moments when war disrupts established class privileges, forcing elites into proximity with those they usually avoid. The narrative thus demonstrates that *Kota-Harmoni* both confirms and complicates historical accounts of transport modernisation: it confirms that modern infrastructures generate unequal speeds and comforts, but it complicates the picture by foregrounding how colonial race

and wartime power can override or reconfigure purely economic distinctions.

Idrus’s fiction requires attention to the structural position of Jakarta as a former colonial capital in transition. The city inherited an infrastructure designed to channel commodities and colonial administrators, not to provide equitable mobility for its residents. Under Japanese occupation, that infrastructure was repurposed for military logistics and ideological control, while formal racial hierarchies were rhetorically replaced by pan-Asian slogans that did little to change the lived reality of discrimination. Sociological studies of mobilities argue that infrastructures are “political technologies” that distribute opportunities and risks unevenly across populations. Idrus’s narrative makes this claim tangible by showing how a single tram journey condenses the effects of requisitioning, overcrowding, militarisation, and shifting racial scripts. The unequal experiences of the old woman, the middle-class man, the ex-car-owner, and the Japanese soldiers are not random; they are products of an underlying matrix in which legal categories, income, gender norms, and occupational roles combine to produce distinct “mobility packages.” In this sense, *Kota-Harmoni* serves as a literary micro-sociology of transport, revealing how modern tram travel in a colonised, wartime city becomes a key site where power, class, and race are materially enacted and contested.

CONCLUSION

Idrus’s *Kota-Harmoni* turns the modern electric tram into a condensed stage on which colonial and wartime power, class, and race are ceaselessly re-enacted. Read through Giddens’s notion of time-space distanciation, the tram appears not as a neutral vehicle, but as a locale where distant administrative, military, and capitalist structures are routinely “reinserted” into bodily routines and fleeting interactions (Giddens, 1990). Ticket partitions, first-second class divisions, and the conductor’s

orders materialise long histories of racial classification and mobility regulation; quarrels over the smell of *terasi*, the eviction of a poor grandmother, and the arbitrary intrusion of Japanese soldiers expose thick, layered patterns of segregation that persist despite the shift from Dutch to Japanese rule. Harvey's idea of time-space compression helps clarify how the once reliable fourteen-minute journey from Kota station to Harmoni station has become a precarious, twenty-minute ordeal, revealing that compressed urban time-space is unequally distributed and easily thrown into crisis (Harvey, 1989). Finally, Khusyairi and Colombijn's emphasis on "moving at a different velocity" illuminates how differentiated speeds, modes, and comforts of travel in the fragment track income, status, and proximity to wartime power, confirming that transport infrastructures in colonial Jakarta were anything but socially neutral (Khusyairi & Colombijn, 2015).

The study's main strength lies in its explicit weaving together of three strands of mobility theory—Giddens's time-space distancing, Harvey's time-space compression, and Khusyairi and Colombijn's differentiated velocities—within a tightly focused close reading of a single Indonesian urban text. Rather than treating these concepts as distant background, the analysis operationalises them at the level of narrative detail, showing how ticket categories, smells, bodily postures, and micro-dialogues index abstract systems of colonial, military, and capitalist power. In doing so, the article demonstrates how the new mobilities paradigm can be productively combined with the sociology of literature to treat transport not as inert setting, but as a primary analytic entry point into historical experience and social imagination (Sheller & Urry, 2006). It adds to scholarship on Indonesian modernity by suggesting that colonial and wartime Jakarta can be read through the micro-politics of tram travel, thereby

complementing archival and urban-historical accounts of mobility regimes in cities such as Batavia and Surabaya (Khusyairi & Colombijn, 2015). At the same time, the research design entails limitations that open productive paths for future work. Focusing on a single fragment set on one tram route in wartime Jakarta, the study does not systematically compare *Kota-Harmoni* with the wider corpus of Indonesian texts in which ships, trains, buses, and airplanes mediate modernity, from *Sitti Nurbaya* and *Student Hidjo* to *Tenggelamnya Kapal van der Wijck* and contemporary urban fiction. It also relies primarily on close reading and theoretical triangulation, without integrating reception studies, oral histories, or systematic archival records that might triangulate how historical readers and city dwellers perceived these mobility regimes. Moreover, the theoretical framing privileges canonical strands in mobility studies, remaining largely silent on feminist, decolonial, or environmental perspectives that could reframe questions of speed, risk, and infrastructural violence. Future research could extend this article by building a broader corpus, mixing literary analysis with additional methods, and examining how literary mobility regimes intersect with gender, ecology, and postcolonial urban planning, thereby deepening and diversifying the emerging conversation on transport in Indonesian literary studies.

REFERENCES

- Atikurrahman, M. (2016). *Jungkir-Balik Dunia Cerita Budi Darma: Produksi Ruang Imajiner Henri Lefebvre dalam Rafilus* [Universitas Gadjah Mada]. <http://etd.repository.ugm.ac.id/penelitian/detail/93577>
- Atikurrahman, M., Ilma, A. A., Dharma, L. A., Affanda, A. R., Ajizah, I., & Firdaus, R. (2021). Sejarah Pemberontakan dalam Tiga Bab: Modernitas, Belasting, dan Kolonialisme dalam *Sitti Nurbaya*. *SULUK: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Dan*

- Budaya*, 3(1), 1–22.
<https://doi.org/10.15642/suluk.2021.3.1.1-22>
- Cresswell, T. (2010). Towards a Politics of Mobility. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 28(1), 17–31.
<https://doi.org/10.1068/d11407>
- Damrosch, D. (2020). *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global Age*. Princeton University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvqsdnmc>
- Fan, Y., Wood, A., & Blumenberg, E. A. (2025). Urban transport as a social construct: Reimagining transport's role in urban studies. *Urban Studies*, 00420980251345704.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980251345704>
- Flick, U. (2018). *An introduction to qualitative research* (Sixth edition). SAGE.
- Gabbert, L. (2007). Distanciation and the Recontextualization of Space: Finding One's Way in a Small Western Community. *Journal of American Folklore*, 120(476), 178–203.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/jaf.2007.0035>
- Georgantzas, N. C., Katsamakas, E., & Solowiej, D. (2010). Exploring dynamics of Giddens' globalization. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, 27(6), 622–638.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/sres.1017>
- Giddens, A. (1990). *The Consequences of Modernity*. Polity Press.
- Given, L. M. (2016). *100 questions (and answers) about qualitative research*. Sage.
- Grusky, D. B. (2015). Social Stratification. In *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (pp. 706–712). Elsevier.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.32137-7>
- Harvey, D. (1989). *The Condition of Post Modernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Blackwell.
- Harvey, D. (1990). Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 80(3), 418–434.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8306.1990.tb00305.x>
- Harvey, D. (2002). 2 'Time-Space Compression On and The Postmodern Condition.' In B. Nicol, *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel* (pp. 40–58). Edinburgh University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474471312-005>
- Idrus, I. (2011). *Dari Ave Maria ke Jalan Lain ke Roma* (27th ed.). Balai Pustaka.
- Idrus, I., & Hudak, T. J. (1988). Kota Harmoni. *Indonesia*, 45(4), 105–108.
- Joshi, S., Bailey, A., & Datta, A. (2021). On the move? Exploring constraints to accessing urban mobility infrastructures. *Transport Policy*, 102, 61–74.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tranpol.2020.11.005>
- Khusyairi, J. A., & Colombijn, F. (2015). *Moving at a Different Velocity: The Modernization of Transportation and Social Differentiation in Surabaya in the 1920s* (pp. 249–271). Brill.
https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004280724_011
- Kloppenburger, S. (2020). Mobility and social stratification. In O. B. Jensen, C. Lassen, V. Kaufmann, M. Freudendal-Pedersen, & I. S. Gøtzsche Lange (Eds.), *Handbook of Urban Mobilities* (1st ed., pp. 245–253). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351058759-25>
- Lefebvre, H. (1990). *Everyday life in the modern world* (2. print). Transaction Publ.
- Lefebvre, H. (2013). *Rhythmanalysis: Space, time, and everyday life* (First edition). Zed Books.
<https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350284838>
- Manugeren, M., Priandana, P., & Suhadi, J. (2023). Hegemony In Hamka's Novel

- Tenggelamnya Kapal van Der Wijck. *Journal Of Language*, 5(1), 35–44. <https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v5i1.6934>
- Ortego, A., Valero, A., & Abadias, A. (2017). Environmental Impacts of Promoting New Public Transport Systems in Urban Mobility: A Case Study. *Journal of Sustainable Development of Energy, Water and Environment Systems*, 5(3), 377–395. <https://doi.org/10.13044/j.sdewes.d5.0143>
- Pietrzak, K., & Pietrzak, O. (2022). Tram System as a Challenge for Smart and Sustainable Urban Public Transport: Effects of Applying Bi-Directional Trams. *Energies*, 15(15), 5685. <https://doi.org/10.3390/en15155685>
- Proudfoot, I. (2005). Brushes with modernity on Batavia's horse tram, 1869-1871. *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*, 39(1). <https://rimbunan.nusa.my/rimbun/items/show/15646>
- Sarifah, R. N., & Safitri, I. N. (2023). Mimikri Pribumi dan Kolonial Belanda dalam Novel "Student Hidjo" karya Mas Marco Kartodikromo: Kajian Postkolonialisme: *Kibas Cenderawasih*, 20(1), 85–97. <https://doi.org/10.26499/kc.v20i1.337>
- Sheller, M. (2018). *Mobility justice: The politics of movement in the age of extremes*. Verso.
- Sheller, M., & Urry, J. (2006). The New Mobilities Paradigm. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 38(2), 207–226. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a37268>
- Uteng, T. P., & Turner, J. (2019). Addressing the Linkages between Gender and Transport in Low- and Middle-Income Countries. *Sustainability*, 11(17), 4555. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11174555>
- Werlen, B. (2009). Structurationist Geography. In *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* (pp. 50–58). Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-008044910-4.00659-3>