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Mimicry and Resistance in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Bumi Manusia*: A Postcolonial Reading through Homi K. Bhabha's Theory

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana mimikri berfungsi sebagai strategi budaya perlawanan masyarakat adat dalam novel *Bumi Manusia* karya Pramoedya Ananta Toer dalam kerangka pascakolonial. Dengan metode analisis teks kualitatif dengan pendekatan dialektis, berfokus pada teks naratif terpilih yang menonjolkan interaksi antara otoritas kolonial dan subjek pribumi. Analisis dilakukan melalui tahap-tahap sistematis reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mimikri manifestasi dalam empat modus yang saling terkait—linguistik, pendidikan, nominatif, dan ekonomi melalui mana karakter pribumi menegosiasikan akses ke struktur kolonial dan modus-modus ini menghasilkan empat bentuk resistensi budaya yang mengganggu hierarki kolonial dengan merekonstruksi identitas, agen, dan otonomi. Alih-alih berfungsi sebagai peniruan semata, peniruan muncul sebagai praktik ambigu dan subversif yang memfasilitasi afirmasi dekolonial dan rekonstruksi identitas.

Kata Kunci: sastra pascakolonial, mimikri, Bumi Manusia

Abstract

This study explores how mimicry functions as a cultural strategy of resistance for indigenous peoples in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's novel *Bumi Manusia* within a postcolonial framework. Using qualitative text analysis with a dialectical approach, it focuses on selected narrative texts that highlight the interaction between colonial authorities and indigenous subjects. The analysis was conducted through systematic stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results of the study show that mimicry manifests itself in four interrelated modes—linguistic, educational, nominative, and economic—through which indigenous characters negotiate access to colonial structures. These modes produce four forms of cultural resistance that disrupt the colonial hierarchy by reconstructing identity, agency, and autonomy. Rather than functioning as mere imitation, mimicry emerges as an ambiguous and subversive practice that facilitates decolonial affirmation and identity reconstruction.

Keywords: postcolonial literature, mimicry, Bumi Manusia

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Introduction

In recent decades, postcolonial literary studies have sought to expand their geographical and epistemological reach beyond the dominant terrains of Africa and South Asia. Nevertheless, Southeast Asia remains comparatively underrepresented within global postcolonial discourse, a condition that reflects the persistence of Eurocentric orientations in the humanities that frequently subsume regional specificities under universalized theoretical frameworks (Huggan, 2022; Krishnan, 2023). Addressing this imbalance requires examining how Southeast Asian literatures not only engage with postcolonial theory but also actively reshape its epistemological assumptions. Within this context, Indonesian literature offers a particularly productive site for analyzing how colonial modernity intersects with localized epistemologies of resistance and cultural negotiation.

Indonesia's historical experience of colonialism was extensive and multilayered, shaped by successive regimes of Portuguese, Dutch, and Japanese domination, each of which left enduring linguistic, political, and ideological legacies. These overlapping historical trajectories complicated the binary opposition between colonizer and colonized, producing hybrid cultural zones in which power and knowledge were continuously negotiated. In such contexts, literature has functioned as a critical medium for reclaiming voice, rearticulating historical memory, and redefining agency through language. As Faruk (2007) and Young (2020) argue, modern Indonesian literary production cannot be separated from its role as a site of ideological negotiation between global imperial forces and local assertions of identity.

Literature in postcolonial societies therefore operates not merely as an artistic enterprise but as an epistemic and political act through which historical trauma, cultural memory, and relations of power are continually negotiated. In Southeast Asian contexts, literary texts function simultaneously as archives of colonial violence and as performative spaces of resistance, where imperial authority is contested through narrative strategies, linguistic reappropriation, and symbolic inversion (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2013; Park, 2024). Recent scholarship further demonstrates that postcolonial writing in non-Anglophone regions articulates distinctive forms of mimicry and hybridity shaped by multilingual environments, colonial legal regimes, and localized epistemologies that cannot be fully explained through Anglocentric models (García, 2021; Sultana, 2025). Through narrative imagination, formerly colonized subjects reconstruct selfhood, reconfigure inherited ideologies, and reframe the language of power by appropriating and refunctioning colonial discourses from within. As Chandra (2021) contends, postcolonial writing does not merely respond to colonial domination but actively generates alternative systems of meaning that destabilize imperial epistemologies at their core. Comparative studies of Southeast Asian literature further reveal that such practices give rise to ethically grounded forms of agency—conceptualized as moral hybridity—that enable cultural negotiation beyond

oppositional rupture (Ekaristi, 2023), while applied readings of Indonesian texts show how linguistic and narrative strategies operate as concrete modalities of cultural resistance (Charmaz, 2021; Yulianti et al., 2025).

Within this theoretical landscape, the present study draws on Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity to examine Bumi Manusia as a narrative that stages the contradictions of colonial modernity. Mimicry is understood as a discursive and narrative practice through which indigenous characters adopt colonial linguistic forms, institutional norms, and epistemic values while simultaneously producing reinterpretations that destabilize colonial authority. Ambivalence refers to the structural contradiction inherent in colonial discourse, observable when the same institutions both authorize and subordinate indigenous subjects. Hybridity denotes the co-presence of colonial and indigenous epistemic logics within a single narrative position. Building on these definitions, the study advances three testable propositions: first, that mimicry in Bumi Manusia functions as a conditional mechanism of access to colonial power structures—particularly education, legal recognition, and discursive legitimacy—while exposing their internal limits; second, that ambivalence operates as a systemic feature of colonial modernity manifested in institutional settings such as schools, courts, and the press; and third, that hybridity constitutes a mode of negotiated agency rather than passive assimilation. These propositions are examined through explicit analytical indicators, including the appropriation and refunctioning of colonial language and norms, narrative patterns of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, and the articulation of hybrid subjectivities that merge colonial rationality with indigenous ethical frameworks (Bhabha, 2004; García, 2021; Park, 2024; O'Donnell, 2020; Salam & Zuliana, 2022).

Despite extensive scholarship on Bumi Manusia that has emphasized its nationalist, historical, and sociological dimensions (Nuronniah & Rahman, 2023; Lazuardi & Laksono, 2021), relatively little attention has been paid to the novel's operation of mimicry as a performative and epistemic mode of resistance, particularly through the lens of Bhabha's postcolonial theory. This gap obscures how imitation, ambivalence, and hybridity function not merely as thematic elements but as narrative strategies through which colonial power is rearticulated from within. To address this limitation, the present study asks: (1) how mimicry operates as an ambivalent cultural practice in Bumi Manusia; (2) how ambivalence mediates the relationship between colonial authority and indigenous subjectivity; and (3) how hybridity enables negotiated forms of agency under colonial domination. By answering these questions through qualitative textual analysis, the study demonstrates that Pramoedya's narrative transforms mimicry into a distinctly Indonesian form of decolonial consciousness—one in which resistance emerges not through direct confrontation, but through the strategic rearticulation of colonial discourse—thereby contributing a Southeast Asian perspective that extends and refines Bhabha's theoretical model within global postcolonial literary studies.

Finally, within Bumi Manusia, Minke's engagement with Western education, rationality, and journalism exemplifies this ambivalent process. His adoption of colonial discourse does not signify submission but intellectual re-signification. By mastering the tools of empire—language, print culture, and rational thought—Minke and other indigenous characters expose the

contradictions embedded within the colonial project itself. Mimicry thus operates simultaneously as adaptation and critique, producing what Krishnan (2023) describes as "hybrid modernities" that redefine agency within constraint. Through this narrative strategy, the novel demonstrates how colonized subjects construct subaltern agency through irony, ambivalence, and cultural retranslation.

Method

This study adopts an interpretivist epistemology, positioning literary texts as socially constructed systems of meaning rather than static representations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Charmaz, 2021). Such a paradigm allows for the exploration of how cultural discourse and power relations are embedded within narrative language, which aligns with postcolonial theory's critical interrogation of representation, hybridity, and resistance. The research employs a qualitative textual analysis to interpret the dynamics of mimicry and indigenous resistance in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Bumi Manusia, viewing language as both a site of domination and a medium of subversion. The corpus is limited to Bumi Manusia (1980) as a single literary text that foregrounds colonial encounters in the early twentieth-century Dutch East Indies. Data were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on narrative events, dialogues, and descriptions that depict interactions between colonial authority and indigenous subjects, particularly in educational, legal, and journalistic contexts. This delimitation enables a systematic analysis of mimicry as a performative and epistemic practice of resistance.

Research Focus

Guided by Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial framework, the study addresses three analytical questions: How does mimicry function as a performative act of resistance in Bumi Manusia?; How does ambivalence mediate the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized?; and How is hybridity represented as a form of cultural negotiation and identity reconstruction?. These questions direct the interpretive process toward uncovering how textual strategies reflect both colonial ideology and the agency of indigenous subjects within narrative discourse.

Data and Sources

This study adopts a qualitative textual approach grounded in close reading and postcolonial interpretation. The primary corpus consists of Bumi Manusia by Pramoedya Ananta Toer, using the original Indonesian-language edition published by Hasta Mitra (1980) to preserve historical and linguistic specificity. Analysis is confined to this text to ensure thematic coherence (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2021; Ahmed et al., 2025; Lyhne, Thisted, & Bjerrum, 2025).

Textual data were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) passages depicting encounters between European colonial authority and indigenous characters; (2) scenes situated in institutional or discursive contexts central to colonial modernity, including education, law, journalism, and domestic governance; and (3) textual moments foregrounding

linguistic appropriation, ideological negotiation, or symbolic tension relevant to mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity (Guest, Namey, & Saldaña, 2018; Lyhne, Thisted, & Bjerrum, 2025).

The units of analysis comprise narrative passages, scenes, and dialogues in which colonial hierarchies are articulated, negotiated, or contested. Analytically, the study employed a theory-informed thematic coding scheme developed through iterative close readings. Initial codes were deductively derived from Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity, and inductively refined to capture recurring patterns and context-specific variations. Coding was conducted manually to maintain interpretive sensitivity, thereby enhancing analytical consistency across the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Ahmed et al., 2025). Secondary data include peer-reviewed postcolonial studies on Pramoedya's works (Faruk, 2007; Nuronniah & Rahman, 2023; Lazuardi & Laksono, 2021; Salam & Zuliana, 2022), providing comparative and theoretical grounding.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis followed a three-stage interpretive process: Textual Immersion and Segmentation – The text was subjected to multiple close readings to identify narrative events, dialogues, and symbols that encode postcolonial tension; thematic Abstraction through Dialectical Interpretation – Excerpts were categorized into thematic clusters (mimicry, ambivalence, hybridity, resistance) using a deductive–inductive coding strategy: deductively guided by Bhabha's theoretical constructs and inductively refined through recurring textual patterns; and Theoretical Synthesis and Hermeneutic Integration – Identified themes were synthesized and interpreted in alignment with Bhabha's postcolonial theory to uncover how mimicry operates as both imitation and epistemic disruption. This analytical process follows Fairclough's (2003) critical discourse interpretation, emphasizing the interaction between text, ideology, and sociocultural context. The unit of analysis consists of narrative events and dialogues where colonial hierarchies are negotiated, contested, or redefined.

Validity and Reflexivity

Analytical credibility was ensured through theoretical triangulation—cross-validating interpretations with prior postcolonial scholarship and theoretical discussions on Bhabha's concepts (García, 2021; Krishnan, 2023; Chandra, 2021). Reflexivity was maintained by acknowledging the researcher's dual positionality as both a cultural insider, familiar with Indonesian historical and linguistic contexts, and a critical interpreter, engaging with global postcolonial discourse. This reflexive stance minimizes interpretive bias and strengthens contextual accuracy.

As this research deals exclusively with published literary texts and secondary sources, no ethical clearance was required. Nonetheless, all referenced materials were properly attributed to uphold academic integrity and research transparency in line with COPE ethical standards.

Overall, this methodological design integrates qualitative textual analysis with postcolonial interpretive theory to examine how mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity construct indigenous resistance within Bumi Manusia. It ensures epistemological coherence, methodological

transparency, and contextual sensitivity, allowing the findings to contribute rigorously to global postcolonial literary scholarship.

Result

The analysis demonstrates that *Bumi Manusia* constructs indigenous resistance not through open rebellion but through discursive and performative practices embedded in language, education, law, and economic life. Drawing on Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial categories—mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity—the findings identify three interrelated dimensions of resistance, each grounded in observable textual indicators.

Mimicry operates through lexical transfer, performative speech acts, and institutional refunctioning. Indigenous characters appropriate Dutch vocabulary and syntactic forms to claim discursive authority, most notably in Nyai Ontosoroh's fluent use of Dutch, which mirrors colonial speech while destabilizing its exclusivity. This linguistic mimicry functions as dialogic inversion rather than assimilation. Mimicry also appears in educational and journalistic practices, particularly in Minke's engagement with colonial schooling and print culture, where European rationalist forms are redirected toward critiques of colonial injustice, producing counter-hegemonic meanings from within dominant discourse.

Ambivalence emerges through dialogic contradiction, symbolic insult, and legal exclusion, revealing the structural instability of colonial authority. Scenes in which Minke is praised for intellectual merit yet racially degraded exemplify simultaneous inclusion and exclusion. In legal contexts, Nyai Ontosoroh's denial of maternal rights despite her moral and economic competence exposes the moral incoherence of colonial law, while her assertive courtroom speech constitutes counter-performative enunciation.

Hybridity is articulated through identity in-betweenness, ethical translation, and pragmatic synthesis. Minke's position between indigenous and European worlds enables reflective agency, while Nyai Ontosoroh embodies gendered hybridity by combining colonial managerial rationality with indigenous moral authority. Overall, the novel transforms colonial domination into a dialogic arena of negotiation, confirming the analytical utility of Bhabha's framework in the Southeast Asian colonial context.

Indigenous Mimicry toward Colonialism

In *Bumi Manusia* (*This Earth of Mankind*), mimicry functions as an initial entry strategy through which indigenous subjects negotiate access to colonial regimes of language, knowledge, and legitimacy. Rather than reading imitation as submission, this section treats mimicry as a calibrated mode of resemblance that enables proximity to colonial authority while preserving a margin of difference. Consistent with Bhabha's (2004) formulation of mimicry as menace—"almost the same, but not quite"—Pramoedya shows that colonial forms can be taken up and redeployed, making mimicry not an endpoint (assimilation) but a starting condition for later structural effects (ambivalence) and epistemic outcomes (hybridity).

Linguistic Mimicry as Uptake and Performativity

In *Bumi Manusia*, language is the earliest site where mimicry becomes visible as performative uptake of colonial authority. Nyai Ontosoroh—initially framed within colonial taxonomy as a *nyai*—demonstrates how linguistic competence produces a new position within the discursive order. Minke is astonished to discover that Annelies's mother speaks Dutch with fluency and refinement,

> *"Her Dutch was quite fluent, proper and civilized; her manner toward her daughter was gentle and wise, open and honest—not like native women; her conduct was no different from that of an educated European lady."* (Toer, 1980, p. 24)

This passage foregrounds mimicry as discursive uptake: the colonial language, originally a sign of domination, is appropriated as a resource for self-fashioning and public credibility. Nyai Ontosoroh's Dutch is not mobilized to serve colonial authority; rather, it functions as a performative speech act that shifts her from object of representation to speaking subject. In Bhabha's terms, the threat is not that she becomes European, but that her "almost sameness" makes the category "European" appear reproducible—and therefore unstable. The analytic point here is not simply that mimicry resists, but that linguistic mimicry produces proximity to colonial voice while generating semantic slippage that colonial authority cannot fully control. As Bhabha (2004) argues, mimicry is dangerous to the colonizer because resemblance reveals that authority depends on signs that can be replicated—and thus reoriented.

European Literacy as Refunctioning and Internal Critique

If language marks entry into colonial discourse, literacy and education amplify mimicry into epistemic leverage—a capacity to repurpose colonial knowledge from within its institutional circuits. Colonial education becomes the second medium through which mimicry is operationalized as strategic access. Early in the novel, Minke declares,

> *"I will continue my studies in the Netherlands. I will become an engineer."* (Toer, 1980, p. 11)

Rather than framing this aspiration as assimilation, this subsection reads it as a bid to enter the epistemic boundary of colonial modernity (HBS, the press, juridical rationality) in order to redirect its authority claims. Minke's literacy enables him to write, debate, and occupy public discursive space using the very forms that authorize colonial superiority. In Bhabha's (2004) account, this is refunctioning: colonial epistemic instruments are reused to produce internal critique. The analytic move here is progressive: mimicry shifts from "menace" (a threatening resemblance) to epistemic leverage (a capacity to turn colonial rationality into a tool for exposing colonial contradiction). When Minke later deploys European legal logic to defend Nyai Ontosoroh in a colonial trial, the colonial apparatus is not merely confronted from outside; it is made to encounter its own normative incoherence from within. Thus, education operates as a

channel through which mimicry becomes an internal critique mechanism, setting up the structural effects later theorized as ambivalence.

Colonial Naming as a Performance of Hybrid Identity

Where language and literacy provide access to colonial discourse, naming makes mimicry operate at the level of signification and identity governance. Names are political instruments within colonial discourse, and Pramoedya employs them as sites where imposed labels are reauthored. Nyai Ontosoroh explicitly addresses her colonial naming,

> *"People call me Nyai Ontosoroh. They cannot pronounce Buitenzorg. It seems Sinyo hesitates to call me that. Everyone calls me so. Don't be shy."* (Toer, 1980, p. 19)

Within colonial hierarchies, "Nyai" functions as stigma, yet the text shows how the imposed label can be reclaimed and resemanticized. The analytic gain here is cumulative: mimicry is no longer only uptake of language or institutional forms but also recomposition of colonial signs. This action anticipates hybridity by demonstrating that colonial signifiers do not retain fixed meanings once taken up by the colonized subject. In Bhabha's (2004) terms, hybridity emerges as the space where signs are recombined to generate new meanings. "Ontosoroh" signifies a third-space identity—simultaneously colonial and native—yet the core mechanism remains mimicry as a performative sign-act: by presenting the name without shame, she asserts discursive control over a category designed to degrade her. The theoretical escalation is deliberate: naming demonstrates how mimicry becomes semiotic leverage, preparing the later claim that hybridity is not mixture but an ethical mode of agency.

The Colonial Economy as a Site of Negotiated Agency

The economic sphere extends mimicry into material practice, demonstrating that colonial systems can be inhabited without surrendering the possibility of negotiated agency. Pramoedya depicts resistance within mundane economic calculations, such as colonial currency,

> *"That money, fifteen guilders, was enough to feed a family in the village for ten months, even twenty months if spent wisely—two and a half cents a day."* (Toer, 1980, p. 148)

This passage reveals mimicry as pragmatic uptake: indigenous communities accept colonial currency while repurposing it for local sustenance and solidarity. The analytic point here is again progressive: mimicry becomes structural participation with altered function—a form of refunctioning that shifts a colonial instrument from extraction toward subsistence and autonomy. In Bhabha's (2004) terms, such practices can be read as hybrid agency: the colonial economic form is maintained, yet its meaning and social effects are recalibrated from within indigenous circuits of value. Nyai Ontosoroh's management of the Mellema enterprise embodies this logic—indigenous agency redefines economic modernity without fully internalizing colonial

ideology. Across language, literacy, naming, and economy, mimicry thus operates as a graded set of access strategies that cumulatively generate the conditions for colonial ambivalence.

Colonial Ambivalence and Symbolic Violence

Building on the prior section, colonial ambivalence is treated here not as a generalized paradox but as a structural effect of mimicry: the closer the colonized subject approaches colonial forms, the more colonial authority intensifies symbolic policing to re-secure difference. In Bhabha's (2004) framework, ambivalence names the instability of a regime that requires resemblance to legitimate its "civilizing" claims yet must deny resemblance to preserve hierarchy. This section therefore escalates the analysis from mimicry-as-access to ambivalence as a representational crisis, where colonial discourse reveals its dependence on categories it cannot stabilize.

The Ambivalence of Colonial Power: The Fear of Resemblance

Colonial power in *Bumi Manusia* works through the production of boundaries between "colonizer" and "colonized," yet those boundaries become fragile once mimicry produces resemblance. Pramoedya dramatizes the fear of resemblance when Minke begins to exhibit European-coded attributes—dress, speech, intellect—and the colonial response becomes symbolic degradation,

> *"You think that by wearing European clothes, mingling with Europeans, and speaking a little Dutch you can become European? You're still a monkey!"* (Bumi Manusia, 1980, p. 43).

This line exemplifies ambivalence as representational crisis: colonial authority cannot sustain its narrative of superiority once resemblance becomes observable, so it resorts to racial animalization to restore distance. The analytic function of this subsection is specific: it shows how mimicry produces boundary anxiety, forcing colonial discourse to reveal the violence required to keep categories intact. Ambivalence is thus not merely contradiction but an institutionalized reaction to the success of mimicry.

Symbolic Violence and the Hierarchy of Language

Language, previously shown as a resource for mimetic uptake, reappears here as the domain where ambivalence manifests as symbolic violence and status inscription. Dutch operates as a sign of superiority, and indigenous languages are positioned as inferior. Minke experiences language as weapon,

> "He spoke to me in a commanding tone, as if I were his servant, even though we were both students. His Dutch was sharp, cold, and left no room for reply." (Bumi Manusia, 1980, p. 44).

This scene exemplifies colonial enunciation—speech that assigns subject positions (Bhabha, 2004). Yet once Minke responds in the same language, ambivalence intensifies: the colonial voice demands resemblance (fluency) but punishes resemblance (authority). The progressive analytic gain is that ambivalence emerges as a conflict over who may legitimately occupy the colonial voice, exposing the representational instability of colonial language itself.

Legal Discrimination and the Crisis of Colonial Representation

The legal system makes ambivalence most explicit by staging the collapse of colonial claims to universality. Nyai Ontosoroh is denied maternal rights solely because of her indigenous status,

> *"It was useless that I bore you, for the Law does not recognize my motherhood—only because I am Native and not lawfully married."* (Bumi Manusia, 1980, p. 78).

When she asserts,

> "This is my house. Speak like that outside, not here." (Bumi Manusia, 1980, p. 105),

the text converts the courtroom and domestic space into arenas where colonial representation fails to reconcile its professed rationality with racial exclusion. The analytic function here is new: ambivalence is demonstrated as a **representational crisis of law**, where the legal discourse that claims civilization is unmasked as selective and morally incoherent once confronted by a speaking indigenous subject.

Moral Ambivalence and the Hybridity of Identity

Colonial ambivalence is internalized and transformed into reflective consciousness when Minke articulates his in-betweenness,

> *"Sometimes I feel I am no longer Native, but not yet European either. I stand between them—and there, I begin to understand myself."* (Bumi Manusia, 1980, p. 219).

This statement reframes ambivalence from external contradiction to a condition that produces epistemic perspective—what Bhabha (1994) treats as the productivity of the "in-between." The progressive analytic step is crucial: ambivalence is no longer only the colonizer's paradox but becomes the colonized subject's **site of critical cognition**. This transition prepares the next section, where hybridity is defined not as mixture but as ethical agency emerging from the representational crisis of colonial power.

Hybridity as Cultural Negotiation and the Reconstruction of Identity

In *Bumi Manusia* (*This Earth of Mankind*), hybridity functions not as cultural mixture but as an epistemic outcome of colonial ambivalence, namely a mode of subjectivity produced through sustained negotiation within unstable systems of colonial representation. Building on Bhabha's (2004) concept of the *third space*, hybridity in the novel emerges as a site of ethical judgment in which colonial rationality is neither rejected nor absorbed, but critically translated into indigenous frameworks of meaning. This section advances hybridity from a descriptive condition of in-betweenness into an active process of identity reconstruction grounded in moral reasoning and reflexive agency.

Hybridity in the Colonial Context: Between Two Worlds

Hybridity in *Bumi Manusia* is articulated through the lived experience of occupying an unstable threshold between colonial and indigenous worlds. Minke's confession,

> *"Sometimes I feel I am no longer Native, but not yet European either. I stand between them, and there I begin to understand myself."* (*Bumi Manusia*, 1980, p. 219),

frames hybridity as an epistemic position rather than an identity deficit. The phrase "there I begin to understand myself" is analytically crucial because it marks in-betweenness as a site of cognition where awareness emerges precisely from contradiction. In Bhabha's (2004) terms, this threshold enables the colonized subject to perceive the limits of colonial rationality while remaining intelligible within its discourse. Hybridity thus operates as critical distance within proximity, allowing reflection without withdrawal from the colonial field.

Cultural Negotiation through Language and Education

Hybridity becomes operative through negotiated engagement with colonial language and education, which now function as epistemic instruments rather than mimetic signs. Minke's declaration,

> *"I will continue my studies in the Netherlands. I will become an engineer"* (*Bumi Manusia*, 1980, p. 11),

signals not aspirational assimilation but strategic entry into the epistemic center of colonial modernity. Education is refunctioned as a means of intellectual autonomy, enabling Minke to appropriate Western rationality while subjecting it to ethical scrutiny.

Similarly, Nyai Ontosoroh's linguistic competence,

> *"Her Dutch was fluent, refined, and civilized; her manner toward her child gentle, wise, and open, not like Native mothers; her behavior no different from that of an educated European woman."* (*Bumi Manusia*, 1980, p. 24),

demonstrates linguistic hybridity as discursive negotiation. Mastery of Dutch does not dissolve indigenous identity but enables the articulation of authority within colonial discourse without conceding moral orientation. Analytically, hybridity here functions as epistemic leverage with ethical direction, transforming colonial language into a medium of indigenous self-authorization.

Gendered Hybridity: Nyai Ontosoroh as a Subject of Negotiation

Nyai Ontosoroh embodies hybridity as gendered ethical agency by synthesizing colonial managerial rationality with indigenous moral responsibility. Her declaration,

> *"Annelies must be more respectable than an ordinary Indo. She must become an honorable Native among her own people. That dignity can only come from this enterprise."* (*Bumi Manusia*, 1980, p. 325),

reframes modern economic discipline as a tool for indigenous dignity rather than colonial normalization. Nyai does not reject modernity; instead, she reorients its purpose toward moral self-determination.

Her call to collective struggle,

> *"Minke, we will fight. Are you brave, my child?"* (*Bumi Manusia*, 1980, p. 373),

extends hybridity beyond personal identity into ethical leadership. Analytically, hybridity is shown to generate authority not through recognition by colonial institutions but through responsibility toward others, particularly across gendered and generational lines.

Crisis and Reconstruction of the Colonial Subject's Identity

Hybridity culminates in crisis as an epistemic wound produced by the collision of empowerment and subjugation. Minke articulates this rupture when he states,

> "I am educated, yet my homeland is enslaved. The knowledge I learned from them only made me see my nation's wounds more clearly" (*Bumi Manusia*, 1980, p. 287).

This confession reframes hybridity as a condition of heightened perception rather than fragmentation. Knowledge becomes painful because it clarifies injustice, yet this pain constitutes the ground of ethical awakening.

Nyai Ontosoroh's insistence,

"Annelies will suffer deeply. Yet she must become an honorable Native among her people. That dignity can only come from this enterprise" (*Bumi Manusia*, 1980, p. 325),

anchors reconstruction in moral purpose. The courtroom exchange,

> "Minke, we will fight. Are you brave, my child?" "Even without a lawyer. We will be the first Natives to challenge the White Court" (*Bumi Manusia*, 1980, p. 373),

renders hybridity as translation into action. Colonial institutions are entered not for validation but for ethical confrontation. Hybridity thus emerges as ethical agency capable of reconstruction rather than as cultural mixture.

Hybrid Consciousness as the Genesis of Decolonization

Minke's statement,

> "I am educated, yet my homeland is enslaved" (*Bumi Manusia*, 1980, p. 287),

captures what Bhabha (1994) defines as double vision, namely the ability to inhabit colonial epistemology while refusing its authority claims. Hybrid consciousness functions here as epistemic disobedience, not through rejection of knowledge but through its ethical redirection.

Nyai Ontosoroh's testimony,

> *"You are a native woman, a nyai. You have no standing in this Court."* (*Bumi Manusia*, 1980, p. 369),

demonstrates that hybrid consciousness is also affective and moral. Awareness arises from exclusion and transforms humiliation into interpretive clarity. Analytically, this subsection establishes hybrid consciousness as the precondition of decolonial judgment rather than its enactment.

The Transformation of Knowledge into Action

Hybrid consciousness becomes resistance when it enters institutional space. The courtroom dialogue,

> *"Minke, we will fight. Are you brave, my child?"*
> *"We will fight, Mother, together."*
> *"Even without a lawyer. We shall be the first Natives to challenge the White Court, my child."* (*Bumi Manusia*, 1980, p. 373),

marks the conversion of ethical awareness into performative institutional challenge. Colonial law is not rejected but confronted on its own procedural terrain, exposing its normative contradictions. Nyai's assertion,

"This is my house. Speak like that outside, not here" (*Bumi Manusia*, 1980, p. 105), illustrates how speech acts reclaim spatial and moral authority. Resistance here operates as performative reterritorialization in which colonial language is used to redraw boundaries of power.

Solidarity and the Ethics of Resistance: From Individual to Collective

Resistance matures into collective ethics when individual struggle is reframed as communal dignity. Nyai's statement,

> *"Annelies will suffer greatly. She must become an honorable Native among her people."* (*Bumi Manusia*, 1980, p. 325),

transforms personal loss into collective responsibility. This moment exemplifies what may be termed hybrid solidarity, namely the convergence of indigenous communal ethics with refunctioned colonial rationality.

Analytically, resistance is no longer reactive but normative, oriented toward sustaining dignity rather than merely opposing domination. Through this progression, *Bumi Manusia* presents resistance as an ethical project grounded in hybridity, one that rewrites colonial meaning without erasing historical complexity.

Discussion

Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Bumi Manusia (This Earth of Mankind) represents one of the most profound literary interrogations of colonial discourse in Southeast Asian literature. The novel articulates the epistemic and moral tensions between the colonizer and the colonized through the subjectivity of characters such as Minke and Nyai Ontosoroh, whose voices embody the intellectual awakening of the indigenous elite and the formation of a critical public consciousness in the late colonial period (Foulcher, 2017). Within the theoretical framework of Homi K. Bhabha, the text unfolds through three interrelated concepts—mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity (Bhabha, 2004, 2004)—each of which provides an analytical lens for understanding how Bumi Manusia performs resistance, negotiates cultural identity, and reconfigures colonial modernity beyond linear models of Westernization (Eisenstadt, 2000).

Mimicry in the novel functions not merely as imitation but as a performative strategy that destabilizes colonial authority from within its own representational logic. Both Minke and Nyai Ontosoroh adopt the colonizer's language, manners, and epistemology not to assimilate but to rearticulate power relations. When the narrator observes that Nyai Ontosoroh speaks Dutch "fluently, properly, and with grace" (Pramoedya, 1980, p. 24), the act of speaking the colonizer's tongue signals what Bhabha (1994) famously terms "almost the same, but not quite," a form of resemblance that simultaneously authorizes and threatens colonial dominance. At this stage, mimicry functions as a linguistic and institutional menace, exposing the imitative foundations of colonial authority itself and revealing the ethical burden embedded in colonial representation (Bhabha, 2019). As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2013) argue, such appropriation becomes a mode of writing back to the empire, reversing the discursive gaze without abandoning the language of power.

For Minke, education and language become instruments of epistemic rebellion. His declaration, "I will continue my studies in the Netherlands. I will become an engineer" (p. 11), reframes colonial education from a vehicle of assimilation into an assertion of intellectual

sovereignty. Rather than internalizing Western superiority, Minke reclaims knowledge as a means of collective emancipation. As Rahman and Nuronniah (2023) note, Pramoedya presents education as a counter-hegemonic space in which modern knowledge is ethically reoriented. In this sense, mimicry operates as performative inversion: imitation becomes a strategic gesture that exposes, destabilizes, and ultimately undermines colonial hierarchy from within, aligning with broader critiques of colonial modernity that emphasize negotiated rather than derivative forms of modernization (Eisenstadt, 2000).

The structural instability produced by mimicry gives rise to ambivalence, which forms the second analytical axis of the discussion. Ambivalence, as Bhabha (2004) suggests, sustains colonial power precisely by rendering it contradictory, producing subjects who must be simultaneously similar and inferior. This paradox permeates Bumi Manusia: despite mastering Western rationality, Minke is derisively called a "monkey" by Robert Suurhof. The insult crystallizes what Loomba (2015) describes as the colonizer's fear of proximity, an anxiety that the colonized subject may mirror the European self too closely. Ambivalence thus emerges not merely as paradox but as a representational crisis in which colonial authority must continuously reassert difference to prevent its own collapse.

Ambivalence also governs the colonial legal order. Nyai Ontosoroh's exclusion from parental rights over Annelies on the basis of her status as a "native concubine" exemplifies the epistemic violence embedded in colonial institutions (Spivak, 1988) and the conditional nature of legal recognition under colonial rule (Merry, 2020). Her refusal—"This is my house. Speak that way on the street, not here" (p. 105)—constitutes a moral rejection of legal dehumanization and an assertion of indigenous authority within a system designed to deny it. As Faruk (2007) observes, Nyai Ontosoroh embodies domestic resistance by transforming the private sphere into a site of ideological contestation. This ambivalence generates fissures within colonial authority through which postcolonial consciousness emerges.

The cumulative tensions produced by mimicry and ambivalence culminate in hybridity, which in Bumi Manusia functions as a mode of cultural negotiation and ethical reconstruction rather than mere cultural mixture. In Bhabha's (2004) formulation, hybridity marks the emergence of a "third space" where meaning and identity are rearticulated beyond binary opposition. Within the novel, hybridity materializes through the relational ethics of Minke and Nyai Ontosoroh, who synthesize Western rationalism with indigenous humanism. Nyai's assertion that "Annelies must become a respectable native among her people" (p. 325) articulates a vision of modernity grounded in dignity and moral equality rather than imitation, resonating with theories of multiple and alternative modernities that foreground ethical agency over civilizational hierarchy (Eisenstadt, 2000).

At this point, the present study makes its central theoretical contribution. Conceptually, it extends Bhabha's notion of hybridity through the formulation of archipelagic hybridity, a Southeast Asian inflection grounded in maritime plurality, communal ethics, and relational agency rather than diaspora or metropolitan displacement. Empirically, this concept is derived from a close rereading of Bumi Manusia that foregrounds ethical and discursive resistance over

nationalist allegory, demonstrating how hybridity operates as moral and political practice within colonial modernity and the Indonesian public sphere (Foulcher, 2017).

Minke's engagement with journalism further exemplifies hybridity as cultural translation (Huggan, 2022). By appropriating the rhetorical forms of colonial journalism, he transforms them into instruments of critique against colonial injustice. This process parallels what Syawaludin (2025) describes as urban identity negotiation, whereby global symbols are reembedded within local ethical frameworks. In the Indonesian context, hybridity thus becomes a generative process that integrates intellectual emancipation with cultural rootedness, producing what Ekaristi (2023) terms moral hybridity. What hybridity resolves at the ethical level, ambivalence exposes at the representational level, marking a clear progression in the analytical structure of the argument.

Beyond its immediate textual analysis, Bumi Manusia extends Bhabha's framework toward what this study conceptualizes as archipelagic hybridity. Unlike standard formulations of hybridity grounded in diaspora, exile, or metropolitan contact zones, archipelagic hybridity emerges from territorially plural, maritime, and communally embedded colonial settings. Shaped by the intersections of ethnicity, geography, and collective memory, this form of hybridity foregrounds ethical balance, dialogical coexistence, and solidarity across difference, offering a distinctly Southeast Asian inflection to postcolonial theory (Young, 2020).

In this way, Bumi Manusia integrates mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity into a coherent semiotic structure of resistance. Mimicry destabilizes the language of power, ambivalence fractures its moral certainty, and hybridity reconstructs identity beyond the binary of colonizer and colonized. Together, these dynamics demonstrate how colonial discourse can be appropriated, reinterpreted, and ethically redirected through narrative performance rather than oppositional rupture. As Salam and Zuliana (2022) observe, Pramoedya's fiction transforms historical trauma into a discursive arena where knowledge, emotion, and morality become instruments of liberation.

Ultimately, Bumi Manusia functions not merely as a colonial archive but as a decolonial text that intervenes in global postcolonial theory. Conceptually, this study extends Bhabha's notion of hybridity by proposing archipelagic hybridity as an ethical and relational mode of agency; empirically, it offers a systematic rereading of Bumi Manusia that foregrounds discursive resistance over nationalist allegory. By grounding Bhabha's concepts within the lived realities of Indonesian colonial history, Pramoedya articulates a Southeast Asian epistemology of freedom that privileges moral agency, linguistic creativity, and negotiated modernity over domination and essentialism. Through this synthesis, the novel affirms the possibility of a plural and dialogic modernity forged through encounter rather than separation.

Conclusion

This study shows that Bumi Manusia constructs indigenous resistance through discursive practices of mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity rather than through direct confrontation. The analysis demonstrates that mimicry functions as a strategic rearticulation of colonial language, education, law, and economic rationality, enabling indigenous characters—most notably Minke

and Nyai Ontosoroh—to negotiate agency within colonial constraints. Ambivalence emerges as a structural feature of colonial authority that reveals its instability, while hybridity operates as a narrative space in which identity, morality, and knowledge are renegotiated beyond binary oppositions. The study contributes theoretically by refining Bhabha's concept of hybridity as a form of performative consciousness grounded in ethical negotiation and discursive refunctioning, rather than as cultural mixture alone. By situating these processes within the Indonesian colonial context, the analysis extends postcolonial theory toward a Southeast Asian articulation of decolonial agency that foregrounds moral reasoning and relational ethics. This research is limited by its focus on a single literary text and on textual analysis. Future studies may pursue comparative analyses across Indonesian authors or incorporate reception-based approaches to examine how strategies of mimicry and hybridity are interpreted by readers and across historical contexts.

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