

Multilingualism and Cultural Resistance in *Bumi Manusia*: A Critical Sociolinguistic and Postcolonial Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the complex relationship between language and culture in *Bumi Manusia* (*This Earth of Mankind*), a novel by Indonesian author Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Set during the Dutch colonial period in the early 20th century, the novel presents a multilingual environment where Dutch, Malay, and Javanese languages interact within a socially stratified society. The central research problem addressed is how language operates as both a tool of colonial control and a medium for cultural resistance and identity formation. Through the lens of critical sociolinguistics and postcolonial cultural theory, this study examines how linguistic practices in the novel reflect broader power dynamics, colonial ideologies, and cultural negotiations. The protagonist, Minke, embodies a linguistic and cultural hybrid, navigating between colonial education in Dutch and his native cultural roots expressed in Malay and Javanese. His linguistic choices mirror his shifting identity, revealing a deeper tension between imposed authority and indigenous self-determination. Pramoedya's strategic use of multilingual narration is interpreted as a form of subversive storytelling that challenges the dominance of the colonial language while asserting the significance of native cultural perspectives. The novelty of this research lies in its interdisciplinary focus on how literature can function as a site of linguistic resistance and cultural recovery in the face of colonial hegemony. By analyzing the novel's language politics, this paper contributes to broader discussions on the role of language in postcolonial identity formation and the intersection between linguistic power and cultural expression in Southeast Asian literature.

KEYWORDS

Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *Bumi Manusia*, language and culture, critical sociolinguistics



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Introduction

Language and culture are closely intertwined in shaping individual and collective identities, where language functions as a means of communication as well as a marker of social and cultural identity [1], [2]. In colonial and postcolonial contexts, language choice is often a tool of domination as well as a means of resistance to dominant cultural hegemony [3]. Language not only functions as a means of communication, but

also as an instrument of power that can strengthen domination or become a means of resistance to oppression [4]. This phenomenon is very evident in the history of colonized nations, including Indonesia, where Dutch colonialism systematically regulated social hierarchies through language, education, and cultural policies.

One work of Indonesian literature that represents this dynamic in depth is the novel *Bumi Manusia* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. The novel not only tells the life journey of a young character named Minke in the midst of the colonial system, but also displays the complex interaction between Dutch, Malay and Javanese languages in a social space full of inequality [5], [6]. Through multilingual narratives, Pramoedya shows how the use of language reflects colonial power structures as well as being a medium for struggling for cultural identity.

A number of previous studies have discussed *Bumi Manusia* from the perspectives of postcolonialism, colonial ideology and cultural hybridity. For example, Ningsih et al. [7] analyzed the ideology of colonialism in this novel with a postcolonial approach, while Maulana [8] highlighted cultural hybridity in the main character. Simatupang and Peter [9] highlight how *Bumi Manusia* reflects the inequality of colonial power relations through representations of law, race and power, and its relevance to contemporary Indonesian sovereignty. Wedhowerti [10] in her study of the translation of *Bumi Manusia* emphasizes the importance of maintaining traces of postcolonial culture in the translation process as a form of identity representation. Meanwhile, Sulaeman et al., [11] examined the variety of languages used in the novel-including Dutch, Javanese, and Malay-as a reflection of colonial social and cultural complexity. Yulianti and Jayantini [12] also highlighted the important role of language structure in conveying cultural meanings and nuances through the analysis of textual metafunctions in the translation of *Srimad Bhagavatam*. In addition, Yulianti and Marhaeni [13] emphasized the importance of aesthetic values in traditional performances as a medium of cultural expression that strengthens local identity, which parallels how literature can be a tool for the preservation and expression of cultural identity in a multilingual context. However, studies that specifically highlight critical sociolinguistic aspects in relation to postcolonial cultural theory are still very limited. In fact, this novel offers a rich space to see how linguistic practices can represent power relations, symbolic resistance, and the process of identity formation in colonial society. This gap is an important basis for this research to fill the untapped study space.

This research aims to fill the void by analyzing the role of language in *Bumi Manusia* as an instrument of power as well as a medium of resistance and affirmation of cultural identity. By adopting a critical sociolinguistic approach that highlights power relations in language practices [14]. The main focus is on the character of Minke as a representation of linguistic and cultural hybridity that continues to grapple between the demands of colonial education and local cultural roots. Through this approach, this

research seeks to reveal the ideological dimensions of language in Pramoedya's narrative as well as its contribution to building a discourse of resistance and postcolonial identity recovery.

The novelty of this study lies in the application of an interdisciplinary approach between critical sociolinguistics and postcolonial cultural theory in analyzing language politics and identity dynamics in Indonesian literary works. This study seeks to explore how Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Bumi Manusia* becomes a narrative space that represents linguistic practices as ideological instruments in colonial society. As stated by Fairclough [15] and Blommaert [16], language is a social practice laden with the meaning of power, and its use in texts reflects relations of domination and resistance embedded in social structures. Pennycook [17] further emphasizes that language is always in the constellation of colonial history and unequal cultural relations. On the other hand, postcolonial cultural theory formulated by Bhabha [18] provides a conceptual framework for understanding strategies of representation and negotiation of identity in colonized societies through the concepts of hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence. Through this lens, *Bumi Manusia* can be read as a text that reproduces colonial subjects in a symbolic struggle between imperial power and local identity.

Methodologically, this research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a text analysis method, focusing on the Indonesian version of *Bumi Manusia*. The data collection process was conducted through close reading, focusing on parts of the text that display multilingual practices, the use of ideological terms, and socio-political narratives that reflect colonial power relations. The data were analyzed through theoretical triangulation by combining critical sociolinguistic frameworks and postcolonial theory to obtain contextualized and reflective interpretations. This analysis model follows the standards in postcolonial studies that place language as a field of articulation of identity and power [19]. Thus, this study makes a significant contribution to the development of literature in the fields of linguistics, postcolonial literature, and cultural studies in the Southeast Asian region, and fills a gap in previous research that has not explicitly highlighted critical sociolinguistic dimensions in Indonesian literary works.

Discussion

Bumi Manusia, the first novel in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Buru Tetralogy, is a monumental literary work born out of political constraints and repression. Written during his incarceration on Buru Island and originally delivered orally to fellow political prisoners, the novel was first published by Hasta Mitra in 1980. The dark historical setting of its creation gives strong political and moral weight to the content of the narrative. Pramoedya created a discursive space that allowed silenced voices,

especially subaltern voices within the structures of colonialism, to speak out through the medium of literature [5].

Set in the Dutch East Indies in the late 19th century, *Bumi Manusia* tells the intellectual and inner journey of an educated Javanese youth named Minke [21]. He must navigate a colonial world that is not only socially alien, but also epistemologically. In this context, Minke is not just a fictional character, but a representation of the ambivalent position of the colonized subject who is divided between his Western education and his local cultural roots. His identity conflict reflects the complex experience of a hybrid identity full of tension and negotiation [7].

This novel not only presents historical fiction but also offers a postcolonial narrative that is rich in criticism of the power relations between the colonizers and the colonized. Within this framework, language is not merely a means of communication but also an ideological instrument used to control knowledge and shape subjectivities. Minke, who writes in Dutch, experiences the paradox of gaining symbolic power from the colonizer's language while simultaneously feeling alienated from his Javanese identity and mother tongue [11]. This illustrates how colonialism operates through a process of cultural and epistemic transgression.

The strength of *Bumi Manusia's* narrative also lies in its female characters, especially Nyai Ontosoroh. As a Javanese woman who is a mistress, she has no legal standing, but in practical life, she has control over business, children's education, and moral principles. Nyai Ontosoroh presents a contradiction to patriarchal and colonial structures that marginalize women, and through her struggle, she demonstrates a form of symbolic resistance to the oppressive dual system: colonialism and patriarchy [22]. In terms of language and narrative style, Pramoedya uses various language variants to show social stratification. Dutch appears as a symbol of power and access to colonial knowledge, while Malay and Javanese illustrate the dynamics of local roots that Pramoedya continues to try to maintain. The tension between colonial and indigenous languages in this novel is not just a literary aesthetic, but an ideological map that shows the relations of domination and resistance in the colonial structure [11].

Bumi Manusia is not only strong on an aesthetic and ideological level, but also holds national values that are important for present-day reflection. In Hanung Bramantyo's film adaptation, the values of nationalism embedded in the novel-such as the struggle for justice, respect for education, and defense of individual rights-are re-emphasized. These values are relevant as part of efforts to reconstruct a humanist and progressive national identity [23].

Furthermore, the novel also offers an important contribution in dismantling colonial myths that have been constructed through the official history curriculum or colonial archives. By narrating historical events from the perspective of colonized subjects, Pramoedya repositions historical narrative as a contested domain. This is in line with

the thoughts of Edward Said and Frantz Fanon that history is never neutral, but rather the result of a clash of interests and social positions [7]. The novel's strength also lies in its ability to revive discussions about the relationship between literature and politics. By combining personal narrative, social history and political reflection, *Bumi Manusia* revives the concept that writing is a political act. In this case, Pramoedya articulates the function of literature not only as a mirror of reality, but also as a transformative tool that can shape consciousness and social change [24]. In postcolonial literary studies in Southeast Asia, *Bumi Manusia* occupies an important position as a work that reflects and dismantles the legacy of colonialism. It parallels liberation narratives in other formerly colonized countries and offers space for the formation of alternative narratives that were previously silenced. Therefore, reading and studying this novel is not only important for Indonesian literary studies, but also for understanding postcolonial dynamics in the Asian region [25].

In conclusion, *Bumi Manusia* is not only a great literary work because of the strength of its narrative, but also because of its courage in reopening long-kept colonial wounds. Through the characters of Minke and Nyai Ontosoroh, as well as through a reflective and ideological language style, Pramoedya succeeded in conveying the message that the struggle to become an independent human being begins with an awareness of history, language and identity. In the context of contemporary Indonesia, which is still struggling with the impact of colonial legacy and the problem of national identity, this novel remains relevant and worth re-reading as a material for collective reflection [26].

Through a critical sociolinguistic approach and postcolonial theory [27], the following discussion examines five main aspects that show how language and identity become arenas of symbolic resistance in *Bumi Manusia*. These aspects include (1) language as a tool of colonial power, (2) local language as a medium of resistance and cultural identity, (3) the hybridity of Minke's identity, (4) multilingual narrative strategies as a form of language decolonization, and (5) the contribution of literature in the reconstruction of identity and symbolic resistance.

Language as a Tool of Colonial Power

The mastery of Dutch by the character Minke in the novel *Bumi Manusia* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer is the most obvious illustration of how colonial power works through language. Language, in the colonial context, is not just a means of communication, but a tool for the reproduction of power, social selection, and identity formation. Minke, a Javanese native who attends Hoogere Burgerschool (HBS)-a colonial educational institution accessible only to the elite-is presented as an excellent student and fluent in Dutch. Pramoedya writes: “At HBS, Minke was known as an intelligent student who spoke fluent Dutch. He always received praise from his Dutch teachers for his superior language skills compared to his friends” [20].

Minke's ability to speak Dutch not only reflects individual intelligence, but also symbolizes social mobility in the colonial system. In this context, colonial language became symbolic capital [28] that solidified Minke's position in the hierarchical colonial social structure. The Dutch language gave him access to knowledge, power and recognition from the colonial authorities, which was not available to the majority of natives. As noted by Sulaeman et al. [11], the use of Dutch in *Bumi Manusia* marks social class boundaries and access to epistemic power.

However, the dominance of colonial language in this novel cannot be separated from the process of epistemic colonization, namely the domination of local knowledge systems through language and education. Mignolo [29] calls this the "coloniality of knowledge" - where European languages not only exclude local languages from the formal sphere, but also reshape ways of thinking and values that are considered valid. In this case, Minke not only used colonial language as a tool, but also began to think within a Western epistemic framework. He writes his stories and personal reflections in Dutch, which means he has entered the space of colonial discourse without fully realizing that he is being symbolically colonized.

Minke's inner conflict reflects the tension between empowerment and subordination. On the one hand, his mastery of the Dutch language gave him an advantage and a bargaining position in the colonial world. But on the other hand, it also alienates him from his cultural identity as a native. When Minke has to interact with his countrymen in a formal context, he feels alienated by his own mother tongue. This ambivalence is subtly portrayed by Pramoedya in Minke's dialog and inner narrative, which shows that being "modern" in the colonial context means accepting a structure that oppresses oneself [22].

It is important to note that this tension is a key feature of hybrid identities in postcolonial theory. Bhabha [27] calls it the third space, an interstitial space where the colonial subject is neither fully colonizer nor colonized. Minke is in this position: he is not fully accepted by the Dutch because of his racial and social status, but also begins to separate from his indigenous community because of his Western-influenced way of thinking and expressing himself. *Bumi Manusia* thus illustrates the process of colonial ambivalence, where the colonial subject internalizes the colonizer's values while still experiencing structural oppression.

This condition is also in line with Gramsci's [30] idea of hegemony, where power is not solely imposed through physical violence, but also through consensus formed by institutions such as schools. HBS became a hegemonic tool that produced "educated natives" who thought in colonial terms, but still did not have equal rights and positions with the colonizers. Minke's experience becomes an idealized image of the colonial

hegemonic project: education creates subjects who are symbolically integrated, yet remain structurally separate.

In this context, the Dutch language is not only an instrument of mobility, but also an instrument of colonization that limits the space for articulation of indigenous identity. This is emphasized by Khoirunnisa [21] that *Bumi Manusia* not only presents colonial reality narratively, but also exposes how the structure of language becomes part of a subtle but effective ideological control. When Minke speaks and writes in Dutch, he is actually internalizing the colonial perspective that considers the Western knowledge system as the only source of truth.

This conflict is complicated by the fact that the Dutch language in the novel is not always used for domination. Pramoedya presents moments when colonial language is used as a symbolic tool of resistance. Minke's writings in newspapers, for example, use Dutch to criticize the colonial system itself. This shows that colonial language, although ideologically loaded, can still be reclaimed and used as a tool of resistance. This is what Bhabha calls "mimicry" - a form of imitation that produces imbalances and gaps in colonial power.

It should be noted that this dynamic is also influenced by the representation of colonial education in the novel. The HBS school, despite being a symbol of progress, also became a tool to perpetuate the hierarchical structure between the Dutch and the natives. As described by Jurahman [24], the novel *Bumi Manusia* provides a deep understanding of how Indonesian history cannot be separated from the elitist and exclusive narrative of colonial education. In colonial education, language became training to think like the colonizers, not to strengthen local identity.

Moreover, in Assegaf & Masunah's article [23], it is emphasized that the values of nationalism that emerge in the novel and its film adaptation grow from the awareness of this inequality. The Dutch language, although dominant, was not able to completely remove the spirit of struggle in Minke and other characters. This realization eventually gave rise to an alternative narrative that rejected cultural inferiority and reaffirmed the dignity of indigenous people.

Local Language as a Medium of Resistance and Cultural Identity

The Malay and Javanese languages, in contrast to the Dutch language that represents colonial power, serve as an important medium in expressing local identity as well as a space for cultural resistance in *Bumi Manusia*. Through dialog and the inner narratives of indigenous characters, the use of local languages emphasizes the strong ties to traditional values and ancestral heritage that continue to be maintained despite colonial oppression. The choice to use Malay and Javanese is not just a means of daily communication, but a political and cultural statement that reflects the unequal power

relations between the colonizers and the colonized. As expressed by Minke in a dialogue with Nyai Ontosoroh, “*Aku iki wong cilik nanging nduweni rasa*” [31], this sentence confirms that even though he comes from a small or marginalized community, he still has strong feelings, awareness, and self-esteem as part of the indigenous community. Del Percio [32] asserts that local languages in this context function as symbols of cultural resilience that not only survive, but also experience revitalization as a form of resistance to the homogenization of colonial culture and language. In various scenes, for example, Minke and other indigenous characters use Javanese in intimate conversations that contain cultural and philosophical values, strengthening the identity and solidarity of communities marginalized by the colonial system. Thus, Malay and Javanese are not only communication media, but also strategic instruments in maintaining and negotiating indigenous cultural identity amidst the domination of colonial power.

Furthermore, the linguistic strategy used by Pramoedya in this novel not only shows resistance to the dominant colonial narrative, but also emphasizes the position of the local language as a form of counter-discourse against the hegemony of the Dutch language. Malay as a lingua franca becomes a means of communication that bridges various layers of local society, while strengthening collective feelings as a nation that has its own history and identity, independent of the colonizer's narrative. According to Jurahman [24], *Bumi Manusia* not only describes the history of colonization narratively, but also presents a critical understanding of the dynamic role of language in creating and perpetuating social structures. By maintaining dialog in the local language and reflecting Javanese cultural values, Pramoedya did not just write a novel, but built a symbolic space to voice cultural resistance. This is what makes this work a form of literary documentation that reflects cultural nationalism, as also examined by Assegaf and Masunah [23] in their study of the film adaptation of *Bumi Manusia*, which emphasizes the importance of language and culture as pillars of national identity.

In addition to being a means of resistance, the use of local language in this novel also has an educational function. Through dialogues written in Javanese and Malay, readers are invited to reflect on local wisdom values such as gotong royong, politeness, and respect for parents. These values are not present as a mere setting, but become an important element in shaping the characters and the conflicts they face. Local language, thus, becomes a vehicle for transferring character values that are important in the formation of national identity, especially in the context of cultural and historical education. In this context, as Simatupang and Peter [9] point out, the role of language in *Bumi Manusia* is not only narrative or symbolic, but also normative and pedagogical—helping the younger generation understand the history of colonization while strengthening a plural national identity rooted in local traditions.

The Hybridity of Minke's Identity in Postcolonial Perspective

Bhabha's [27] third space theory provides an effective conceptual framework for understanding the cultural and linguistic tensions experienced by the character Minke in *Bumi Manusia*. Third space is a space of encounter and negotiation between Western colonial culture and Eastern indigenous culture that results in a dynamic and continuously reconstructed hybrid identity. Minke lives in this space - facing the pressure of two conflicting cultures, resulting in identity conflicts and complex inner tensions. Minke's hybridity is not only a form of passive adaptation to the colonial system, but also a symbolic strategy to negotiate his existence as an educated native subject who is not completely uprooted from his own cultural roots [27].

In the novel, Minke is described as fluent in Dutch and educated at the colonial school Hoogere Burgerschool (HBS), a symbol of status and power. But at the same time, he still uses Javanese and Malay in personal and spiritual contexts. For example, his conversations with Nyai Ontosoroh and his mother often use local language that is full of cultural and emotional meaning. This reflects the ambivalent position he occupies: one foot in the world of colonial modernity, and the other tethered to traditional heritage. According to Jurahman [24], the character of Minke is a representation of the confusion of an educated native generation in the midst of the transition between two worlds, and his conflict is a reflection of the transformation of Dutch East Indies society at large.

This reflects the ambivalent position he occupies: one foot in the world of colonial modernity, and the other tethered to traditional heritage. According to Jurahman [24], the character of Minke is a representation of the confusion of a generation of educated natives who are in the midst of a transition between two worlds, and his conflict is a reflection of the transformation of Dutch East Indies society at large. Furthermore, Minke's construction of a hybrid identity reflects the phenomenon of colonial mimicry, which is an imitation of colonial culture that is never completely identical, but always "almost the same, but not quite" [27]. In this context, Minke displays adaptability to colonial norms such as European dress, rational thinking, and mastery of the Dutch language. However, he never truly became part of the colonial class. He is still considered "indigenous", limited by colonial social structures and laws. This ambiguity, as Del Percio [32] notes, opens up a subtle space of resistance: through imitation and partial adoption, Minke renegotiates his identity position within an oppressive system.

Minke's internal conflict is a manifestation of symbolic resistance hidden behind everyday practices. Language becomes the main tool in this process. He recognizes that Dutch gives him access to the intellectual world, but he is also aware that it is the language of the 'colonizers'. The choice to maintain the use of local language in intimate spaces is a cultural strategy to strengthen collective identity and maintain local values amidst the pressure of colonial modernity. According to Simatupang and

Peter [9], the linguistic practices in *Bumi Manusia* show how language is used as a negotiation arena between subordination and autonomy of identity.

In the film adaptation of *Bumi Manusia*, as analyzed by Assegaf and Masunah [23], the character Minke is shown experiencing the same dilemma between “being Dutch” and “remaining Javanese”. The film highlights the symbolism of Minke's clothing, speech accent, and interactions with other characters as visual representations of identity hybridity. This depiction emphasizes how postcolonial identity struggles do not occur in an empty space, but in concrete social and political contexts - namely colonial domination, social stratification, and cultural crisis.

Hybridity in *Bumi Manusia* is thus not only a linguistic or cultural phenomenon, but also a reflection of the colonial power structure that creates ambiguous subjects-not fully colonizers, but also not fully colonized. Minke's identity is a product of the negotiation between these two poles, and the tension he experiences symbolizes the struggle of indigenous people in the face of the project of epistemic colonialism. In this third space, the opportunity arises to create new forms of identity that are not fully subject to the logic of colonial power, but also do not return to the traditional past as a whole. Minke's identity, in this case, is an active and political form of postcolonial subjectivity.

Multilingual Narrative Strategy as a Form of Language Decolonization

Through *Bumi Manusia*, Pramoedya Ananta Toer develops a narrative strategy that is not only aesthetic, but also political. Through a multilingual strategy, Pramoedya builds a narrative that illustrates the complexity of colonial relations and efforts to resist cultural hegemony through linguistic practices. Dutch, which in the colonial context was considered the language of modernity and power, is depicted in this novel as an instrument of structural domination. When a Dutch official asks Minke, “*Waarom zwijg je?*” (Why are you silent?), this question is not just an ordinary invitation to speak, but also a symbolic pressure that demands Minke to respond within the colonial discursive framework [31]. Within colonial power structures, the Dutch language became a marker of epistemic superiority: those who mastered it were entitled to the discourses of knowledge, law and modernity. As such, mastery of this language carries with it ideological ambivalence. Minke gains prestige and access to the colonial intellectual world through the Dutch language, but at the same time he is trapped in a knowledge system that does not recognize his indigenous identity and voice as valid.

However, this dominance is not left unchallenged. Pramoedya consciously compensates by presenting Malay and Javanese languages in various dialogues, inner narratives and social situations in the novel. When Minke speaks to his mother, he uses Javanese fine manners, which not only shows politeness, but also represents a deep emotional and cultural connection with his cultural roots. Here we see that local language functions

not only as an alternative means of communication, but also as a medium of articulation of identity and collective memory that is not touched by the colonizer's language.

Minke's practice of language switching creates a code-switching phenomenon that is not merely a linguistic response, but also a form of ideological expression. In a colonial context, code-switching becomes a political act: moving from one language to another means moving from one power framework to another. Dutch carries colonial norms and values, while Javanese and Malay carry values of community, spirituality and ethnic solidarity. When Minke chooses to use indigenous languages in intimate or spiritual contexts, he is reasserting his personal identity and agency outside of colonial logic.

This multilingual strategy thus becomes a tool of narrative decolonization. In *Bumi Manusia*, Pramoedya does not submit to the colonial monolingual logic that tends to erase the plurality of linguistic and cultural identities of Indonesian society. Instead, he asserts that colonial society was multilingual, and that local languages have equal, if not more authentic, epistemological value and function than colonial languages. By inserting idioms, expressions, and sentence structures from three languages-Dutch, Malay, and Javanese-Pramoedya creates a narrative that reflects the complexities and tensions of postcolonial identity that cannot be reduced to a single language.

More than just an aesthetic technique, this strategy can be read in terms of epistemic disobedience [29], which is the defiance of colonial knowledge systems through the recovery and articulation of languages that have been considered subordinate. In this case, Pramoedya not only presents the story of an individual's struggle against colonial structures, but also opens an alternative space for historical narratives, experiences, and local subjectivities. He rejects the dichotomy of modern versus traditional languages, and instead shows how they coexist and intersect in a hybrid colonial consciousness.

It also allows readers - especially Indonesian readers - to re-experience local languages as part of an active and reflective reading experience. In the colonial education system, local languages were often considered unscientific, irrational, and even useless. *Bumi Manusia* radically challenges this assumption by placing local languages at the center of character development, emotional structure, and narrative flow. As such, readers are faced with the option of understanding the complexity of Minke's identity not only through the narrative content, but through the linguistic textures that compose it.

This multilingual narrative strategy also provides an important lesson that decolonization struggles do not always take place in the form of armed confrontation or explicit ideological discourse. Sometimes, resistance occurs in subtle and symbolic forms-through word choice, language shifts, or the return of local meanings in spaces that were once usurped by colonialism. In this context, *Bumi Manusia* is a literary work

that not only records the history of colonization, but also actively reconstructs linguistic spaces that have been suppressed and silenced.

Bumi Manusia can thus be understood as a literary-political project that combines aesthetics, ethics and ideology in one complex multilingual narrative. Pramoedya didn't just write a novel; he rewrote the history of Indonesian language and colonial experience from a perspective that rejects singular domination. In this narrative space, language becomes a tool of decolonization, not only of colonial power, but also of the way we understand, write and live history itself.

Literature's Contribution to Identity Reconstruction and Symbolic Resistance

Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Bumi Manusia* not only presents a story of individuals confronting colonialism, but also functions as a postcolonial text that consciously uses linguistic strategies to challenge and revise colonial power structures. Through the representation of the character Minke and a narrative that combines Dutch, Malay and Javanese, Pramoedya creates a dialectical space where language acts as a political and symbolic instrument. The local language is not just a cultural ornament, but a form of active resistance to colonial symbolic domination, as Thiong'o [33] calls language of resistance - language as a medium of struggle against mental colonialization.

Compared to the monolingual and hegemonic colonial narrative, Pramoedya's multilingual strategy shows aesthetic and political courage to assert cultural autonomy. Literature, in this case, appears as an articulate medium that not only conveys stories, but also reconstructs the collective identity of colonized communities. This is in line with Bhabha's [27] idea of cultural hybridity, where subaltern identities are not formed passively, but through symbolic negotiations that allow new articulations in the "third space" of culture.

By reclaiming narrative space from colonial language and filling it with local voices, Pramoedya showed that literature can be a significant field of symbolic struggle. Mignolo [29] also asserts that decolonial options in cultural practices - including literature - allow for epistemic disobedience, which is the rejection of the dominant knowledge system shaped by Western colonialism. This approach strengthens the position of literature as an intellectual force capable of transcending aesthetic boundaries to enter the realm of ideological discourse.

Research by Simatupang and Peter (2024), published in the *International Journal of Humanities, Social Science, and Management*, highlights how *Bumi Manusia* illustrates the hegemony of colonial power through racial differences, material possessions, and legal hierarchies, thereby reflecting the social inequalities of the time. In addition, Wedhowerti [10], writing in *Eralingua: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Asing dan Sastra*,

examines postcolonial traces in the translation of *Bumi Manusia*, emphasizing the importance of Indonesian cultural representation in its English version. Meanwhile, Sulaeman et al. [11], in the *Journal of English Language and Literature*, identify language variation in the novel—including the use of Dutch, Javanese, and English—reflecting the complexity of Pramoedya’s cultural identity and narrative strategies.

Bumi Manusia’s contribution to postcolonial studies lies not only in its representation of colonial history but also in its creation of new forms of linguistic and cultural awareness. In the context of Southeast Asia’s rich linguistic diversity and long history of colonialism, works like *Bumi Manusia* open up opportunities for a more critical and contextualized re-reading of power relations, language, and identity [34].

Conclusion

Based on the explanation in the results and discussion section above, it can be concluded that the novel *Bumi Manusia* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer is a postcolonial literary work that not only records the history of colonialism in the Dutch East Indies, but also actively deconstructs the colonial narrative through narrative strategies, language structure, and identity representation. This novel raises the issue of power relations in the colonial context, especially through the representation of language as a tool of domination as well as a medium of resistance.

Through the character of Minke, readers are invited to explore the dynamics of hybrid identity-between the Western values instilled through colonial education and the local cultural roots that still bind him. This tension is presented in a complex manner, highlighting how colonialism not only colonized physical territory, but also epistemic and linguistic territory. On the other hand, the character of Nyai Ontosoroh symbolizes resistance to the oppressive patriarchal system and colonial laws, reinforcing the message that resistance can take moral, cultural and symbolic forms.

The multilingual approach used in the novel not only reinforces social realism, but also becomes a form of narrative resistance to colonial language hegemony. This strategy shows that decolonization does not only occur in the political realm, but also in the way a society articulates itself through language and narrative. As such, *Bumi Manusia* is a literary work that is not only aesthetically powerful, but also ideologically and politically significant. The novel makes an important contribution to postcolonial discourse, both at the national and regional levels, and reinforces the position of literature as an important medium in reconstructing identity, revealing historical wounds, and building collective awareness of the importance of freedom of thought, speech, and being fully human.

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