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The Idea of Home and Displacement in Anak Semua Bangsa by Pramoedya Ananta Toer

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ABSTRACT
This paper explores the thematic construction of home and the experience of displacement in Anak Semua Bangsa (Child of All Nations) by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. As the second novel in the Buru Quartet, the text continues the journey of Minke, a native intellectual negotiating his identity amid the turbulence of Dutch colonial rule. The narrative presents home not merely as a physical dwelling, but as a contested ideological space shaped by race, power, and colonial epistemology. Through the characters of Minke and Nyai Ontosoroh, the novel interrogates how colonial structures displace native subjectivities, both literally and symbolically, resulting in fragmented identities and shifting notions of belonging. Drawing on postcolonial theories by Homi Bhabha and Edward Said, this paper examines how colonial modernity fractures indigenous connections to home while simultaneously generating hybrid spaces of resistance and redefinition. The analysis focuses on selected episodes that highlight exile, inheritance, and spatial marginalization, revealing how Pramoedya reclaims the narrative of home as a political site of cultural assertion. Ultimately, the study situates Anak Semua Bangsa within broader world-literature paradigms by showing how Indonesian anti-colonial resistance resonates through the language of displacement, memory, and imagined return.

KEYWORDS
Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Anak Semua Bangsa, Home, Displacement, Postcolonial Identity

Introduction

The concept of home in colonial discourse is often fraught with ideological tensions, situated between memory, loss, and power. In *Anak Semua Bangsa* (*Child of All Nations*), Pramoedya Ananta Toer explores this tension through the protagonist Minke's evolving understanding of domestic, cultural, and national belonging under Dutch colonialism. Edward Said's [5] theory of Orientalism provides a critical lens for unpacking how colonial structures disrupt indigenous conceptions of home, positioning it as a site of surveillance, exclusion, and ideological control.

This article analyzes key episodes from *Anak Semua Bangsa* to examine how home becomes a contested and hybrid space—negotiated through memory, legality, race, and resistance. Drawing also from Homi Bhabha's [1] ideas on hybridity and mimicry, the paper foregroundshow characters such as Nyai Ontosoroh, Minke, and Minem assert alternative, decolonial meanings of home, even as colonial structures seek to erase or delegitimize them.

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Colonial Modernity and the Fractured Home

Colonialism fractures the indigenous experience of home by transforming intimate, familial spaces into arenas of state control and ideological violence. In the early chapters, Minke's house arrest, despite the absence of formal charges, illustrates how colonial power disrupts the sanctity of home. According to Said [5], colonial rule renders the native subject perpetually suspect, subject to surveillance and exclusion. Minke's domestic sphere, therefore, mirrors the broader displacement of native authority under colonial rule.

Similarly, the loss of Annelies—a central trauma carried over from *Bumi Manusia*, represents a rupture in both familial continuity and cultural roots. Her forced removal to the Netherlands, sanctioned by colonial law, symbolizes how the indigenous home is made vulnerable to external control. The metaphor of Annelies as a young graft torn from its tree ("cangkokan muda direnggut dari batang induk") evokes a broader colonial strategy of separating native subjects from their cultural soil.

Colonial modernity in *Anak Semua Bangsa* is not a liberatory force, but a mechanism of rupture, one that fractures indigenous structures of belonging and displaces the epistemologies embedded in family, place, and memory. Said [5] emphasized that colonial control extends beyond physical dominance to the epistemological framing of the "Other," rendering the colonized subject as irrational, incomplete, and in need of Western governance. This epistemic violence is enacted most clearly in the reconstitution of home as a space of uncertainty, alienation, and loss.

One of the clearest symbols of this fracture is the separation of Annelies, whose absence continues to haunt Minke. On page 80, she is described metaphorically: "Annelies telah belayar. Kepergiannya laksana cangkokan muda direnggut dari batang induk." This imagery evokes a violent uprooting and colonial severing of kinship. Her forced departure, which is legally sanctioned by Dutch custody law, turns familial intimacy into bureaucratic displacement.

This sense of personal rupture is compounded by Minke's psychological dislocation. On page 82, he reflects: "Matahari bergerak begitu lambat, merangkaki angkasa inci demi inci." The slowing of time becomes a metaphor for existential suspension. Bhabha [1] calls this a liminal temporality, or a colonial 'waiting room' in which the native subject is caught betweenloss and an inaccessible future. Minke's perception of time reflects a mental exile where home is no longer a stable point of return.

On pages 83–84, Minke struggles with a return to Wonokromo: "Haruskah aku kembali ke Wonokromo? Apakah tempat itu rumahku?" This rhetorical question reveals that colonial modernity has unmoored the concept of home. Said (1978) argues that exile is

not merely geographic, but is ontological. Minke's homeland no longer feels like his own; colonial logic has rewritten its moral and emotional coordinates.

The ring from the Suurhof family becomes a material trace of this colonial entanglement. On page 221, Minke remarks: “Cincin itu menusuk-nusuk pahaku.” A token of mixed-blood legacy, the ring symbolizes the psychic discomfort of receiving gifts from a racialized system of patronage. It is both personal and political, what Bhabha [1] would call a colonial relic that is simultaneously intimate and coercive. When Minke returns the ring to the Dutch police, Tuan Sekaut (p. 222), he is not merely shedding a gift; he is symbolically rejecting a poisoned inheritance that has no place in a liberated home.

The destruction of Minke’s manuscript about Trunodongso on page 225 further dramatizes the fragility of home as narrative space. Described as “kertas itu telah jadi kepingan-kepingan kecil,” the manuscript's shredding parallels the colonial obliteration of native memory. Minke's work was a testimonial home for the oppressed, a decolonial archive meant to preserve the voices of displaced farmers like Trunodongso. Its destruction at the hands of Nijman, who accuses Minke of producing “smaadschrift” or defamation (p. 224), exposes the epistemological violence of Orientalism. As Said [5] observed, native truths are often dismissed as anecdotal unless validated by colonial authorities.

Nyai Ontosoroh’s situation further underscores the legal displacement of indigenous women. On page 332, she is declared to have no legitimate claim: “Mama Sinyo hanya perempuan Pribumi. Mereka hanya batang-batang pisang.” This racist metaphor reduces native women to disposables, erasing their moral and maternal authority. Although Nyai has built the household and raised her children, colonial legality refuses to recognize her contribution. This dramatizes Said’s claim that Orientalism renders the colonized incapable of legal or ethical sovereignty.

On pages 328–329, the home is violated once more by colonial surveillance when Jan Tantang (Babah Kong), a secret police agent, infiltrates their space under false pretenses. His exposure as “agen polisi klas satu” confirms that even the intimate realm of domesticity is not beyond the colonial gaze. Home is no longer private but transformed into a carceral node in the colonial surveillance network.

Even within maternal care, Minke experiences feelings of inferiority and dependency. On page 80, he confesses: “Bekerja di dekat Mama aku merasa sebagai cebol di belakang raksasa. Pribadiku tenggelam dalam kehebatan pikirannya.” This loss of self within the domestic sphere aligns with Orientalist constructions of the native as infantilized—unable to assert individuality except through detachment from native space. Hence, Minke’s desire to leave his maternal home is also a yearning for modern selfhood, a paradox induced by colonial epistemology.

Finally, on page 334, the fight over the child Rono, an illegitimate son of Robert and Minem exposes how colonial legality reshapes family as a contractual, transactional space. Minem is asked: "Kau tidak dalam keadaan bunting sekarang?" reducing her status to sexual utility, while Nyai must argue for Rono's future as an act of maternal resistance. Home, here, is no longer defined by blood or affection, but by legal control and racial legitimacy.

Symbolism and the Material Contamination of Home

Objects such as the diamond ring from the Suurhof family and Minke's manuscript serve as symbols of colonial infiltration into personal and cultural spaces. The ring, a gift from an Indo- European figure, becomes a source of unease and moral conflict for Minke. He describes it as "menusuk-nusuk pahaku"—a metaphor for the psychic discomfort of carrying colonial residues. It embodies what Bhabha [1] terms the "ambivalence" of mimicry, where colonial artifacts are both desired and detested, contaminating the native space of home.

Later, the destruction of Minke's manuscript on Trunodongso—an act of colonial censorship— further reveals the fragility of indigenous narratives. In Said's framework, the colonizer monopolizes truth; native voices are silenced or dismissed as anecdotal [5]. The manuscript, framed by Minke as "kerja untuk keabadian," represents an intellectual home for the oppressed. Its tearing apart signifies the violent erasure of native memory under colonial rule.

Collectively, these scenes illustrate that colonial displacement is not simply about the loss of land or property, but about the systematic dismantling of indigenous structures of kinship, memory, and sovereignty. Home becomes a space that is not only lost but must be constantly negotiated, in which an unstable site is caught between resistance and subjugation. As Said [6] notes in Reflections on Exile and Other Essays, the experience of colonial exile is not limited to those who leave their homeland, but is also endured by those who stay behind and find their homeland transformed beyond recognition.

Thus, in Anak Semua Bangsa, Pramoedya does not offer a nostalgic return to a pre-colonial home. Instead, he interrogates the very conditions that make home possible, exposing its fragility under imperial domination while gesturing toward the potential for its reconstruction through resistance, memory, and cultural affirmation.

Language, as a key marker of identity and belonging, is central to Pramoedya's critique of colonialism. Minke's choice to write in Dutch alienates him from his cultural roots, as Kommer and Jean Marais repeatedly urge him to write in Malay or Javanese. Kommer's challenge when he says, "Bangsa Tuan sendiri lebih membutuhkan tulisan

Tuan," positions language as both an epistemic and emotional home, one that Minke is in danger of abandoning.

Language in Anak Semua Bangsa operates as a battleground of belonging. Minke's preference for Dutch, despite Kommer and Jean Marais's pleas to write in Malay, signifies a deeper crisis of cultural displacement. Kommer's rebuke, as he says, "Bangsa Tuan sendiri lebih membutuhkan tulisan Tuan," calls for linguistic decolonization [4, p. 190).

Said [5] and Bhabha [1] stress that language is a carrier of ideology. Minke's alienation from his mother tongue renders him epistemologically unmoored. Writing in Dutch distances him from his community, while simultaneously denying him full assimilation, he remains an outsider in both linguistic homes.

According to Said [5], colonialism involves not just territorial conquest but epistemological control. The dominance of European languages marginalizes native tongues, rendering them incapable of expressing complex ideas. Minke's internal crisis mirrors this erasure, as he struggles to reconcile his Western education with his responsibility to articulate indigenous experiences.

The presence of colonial agents like Pilkemboh and Jan Tantang in domestic spaces underscores the extent of colonial intrusion. The sugar factory administrator's authority surpasses even that of local regents ("lebih berkuasa daripada bupati"), turning the home into a site of surveillance, not sanctuary.

Japan, as the only Asian country to achieve parity with Western powers, emerges in the text as an alternative home for colonized Asian identities. Minke's admiration for Japan, however, risks reproducing essentialist fantasies: Japan becomes a stand-in for dignity and autonomy that Java cannot yet achieve.

Khouw Ah Soe's fragmented identity further problematizes this vision. Living in exile, speaking a foreign tongue, and dying for a cause far from home, he embodies the dislocated colonial subject. His home is neither China nor the Indies, but the political ideal of liberation. In Bhabha's [1] terms, Khouw inhabits a "third space," a zone of resistance forged through mobility, speech, and sacrifice.

The inheritance conflict that follows Robert Mellema's death reveals the violence of colonial legality. Although Nyai raised Annelies and managed the household, she is denied any legal claim. Her domestic authority is devalued precisely because it does not conform to European norms. The line "Mama Sinyo hanya perempuan Pribumi" (p. 332) encapsulates this racialized and gendered disqualification.

Maurits Mellema's return from Europe and his immediate legal authority underscore the Orientalist fantasy of European supremacy—even when unearned. His claim to the

estate is not based on emotional ties or moral responsibility, but on bloodline and colonial statute. Said (1978) highlights how colonialism relies on these hierarchies to perpetuate control.

Yet Nyai resists. Her moral outrage says, “Hilangkan anakku tak dapat diganti dengan jabatan tangan pembunuhnya,” (p. 387) reframes home not as property but as emotional and ethical belonging. In this defiance, she becomes the novel’s most potent symbol of postcolonial agency.

Thus, Pramoedya Ananta Toer presents home not as a fixed dwelling but as a contested ideological terrain, fractured by colonial intrusion yet reimagined through resistance and cultural assertion. Through the lenses of Orientalism [5] and hybridity [1], this article has examined how the novel foregrounds the displacement of native subjectivities and their attempts to reclaim home as a space of voice, memory, and belonging.

Nyai Ontosoroh, Minke, and other figures do not merely endure colonial domination. In fact, they redefine what it means to belong, to narrate, and to resist. In doing so, Anak Semua Bangsa articulates a decolonial vision of home that transcends legality and geography, rooted instead in moral clarity and historical truth.

Gendered Exclusion

Women in Anak Semua Bangsa face compounded exclusion, as their roles within the home are rendered invisible or illicit under colonial frameworks. Nyai Ontosoroh, despite her formidable moral authority and managerial competence, is dismissed in legal discourse as “hanya perempuan Pribumi” (p. 332). This feminization and racialization of indigenous women align with Orientalist constructs that position the native woman as irrational, emotional, and politically irrelevant [5, 3].

Minem’s loss of Rono further exemplifies this dynamic. Though the biological mother, her status is precarious as she is interrogated about her past, her morality, and her legitimacy as a parent. Her desperation to maintain maternal ties is repeatedly challenged by colonial legal and patriarchal systems, which see motherhood not as relational but as property-based. In one poignant moment, Nyai asserts, “Aku akan beri kau pesangon tapi aku tidak membeli cucuku sendiri” (p. 358), underscoring the degradation of kinship into economic transaction.

Pilkemboh’s sexual harassment of Surati and violent entry into private spaces represent the colonial home as a theater of subjugation. The phrase “Kau hendak digundiknya” encapsulates the gendered violence of colonial power, where native women’s bodies are treated as extensions of occupied land.

These scenes align with Said's [5] contention that Orientalist discourse not only constructs the Orient as feminine and submissive but also authorizes its violation under the guise of civilization.

Hybridity and the Reclamation of Home

Despite the pervasive mechanisms of colonial displacement, Anak Semua Bangsa also articulates a powerful countercurrent: the native subject's active reclamation of home through resistance, memory, and narrative authorship. Pramoedya Ananta Toer does not present the home solely as a site of loss; rather, he shows how memory and moral clarity can forge new conceptualizations of home beyond the constraints of legality and geography. This reclamation occurs across personal, linguistic, and political dimensions, offering a decolonial reimagining of belonging.

One of the most emblematic figures of resistance in the novel is Nyai Ontosoroh, whose life defies the colonial script imposed upon native women. Though legally dismissed as "hanya perempuan Pribumi" [4, p. 332], Nyai asserts her agency through her moral authority, business acumen, and maternal dedication. Her resistance is not revolutionary in the conventional sense; rather, it is embedded in daily acts of care, reason, and resolve. She builds and maintains a household that, while denied legal recognition, functions as a sanctuary of indigenous order. In this way, Nyai exemplifies what bell hooks (1990) describes as the homeplace—a site of radical resistance, especially for marginalized women, where values of dignity and care can flourish despite external violence.

Minke's development as a writer represents another key dimension of reclamation. Initially seduced by the prestige of writing in Dutch and appealing to European audiences, Minke gradually realizes the alienation this causes, both from his cultural roots and from the very people whose lives he wishes to represent. Kommer's challenge when he says, "Bangsa Tuan sendiri lebih membutuhkan tulisan Tuan" is a turning point that reframes writing not as a means of assimilation, but as a form of reclamation [4, p. 190]. Kommer urges Minke to use his pen to rebuild an intellectual and emotional home for the oppressed, one grounded in native languages and sensibilities.

In this sense, writing becomes a metaphorical home. It is a space where displaced histories, silenced narratives, and fragmented identities are reassembled and preserved. Minke's manuscript on Trunodongso, though ultimately destroyed, functions as an act of narrative resistance. He calls it "kerja untuk keabadian" [4, p. 223]—a work for eternity— signifying its role as an archival home for the memory of the disenfranchised. Although its physical destruction by colonial authorities dramatizes the precarity of native voices under empire, the symbolic act of writing affirms what Fanon [2] called the necessity for the colonized to reclaim their history through self-representation.

Even after the destruction of his manuscript, Minke does not retreat into silence. Instead, the very act of mourning its loss deepens his commitment to memory as resistance. Said [6] emphasizes that memory can become a political act, as "a form of resistance to the erasures and distortions of colonial historiography." In Pramoedya's narrative, memory is not passive nostalgia but an active reconstruction of the self and the community, drawn from fragments and scars.

The notion of reclaiming home through ethical solidarity is also present in Minke's changing relationships with the peasantry and the oppressed. Through encounters with figures like Trunodongso and Kommer, Minke begins to see his role not just as a chronicler but as a participant in the struggle for justice. This growing sense of moral responsibility realigns his understanding of home not as a private domain or legal asset, but as a shared project grounded in justice, language, and memory.

In the novel's closing movements, Nyai's refusal to accept financial compensation for the loss of her grandchild underscores the ethical reclaiming of home. She declares, "Hilangkan anakku tak dapat diganti dengan jabatan tangan pembunuhnya" [4, p. 387], rejecting the commodification of family and signaling that home is ultimately rooted in relationships, not contracts. This moment reclaims home as an affective and moral space that defies colonial structures of property and legality.

Finally, the emergence of hybrid homes in which spaces created at the margins of legality but rich in cultural meaning offer a model of resistance that is both pragmatic and visionary. These homes, whether forged by Nyai, Minem, or Minke, represent what Bhabha [1] calls the "third space," a site of negotiation where new identities and structures of belonging emerge from the ruins of colonial order. These hybrid homes are not imitations of European domesticity; rather, they are grounded in indigenous resilience, affective labor, and political clarity.

Through its portrayal of resistance, memory, and cultural authorship, Anak Semua Bangsa refuses to let the colonial project define the limits of home. Instead, it offers a vision of home as a decolonial praxis, an ongoing commitment to justice, care, and self-definition. In doing so, Pramoedya not only critiques the violence of colonial displacement but also illuminates the pathways through which home may be ethically and imaginatively reclaimed.

Conclusion

In Anak Semua Bangsa, Pramoedya Ananta Toer reconfigures the notion of home as a contested ideological and emotional terrain shaped by the forces of colonialism, gendered dispossession, and epistemic violence. Far from a stable domestic refuge, home in this narrative becomes a site of surveillance, legal erasure, and ontological exile. The Dutch colonial regime fractures indigenous experiences of belonging,

transforming home into a disciplinary space where familial intimacy is displaced by bureaucratic control and racialized legality [5; 4, pp. 70-72, 328-329].

Through the experiences of characters like Minke and Nyai Ontosoroh, the novel dramatizes how colonial modernity invalidates native kinship, disrupts maternal authority, and renders the domestic realm vulnerable to external incursions. Nyai's erasure from legal recognition, despite her moral and managerial authority, exemplifies the gendered marginalization of native women, aligning with Orientalist frameworks that feminize and infantilize colonized subjects [3; 4, p. 332].

Yet, amidst the ruptures, Anak Semua Bangsa also offers a compelling counter-narrative of resistance and cultural reclamation. Minke's evolving consciousness as a writer, spurred by figures like Kommer, marks a shift toward epistemological self-determination where writing in Malay becomes an act of reclaiming narrative authority and rebuilding a collective home through memory and solidarity [1; 4, p. 190]. His manuscript on Trunodongso, although destroyed, symbolizes the power of language and historical witness as forms of home-making.

The novel's final chapters deepen this vision of decolonial home through Nyai's moral stance and refusal to commodify family bonds. Her declaration "Hilangkan anakku tak dapat diganti dengan jabatan tangan pembunuhnya" or "the loss of my son cannot be replaced by shaking the hand of his killer" [4, p. 387] affirms home as a site of ethical belonging, not property. This ethos of care, memory, and resistance redefines home as what bell hooks might term a "homeplace," a space for dignity, survival, and decolonial assertion.

Ultimately, Anak Semua Bangsa reveals that home, under colonial rule, is not simply lost, it must be reimagined. Drawing on Edward Said's [5] critique of Orientalism, Homi Bhabha's [1] theory of hybridity, and Frantz Fanon's [2] vision of narrative resistance, Pramoedya's work insists that home is forged not from geography or legality, but from moral clarity, linguistic solidarity, and historical consciousness. It is a space continually negotiated at the margins of a hybrid "third space" [1] where the colonized reclaim their voice, their history, and their future.

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