

CHAPTER I

Introduction

This chapter discusses the background of the study, the identification and limitation of the problem, the research questions, the objectives, and the significance of the research.

1.1 Research Background

In the late 19th century, Indonesia remained under Dutch colonial rule, governed by a discriminatory legal system structured along racial and social class lines. Indigenous people, referred to as *inlanders*, occupied the lowest rung in the colonial hierarchy, beneath Europeans and Easterners (Chinese and Arabs). This racialized structure created deeply rooted social inequalities, particularly in education, employment, and land ownership rights (Ricklefs, 2001).

Understanding this socio-political backdrop is crucial to comprehending the narrative of *This Earth of Mankind* (*Bumi Manusia*), a novel by Pramoedya Ananta Toer that vividly portrays the impact of colonialism on personal and collective identities. Through the character of Minke, an intelligent Javanese boy educated at the elite Hogere Burger School (HBS), the novel highlights the persistent racial discrimination that undercuts even the privileges afforded by Western education. Alongside Minke stands Nyai Ontosoroh, an

indigenous woman who, despite her business acumen and resilience, remains legally marginalized because of her status as a concubine.

Prior studies have explored various aspects of *This Earth of Mankind*. Afsani et al. (2022) compared the novel with its film adaptation, analyzing the influence of socio-political elements on the narrative. Susanto (2018) focused on the construction of identity in Pramoedya's works, particularly emphasizing the pervasive effects of colonialism. Wibowo (2021) examined the theme of resistance, illustrating how characters actively challenge established power structures.

Additionally, theoretical insights from *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon, 1961) elucidate the psychological effects of colonialism, particularly the creation of the "colonized intellectual" individuals educated within the colonizer's framework yet excluded from its privileges. Minke embodies this internal struggle: although he masters the tools of Western knowledge, he remains socially and legally oppressed. Meanwhile, Nyai Ontosoroh personifies Fanon's concept of resistance, reclaiming dignity and agency despite systemic marginalization.

Beyond the exploration of race and power, *This Earth of Mankind* profoundly engages with universal human experiences particularly love and tragedy. Love, both romantic and maternal, serves as an act of resistance against dehumanization, while tragedy emerges not merely from personal misfortune but from the structural violence of colonial law. Thus, analyzing the intersection of love, identity, and tragedy is essential for a deeper understanding of how Pramoedya constructs a narrative that is both historically grounded and emotionally resonant.

While previous research has provided valuable insights into themes of identity and resistance, there has been limited exploration of how love and tragedy intertwine with colonial constructs of identity. Therefore, this study seeks to fill that gap by examining how these three themes love, identity, and tragedyinterconnect within the narrative structure of *This Earth of Mankind*.

Previous studies on *This Earth of Mankind* have primarily focused on historical, political, and anti-colonial resistance aspects. Some have examined one specific theme, such as love or identity, but rarely have these three themes love, identity, and tragedy been explored together

within a postcolonial framework. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by integrating these three themes into a comprehensive analysis.

1.2 Identification of the Study

This study focuses on analyzing *This Earth of Mankind* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer, particularly in its depiction of love, identity, and tragedy. The research will examine how socio-political conditions shape these themes and how the main characters navigate these challenges within the colonial context.

1.3 Limitation of the Study

This study focuses specifically on *This Earth of Mankind* as a singular text, acknowledging that it represents the English Version of Pramoedya's Gramedia book. While references to the broader tetralogy may inform the analysis, the primary focus remains on the themes as they appear within this foundational novel.

The research examines the themes of love, identity, and tragedy as they intersect with colonial power structures, colonial law, and resistance narratives. The analysis is further limited to the experiences of the two central characters Minke and Nyai Ontosoroh as

representative figures whose personal journeys illuminate broader colonial dynamics.

1.4 Research Question

This study addresses three primary research questions:

1. How is love portrayed in *This Earth of Mankind*?
2. How do socio-political contexts influence the identity of the main characters?
3. What is the role of tragedy in *This Earth of Mankind*, and how does it affect character development?

1.5 Objective of the Study

The primary objectives of this research are:

1. To analyze the multifaceted portrayal of love in *This Earth of Mankind*, examining how romantic, familial, and intellectual forms of love both challenge and succumb to colonial power structures.
2. To investigate the processes of identity formation under colonial rule, particularly focusing on the psychological and cultural conflicts experienced by colonized intellectuals and marginalized women.

3. To examine the function of tragedy as a narrative and political device that exposes the systematic violence of colonial law and its impact on indigenous communities

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to several areas of literary and cultural scholarship. Within postcolonial literary studies, it offers a nuanced analysis of how Indonesian literature engages with colonial trauma and resistance, contributing to broader understanding of Southeast Asian postcolonial writing. The research also advances feminist literary criticism by examining Nyai Ontosoroh's complex position as a woman who asserts agency within multiple systems of oppression.

From a cultural perspective, this study enhances appreciation for Pramoedya Ananta Toer's literary achievement and his contribution to Indonesian national consciousness. By analyzing the intersection of personal and political themes, the research illuminates how literature functions as both artistic expression and social critique.

The study's methodology combining textual analysis with postcolonial theoretical frameworks also contributes to literary criticism by demonstrating how close reading can be enhanced

through theoretical engagement, offering a model for future analyses of postcolonial texts.

Practically, this research is expected to serve as a reference for educators and students in understanding the complexity of social relations during the colonial era as portrayed in literature. Theoretically, it is expected to enrich the field of postcolonial literary studies, especially within Indonesian literature focusing on the interplay between personal and structural themes.