# *AMBIVALENCE OF THE DISCOURSE OF DEVELOPMENT CRITIQUE IN AHMAD TOHARI'S ORANG-ORANG PROYEK NOVEL: A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY*

***(Ambivalensi Wacana Kritik Pembangunan dalam Novel Orang-Orang Proyek Karya Ahmad Tohari: Sebuah Kajian Postkolonial)***

**Atika Silma Nabila**
Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta
atikasilmanabila@uny.ac.id

***Abstract:*** *The development discourse reproduced by the New Order government oriented towards modernity and economic progress in line with the discourse of Western colonialism that ultimately led to capitalist profits. Ahmad Tohari's novel Orang-Orang Proyek (OOP) records the embodiment of a government development project in the form of the construction of a bridge in Cibawor village. The novel contains criticism of the development discourse in the New Order era, but the criticism constructed in the novel is influenced by the discourse of Western colonialism. This study analyzes how the author constructs a critique of the development discourse of the New Order era in the OOP novel through the theory of Postcolonialism. The method used is qualitative method. The results of the study indicate that the author's critique of development discourse in the OOP novel is still influenced by colonial thinking. 1. The discourse of development is positioned as a civilizing mission leading to modernity, aimed at economic progress, built on a foundation of rationality through education, and dominated by masculinity. 2. The ideal discourse of development is constructed through Western-style binary opposition. 3. The author experiences ambivalence in constructing a critique of development. Analysis within OOP shows that the author not only opposes Western discourse with the East, but also with the West itself.*

***Keywords:*** *Development; Discourse; New Order; Orang-Orang Proyek; Postcolonialism*

## *A. INTRODUCTION*

The development of a country is often identified with modernization. According to Siagian (1994 via Badruddin, 2009), development is "an effort or series of efforts of growth and change that are planned and carried out consciously by a nation, state, and government, towards modernity in the context of nation-building". Historically, modernity refers to the emergence of a form of society in Europe around the 17th and 18th centuries, guided by the ideals of the Enlightenment regarding rationality and progressiveness. Modernity is often associated with capitalism. In Weber's thought, the density of modernity manifests itself in the centralization of various institutions of power. The density of modernity is realized in the transformation of traditional modes of life into modes of life led by legality-bureaucracy (Robet, 2015). Thus, the direction and view of development tend to refer to modernization based on capitalism.

In the history of Indonesian politics, the New Order government built a strong image as the Development Order through dominant discourses. The discourse of development was produced through government policies, strategic state projects, and propaganda giving Soeharto the title of Father of National Development. The implementation of development carried out by the New Order was then framed into a concept known as the

Trilogy of Development. The concept consists of stability, growth, and equity. The Trilogy of Development is a key development strategy implemented in the Soeharto government (Dwi & Kasuma, n.d.)

Development as a dominant discourse in the New Order era is also evident in literary works that emerged as a response by authors to a social reality. This can be found, for example, in the collection of poems written by W.S. Rendra entitled *Potret Pembangunan dalam Puisi* which was first published in 1980. The poems contain social criticism that discusses issues of social power, political power, political ideology, poverty, corruption, and education (Ayuningrum, 2021). For his poems that dared to criticize the New Order government, Rendra was imprisoned. Although the New Order era has ended, criticism of development discourse continues to be written through literary works. In addition to poetry, criticism of development discourse is also contained in the novel genre, such as Tere Liye's *Si Anak Badai*, which was first published in 2019. This novel contains conflicts that occur in the infrastructure development of a port in Kampung Manowa(Nurhardiansyah et al., 2023). Several years before, a novel with the same theme called *Orang-Orang Proyek (OOP)* by Ahmad Tohari (AT) was first published in 2002. It has been reprinted several times, including in 2015 and 2019 by Gramedia Pustaka Utama. The novel remains relevant today because it encapsulates the complexities of social issues during the New Order era that seemingly persisted unresolved. As Suryaman once said, *OOP* is a document or fact about the New Order's power that oppresses conscience through the political machine (Suryaman, 2004).The novel contains important social data from the New Order era that is worth discussing. It shows literary works that were born to respond to development discourse both in the New Order, Reformation, and Democracy eras continue to emerge. Criticism of this discourse is still relevant to discuss today, considering the direction of development which is considered to still have shortcomings.

The *OOP* novel tells the story of a government project to build a bridge in Cibawor village, which is full of corruption problems. Set in 1991 when the New Order was still in power, Kabul, an idealistic engineer and leader in the bridge construction, faces complex moral, social, economic, and political problems. Kabul experiences an extraordinary dilemma in handling the completion of the bridge construction. On the one hand, he has a moral responsibility to complete the project well in the name of honesty and professionalism. Moreover, Kabul understands that the construction of the bridge provides great benefits for the people of Cibawor village who are lagging behind in all fields. On the other hand, he is under pressure from various parties who have an interest in the project. Basically, AT does not reject the discourse of development in his novel. However, AT criticizes how development practices are carried out fraudulently to benefit certain parties. In OOP, the direction of development is primarily progress in the economic field, which cannot be separated from modernity.

The *OOP* novel has been relatively extensively studied in literary studies. In “The Analysis of the Socio-Political Fiction Under Binary Opposition and Deconstructive

Reading Method (Case Study of Indonesian Novel Entitled “Orang-Orang Proyek” by Ahmad Tohari)”, Muqid discusses the binary opposition in the OOP novel which is apparent from Kabul's ideal expectations for the bridge project that contradict the reality of corruption around it (Muqit, 2019).

Several writings analyze the *OOP* novel using a Sociology of Literature perspective. A thesis by Marwantina entitled “Authoritarianism in Ahmad Tohari's Orang-Orang Proyek Novel: A Sociology of Literature Study by Alan Swingewood” finds that the author, Ahmad Tohari, is a representative of the 'wong cilik' (little people). Marwantina also found an authoritarian attitude in the New Order era government which was proven by historical and social facts (Marwantina, 2021). Then, another writing in the form of a journal article entitled “Rampant Corruption: A Sociological Literature Review of the Orang-Orang Proyek Novel” written by Kurniati finds that *OOP* is a literary documentation that presents the reality of resistance to corruption and deviations (Kurniati, 2014).

With a different approach, (Febriyanti et al., 2025) examines the *OOP* novel using Teun A. van Dijk's critical discourse analysis. Febriayanti sees that the discourse of consciousness in *OOP* is the ideology of class consciousness that sides with the proletariat. Febriyanti's writing discusses the theme of *OOP* regarding lower class issues in more depth by paying attention to the structure of the text combined with cognition and social context. Through the figure of Kabul, Ahmad Tohari is represented as a Marxist who seeks to side with the common people.

An article entitled The Spirituality of Nature in the “Orang-Orang Proyek Novel (Ecofeminism Perspective)” by (Putri & Dewi, 2024) shows that the figures of Mak Sumeh, Wati, and Ibu are depicted as women who have strength, faith, and religious awareness in appreciating, caring for, and loving the natural environment and fellow human beings.

An article entitled “The Symbol of Dehumanization in Ahmad Tohari's Orang-Orang Proyek Novel” written by Umam Az examines the symbols of dehumanization in the *OOP* novel. He interprets these symbols as an attitude of looking down on other humans and considering worldly and political positions as everything. This assumption results in an arbitrary attitude towards others (Khatibul & Az, n.d.).

Several of the writings above show that the *OOP* novel has never been studied using a Postcolonialism approach. Previous studies analyzed the *OOP* novel related to the topic of lowerclass issues, corruption. and the natural environment were studied with different approaches. However, there is a concept of binary opposition which is also discussed in Muqid's article. However, the discussion of binary opposition in Muqid's writing is different from this research because. If Muqid discusses binary opposition which shows the distance between the character's expectations and reality, binary opposition in this

study is used to see how the author constructs a discourse of development that leads to Western-style modernity and advancement.

Postcolonial studies highlight the enduring influence of colonialism, even after its physical departure (Bandel, 2016). Colonialism has shaped both former colonies and colonizing nations, with postcolonialism emerging from literary studies to examine how texts reinforce cultural authority and construct a binary between the European "self" and the non-European "other"(Loomba, 2020). Edward Said's "Orientalism" illustrates how the West defines itself in opposition to the East, asserting its superiority and creating a colonial discourse that legitimizes Western dominance(Said, 2010). This discourse assumes the superiority of the white race and the Western model of development, pushing a "civilizing mission" that imposes Western systems and values on the "Third World"(Bandel, 2016). However, dominant discourses reveal ambivalence and anxiety surrounding their authority, attempting to portray the "Other" as fundamentally different while simultaneously maintaining a connection to solidify control (Ashcroft et al., n.d.)

Related to the discourse of development, which is closely linked to modernity, this view assumes that there is only one direction that development aims for. Bandel explains that there is an assumption underlying the view that all human beings must go through the same development, namely from "primitive" to "modern." Modernity here is generally associated with rationality, which is defined as the ability to think rationally/scientifically as developed in the Western scientific tradition (Bandel, 2016). This is what is known as the Civilizing Mission, which is assumed to be the moral burden or responsibility of the white race through the colonial apparatus of power, modern systems, politics, and economics through colonialism (Bhabha, 1994). Development, in its relationship to colonial discourse, becomes a form of civilizing mission that directs a nation towards modernity and rationality.

This single development discourse is in line with the discourse of Western colonialism, which leads to capitalist profits. Therefore, this study wants to see (1) how the discourse of development in the OOP novel is constructed by colonial discourse, and (2) how the author is ambivalent about criticism of development discourse.

## *B. METHOD*

The research was conducted using qualitative methods with a postcolonial literary criticism approach. Qualitative literary research emphasizes understanding meaning through the interpretation of texts with a specific theoretical framework (Faruk, 2012). In this study, the material object, namely OOP by AT, was read using a postcolonial literary criticism approach. The stages carried out were:

1. Researchers collected data in the form of words, sentences, or paragraphs that show the discourse of development in the construction of colonial discourse that contains binary opposition.

2. Researchers collected data in the form of linguistic units that contain criticism of the discourse of development that shows ambivalence.

To analyze the data, researchers used a close reading technique, namely a careful reading of text details (Lentricchia & Dubois, 2003). This reading was carried out to analyze data containing development discourse using Edward Said's postcolonial theory as a form of colonial discourse construction. Furthermore, data containing criticism of development discourse was analyzed using Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory with the concept of ambivalence. Ambivalence is used to see how the author's criticism of development discourse in OOP is constructed. This is mainly obtained from contradictory texts and things that the text does not explicitly say.

The analysis was carried out by identifying and categorizing quotations that contain development discourse and criticism of development discourse, relating the data obtained to the concepts of colonial discourse and ambivalence, then interpreting the meaning of these relationships.

## *C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION*

This study intends to answer how the discourse of development in the *OOP* novel is built in the construction of colonial discourse and the author's ambivalence in criticizing development discourse. First, we will look at how the discourse of development is built through colonial construction in the form of binary opposition, such as advanced vs. backward, educated vs. uneducated, and masculine vs. feminine, which leads to the main narrative that development leads to progress and Western-style modernity.

### 1. Development as a Civilizing Mission

### Economic Improvement

In the *OOP* novel, the dominant narrative of the New Order government's development is a type of progress in the form of Western-style modernity. If it is associated with the context of Dutch colonialism in the archipelago, Dutch colonialist culture is used as a model for the idea of modernity or "progress" (Faruk, 2007). Although colonialism in Indonesia has historically ended, views regarding Western modernity and progress are still the goals of national development, especially in the New Order Era. Through this assumption, this study wants to show how development is discoursed as a civilizing mission. Development is said to be a civilizing mission because, according to Western perspectives, the West is considered to have achieved high modernity and rationality, while other cultures are believed to be at a lower stage, namely the stages that have been passed by Western culture (Bandel, 2016). For example, other nations are considered primitive because they have not or have not experienced progress like that achieved by the modern West. Western-style progress is measured by comparing certain qualities and quantities, for example, area A is more advanced than area B because its economic ability is higher. The novel also shows a similar view.

*"Dan setelah terisolasi hampir empat puluh tahun, beberapa desa di seberang bekas jembatan itu menjadi wilayah yang tertinggal hampir di segala bidang (Tohari, 2007).*

"And after being isolated for almost forty years, several villages across the former bridge became areas that were lagging behind in almost all fields.

Through the views of the character Tarya, several villages around Cibawor are considered to be lagging behind because their locations are isolated due to the lack of bridge access as a connector. Tarya implies that there is inequality between villages around the Cibawor River and other more advanced villages or cities. Thus, the villages around Cibawor are not yet at the same stage of progress as other villages. Through the views of his characters, AT assumes that bridge construction is needed to support mobility in the economic activities of the surrounding community so that they can be more productive. In the end, it is hoped that the community will achieve certain qualities of life that are in accordance with the standards of New Order progress.

In addition to the discourse of development which is described as potentially bringing progress to the surrounding community, the development project has also automatically opened up economic opportunities for the community. Job opportunities created from development projects provide opportunities for people to earn income. Large-scale state projects require a lot of human resources. This project automatically opens up new jobs and drives the economy in the area around the project.

*Lebih dari seratus orang resmi bekerja di situ. Mereka adalah tukang batu, perancang besi, mandor, beberapa insinyur sipil, dan kuli-kuli. Operator alat-alat berat. Sopir-sopir truk dan kernetnya. Preman-preman kampung dan pensiunan tentara yang direkrut menjadi satpam. Warung-warung bermunculan. Rokok, minuman, dan nasi rames bisa dibeli. Juga obat nyamuk atau aspirin. Bakso dan jamu pegel linu. Rujak atau es cendol.(Tohari, 2007)*

More than a hundred people officially work there. They are stonemasons, iron designers, foremen, several civil engineers, and laborers. Heavy equipment operators. Truck drivers and their assistants. Village thugs and retired soldiers who were recruited to become security guards. Stalls are popping up. Cigarettes, drinks, and mixed rice can be bought. Also mosquito repellent or aspirin. Meatballs and herbal medicine for aches. Fruit salad or ice cendol.

The project location, which was originally described as a quiet place far from the village, has now become crowded with people from various regions and backgrounds. The place that was previously untouched by civilization has become a dynamic economic driver. This shows that there are social and economic benefits that are directly felt by the community with the existence of a new bridge project. Building infrastructure that supports community mobility with the aim of creating prosperity is a modern idea. Rural

areas are built with infrastructure aimed at boosting the national economy. The absence of infrastructure facilities was previously seen as a factor causing the villages around the Cibawor River to not yet be at a stage that was in accordance with the progress standards of the New Order government. In addition, the community also gets direct benefits from development projects by creating jobs and driving the economy. From this, we can see that AT does not actually reject the New Order government's development project. The author has hopes for development which is considered beneficial for improving people's welfare. Thus, the discourse of development in the OOP novel, which is a modernization project to achieve certain advances, is supported by the author. Development is like a civilizing mission that brings a certain society out of backwardness towards enlightenment through stages that are in accordance with the principles of modernization. The discourse of development regarding progress and modernity defined in a single way signifies the strength of colonial discourse in the New Order era.

**Education Supports Development**

Modernity cannot be separated from rationality. Therefore, rationality, which is associated with science, becomes the path to achieving ideal development. The knowledge referred to in this context is knowledge that comes from the West. This knowledge is disseminated through formal education. Formal education in Indonesia began in the early 20th century when Dutch humanists initiated the Ethical Policy due to concerns about declining public welfare. One of the programs is education. The orientation of Dutch education is more pragmatic, namely to produce Dutch government employees (Faruk, 2007). The Netherlands has an interest in obtaining cheap labor so schools were established for natives (Farid, 2023; Nur, 2022)

The relationship between the discourse of education and development can be found in the *OOP* novel through the character Kabul. Kabul is the main character who acts as the foreman who leads the Cibawor River project. As an engineer, Kabul feels he has a moral and professional responsibility in completing development projects well. Kabul is an idealistic person who is also confident in his field of expertise. He makes calculations, plans, and decisions related to project implementation well. Unfortunately, many parties have an interest in the project to gain profit. Kabul faces a dilemma of remaining honest and adhering to ethics and professionalism in his duties or accommodating the interests of various parties.

> *Sebagai insinyur, Kabul tahu betul dampak semua permainan ini. Mutu bangunan menjadi taruhan. Padahal bila mutu bangunan dipermainkan, masyarakatlah yang pasti akan menanggung akibat buruknya. Dan bagi Kabul hal ini adalah pengkhianatan terhadap derajat keinsinyurannya* (Tohari, 2007).

> As an engineer, Kabul knows very well the impact of all these games. The quality of the building is at stake. In fact, if the quality of the building is compromised, the

community will certainly bear the brunt of the consequences. And for Kabul, this is a betrayal of his engineering degree.

Kabul is depicted as having high integrity towards his field of knowledge. He is very optimistic that the knowledge and skills gained in college can produce ideal development. However, because many parties are interested in the project, the implementation of development cannot be carried out ideally as Kabul expected. In the end, the bridge is completed, but the building quality is poor and not strong enough, so it only lasts for a short time. This shows that the author is consistent with his optimism that knowledge is actually considered capable of leading humans to achieve ideal development. This achievement failed because the parties interested in the project ignored Kabul's opinion based on his calculations for project planning, rationality. AT's optimism towards science and technology is part of the idea of progress as depicted by the West. Realizing ideal development through knowledge gained from formal educational institutions.

Education in Indonesia today tends to be dominated by an education system based on a market system and a state command system that gives birth to capitalist education, so it is oriented towards alignment and linkages with the business and industrial world. Modernism, like capitalism, is a product of Western European culture of the 17th century that carries a vision and mission that emphasizes aspects of rationality, secularism, and scientific thinking as pathways to human progress. Both become machines that perpetuate developmentalism (Nur, 2022). The direction of knowledge disseminated through formal education in Indonesia leads to Western ideas about rationalism, capitalism, and modernism that support development. This is in line with the discourse of development in the *OOP* novel which is supported by modernism and also knowledge that refers to Western-style progress.

**2. Masculinity of Development Discourse**

The bridge development project in the *OOP* novel is depicted as very masculine. The figures directly involved in the development project are men. The jobs done are also related to physical work. Women are depicted as not having a direct contribution to the development process. The only woman working in the development project is an administrative employee working in the office. Other figures play a role outside the project such as shop owners, waitresses, and street musicians who provide the needs of the workers.

*Ada operator alat berat bernama Siringo-ngo. Ada mandor bernama Kang Acep, ada pemasok bahan bangunan bernama Atay. Juga ada sopir Hutauruk, tukang batu Bejo, atau tukang las Cak Mun. Mak Sumeh membawa barisan pelayan warungnya; Sri, Mita, dan Sonah* (Tohari, 2007).

There is a heavy equipment operator named Siringo-ngo. There is a foreman named Kang Acep, there is a building material supplier named Atay. There is also a driver

Hutauruk, a stonemason Bejo, or a welder Cak Mun. Mak Sumeh brings a row of waitresses from her shop; Sri, Mita, and Sonah.

In general, the *OOP* novel does not depict a significant role for women related to their contribution to the development project. Female figures are depicted only as supporters, such as Mak Sumeh as the shop owner who meets the consumption needs of the project laborers. The only woman who has an official and professional position in the bridge project is Wati. Wati is a female employee who is placed in the administration section. In her daily life, Wati works in a simple room in the project area.

*Tapi menerima Wati memang tidak salah. Pendidikannya lebih dari cukup bila dibanding tugasnya yang hanya urusan adminitrasi ringan* (Tohari, 2007).

But accepting Wati is not wrong. Her education is more than enough compared to her duties which are only light administration matters.

The insignificant role of women in the implementation of the project shows the existence of a gender order in the *OOP* novel. Gender order is related to certain roles attached to women. This role is constructed continuously through historical and local conditions (with all the cultural and global factors that influence it at a certain historical moment) (Bandel, 2016). This role is then considered normal, natural, and accepted as is. In addition to roles, female characters are also depicted very distinctively. Mak Sumeh is displayed with the persona of a middle-aged woman who is very chatty and likes to joke about matching Kabul with Wati at every opportunity. The conversations that Mak Sumeh has with other figures are light, just about gossip and daily life. Meanwhile, the character of Wati is depicted as a woman who is busy with her feelings of love for Kabul. Besides Mak Sumeh and Wati, there is a transvestite street musician character that is brought up in the *OOP* novel. This transvestite figure becomes entertainment in the middle of male workers.

Colonial discourse is also synonymous with masculinity which is used to legitimize dominant power. Masculinity shows a superior nature to femininity which is considered inferior. Masculinity is identified with conquest, colonialism, oppression which is depicted through rationality, strength, and civilization. Conversely, Other is considered emotional, weak, and primitive. Therefore, men are more dominant than women. In general, femininity is often associated with emotionality, while masculinity is associated with rationality. Women are portrayed as creatures who like to gossip or "vent", while men focus on serious discussions about "big" things that are "more important"(Bandel, 2016). Mulvey (1975) the tendency to view women with more attention to their bodies and physical appearance, while men are more judged based on other elements (for example, intellectual ability, status, wealth, authority) (Bandel, 2016). From several figures outside the male gender, we can see that they do not have a significant role in the construction of the bridge directly, namely as simple administrative employees, shop owners, and street musicians. No woman is depicted as having an elite position that has

the authority as a policy maker or regulator of the project. Women with their distinctive characters do not get a place in important positions that are only filled by men.

### 3. Author's Ambivalence in Criticism of Development Discourse

AT does not reject the discourse of development, but it is clear that AT wrote *OOP* to criticize development in the New Order era which was full of corruption. AT criticizes various parties who have an interest and want to profit from the bridge development project. Parties, government elites both local and central, project contractors, to community members who feel entitled to get a share of the project. However, how does AT build criticism of development discourse?

Western colonial discourse navigates the development of a country towards modern progress with materialistic measures. Such development discourse is influenced by Western civilization as the center of the world which is considered the most advanced. In addition to colonial construction shaping the discourse of development in the OOP novel, criticism of development is also built within the framework of colonial discourse. This is where the author's ambivalence is seen.

AT narrates criticism of development through certain figures. The three figures who directly criticize the implementation of development are Kabul, Basar, and Tarya. Kabul is the project implementation engineer, Basar is the village head, and Tarya is a local resident who is a retired employee. Kabul and Basri are college friends. Kabul is a student of the faculty of engineering, while Basar is a student of the faculty of politics. Both are campus activists. They undergo a good academic life and diligently discuss religion and politics. Kabul comes from a poor family, but thanks to his higher education he gets a well-established job as a foreman for development projects. Meanwhile, the figure of Basar pursues a political career as a village head and lives a simple life. Basar has great concern for his citizens. Another figure, namely Pak Tarya, comes from a family of educators. His father is an elementary school teacher and Pak Tarya himself is a retired information office employee. In his youth, he wandered to Jakarta and is suspected of working in publishing or as a journalist. AT depicts the figures who have critical thoughts on development discourse as people who have access to education and come from the middle class. The ability of these figures to think critically is assumed to be obtained from the knowledge they have as well as the life experiences they have gone through.

These three figures not only criticize the development project, but the corrupt New Order government system as a whole. AT narrates criticism of the New Order through these three figures because they, with their educational background, are assumed to have sharpness of thought. With the depiction of educated figures, they are used to discussing social and political issues so that critical thinking skills are formed. They are rational people who have a basis for critical thinking so they can build a strong and sharp narrative of criticism against the government. There is a shared awareness that they are trapped in a corrupt system that perpetuates the political power of the New Order. This corrupt

system is deeply rooted to involve every layer of society from the grassroots to the elite. Especially the figures of Kabul and Basar, they feel trapped in a dilemmatic corrupt system.

> *"Seperti Kabul, saya juga sarjana dan mantan aktivis. Tapi di sini saya adalah kepala desa yang wajib tunduk kepada orang pemerintah dan orang partai golongan."* (Tohari, 2007)
>
> "Like Kabul, I am also a graduate and former activist. But here I am a village head who must submit to government people and party members."

Outside of the three figures who construct the discourse of criticism of development, the majority of other figures are not depicted as such. Other figures come from the lower social class who do not have enough access to higher education. They are project laborers who are immersed in the routine of work. They are depicted as experiencing economic difficulties, but there is no anxiety like Kabul and the other two figures feel. These figures are depicted as powerless even when poverty occurs due to a corrupt system.

> *"Betul. Mereka menikmati kegembiraan semu, bahkan tragis. Ya, tragis karena mereka tidak menyadari telah menjadi korban, menjadi tumbal bagi ambisi orang-orang partai. Dan semua ini terjadi karena massa kebanyakan kurang terdidik sehingga buta akan hak-hak politik mereka. Akibatnya mereka jadi sangat mudah digiring ke sana-kemari, ditipu, dan akhirnya dimobilisasi* (Tohari, 2007).
>
> "That's right. They enjoy false joy, even tragic. Yes, tragic because they do not realize they have become victims, become sacrifices for the ambitions of party people. And all this happens because the majority of the masses are less educated so they are blind to their political rights. As a result, they are very easily herded here and there, deceived, and finally mobilized. 242

From Kabul's point of view, we can see how an educated figure sees life differently than other figures. Kabul feels he has an intellectual distance with other figures. Kabul has the awareness that poverty is a result of the corrupt government structure. However, most of the other figures do not have that awareness. This awareness leads Kabul to choose a different path in life. Kabul chooses to leave the Cibawor bridge development project because he follows his conscience. This choice is taken because of his critical thinking, moral values, and economic stability. He cannot compromise with a corrupt system. Even though he loses his job, he is able to survive,and can even marry Wati. At the end of the story, he still works in the same field but under a private company. Kabul has loose choices because he has good educational capital and skills. This is not owned by most of the other figures. Factory workers rely on income from the bridge project. When this project is completed, it is not certain that they will get the same opportunity. This further reinforces the argument that development does not bring sustainable benefits except to those with education and skills, like Kabul did.

Actually, there are other highly educated figures such as Ir. Dalkijo, who is Kabul's boss. However, Dalkijo is part of the party that benefits from the project. In fact, Dalkijo advises Kabul to follow in his footsteps. From this we can see that education and knowledge on the one hand can be capital to deceive others to perpetuate political or economic power. But on the other hand, knowledge is used to criticize the dominating system.

AT constructs criticism of the Cibawor bridge development project as well as criticism of the whole New Order government system through educated figures. This shows who has the right and can speak and whose criticism will be heard. Figures who do not have a good educational background are not given similar space. Thus, the *OOP* novel shows AT's ambiguity. On the one hand, AT agrees with the single colonial discourse that leads to development by relying on modernity, progress, and rationality. AT is optimistic that such development can bring about better changes in society. This development can be achieved ideally through knowledge and education. On the other hand, AT builds criticism of development also through educated figures. The three figures are rational so that they can think critically and have the awareness that they are harmed by the New Order regime. Conversely, uneducated figures are depicted as victims who are unaware that they have been harmed and even steered by a system that supports the interests of the elite.

AT constructs the discourse of development through binary opposition by contrasting between advanced vs. lagging, educated vs. uneducated, and masculine vs. feminine. AT agrees with the discourse of development that is full of colonial discourse as an answer to community problems in order to get out of backwardness. On the other hand, the discourse of criticism of development in the OOP novel is also built through critical thinking which is the result of the rational thinking of educated figures. This means that there is ambivalence in the author who criticizes development through the colonial discourse itself. Development as a colonial discourse built on binary opposition is criticized with rationality that is also built by the Western discourse itself.

## *D. CONCLUSION*

This article analyzes Ahmad Tohari's novel *Orang-Orang Proyek* (OOP) through a postcolonial lens. The author constructs the discourse of development through binary oppositions (such as advanced vs. lagging, educated vs. uneducated, and masculine vs. feminine), which reinforces the idea of Western-style progress as the ideal. Such binary opposition frames development through a Western lens as a civilizing mission. Moreover, this article examines the ambivalence in the author's critique of the New Order's development discourse. The study reveals that Tohari builds critiques to development project through colonial ways of thinking.

The analysis highlights that the author's ambivalence stems from simultaneously embracing and critiquing the colonial discourse of development. On one hand, Tohari agrees with the idea of modernization and progress brought about by development, seeing it as a way for society to overcome backwardness through knowledge and education. On

the other hand, he uses educated characters, who are themselves products of modernity and rationality, to critique the discourse of development that exploits uneducated people.

Ultimately, the article concludes that Tohari's novel reflects the complexities and contradictions inherent in postcolonial societies, where the desire for progress is intertwined with the legacy of colonial influence and power structures. The critique of development, therefore, becomes ambivalent, as it is built upon the very discourse it seeks to challenge.

## *REFERENCES*


Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (n.d.). *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in Post-colonial literatur* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Ayuningrum, S. (2021). Kritik Sosial Potret Pembangunan dalam Puisi Karya W.S. Rendra (Kajian Sosiologi Sastra). *Metamorforsa*, *9 (1)*.

Badruddin, S. (2009, March 19). *Pengertian pembangunan*.

Bandel, K. (2016). *Kajian Gender dalam Konteks Pascakolonial*. Sanata Dharma University Press.

Bhabha, H. K. . (1994). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge.

Dwi, W. H., & Kasuma, G. (n.d.). *Propaganda Orde Baru*.

Farid, I. (2023). *PERKEMBANGAN PENDIDIKAN DI INDONESIA DARI MAS KE MASA* (Vol. 12, Issue 2). http://jurnal.umt.ac.id/index.php/lgrm

Faruk. (2007). *Belenggu Pasca-Kolonial: Hegemoni dan Resistensi dalam Sastra Indonesia*. Pustaka Pelajar.

Faruk. (2012). *Metode Penelitian Sastra*. Pustaka Pelajar.

Febriyanti, A., Firdaus, Y. A. N., Setiawati, E., & Widagdo, T. B. (2025). Mengungkap ideologi kesadaran kelas novel Orang-Orang Proyek dalam perspektif Analisis Wacana Kritis Teun A. van Dijk . *Sintesis* , *Volume 19*(Issue 1), 44–59.

Khatibul, A. R., & Az, U. (n.d.). *Simbol dehumanisasi dalam novel Orang-Orang Proyek karya Ahmad Tohari*.

Kurniati. (2014). Excessive Corruption: Literature Sociology Study in Novel Orang-Orang Proyek . *Sirok Bastra Jurnal Kebahasaan Dan Kesastraan*, *2 No.2*, 121–210.

Lentricchia, F., & Dubois, A. (Eds.). (2003). *Close reading: The Reader*. Duke University Press.

Loomba, A. (2020). *Kolonialisme/Pascakolonialisme*. Narasi.

Marwantina, D. J. (2021). *Otoritarianisme dalam Novel Orang-Orang Proyek Karya Ahmad Tohari: Kajian Sosiologi Sastra Alan Swingewood*. Universitas Negeri Surakarta.

Muqit, A. (2019). The analysis of the socio-political fiction novel under binary opposition dan deconstructive reading method (Case study of Indonesian novel entitled “Orang-Orang Proyek” by Ahmad Tohari. *INFORMASI* , *49 No.1*, 65–76.

Nur, A. (2022). Kapitalisme Pendidikan dan Reinventing Paradigma Pendidikan Indonesia: Sebuah Tinjauan Antropologi Pendidikan Askar Nur. *Al-Ubudiyah*. http://jurnal.staiddimakassar.ac.id/index.php/aujpsi

Nurhardiansyah, T. P., Rakhman, F., & Kurniawan, E. D. (2023). Konflik Pembangunan Pelabuhan Di Kampung Manowa Dalam Novel Si Anak Badai Karya Tere Liye. *Gudang Jurnal Multidisiplin Ilmu*, *1*(6), 18–22. https://doi.org/10.59435/gjmi.v1i6.131

Putri, E. D., & Dewi, N. (2024). Spiritualitas Alam dalam Novel Orang-Orang Proyek (Perspektif Ekofeminisme) . *Jurnal Onoma: Pendidikan, Bahasa Dan Sastra*, *10*, *No. 4*, 4458–4465.

Robet, R. (2015). Modernitas dan Tragedi: Kritik dalam Sosiologi Humanistis Zygmunt Bauman. *Masyarakat, Jurnal Sosiologi*, *20*(2). https://doi.org/10.7454/mjs.v20i2.1030

Said, E. (2010). *Orientalisme: Menggugat Hegemoni Barat dan Mendudukkan Timur sebagai Subjek.* . Pustaka Pelajar.

Suryaman, M. (2004). Nilai sastra dalam novel Orang-Orang Proyek karya Ahmad Tohari (Tinjauan Sosio-pragmatik Sastra). *Litera*, *3 No.2*, 285–304.

Tohari, A. (2007). *Orang-Orang Proyek*. Gramedia.