



Mimicry in Ahmad Tohari's Short Stories "Paman Klungsu dan Kuasa Peluitnya": A Postcolonial Analysis By Homi K. Bhaba

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis manifestasi mimikri dan ambivalensi dalam cerpen Paman Klungsu dan Kuasa Peluitnya (PKKP) karya Ahmad Tohari melalui lensa teori pascakolonial Homi K. Bhabha. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif dengan fokus pada analisis wacana sastra sebagai dokumentasi jejak kolonialisme. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tokoh Paman Klungsu melakukan tindakan mimikri dengan mengadopsi atribut-atribut kekuasaan, seperti rompi "Poltas Swakarsa" dan peluit, untuk mendapatkan wibawa di ruang publik. Namun, tindakan ini menciptakan ambivalensi; di satu sisi ia merasa berwibawa, namun di sisi lain ia mengalami keterbelahan identitas ketika berhadapan dengan nilai-nilai lokal yang diwakili oleh tokoh Yu Binah. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini adalah bahwa peniruan yang dilakukan oleh subjek terjajah tidak pernah mencapai kesamaan sempurna dengan aslinya, dan kekuasaan seringkali tetap melekat pada atribut fisik daripada subjek itu sendiri.

Keywords: *Ahmad Tohari, Ambivalensi, Mimikri, Paman Klungsu, Pascakolonialisme*

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the manifestations of mimicry and ambivalence in Ahmad Tohari's short story Paman Klungsu dan Kuasa Peluitnya (PKKP) through the lens of Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory. The research method employed is descriptive qualitative, focusing on literary discourse as a documentation of colonial traces. The results indicate that the character Paman Klungsu engages in mimicry by adopting attributes of power, such as the "Poltas Swakarsa" vest and a whistle, to gain authority in public spaces. However, these actions create ambivalence; while he feels authoritative, he simultaneously experiences a split identity when confronted with local values represented by the character Yu Binah. The study concludes that the imitation performed by the colonized subject never achieves perfect mimicry of the original, and power often remains attached to physical attributes rather than the subject.

Keywords: *Ahmad Tohari, Ambivalence, Mimicry, Paman Klungsu, Postcolonialism*

INTRODUCTION

Literary works are not born in a historical vacuum. They are the product of the author's imagination and social experiences, which they seek to express through their writing. Moreover, literary works are not merely expressions of emotion but also movements toward a cause worth fighting for. As Suyitno states in Hartono (2005: 251), an author creates a work not only driven by

the desire to create beauty but also with the intention of conveying thoughts, feelings, opinions, and impressions regarding something. Thus, postcolonial literary works can be regarded as documentation that preserves or records the traces of colonialism. Moreover, literature is not merely a sequence of words or sentences but a discourse. The discourse of postcolonial literature shares common characteristics rooted in the tension arising from unequal power relations, a dynamic present both before and after colonization (Suwondo, 2016:28).

The traces of colonialism are then revealed through postcolonial studies that do not separate the colonizer and the colonized as distinct aspects of colonialism. Postcolonial theory itself is a set of statements regarding the conditions and tendencies of colonized and formerly colonized societies (Faruk, 2007:16). Indonesia, as a country with a long history of colonization, is frequently depicted in literary works, both implicitly and explicitly. One literary work that portrays postcolonial societal conditions is the short story published in Kompas titled **Paman Klungsu and the Power of His Whistle** (PKKP) by Ahmad Tohari.

Many postcolonial studies focus on the colonizers without examining the perspective of the colonized. Yet, according to Bhaba, colonizers and the colonized, through a “liminal space,” have the potential to interact. Such interactions can then prompt the colonized to engage in mimicry. Faruk (2007: 6) states that Homi K. Bhaba demonstrates that, as a sign, colonial discourse is inherently ambiguous and polysemic. Consequently, colonial constructions regarding itself or the East can be interpreted in various ways—and even contradictorily. Furthermore, on the same page, Faruk states that the mimicry practiced by the colonized society toward the models of life offered by colonial discourse, and the colonized society’s identification with the West, does not necessarily imply the colonized society’s compliance with its colonizer. Thus, this postcolonial study will examine the aspect of mimicry present in the PKKP short story.

Bhaba’s concept of postcolonial studies constitutes a critique of Said’s concept, which focuses on the colonizer, and Fanon’s concept, which focuses on the colonized discourse. Bhaba asserts that the concepts of colonizer and colonized are not independent; rather, between them—both colonizer and colonized—there exists a “liminal space” that allows for interaction, thereby creating a flexible space for resistance.¹ As stated by Lo & Gilbert, and Ashcroft et al. in Hartono (2005: 253–254), postcolonial studies give rise to an idealization of resistance, and the emergence of a resistant stance within this postcolonial discourse is a logical consequence of the various unjust representations perpetrated by the colonizers against their colonies.

Therefore, the colonized people engage in resistance by utilizing the colonizers’ power. As expressed by cf. More-Gilbert in Faruk (2007: 17):

“No matter how strong the influence of colonial power may be, the space of thought, feelings, attitudes, and behavior of the colonized people is never fully understood and thus never fully controlled by the colonizers. This reality always leaves open the possibility for the colonized to manipulate colonial power in unexpected and incomprehensible ways—or even in ways that often surprise the colonizers themselves.”

According to Bhabha (1994: 86), the concept of mimicry is the desire of a subject to become a subject of the Other—one that is almost the same, but not quite—and Bhabha’s concept of mimicry contains an ambivalence because, on the one hand, the colonized wish to construct an identity of sameness with the colonizers, while also maintaining their differences. Furthermore, Huddart (2006: 39) states that Bhabha understands mimicry as a copy or imitation of language, culture, actions, and ideas; “Mimicry, as Bhabha understands it, is an exaggerated copying of language, culture, manners, and ideas.”

Although many postcolonial studies tend to focus predominantly on the colonizer’s perspective, Bhabha emphasizes the existence of a "liminal space" where the colonizer and colonized interact, allowing the colonized to perform mimicry. In the context of *Paman Klungsu dan Kuasa Peluitnya*, this mimicry is not merely a sign of obedience but can function as a form of resistance through the strategic adoption of the "Other's" symbols and authority. However, this process is inherently complex, as it produces a state of ambivalence where the subject is caught between an imitation of authority and their original identity. By analyzing the specific attributes and behaviors of Paman Klungsu, this study seeks to reveal how these postcolonial dynamics manifest in contemporary Indonesian literary discourse.

Based on the background described above, the research question for this study is: How are the manifestations of mimicry and ambivalence depicted in the character of Paman Klungsu in Ahmad Tohari’s short story *Paman Klungsu dan Kuasa Peluitnya*?

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method with a focus on textual analysis to examine the literary work. A qualitative method can be defined as an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the context of literary research, qualitative studies emphasize a deep understanding of textual nuances, patterns, and meanings rather than statistical generalizations (Ratna, 2015). The primary objective of this methodology is to provide a solid and systematic

framework for analyzing postcolonial elements, specifically the concept of mimicry proposed by Homi K. Bhabha, within the short story. The object of this research is a short story published by Kompas titled “Paman Klungsu dan Kuasa Peluitnya” (PKKP) authored by Ahmad Tohari.

The data for this study consist of textual units, including words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs, that indicate mimicry and ambivalence as manifested by the character Paman Klungsu. Data collection was conducted through an active and repetitive reading technique (close reading), followed by note-taking and categorization based on postcolonial parameters (Endraswara, 2011). Close reading allows the researcher to identify implicit postcolonial resistance and structural ironies embedded within the narrative layout (Jasinski, 2001).

The instrument of this research is the researcher themselves (human instrument), guided by Bhabha’s postcolonial framework. In qualitative literary analysis, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection and interpretation because human capacity is required to grasp the complex symbolic meanings within a text (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data analysis follows the interactive model containing three concurrent flows of activity proposed by Miles et al. (2014):

1. Data Condensation: Selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming the raw data found in the short story paragraphs into categorized postcolonial dimensions, such as attributes, behaviors, and psychological ambivalence.
2. Data Display: Organizing and assembling the structural excerpts of the short story into narrative texts and contextual tables to clearly visualize the mimicry phenomenon.
3. Conclusion Drawing and Verification: Interpreting the displayed data to understand how the colonized subject plays with authority and experiences internal splitting (ambivalence), leading to a robust critical conclusion.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The analysis of Ahmad Tohari’s short story, “Paman Klungsu dan Kuasa Peluitnya” (PKKP), reveals distinct manifestations of postcolonial mimicry and psychological ambivalence embedded within the narrative structure. Based on the textual evidence gathered from the character of Paman Klungsu, the phenomenon of mimicry operates not merely as a mechanical reproduction of dominant authority, but rather as an exaggerated and flawed copying of the institutional power structures—represented by the police force (Poltas Swakarsa). This flawed imitation, which Bhabha conceptualizes as being “almost the same, but not quite,” visually and behaviorally disrupts the absolute authority it attempts to replicate. The following sections elaborate on how these postcolonial tensions are localized through the appropriation of power attributes, the performance of

authoritative behaviors, and the subsequent psychological splitting experienced by the subaltern subject.

The PKKP short story tells the tale of a character named Uncle Klungsu, who five years ago was a porter, tasked with carrying goods for merchants at the market. However, that was the past. Now he is credited with alleviating traffic congestion at the three-way intersection near the market. Especially in the morning, when everyone crowds the streets, each heading to their respective workplaces and schools. The act of mimicry found in the short story is evident in the following excerpt:

“Uncle Klungsu usually wore a worn-out vest bearing the label ‘Poltas Swakarsa’ written in marker. Whoever wrote it, I don’t know. In addition to the faded, banana-yellow vest that glowed faintly, Uncle Klungsu also equipped himself with a red plastic whistle. Although small, the whistle’s sound was extremely loud, and its authority was clearly respected by the drivers...” (Tohari, 2017: 25)

Based on the quote above, it is evident that the character of Uncle Klungsu, as a member of the colonized group, has a tendency to use police-style attire—which simultaneously serves as a representation of the ruling authority, in this case the colonizers. It was not enough for him to simply wear a vest bearing the words “Poltas Swakarsa”; Uncle Klungsu wanted to further identify himself with the addition of a whistle, a tool used to clear traffic jams and demonstrate his authority. Moreover, he has literally expressed this self-identification by declaring that he is a “poltas swakarsa”; “He felt he had been promoted to—as he called it himself—a ‘poltas swakarsa’” (Tohari, 2017: 25).

The use of all these attributes as a form of mimicry—and his self-presentation no longer merely through symbols but literally—does not instantly enable Uncle Klungsu to match his imitation. The reaction of the schoolchildren shows that even though Uncle Klungsu used the trappings of his authority, he was unable to match it; “Dozens of junior high and high school students on motorcycles with modified exhausts also scrambled out of the village road onto the highway. Without helmets, without driver’s licenses. But they seemed unconcerned and extremely confident.” (Tohari, 2017:25). Moreover, the local community, acting as the “object of definition” (in the Lacanian perspective), then explains that Uncle Klungsu is capable of matching the police. As expressed in the following fourth quote:

“Ah, you’re just a soft-hearted cop, a mere pretender. You only dare to regulate vendors and schoolchildren, but you’re powerless when officials or big bikes pass by. You also always give special treatment to Yu Binah. Whenever that woman passes by, you always clear the way for her.” (Tohari, 2017: 25)

Furthermore, realizing that simply using the same attributes wasn’t enough to make him a success on par with his role model, he turned to mimicry in terms of actions and attitude. Uncle Klungsu engaged in mimicry by taking a firmer stance against anyone who broke his rules. Not only did his whistle sound louder, but his body language—his raised right hand—also became a form of his imitation. This is illustrated in the following fifth excerpt:

“So one time he moved quickly when a flashy car was about to break his rules. With a limping gait, Uncle Klungsu blocked the way of that fancy red-plated car. Uncle Klungsu stood right in front of the car, his right hand held straight up. However, his left leg was slightly bent because it was shorter. His whistle shrieked as loudly as it could. The driver snorted and stopped, eyes wide. Anger filled his face. But Uncle Klungsu didn’t budge. And to Uncle Klungsu’s surprise, everyone at the intersection clapped in support. Uncle Klungsu’s whistle shrieked even louder and more relentlessly. His right hand remained raised high. The crowd cheered even more loudly.” (Tohari, 2017:25)

The act of imitation performed by Uncle Klungsu made him even more confident, and he felt more dashing. An object like the red plastic whistle—nothing more than a small device designed to produce a loud sound when blown—became an instrument Uncle Klungsu believed granted him authority and greater self-confidence. Similarly, the vest bearing the words “Poltas Swakarsa,” though written merely in marker, had come to signify more than its literal meaning as a sleeveless outer garment. However, all this talk of authority failed to change his attitude toward Yu Binah; “Unfortunately, people also remained witnesses to the fact that Uncle Klungsu’s whistle never sounded loud toward Yu Binah. When she passed by, Uncle Klungsu always let her go first, with genuine kindness as well. Toward Yu Binah, Uncle Klungsu’s whistle seemed to be silent.” (Tohari, 2017: 25)

Yu Binah, who symbolizes the East with her kindness, far from being individualistic and always helping Uncle Klungsu, causes the whistle of power to remain silent.

“He said he owed Yu Binah a great debt of gratitude. The rice seller would always give him a full plate of rice, no matter how much Uncle Klungsu paid. Realizing his money was often insufficient, he added, he usually asked only for rice and plain water. The side dishes were just soy sauce and chili paste, which were provided for free anyway. Yet, Yu Binah still gave him a full rice meal with a sprinkle of fried onions, tofu, or tempeh, and sometimes even fish.” (Tohari, 2017: 25).

This is what later caused Uncle Klungsu to feel torn, as he felt confident and authoritative through the mimicry he practiced, yet Yu Binah made him rediscover the beauty of the Eastern perspective. So when Yu Binah criticized his whistle of authority for emitting a foul odor, he could only smile in response. As depicted in the following excerpt:

“Uncle Klungsu nodded and smiled. After Yu Binah turned away, Uncle Klungsu stood there for a moment. Suddenly he was tempted to try smelling the whistle himself. So he brought the small object’s opening close to his nose. Oh, Uncle Klungsu suddenly jerked back and shuddered repeatedly, then spat! Then Uncle Klungsu walked limping with his head bowed, back to the three-way intersection. The scorching sun beat down on his head. And the magical whistle with its foul odor remained in his grip.” (Tohari, 2017:25)

Moreover, the mimicry performed by Uncle Klungsu would never truly match what he was imitating. No matter how hard he tried to continue the imitation, he would never match it. Even when he felt so confident and authoritative, people did not see it the same way. “People often ask which is more authoritative at that three-way intersection: Uncle Klungsu or his whistle” (Tohari, 2017: 25). Based on this frequently asked question, it can be said that people do not perceive Uncle Klungsu as having gained authority through the use of an attribute like the whistle as part of his mimicry. People perceive that, even though Uncle Klungsu uses attributes that signify power, the one who is in power or appears authoritative remains the attribute itself.

Furthermore, the limits of Paman Klungsu's mimicry become starkly visible through his interactions with Yu Binah, a figure who symbolically embodies the communal and nurturing values of the East. Despite his rigorous performance of authority, Paman Klungsu experiences a profound psychological splitting—or ambivalence—when confronted with Yu Binah's genuine kindness and past favors, which renders his authoritative whistle completely silent in her presence. This localized counter-space demonstrates that the subaltern cannot fully assimilate into the colonial identity; the lingering attachment to indigenous cultural solidarity disrupts the totalizing gaze of power. When Yu Binah criticizes his whistle for emitting a foul odor, Paman Klungsu's sudden realization and shuddering reaction signify the painful awakening of the colonized subject to the inherent corruption and artificiality of the power he has been copying.

Ultimately, Ahmad Tohari underscores the tragic reality that the subaltern's attempt to match their oppressor through mimicry is bound to remain an unfulfilled pursuit. The local community's persistent questioning regarding whether authority resides in Paman Klungsu himself or merely in his red plastic whistle proves that the public does not perceive him as a genuine figure of power. Instead, the community recognizes that the authority remains entirely displaced within the institutional fetish—the object of the whistle and the handwritten vest—rather than being internalized by the individual. Consequently, Paman Klungsu's mimicry produces an ironic spectacle that functions as a form of camouflage, yet it fails to grant him authentic agency, leaving him trapped in a liminal space of a fractured and incomplete identity.

CONCLUSION

The postcolonial analysis of Ahmad Tohari's short story, "Paman Klungsu dan Kuasa Peluitnya" (PKKP), through Homi K. Bhabha's conceptual lens of mimicry, brings to light the intricate and ambivalent power dynamics that persist within a postcolonial society. This study reinforces the vital thesis that literature does not emerge from a historical vacuum; rather, it serves as an imaginative and social documentation of the lingering psychological and structural scars left by colonialism. By exploring the liminal space where the colonizer and the colonized interact, this research underscores how subaltern subjects attempt to reclaim agency by adopting the language, behaviors, and symbols of dominant authority. However, as demonstrated through the tragicomic figure of Paman Klungsu, this strategic imitation inevitably manifests as a fractured performance—one that is "almost the same, but not quite".

To provide a complete synthesis of this textual exploration, the research demonstrates that mimicry operates across multiple layers of the subaltern's existence. First, it manifests materially through the appropriation of institutional vestments. Paman Klungsu's transformation from a

humble market porter to a self-proclaimed traffic warden relies entirely on the visual authority of a makeshift "Poltas Swakarsa" vest and a bright red plastic whistle. While these superficial signifiers grant him a temporary semblance of prestige and public compliance, they ultimately expose the superficiality of his authority. Second, mimicry transitions into physical performance and behavioral posturing. Paman Klungsu's commanding gestures and sharp whistle-blowing mimic the rigid disciplinary state apparatus, allowing him to challenge elite transgressions, such as confronting a government vehicle. This specific act of resistance showcases how the colonized subject can play with the colonizer's own power structures in unexpected ways.

Nevertheless, this completeness in analysis is achieved by recognizing the profound psychological splitting, or ambivalence, that prevents a total assimilation into the dominant identity. Paman Klungsu's authority collapses entirely when confronted by Yu Binah, an emblem of indigenous Eastern solidarity, hospitality, and communal debt. His silence before her illustrates the irreconcilable tension between the artificial, individualistic power structures he mimics and the deep-rooted cultural values he cannot abandon. Furthermore, the community's lingering skepticism regarding whether authority resides in Paman Klungsu himself or merely in his whistle confirms that mimicry fails to confer authentic human agency. The power remains alienated within the fetishized object of control.

In conclusion, this study leaves a powerful final impression regarding the enduring paradox of the postcolonial condition. Paman Klungsu's final, unsettling realization—where he smells the foul odor emanating from his own "magical" whistle—serves as a striking metaphor for the moral and psychological decay inherent in mimicking oppressive structures. Tohari masterfully illustrates that subaltern mimicry is a double-edged sword: it offers a provisional mechanism for local resistance and order, yet it traps the individual in a state of perpetual displacement and unfulfilled identity. By uncovering these narrative layers, this paper highlights that true liberation for the postcolonial subject does not lie in the flawless reproduction of the colonizer's whistle, but in dismantling the systemic reliance on its authoritarian sound.

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