



Social Injustice in the Dutch East Indies: Analyzing Class and Discrimination in Bumi Manusia

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Abstract

This study examines social class discrimination as depicted in the Indonesian film Bumi Manusia (2019), directed by Hanung Bramantyo. Adapted from Pramoedya Ananta Toer's novel, the narrative unfolds in the Dutch East Indies during the late 19th century and portrays the complexities of colonial society. Utilizing qualitative methods, the research analyzes dialogues and scenes involving Minke, a young Javanese student, and other characters to reveal instances of discrimination and stratification. The findings highlight the pervasive inequalities of colonial society, from derogatory terms to systemic injustice rooted in racial and social hierarchies. Through Allport's theory of discrimination and Theodorsen's social class framework, the study underscores the deep-seated biases and prejudices of the era, which continue to resonate in contemporary society. By engaging with these themes, the film prompts critical reflections on social injustice, urging viewers to address such inequities in both historical and modern contexts.

Keywords: social class, discrimination, colonialism, Indonesia, Bumi Manusia

INTRODUCTION

In the Indonesian film industry, many films raise issues about romance, comedy, and family, and one of them is about discrimination. For the example is *Bumi Manusia* (2019). *Bumi Manusia* (or *This Earth of Mankind*) is a novel by Indonesian author Pramoedya Ananta Toer, published in 1980. It is the first book in the *Buru Quartet* and is set in the Dutch East Indies during the late 19th century. The story follows Minke, a young Javanese student of Dutch descent, who navigates the complexities of colonial society. He becomes involved with Annelies, a beautiful girl of mixed heritage, whose life is marked by the oppressive realities of colonial rule. The novel explores themes of identity, social injustice, and the struggle for independence, highlighting the tensions between the colonizers and the colonized. As Minke becomes increasingly aware of the inequalities and injustices around him, he grapples with his own beliefs and aspirations. The narrative is rich in cultural and historical context, offering an in-depth commentary on the impact of colonialism on Indonesian society creating how social class and discrimination occurred during that time.

According to Theodorson (as cited in Panjaitan et al., 2024) explains that social class is a condition where a group in society is differentiated based on work, education, or economic background. Social class can cause different levels of life in society, which in the end can trigger discrimination. Yulinar et al. (2021), discrimination is a difference that often occurs in social life. Differences often make people tend to compare advantages and disadvantages. This can be seen in discrimination that occurs regarding gender, race, skin color, or physical condition. According to Allport (as cited in Sufiana et al., 2022) discrimination is the act of denying individuals or groups the equal treatment they expect. In other words, the right to equality that every human being should have can be taken away by individuals or groups who feel superior, simply because of the differences between them, so discrimination arises in society. This can be interpreted as people in certain groups who often consider themselves “special” or “dominant” exploit racial differences to enforce unequal treatment. As a result, the basic rights and equality that everyone should have—such as the right to work, the right to education, or the right to speak—are taken away by those who consider themselves superior. Therefore, discrimination not only harms an individual but also causes social divisions in a group. Ultimately, discrimination creates enormous conflict by fostering hatred.

METHODS

This research uses qualitative methods which will be used to analyze discrimination and social class in *Bumi Manusia* (2019) which was directed by Hanung Bramantyo, and there is also a definition of qualitative methods. "Qualitative methods" is a general word that can be used to describe a variety of research techniques with theoretical roots in anthropology, sociology, philosophy, social psychology, and linguistics, among other fields. Even though there is a great deal of variation in the kinds of research that go under the umbrella of "qualitative" research, a number of fundamental traits may be identified. These include: objectives that seek to provide a comprehensive and interpreted understanding of the social world of research participants by learning about their material and social circumstances, experiences, viewpoints, and histories; small-scale,

purposefully chosen samples based on important criteria; data collection techniques that typically entail close interaction between the researcher and research participants, which are developmental and interactive and enable the exploration of emerging issues; and data that are extremely detailed, information-rich, and comprehensive, analysis that is receptive to new concepts and ideas, can generate thorough descriptions and classifications, find patterns of association or develop typologies and explanations, and tend to concentrate on how participants' social worlds are mapped and "represented" in order to interpret social meaning (Snape and Spencer 2003, 5).

The source of data for the research is from the dialogues and scene involving the main character and the other characters, wherein Robert Suurhof (Jerome Kurnia) extends an invitation to Minke (Iqbaal Ramadhan), a resident, to come see the Mellema family's home, Boerderij Buitenzorg in Wonokromo. Robert Mellema (Giorgino Abraham), who actually greets Suurhof with great intimacy, is suspicious of Minke's coming, but his mother Ontosoroh (Sha Ine Febriyanti) and sister Annelies Mellema (Mawar de Jongh) embrace Minke with joy. Despite Annelies feeling unaccustomed to Minke, Minke starts to form a close bond with both her and Ontosoroh. When Annelies' father, Herman Mellema (played by Peter Sterk), returns home during dinner and discovers Minke with his daughter, he gets upset and labels Minke a "monkey," which is an extremely derogatory term for native people. Ontosoroh orders Herman to enter her room when the disturbance comes to an end.

For the data collection first, the author watched the film several times so that it could be clearer and nothing was left behind so that research could be carried out, secondly, taking dialogue and interpreting the dialogue and also screenshots the scenes that contain discrimination and social class.

The data is analyzed using the theories from Allport (1954) for the discrimination and Theodorson (1979) for the social class.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After watching the *Bumi Manusia* movie, some discrimination was found visible in the film. Here are some discrimination such as:

Data 1

07.05 : “*Bahasa Belanda bukan untuk monyet*”

Explanation: This statement was made by a Dutchman who apparently did not like it if natives were able to understand and use Dutch, as Minke and his friends did. Apart from that, the Dutch indirectly equated natives with monkeys, both in terms of social position and physical form. This shows that there was discrimination carried out by the Dutch with the aim of degrading the dignity of the natives. The contrast between skin colors is also one of the reasons for this discrimination. Natives with olive or tan skin were considered inferior to Europeans, especially the Dutch, who had pale white skin.

Data 2

43.03 Ontosroh: *"Rupanya, kau masih belum sadar juga, kau jangan bermalas-malasan dirumah ini."*

Robert Mellema: *"Lalu?"* (shows an arrogant face)

Explanation: In a conversation between Ontosoroh and his son, Robert Mellema, Ontosoroh gave his son a warning. However, Robert only responded with a cynical look and an arrogant expression, as if he didn't want to accept any advice from his mother. Robert's arrogant face reflected a condescending attitude, as if to suggest that his mother was not worthy of giving such a warning. This happened because Robert felt he had a higher status than Ontosoroh. As an Indo (child of a Dutch father), he was influenced by colonial thinking which considered his status superior to Ontosoroh, who was only a 'Nyai'.

Data 3

52.56 : *"Pribumi seperti kau selalu berusaha mendekati gadis-gadis Eropa biar derajatmu naik kelas, Monyet!"*

Explanation: This statement shows discrimination against indigenous people. Europeans used the word "monkey" to denigrate native people and did not consider natives as humans. Apart from that, this statement also contains social classes. Where Europeans consider themselves much higher, while native people are in a much lower position than them, both racially and socially. Negative stereotypes that are often attached to indigenous people, such as being seen as looking for opportunities or unable to stand on their own without Europeans, strengthen social and economic inequality. Thus, this statement not only represents individual humiliation, but also highlights the structural inequalities created and maintained by colonial systems to maintain their dominance over indigenous peoples. The discrimination and social stratification depicted in this statement are a reflection of deep injustice and had an impact on various aspects of society at that time.

Data 4

56.36 : Robert Mellema: *"Aku tidak ada urusan dengan pribumi."*

Ontosroh: *"Kamu separuh darah pribumi, kamu tidak pantas menghina pribumi."*

Explanation: Robert Mallema's statement shows that he is trying to separate himself from his native identity, even though he has mixed blood. Robert Mallema's statements and attitudes clearly illustrate the discrimination of that era, where being native was a very shameful thing. He tried to equate himself with Europeans, who had high positions at that time, in order to get better status and treatment. This also

shows that Robert rejects the part of himself that comes from the natives, because of the influence of the negative views attached to natives in the colonial system. Nyai Ontosoroh's response, "You are half native blood, you do not deserve to insult natives," emphasizes the importance of awareness of identity and respect for one's origins. Nyai Ontosoroh reminded Robert that even though he had European blood, he could not deny the part of himself that was native. This is a critique of the colonial mentality that made mixed-race individuals feel compelled to choose an identity based on social hierarchy, which often pushed them away from natives for better social status.

Data 5

74.44 : *"Tanpa orang Eropa, peradaban pribumi rendah. Pribumi tetap saja cacing. Lihat! Seorang Indo yang membela pribumi sama rendahnya dengan pribumi. Kau kotor seperti cacing!"*

Explanation: This sentence shows the view that Dutch people are considered higher and more superior than natives. This reflects the general colonial view of that time, where the Dutch often saw themselves as a more advanced civilization, while the natives were considered inferior by them. In addition, in the colonial system, Indo groups were often forced to choose an identity, where choosing to defend natives was considered an act that undermined their dignity. This reflects social stratification that not only discriminates against natives but also controls the behavior and identity of mixed-race groups, by putting pressure on them to associate themselves with the Dutch for the sake of higher social status. By calling the natives "worms", there was an attempt by the Dutch to demean their dignity and state that they had no value. This also shows how discrimination does not only occur between different races but also within the same group, where Indo people are also considered inferior if they defend natives.

Data 6

102.27 : *"Jika ibuku diharuskan melepaskan sepatunya, maka aku juga."*

Explanation: This sentence was uttered by Annelies Mellema, the biological daughter of Kesoroh. Sentence Annelies said this because she saw the different treatment she received and his mother while in the courtroom regarding his father's death. saw his mother requiring him to take off his sandals and squat to enter the courtroom. Meanwhile, when he wanted to do the same thing, he was not allowed by the soldiers there because he was Indonesian. This different behavior often occurred at that time when European people were treated better than Indigenous people. It can be concluded that having the title "nyai" did not merely change her position in the eyes of European society.

Data 7

107.50 : *"Annelies Mellema itu Indo. Lebih tinggi dari pribumi dan nyai"*

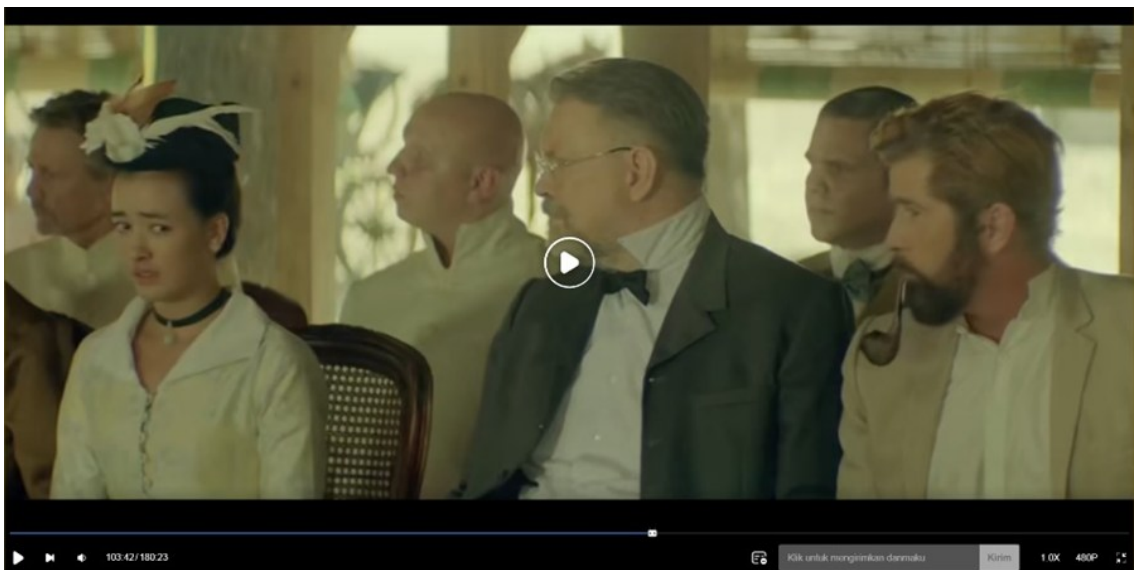
Explanation: This statement shows the existence of social stratification determined by race and ethnicity. "Nyai" refers to indigenous women who have relationships with Dutch men, who were often looked down upon in colonial society. Thus, this quote confirms Annelis' position as an individual who has a higher status in the social hierarchy established by colonial power. Apart from that, this quote also reflects the discrimination that occurred in colonial society, where people with Dutch or mixed (Indo) backgrounds received better treatment and more rights compared to natives. This shows how race and ethnicity are determining factors in social and economic treatment, and create deep inequities.

Data 8

110.54 : *"Eropa yang menciptakan hukum, Eropa pula yang memainkannya. Pribumi hanya penonton, tukang sorak, sekaligus pesakitan atas pertunjukkan yang akan dibuat. Tetapi bagaimanapun, mereka tidak akan mengecek hukum mereka sendiri."*

Explanation: This quote describes the injustice faced by indigenous people in the colonial system. Colonial law, created and implemented by the Dutch, became a tool to maintain their domination over the natives. Natives are depicted as spectators who have no say in the legal process and are always the ones who suffer losses, reflecting their powerless position in this unjust system. They do not have the power to influence or change applicable laws, so they are trapped in a passive role in a performance that does not benefit them. Furthermore, the laws created by the Dutch not only benefited them, but also oppressed the natives, who were often treated as "suffering" as a result of discriminatory policies and regulations. This reflects systemic discrimination deeply rooted in the social structure, where indigenous people do not have equal access to justice and their rights. Apart from that, this quote is a lesson in the need for equality and justice to create social change.

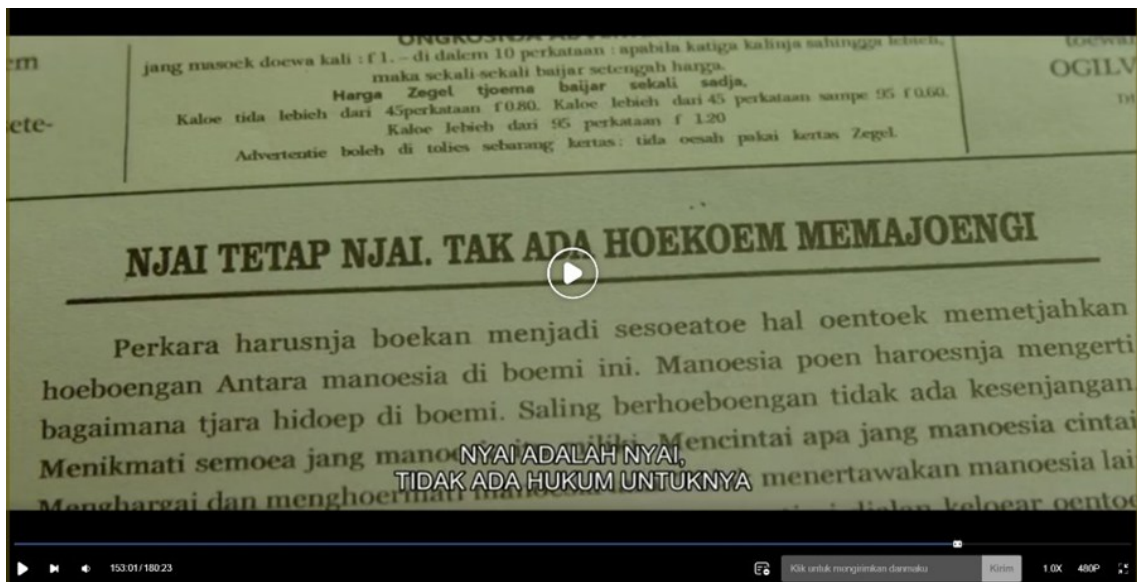
Data 9





Explanation: This scene shows where sitting positions are differentiated based on social class, where Minke sits in the native section and Annelies sits in the Dutch section, here showing that there are differences in behavior towards the natives themselves.

Data 10



Explanation: This scene states that 'Nyai' does not have the legal power to protect him, while the major law is possible it can protect him from this punishment, but this law does not have the right to help him, even though Nyai has an important

role in the life of Dutch men, there is a stigma about their status. These women do not receive fair protection and have a position without the same recognition or protection as legal wives who are recognized by law, because there is a policy that "the wife remains the wife, it is not legal for her".

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the film *Bumi Manusia* serves as a strong investigation of social lessons and segregation inside the setting of colonial Indonesia. Through the focal point of Minke's encounters, the account strikingly outlines the unavoidable imbalances and biases that characterized the colonial period. The occasions of segregation depicted, from defamatory comments to systemic imbalance, highlight the deep-rooted issues of racial and social pecking orders that proceed to reverberate nowadays. The film not only reflects the historical realities of its time but also prompts watchers to go up against the continuous challenges of separation in modern society. By locking in with such subjects, *Bumi Manusia* underscores the significance of recognizing and tending to social treacheries to cultivate a more equitable future. This research emphasizes the requirement for a proceeded talk on segregation and its suggestions, supporting a basic examination of both past and show societal structures.

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