

COLONIAL REFLECTIONS IN HAMKA'S *TENGGELOMNYA KAPAL VAN DER WIJCK* : A HISTORICAL STUDY

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Abstrak

Keywords:

Historical Approach,
Social Stratification,
Culture,
Colonialism,
*Tenggelamnya Kapal Van
Der Wijck*

*This study examines colonial social values in Hamka's *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wijck* through a historical approach. The novel depicts Minangkabau society during the Dutch colonial period, marked by rigid traditions, social stratification, and lineage-based discrimination. Using a descriptive qualitative method and content analysis, this study applies Wellek and Warren's historical approach to analyze the relationship between text and context. The findings show that colonial values appear through social hierarchy and restrictions on individual freedom, particularly in marriage, and continue to resonate in contemporary Indonesian society as enduring social inequalities.*

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of discrimination based on social class and lineage remains a crucial issue that influences the dynamics of social relationships in Indonesia today. These values often restrict individual freedom and impose rigid collective standards, a reality whose historical roots can be traced through literary works. As a form of cultural record, literature serves not only as entertainment but also as a tool for understanding the identity and social dynamics of the past (Angraini, 2025). A prime example of a work that captures the tension between tradition, social status, and individual identity is Hamka's novel, *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck*.

This novel depicts Minangkabau life during the colonial period, emphasizing the stark differences in status and ancestry. Through the tragic love story of Zainuddin and Hayati, the author highlights the conflict between traditional values and personal identity within the social context of that era. However, these issues are not merely relics of the past; the social values depicted in the novel remain strikingly relevant. The ongoing phenomenon of social discrimination and the obsession with status and origin are forms of colonial values that have not completely disappeared from modern society (Rohman, 2025). Therefore, this study aims to explore the influence of 1930s social values in



Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck and their relevance to the current social conditions in Indonesia through a historical approach.

The social issues reflected in this work show how colonial values and norms still leave their mark on Indonesian society. To analyze this continuity, this study applies Wellek and Warren's (1956) Historical Approach, which examines the reciprocal relationship between a literary work and its specific era.

Several previous studies have examined Hamka's novel *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wijck* from various perspectives. Saifullah (2023) discusses the portrayal of Indonesian social life during the colonial period through the aspects of time and space, characters, and social situations in the novel *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wijck*. Refira (2023) analyzing the novel *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wijck* using a phenomenological approach to uncover the meaning of the reality represented in the story. Meanwhile, Ramadani and Nurholis (2024) examine characterization from the perspective of literary sociology and demonstrate that the characters in the novel are strongly influenced by the social, cultural, and historical context of Minangkabau society. Although previous studies have focused more on describing social values and their influence on the psychology of characters and their fates, several previous studies do not explain social values to present day issues in Indonesia.

Therefore, this study fills this gap by analyzing the influence of social values on the story structure and characters, while also linking them to contemporary social conditions. The novelty of this research lies in its attempt to link the colonial social values in the novel with contemporary social dynamics, such as discrimination, class differences, and individual freedom in choosing a life partner, through a combination of historical approaches and contemporary social analysis.

This study aims to describe the social and cultural conditions during the colonial period in Hamka's *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wijck*, identify its historical elements, and explain their relevance to current social issues in Indonesian society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Approach in Literary Analysis

The historical approach is a literary approach that emphasizes understanding the author's biography, the historical events surrounding the creation of a literary work, and the development of literature across different periods. According to Ichsan (2019), this approach enables readers to interpret literary works by considering the historical background in which they were produced, allowing literature to be understood not only as an artistic creation but also as a product of its time.

In literary studies, the historical approach is closely related to the theory proposed by René Wellek and Austin Warren in their influential book *Theory of Literature* (1949). Their theory provides a comprehensive and systematic framework for literary analysis by examining various aspects, including literary genre, form, and historical context. One of their central concepts is the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic criticism. While intrinsic criticism focuses on the formal elements of a literary work, such as structure, language, and style, extrinsic criticism emphasizes external factors, including historical, social, and cultural contexts, that contribute to the interpretation of literary texts (Sevia, 2024).

Furthermore, the historical approach recognizes that literary works reflect the socio-historical conditions of the period in which they are created. According to Damono (1979), literature and society are inseparable entities connected through a dialectical relationship. Literature does not emerge in isolation but is shaped by the social, political, and cultural environment surrounding its creation. It serves as a mirror that reflects the realities, concerns, and

values of a particular era. Beyond functioning as a passive reflection of society, literature also possesses the power to shape, challenge, and even encourage social change. Through its narratives, characters, and imaginative representations, literature creates spaces for critical discussion, questions established social orders, and voices the aspirations of marginalized communities. Consequently, literary works become both an arena for the contestation of ideas and an important record of the evolution of a nation's collective consciousness (Diana, 2025).

This relationship between history, literature, and society further demonstrates that literary works cannot be separated from the social realities that influence their creation. According to Aini (2018), literature is closely connected to society and may be examined through various perspectives, including the author's biography, psychology, philosophy, and the social environment in which the author lives. Therefore, the historical approach provides a relevant framework for understanding literary texts by integrating historical background with social and cultural contexts, enabling researchers to interpret literature as both an artistic expression and a historical document that reflects the realities of its time.

Colonialism and Postcolonial Theory

Colonialism and postcolonialism are closely related concepts that provide an important theoretical framework for understanding literary texts that portray the experiences of colonized societies. According to Edward Said, the present cannot be understood without recognizing the role of colonialism in shaping historical realities. He argues that the histories of the colonizer and the colonized are inseparably interconnected and should not be studied from a unilateral perspective. In literary studies, postcolonialism serves as a critical approach to examining the effects of colonialism as represented in literary texts (Day & Foulcher, 2008).

Edward Said further elaborates this perspective in *Orientalism* (1978), where he explains that postcolonialism examines how colonialism shaped Western perceptions of the East and how these representations functioned as instruments of power and domination. The concept of colonialism itself, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) as cited in Loomba (2003), originates from the Latin word *colonia*, meaning "farmland" or "settlement," which initially referred to Roman settlements established in foreign territories while maintaining Roman citizenship. Ratna (2008) further explains that although the term originally referred to settlement rather than domination, it later acquired negative connotations because of the unequal relationship between colonizers and indigenous populations.

Expanding this concept, Loomba (2003) argues that colonialism involved not merely territorial expansion but also the conquest and control of other people's land and property. The establishment of colonial settlements created complex and traumatic relationships between colonizers and indigenous communities, often characterized by trade exploitation, looting, slavery, mass violence, rebellion, and the restructuring of existing social systems. These practices demonstrate that colonialism was not only a political and economic project but also a system that reshaped the social and cultural foundations of colonized societies.

The long-term consequences of colonialism are further explained by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). Fanon argues that colonialism destroys indigenous cultures, instills feelings of inferiority, and creates identity alienation among colonized peoples. He emphasizes that colonial domination operates through both physical and psychological violence, damaging self-esteem while weakening communities' connections to their cultural traditions and historical identities. Nevertheless, Fanon also maintains that through collective resistance and decolonization, colonized societies can reclaim their cultural identity and reconstruct their national consciousness. Therefore, postcolonial theory provides a valuable perspective for examining how colonial power shapes cultural identity, social relations, and systems of representation within literary works.

Colonial Indonesia Context

Understanding the historical context of colonial Indonesia is essential for interpreting literary works that portray the realities of Indonesian society during the Dutch colonial period. In the 1930s, the Great Depression caused a significant decline in export prices and severely affected

the agricultural sector of the Dutch East Indies, resulting in widespread poverty, land dispossession, and socioeconomic instability among farmers, laborers, and indigenous communities. These conditions intensified social inequality, and their long-term consequences continue to influence Indonesia's educational, legal, and economic systems (Aditya, 2024).

The Dutch colonial system not only shaped Indonesia's political and economic structures but also influenced its social and cultural development. Modern Indonesian cultural identity emerged through continuous interactions between indigenous traditions and Dutch colonial heritage. This legacy is reflected in various aspects of contemporary Indonesian society, including the education system, legal institutions, architecture, and social practices. Through processes of adaptation and cultural hybridization, Indonesian society incorporated colonial influences into a more complex national identity, demonstrating the enduring impact of colonialism on Indonesia's sociocultural development (Juwita, 2025).

One of the most significant characteristics of colonial society was the existence of hierarchical social structures. According to Max Weber, as cited in Adnan (2019), social stratification refers to the classification of individuals into hierarchical social layers based on particular values and status. During the colonial period, Minangkabau society emphasized wealth, family honor, and educational access as the primary indicators of social status, creating a clear distinction between the upper and lower classes. This hierarchical system contributed to social discrimination, particularly in marriage practices and educational opportunities, which were largely reserved for elite groups, thereby limiting social mobility among lower-class communities (Fatmawati, 2024).

Although Indonesia has achieved independence, many colonial values continue to influence contemporary society. Social stratification based on wealth, educational attainment, and family prestige remains visible in various aspects of social life. Unequal access to education, differences in economic opportunities, and social attitudes toward class continue to reflect patterns established during the colonial period. In addition, subtle forms of discrimination against economically disadvantaged groups and the persistence of unequal control over land and economic resources demonstrate that colonial social structures have not entirely disappeared (Aditya, 2024). Consequently, understanding the colonial context provides an important foundation for examining how literary works represent the social values, inequalities, and cultural conflicts inherited from the colonial era.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative descriptive research design with a historical approach to analyze issues and reflections of colonial social values (Cresswell, 2018). This analysis focuses on explaining how the novel represents social and cultural conditions during the Dutch colonial period.

The object of this research is the quotation found in the Hamka's novel "*Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wijck*". This study explores the representation of colonial-era social values such as social stratification, discrimination based on lineage, and the suppression of individual freedom in the novel, as well as its resonance in modern Indonesian society.

Table 1. Sample of Data Classification Table

No	Quotation	Character	Social Discrimination	Traditional Norm	Class Hierarchy	Conflict : Tradition vs Individual	Colonial Influence
1.	“Engkau Bukan anak Minangkabau, Keturunannu tidak jelas.”	Community Leader	✓				✓
2.	Meskipun dia anak orang Minangkabau tulen, dia masih dipandang orang pendatang, masih dipandang orang jauh, orang Bugis, orang Mengkasar.	Narrator	✓				✓

The objects analysis in this study are the reflections of colonial social and cultural values in the novel, particularly those related to the social stratification of *Minangkabau* society, customary law, discrimination based on descent, and the conflict between traditional values and individual freedom. The focus of the study is on how these values shape the characters' experiences and social conflicts in the story.

The data were collected through library research and in-depth reading of the novel *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wijck*. The researcher gathered relevant theories, previous studies, historical records, and scientific works related to colonialism, historical literary studies, and *Minangkabau* social structures. The novel was selected as the main source because it represents social life during the colonial period and conflicts rooted in *Minangkabau* customs. The researcher conducted repeated in-depth readings to understand the historical background, social hierarchy, cultural norms, and relationships between characters in the story. The data were identified from dialogues, narrative descriptions, and events that reflect colonial social values, discrimination, social stratification, and cultural conflicts.

In summary, this study applies a descriptive qualitative method with a historical approach to analyze how the novel *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wijck* by Hamka represents social conditions and colonial values during the Dutch colonial period, supported by library research and in-depth reading. The methodological framework, consisting of data selection, identification, and interpretation, enables the researcher to reveal social stratification, discrimination, and cultural conflict in the novel and relate them to their continuing influence on modern Indonesian society.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings of this study are derived from 19 selected quotations and narrative passages in the novel *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wijck* by Hamka, which reflect colonial social values in *Minangkabau* society. Through qualitative content analysis, each passage was examined to understand how social discrimination, traditional norms, social class hierarchy, conflicts between customs and individual freedom, and colonial influence are represented within the narrative.

The analysis shows that social class hierarchy and cultural conflict are the most dominant themes, followed by discrimination and the tension between *adat* (customary law) and individual freedom, while direct colonial influence appears implicitly through social structures and values. These patterns are illustrated through the experiences and conflicts of the characters, which reveal how colonial-era social systems shape relationships and limit individual agency, supported by textual evidence and interpreted using historical and postcolonial perspectives.

Table 1. Data Classification Table

No	Quotation	Character	Social Discrimination	Traditional Norm	Class Hierarchy	Conflict : Tradition vs Individual	Colonial Influence
3.	“Engkau Bukan anak Minangkabau, Keturunannya tidak jelas.”	Community Leader	✓				✓
4.	Meskipun dia anak orang Minangkabau tulen, dia masih dipandang orang pendatang, masih dipandang orang jauh, orang Bugis, orang Mengkasar.	Narrator	✓				✓
5.	Pandangan orang kepadanya bukan pandangan sama rata, hanya ada juga kurangnya.	Narrator	✓				✓
6.	Ia diusir, meskipun dengan cara halus. Perbuatannya dicela, namanya dibusukkan.	Narrator	✓				✓
7.	“Diskriminasi terhadap Zainuddin mencerminkan ketidakadilan sosial pada masa kolonial.”	Narrator	✓				✓
6.	“Adat tidak dapat menerima	Traditional leader		✓			✓

	orang yang tidak diketahui asal usulnya.”						
7.	Bangsa diambil daripada ibu.	Narrator		✓			✓
8.	Walaupun seorang anak berayah orang Minangkabau, jika ibunya orang lain, dia dipandang orang lain juga.	Narrator		✓			✓
9.	“Meminang dengan mengirim surat itu sudah nyata bukan adat dan bukan lembaga di negeri kita.”	Datuk Garang		✓			✓
10.	Hayati tidak dapat melawan keputusan adat.	Narrator		✓		✓	
11.	Zainuddin dipandang rendah karena bukan dari kelas atas.	Narrator			✓		✓
12.	Dia tidak berhak diberi gelar pusaka, sebab dia tidak bersuku.	Narrator			✓		✓
13.	Meskipun dia kaya raya, gelar itu tak boleh diturunkan pula kepada anaknya.	Narrator			✓		✓
14.	Seorang anak muda, yang berkenalan dengan seorang anak perempuan, dengan maksud baik, maksud hendak kawin, dibusukkan, dipandang hina. Tetapi seorang yang	Narrator			✓		✓

	dengan gelar bangsawan nya, dengan titel datuk dan penghulunya mengawini anak gadis orang berapa dia suka, kawin disana, cerai di sini, tinggalkan anak di kampung anu dan cicirkan dikampung ini, tidak tercela, tidak dihinakan.						
15.	Hayati hanya korban dari pada kekejaman peraturan adat yang telah usang itu.	Narrator				✓	✓
16.	Meski pun ninik-mamak atau adat menerimanya, padahal hati Hayati sendiri misalnya, tiada suka kepadanya, itu pun berarti memaksa.	Narrator				✓	✓
17.	Memaksa hati seorang muda, baik itu laki-laki maupun prempuan menempuh perkawinan, berarti mematahkan kemekaran bunga kehidupan	Narrator				✓	✓
18.	Pincangnya masyarakat Minangkabau, buruk nian nasibnya.	Narrator				✓	✓
19.	Tetapi bukan itu yang jadi					✓	✓

sebabnya, walau pun wang berbilang, emas bertahil, namun pemisahan adat masih tebal di negeri itu.						
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Discussion

Social Discrimination in Minangkabau Society

Social discrimination appears as a dominant pattern in the novel. From the total data, five quotations are categorized under social discrimination. These data illustrate how Zainuddin is treated unfairly due to unclear lineage and his status as an outsider. The discrimination is reflected in statements that label Zainuddin as “bukan anak Minangkabau” and portray him as socially inferior despite his moral integrity. This indicates that social acceptance is determined by origin rather than individual character. Such representation reflects colonial-era social structures that relied on exclusion and rigid classification.

Viewed through Wellek and Warren’s (1956) historical approach, the social discrimination experienced by Zainuddin reflects the reciprocal relationship between literary representation and the socio-historical conditions of the 1930s colonial period.

Traditional Norms as Instruments of Social Control

Viewed through Wellek and Warren’s (1956) historical approach, the portrayal of traditional norms in *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck* reflects how the matrilineal adat system of Minangkabau society was shaped by and embedded within the socio-historical conditions of the colonial era. The exclusion of individuals who do not meet adat requirements and the rigid regulation of marriage demonstrate how customary norms function as mechanisms of social control that restrict personal choice, as seen in Hayati’s inability to resist adat decisions. In line with Said’s (1978) view of culture as a form of power, the novel represents adat as a structure that reinforces social boundaries and legitimizes discrimination, revealing the persistence of colonial-era values within traditional social systems.

Class Hierarchy and Social Stratification

Class hierarchy is represented through four quotations that reveal unequal social status based on lineage, traditional titles, and honor. Characters with noble status are granted social privileges, while those without lineage are marginalized. This stratification corresponds with Max Weber’s theory of social hierarchy, where status and honor determine one’s social position. The novel demonstrates that wealth alone cannot overcome class barriers, as seen in Zainuddin’s continued marginalization despite his success. This portrayal reflects colonial social systems that preserved elite dominance and limited social mobility for lower-class individuals.

Conflict Between Tradition and Individual Freedom

Viewed through Wellek and Warren’s (1956) historical approach, the representation of class hierarchy in *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck* reflects the socio-historical structure of Minangkabau society during the colonial period, where lineage, traditional titles, and honor determined social status. In line with Max Weber’s theory of social stratification, the novel shows that individuals with noble status are granted social privileges, while those without recognized lineage, such as Zainuddin, remain marginalized despite economic success. This depiction illustrates how colonial social systems preserved elite dominance and restricted social mobility, a historical reality that is transformed by Hamka into a narrative critique of inequality.

Colonial Influence on Social Structure

Viewed through Wellek and Warren’s (1956) historical approach, colonial influence in *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck* is implicitly reflected through the rigidity and inequality of Minangkabau social structures rather than direct representation of colonial authorities. In line with Loomba’s (2003) argument on the persistence of unequal colonial structures, the novel portrays

how rigid adat and social divisions mirror colonial hierarchies that were maintained and internalized within local society. By exposing the suffering caused by these systems, Hamka critiques colonial influence as operating through social values and cultural norms, revealing its enduring impact beyond formal political domination.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck* reflects colonial social values through a complex interaction between social discrimination, traditional norms, class hierarchy, conflict between tradition and individual freedom, and implicit colonial influence. The experiences of Zainuddin and Hayati illustrate how rigid adat, lineage-based status, and social stratification function as mechanisms of exclusion that marginalize individuals who do not conform to dominant social structures. As a result, the novel represents colonial influence not through direct political domination but through internalized social values and cultural norms that continue to shape social relations.

Future research is suggested to explore historical and postcolonial representations in other Indonesian literary works to further examine how colonial values are negotiated within local traditions. Comparative studies involving different authors, periods, or regional settings may provide deeper insight into the persistence of colonial social structures and their influence on identity, power relations, and social inequality in Indonesian literature.

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