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## THE OLD FASHIONED RELIGIOUS IMPERIALISM DEPICTED IN TOER'S ARUS BALIK: CRITICAL APPROACH ANALYSIS

### Abstract

This study aims to describe and examine how colonialism is disguised in religious imperialism, meaning religion is used as a tool to carry out imperialism, in the historical setting of the early Islamic Kingdom of Demak, and colonization by the Portuguese in the archipelago. The study was conducted in two stages, namely to reveal how the theme is displayed in each part of the story, and the next stage is to reveal the key mechanisms in the practice of religious imperialism in the past. For the first objective, the approach used is the construction of story grammar offered by Mandler and Johnson, and for the second objective the researcher uses intertextual analysis from Gee. The results of the study illustrate that religious imperialism can be found in every part of the story: the setting, development and ending of the story. For the second objective, it was found that the key mechanisms of religious imperialism are religious conversion as a political tool, missionary or preacher activities and cultural domination, religious justification for colonial rule, and institutional control over religious practices.

**Key words:** Critical Discourse Analysis; Literature; Arus Balik

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan dan mengkaji bagaimana penjajahan dengan bungkus agama, yakni agama digunakan sebagai alat untuk melakukan penjajahan, pada latar sejarah Kerajaan Islam Demak masa awal, dan penjajahan oleh Portugis di nusantara. Penelitian dilaksanakan dengan dua tahap, yakni mengungkap bagaimana tema ditampilkan dalam setiap bagian cerita, dan tahap berikutnya adalah mengungkap tentang mekanisme kunci dalam praktik penjajahan berbungkus agama di masa lalu. Pada tujuan yang pertama, pendekatan yang digunakan ialah konstruksi story grammar yang ditawarkan oleh Mandler and Johnson, dan untuk tujuan kedua peneliti menggunakan intertextual analysis dari Gee. Hasil Penelitian menggambarkan bahwa penjajahan berbungkus agama dapat ditemukan pada setiap bagian cerita: latar cerita, pengembangan dan akhir cerita. Untuk rumusan masalah yang kedua ditemukan bahwa mekanisme kunci dalam penjajahan berbungkus agama adalah konversi agama sebagai alat politik, kegiatan misionaris atau pendakwah dan dominasi budaya, dan pembenaran agama untuk pemerintahan kolonial, kontrol kelembagaan atas praktik keagamaan.

**Kata Kunci:** Critical Discourse analysis; Literature; Arus Balik

### INTRODUCTION

Studying imperialism is crucial for understanding historical and contemporary global relations, power structures, and cultural interactions. There are several key reasons why examining imperialism is important for humanity. To name some, there are historical injustices, cultural and religious transformation, understanding global inequality, recognising patterns of oppression and resistance, and understanding contemporary political and social movements.

Firstly, imperialism causes historical injustices.

We know that imperialism shaped the modern world by enforcing political domination, economic exploitation, and cultural subjugation. Studying imperialism helps us to recognize the systemic inequalities that persist today.

Secondly, through studying imperialism, we will be able to analyse cultural and religious transformations meaning that the forced spread of religions, languages, and ideologies altered

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indigenous traditions and identities. Understanding these transformations allows societies to reclaim and preserve their heritage.

Thirdly, we can examine the roots of global inequality.

By studying imperialism, we know that imperialism created economic disparities between the global North and South. By studying its impact, we can better address issues like poverty, underdevelopment, and neocolonialism.

Fourthly, from history concerning imperialism we recognize patterns of oppression and resistance. Recognizing the patterns, as a matter of fact, allows us to understand imperial strategies, such as military occupation, religious conversion, and economic control. This helps us to identify similar patterns in modern forms of domination.

The fifth aspect, the last but not the least, studying imperialism will help us to understand contemporary political and social movements. Anti-colonial struggles, decolonization movements, and postcolonial theory are deeply rooted in studying imperialism. This knowledge is vital for shaping policies on reparations, human rights, and global justice (Encyclopedia Britannica).

Encyclopedia Britannica, in addition, also gives sufficient definition of imperialism. In general, imperialism refers to the domination of one nation or culture over another, often through political, economic, or military means.

One of imperialism practices is called religious imperialism. It is a specific form of this phenomenon in which a dominant power imposes its religious beliefs and practices on a subjugated population, often as part of a broader colonial agenda. In addition, other references, such as Nkomazana (2016), show how religious imperialism happens. First, it is called as missionary activities that means colonial powers frequently used missionaries to spread their religion among indigenous populations (Nkomazana, Fidelis. & Setume, 2016). These missions were often backed by state authorities and used education, healthcare, and economic incentives to encourage conversion.

Secondly, religious justification for colonialism meaning that colonial rulers framed their expansion as a "civilizing mission". They argue that introducing Christianity (or other dominant religions) would uplift "backward" societies. This narrative legitimized both political and religious dominance.

Thirdly, after justification for colonialism has been developed, colonial rulers come to legal and institutional control step. In this step colonial authorities often imposed laws favouring their religion while restricting local spiritual practices. This included banning indigenous rituals, seizing religious sites, and controlling religious education.

Fourthly, after establishing legal and institutional control step, colonial rulers establish economic and social incentives, namely conversion to the colonial religion was sometimes rewarded with economic benefits, access to education, and social mobility; while those who resisted faced discrimination. Once this phase happens, syncretism and cultural resistance come into existence where local communities resisted religious imperialism by blending traditional beliefs with imposed ones, creating hybrid religious practices as a means of cultural survival.

Now we come into a question about why imperialism, especially religious imperialism happens.

It is true that imperialism is not merely about religion. Some researches mention that there is cultural imperialism Wahid et al. who conducted research in 2015 (Wahid, Umaimah; Isnaini, Muhammad; Kurniasari, 2015), ZTF (ZTF, 2017), and Kastanya (Kastanya, 2016). Some researchers also contribute on linguistics imperialism ((Kastanya, 2016), (ZTF, 2017), (Silalahi, 2019), (Budiari, 2018)), ecological imperialism (Indriyanto, 2019), racism imperialism (Hasan, Mariwan; Ahmad, Lona; Muhammad, 2021), and intellectual imperialism (Mohomed, 2022). While religious imperialism played a crucial role in justifying and facilitating colonial expansion, imperialism as a whole was driven by multiple motivations, including economic gains, political and strategic control, cultural and civilizational superiority, religious mission, and scientific and technological justification ((Nkomazana, Fidelis. & Setume, 2016), (Ali, 2016)).

Economic gains means that colonizing powers sought to control resources, markets, and trade routes. The Dutch, for example, colonized Indonesia largely for its valuable spices, while European powers exploited colonies for raw materials and cheap labour.

The next motivation is political and strategic control. This motivation encourages empires to expand their territory to gain geopolitical advantages, establish military bases, and control crucial trade routes. Colonial rule often reinforced national power and prestige.

Next, the third motivation is cultural and civilizational superiority. Many imperialists believed in the superiority of their civilization and sought to spread their language, values, and education systems to "civilize" indigenous populations.

In the fourth position we have religious mission where missionary efforts were often intertwined with colonial expansion, as religious groups aimed to convert local populations to Christianity or Islam. However, these efforts were frequently accompanied by economic and political coercion.

The last kind of imperialism motivation is scientific and technological justifications. In this kind, some colonial powers used pseudo-scientific racial theories to justify their dominance, claiming that their rule was necessary to bring progress and modernity to "less developed" societies.

Pramoedya Ananta Toer's novel *Arus Balik* offers a compelling exploration of colonial encounters, cultural resistance, and the mechanisms of religious imperialism in the context of Indonesian history. Through its narrative, the novel captures the intersection of political dominance and religious conversion, illustrating how religion was used as both an instrument of control and a mean of resistance during the colonial era. Religious imperialism, in this context, refers to the imposition of foreign religious ideologies, often intertwined with colonial ambitions, leading to the transformation of indigenous spiritual practices and societal structures. In *Arus Balik*, Pramoedya Ananta Toer critiques the multifaceted nature of imperialism, illustrating how religious conversion was not just a matter of faith but also a tool for political control and economic exploitation.

This research aims to give a thick description and analyses upon how religions are used as tool in establishing imperialism by Demak and Portuguese in Toer's *Arus Balik*. The second aim is finding the key mechanism of religious imperialism in the novel. In other words, the research questions are: how the novel depicts religious imperialism, and secondly, what the key mechanism of religious imperialism portraited in the novel are.

## METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design, specifically employing discourse analysis as the methodological approach. Discourse analysis is selected because it allows in depth examination of how language functions within literary texts to construct meaning, reveal themes, and shape character interactions. By focusing on both the linguistic features and narrative structures, this approach enables the researcher to explore not only the explicit content but also the implicit social, cultural, and psychological messages embedded in the novel. The qualitative nature of the study emphasizes interpretive understanding rather than quantification, making it well suited to analyze the complex and nuanced discourse present in the selected short stories. This study focuses on *Arus Balik* as the primary textual subject, with historical texts and literary criticism serving as secondary sources to provide a broader perspective on religious imperialism and its socio-political consequences.

The primary data source is Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Arus Balik*. This study also incorporates secondary sources, including historical texts and literary criticism, to provide context on religious imperialism and colonial discourse in Indonesia. Data collection will involve close reading and systematic note-taking, focusing on linguistic structures, intertextual references, and narrative strategies that depict conversion, resistance, and religious dominance.

At first, the researcher will analyze the novel in order to find its story grammar which needs some steps, namely: constructing synopsis, simple story, dan the story grammar itself. The story grammar, thence, will be used to discover the novel's theme. As the theme is discovered, analysis will come into intertextual analysis where the text in the novel will be compared with historical books, and imperialism books. This step will answer the second question, namely how does *Arus Balik* depict religious imperialism as a tool of colonial dominance? What are the key mechanisms of religious imperialism represented in the novel, and how do they reflect historical realities?

Later on, data will be analysed within the framework of Gee's discourse analysis, incorporating thematic analysis as an analytical tool. The process includes: 1) Identifying thematic patterns meaning that using thematic analysis to extract recurring themes related to religious imperialism, colonial power structures, and identity formation; 2) Intertextual analysis meaning that examining how *Arus Balik* engages with historical narratives, colonial texts, and religious discourses, applying Gee's concept of intertextuality; 3) Discourse Tools Analysis meaning that utilizing Gee's discourse tools, such as situated meaning, social language, and figured worlds, to analyse how religious imperialism is linguistically constructed in the novel; 4) Comparative Contextualization meaning that relating the novel's discourse on religious imperialism to historical realities and postcolonial critique, integrating insights from historical texts and literary criticism.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **HOW THE NOVEL DEPICTS RELIGIOUS IMPERIALISM**

To answer the first research question, the researchers employ psycholinguistic approach analysis proposed by Mandler and Johnson. It is found that religious imperialism presents in each part of the story.

#### **The Setting**

After the fall of Majapahit, a power vacuum emerged in the Nusantara region. In this void, two forces began to play dominant roles: the Sultanate of Demak, a rapidly growing local Islamic power in Java, and the Portuguese, a foreign power arriving from the West with missions of trade and colonization. Both of them are depicted as conducting annexation due to religious motives. Both of them use word "infidel" to justify their actions.

#### **The Beginning**

In spite of its subjugation upon Tuban's region named Jepara, Demak kingdom proposed olive coalition to Tuban to conquer Portuguese in Malacca. Tuban responded half-heartedly Demak's persuasion because Demak, actually, its enemy. In this part, religious imperialism is practiced by Demak by declaring that other kingdoms, including Tuban, were backward people and infidel. By these two reasons, Demak annexed Jepara and Portuguese conquered Malacca.

#### **Complex Reaction (Simple Reaction and Goal)**

In 1513, Demak attacked Portuguese in Malacca for it was thought as infidel, but Demak failed to defeat Portuguese even in the second attack in 1521. It is described that the solidity of Demak's coalition troops was not firm. Demak used word "infidel" both for Portuguese (its enemy), and for Tuban's Hindu troops (its coalition). This made a half-hearted commitment upon Tuban's leader and troops.

#### **The Goal Path (Attempt and Outcome)**

Tuban found its spirit of defending its territory by defeating both Demak and Portuguese. To these two kingdoms, they perceived that their objectives are imperialism. The word "infidel" is used only to degrade the dignity of Tuban's troops and people.

#### **Ending**

Tuban had successfully repelled both its adversaries: the Portuguese and Demak. Both of them are perceived as the same. They do not merely spread their religions but also degraded other people beliefs, and cultures in their own benefits.

### **THE KEY MECHANISM OF RELIGIOUS IMPERIALISM**

To answer the second question, the researchers employ Gee's intertextual analysis technique. It guides the researcher to make dialectical analysis among the text in the novel, and the books about imperialism. In general, the key mechanisms of religious imperialism represented in *Arus Balik* and their reflection of historical realities are conversion as a political tool, missionary activities and cultural domination.

#### **Conversion as a Political Tool**

The novel portrays religious conversion as one of the means to secure political alliances. Rulers and elites strategically adopt foreign religions to gain favour with colonial powers, reflecting historical cases where conversion was incentivized by economic and military benefits. This mirrors historical realities in Indonesia, where both Islam and Christianity spread partly due to political and economic motivations.

In the early part of the novel, it is narrated that Demak seized Jepara from Tuban, and the spread of Islam began in these two regions by suppressing the existence of Hinduism (p.35).

The word “infidel” is used to refer to pre-Islamic teachings such as Hindu-Shaivism or Buddhism that were still being taught to indigenous children. These teachings were labeled as infidel because they were considered contrary to the Islamic values that were starting to spread.

Thus, in territories controlled by Demak, religions other than Islam no longer had the right to exist. In this quotation, infidel is used by Demak to justify its acts (p.336).

Word infidel also refers to the Portuguese (Peranggi) who wounded Adipati Unus, the duke of Jepara, during his campaign against the Portuguese in Malacca. Throughout this campaign, it was proclaimed that the war against the Portuguese was a holy war against the infidels, and therefore Malacca must be returned to the Islamic kingdom (p.404).

Word “infidel” is also used by Tuban’s rebel named Rajeg Iskak. He states that his rebellion was against an infidel ruler, namely the Duke of Tuban, even though, as we know, the duke was the father of Sunan Kalijaga, one of the most prominent Islamic preachers in Java (p.497). Here, the term infidel is used strategically to categorize Rajeg Iskak’s political enemies. Although Adipati Tuban is a muslim, Rajeg still labels him an infidel to justify rebellion. The same label was also applied to the Portuguese and other locals who did not align with his cause. This reflects the political manipulation of religious labels, who is called “infidel” depends on who is resisting or supporting his authority (p.498). So, an infidel status can be negotiated through political loyalty, not necessarily through faith. If someone refuses to follow Rajeg’s authority, his ways, and his religion, then they are labeled as infidels.

In other part of the novel, it is found that infidel does not signify religious disbelief but political disobedience (p.502). The term infidel here is a removable label, anyone who accepts Islamic authority is no longer considered infidel. Ultimately, the final goal of all these religious conversions for political legitimacy is portrayed through the idea that territories conquered will later be renamed using religiously significant names chosen by the speaker (p.540). Islamization of a region, by renaming and restructuring power, is, therefore, used as a symbol of authority and legitimacy. This is a systemic conversion that is political, not personal (p.1186).

The renaming of regions is also used in Christian colonial missions, not to save souls, but as part of an imperial conquest program. Conversion here is a strategy for political and religious ideological expansion. Thus, the imperialists were so eager to impose their power because they believed themselves to be superior, better in every way, than those who did not share their race or religion (p.250, p. 252, p.255, and p.459).

In short, it is clear that the first justification for conquering a territory and its people (imperialism) is the assignment of the infidel label to the opponent. This label provides moral and ideological grounds to destroy and dominate others. The pretend of fighting infidels, those deemed backward and uncivilized, may sound noble, as though it were a mission to educate a people or nation into honour and progress. However, as this novel portrays, the use of infidel is more of a political pretext to justify aggression and conquest. For example, Rajeg Iskak, though a muslim, rebelled against Adipati Tuban, who was also a Muslim. Yet to build esprit de corps among his followers, he still labeled the duke an infidel so his soldiers would not hesitate to fight him.

This kind of labeling also occurred during Demak’s attack on Jepara, which was still part of Tuban’s territory. Even though Adipati Tuban was the father of Sunan Kalijaga, a prominent Islamic advisor to Demak, he was still called an infidel. This is another proof that the word infidel is used more as a tool of justification for conquest and domination, rather than for a sincere religious or theological mission.

#### Missionary activities

Besides conquering territories, religious imperialism, as described in the novel, is carried out by sending Islamic preachers and Christian missionaries to colonized regions. The main targets of these preachers or missionaries are those who had no belief and no knowledge of the teachings of their respective prophets (p.242). Thus, the first definition of dakwah (Islamic proselytism) is identifying who is considered an infidel and who should be invited to embrace Islam. This represents the early form of missionary activity (p.253).

The same phenomenon is also found in Christianity. Word infidel is used referring to everything that has not been touched by the teachings of Jesus. An “infidel land” means a land

that has not embraced Christianity. These sermons served as missionary guidance for the ship's crew and were part of the organized missionary structure. For both Muslim preachers and Christian missionaries, entering a region they considered infidel often led to establishing Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) or churches (p.435, p. 1189).

When the Islamic preacher arrived in Blambangan, he established a pesantren, and when the Portuguese soldiers reached Ternate, they established a church. Both pesantren and churches functioned not only as places of worship but also as centers of missionary outreach (p.1007).

Through these institutions, the missionary makes efforts to Islamize or Christianize the native population. This represented the second mechanism after religious conversion had been introduced by force or authority.

#### Cultural Domination

The third mechanism of religious imperialism is cultural domination, which is carried out by continuously demeaning indigenous cultures. The domination is presented by belittling the language and culture of the Javanese, which was still strongly rooted in pre-Islamic traditions (p.99, p.111). A dialogue between the captain of a ship rented by a former port officer of Malacca, Almusawa, who later becomes Portuguese collaborator on p.114 represents this.

Cultural domination also targeted written forms, especially Javanese scripts recorded on palm leaves (p.134). Javanese script with Sankrit characters are called "infidel script". As a result, when someone converted to Islam (a mualaf), it wasn't only their religious practices that had to change, but also their behavior, habits, and customs (p.218). A woman, for example, is called infidel woman who practices tradition of chewing betel, which stains their teeth black.

This cultural degradation even extended to physical appearance, often in deeply personal ways just because he wears his traditional clothes (405). It shows that the term infidel could be applied merely due to one's appearance, like having long hair, a practice common among Hindus who believed that cutting one's hair could displease ancestral spirits (p.427, p. 469). Even traditional Javanese music, gamelan, was not spared from being labeled as infidel (p.670).

In short, cultural domination is expressed bluntly: gamelan is infidel, long hair is infidel, chewing betel is infidel, and Javanese manuscript is infidel. Everything unless they are from their culture and tradition are infidel that must be dismissed or changed. Otherwise, they must not be touched.

## CONCLUSION

It is concluded that religious imperialism, in this novel, is implemented by both Demak for Islam and Portuguese for Christianity. Both of them use the concept of "kafir (infidel)" for those who do not convert into Islam or Christianity. Soon after entering a territory, they perceived and declared that the indigenous local people, as well as their religion and culture are "Kafir (infidel)" and are allowed to be oppressed as long they have not converted into Islam or Christianity.

Secondly, the key mechanism of religious imperialism depicted in the novel is conversion as political tool, missionary activities, and cultural domination. Arus Balik illustrates how colonial authorities utilized religious conversion to dismantle local belief systems, mirroring historical realities in Indonesia. The characters in Arus Balik navigate religious conversion in various ways, reflecting the complexities of colonial encounters in Indonesia.

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