
THE BRITISH COLONIAL POWER IN GEORGE ORWELL'S *BURMESE DAYS***Ryan Zulkarnaen,* Ruminda, Lili Awaludin**English Literature, Faculty of Adab and Humanities, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati
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ABSTRACT

This study tried to discover British colonial power in George Orwell's *Burmese Days*. Gramsci's hegemony theory regarding to a concept of an integral state was applied. A qualitative descriptive method was used in the study. Data in the study were dialogues and narratives from historical contacts between British and Burmese regarding the British colonial regime. The data consisted intrinsic element of theme, and 2 extrinsic elements of political society and civil society. Both elements were structure in literary works, and represent the British colonial power in George Orwell's *Burmese Days*. A theme of colonial was found among the element of fiction. There were extrinsic elements such as political society and civil society. The study concluded that the intrinsic elements forming a story that could representative how the British colonial power appeared on theme. The relationship of both elements form totality of meaning and integrity that how the British colonial power operations in George Orwell' *Burmese Days*.

Keywords: colonialism, hegemony, integral state, orientalism**INTRODUCTION**

Throughout the era of European colonialism, numerous instances of dehumanization and exploitation occurred in the colonized regions. This exploitation took the form of colonial powers venturing to various corners of the world in pursuit of the "3G mission" - gold, glory, and gospel (Iskarna, 2018). As British colonialism expanded into the Asian continent, one of its objectives was to acquire resources and labor from Burma. Initially, the British colonial administration established alliances with the Burmese elite, integrating them into the European Club. Modern colonialism extended beyond the mere extraction of tribute goods and wealth from the conquered territories; it fundamentally reshaped their economies, creating intricate

relationships that facilitated the flow of both human and natural resources between the colonized and colonial countries (Loomba, 1998, p. 3). It is evident that recruiting the Burmese elite was a strategy to harness native manpower and potential in order to maintain control over the region's historical connections. In essence, the primary goal of colonialism was the subjugation of colonies to exploit their material wealth.

The British colonial administration exerted its authority through a combination of domination and hegemony. Initially, domination was employed during the early stages of British expansion into Burma, leading to substantial material harm. Subsequently, hegemony was utilized to garner consensus among the Burmese population in favor of British rule. The aim was to establish a cultural interaction zone where Burmese natives would willingly participate without resistance, assuming British rule as a given. In practice, the British colonial regime exercised power as an integrated entity, combining both domination and hegemony to maintain control.

The era of Colonialism should not be solely seen as a historical period marked by one nation's conquest of another. Modern European colonialism, in fact, delves into the multifaceted interactions of nations and territories, significantly influenced by the advancements in Western science. Mary Louise Pratt has argued that, starting from the mid-eighteenth century, science began to play a crucial role in shaping Europe's engagement with imperial frontiers and was likewise influenced by these interactions (Loomba, 1998, p. 61).

European explorations of non-European societies and their cultures provided material for colonial discourse, with orientalist framing these discoveries. The involvement of science in the development of colonial discourse served to legitimize European practices such as trade, settlements, religious missions, and military operations in the colonized regions.

Post-colonial literature is a genre of literary works that explore the historical interactions between two nations and the consequences that arise from such encounters (Hamadi, 2014). One of these consequences is the lasting impact of colonial rule, which not only inflicts material damage but also leaves a profound psychological toll on the colonized population. In examining this theme, scholars often turn to works like "Burmese Days," a novel that vividly portrays the British colonial period in which Burma (present-day Myanmar) was subjected to conquest and domination.

The story unfolds with the British colonial regime's directive to recruit a Burmese elite member into the European Club, presenting a significant opportunity for figures like U Po Kyin and Dr. Veraswami. Both individuals share a common ambition to secure membership in the Club, driven by the desire for privilege, prestige, and undeniable wealth.

During cultural interactions, the elite Burmese often held a deep admiration for the prestige and greatness of the British nation. They viewed the arrival of British colonialism as a mission aimed at civilizing the Burmese population. This admiration extended to praising the British government and glorifying the British people for imparting civilized ways of life. The British

were credited with teaching trade practices and contributing to infrastructure development, including schools, machinery, ships, railways, and even the utilization of Burma's natural resources through deforestation.

Furthermore, the British colonial regime's policy of recruiting elite Burmese individuals represented a significant opportunity for them. Essentially, the British colonial administration would continue to maintain control over the colonies as long as the Burmese continued to affirm British leadership and justify all the practices of the British colonial regime as both necessary and inherent.

Based on the description provided concerning the subject of the study, "Burmese Days," the researchers have primarily focused on the perspective of the colonizers. Specifically, they are examining the mindset of the Burmese elite and their deep admiration for British colonial authority in the colonized regions. In this context, the British colonial system initially asserted its power through domination and later sought to maintain that power through hegemony.

The preservation of this binary relationship is reinforced by the role played by various institutions, cultural activities, and other actors that promote and uphold British dominance. Consequently, the discourse of orientalism can be seen as comprehensive and systematic when it is expressed through tangible manifestations, such as within social, economic, and political institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hegemony comes from a word *hegeisthai* (Greek), meaning to lead, leadership, power, which exceeds other powers. Lexicographically, hegemony is leadership (Matthijs, 2022). In *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci uses the word *direzione* (leadership, direction) interchangeably with *egemonia* (hegemony) and in contrast to *dominazione* (domination). Hegemony is a relation, not of domination through force, but of consent through political and ideological leadership. It is the organization of consent (Simon, 1999, p. 24). Thus, the key to the process of hegemony is always related to the power of a group and other classes which is achieved through consensus and bound by common sense.

In the tradition of critical theory thinking, Gramsci is mentioned as the greatest thinker after Marx. The initial concept of Gramsci's hegemony was developed based on his deconstruction of the reductionism of social change adopted by Orthodox Marxists. Gramsci reinterpreted the role of the superstructure, due to the influence of Benedetto Croce's idealist philosophy. Croce's concept of 'political ethical' history contributed to the development of Gramsci's concept of hegemony (Simon, 1999, p. 96). As a superstructure theorist, Gramsci's hegemony is closely related to the solution of political action, such as resistance to the ideological apparatus.

The starting point for the hegemony of a dominant class over a subordinate class is built through a consensus mechanism. For Gramsci, hegemony is a consensus that arises through active commitment of social

classes that have historically been born in production relations (Patria & Arief, 2015, p. 126). Consensus is built based on the view of the highest position that is legitimately recognized. Gramsci argues that this consensus always relates to psychological spontaneity which includes various acceptances of sociopolitical rules or other aspects of the rules (Patria & Arief, 2015, p. 125). Gramsci bases this awareness and agreement as a conceptual basis and forms the consciousness of subordinate groups under the dominion of the dominant group.

Hegemony will operate in the area of civil society rather than political society because civil society is formed from voluntary, rational, and non-coercive community groups so that consensus will be achieved without resorting to violence. For Gramsci, the process of hegemony occurs when the way of life, way of thinking and views of the subordinate group accept the way of thinking and lifestyle of the dominant group (Fakih via Simon, 2004: xvii). In essence, hegemony is an attempt to lead people to assess and view social problems within a predetermined framework.

Gramsci's hegemony frameworks in Musa *et al.* (2022) consists of five key concept, they are culture, ideology, common sense, intellectuals, and state. As a superstructure Marxian theorist, Gramsci contribute a new concept for a critic towards liberal ideological state. In this context, Gramsci divided the separation of powers into two areas. First, political society, the state as representing every attempt to crystallise permanently a particular stage of development, a particular situation. Second, civil society, in which the church is taken as representing the totality of civil society, whereas in fact it is only an element of diminishing importance within it (Quintin & Smith, 1971, p. 245). In this sense, civil society and state are one and the same. The form of modern state is representing political society and civil society powers.

The concept of integral state is the result of a combination between contribution a coercion and the place of a hegemonic leadership in society. Therefore, integral state consist two aspect. First, political society is means of coercion, apparatus of state: police, army force, bureaucracy, the court and another. Second, civil society is means of establishing hegemonic leadership, such as education, religion, medium, publisher, and another (Patria & Arief, 2015, p. 144). Obviously, the integral state is a hegemony that is covered with a veil of power, but always accompanied by a step of coercion. To the point, the role of hegemonic class or the state not only justifies maintained power, but the state must be able to win leadership intellectually and morally.

METHOD

This research has used a qualitative descriptive analysis method in collecting data and supporting arguments needed in finishing an analysis. Qualitative research methods are research methods based on the philosophy of post-positivism, used to examine the condition of natural objects (Sugiyono, 2012, p. 9). Regarding the quotation above, it means designed from the process of finding social phenomena, discussing, analyzing which occurs

naturally. In essence, qualitative research is used to obtain in-depth data, the meanings contained behind phenomena.

The source of data is taken from the first Orwell novel written in 1934 by George Orwell entitled *Burmese Days*. This novel is a Penguin Classics series, Published by Penguin Books Ltd, Year: 2010, ISBN 9780141965048. A *Burmese Days* Novel that consisted of 25 chapters and was printed with 292 pages. In this edition of the novel added an Introduction by Emma Larkin and A Note on the Text by Peter Davison. The novel was selected because it represented orientalism discourse based on the perspective of the colonizers. The study tried to investigate British colonial regime-maintained power in the colonized country in George Orwell's *Burmese Day*.

The technique of collecting data was performed by using a document. The researcher read the object of study to get the data about orientalism discourse. After that, the data were taken from reading Orwell's *Burmese Days* and collects the data from dialogues and narrations which are associated with orientalism discourse based on historical contact between British colonial and the colony. In this research, the colonial point of view was taken regarding how the colonial government declared its power through domination and hegemony.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter deals with the research result and analysis of data. The discussion of data is divided into two-part. First, fictional element are used to represent the British colonial power in George Orwell's "*Burmese Days*". The second, the British colonial regime-maintained power in the colonized country in George Orwell's *Burmese Days*.

Theme

In *Burmese Days*, the author uses the base of the story about how the life of European Club must carry out the policies of the British colonial regime, such as recruiting one of elite Burmese become a member of the Club. This policy resulted in an internal conflict within the Club against the policies of British colonial regime in Burmese.

The author conveys a story by using intrinsic elements such as dialogue, characters, thoughts, feelings, events, and settings to effort to build a theme. In this case, the author presents a theme of colonial through Ellis' thoughts, as a member of the European Club who has racial awareness, and considers himself to be a superior nation. In this story, Ellis is described as the Englishman who most dictates and intervenes every British association at the Club in the quote (Table 1).

In the quotation above Ellis is described as the only Englishman who cared the most about the principles and fate of the European Club. Ellis dared to criticize the policies of the British colonial regime and offended Mr. Macgregor. Besides, Ellis demands that all Club members exercise their right to object to government policies, especially Mr. Macgregor, as Assistant

Deputy Commissioner. Ellis' concern is a racial awareness, as well as a warning that the purpose of the British coming to Burmese, was to conquer and dominate Burmese. We are a superior and civilized nation. Therefore, rejecting the British colonial regime's policies, and treating Burmese as slaves is the right action to maintain British superiority. The implication is that the European Club is the only club that still maintains racial awareness.

Table 1. Quote 1

"My God.' Said Ellis a little more calmly, taking a pace or two up and down, 'my God, I don't understand you chaps. I simply don't. Here's that old fool Macgregor wanting to bring a nigger into this Club for no reason whatever, and you all sit down under it without a word. Good god, what are we supposed to be doing in his country? If we aren't going to rule, why the devil don't we clear out? Here we are, supposed to be governing a set of damn black swine who have been slaves since the beginning of history, and instead of ruling them in the only way they understand, we go and treat them as equals. And all you silly b—s take it for granted. There's Flory, who makes his best pal of a black babu who calls himself a doctor because he is done two years at an Indian so-called university. And you, Westfield, proud as Punch of your knock-kneed, bribe-taking cowards of policemen. And there is Maxwell, who spends his time running after Eurasian tarts. Yes, you do, Maxwell; I heard about your goings-on in Mandalay with some smelly little bitch called Molly Pereira. I suppose you'd have gone and married her if they had not transferred you up here? You all seem to like the dirty black brutes. Christ, I don't know what is come over us all. I really don't." Ellis (Page 39-40)

On the other side, Ellis criticizes the personality of the British that can defame British superiority. There are problems Ellis judges the behavior of British as Flory hangs out with Dr. Veraswami who has ambitions to join the Club, Westfield likes to take bribes, and Maxwell date with a native prostitute. All the behavior of the British is Ellis's concern for the fate of the Club, as a result of all the bad behavior of Club members during contact with the Burmese, will slowly threaten the existence of the Club. It is during historical contact that the elite Burmese will have obligations to the British. This situation will be detrimental and obliterate the goal of the British colonizing Burmese. However, Ellis has racial aware, than Mr. Macgregor is a wise and the old man at the Club. Ellis is a representation of British superiority over the inferiority of non-European countries. In a short, Ellis is the centralization of antagonist who reinforces how the power of orientalism discourse appears in the theme of this novel.

Political Society

Political Society is area where violent practices emerge (police and other violent apparatus), and the place where the establishment of the state takes place (Patria & Arief, 2015, pp. 136-137). Political society or state is an area formed from state bodies, such as the military, police, and bureaucracy which politically act as the dominant ruler. Then, how orientalism discourse operates on political society in *Burmese Days*. The researcher will present the findings of the data and describe the data in a theoretical and descriptive framework.

Authoritarian British Colonialism against Dr. Veraswami

Dr. Veraswami is a civil surgeon and prison superintendent in Kyauktada village. In social interaction, Dr. Veraswami always hangs out with John Flory, one of European Club members. This friendship give a prestige for Dr. Veraswami's privilege, his closeness with Flory is seen in every discussion and drinking together. Generally, elite Burmese rarely associate with British. Their closeness led the British to warn Flory not to bring Dr. Veraswai to the Club. Indeed, Dr. Veraswami realized that he was a representative of an inferior nation, so making friends with one Briton was a huge achievement for the Burmese elite. Dr. Veraswami's ideas and statements show mental inferiority in any discussion with Flory. When John Flory's has dead, Dr. Veraswami shrank, at the same time he was accused of treason against the British. In fact, Dr. Veraswami's ambition to become a member of Club European is utopia. Consequently, Dr. Veraswami had to accept bad luck and her life is difficult conditions in a quote (Table 2).

Table 2. Quote 2

"The dreaded no and wink passed somewhere in high places, and the doctor was reverted to the rank of Assistant Surgeon and transferred to Mandalay General Hospital. He is still there and is likely to remain. Mandalay is rather a disagreeable town-it is dusty and intolerably hot, and it is said to have five main products all beginning with P, namely, pagodas, pariahs, pigs, priests, and prostitute-and the work at the hospital is a dreary business. The doctor lives just outside the hospital grounds in a little bakehouse of a bungalow with a corrugated iron fence around it is tiny compound and in the evening he runs a private clinic to supplement his reduced pay. He has joined a second-rate club frequented by Indian leaders. It is glory is a single European member-a Glasgow electrician named Macdougall, sacked from the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company for drunkenness, and now making a precarious living out of a garage." (Page 288)

The quotation above shows that U Po Kyin's structured, systematic and massive tactics have eliminated the position of Dr. Veraswami. U Po Kyin's strategy is act of political intrigue. In this case, U Po Kyin destroyed Dr. Veraswami through domination and leadership. First, U Po Kyin involved the army, police, and bureaucracy where he accused Dr. Veraswami of being the mastermind behind the rebellion. Second, U Po Kyin sent anonymous letters containing accusations to the British colonial to win the sympathy of the British. Through ideas and practices, U Po Kyin implements the concept of an integral state. The integral state is the result of a combination of the contribution of coercion in society and the place of hegemonic leadership, the integral state is a hegemony that is covered with a veil of power but is always accompanied by a step of coercion (Gramsci in Patria and Arif, 201). Implicitly, U Po Kyin' attack toward Dr Veraswami position is one of way into a member of European Club.

Dr. Veraswami's position is a victim of structural violence in the policies of the British colonial regime, as well as a political prisoner. Although Dr. Veraswami was not imprisoned and worked under political pressure. In this case, there is no mediation for the fate of doctors, let alone complaints through legal channels. Dr. Veraswami's efforts will be in vain. First, bureaucracy, Dr. Veraswami must report to Mr. Macgregor as Deputy Commissioner in the British colonial in Burmese. Impossible, the British colonial was antipathy to the behavior of Dr. Veraswami who has betrayed the British colonial regime. U Po Kyin attack has provided facts about Dr. Veraswami's true character behind the profession as a doctor. Of course, the British colonial regime will believe the facts regarding Dr. Veraswami's character. However, the British colonial regime took preventive measures, because it involved the power of the British colonial power in Burmese.

Second, Dr. Veraswami did not solve the law problem. He has faced U Po Kyin, a Kyauktada District Magistrate, who lost his position and ambition to become a member of the European Club. For Dr. Veraswami there is no structural power to demand justice for the allegations against his life. Moreover, Burmese civil society, all supporters and under the maintained of U Po Kyin's power. The relationship between John Flory had no effect, as Flory did not have power to discuss the doctor's demands with the members of Club European. Ellis despises Flory's friendship with the doctor as a Burmese, much less to the point of defending a traitor, because members of the European Club have racial consciousness, there is no history of white coolies defending Burmese people who have betrayed the British government. However, Flory is one of the most thought-provoking Britons among the British people, even before Dr. Veraswami as a person living in Burmese. Flory's position will not be taken into account by the members at every meeting at the Club. It is undeniable, Dr. Veraswami has to accept the reality of life, losing his position and ambition to be a member of the European Club.

Civil Society

Civil society is another organization outside the state in a social formation and outside the part of the material and economic production system, which is supported and implemented by people or components outside the above limits (Patria & Arief, 2015, pp. 136-137). Civil society is formed from community groups that are voluntary, rational, and not coercive, including schools, families, unions, communication organizations, sports, youth associations, and others. This civil society is in the area of the dominant social group to reach consensus and regulate other social groups. Also, civil society, which is subordinate to social, groups, can organize their resistance to build an alternative counter-hegemony (Simon, 1999, p. 24). In *Burmese Days*, how the hegemonic forms of orientalism discourse can operate in civil society.

Burmese's Inferior Mentality

One aspect of creating orientalism discourse persists in the consciousness of Burmese natives, namely when Burmese natives affirmed the existence of British colonialism carrying a vision of civilizing Burmese. The affirmation arises due to historical contacts between one nation and another, where British colonialism reached Burmese native consensus on the projects and practices of British colonialism in Burmese. This affirmation process is not born through violence, coercion, or threats, but a nation gains consensus through ideological and moral leadership. In Orientalism, where texts based on Eastern exteriority can operate to spread orientalism discourse through mediums such as language, common sense, and folklore. Therefore, orientalism discourse can justify practices and projects.

The implication is that orientalist texts can support the journey of European colonial countries to the East. One of them is the expansion of British colonialism to conquer Burmese. British colonialism asserted power in Burmese through domination and hegemony. As a result, through ideological and political leadership, British colonialism was able to maintain power in the colonies. As the Burmese natives affirmed the power of British colonial regime to bring a vision of civilization to the Burmese. This phenomenon indicates how British colonialism managed to gain consensus actively from the Burmese natives. One of them, if the Eastern world can present itself, then, of course, it will, but because it is not able to do so, the orientalist feel the need to represent it in the form of imaginative and scientific texts (Said, 2010, p. 31). It is clear, it can justify the British colonialism project to control Burmese, especially to reach a voluntary native Burmese agreement in a quote (Table 3).

The quotation above shows the historical contact between Flory *British* and Dr. Veraswami *Burmese*. This historical contact contains statements by Dr. Veraswami which show mental inferiority to British superiority. Dr.

Veraswami's statements refer to the affirmation of British colonial rule in Burmese. Dr. Veraswami always dialogues with Flory, but he only praises and boasts of the arrival of the British who brings the vision of advancing Burmese. As the world know, this affirmation is a form of voluntary surrender of ideology to the British government. At the same time, Dr. Veraswami's affirmation was not to position himself to get the attention of the British people but to strengthen the power of British colonialism in Burmese. Thus, without resorting to violence, The British colonial regime could gain leadership by consensus. Consequently, this moral and ideological leadership was an attempt to maintain British rule in Burmese.

Table 3. Quote 3

"My friend, it is pathetic to me to hear you talk so. It is truly pathetic. Do you say you are here to trade? Of course, you are. Could the Burmese trade for themselves? Can they make machinery, ships, railways, roads? They are helpless without you. What would happen to the Burmese forests if the English were not here? They would be sold immediately to the Japanese, who would gut them and ruin them. Instead of which, in your hands, actually they are improved. And while your businessmen develop the resources of our country, your officials are civilizing us, elevating us to their level, from pure public spirit. It is a magnificent record of self-sacrifice." (Page 54)

The British colonial regime had several projects of interest to British colonialism in Burmese. First, technology, through vehicles and infrastructure development, is not only to advance and civilize, but the political nature of British colonialism to facilitate their access to transport Burmese natural resources. Second, the British taught the natives to trade, not only to prosper the indigenous economic sector but to bring the natives into complex economic relations. In this case, British people have lucrative positions such as entrepreneurs and managers in timber companies, while Burmese natives only work as laborers in British companies in Burmese.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on research findings and data analysis about the British colonial power in George Orwell's *Burmese Days*, the researcher took to some conclusion. On one hand, one of element fiction, theme. The author describes a theme of colonial through Ellis' thoughts, as a member of the European Club who has racial awareness, and considers himself to be a superior nation. One other hand, there are extrinsic elements consists are political society and civil society. First, political society, U Po Kyin could destroyed Dr. Veraswami's image and dignity, after he result maintained the

consensus of all members European Club. Second, civil society, Dr Veraswami's inferior mentality affirmation to the British colonial regime bring a vision of civilization to the Burmese. In short, the British colonial regime is not only justifies maintained power, but the state must be able to win leadership intellectually and morally against outside forces. Then, intrinsic elements forming a story that could representative how the British colonial power appear on theme of this novel. Basically, the relationship of both elements form totality of meaning and integrity that how the British colonial power operations in George Orwell' *Burmese Days*.

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