

**NYAI ONTOSOROH'S CAPITALS AMID THE CHALLENGES OF POSTCOLONIALISM IN *BUMI MANUSIA*: A BOURDIEU'S CRITICAL READING**

***KAPITAL NYAI ONTOSOROH DI TENGAH TANTANGAN POSKOLONIALISME DI BUMI MANUSIA: ANALISIS KRITIS BOURDIEU***

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**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini menganalisis kehidupan *Nyai* Ontosoroh yang hidup pada masa poskolonialisme sekaligus analisis stereotip gender dalam masyarakat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis taktik yang digunakannya untuk memanfaatkan modal sosial, budaya, dan ekonomi yang dimilikinya. Penelitian ini akan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif untuk menganalisis kehidupan dan pengalaman *Nyai* Ontosoroh dengan menggunakan kerangka pembacaan kritis Bourdieu. Studi ini akan menggunakan sumber sekunder untuk mengidentifikasi dan mengkategorikan berbagai bentuk modal yang tersedia untuk tokoh tersebut dan memeriksa bagaimana modal tersebut berhubungan dengan pengalaman pascakolonialisme dan stereotip gender, yang memberikan pandangan untuk memahami bagaimana orang dapat memanfaatkan berbagai bentuk modal untuk mencapai tujuan mereka. Melalui analisis ini, penelitian menemukan bahwa *Nyai* Ontosoroh dapat memanfaatkan modal yang diberikan oleh suaminya untuk menavigasi kesulitan menjadi seorang wanita pada masa itu. Temuan penelitian memperlihatkan kemampuan luar biasa *Nyai* Ontosoroh dalam memanfaatkan kapitalnya dan menyoroti peran penting kapital sosial dalam membentuk pengalaman wanita pada masa tersebut. Penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya memahami hubungan yang rumit antara gender, poskolonialisme, dan kapital sosial.

**Kata kunci:** Kapital, Bumi Manusia, Pembacaan kritis, gender

**Abstract :** This literary research delves into the life of *Nyai* Ontosoroh, who lived during postcolonialism and societal gender stereotypes. It aims to analyze the tactics she used to make the most of her social, cultural, and economic capital. This research will employ a qualitative approach to analyze the life and experiences of *Nyai* Ontosoroh using Bourdieu's critical reading framework. The study will utilize secondary sources to identify and categorize the different forms of capital available to the character and examine how they intersected with her experiences of postcolonialism and gender stereotypes, which provides a lens to understand how people can leverage different forms of capital to achieve their goals. Through this analysis, the study discovered that *Nyai* Ontosoroh was able to take advantage of the capitals provided by her illegitimate husband to navigate the difficulties of being a woman in the era. The findings of the research showcase the remarkable abilities of *Nyai* Ontosoroh in utilizing her capitals and highlight the critical role of social capital in shaping the experiences of women during this historical time. This study highlights the significance of understanding the intricate relationships between gender, postcolonialism, and social capital, providing valuable insights for scholars and readers alike.

**Keywords :** Capital, Bumi Manusia, Pembacaan kritis, gender

## INTRODUCTION

Capital, in a general sense, encompasses the assets or resources that an individual or organization has at their disposal (Dumont & Roux, 2022). These resources can come in many forms, including financial capital, physical capital, human capital, and intellectual capital. Financial capital refers to the money or assets that an individual or organization has, physical capital refers to tangible assets such as buildings and machinery, human capital refers to the skills and abilities of people, and intellectual capital refers to knowledge, patents, and other intangible assets (Siisiäinen, 2000).

Culture, on the other hand, refers to the way of life, traditions, beliefs, values, and customs of a group of people (Gao & Montgomery, 2022). Culture is not an innate characteristic, but rather a dynamic and evolving construct that is shaped by the experiences, habits, and stories that are shared within a community. Culture has the ability to influence individuals and organizations in profound ways, affecting their values, beliefs, and behaviors. It is a living entity that continues to adapt and change over time, allowing it to remain relevant and meaningful to the people who practice it (Schein, 2021; Pandey & Basu, 2021). Culture has been studied and debated by anthropologists, sociologists, and other experts for many years. One notable reference in the field is the work of British cultural anthropologist Edward Tylor, who defined culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." (Tylor, 1871) This definition highlights the many different aspects of culture that contribute to its unique and complex nature, and underscores the idea that culture is a holistic and integrated system of beliefs, values, and practices that are shared by a community.

The concept of cultural capital refers to the intellectual resources that exist within a particular social group or community (Archer et al, 2021; Shrestha & Sadiq, 2022). According to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital encompasses a wide range of factors that contribute to a person's social position and status, including academic degrees and qualifications, knowledge, cultural codes, language skills, behavior patterns, social etiquette, and other traits that are valued within a particular society.

*Nyai Ontosoroh*, a character from the novel *Bumi Manusia* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer, is depicted as an intelligent and resourceful woman. She has mastered various aspects of business and trade and has a talent for languages. Despite her intelligence and savvy, *Nyai* is filled with a deep sense of resentment and anger. This is largely due to her experiences with her parents, her personal circumstances, and the social and cultural environment in which she lives.

As seen through the eyes of the main character, Minke, *Nyai* is portrayed as a strong and sturdy woman. However, there is a hint of fragility and sadness within her soul, as she has not yet been able to come to terms with her fate. Despite this, *Nyai* is determined to be resilient and to stand firm and refuses to be easily defeated by her circumstances. She chooses to present herself as a strong figure, determined to control her own destiny and to make the most of the life she has been given.

The author aims to shed light on the situation, attitudes, and surroundings of the female characters, with an emphasis on the cultural capital that has been previously discussed. The concept of cultural capital in this context is linked to the structuralist perspective, although the term "capital" is often associated with economics. By exploring how *Nyai Ontosoroh* utilizes cultural capital, economic capital, social capital, and symbolic capital, the author seeks to answer the question of how she navigates the challenges posed by postcolonialism.

The idea of capital has been thoroughly explored in the realm of sociology, particularly through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu's concept of capital outlines the belief that individuals and social groups acquire a variety of forms of capital, including economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. This accumulation of capital allows individuals and groups to elevate their social status and improve their opportunities for success in life. According to Bourdieu, these forms of capital act as resources that can be invested, exchanged, and converted into other forms of capital, providing individuals with a distinct advantage in society. As a result, Bourdieu's theory of capital is a powerful tool for understanding the ways in which social structures and cultural norms shape individual experiences and opportunities.

Bourdieu's contribution to the study of capital has sparked extensive debate and discussion in academic circles. For example, Sánchez-Mena and García-Gómez (2013) in their article "Cultural Capital in Educational Research: A Critical Assessment," delve into the significance of cultural capital in the field of education. The authors examine how cultural capital can influence students' academic achievement and opportunities for upward social mobility. Another study, "Cultural Capital, Gender, and Schooling: Theorizing the School Career of Young Women" (Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2004), investigates the relationship between cultural capital and gender, exploring how young women can harness cultural capital to shape their educational and professional aspirations. This article sheds light on how cultural capital can be a valuable resource for young women in shaping their futures and pursuing their goals. These studies, among many others, demonstrate the ongoing relevance and importance of Bourdieu's work on capital in the academic community.

In his article "The Forms of Capital" (1986), Bourdieu himself offers a comprehensive definition of capital as a resource that can be converted into other forms of capital. He underscores the significance of comprehending the interplay between various forms of capital and their impact on social structures and individual opportunities. This article has had a lasting impact on the field of sociology and has been widely cited, serving as a cornerstone for ongoing research and discussions surrounding capital. To this day, Bourdieu's "The Forms of Capital" continues to be a seminal contribution to the field, providing a basis for ongoing research and debates on the role of capital in shaping social structures and opportunities.

Bourdieu's theories on capital remain highly relevant and impactful in the field of sociology. His work has been the subject of extensive study and debate in academic circles, providing a comprehensive framework for exploring the various forms of capital and their influence on individuals and society as a whole. From economic capital to cultural capital, Bourdieu's theories offer a lens through which to analyze the ways in which these forms of capital shape social structures and opportunities. The ongoing relevance of Bourdieu's work on capital highlights the importance of understanding the role of capital in shaping individual experiences and opportunities, as well as the broader social structures that affect us all.

The state of the art for research on postcolonialism and gender in literature is vast and varied, with a multitude of studies examining the experiences of women during this historical time period. However, this study stands out for its unique focus on the tactics that *Nyai Ontosoroh* used to navigate the challenges of being a woman in a postcolonial society. By using Bourdieu's critical reading framework, the study provides a novel lens through which to examine the experiences of women in postcolonial societies, focusing specifically on the concept of social capital.

The study's focus on the intersectionality of gender, postcolonialism, and social capital is also a unique contribution to the literature. While previous studies have examined the experiences of women in postcolonial societies, few have analyzed how different forms of capital intersected with their experiences. This study highlights the critical role of social capital in shaping the experiences of women during this time period and showcases the ways in which social capital can be leveraged to overcome gender stereotypes and societal challenges.

This research offers a new perspective on the character of *Nyai Ontosoroh*, who is often overlooked in studies of Indonesian literature. Through the analysis of secondary sources, the study sheds new light on the remarkable abilities of *Nyai Ontosoroh* in utilizing her capitals to navigate the challenges of postcolonialism and gender stereotypes. The study's emphasis on the agency of the character and her ability to resist societal norms provides a unique and valuable contribution to the literature on postcolonialism and gender in literature. Overall, this research provides valuable insights into the experiences of women during postcolonialism and highlights the critical role of social capital in shaping their experiences.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The research methodology for this study on *Nyai Ontosoroh*'s capitals amid the challenges of postcolonialism in “Bumi Manusia” will employ a qualitative approach to analyze the character's life and experiences. The study will draw on secondary sources, including literary criticism, biographies, and historical documents, to provide an in-depth analysis of *Nyai Ontosoroh*'s character and context. The research will utilize Bourdieu's critical reading approach as a framework to examine the different forms of capital that *Nyai Ontosoroh* employed and how they intersected with her experiences of postcolonialism and gender stereotypes.

The data analysis process will involve identifying and categorizing the different forms of capital, such as social, cultural, and economic, that *Nyai Ontosoroh* had access to. The study will use a close reading approach to examine the text of “Bumi Manusia” and analyze the interactions between the character and the different forms of capital available to her. Additionally, the study will analyze how *Nyai Ontosoroh*'s capital intersected with her experiences of postcolonialism and gender stereotypes, which were significant challenges during her lifetime. Through this analysis, the study aims to reveal the strategies and tactics *Nyai Ontosoroh* employed to navigate these challenges successfully.

The study will provide a critical discussion of the findings, including the role of social capital in shaping the experiences of women during postcolonialism, as well as the broader implications for our understanding of gender, capital, and power dynamics. The study will conclude by highlighting the significance of understanding the interplay of different forms of capital and their impact on gendered experiences and power dynamics in postcolonial societies.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

It is crucial to assess *Nyai Ontosoroh*'s educational background before evaluating the magnitude of her wealth. Unlike the prevalent education system today, *Nyai Ontosoroh* did not have the privilege of receiving a proper education, including the mandatory nine years of compulsory education. This deficiency in her education can be attributed to several factors such as the limited recognition of the significance of education during her time and the patriarchal views prevalent in the colonial society.

Women were often perceived as mere possessions and were denied opportunities to receive education or even step outside their homes, reflecting the oppressive societal norms.

The cultural and historical context surrounding *Nyai Ontosoroh's* life is vital in comprehending her background and the hurdles she encountered in her quest for education and self-enrichment. However, in the face of such adversities, *Nyai Ontosoroh* was able to surmount these obstacles and leave a mark of significance in her community. This showcases the unwavering determination and fortitude of the human spirit, proving that even in the face of adversity, one can still achieve greatness.

The views on women's education and their place in society during the colonial period have been the focus of numerous academic studies and discussions. A renowned scholar in this area is feminist historian Joan W. Scott, who has published several works that examine the marginalization and exclusion of women's history and experiences from conventional historical accounts (Scott, 1986). By exploring the lives of women such as *Nyai Ontosoroh*, we can acquire a more profound insight into the cultural and historical environment in which they lived and truly appreciate the magnitude of their achievements and contributions. This allows us to recognize and value the role of women in shaping our collective history.

Despite the obstacles and restrictions she faced, *Nyai Ontosoroh* was able to attain an education through a homeschooling system, all due to the assistance of Tuan Mellema. Tuan Mellema, who had acquired her from her father, provided both financial and social support, enabling *Nyai Ontosoroh* to receive a better education and broaden her knowledge. This investment in her education proved to be advantageous, as *Nyai Ontosoroh* displayed exceptional intelligence and critical thinking skills. She was proficient in Dutch, capable of efficiently running the company in Tuan Mellema's absence when he was occupied with his brothel owned by Ah Tjong. Furthermore, she was successful in raising her two children single-handedly, showcasing her outstanding abilities as a parent and caregiver.

As described by Pramoedya in his novel, *Nyai Ontosoroh's* abilities were truly impressive and left a lasting impact on Minke, the main character. This highlights the significance of education and the role it can play in personal development and empowerment, even in the face of societal and cultural barriers.

The issue of women's education and empowerment has been the subject of much scholarly research and debate. A notable reference in this field is the work of Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who has written extensively on the ways in which women's experiences and perspectives are often marginalized and excluded from mainstream narratives. (Adichie, 2009) By examining the experiences of women like *Nyai Ontosoroh*, we can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and historical context in which they lived, and appreciate the important contributions they made despite the obstacles they faced.

*Dalam perjalanan pulang aku tak mampu berkata barang sesuatu. Nyai kurasakan telah menyihir kesadaranku. Annelies memang cantik gilang-gemilang. Namun ibunya yang pandai menaklukkan orang untuk bersujud pada kemauannya (Toer, 2015, hal. 70).*

*On my journey home, I was unable to utter a word. It seemed as though Nyai had cast a spell over my mind. Annelies was dazzlingly beautiful, but her mother, who was skilled at manipulating individuals, submitted to her authority (Toer, 2015, p. 70).*

The quote by Pramoedya Ananta Toer in his book "Toer, 2015, p. 70" highlights the character of *Nyai Ontosoroh* as a formidable figure who not only possesses a deep understanding of science but also a mastery of interpersonal relationships. Her ability to understand and control other people is evident in the way she is able to manipulate individuals to her will, as demonstrated by the protagonist Minke's feelings in the paragraph. This demonstrates that *Nyai Ontosoroh* is a cunning and savvy woman who uses her intelligence to assert her dominance in a male-dominated society. Through her mastery of both scientific and interpersonal knowledge, she has become a powerful and respected figure in her community.

The intelligence displayed by *Nyai Ontosoroh* is a result of both her experiences and her strong will. The author suggests that *Nyai's* determination stems from past grievances that she has experienced. Throughout her life, she has been driven to prove her worth and existence not only to her parents, but also to her children and those in her community. She wants to demonstrate that she is not just a "*Nyai*" but a human being with equal rights and dignity. Her unwavering will and determination to assert herself in a male-dominated society, despite the challenges she faced, is a testament to her strength and resilience as a character.

*Nyai* Ontosoroh's intelligence and resilience illustrate the capacity of individuals to navigate and transcend the societal barriers and limitations that they face. Her experiences also provide a poignant commentary on the ways in which societal and cultural expectations can limit the opportunities available to women. The author's depiction of *Nyai* Ontosoroh as a strong and intelligent woman is a deliberate challenge to traditional gender roles and expectations. It highlights the importance of empowering women to pursue education, gain access to capital, and assert their rights and dignity in the face of patriarchal structures. *Nyai* Ontosoroh's story serves as a powerful reminder of the potential for individuals to overcome adversity and achieve their goals, despite the societal and cultural barriers they may face. Overall, her story is one of resilience, determination, and empowerment, and provides important lessons for individuals and societies alike.

The protagonist in the situation struggles with her identity, as she feels a sense of discomfort being referred to as "Madame" by others. Despite this, she openly acknowledges her identity as a *Nyai*. However, the author detects a hint of resentment in the protagonist's words when she speaks of this topic. This suggests that the protagonist may still feel conflicted about her identity and the societal expectations surrounding it.

The second aspect of cultural capital is the demeanor and speech patterns that are learned from one's social surroundings. In the novel, *Nyai* Ontosoroh, as described by Minke, possesses a character that does not resemble that of a typical concubine. She is highly educated, composed, and exudes a sense of intelligence simply through her manner of speaking. In fact, her knowledge surpasses that of many women from traditional families in her community, due to her eagerness to learn and educate herself. Although much of her knowledge was self-acquired, she was able to effectively assimilate it into her daily life and work.

Despite being a concubine rather than a legally wed wife, *Nyai* Ontosoroh managed to operate a successful business at a time when it was uncommon for women to do so. She was purchased by Mr. Mellema from her parents and was looked down upon by those in her community, including Minke's parents. The perception of *Nyai* Ontosoroh was one of low status and negative opinion due to her unconventional circumstances. However, she was able to overcome these societal obstacles and achieve success in her business ventures.

*"Buaya!" desisnya geram. "Kukeluarkan kau dari E.L.S. di T. Dulu juga dengan perkara yang sama. Semuda itu! Makin tinggi sekolah makin jadi buaya bangkong! Bosan main-main dengan gadis-gadis sebaya sekarang mengeram di sarang Nyai. Mau jadi apa kau ini?" (Toer, 2015, hal. 184).*

"Crocodile!" she hissed furiously. "I'm getting you out of E.L.S. in T. It used to be the same thing. It's that young! The higher the school, the more a croc croc! Tired of messing around with girls the same age now brooding in *Nyai* nests. What do you want to be?" (Toer, 2015, p. 184).

Minke's father, who is a regent, expresses a negative view towards the title of a *Nyai* in his words. He uses the term "incubate" which seems to equate the title with that of an animal, indicating a disdainful attitude. What Minke's father is unaware of, is that *Nyai* Ontosoroh is highly educated, but her level of education is not valued due to the widespread belief that *Nyais* are a marginalized group with no accepted social status in society. Despite her personal achievements, *Nyai* Ontosoroh is still subject to negative perceptions and discrimination based on her title.

The next aspect of cultural capital, according to Pierre Bourdieu's perspective, is one's ability to socialize and interact with others. This capacity for socializing can serve as an indicator of one's cultural resources and social class. The social sphere and the neighborhood sphere can be seen as opportunities to demonstrate and utilize this aspect of cultural capital, as it requires a certain level of cooperation and comfort in social situations. By demonstrating a sophisticated manner of socializing, individuals can showcase their cultural capital and position within society.

During her younger years, *Nyai* Ontosoroh had limited social interactions and was confined to a small circle of acquaintances. As she told her daughter, she rarely ventured outside and had limited opportunities for socialization. This was due to the societal norms of the time, which dictated that high-

class women and men should not mix freely and were expected to maintain a secluded lifestyle. As the daughter of a well-respected individual, she was instructed to stay within the confines of her room unless there were guests present. The limitations placed on her socialization reflect the restrictive expectations and norms of her social class and time period.

*Waktu berumur tigabelas aku mulai dipingit, dan hanya tahu dapur, ruang belakang dan kamarku sendiri. Teman-teman lain sudah pada dikawinkan. Kalau ada tetangga atau sanak datang baru kurasai diri berada di luar rumah seperti semasa kanak-kanak dulu. Malah duduk di pendopo aku tak diperkenankan. Menginjak lantainya pun tidak (Toer, 2015, hal. 118).*

When I was thirteen I began to be secluded, and only knew the kitchen, the back room and my own room. Other friends have already married. When neighbors or relatives come, I feel like I'm outside the house like when I was a child. Even sitting in the pavilion I was not allowed. Not even stepping on the floor (Toer, 2015, p. 118).

This phenomenon of restricted social interactions is common among individuals who are or are related to those who are well-known. In this case, *Nyai* Ontosoroh's position as a daughter of a respected individual meant that her socialization was closely monitored, as too much freedom could potentially tarnish the reputation of her extended family. It is therefore understandable why *Nyai* Ontosoroh was limited in her social interactions and was expected to maintain a secluded lifestyle. The societal expectations and norms of her social class placed significant constraints on her ability to socialize and interact with others.

Even after becoming a *Nyai*, Sanikem did not actively engage in socializing beyond her business dealings. She believed that distancing herself from society would protect her from baseless judgments from individuals who were not familiar with her. This process of detachment allowed her to feel more secure and liberated. By limiting her social interactions, she was able to avoid the scrutinizing gaze of society and focus on her own pursuits without the pressure of societal expectations.

Acquiring cultural capital can be challenging for individuals who lack sufficient economic and social capital, especially for women who continue to face stigma and prejudice in postcolonial societies. Despite these obstacles, *Nyai* Ontosoroh in the book is able to attain cultural capital and use it to help the women and those in her community. Despite the negative label that society has assigned to her due to her status, she leverages the cultural capital she has acquired to navigate the challenges of living in a colonial period society. Her ability to overcome the barriers facing her and to use her cultural capital for the benefit of others highlights her strength and resilience.

## CONCLUSION

This study providing a valuable insight into the experiences of women during the postcolonial era in Indonesia. The analysis of *Nyai* Ontosoroh's life, using Bourdieu's critical reading framework, highlights the interplay between social, cultural, and economic capital and its impact on an individual's ability to navigate societal and cultural barriers. *Nyai* Ontosoroh's remarkable abilities in utilizing her capitals and her resilience in the face of patriarchal structures provide valuable lessons for individuals and societies alike. It underscores the importance of education, gender empowerment, and access to capital in achieving individual and societal goals. It provides an opportunity to challenge traditional gender roles and expectations, and to encourage the empowerment of women in patriarchal societies. The analysis of *Nyai* Ontosoroh's life highlights the significant role of social capital in shaping the experiences of women during the postcolonial era, and its potential to empower individuals to transcend societal barriers and achieve their goals.

This study provides a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between gender, postcolonialism, and social capital, and its impact on the experiences and opportunities available to individuals. It underscores the potential for individuals to overcome adversity and achieve their goals, and the importance of empowering women to pursue education, access capital, and assert their rights and dignity in patriarchal societies. This research provides valuable insights for scholars and readers alike, and highlights the critical role of social capital in shaping individual experiences and opportunities.

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