

Feudal colonialism: Racial authority, aristocratic brokers, and the subjugation of the body in *Pangeran dari Timur*

Aslan Abidin^{1*}, Angellika Matta¹, Andi Karman¹

¹Faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

Article Info	Abstract
Keywords: colonial Java; feudal colonialism; Indonesian historical literature; racial hierarchy; Raden Saleh Article History Received: 2026-07-01 Reviewed: 2026-07-12 Accepted: 2026-09-01  License: CC BY-SA 4.0	This article examines how colonialism is represented not as a simple opposition between European colonizers and Indigenous subjects in <i>Pangeran dari Timur</i> , a novel by Iksaka Banu and Kurnia Effendi. Employing qualitative content analysis, the study examines 52 purposively selected textual excerpts, validated through close reading and coded into two analytical domains: feudal colonialism and its effects, and racialized status hierarchy. The findings indicate that elite collaboration, discrimination, and colonial privilege are the most prominent patterns in the corpus. Colonialism emerges as a layered political and cultural formation, particularly in Java. Dutch and British colonial power becomes effective because it is translated through kings, regents, priyayi, landlords, court protocols, land relations, and ritualized forms of deference. Everyday objects and gestures, including shoes, clothing, seating arrangements, language, kneeling, and artistic patronage, transform hierarchy into embodied habit. Raden Saleh appears as an ambivalent figure who reveals both the possibilities and the limits of colonial inclusion. The article proposes feudal colonialism as a literary-analytical model for reading colonial formations in which foreign racial authority and Indigenous aristocratic mediation operate simultaneously.
*Corresponding Author	Aslan Abidin Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia; aslanabidin@unm.ac.id
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INTRODUCTION

Historical fiction occupies an important position in postcolonial literary studies because it reconfigures the relationship among memory, political authority, and narrative form. Historical literature reconstructs the past and renders it more intelligible. A central question in colonial fiction is not merely whether a text represents domination, but how the text explains the social durability of that domination. Novels such as *Pangeran dari Timur* by Iksaka Banu and Kurnia Effendi are therefore significant because they refuse to reduce colonial Java to a simple opposition between Europeans and Indigenous subjects. The colonial world of the novel is constructed through layered relations among Dutch and British officials, Javanese aristocrats, regents, priyayi, landlords, servants, peasants, artists, and spectators of history (Banu & Effendi, 2020).

To account for this layered structure, this article develops the concept of feudal colonialism. The term does not equate colonialism with feudalism. Rather, feudal colonialism is defined as a representational mechanism through which foreign colonial authority becomes socially effective by using, preserving, rewarding, and redirecting Indigenous hierarchies. *Pangeran dari Timur* does not position colonial power outside Javanese political culture; instead, it inserts that power into court protocols, landholding, status etiquette, patronage, education, clothing, and the choreography of deference.

This proposition builds on Loomba's argument that colonialism is material, discursive, and ideological, and that it always interacts with local histories rather than operating in an empty space (Loomba, 2003). It also follows Said's insight that colonial knowledge produces the East as an object that can be classified and administered (Said, 1979). In addition, Bhabha's account of

colonial interaction emphasizes ambivalence, mimicry, and partial inclusion in relations between colonizers and colonized subjects (Bhabha, 1994).

Conceptually, feudal colonialism is treated here as a literary-analytical model rather than a historiographical label that closes off the complexity of Javanese history. The concept has four components: foreign racial authority; Indigenous aristocratic brokerage; the materiality of land and labor; and the habituation of hierarchy through the body and etiquette. Its textual indicators include scenes of elite mediation, the hollowing out of court sovereignty, the distribution of racial privilege, the regulation of clothing and posture, and conflicts between feudal loyalty and anticolonial dignity. The concept is not intended to explain all forms of Indonesian colonialism; rather, it names a pattern in which foreign power becomes localized through pre-existing structures of rank.

The need for such a concept becomes clear when *Pangeran dari Timur* is read in relation to debates on colonial hierarchy. Recent postcolonial scholarship emphasizes that colonial power endures through race, institutions, epistemology, language, urban space, media, and everyday routines, rather than through military domination alone. Studies of racialized belonging show that race structures national membership and social legitimacy (Agius Vallejo, 2026; Biaback Anong & Perko, 2026). Other studies demonstrate that European and imperial orders continue to mobilize race as a mechanism of authority, mobility, value, and legitimacy (Agathangelou et al., 2026). Research in culture and education further shows how colonial legacies operate through hierarchies of knowledge, the dominance of English, and epistemic gatekeeping (Shah et al., 2026; Bittencourt, 2026). Although these studies do not address colonial Java specifically, they help explain how colonial domination is sustained by institutions and classifications that appear ordinary.

At the same time, this article avoids universalizing theories that erase Javanese specificity. Bamberger and Morris (2026) warn that some postcolonial critiques gain persuasive force by reducing complex relations to essentialist binaries. Markland (2026) likewise calls for historically sensitive analysis that provincializes Western categories. Feudal colonialism is therefore employed as a situated reading strategy grounded in the context of Indigenous Javanese feudal structures. Anderson shows that power in Java can be encoded through rank, etiquette, gradation, and symbolic submission (Anderson, 2006). Carey demonstrates that nineteenth-century colonial conflict cannot be separated from court politics, aristocratic authority, and the crisis of the old Javanese order (Carey, 2007).

The research gap addressed in this article lies in the absence of an integrated model for reading *Pangeran dari Timur* as a narrative of racialized colonial authority mediated by Indigenous feudal structures. Indonesian postcolonial literary scholarship has discussed nationalism, gender subordination, cultural violence, and colonial memory (Bandel, 2013; Foulcher & Day, 2002). Studies of Iksaka Banu's historical fiction have also shown how literary texts stage colonial domination and silenced subjectivities (Aisyah et al., 2024; Annisa et al., 2024). Nevertheless, a more precise analytical vocabulary is still required to explain how *Pangeran dari Timur* binds court etiquette, elite collaboration, land relations, racial privilege, symbolic posture, and artistic patronage into a single system of power. The research gap, therefore, is not the absence of postcolonial readings, but the lack of a model that explains how foreign authority and local hierarchy operate together within colonialism.

The novel intensifies this problem by centering its narrative on Raden Saleh. He is portrayed as more than an Indigenous victim, collaborator, or nationalist hero. Raden Saleh is a privileged Indigenous artist whose mobility depends on European patronage, aristocratic status, and recognition within a colonial world that never grants him full equality. His career connects literature with visual culture. Scholarship on his painting of Diponegoro's arrest has debated whether the work should be read as proto-nationalist critique, aristocratic performance, or an ambivalent expression of colonial modernity (Kraus, 2005; Protschky, 2011). *Pangeran dari Timur* transforms this debate into narrative form by asking who is permitted to represent history, who may stand upright, who may enter spaces of recognition, and who remains dependent on permission. This article addresses two research questions. First, how does *Pangeran dari Timur* represent feudal colonialism and its social, political, economic, and cultural effects? Second, how

does *Pangeran dari Timur* represent differences in status between Indigenous subjects and Dutch or British colonial figures?

The central argument is that the novel's strongest political insight lies in its representation of colonialism as a dual formation: racialized European authority at the upper level and Indigenous feudal mediation in the middle. The article's empirical contribution is the transparent coding of 52 textual excerpts. Its theoretical contribution is the concept of feudal colonialism as a transferable yet context-sensitive literary model for analyzing colonial formations in which foreign power governs through local apparatuses, inherited authority, ritual submission, and everyday signs.

METHOD

This study employs qualitative content analysis within an interpretive postcolonial framework. The primary object of analysis is the novel *Pangeran dari Timur* by Iksaka Banu and Kurnia Effendi (2020). The working corpus consists of 52 textual excerpts selected from scenes and statements that directly address the two research problems: the representation of feudal colonialism and its effects, and the representation of racialized status hierarchies between Indigenous subjects and colonial figures. The excerpts were selected according to three inclusion criteria. First, a passage had to represent a concrete power relation, such as elite collaboration, court protocol, land control, racial privilege, social exclusion, economic dependency, or resistance. Second, the passage had to perform interpretive work within the novel rather than merely provide historical background. Third, it had to be connected to one of the two research questions.

Passages that merely described the setting without interpretive significance for colonial or feudal power were excluded. This procedure treats literary evidence as a structured corpus of meaningful scenes. The selected excerpts are not treated as a statistical sample of the entire novel, but as a theoretical-purposive corpus suitable for close reading.

To strengthen the transparency and auditability of the analysis, the coding process involved layered readings by two coders. The first coder, the principal researcher, conducted the initial reading, identified excerpts relevant to colonial relations, feudal status, racial hierarchy, and the forms of power relations central to the study, and assigned preliminary codes based on previously established operational definitions. The second coder, a member of the research team, reviewed the excerpts, codes, and categorizations using the same narrative context and analytical criteria. Each excerpt was then re-examined to determine its dominant category according to its narrative function in the scene. Where an excerpt could potentially represent more than one category, classification was based on the most salient function, such as elite mediation, political impact, lifestyle differentiation, or racial exclusion. Coding differences identified during the review stage were recorded and discussed by both coders by reconsidering the excerpts in their narrative contexts, the operational definitions of the categories, and the study's theoretical framework. Final decisions were reached by consensus after the two coders agreed on both the category and the interpretive rationale underlying it. This procedure made each coding decision traceable to the textual evidence and analytical criteria employed.

The coding process proceeded in four stages. First, each excerpt was reread to identify the dominant mechanism of colonial power or the dominant effect of hierarchy. Second, the excerpts were grouped into two analytical domains. The first domain, feudal colonialism and its effects, comprised seven categories: elite collaboration, colonial domination, resistance, social effects, political effects, economic effects, and cultural effects. The second domain, racialized status hierarchy, comprised three categories: colonial privilege, lifestyle differentiation, and discrimination. Third, descriptive statistics were used to map thematic density. Fourth, the coded findings were synthesized with postcolonial theory and recent scholarship on racialized hierarchy, cultural hegemony, and colonial legacies.

This method combines close reading with transparent categorization. Framework development in qualitative research requires visible links among the literature, category construction, and conceptual validation (Heydari et al., 2023; Lahn & Berntsen, 2023). Topic mapping helps make a corpus legible without reducing interpretation to counting (Muller et al., 2021; Yadav et al., 2024). Content-analysis-based studies demonstrate the importance of pattern identification, category consistency, and careful movement from textual evidence to analytical

concepts (Correa Lucero & Martens, 2026; Ravenda et al., 2024; Zugaj et al., 2025). These methodological insights were adapted to a literary corpus that is small in scale but semantically dense.

Case-study logic guides the research design. *Pangeran dari Timur* is treated as a theoretically strategic case because it brings together historical figures, colonial administration, Javanese court culture, visual art, aristocratic mobility, and modern nationalist retrospection. Case-based qualitative inference requires clarity regarding why a case is selected and what that case can and cannot demonstrate. Accordingly, this article does not claim that a single novel represents the entirety of Indonesian colonial fiction. Rather, it argues that the novel enables feudal colonialism to be formulated analytically and subsequently compared with other literary representations of colonial governance. The use of frequencies is deliberately limited. Categories containing a larger number of excerpts indicate recurrence within the selected corpus, not statistical generalization to the entire novel or to Indonesian literature. A single scene may be conceptually decisive even if it appears only once. Conversely, repeated administrative references may carry less aesthetic intensity than a single scene of bodily humiliation. The study therefore combines descriptive distributions with close interpretive analysis.

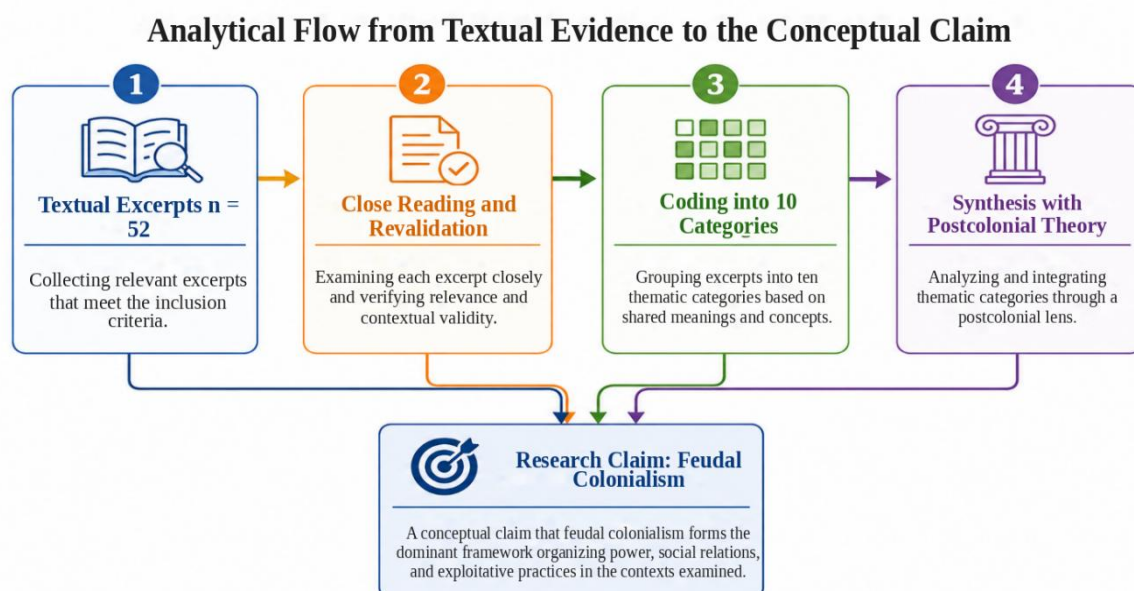


Figure 1. Analytical flow from textual evidence to the research claim

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are presented by moving from thematic distribution to close interpretation. The corpus contains 52 excerpts. Of these, 35 excerpts (67.3%) fall within the domain of feudal colonialism and its effects, while 17 excerpts (32.7%) fall within the domain of racialized status hierarchy. This distribution suggests that the political imagination of *Pangeran dari Timur* is structured less by isolated acts of European cruelty than by a system in which colonial authority is organized through local mediation, symbolic protocols, land relations, embodied ranking, and cultural aspiration.

Table 1 presents the coding architecture. The most frequent category is elite collaboration, represented by eight excerpts (15.4% of the corpus). This is followed by discrimination with seven excerpts (13.5%) and colonial privilege with six excerpts (11.5%). Colonial domination, resistance, and cultural effects each appear in five excerpts (9.6%). Social, political, and economic effects, as well as lifestyle differentiation, each appear in four excerpts (7.7%).

This pattern is significant because elite collaboration, colonial privilege, and discrimination form the core grammar of the colonial world in the novel. Table 1 presents the coding architecture and illustrative decision rules.

Table 1. Presents the coding architecture and illustrative decision rules

Domain	Category	Operational Meaning	n	%
Elite collaboration	Elite alliance	Collaboration among colonial elites in decision-making and diplomacy.	3	5.8
Elite collaboration	Mutual benefit	Distribution of economic and political benefits among colonial elites.	5	9.6
Colonial domination	Land control	Control of customary land through appropriation, coerced leasing, or colonial law.	6	11.5
	Labor control	Forced or inequitable exploitation of Indigenous labor.	4	7.7
Resistance	Passive resistance	Covert or symbolic forms of resistance by colonized communities.	3	5.8
	Active resistance	Open resistance through movements, protests, or rebellion.	2	3.8
Social effects	Social stratification	Formation of social hierarchy based on race and coloniality.	5	9.6
	Subjectification	Internalization of inferiority by colonized groups.	2	3.8
Political effects	Policy influence	Formulation of policies that advance colonial interests.	4	7.7
Economic effects	Resource exploitation	Exploitation of natural resources for colonial economic interests.	4	7.7
Cultural effects	Cultural erasure	Erasure of local values, traditions, and knowledge.	5	9.6
Colonial privilege	Legal advantage	Legal and administrative privileges granted to colonial groups.	6	11.5
Lifestyle differentiation	Symbolic differentiation	Construction of lifestyles and symbols of exclusivity among colonial groups.	4	7.7
Discrimination	Institutional exclusion	Structural discrimination in access and opportunity.	7	13.5
Total			52	100

Note. Percentages are calculated from the 52 excerpts and function as descriptive indicators.

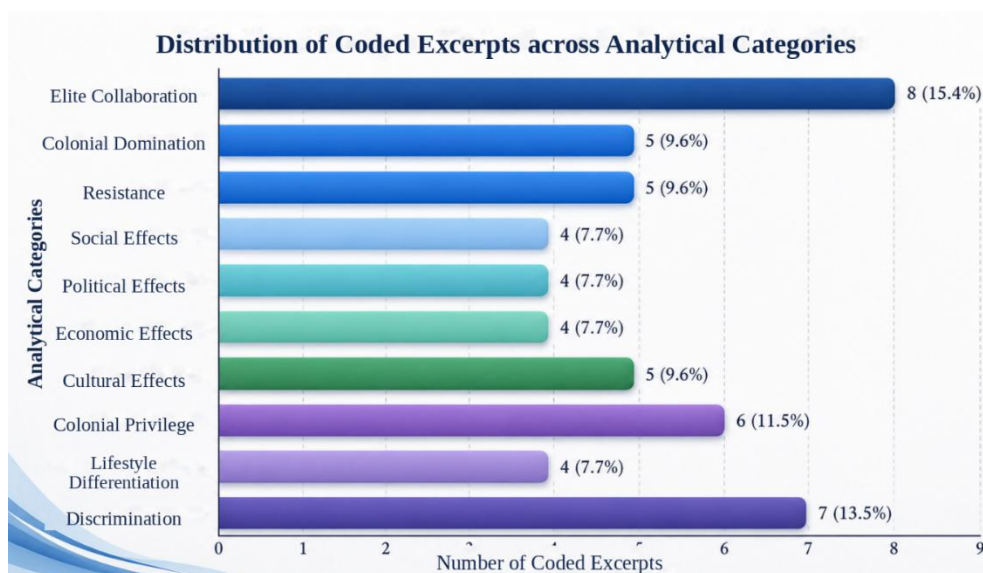


Figure 2. Distribution of coded excerpts across ten analytical categories

The distribution helps prevent a merely anecdotal reading. A reader may recall one dramatic scene of humiliation or one powerful moment involving Raden Saleh and assume that the novel's politics reside only there. The coded data reveal something more structural. Collaboration and hierarchy recur across scenes involving court life, land, education, patronage, public deference, clothing, and artistic recognition. The density of these motifs supports the

concept of feudal colonialism: the colonial order does not simply dominate local society from outside; it turns certain local institutions into media through which domination becomes ordinary.

The first major finding is that *Pangeran dari Timur* represents colonialism as a system of Indigenous brokerage. The colonial state preserves its influence by maintaining and rewarding local elites whose authority is useful. Kings, regents, priyayi, landlords, and educated aristocrats retain status, but the value of that status is reorganized through colonial recognition. Aristocratic figures in the novel are therefore politically ambivalent. They are not merely victims of external power; some also benefit from the order that subordinates them. Yet they are not sovereign partners either, because their authority becomes increasingly dependent on colonial approval.

This structure explains why the novel repeatedly returns to land, rank, and access. Policies that allow aristocrats to lease land to Dutch capitalists do not merely modernize property relations. They transform feudal ownership into a channel of colonial extraction. Peasants experience colonialism not as an abstract ideology but as the combined pressure of foreign authority and local landlords. This insight resonates with research on colonial landscapes in West Java showing how plantation settlements organized space according to racial and class hierarchies (Nuralia et al., 2026). It also parallels postcolonial studies in other Southeast Asian settings, including research on colonial resorts and the built environment in Vietnam, where architecture, leisure, and spatial planning served both practical and political functions for European elites (Jennings, 2003).

The figure of the local broker is central. In the novel, a multilingual regent who is connected to European officials and useful in translating law and custom appears educated and capable. Yet precisely this competence makes him valuable to the colonial administration. Translation, knowledge, and refinement become techniques of government.

This is not simply a story of corrupt individuals. It is a structural condition in which local knowledge is made legible to foreign power. This point closely aligns with arguments that colonial and neocolonial power operate not only through coercion but also through epistemic management, institutional normalization, and the selective elevation of compliant intermediaries (Adeniyi, 2026; Bağlama et al., 2026; Merlingen, 2026). The brokerage pattern also complicates the moral vocabulary of collaboration. Collaboration cannot be explained solely as betrayal. Some figures cooperate to survive; some seek status; some believe limited reform may be possible from within the colonial order; and others have internalized European prestige. Contemporary scholarship on postcolonial politics and local power likewise reminds us that domination is often reproduced through negotiated local legitimacy rather than by a single vertical command (Manoli, 2026). *Pangeran dari Timur* dramatizes this condition by showing that elite negotiation is paid for by those below: peasants, servants, laborers, and ordinary people who bear the material costs of aristocratic compromise.

The second major finding concerns the reorganization of sovereignty through protocol. The novel repeatedly stages the contraction of court authority through seating arrangements, ceremonies, clothing, gestures, and forms of address. Colonial power does not need to abolish the court in order to dominate it. It can preserve the court as spectacle while hollowing out its political substance.

When the court is described as “little more than a mere plaything” (Banu & Effendi, 2020), the metaphor condenses the novel’s political diagnosis: royal grandeur remains visible, but sovereignty has become something manipulated by others. This is a form of symbolic domination. A king may still be called a king, and a palace may still be called a palace, but the meaning of authority changes when European officials determine the protocols of recognition.

The colonial order turns etiquette into a political technology. Who sits where, who bows, who waits, who receives deference, and who may stand upright become matters of governance. Anderson’s account of gradation and hierarchy in Javanese political language helps explain why these scenes carry such force (Anderson, 2006). Carey’s historical account of nineteenth-century Java likewise shows that colonial conflict unfolded through court politics and the crisis of the old order, not only through warfare (Carey, 2007).

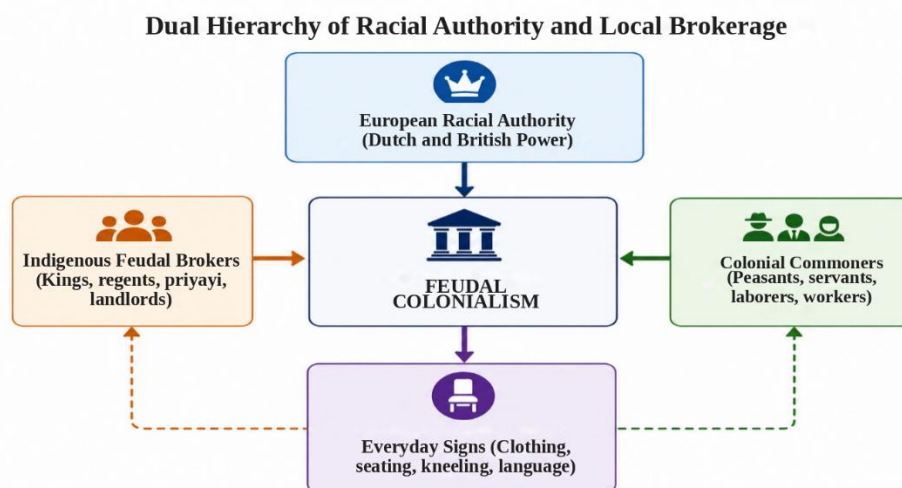


Figure 3. Feudal colonialism as a dual hierarchy of racial authority and local brokerage

Figure 3 provides a conceptual synthesis of the evidence discussed above. European racial authority occupies the upper tier of the hierarchy. Indigenous feudal brokers constitute the internal mechanism of mediation. Ordinary colonized people occupy the lower tier, where the consequences of political compromise become material. Everyday signs - clothing, seating, kneeling, language, and permission - translate this abstract structure into embodied habit. The model shows why feudal colonialism differs from a simple colonizer/colonized binary: the same Indigenous aristocrat can be superior to ordinary people while remaining subordinate to Europeans.

Such layered status is not unique to the setting of *Pangeran dari Timur*. Recent studies across different regions show that colonial orders often reproduce hierarchy through racialized recognition, internal stratification, and the moral elevation of dominant groups. Research on the global color line and regional mobility demonstrates that race, ethnicity, and origin continue to structure access even where formal rights are available (Biaback Anong & Perko, 2026). Research on colonial borders shows how policing practices secure racial orders by marking racialized bodies as less than fully human (Brito, 2026). Studies of whiteness and housing in Chile likewise show that racialization can reorganize class struggles into new forms of postcolonial exclusion (Bonhomme, 2026).

In *Pangeran dari Timur*, racial hierarchy becomes visible through lifestyle, access, and bodily posture. Shoes, European clothing, vehicles, servants, education, and leisure practices are not trivial details; they classify bodies. Passages that identify shoes and Western clothing as symbols of status and rank (Banu & Effendi, 2020) transform material objects into social theory. Clothing is not merely decorative. It regulates who may appear refined, who may cross the thresholds of certain spaces, and who must remain visibly local.

The episode in which Raden Saleh's desire not to kneel is condensed in the phrase "no need to kneel" (Banu & Effendi, 2020) is a decisive point of close reading. The issue is not clothing alone, but the right for the body to be recognized as equal in public space. Trousers, an upright posture, and access to European-coded spaces become signs of political dignity. The fact that such matters require permission reveals the microscopic reach of colonial power. The body is regulated before it speaks; posture is interpreted before an argument is made. The novel's critique therefore extends beyond administrative domination to expose the bodily grammar of colonial status.

Racialized status is also reproduced through exclusion. Indigenous subjects are denied equal access to facilities, conversations, recognition, and institutional trust. Europeans may receive deference simply because of their European identity, whereas Indigenous subjects must continually demonstrate exceptional worthiness. This reinforces Said's insight that colonial discourse classifies before it evaluates (Said, 1979). It also resonates with scholarship on racialized belonging that treats belonging as historically produced and stratified rather than natural (Agius Vallejo, 2026).

The third major finding concerns resistance. The novel does not portray Indigenous society as passive. Resistance appears in several modes: ethical refusal, antifeudal critique, nationalist debate, and artistic intervention. This range matters because feudal colonialism cannot be resisted simply by opposing Europeans; it must also be resisted by interrogating local institutions that have learned to mediate European power.

The novel's anticolonial imagination is therefore also antifeudal. This claim connects with scholarship on resistance literature that moves beyond underground or armed struggle toward public, symbolic, and cultural defiance (Biswas, 2026; Chan, 2026). It also resonates with anticolonial and antiracist traditions that connect sovereignty, dignity, and universal claims to justice (Ibhawoh & Nnake, 2026).

Raden Saleh's visual agency constitutes the most sophisticated expression of resistance. He cannot be reduced to collaborator, imitator, nationalist, or victim. His training in European art gives him a language of representation; his aristocratic and colonial connections grant him access; and his racialized status marks the limits of that access. His art can challenge colonial visibility, yet his biography remains entangled in colonial patronage. This ambivalence makes Bhabha's concept of mimicry useful but insufficient (Bhabha, 1994). Raden Saleh is not merely "almost the same, but not quite"; he is a figure whose partial inclusion depends on feudal rank and whose critical capacity is enabled by the very world that simultaneously constrains him.

The novel's visual dimension extends the article's contribution. Studies of visual culture and colonial modernity show how images, photography, and architecture can normalize progress, patriotism, social hierarchy, and colonial power (Pereira, 2026; Protschky, 2011). Scholarship on literature and empire similarly demonstrates how racial hierarchies are inscribed in narrative form and subsequently contested through editing or critical reading (Morrissey, 2026; Paulk, 2026; Zaremba, 2026).

Pangeran dari Timur joins these concerns by making painting part of the struggle over historical authority. To paint Diponegoro, narrate Raden Saleh, or stage a court scene is to ask whose gaze organizes the past. Table 2 presents a matrix linking dominant textual patterns to their interpretive claims.

Table 2. Presents a matrix linking dominant textual patterns to their interpretive claims

Category	Dominant Textual Pattern	Textual Anchors	Theoretical Function	Manuscript Claim
Elite Collaboration	Coordination, partnership, shared interests.	Local elites, shared interests, collaboration, diplomacy.	Explains local co-optation as a strategy of colonial legitimation (Gramsci; Said).	Colonialism endures through strategic partnerships with local elites.
Colonial Domination	Territorial control, exploitation, regulation.	Land control, labor, colonial law, coercion.	Explains mechanisms of structural and economic domination (Fanon; Young).	Colonial power is exercised through control over land, labor, and law.
Resistance	Opposition, refusal, subaltern agency.	Resistance, protest, open and covert opposition, colonized communities.	Highlights agency and resistance to domination (Scott; Foucault).	Colonized communities are not passive; they resist both openly and covertly.
Social Effects	Social hierarchy, inequality, stratification.	Social hierarchy, race, colony, inferiority, stratification, marginalization.	Explains the reproduction of social hierarchy and stratification (Bourdieu; Wallerstein).	Colonialism creates social stratification based on race and coloniality.
Political Effects	Colonial policy, legitimacy, political control.	Colonial policy, political control, legitimacy, power.	Explains how policy advances colonial interests (Bhabha; Lugones).	Colonial policies are designed to perpetuate colonial interests and political control.
Economic Effects	Resource exploitation, extraction, profit.	Exploitation, natural resources, colonial economy, profit.	Explains economic motives and structural exploitation (Marx; Amin).	Economic exploitation is a principal foundation of colonialism.

Category	Dominant Textual Pattern	Textual Anchors	Theoretical Function	Manuscript Claim
Cultural Effects	Assimilation, cultural erasure, control of knowledge.	Erasure, values, traditions, local knowledge, culture.	Explains cultural hegemony and colonial knowledge (Spivak; Mignolo).	Colonialism erodes local values, traditions, and knowledge.
Colonial Privilege	Privilege, special rights, structural discrimination.	Privilege, law, administration, colonial groups.	Explains the structural privileges of colonial groups (Weber; Du Bois).	Colonialism grants legal and administrative privileges to colonizers.
Lifestyle Differentiation	Status symbols, exclusivity, lifestyle differentiation.	Lifestyle, symbols, exclusivity, modernity, colonial groups.	Explains symbolic capital and the construction of colonial elite identity (Bourdieu; Elias).	Colonialism differentiates lifestyles to reinforce status and domination.
Discrimination	Exclusion, marginalization, structural injustice.	Discrimination, exclusion, access, opportunity, institutions.	Explains structural discrimination and systemic exclusion (Crenshaw; Mbembe).	Discrimination is institutionalized through unequal access and socioeconomic opportunities.

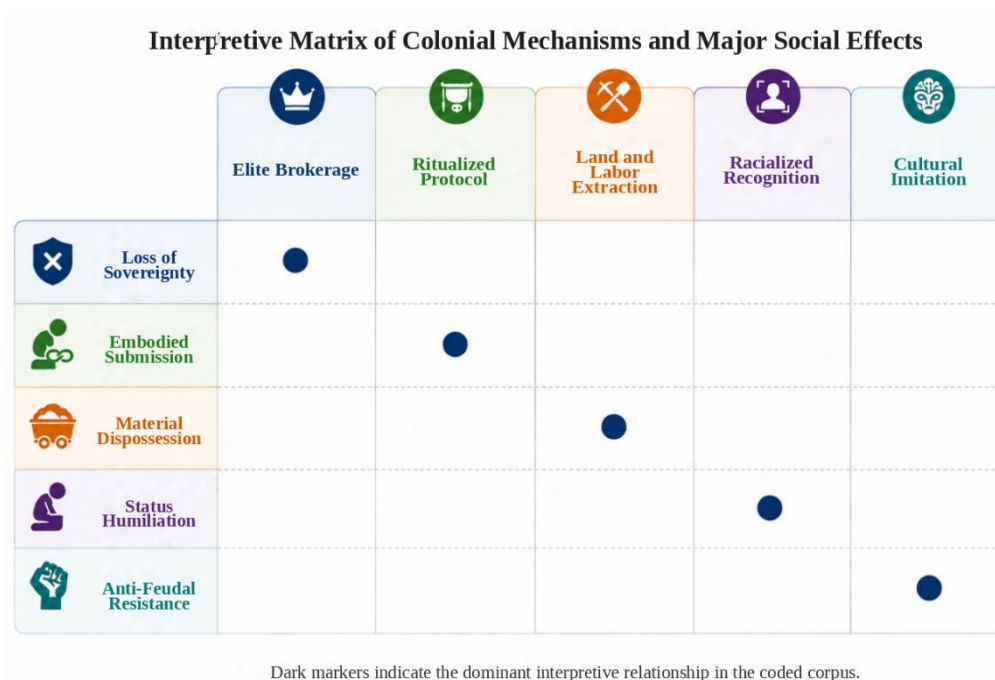


Figure 4. Interpretive matrix of colonial mechanisms and their principal social effects

Figure 4 clarifies relationships among mechanisms that may not be visible when the data are read only as a list of categories. Elite brokerage produces a loss of sovereignty; ritualized protocol produces embodied submission; land and labor extraction produces material dispossession; racialized recognition produces status humiliation; and cultural imitation produces antifeudal resistance because imitation exposes the fragility of local legitimacy. The visualization is therefore not ornamental but argumentative: it shows how feudal colonialism operates as a relational system.

The concept of feudal colonialism offers three analytical advantages. First, it prevents colonialism from being imagined as wholly external. Colonial authority in the novel is foreign, yet it becomes durable by entering local structures. Second, the concept prevents feudalism from being romanticized as an authentic tradition. Some traditions sustain dignity; others train subjects in submission and can be captured by colonial power. Third, the concept prevents racial hierarchy from being treated as merely symbolic. Race operates through clothing, posture, access, education, leisure, and the distribution of trust. In this sense, the concept brings together

Loomba's (2003) material-discursive model of colonialism, Said's (1979) critique of classificatory knowledge, Bhabha's (1994) account of ambivalence, and Anderson's (2006) analysis of Javanese hierarchy.

This conceptual contribution speaks to broader decolonial debates. Adeniyi (2026) argues that theory can be generated from local epistemic worlds rather than merely imported from Western frameworks. Chimbi (2026) cautions that decolonization should not be reduced to race or nationality alone because colonial structures may be reproduced by a range of actors. Andreucci et al. (2026) show that struggles for subaltern hegemony require articulation across different visions of sovereignty rather than dichotomous analysis. These insights help explain why feudal colonialism is more than a local label. It is a locally grounded concept that can travel cautiously to other contexts in which empire governs through pre-existing hierarchies.

The concept also helps explain why the novel remains relevant beyond its nineteenth-century setting. Recent scholarship on coloniality in technology, education, public policy, climate discourse, and management shows that older hierarchies can be reorganized in new institutional forms (Correa Lucero & Martens, 2026; Bağlama et al., 2026). This article does not claim that these contemporary systems are equivalent to colonial Java. Instead, it draws a methodological lesson: domination becomes durable when it is embedded in institutions already inhabited by people. In *Pangeran dari Timur*, these institutions include the royal court, landlords' estates, colonial schools, studios, drawing rooms, and the etiquette of submission.

Historical literature therefore needs to be read not only for the reconstruction of facts or nationalist memory, but also for its conceptual work. *Pangeran dari Timur* theorizes power narratively. It tests how domination operates through scenes, bodies, spaces, and objects before the critic names that operation as theory. This aligns with postcolonial literary scholarship that treats narrative, myth, language, and translation as sites through which communities reconstruct memory and renegotiate social order (Laidi & Bessedik, 2026; Neba, 2026; Rabéa, 2026).

The category of cultural effects connects the political with the intimate. In the novel, European modernity is not rejected wholesale. Education, painting techniques, travel, and debate all create new forms of possibility and opportunity. The problem lies in the unequal distribution of modernity under colonial conditions.

Europeans claim modernity as evidence of civilizational superiority. They selectively grant Indigenous elites access while ordinary people encounter modernity primarily as dispossession, taxation, wage dependency, or humiliation. This ambivalence resembles recent critiques of postcolonial education and decolonization that reject simple replacement models and examine how institutions continue to reproduce colonial and neoliberal hierarchies while claiming to reform them (Bamberger & Morris, 2026; Chimbi, 2026).

The economic dimension prevents feudal colonialism from being treated as merely symbolic. Land, labor, rent, taxes, debt, and dependency are central to the novel's account of power. When peasants identify "the Dutch and the landlords" as a shared source of calamity (Banu & Effendi, 2020), the novel names a system rather than a single enemy.

The phrase "the Dutch and the landlords" is significant because it links foreign authority to local extraction. Studies of colonial dispossession and resource politics in other contexts show that colonial legacies often endure through relations among global capital, local elites, and material loss (Brett & Hill, 2026; Nuralia et al., 2026).

The social dimension is equally sharp. Elite imitation of European leisure - drinking, gambling, sexual exploitation, and ornamental refinement - marks a loss of public responsibility. The novel does not condemn every form of cultural exchange; rather, it distinguishes exchange from dependency.

A culture becomes politically vulnerable when its elites learn to measure distinction by proximity to colonial prestige while distancing themselves from the people below. Karam et al. (2026) use the term "repellent culture" for conditions in which Indigenous institutions fail to meet social aspirations under the pressures of authoritarianism, inequality, and Western cultural hegemony. *Pangeran dari Timur* stages an early version of this problem: the more local authority seeks validation from colonial taste, the more it loses ethical legitimacy.

This reading clarifies the place of hegemony in the article. Hegemony in *Pangeran dari Timur* does not operate solely through ideological persuasion. It works through practical common

sense: the assumption that Europeans deserve seats, aristocrats deserve deference, Western objects signify refinement, peasants should bear burdens silently, and exceptional Indigenous subjects must seek permission merely to appear equal. Neo-Gramscian and postcolonial studies of hegemony emphasize that domination endures when it becomes ordinary, morally plausible, and institutionally reproduced (Andreucci et al., 2026; Merlingen, 2026). The novel's strength lies in making this common sense visible as a historical construction.

Finally, the findings have implications for how Indonesian historical literature may be compared globally without being dissolved into global theory. The novel shares themes with postcolonial literature elsewhere: ambivalent elites, racialized recognition, symbolic violence, cultural imitation, and resistant art. Yet its specific architecture is Javanese and Indonesian. It depends on the royal court, priyayi rank, colonial painting, the memory of Diponegoro, and Raden Saleh's distinctive position between Europe and Java. Comparison should proceed through analogy rather than equivalence. *Pangeran dari Timur* may be placed alongside studies of postcolonial texts from Algeria, Africa, the Caribbean, and Egypt because they all examine colonial hegemony and cultural resistance. Yet its conceptual center remains the conversion of Javanese feudal authority into colonial infrastructure (Laidi & Bessedik, 2026; Neba, 2026; Rabéa, 2026).

This analysis has limitations. The corpus is purposive rather than exhaustive; the article examines one novel rather than a national literary tradition; and the frequencies are descriptive rather than inferential. These limits define the scope of the claims. The argument is that *Pangeran dari Timur* provides a strategic case for formulating feudal colonialism as a literary concept. Future research can test this concept against other Indonesian historical novels, other representations of court authority, other narratives of colonial art, and other regional histories in which foreign rule depends on local brokers.

CONCLUSION

Pangeran dari Timur represents colonialism as a layered formation sustained by the convergence of European racial authority and Indigenous feudal mediation. Through qualitative content analysis of 52 excerpts, this study shows that the most recurrent patterns in the novel concern elite collaboration, discrimination, and colonial privilege. These categories reveal a political world in which colonial authority endures because it is enacted through kings, regents, *priyayi*, landlords, court rituals, land relations, artistic patronage, and bodily etiquette. The article's principal contribution is the concept of feudal colonialism: an analytical model for explaining how foreign rule and local hierarchy reinforce one another without becoming identical. European power depends on Indigenous intermediaries to govern effectively, while Indigenous elites receive symbolic and material rewards for collaborating with and serving the colonial order. The costs of this arrangement are borne primarily by ordinary people, peasants, servants, and laborers, whose dispossession and humiliation are mediated through both colonial and local structures.

The analysis also shows that hierarchy in the novel is embodied through shoes, clothing, seating, kneeling, language, rooms, and images. Raden Saleh's ambivalent mobility clarifies the paradox of colonial modernity: European education and art can offer forms of agency, yet recognition remains racialized and conditional. Anticolonial critique in the novel must therefore also become antifeudal critique. *Pangeran dari Timur* is not merely a historical novel about Raden Saleh and nineteenth-century Java, but a literary inquiry into how domination becomes ordinary, privilege becomes naturalized, and dignity remains imaginable in a world that denies equality.

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Author contributions

Aslan Abidin designed the study and collected the data. Angellika Matta analyzed the data and drafted the manuscript. Andi Karman reviewed and approved the final version.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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About the authors

Aslan Abidin is a lecturer in the Indonesian Language and Literature Study Program, Faculty of Language and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar. His research interests include postcolonial studies and literary studies. Email: aslanabidin@unm.ac.id

Angellika Matta is a student in the Indonesian Language and Literature Study Program, Faculty of Language and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar. Her research interests include postcolonial studies and literary studies. Email: angellikamatta@gmail.com

Andi Karman is a lecturer in the Master's Program in Language Education, Faculty of Language and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar. His research interests include literary studies, literature education, and critical discourse analysis. Email: andikarman@unm.ac.id