
Cultural Contestation and Power in the Novel Kubah

by Ahmad Tohari

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ABSTRACT

This study is based on culture ideally should be a noble guideline that unites and elevates human dignity, but in practice it becomes a source of conflict between people. Culture is not a static entity, but rather an arena in which society assigns value and meaning. The purpose of this study is to reveal the contestation of culture and power in the novel Kubah. The theory used is Raymond Williams' Cultural Materialism, which focuses on the analytical framework of dominant, residual, and emergent cultures. This study uses a qualitative method with a textual analysis approach to the novel Kubah. theory. The main objective is to classify and analyze how these three cultures interact, clash, and shape the social landscape as embodied by the characters and main figures in the novel. The steps involved briefly consisted of reading the novel in depth, then classifying words, phrases, sentences, and quoted discourse related to cultural contestation. The data was then analyzed by interpreting the meaning of how the characters and narratives in the novel reflect and maintain their respective identities amid cultural tensions in society. The results of the study show that Karman, as the main character, was alienated by the dominant culture that destroyed communal relations in his village as a result of the events of 1965. However, he found acceptance again through residual culture, namely Javanese traditions and religious values. Karman created new meaning for himself, opening up a space for existence outside the pressures of dominant and residual culture.

Keywords: *contestation; culture; Kubah; power; Raymond Williams*

INTRODUCTION

Culture ideally should be a noble guideline that unites and elevates human dignity, but in practice it becomes a source of conflict between people (Shi, 2010; Mh, 2024). Culture is not a static entity, but rather a dynamic arena of contestation (Hassoun & Wong, 2012; Nguyen, 2024). Identity, values, and social meaning are never completely fixed, but are constantly negotiated by society in accordance with the historical, political, and social contexts that surround them (Collier, 2009; Moran, 2018). This process of negotiation and contestation involves relationships between power, collective experience, and conflicting interests, so that culture becomes an arena for the struggle for meaning that determines how individuals and groups understand themselves, others, and social reality (Brett, 2000; Gunia et al., 2016). Through these dynamics, culture acts as a means of forming and testing human values in communal life. In the process of forming these values, on the one hand, those in power (the dominant group) play an important role in shaping and even controlling the main narrative and

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determining the important values in society (Mumby, 1993). However, on the other hand, shared experiences also empower small (subordinate) groups to challenge and change these narratives and dominance. Different interests create tensions that drive cultural change. Through this process, culture helps shape humanistic values. Culture becomes a vessel in which ideas about equality, justice, and human dignity are tested (Mattson & Clark, 2011). This process shapes individual and group identities, as well as influencing broader social structures. In this context, understanding cultural dynamics is crucial for overcoming social conflict and creating a more dignified and inclusive society (Lüders et al., 2024). One novel that strongly depicts cultural contestation, power, and negotiation is *Kubah* by Ahmad Tohari.

Ahmad Tohari's novel "Kubah" strongly indicates the existence of fierce cultural competition through the development of each character. How the main character Karman becomes central to this cultural contest (Djenar, 2016). How a young man living in a religious environment becomes an atheist and chooses the ideology of the communist party. How does Karman's inner turmoil position him in the existing cultural struggle? This cultural competition is also depicted through conflicts between other characters. How does the conflict and opposition between the main character Karman and Hasyim represent a clash between communist and traditional-religious ideologies? These questions and indications are interesting to explore and discuss. In addition, there are three aspects of the novel *Kubah* that are interesting to examine. First, the historical context after 1965. This novel contains an epic contestation of political events in Indonesia. In the novel, the tragedy or events of 1965 are indicated not only as a political conflict, but also as a deep moral, ideological, and social contestation. How did the regime in power at that time, the New Order, construct a single anti-communist hegemonic narrative, stigmatize groups that opposed or disagreed with it, and attempt to erase different collective memories (Eddyono, 2023). The novel *Kubah* provides an overview of how dominant groups are opposed by presenting perspectives from below and within. It shows the differences and clashes between state ideology and traditional values and individual humanity at the grassroots level. *Kubah* reflects the complexity of how political power is used to control the cultural sphere and public consciousness (DeMarrais et al., 1996).

Second, cultural elements conflict and negotiate with each other. The novel *Kubah* describes how political ideologies (between nationalism, communism, and religion) clash. This novel also describes how value systems battle between modernity and traditionalism, between the sacred and the secular. It also depicts the competition between memory (official history) and narrative (life experience). Through his characters, Ahmad Tohari illustrates how conflicts destroy social order, cause division, and breed mistrust (Srikandi, 2018). On the other hand, he (the author) also shows how people resist, adapt, and search for new meaning from the remnants of the old heritage. *Kubah* not only portrays or reflects on competition, but also explores the potential for reconciliation and cultural recovery through the main character, Karman. Third, social class contestation framed by cultural conflict. The *Kubah* strongly suggests how cultural contestation becomes an arena and a means of raising issues of social class conflict (Falah, 2017). This social group has the potential to be controversial and can lead to hegemony (Falah, 2018). How characters are portrayed and experience conflict from the individual to the ideological realm, as shown by the characters Karman and Haji Bakir (Jarness et al., 2019). How these conflicting characters then play a role in propaganda, hegemony, and even oppression. The character Karman represents the occurrence of cultural contestation from the personal to the communal realm. Karman is not a passive individual; he is caught up in various cultural forces that pull, shape, and transform him. Analyzing Karman's position allows us to understand how cultural contestation not only occurs at the macro level but also internalizes itself at the personal level.

Research on Ahmad Tohari's novel *Kubah* using Raymond Williams' cultural materialism approach, based on a literature review, has not been systematically developed. This research

gap is a strong reason for a critical study examining how cultural and power contests are reflected in one of the most important literary works discussing the post-1965 period in Indonesia. Most previous studies tend to place *Kubah* in a religious, humanistic, or historical trauma context, so that the cultural aspect as an arena of material power relations has not been studied in depth.

Prakoso (2022), through a study of female characters' life choices and Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis, highlights the limitations of women's agency in patriarchal social structures, while Yulisetiani (2020) emphasizes prophetic ethics and the wisdom of Banyumas women as moral values that persist in society. Research on the negotiation of social sanctions against the character Karman focuses on stigma and social acceptance as ethical issues, while Sahliyah (2017), using a new historicism approach, places *Kubah* in the historical, economic, and cultural context of the post-1965 era. On the other hand, comparative studies, gastronomy, and translations of Tohari's works emphasize thematic representation, cultural identity, or linguistics. Although their contributions are significant, these studies have not explicitly viewed culture as an arena of material contestation of power involving dominant, residual, and emergent cultures. The absence of Raymond Williams' cultural materialism framework in reading the dynamics of values, ideologies, and social practices presents a gap in research. Therefore, this study offers a critical reading of *Kubah* as a space for negotiation and the struggle for cultural meaning, while also revealing the power relations that operate symbolically in society. This study uses Raymond Williams' theory of cultural materialism.

Raymond Williams (1977), a leading cultural theorist, developed the idea of cultural materialism, which critically highlights the interdependence between cultural formation and the material conditions and history of society, rejecting static or idealistic views of culture. Within his framework, Williams identifies three main categories that operate simultaneously and interact in every cultural formation. First, dominant culture refers to the organized and powerful system of values, meanings, and practices at a given time, which actively shapes individual consciousness and experience. This category is often closely related to hegemonic ideologies that seek to normalize and legitimize existing power structures, reflecting the interests of dominant groups (Olwell, 2015). Second, residual culture consists of elements from the past, practices, beliefs, and values that, despite having been formed in previous social structures, are still active and influential in contemporary or ongoing cultural processes (Cardinal & Loughmiller-Cardinal, 2025). Although no longer dominant, residual cultures can be a source of alternative values or even opposition to the dominant culture, preserving different memories and practices. Third, emergent cultures describe new forms of meaning, values, and practices that are constantly being created, often in response to changing material conditions or as a challenge to the dominant culture. Emergent cultures can arise from new groups or new experiences, and have the potential to become dominant cultures in the future or offer radical alternatives. Williams emphasizes that these three categories do not operate in isolation, but rather in constant interaction and contestation, reflecting the complexity and constant change in the cultural landscape (Olwell, 2015). This framework critically enables an in-depth analysis of the dynamics of power and change in cultural production, linking cultural phenomena to the underlying material conditions and social structures, including in the novel *Kubah*.

Within the framework of cultural materialism theory proposed by Raymond Williams, culture is broadly defined as "the whole way of life" of a society, encompassing social practices, institutions, values, and meanings that are historically produced and reproduced (Williams, 1977). This definition goes beyond "high" art and intellectualism, encompassing all forms of human experience and expression related to material conditions and power structures. From this definition emerges the concept of contestation (Kustantinah et al., 2025), which refers to the ongoing struggle in the production, distribution, and reception of meaning and

value in the cultural sphere (Peist Rojzman, 2022). Contestation is not merely a surface conflict, but rather a struggle for power to define reality, establish norms, and shape collective consciousness, which is inherently linked to social and political dynamics (Hall, 1997). Contestation also refers to the social process in which various actors or groups compete, negotiate, and debate meaning, value, and legitimacy within a cultural context or discourse. According to Bourdieu (1991), Fairclough (1995), and Williams (1977), contestation emphasizes that cultural meaning is always produced through dynamic and historical power relations. Contestation is defined as a dynamic and ongoing struggle over meaning, interpretation, and the distribution of power within a social system (Smith, 2023). This includes the rejection or challenge of dominant narratives, norms, or established hegemony (Jones, 2022), as well as the struggle for legitimacy over the definition of reality (Brown, 2021). Its boundaries span from the symbolic to the material, highlighting the non-static nature of culture.

In the novel *Kubah*, cultural and power contests are analysed as a dynamic struggle over meaning, values, and narratives that shape social reality after 1965. Power, whether repressive or hegemonic, seeks to control and stigmatize, while culture becomes an arena for resistance and negotiation. This analysis reveals how the dominant culture of the New Order interacts with values that still persist and the emergence of a new culture that offers new hope and meaning, especially through the journey of the character Karman.

METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative descriptive study that focuses on literary text analysis (novels). The purpose of this study is to reveal cultural and power contestations in the novel *Kubah*. The material object in this study is the novel *Kubah* by Ahmad Tohari. *Kubah* strongly indicates that it contains socio-political representations in Indonesia after 1965. The selection of the novel *Kubah* as the material object is based, among other things, on the existence of cultural contestation, power, norms, and values in a fragmented society. The formal object in this study is the contestation and power reflected in the narrative of *Kubah* through each character. Regarding these material and formal objects, the relevant perspective used is Raymond Williams' cultural materialism. This cultural materialism perspective focuses on three categories: dominant culture, residue, and emergence. This perspective is used to identify and reveal the deeper meaning in *Kubah*. How the ruling ideology (dominant), practices and values of the past that are still embraced and survive (residue), and new forms of meaning and life (emergence). Data collection was carried out through an in-depth reading of the novel *Kubah*. The research data consisted of words, phrases, sentences, and discourses related to the contestation of the three cultural categories. The research data was carefully read, then the text or quotations relevant to the research problem were identified and marked. The collection process required a deep understanding of the concepts being studied, namely cultural contestation. Then the data was classified. At this stage, the data was grouped based on the predetermined research question, namely how cultural contestation occurs in the *Kubah*. In this classification stage, elements of narrative, dialogue, description, or events in the novel that reflect cultural conflicts or struggles between characters or social groups are identified and separated. The analysis focuses on interpreting the meaning within the structure of the story, events, dialogue, and relationships between characters related to cultural contestation, rather than being based on quantitative measurements. Then, character analysis. Characters in novels are positioned as narrative subjects who have certain ideological positions in cultural contests. The final stage of analysis is carried out through interpretation and inductive conclusions drawn from research data found in *Kubah* using Raymond Williams' cultural materialism.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on a comparison of recent research results (within the last 2-3 years), research trends on both the novel Kubah and Ahmad Tohari's other works tend to focus on issues of local tradition representation, Banyumasan identity, and gender politics. Bugov (2024) maps the variations in the performance of Lengger Banyumas as a cultural practice that continues to evolve, while Nurdyianto et al. (2023) shows how Banyumas toponymy reflects the memory and identity of local communities. Arif, Faqbal, and Fariz (2025) highlight the process of iconization of Banyumas local culture in the context of development, showing how local culture can be packaged and directed by the dominant agenda. Then, in the realm of text transformation, Windari and Hayati (2024) analyze the adaptation of Tohari's short stories into drama performances, marking a research interest in the circulation and pedagogy of Tohari's works in new media.

Another growing trend is the reading of gender and power in texts and performing arts related to Tohari's world. Muqit and Polii (2024) examined Berkisar Merah and found that women's struggles move between the drive for emancipation and the trap of patriarchal structures. Wardani et al. (2023) identify hegemonic masculinity in Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk as a mechanism of power that normalizes subordination, while Meiliana (2023) finds cultural violence in ronggeng art through a feminist analysis of the power relations between the body, the stage, and the community. Similarly, but in the ethnographic realm, Marwah, Ramadhanti, and Pratiwi (2025) interpret Sintren dance as a space for contestation of gender and power, affirming traditional art as an arena for identity negotiation.

These studies generally highlight value conflicts and experiences of powerlessness and resistance, but often tend to stop at themes (gender/identity) without systematically mapping the logic of cultural hegemony. In addition to identity and gender, there has been a noticeable expansion of perspectives to include ecology, postcolonialism, and social disorganization, but these studies still rely on thematic readings. Efendi et al. (2025) use ecopostcolonialism to highlight local voices and ecological narratives as resistance to dominant ideologies, to see how local traditions become a battleground for discourse. Romala (2023) traces religious searches through folk songs in various versions of Bekisar Merah, showing the mobility of meaning (folk, national, global) in Ahmad Tohari's texts. Aribowo (2024) interprets Jegingger as a renarrative related to sacredness and social disorganization, asserting that Tohari's text can be read as a critique of the breakdown of the communal order. Meanwhile, Madyananda et al. (2023) show eroticism in Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk as a symptom of changing cultural views, but have not linked it to the configuration of social forces that have the potential to create change and conflict.

At this stage and in this context, research on the novel Kubah offers an important opportunity to fill a gap: recent research has touched on socio-political trauma and the psychological impact of post-1965 through the character of Karman (e.g., Uluwwi et al., 2024), but has not sufficiently mapped how this trauma functions as a cultural contestation between dominant values (state discourse/post-event normalization), residues (moral-religious values, village solidarity), and emergences (new forms of consciousness, reconciliation). Harding & Pribram (2002) then place emotion as the key to understanding the dynamics of power, the basis for reading fear, shame, guilt, hope, and alienation in Kubah as social phenomena that have not been fully institutionalized. Thus, the position of this research is to shift the focus from thematic readings (trauma/gender/identity) to hegemonic mapping and Raymond Williams' cultural materialism: explaining how Kubah is not only a narrative of historical wounds, but also reveals the battle of values and ways of life (dominant, residual, and emergent) that reshape subjects, communities, and future opportunities after 1965.

This study systematically describes the contestation of culture and power in Ahmad Tohari's novel "Kubah." The analysis uses Raymond Williams' framework of cultural materialism, which distinguishes between dominant, residual, and emergent cultures. The main focus is on Karman's dynamic position in facing and responding to these three cultural categories. Each category is supported by specific narrative evidence from the novel, illustrating how Karman becomes an arena for cultural struggle and synthesis. The following are the results of the study in Table 1 and the discussion in the next subsection.

TABLE 1. Cultural contestation and power

The Contestation Of Culture And Power In The Novel Kubah		
Cultural Categories (Raymond Williams)	Karman's Position In Kubah	Evidence In The Novel Kubah
1. Dominant	The New Order Comes To Power; Anti-Communist Ideology; Karman's Position: Labeled An Ex-Pki Member, Persecuted, Imprisoned.	1 Arrest, Torture, And Imprisonment On Charges Of Involvement With The Pki; The Stigma Attached To Being An Ex-Pki Member.
2. Residual	Traditional Islamic Values; Past Cultural Practices; Solidarity; Karman's Position: Rooted In Identity And Preservation.	He Has Strong Islamic Beliefs, Which He Had Abandoned But Regained After Prison; Memories of Village Solidarity and Humanitarian Values Before Ideological Divisions.
3. Emergent	Self-Reconciliation; Synthesis of Life Experiences; Building A Mosque Dome; Karman's Position: Searching For New Meaning And Reflecting.	Building A Mosque: A Symbol of Spirituality, Hope, And Recovery; Forms of Resistance And Preserving Memory Differ from The Official Narrative.

DOMINANT CULTURE: KARMAN AS A VICTIM OF POST-1965

Dominant Culture In Raymond Williams' cultural materialism, dominant culture is defined as a system of values, meanings, and social practices that are legitimized by power to maintain ideological hegemony in society. The dominant culture operates not only through state apparatus, but also through language, social norms, and collective consciousness that shape what is considered normal, reasonable, and right. In the novel Kubah, the post-1965 dominant culture is strongly depicted by the power of the New Order. This power functions through the repressive anti-communist ideology of the state, which structures all aspects of social life. The state and the people in this context experience conflict. The character Karman becomes a central figure who shows how the dominant culture systematically produces victims.

"Dan tamat sudah kisah pelariannya, karena seorang gembala kerbau melihat segala gerak-geriknya. Di siang itu beberapa orang pamong desa datang ke Astana Lopajang. Karman ditangkap dalam keadaan sakit payah. Boleh jadi karena keadaannya itulah orang tidak tega menghabisi nyawanya". (Kubah, 2012)

This quote sharply illustrates the competition for power and dominant culture after 1965, when the stigma of the PKI was so deeply ingrained in public consciousness that even a shepherd acted as an agent of surveillance. Karman's arrest while seriously ill shows how relentless the hunt for those labeled as "ex-PKI" was, confirming that their existence was considered a threat that had to be eliminated. The phrase "people couldn't bring themselves to take his life" ironically highlights the extreme dehumanization that occurred, where Karman's survival was a rare exception amid a wave of violence. Karman is not just an individual who has suffered political defeat, but a subject whose humanity has been reduced by the

mechanisms of the dominant culture. Karman is under the shadow and pressure of ideological stigma attached by the state and reproduced by the village community. From Williams' cultural materialism perspective, this condition shows the success of cultural hegemony, when dominant values are no longer imposed openly but accepted as common sense. In this context, in the community's memory, who is part of and who is against the country is very clear. The community does not question the injustice experienced by Karman, because the anti-communist discourse has formed a rigid moral boundary between what is right and what is wrong.

The dominant culture in the Kubah functions through discourse control. Karman is portrayed as the opposition or antithesis of the dominant state/culture. Karman's identity has been defined by the state, thus depriving him of the opportunity to define himself. It is not physical or visible crimes that get Karman tried and punished, but rather simplified ideological consequences. This is where symbolic power comes into play: ideological language and labels replace individual humanity. Society does not think logically and fairly, and the state does not need to be physically present, because control has been internalized by society and by Karman himself in the form of fear and alienation. In the context of Kubah, it is clear that the dominant culture not only oppresses structurally, but also destroys social relationships and communal solidarity. The kinship that was originally the basis of village society has turned into a space of surveillance and moral judgment. In Williams' terms, the dominant culture successfully regulates people's life experiences to suit the interests of power. Karman lives as "the other" in the midst of his own community, alienated within a cultural structure that is supposed to protect him. However, Kubah does not stop at the reproduction of hegemony and negotiation. By presenting Karman's inner suffering in a human way, this novel implicitly challenges the legitimacy of the state's dominant culture. The author opens up a space for critical reflection on how an ideology that claims to maintain stability actually results in dehumanization. Thus, Kubah functions as a cultural text that reveals the dark side of the dominant culture after 1965 and asserts that culture, when co-opted by power, can become the most effective tool of symbolic oppression.

RESIDUAL CULTURE: THE ROOTS OF IDENTITY AND MORAL RESILIENCE KARMAN

The novel "Kubah" by Ahmad Tohari not only presents a powerful story about the destruction caused by the events of 1965, but also highlights the extraordinary resilience of cultural values and practices that have survived. Within the framework of cultural materialism proposed by Raymond Williams (1977), Karman, as the central character, becomes a real figure of how residual culture, values, and cultural practices from the past, especially those that are religious and communal in nature, serve as a foundation that supports him amid the destruction. There is a tension between residual and dominant cultures. Residual culture is not completely lost and is rediscovered by him, becoming an important source of strength and identity. Williams (1977) defines residual culture as elements of the past, practices, values, and beliefs, which, although formed in previous social structures and no longer dominant, remain active and have a significant influence on current cultural processes. There is a space for cultural dialectics. In the context of the cultural Kubah, this residual culture became the antithesis of the dominant anti-communist culture of the New Order, which sought to impose a single narrative and eradicate all forms of deviation from the dominant ideology. For Karman, this residual culture is rooted in his childhood in the village of Pegaten, an environment steeped in traditional Islamic values and strong communal ties. Uncle Hasyim and Haji Bakir consistently demonstrate their adherence to inherited religious values. Examples include the way Hasyim gives advice to Karman and Haji Bakir's belief in destiny.

“Karman, aku tak bisa mengerti mengapa kau meninggalkan nikmat itu, nikmatnya orang yang melaksanakan kewajiban. Apakah kau belum bisa merasakan kepuasan jiwa selagi kau bersujud, sehingga kau menganggap kewajiban itu hanya sebagai pikulan yang menindih pundakmu? (Kubah, 2012).

The quote shows Uncle Hasyim describing to Karman the traditional religious values that remain and provide a deep framework of meaning. Hasyim expresses his surprise at Karman leaving behind the spiritual “pleasure” of worship, emphasizing that these practices are not only a burden, but also a source of spiritual satisfaction inherent in the culture. The comparison between the “spiritual satisfaction” of prostration and the “oppressive burden” critically highlights Karman's past failure to understand the essence of this residual culture, which later became the basis for his spiritual recovery after the collapse of the dominant ideology. Thus, Hasyim's advice serves as a reminder of the resilience and relevance of inherited values, which are capable of providing moral and spiritual footing amid social turmoil.

Before becoming involved with the PKI, Karman was part of a social structure filled with local wisdom, neighborly solidarity, and religious devotion. Karman's journey through PKI ideology and his bitter experiences in prison were attempts by the dominant culture to destroy his identity and sever his ties with his residual heritage. However, it was precisely when his personal destruction reached its peak, after experiencing both physical and mental oppression, that Karman slowly rediscovered strength in these residual values. This residual culture made Karman return to a more psychologically rooted existence in the village environment. Narrative evidence shows that the traditional Islamic beliefs he had held since childhood, although he had abandoned or ignored them during his involvement with the PKI, once again became his spiritual compass after his release from prison. Meetings and guidance from figures such as Haji Bakir, who consistently represented steadfastness in pure and humanistic religious values, were important for Karman. Haji Bakir was the living embodiment of residual culture; he was not involved in politics, but was steadfast in moral principles that transcended ideological conflicts. Through Haji Bakir, Karman was reminded of the essence of faith, which offers forgiveness, hope, and meaning in the midst of despair. This shows that religious values, as part of residual culture, have extraordinary resilience and can be a source of moral strength that resists the dehumanization promoted by the dominant culture.

Karman, despite having been gone for a long time and returning with the stigma of being a former political prisoner, was warmly welcomed by the people of Pegaten. This attitude demonstrates the cultural resilience of solidarity and forgiveness that has become an inherent trait of the village community.

“Karman sedang dirubung oleh para tamu, tetangga-tetangga yang sudah amat lama ditinggalkan. Ia merasa heran dan terharu, ternyata orang-orang Pegaten tetap pada watak mereka yang asli. Ramah, bersaudara, dan yang penting” (Kubah, 2012).

This quote clearly reveals the resilience of residual culture in society, where communal values such as hospitality and brotherhood remain intact even though Karman has long been negatively labeled by the dominant culture. Karman's surprise and emotion show that he himself did not expect these traditional human bonds to still be so strong, transcending fear and political divisions. This confirms that residual culture is a source of enduring strength and identity, providing Karman with acceptance and hope amid the destruction caused by the ruling ideology.

In addition, memories of village solidarity and humanitarian values that existed before the ideological split are also important elements of the residual culture that supports Karman. Although the Pegaten community is divided and surrounded by fear, memories of harmony, togetherness, and family ties remain, even if they are often hidden. This has a significant impact on Karman, on how society should function, and forms the basis for hopes of recovery. In this

context, this residual culture functions as a remnant that refuses to be completely erased, constantly intervening in a reality dominated by violence and mistrust. Residual culture not only functions as a defense mechanism for Karman, but also as a form of passive resistance against attempts at homogenization and the erasure of identity by the dominant culture (the state). With his principles based on the values of the past, Karman implicitly rejects the dominant narrative that seeks to claim him entirely as an “ex-PKI” who had no place in society at that time.

For Karman, residual culture provides a moral and spiritual foundation for rebuilding his shattered identity, for surviving and finding meaning amid the destruction. This legacy proves that culture cannot be completely controlled or erased by dominant powers; there are elements that have inherent resilience, which can be a source of strength for individuals and communities to remain steadfast and even become the seeds for the emergence of new forms of culture, as represented by Karman.

EMERGENT CULTURE: THE SEARCH FOR NEW MEANING AND ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF LIFE KARMAN

The novel *Kubah* by Ahmad Tohari presents a profound story of destruction and recovery, which intensively explores cultural contestation in Indonesia after 1965. Within the framework of cultural materialism proposed by Raymond Williams (1977), the journey of the main character, Karman, brilliantly illustrates the concept of cultural emergence: a search for new meaning and the development of alternative ways of life in response to trauma and pressure from the dominant culture. This is not merely a return to the past, but rather a new synthesis of his complex life experiences, offering a critical perspective on the dynamics of cultural change.

Williams (1977) defines emergent culture as new forms of meaning, values, and practices that are constantly being created, often in response to existing conditions or as a challenge to the dominant culture. Emergent culture can originate from new groups or new experiences, and has the potential to become the dominant culture in the future or offer radical alternatives. In the context of *Kubah*, Karman is the living embodiment of this emergent process. After experiencing brutal oppression by the dominant culture of the New Order—arrest, torture, imprisonment, and stigmatization as an “ex-PKI”—Karman was faced with the total destruction of his identity and existence. The PKI ideology he once believed in had collapsed, and the traditional values he had left behind were no longer accessible in the same way. In this void, Karman was forced to create something new.

Karman's search for new meaning does not simply mean returning to the remaining culture, even though the remaining values, such as traditional Islamic teachings and communal solidarity, are indeed important foundations. However, his traumatic experiences have fundamentally changed him, so that he cannot simply return to his old beliefs or practices without critical reflection. Karman's faith after leaving prison became more personal, profound, and reflective. It was a “new spirituality” that emerged from suffering, an attempt to find the essence of faith that transcended mere ritual or dogma, and which was able to provide comfort and purpose amid destruction. This process is a synthesis of his life experiences: he does not erase his past as a former member of the PKI, but rather integrates it into a new understanding of justice, suffering, and forgiveness. It is a complex form of self-reconciliation, in which he tries to understand how he got to that point and how he can move forward. The most symbolic act of Karman's new culture is the rebuilding of the mosque dome.

Karman did not build the dome carelessly. He devoted all his expertise, perseverance, and artistic sense to create a masterpiece. This reflects his sincerity in redeeming his past and giving his best to the community.

“Maka Karman bekerja dengan sangat hati-hati. Ia menggabungkan kesempurnaan teknik, keindahan estetika, serta ketekunan. Hasilnya adalah sebuah mahkota mesjid yang sempurna. Tidak ada kerutan-kerutan. Setiap sambungan terpatri rapi. Kerangkanya kokoh dengan pengelasan saksama. Leher kubah dihiasi kaligrafi dengan teralis” (Kubah, 2012).

The quote describes Karman's new culture through meaningful acts of creation, in which he combines technical perfection and aesthetics with deep perseverance in response to past trauma. The construction of the “perfect mosque crown” symbolizes the synthesis of his life experiences, transforming destruction into a symbol of hope, spiritual recovery, and community rebuilding. This is a form of strong silent resistance, in which Karman creates an alternative narrative of dignity and sustainability, challenging the stigma and destruction imposed by the dominant culture.

The destroyed dome is not only a symbol of physical damage, but also of spiritual and communal destruction caused by ideological conflict. The rebuilding of the dome, which Karman did with his own hands, is an act that goes beyond mere physical restoration. It is a spiritual act, a concrete manifestation of hope, recovery, and an effort to rebuild the community not the same community as before, but one that has learned from tragedy and is trying to heal. The construction of the dome has become a symbol of a “new culture” emerging from the ruins, a culture that values hard work, perseverance, deep faith, and reconciliation.

Karman's emergent culture in Kubah presents a critique of the dominant culture. Although he does not openly engage in political resistance, his existence and actions constitute a powerful form of silent resistance. By finding new meaning, rebuilding, and living with dignity amid stigma, Karman implicitly challenges the dominant narrative that seeks to erase and stigmatize him completely. He demonstrates that humans have the ability to create new meanings and forms of life even under the most extreme pressure. Karman's emergent culture reveals that from trauma and oppression, new awareness, more authentic spirituality, and hope for a future that, while imperfect, offers the possibility of healing and sustainability can emerge. This proves that culture is not static, but is constantly being created and recreated, even under the shadow of the most oppressive power.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Culture in Ahmad Tohari's novel Kubah is not a static entity, but rather a dynamic arena filled with struggles and negotiations, reflected or depicted through the journey of the main character, Karman. Using Raymond Williams' framework of cultural materialism, Karman's position can be effectively analyzed in three categories: dominant, residual, and emergent culture. Karman is the main character (subject) who is stigmatized and oppressed by the dominant culture. Karman became a victim of the New Order's hegemony with its repressive anti-communist ideology. Karman suffered greatly; he was arrested, tortured, and imprisoned on charges of involvement with the PKI. Karman's social and economic life was destroyed because he was stigmatized as a former PKI member and because the dominant power controlled discourse, identity, and ideological compliance. However, amid this dominant cultural pressure, Karman has communal solidarity and traditional religious values that function as residual culture. Although he was once alienated, his humanity and spirituality were formed from the bonds of village society and Islamic teachings before the political division, and have now become his foundation once again. Karman is supported by the figure of Haji Bakir to reinforce the values of the past in order to preserve humanity amid dehumanization.

The culmination of Karman's journey, and his most dominant position within Williams' framework, is his attempt at reconciliation and finding new meaning and hope that represent the culture of emergence. Karman did not simply return to the past; he also transformed

himself. His more personal and profound spiritual search after leaving prison, his efforts to make peace with his dark past, and his actions in rebuilding the dome of the mosque are powerful symbols of recovery and the creation of meaning from a dark period. In short, Karman shows that in the midst of oppression, rediscovering one's essence, rebuilding community, and fostering new hope can continue to emerge, challenging the dominant narrative and opening up opportunities for a different future. This study is limited to examining the Kubah from the perspective of cultural contestation. Further research is needed from other perspectives, such as social dimensions, psychology, collective memory, trauma, hegemony, and character education.

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