Social Conflict in the Novel Orang-Orang Proyek by Ahmad Tohari

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Article Info	Abstract
	The focus of this research is to describe the social conflict in the novel "Orang-Orang Proyek" by Ahmad Tohari. This research uses a sociological perspective of literature based on the Theory of Power and Domination (Ralf Dahrendorf). Dahrendorf developed Marx's theory with a greater emphasis on authority structures within social organizations. The method used in this research is a qualitative descriptive method using textual analysis. The data source for this research is the novel "Orang-Orang Proyek" by Ahmad Tohari. The data collection technique used in this research is library research using written data sources. Three data analysis techniques are used in this study: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results of this study reveal eight structural conflicts, fifteen class conflicts, and fourteen political and economic conflicts throughout the story.

1. Introduction

Social conflict can generally be defined as a process of shifting or changing the structure/order within society, encompassing more innovative ways of thinking, attitudes, and social life, all aimed at achieving a more dignified life. Changes occurring in today's society are a normal phenomenon. Their impact can spread rapidly to other parts of the world thanks to modern communication. New technological inventions made in one place are quickly recognized by distant communities. Social change always gives rise to dynamics that are unwittingly connected to the reality of conflict within society.

This is because social change and social conflict are inherently embedded in the structure of society. Quoting Soerjono Soekanto, social change in society can alter social values, give rise to differences of opinion, or lead to conflict. Conflict theory states that what is constant or permanent is social conflict, not social change. Change is merely a consequence of conflict. Because conflict is continuous, change will follow. (Sumartono 2019). Literary work is a term that has consistently appeared in scientific discourse and public discussions throughout history. However, public understanding of literature remains diverse.

Some define literature solely as works of fiction full of imagination, even limiting it to poetry or pantun. This view often overlooks the true definition of literature itself (Lestari, Balawa, and Badara 2019). In fact, literary works, particularly novels, not only convey imaginative stories but also contain social values that reflect the realities of life, such as norms, ethics, and ideal behavioral patterns that can serve as reflections for readers.

In novels, social issues are generally presented through conflict, which is a crucial narrative element. Conflict not only creates dramatic tension but also depicts complex social dynamics. Conflict in works of fiction often implies clashes between characters with differing interests, both personal and collective (Mariani, Yakob, and Hidayat 2020). In a sociological context, conflict is an inherent part of social life that can occur in various forms and at various levels of society (Nursantari 2018). Through the conflict depicted in stories, readers gain an understanding of the social conditions and dynamics that occur in society.

Based on this context, this study aims to examine the forms of social conflict reflected in Ahmad Tohari's novel "Orang-Orang Proyek." The main focus of this research is identifying the forms of conflict, their causes, and their impact on the characters in the stories. This research is expected to contribute to an understanding of the social dynamics of Indonesian society as reflected in literary works. Literature exists in society as an expression of human life, inseparable from its social roots. The life depicted in literature encompasses the relationship between humans and themselves, their relationships with others, and their relationship with God.

This research focuses on individual moral values. Individual moral values concern the relationship between humans and themselves and can vary in type and intensity. Individual moral values are crucial for humans because they are based on the fact that humans need physical and spiritual well-being to avoid harming others. Individual moral values are values related to the individual and how humans treat themselves. Individual moral values are crucial for every human being to achieve happiness and a perfect life through the use of their full potential. The individual moral values in Ahmad Tohari's novel "Project People" (Orang-Orang Proyek) include: (1) honesty, (2) responsibility, (3) discipline, (4) fear, (5) humility, (6) self-confidence, (7) independence. (Khasanah, Tabrani, and Badrih 2022)

Ahmad Tohari is one of Indonesia's leading writers who has produced numerous literary works. Ahmad Tohari was born in Banyumas on June 13, 1948. His father was a kiai (Islamic cleric) and worked in a religious office, while his mother was a textile trader. Ahmad Tohari lived in Tinggarjaya Village, Jatilawang District, Banyumas Regency. There, Ahmad Tohari also ran an Islamic boarding school (pesantren) after returning to his hometown from Jakarta. This was because Ahmad Tohari felt uncomfortable living in Jakarta, which is essentially a busy metropolitan city. Ahmad Tohari began his career as a civil servant.

2. Method

The type of research used in this study is descriptive qualitative, employing a qualitative approach. This qualitative approach was chosen because this study focuses on understanding the meaning, processes, and dynamics of social conflict contained in literary works. The research data consists of words, dialogue, narratives, and social events depicted in the novel Orang-Orang Proyek by Ahmad Tohari.

Qualitative research aims to uncover the meaning and messages contained within a phenomenon through an in-depth interpretation process. This approach emphasizes understanding the social context, values, and power relations reflected in literary texts. In line with Indraswari (2025), qualitative research is interpretive in nature and is used to analyze the meaning and emotional messages within a phenomenon, thus enabling researchers to comprehensively understand the symbolism and social realities contained within the text.

In the context of this research, a qualitative approach is used to interpret the social conflict depicted in the novel and connect it to the social reality of Indonesian society through the perspectives of literary sociology and social conflict theory.

3. Result

Based on the research findings obtained from the study of social conflict in Ahmad Tohari's novel Orang Orang Proyek, through repeated readings, the researcher found several quotes representing various forms of social conflict that emerge throughout the story. In line with the research objective, which was to

depict social conflict in the novel, the results indicate that the dominant social conflicts include structural conflict, class conflict, political conflict, and economic conflict.

Structural conflict is reflected in the injustice that arises within the project development system, particularly when decisions favor project managers and ignore the interests of the lower classes. Class conflict is demonstrated by the conflict between groups with power and capital and the lower classes directly impacted by project policies. Political conflict is evident through the abuse of authority and personal interests that affect project progress. Meanwhile, economic conflict is evident in the unequal distribution of resources and the economic pressures experienced by certain characters due to a system that disadvantages the lower classes.

These various conflicts not only serve to drive the plot but also serve as a means for the author to convey social criticism of the realities of development and unfair social conditions. Through these conflicts, Ahmad Tohari presents a depiction of community life and human values marginalized by the interests of power and economic interests.

Discussion
A. Structural Conflict

Structural conflict arises from inequalities within the social system that binds society. This conflict arises from differences in position, role, and power between individuals or groups. The novel "Orang-orang Proyek" contains several data illustrating structural conflict, as follows:

Data 1

"Because the losses could actually have been avoided if the start of the bridge's construction had been postponed until the dry season arrived a few months later. That was the recommendation from the designers. However, that recommendation was ignored, supposedly to save time."

"What do you mean?"

"The project's owners and local political leaders wanted the bridge completed before the 1992 elections. Because, I believe, its inauguration would be used as a campaign event for the ruling party. It's annoying. And this is the result when technical and scientific calculations are overridden by political calculations." (OP/19.)

Data 2

"Oh, sorry. What did Mr. Kabul ask earlier? Ah, I remember. Some villagers wanted to get cement for this project by bribing laborers?"

"Yes."

"Without any intention of defending their fellow villagers, they couldn't have harmed the project without collaborating with insiders, right?"

"Yes. But all this time, I thought village people were naive, clean, and unconcerned with other people's belongings."

"Hehe, that was before, Mr. Kabul. Now it's different. Now, village people consider, for example, taking asphalt from the side of the road to be a normal thing. If they were caught, they would buy cigarettes for the foreman. End (OP/21.)

Data 3

The foreman who recorded the material receipts was also adept at playing tricks. He could manipulate the figures by increasing the number of incoming sand or river stones. A truck that had entered ten times could be recorded as fifteen, and for this fraud, he accepted bribes from the drivers.

However, faced with all these levels of leakage, Engineer Nyur Dalkijo—Kabul's superior—seemed to bear no burden. One time, while they were together at a restaurant, Kabul complained about the high leakage rate, which meant a significant additional burden on the project budget.

"Ah, Brother Kabul, you're like floating in the clouds. Step on the ground and look around. As I've said before, project workers are like We have to be smart about it."

"What do you mean, Mr. Dal?"

"Well, how many times do I have to say it? Like the projects we've worked on before, everything always starts with a game. At the job tender level, we have to play. Otherwise, we won't get the project. And the budget is regulated per term, and we only get it if we know how to play. (OP/30.)

Data 4

"Like Kabul, I'm also a graduate and a former activist. But here, I'm the village head who must submit to government officials and party faction members. If they don't disrupt the project, it's fine. But in reality?"

Basar paused, smiling dryly. Mr. Tarya laughed. Understandably.

"Just think, Mr. Tarya. In two months, the party faction anniversary will be held in our village. The funds are enormous, and I don't want them wasted on unnecessary things. So, I told the district people I didn't have the money. But what did they say? 'You still want to be village head, right? There's a big project going on in your village, right?' That's how it is, how can I not be in trouble."

"Have you ever tried to refuse?"

"Indirectly, I have. And I became the laughing stock of fellow village heads who were gathering in the Regency." (OP/51.)

Data 5

"Will maintaining your idealism improve the poor people around us?" Dalkijo once joked. "Is your honesty enough to reduce corruption in this country?"

Kabul often pondered Dalkijo's joke. Yes, upon closer inspection, the joke was true. This country was inhabited by corrupt people, especially among civil and military bureaucrats, as well as among ordinary people.

In fact, Kabul saw a new type of corruption that was subtle but could have very serious consequences. Namely, corruption through the manipulation of academic

degrees.

Someone who didn't meet the intellectual intelligence standard, let alone the emotional intelligence of a bachelor's degree, could officially receive a bachelor's or postgraduate degree.

The degree can be obtained by purchasing it, taking distance learning classes, or attending lectures in small towns run by small universities that sell diplomas (OP/61.)

B. Class Conflict

Class conflict arises from differing interests between social groups. Each group has its own goals, needs, and priorities, so the interests of one group often conflict with those of another, creating tension and disputes. The novel "Orang-orang Proyek" (Project People) contains several data illustrating class conflict, as follows:

Data 6

…Because of his attitude, Mr. Tarya's father was considered a Dutch collaborator. And the punishment he received was typical of revolutionary punishment. Mr. Tarya's father was shot dead by the youth he loved on the edge of a bridge, which they then blew up (OP/14.)

Data 7

"Look, Mr. Tarya. In two months, the party's anniversary will be held in our village. The funds are enormous.

And I don't want it to be drained for unnecessary things. So, I told the district people I didn't have any money. But what did they say? 'You still want to be the village head, right? There's a big project going on in your village, right?' That's how I can avoid it."

"Have you ever tried to refuse?"

"Indirectly, I have. And I became the laughing stock of fellow village heads who were gathering in the regency." (OP/51.)

Data 8

However, at the village hall, Kang Sanu received an explanation that all OT and ET had not received invitations because they were not allowed to participate in the village head elections. Strange! Was this because not all village head candidates were GLM members? "Who are you to dare ask to participate in the village head elections?" asked a village official with a sneer that paralyzed Kang Sanu's joints (OP/100.)

Data 9

… Samad began to flare up. "The state and state officials feel they can do no wrong? Isn't that the culture of a feudal kingdom? Are we, who have been a republic for 45 years, still feudal in spirit?" (OP/126.)

Data 10

…What are you trying to say? Earlier, Baldun was talking about a clean environment. Now you're saying my Islam is questionable?"

"Calm down, please. I want to say, try to tell me whether or not there is material that can now be confirmed as being leftover." (OP/165.)

C. Political and Economic Conflict

Political and Economic Conflict is a clash of interests that arises between the government, investors, and the public as a result of development policies, where each party has different goals, interests, and benefits. The novel "Orang-orang Proyek" contains several data that illustrate political and economic conflict, as follows:

Data 11

"The project's owners and local political leaders wanted the bridge completed before the 1992 elections. Because, I believe, its inauguration would be used as a campaign event for the ruling party. It's annoying. And this is what happens when technical and scientific calculations are overridden by political calculations." (OP/11.)

Data 12

"Yes, because I understand. Even though I'm old and ugly, I'm a retired civil servant. So I know, yes, that's the culture of power in our country. I can even guess that not all of your friends are sad now. Because, the losses caused by the flood can be used as an excuse to ask for additional costs. And this means a new opportunity to inflate the project budget. Ah, we ordinary people know what inflated costs mean to project personnel (OP/11-12.)

Data 13

Kabul is often grumpy. He's annoyed because these obstacles could have been avoided if the government, as the project owner, and the politicians hadn't interfered too much in the implementation stage. And that interference wasn't limited to initial work assignments that violated the designers' recommendations, but also extended to other matters (OP/29.)

Data 14

Not to mention the civil and military officials, as well as certain members of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) who often ask the project treasurer for pocket money when they want to go on vacation. Outside the region (OP/29.)

Data 15

How can you be so naive as to try to argue with us? Let us tell you. The ones who signed the foreign debt were ministers who were GLM cadres. Likewise, the Minister of Public Works, governors, regents, sub-district heads, bank heads—everyone—not just members, but GLM cadres. And contractors (OP/98.)

4. Discussion

1. Structural Conflict

Is a conflict that arises from inequality in the social system that binds society. This conflict arises from differences in position, role, and power between individuals or groups. In the novel "The People of the Project," there are several data points that illustrate structural conflict, as follows:

Data 1

"Because the losses could actually have been avoided if the start of the bridge construction had been postponed until the dry season arrived a few months later. That was the recommendation from the designers. However, that recommendation was ignored, supposedly to save time."

"What do you mean?"

"The project owners and local political leaders wanted the bridge completed before the 1992 elections. Because, I believe, the inauguration would be used as a campaign event for the ruling party. It's annoying. And this is the result when technical and scientific calculations are overridden by political calculations." (OP/19.)

From data (1) above, a structural conflict occurred in the bridge construction project. This conflict arose from inequality in the decision-making system, where the technical recommendations of the designers were ignored by those in power. The project's management and local political elite prioritized political interests, namely completing the project before the 1992 elections, over technical and scientific considerations. As a result, the decisions taken actually resulted in losses.

Data 2

"Oh, sorry. What did Mr. Kabul ask? Ah, I remember. Some villagers wanted to get cement for this project by bribing the laborers?"

"Yes."

"Without any intention of defending their fellow villagers, they couldn't harm the project without collaborating with insiders, right?"

"Yes. But I've always thought of village people as innocent, clean, and unconcerned with other people's belongings."

"Hehe, that was before, Mr. Kabul. Now it's different. Now, villagers consider, for example, taking asphalt from the side of the road to be a common occurrence. If they get caught, they'll buy cigarettes for the foreman. End (OP/21.)

From data (2) above, structural conflicts in construction projects are caused by inequalities in the oversight system and distribution of power. Villagers cannot obtain project materials without collaborating with project insiders, such as laborers and foremen, who have direct access to the building materials. This

indicates that the position of field workers plays a crucial role in opening or closing opportunities for irregularities.

Data 3

The foreman who recorded the material receipts was also adept at cheating. He could manipulate the numbers by inflating the amount of incoming sand or river rock. A truck that had entered ten times could be recorded as fifteen, and for this cheating, he accepted bribes from the drivers.

However, faced with all the leakage levels, Engineer Nyur Dalkijo—Kabul's superior—seemed unconcerned. One time, while they were together at a restaurant, Kabul complained about the high leakage rate, which meant a significant additional burden on the project budget.

"Ah, Brother Kabul, you're like floating in the clouds. Step on the ground and look around. As I've said before, project workers like us have to be clever."

"What do you mean, Mr. Dal?"

"Well, how many times do I have to say it? Like the projects we've worked on before, everything always starts with a game. At the job tender level, we have to play the game. Otherwise, we won't get the project. And the budget is regulated per term, and we only get it if we know how to play the game (OP/30.)

From data (3) above, the structural conflict that occurs in construction projects is the result of an imbalance of power and a weak oversight system. The foreman, as the party in the field, has the authority to record material receipts, but this authority is abused through data manipulation and bribery of truck drivers. Meanwhile, the project supervisor considers budget leaks to be normal and part of the "game" within the project system. This attitude demonstrates that the project structure has been formed in an unhealthy manner, with fraudulent practices occurring from the bottom up.

Data 4

"Like Kabul, I'm also a graduate and a former activist. But here I'm a village head who must defer to government officials and party officials. If they don't interfere with the project, it's fine. But in reality?"

Basar paused, smiling dryly. Mr. Tarya laughed. Understandably.

"Just think, Mr. Tarya. In two months, the party's anniversary will be held in our village. The funds are enormous, and I don't want them wasted on unnecessary things. So, I told the district officials I didn't have the money. But what did they say? 'You still want to be village head, right? There's a big project going on in your village, right?' That's how I can avoid difficulties."

"Have you tried refusing?"

"Indirectly, I have. And I became the laughing stock of fellow village heads who were gathering in the district." (OP/51.)

Data (4) above illustrates the structural conflict that arises from the imbalance of power between village officials and government and political party elites. Basar, as village head, actually shares Kabul's educational background and ideals, but his position within the village government forces him to submit to pressure from more powerful parties. The veiled threats regarding his position as village head and the existence of development projects demonstrate that power is being used as a means of control.

Data 5

"Will maintaining your ideals improve the poor people around us?" Dalkijo once joked. "Is your honesty enough to reduce corruption in this country?"
Kabul often pondered Dalkijo's joke. Yes, upon closer inspection, the joke was somewhat true. This country is inhabited by corrupt people, especially among civil and military bureaucrats, as well as among ordinary people.

In fact, Kabul saw a new type of corruption that was subtle but could have devastating consequences: corruption through the manipulation of academic degrees.

Someone who doesn't meet the intellectual standard, let alone the emotional intelligence of a bachelor's degree, can officially earn a bachelor's or postgraduate degree.

These degrees can be obtained by purchasing them, taking distance learning courses, or attending classes in small towns run by small, diploma-selling universities (OP/61.)

Data (5) above demonstrates a structural conflict related to the breakdown of the social and bureaucratic systems that should uphold the values of honesty and integrity. Dalkijo's joke reflects a pragmatic perspective born of a system so accustomed to corruption that idealism is rendered irrelevant. Kabul finds itself under pressure because its values clash with the reality of a social structure that is permissive of corruption, both among bureaucrats and the general public.

2. Class Conflict

Class conflict arises from differing interests between social groups. Each group has its own goals, needs, and priorities, so the interests of one group often conflict with those of another, creating tension and conflict. The novel "Orang-Orang Proyek" (Project People) contains several data points illustrating class conflict, as follows:

Data 6

...Because of his stance, Mr. Tarya's father was considered a Dutch collaborator. And the punishment he received was typical of revolutionary times. Mr. Tarya's father was shot dead by the youth he loved on the edge of a bridge, which they then blew up (OP/14.)

From data (6) above, class conflict arose due to differing interests between Mr. Tarya's father and the revolutionary youth. His father's perceived support for the Dutch conflicted with the youth's goals, creating tension that ultimately resulted in Mr. Tarya's father's death.

Data 7

"Look, Mr. Tarya. In two months, the party's anniversary will be held in our village. The funds are enormous.

And I don't want to be drained for unnecessary things. So, I told the people in the district I didn't have any money. But what did they say? 'You still want to be the village head, right? There's a big project going on in your village, right?' That's how I can avoid difficulties."

"Have you tried to refuse?"

"Indirectly, I have. And I became the laughing stock of fellow village heads who were gathering in the district." (OP/51.)

From data (7) above, class conflict is evident in the differing interests between Mr. Tarya as the village head and those in power at the district or party level. Mr. Tarya is in a lower position of power and wants to use resources wisely, while those with more power demand the allocation of funds for their own interests.

Data 8

However, at the village hall, Kang Sanu received an explanation that all OT and ET had not received invitations because they were not allowed to participate in the village head elections. Strange! Was this because not all village head candidates were GLM members? "Who are you, daring to ask to participate in the village head elections?" asked a village official with a sneer that paralyzed Kang Sanu's joints (OP/100.)

From data (8) above, class conflict is evident in the differences in position and access to power between Kang Sanu and the village officials. Kang Sanu, as an ordinary citizen, had no right to participate in the village head elections, while the village official, who had power, used his status to assert dominance and ridicule Kang Sanu. This difference in social position and control over political decisions created tensions that reflected class conflict.

Data 9

… Samad began to feel emotionally consumed. "The state and state officials feel they can do no wrong? Isn't that the culture of a feudal monarchy? Are we, having been a republic for 45 years, still feudal in spirit?" (OP/126.)

From the data (9) above, class conflict is evident in the tension between ordinary citizens, represented by Samad, and state officials who wield greater power and authority. Samad feels injustice because officials use their positions to assert dominance, even though a republic should uphold equality. This difference in social standing and control over decisions is the core of the class conflict in this situation.

Data 10

...What are you trying to say? Earlier, Baldun was talking about a clean environment. Now you're trying to say that my Islamic faith is questionable?

"Calm down, please. I want to say, try to tell me whether or not there is material that is now certain to become scrap." (OP/165.)

From the data (10) above, class conflict is evident between Basar and Kabul, which arose due to differing interests and perspectives. Basar wanted to use the remaining project debris to increase capital to meet his superiors' demands. Meanwhile, Kabul rejected the idea, emphasizing that the entire project budget must be used for the benefit of the community, reflecting concern for public rights and welfare.

3. Political and Economic Conflict

Data 11

"The project owners and local political leaders wanted the bridge completed before the 1992 elections. Because, I believe, its inauguration would be used as a campaign event for the ruling party. It's annoying. And this is the result when technical and scientific calculations are overridden by political calculations." (OP/11.)

Data (11) above demonstrates the political and economic conflict that arose as a result of development policies influenced by the interests of those in power. Bridge construction was no longer based on technical and scientific considerations, but rather driven by political interests in the lead-up to the 1992 elections. The project owners and local political leaders used the construction as a campaign tool to gain political advantage, while safety and public interests were neglected.

Data 12

"Yes, because I understand. Even though I'm old and ugly, I'm a retired civil servant. So, I know, yes, that's the culture of power in our country. I can even guess that not all of your friends are sad now. Because, the losses caused by the flood can be used as an excuse to ask for additional costs. And this means a new opportunity to inflate the project budget. Ah, we ordinary people know what inflated costs mean for project personnel (OP/11-12.)

From the data (12) above, political and economic conflicts are rooted in the culture of power in the implementation of development projects. Mr. Tarya realized that the losses caused by the flood were not entirely viewed as a disaster, but rather used as an opportunity by the project team to ask for additional costs and inflate the budget. This practice demonstrates an abuse of power that benefits the project elite and economic stakeholders, while the community bears the brunt.

Data 13
Kabul often becomes irritable. He's irritated because these obstacles could have been avoided if the government, as the project owner, and politicians had not interfered too much in the implementation phase. And this interference, it turns out, wasn't limited to the initial determination of work that violated the designers' recommendations, but also extended to other aspects (OP/29.)

Data (13) above reveals the political and economic conflicts that arose as a result of the strong interference of the government and politicians in the implementation of the development project. Kabul is irritated because the obstacles that arose could have been avoided if technical decisions were left to experts, rather than dominated by powerful interests. Political interference occurred not only in the initial project determination phase, which ignored the designers' recommendations, but also extended to other implementation processes.

Data 14
Not to mention the involvement of civilian and military officials, as well as members of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), who frequently ask project treasurers for pocket money when they want to travel outside the region (OP/29).

Data (14) above demonstrates the increasingly complex political and economic conflicts in the implementation of development projects. The involvement of civilian, military, and DPRD members in asking project treasurers for pocket money reflects the practice of abusing power for personal gain. These actions demonstrate that development projects are not only a means of pursuing economic interests, but also a means of strengthening political and power relations. As a result, budgets that should be used for the benefit of the community are instead eroded by elite interests, thus triggering injustice and widening the gap between those in power and the people.

Data 15
How can you be so naive as to try to argue with us? Let us tell you. The ministers who signed the foreign debt are GLM cadres. Likewise, the Minister of Public Works, governors, regents, sub-district heads, bank heads—all of them are not just

members, but GLM cadres. And the contractors (OP/98.)

The data (15) above illustrates the political and economic conflict that occurs because power is controlled by a single GLM group. All parties with important roles in development projects, from ministers and regional officials to contractors, come from the same group. As a result, voices trying to defend the people are considered insignificant because the power system is already intertwined.

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of research on social conflict in Ahmad Tohari's novel "Project People," it can be concluded that the novel depicts a complex social conflict, including structural, class, and political-economic conflicts. Structural conflict arises from inequality in decision-making, power distribution, and project oversight, where political interests and group profits often trump technical, moral, and community welfare considerations. This is clearly seen in the manipulation of project materials, bribery, and disregard for technical recommendations, which continues from the grassroots to the top levels.

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