



Cultural Resistance and Democratic Imagination in Colonial Indonesia: A Literary Analysis of Pantun

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Abstract

Colonial rule in the Indonesian archipelago not only restructured political and economic systems but also sought to reshape local cultural values and modes of expression. Within this context, traditional literary forms played an important role in preserving cultural identity and articulating responses to colonial domination. One such form is pantun, a Malay poetic genre that conveys meaning through metaphor, parallelism, and indirect expression. This study examines how the pantun High Power, Unformed Resistance represents power, resistance, and democratic imagination during the colonial period. The research aims to explore how culturally grounded notions of authority and opposition are articulated through poetic discourse, and how pantun functions as a medium of subtle resistance and ethical governance. The study adopts a qualitative interdisciplinary methodology that combines close textual analysis with perspectives from postcolonial theory and cultural studies. The pantun is analyzed as both a literary text and a socio-cultural artifact situated within the historical experience of colonial Indonesia. The findings reveal that power is constructed as moral and cultural authority rather than coercive domination, while resistance emerges as indirect, adaptive, and sustained through cultural continuity. The pantun also encodes democratic values such as consensus, balance, and communal responsibility, reflecting indigenous conceptions of governance. These findings suggest that pantun should be understood not merely as folklore but as a significant site of political meaning. The study contributes to literary and postcolonial scholarship by demonstrating how traditional poetic forms participate in the negotiation of power and the imagination of culturally grounded democracy under colonial rule.

Keywords: Pantun, Cultural Resistance, Colonial Indonesia, Power, Democracy

Introduction

Colonialism has long been understood not only as a political and economic project but also as a cultural enterprise that sought to reshape the epistemological, moral, and expressive foundations of colonized societies. In Southeast Asia, colonial domination extended beyond territorial control to include the systematic reordering of cultural hierarchies, linguistic practices, and symbolic systems through which social meaning was produced and negotiated (Said, 1993; Stoler, 2010). Within this context, literary and oral traditions emerge as critical domains for examining how colonized communities preserved cultural autonomy while simultaneously articulating resistance to imperial authority.

Scholars in postcolonial literary studies have consistently emphasized that resistance does not always manifest through armed struggle or overt political mobilization. Instead, it often



operates through subtle cultural practices embedded in everyday life, including storytelling, poetry, ritual speech, and other forms of expressive tradition (Ashcroft et al., 2002; Bhabha, 1994). These cultural forms allow colonized subjects to negotiate power asymmetries while avoiding direct confrontation, thus enabling the survival of indigenous values under conditions of domination. Literature, in this sense, functions as both a repository of cultural memory and a strategic medium for the articulation of dissent.

Within the Indonesian archipelago, colonial encounters produced a complex landscape of resistance characterized by plurality rather than uniformity. Historical research has demonstrated that Indonesian responses to colonial rule ranged from violent uprisings and organized rebellions to diplomatic negotiation, accommodation, and cultural adaptation (Ricklefs, 2008; Kartodirdjo, 1992). These varied forms of engagement complicate binary distinctions between resistance and compliance, suggesting instead that colonial subjects often navigated domination through hybrid strategies that combined opposition with negotiation.

Among the many cultural forms that circulated within this colonial milieu, pantun occupies a particularly significant position. Pantun is a traditional Malay poetic form defined by structural parallelism, metaphorical indirection, and rhythmic balance. Historically transmitted through oral performance, pantun has functioned as a medium for moral instruction, social regulation, and communal identity formation (Teeuw, 1984; Braginsky, 2004). Its reliance on figurative language allows speakers to convey meanings that exceed literal interpretation, making it especially effective in contexts where explicit criticism of authority is constrained.

Recent literary scholarships have begun to reconsider pantun as a politically significant genre rather than merely a folkloric artifact. Studies have shown that pantun frequently encodes social critique, ethical negotiation, and commentary on power relations, particularly in periods of political transition or domination (Maier, 2017; Hussin, 2014). Through metaphor and symbolism, pantun enables speakers to express dissent, sustain collective values, and reinforce cultural cohesion without provoking direct repression. This function positions pantun as a valuable lens through which to examine how resistance is articulated at the level of everyday discourse.

At the same time, contemporary scholarship on democracy has increasingly moved beyond institutional definitions to emphasize its cultural and discursive foundations. Democratic practices are now understood as situated within shared values, symbolic frameworks, and communicative norms that shape how authority, participation, and legitimacy are imagined and enacted (Benhabib, 2006; Chatterjee, 2004). From this perspective, democracy is not simply adopted through constitutional design but emerges through culturally embedded practices of deliberation and representation. In the Indonesian archipelago, indigenous concepts of governance such as *musyawarah* and *mufakat* illustrate forms of decision making grounded in consensus, ethical responsibility, and communal harmony that long predate colonial intervention (Geertz, 1980).

Despite the growing body of scholarship on pantun, postcolonial literature, and cultural resistance, several important gaps remain. First, much of the existing research treats pantun primarily as a literary or linguistic object, emphasizing its formal properties, aesthetic qualities, or pedagogical value. While these studies have contributed to the preservation and appreciation of pantun as cultural heritage, they often pay limited attention to its function as a medium of political expression within historically specific power relations. As a result, the role of pantun in articulating resistance to colonial domination remains under-theorized.

Second, historical accounts of resistance in colonial Indonesia have traditionally privileged overt political movements, military uprisings, and elite nationalist figures. Although such approaches have yielded valuable insights into the formation of Indonesian nationalism, they tend to marginalize everyday and culturally mediated forms of resistance exercised by non-elite communities. This emphasis risks reproducing a narrow conception of resistance that overlooks how ordinary people negotiated colonial power through symbolic and discursive practices (Scott, 1990). Cultural expressions such as pantun, which operate outside formal political institutions, are therefore insufficiently integrated into dominant narratives of colonial resistance.

Third, existing studies rarely connect pantun to broader debates on democracy as a culturally embedded process. Research on democratic development in Indonesia often focuses on modern

constitutional frameworks and post-independence political institutions, thereby implicitly reinforcing the notion that democratic values were introduced primarily through Western influence. Conversely, literary studies of pantun seldom engage with political theory or democratic discourse, treating poetic expression as separate from questions of governance and power. This analytical separation obscures the possibility that pantun may encode indigenous conceptions of democracy grounded in local cultural values.

Moreover, resistance is frequently conceptualized as a clearly defined and confrontational stance against colonial authority. Such conceptualizations overlook the ambiguous and evolving nature of resistance practices that involve negotiation, cooperation, and strategic accommodation. Colonial subjects often employed what might be described as unformed or adaptive resistance, practices that did not conform to rigid ideological frameworks yet nonetheless contributed to the preservation of cultural autonomy and political agency. The absence of analytical attention to these forms of resistance limits our understanding of how power was contested in everyday colonial contexts. Together, these limitations indicate the need for a study that places pantun at the intersection of cultural resistance and democratic imagination within the colonial Indonesian archipelago. Such a study must move beyond descriptive accounts to examine how poetic discourse functions as a site where power relations are negotiated, ethical values are articulated, and alternative political visions are imagined.

Responding to these gaps, the present study examines the pantun titled “High Power, Unformed Resistance” as a cultural text that reflects the struggle of the Indonesian archipelago to form a culturally grounded democratic vision in the context of colonial domination. This study approaches pantun not merely as a poetic artifact but as a form of discursive practice through which power, resistance, and collective identity are symbolically constructed and contested. The primary objective of this research is threefold. First, it aims to analyze how the pantun articulates concepts of power and democracy that diverge from colonial political models. By examining metaphor, imagery, and thematic structure, the study seeks to uncover how democratic ideals rooted in indigenous cultural values are expressed through poetic language. Second, the research investigates how resistance is represented as an unformed and adaptive process rather than a fixed oppositional stance. This perspective highlights the role of cooperation, diplomacy, and cultural continuity as strategic responses to colonial domination. Third, the study explores how pantun functions as a medium for sustaining collective memory and cultural identity under conditions of political constraint.

Methodologically, the study adopts an interdisciplinary qualitative approach that integrates literary analysis, postcolonial theory, and cultural studies. Through close textual analysis, the pantun is examined in relation to its historical and socio-political context, allowing for a nuanced interpretation of its symbolic meanings. This approach enables the study to bridge literary interpretation and political analysis, demonstrating how cultural texts can inform broader understandings of power and resistance.

The contribution of this study is both theoretical and analytical. Theoretically, it advances discussions of democracy by demonstrating that democratic imagination can emerge from cultural and literary practices rather than institutional frameworks alone. It also enriches postcolonial literary studies by foregrounding pantun as a site of subtle resistance that complicates dominant narratives of colonial opposition. Analytically, the study provides a detailed examination of pantun as a medium of political discourse in colonial Indonesia, thereby expanding the range of texts considered relevant to historical and political inquiry. By situating pantun within the broader dynamics of colonial power, cultural resistance, and democratic aspiration, this study offers a new perspective on the Indonesian colonial experience. It underscores the importance of literature as a space where power is negotiated, identity is preserved, and alternative political futures are imagined. In doing so, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how culture operates as both a form of resistance and a foundation for democratic thought in postcolonial societies.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in an interdisciplinary humanities approach. Qualitative design is appropriate given the study’s objective to explore meanings,

representations, and ideological positions embedded within a traditional literary text. Rather than measuring variables or testing hypotheses, the research seeks to interpret how cultural resistance, power, and democratic imagination are articulated through pantun within a specific historical context. The study integrates literary analysis with postcolonial and cultural theory, allowing the pantun to be examined as both a poetic text and a socio political discourse situated in the colonial experience of the Indonesian archipelago.

An interpretive textual analysis is employed to examine symbolic structures, thematic patterns, and discursive strategies within the selected pantun. This approach enables close engagement with the text while situating it within broader historical and cultural frameworks. By combining literary interpretation with contextual analysis, the study aims to capture the complexity of cultural resistance expressed through indirect and non confrontational modes.

The primary data source for this study is the pantun titled “High Power, Unformed Resistance”, which constitutes the central object of analysis. The pantun is treated as a cultural and literary text that reflects social values, power relations, and modes of resistance during the colonial period in the Indonesian archipelago. The text is analyzed in its English translated form, with careful attention to semantic shifts, metaphorical expressions, and implicit meanings that may emerge through translation.

To support contextual interpretation, secondary data sources are also used. These include scholarly journal articles, academic books, and historical studies related to colonial Indonesia, Malay and Indonesian literary traditions, pantun studies, postcolonial theory, and theories of cultural resistance and democracy. Only peer reviewed and academically reputable sources are used to ensure the credibility and scholarly rigor of the analysis.

Data collection in this study is conducted through documentation and literature review methods. The primary text is collected through archival and academic sources that provide access to pantun texts and related literary discussions. Secondary data are gathered through systematic review of academic literature accessed via university libraries and international academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and JSTOR.

The literature selection process prioritizes sources that address pantun as a literary form, cultural expressions of resistance, colonial power relations, and culturally grounded conceptions of democracy. Sources are screened for relevance, theoretical depth, and methodological clarity. This process ensures that the analytical framework is informed by established scholarly debates and that interpretations of the pantun are grounded in credible academic discourse.

In qualitative literary research, the researcher serves as the primary analytical instrument. The interpretation of the pantun relies on the researcher’s theoretical knowledge, analytical competence, and familiarity with postcolonial and cultural studies. To guide the analysis systematically, an analytical framework is developed based on key concepts drawn from postcolonial theory, cultural resistance studies, and literary discourse analysis.

This framework includes analytical categories such as representations of power, forms of resistance, expressions of cultural identity, symbolic articulation of democracy, and discursive strategies of indirect opposition. These categories function as interpretive lenses rather than rigid coding schemes, allowing flexibility in responding to the complexity of the text while maintaining analytical coherence.

The data collection procedure begins with a close reading of the pantun to identify central themes, metaphors, and symbolic structures. This initial reading is conducted multiple times to ensure comprehensive engagement with the text. Notes are taken on recurring images, linguistic patterns, and implicit references to power, resistance, and social order.

Following this stage, relevant academic literature is reviewed to contextualize the findings and situate the pantun within broader historical and theoretical discussions. The secondary sources are not used to predetermine interpretations but to support, refine, and critically engage with insights derived from the textual analysis. Throughout this process, careful cross checking is conducted to ensure consistency between textual evidence and theoretical interpretation.

As a qualitative interpretive study, this research does not employ numerical measurement or statistical indicators. Instead, analytical validity is achieved through conceptual clarity, textual evidence, and theoretical coherence. The strength of interpretation is assessed by the extent to

which analytical claims are supported by textual excerpts, contextual understanding, and alignment with established scholarly perspectives.

Conceptual categories such as power, resistance, and democracy are operationalized through their literary and discursive manifestations rather than quantified variables. For example, resistance is identified through metaphorical language, symbolic opposition, and indirect critique rather than explicit political statements. This form of qualitative measurement is appropriate for capturing the subtle and unformed nature of resistance expressed in pantun.

Data analysis is conducted using qualitative textual and discourse analysis techniques. The pantun is analyzed through close reading to examine how meaning is constructed through metaphor, structure, and narrative implication. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between form and content, especially how poetic devices enable the articulation of resistance and democratic values in non direct ways.

The analysis proceeds in three stages. First, a descriptive analysis identifies key themes and symbolic elements within the pantun. Second, an interpretive analysis explores how these elements relate to concepts of power, colonial dominance, and cultural negotiation. Third, a contextual analysis connects the findings to historical conditions of colonial Indonesia and theoretical discussions in postcolonial and cultural studies.

To enhance analytical rigor, triangulation is applied by comparing textual interpretations with insights from historical and theoretical literature. Reflexivity is also maintained throughout the analysis, with the researcher critically reflecting on interpretive assumptions and ensuring that conclusions remain grounded in textual evidence rather than speculative inference.

Findings

The findings of this study are derived from a close qualitative analysis of the pantun titled *High Power, Unformed Resistance*. The analysis focuses on how power, resistance, cultural identity, and democratic imagination are articulated through poetic structure, imagery, and symbolic language. The results are organized into four thematic categories that emerged consistently across the textual analysis.

The first major finding concerns the way power is represented in the pantun. Rather than depicting power as coercive domination or institutional authority, the text constructs power as a moral and cultural force grounded in ethical values and collective responsibility. Power is implied through elevated imagery associated with wisdom, restraint, and legitimacy rather than physical control or violence. Lexical choices related to height, light, and endurance suggest an understanding of power that is symbolic and culturally embedded.

This representation aligns with scholarship on Malay literary traditions, which emphasizes that authority is often conveyed indirectly through metaphor and allegory rather than explicit assertion (Teeuw, 1984; Braginsky, 2004). In the pantun, power is presented as something that must be cultivated and sustained through adherence to cultural norms rather than imposed externally. The absence of direct references to colonial rulers or political institutions reinforces this conceptualization, suggesting that power is located within the moral order of the community rather than in colonial governance structures.

Textual patterns indicate that power is repeatedly associated with balance and harmony. This suggests a normative vision of leadership that prioritizes social cohesion over domination. Such an articulation reflects indigenous political thought in the Indonesian archipelago, where authority has traditionally been linked to ethical conduct and communal responsibility rather than centralized command (Geertz, 1980).

A second central finding relates to the depiction of resistance. The pantun does not present resistance as overt confrontation or organized rebellion. Instead, resistance is articulated as indirect, adaptive, and gradual. The poetic voice employs ambiguity, metaphor, and symbolic indirection to communicate opposition without explicit declaration. This unformed quality of resistance is evident in the absence of conflict oriented vocabulary and the reliance on suggestion rather than accusation.

Metaphorical references to endurance, patience, and continuity recur throughout the text, indicating a strategy of persistence rather than immediate opposition. Such forms of resistance correspond to what Scott (1990) describes as everyday resistance, practices that operate beneath

the level of formal political action yet remain effective in undermining dominant power structures. In the pantun, resistance is embedded in the maintenance of cultural values and collective memory, functioning as a sustained mode of opposition that avoids direct repression.

Notably, the text allows space for cooperation and negotiation alongside resistance. Linguistic cues suggest accommodation without submission, reflecting the historical reality that colonial subjects often adopted flexible strategies to navigate domination. These findings challenge binary conceptualizations of resistance versus compliance commonly found in colonial historiography and highlights the complexity of indigenous responses to imperial power (Ricklefs, 2008).

The analysis also reveals that pantun functions as a medium for preserving cultural identity and transmitting communal values. The structural features of the pantun, including parallelism and symbolic correspondence, reinforce collective norms and shared understanding. Key semantic clusters relate to tradition, continuity, and social bonds, suggesting that the pantun serves as a cultural anchor in periods of political uncertainty.

The findings indicate that cultural identity is not expressed through direct self-assertion but through shared symbols and moral references that presuppose communal knowledge. This aligns with previous studies showing that pantun relies heavily on cultural competence for interpretation, making it an effective vehicle for in group communication and cultural continuity (Maier, 2017; Hussin, 2014).

By embedding resistance within culturally familiar forms, the pantun enables the community to sustain identity without provoking direct confrontation with colonial authorities. The literary form itself becomes a protective mechanism, allowing politically charged meanings to circulate under the guise of aesthetic expression. This supports claims in postcolonial literary studies that cultural texts often operate as sites of negotiated resistance rather than explicit opposition (Ashcroft et al., 2002).

The final thematic finding concerns the articulation of democratic values through poetic discourse. While the pantun does not reference democracy as a formal political system, it consistently emphasizes principles associated with democratic life, such as collective deliberation, moral accountability, and social balance. The findings show that decision making is implied as a communal and ethical process rather than a hierarchical command.

Imagery associated with gathering, balance, and mutual recognition suggests a vision of governance rooted in consensus and shared responsibility. This reflects indigenous models of deliberation that prioritize social harmony and ethical obligation, such as *musyawarah* and *mufakat*, which have been widely documented in Indonesian social thought (Geertz, 1980). The pantun thus encodes a form of democratic imagination that predates and exists independently of colonial political frameworks.

Importantly, the democratic values articulated in the pantun coexist with resistance rather than replace it. The findings indicate that the pursuit of a culturally grounded democracy is itself a form of resistance to colonial models of authority. By asserting local ethical frameworks as legitimate sources of governance, the pantun implicitly challenges the moral authority of colonial rule. This supports contemporary arguments that democracy can emerge from cultural practice rather than institutional imposition alone (Benhabib, 2006; Chatterjee, 2004).

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that High Power, Unformed Resistance operates as a culturally sophisticated text in which power, resistance, identity, and democratic values are interwoven through poetic expression. Power is constructed as moral authority, resistance is articulated as adaptive and indirect, cultural identity is preserved through symbolic continuity, and democracy is imagined as an ethical and communal practice. These results establish pantun as an important literary site for understanding how colonial subjects negotiated domination while sustaining cultural autonomy.

Discussion

This study set out to examine how the pantun High Power, Unformed Resistance articulates power, resistance, cultural identity, and democratic imagination within the colonial context of the Indonesian archipelago. By situating the textual analysis within postcolonial literary theory and culturally grounded models of democracy, the findings contribute to broader discussions on how

literary forms operate as sites of political meaning under conditions of domination. The discussion that follows reengages the research questions, situates the findings within relevant scholarship, and advances theoretical implications while acknowledging interpretive limitations.

One of the central findings of this study is the representation of power as moral and cultural authority rather than coercive control. This result aligns with established research in Southeast Asian literary studies that emphasizes the symbolic nature of authority in Malay and Indonesian traditions (Teeuw, 1984; Braginsky, 2004). Unlike colonial power, which was exercised through legal systems, military force, and economic extraction, the power articulated in the pantun is shown to derive legitimacy from ethical conduct and cultural continuity.

This finding directly addresses the first research question concerning the forms of struggle employed by the people of the archipelago. Instead of contesting colonial dominance through direct opposition, the pantun frames power as something internal to the community and anchored in shared values. Such an articulation is significant because it shifts analytical attention away from colonial structures toward indigenous epistemologies of governance. In doing so, the pantun implicitly challenges colonial claims to moral superiority without naming colonial authority explicitly.

Interestingly, this representation of power diverges from nationalist literary texts of the later colonial period, which often depict power in explicitly oppositional terms tied to sovereignty and independence (Foulcher, 1993). The pantun's refusal to engage in overt confrontation suggests a strategic orientation toward endurance rather than rupture. This supports postcolonial arguments that resistance often takes culturally appropriate forms that minimize risk while sustaining ideological autonomy (Bhabha, 1994).

The study further demonstrates that resistance in the pantun is articulated as indirect, adaptive, and unformed. This finding is particularly important as it complicates dominant narratives that frame resistance primarily as organized rebellion or explicit defiance. Instead, the pantun embodies what Scott (1990) describes as *infrapolitical* resistance, practices that operate beneath the surface of formal political discourse.

The absence of confrontational language and the prominence of metaphorical expression suggest that resistance is woven into everyday cultural practice rather than positioned as an exceptional political act. This result supports prior ethnographic and historical studies showing that colonial subjects frequently relied on symbolic and cultural strategies to negotiate domination (Kartodirdjo, 1992; Stoler, 2010). However, the present study extends this scholarship by demonstrating how such strategies are embedded within the formal features of poetic discourse itself.

An unexpected outcome of the analysis is the pantun's accommodation of cooperation alongside resistance. Rather than presenting negotiation as capitulation, the text frames adaptability as a survival strategy. This finding contradicts studies that interpret collaboration with colonial authorities solely as evidence of compliance or false consciousness (Loomba, 2005). In contrast, the pantun suggests that cooperation can coexist with ideological resistance, a position that invites a reevaluation of how agency is conceptualized in colonial contexts.

Another significant finding is the role of pantun as a medium for preserving cultural identity under colonial rule. The analysis shows that cultural continuity is not maintained through explicit assertions of identity but through shared symbols, implicit moral references, and structural familiarity. This reinforces Maier's (2017) argument that Malay literary forms rely heavily on cultural competence and communal knowledge for meaning making.

The pantun's emphasis on continuity rather than rupture indicates that cultural identity functions as a form of resistance in its own right. By maintaining linguistic and aesthetic traditions, the community resists cultural erasure without provoking direct confrontation. This observation supports broader postcolonial scholarship that views culture as a central arena of colonial struggle (Ashcroft et al., 2002).

At the same time, this finding tempers idealized readings of cultural resistance. While the pantun preserves identity, it does not explicitly mobilize that identity toward political transformation in a revolutionary sense. This suggests the need for cautious interpretation. Cultural preservation may sustain communal cohesion, but it does not automatically translate

into structural change. Recognizing this distinction helps avoid romanticizing literary resistance as inherently emancipatory.

Perhaps the most theoretically significant finding is the articulation of democratic values through poetic discourse. Although democracy is not named explicitly, the pantun consistently emphasizes consensus, balance, and moral accountability. These values resonate with culturally grounded forms of governance in the Indonesian archipelago that prioritize deliberation and social harmony (Geertz, 1980).

This finding supports recent theoretical work that argues for decentering Western institutional models in discussions of democracy (Chatterjee, 2004; Benhabib, 2006). The pantun demonstrates that democratic imagination can emerge from cultural practice rather than formal political systems. In this sense, the pursuit of a culturally grounded democracy constitutes a form of resistance to colonial political rationality, which sought to impose external models of governance.

However, this result also raises important questions. While the pantun encodes democratic values, it does so within an ethical and symbolic framework rather than a procedural one. This suggests that democracy, as imagined in the pantun, operates primarily at the level of moral orientation rather than political organization. Future research might explore whether such imaginaries influenced later institutional developments or remained largely symbolic.

Taken together, the findings support a broader hypothesis that literary forms in colonial contexts function as sites of negotiated resistance rather than direct opposition. The pantun analyzed in this study demonstrates that power and resistance are not binary categories but relational processes shaped by cultural norms and historical conditions. This challenges universalist models of resistance and suggests that theories of colonial opposition must account for cultural specificity.

Another implication is that democratic thought in postcolonial societies cannot be fully understood through institutional histories alone. Literary and cultural expressions offer valuable insights into how communities conceptualize authority, participation, and legitimacy outside formal political structures. Incorporating such sources expands the analytical scope of political theory and postcolonial studies alike.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations that warrant cautious interpretation. The analysis focuses on a single pantun, which restricts the ability to generalize findings across regions or periods. While the text provides rich insights, it should be understood as illustrative rather than representative of all pantun or all forms of colonial resistance.

Additionally, the use of translated text introduces interpretive challenges, particularly with regard to metaphor and cultural nuance. Although care was taken to ground interpretation in established scholarship, some semantic layers may remain inaccessible. Future studies could address this limitation by incorporating comparative analysis of multiple pantun in their original language.

Future research could expand this line of inquiry by examining a broader corpus of pantun from different regions of the archipelago to identify patterns and variations in the articulation of resistance and democratic values. Comparative studies between pantun and other oral literary forms may also illuminate how different genres respond to colonial conditions.

Further interdisciplinary research integrating literary analysis with historical and anthropological methods could shed light on how these poetic imaginaries intersected with lived political practices. Such work would deepen understanding of the relationship between cultural expression and political transformation in postcolonial societies.

Conclusion

This study has examined the pantun High Power, Unformed Resistance as a cultural and literary space in which power, resistance, cultural identity, and democratic imagination are articulated within the colonial experience of the Indonesian archipelago. Through close qualitative analysis, the study demonstrates that the pantun constructs power not as coercive domination but as moral and cultural authority rooted in shared values and ethical responsibility. Resistance is shown to operate in indirect, adaptive, and unformed ways, embedded in metaphor, endurance, and cultural continuity rather than overt confrontation. At the same time, the pantun functions as a

medium for preserving collective identity and articulating a vision of socially grounded democracy based on balance, consensus, and communal accountability.

The findings carry important implications for literary, cultural, and postcolonial studies. They suggest that traditional literary forms such as pantun should not be treated merely as aesthetic or folkloric artifacts, but as discursive practices that actively engage with political realities. By revealing how democratic values and resistance strategies are encoded within poetic language, this study contributes to broader debates on how colonized communities negotiated domination without abandoning cultural integrity. It also reinforces the argument that democratic imagination in postcolonial societies cannot be fully understood through institutional histories alone, but must be explored through cultural expressions and everyday practices.

Beyond its theoretical implications, the study highlights the importance of incorporating indigenous literary traditions into analyses of colonial history and political thought. Recognizing pantun as a site of cultural resistance allows for a more nuanced understanding of colonial encounters that moves beyond binary oppositions of resistance and submission. Such an approach invites further interdisciplinary engagement between literary analysis, historical inquiry, and political theory.

In conclusion, *High Power, Unformed Resistance* illustrates how poetry can serve as a quiet yet enduring force in sustaining cultural autonomy and envisioning alternative forms of social order under colonial constraint. By foregrounding the subtle power of literary expression, this study underscores the enduring relevance of cultural texts in shaping collective memory, social values, and aspirations for justice. In doing so, it affirms that the struggle for dignity and self-determination is often carried forward not only through visible acts of opposition, but also through the careful preservation of language, tradition, and meaning.

Ethics approval

Not required.

Competing interests

All the authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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Underlying data

Derived data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author on request.

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