



Literary Studies

# Power Relations Between Parents and Children as Seen in Desni Intan Suri's *Aku Tidak Membeli Cintamu* and Mohja Kafh's *The Girl In The Tangerine Scarf*

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## ABSTRACT

The role of parents in determining the lives of their children has been depicted in many media including literary works. This article tries to show how this issue is presented in two novels. Scrutinized from Foucauldian's perspective focusing on power relations between parents and children, this article analyzes Desni Intan Suri's *Aku Tidak Membeli Cintamu* and Mohja Kafh's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*. The results show that the parents impose their power in the form of domination. In addition, the authors portray the children's acceptance as well as resistance to domination. Acceptance indicates obedience. On the other hand, resistance is a way to exemplify that parents' dominations can be challenged as children's voices are also valuable.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of power relations in literary works has been discussed by many literary scholars and critics. For example, Raoufzadeh et.al (2020) applies Foucault's ideology of power in showing how power operates in the protagonist's life and how she tries to resist the power in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. The study reveals that the protagonist fails in resisting the power imposed. Her suicide is proof of this failure. The second study refers to Wasesa's article (2013). He analyzes power relations in Okky Madasari's novel *Entrok* from the lens of Foucauldian. He states that the forms of power relations in the novel are related to thoughts and bodies. Objectification, manipulation, domination, stigmatization, and control are the forms of power relations toward thoughts. Meanwhile, the power relations toward the body involve objectification, manipulation, and control. Wasesa's research also shows resistance toward the power relation.

Particularly, power relations may exist in the relationship between parents and children. Some researchers have analyzed this issue in literary

works. In their article entitled "Strategies in Power Relations in a Fictional Work: A Foucauldian Analysis, Rahmasari and Nurhayati (2019) scrutinize the father-son relationship as seen in Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters*. Referring to the Foucauldian theory about power relations, their findings show that both father and son apply some strategies to achieve their intentions. The father is successful in achieving his dream to make his son marry a Parsi woman instead of a Catholic. Meanwhile, Novela (2017) claims that power relations between parents and children in *My Life as a Stuntboy*. She analyzes the power relations between parents and children by referring to the conflict resolutions theory by Dekovic, Gracia-Ruiz, Hernandez-Cabrera, Maiquez, Rodrigo, and Foucault's theory of power. Her analysis reveals that parents' expectations and the influence of society cause conflicts between parents and children.

This paper discusses power relations between parents and children in two novels. The first novel is Desni Intan Suri's *Aku Tidak Membeli Cintamu*. This novel depicts the life of the Minangkabau family,

particularly from Pariaman, West Sumatra. The main characters, Suci and her siblings experience an arranged marriage proposed by her parents. This novel presents how arranged marriage has a relation to the *Bajapuik* tradition (giving dowry to the groom's family). The dynamic relationship between parents and children in perceiving the dowry tradition becomes the main theme presented in the novel.

Some researchers have examined this novel from various perspectives. Lidya (2018) argues that the characters in this novel have misperceived the *Bajapuik* tradition. Traditionally, this tradition is aimed at respecting the husband. Nevertheless, the characters in the novel consider dowry as a measure of family pride or self-dignity. In this sense, if a woman's family is able to prepare much money for the dowry, then she has the right to rule or control her husband. The other researcher also analyzes the issue of culture in *Aku Tidak Membeli Cintamu*. Novianti (2018) claims that the issue of cultural barriers in the novel is related to beliefs, perspectives, psychological problems, pessimistic views toward new things, and the advancement of technology.

The second article that discusses this novel is Friade's study. In his article entitled *Pemaknaan Novel Aku Tidak Membeli Cintamu karya Desni Intan Suri (Suatu Tinjauan Semiotik)*, Friade (2016) portrays the main characters' critiques toward the roles and functions of *Bajapuik* tradition (giving dowry to the groom's family) in Pariaman, West Sumatera, through the lens of semiotics. Another researcher that examines *Aku Tidak Membeli Cintamu* is Syafnita (2014). By utilizing a feminist perspective, Syafnita (2014) reveals the images of Minangkabau women in the novel. She categorizes the images of Minangkabau women into two. The images of Minangkabau women as an individual and as a part of society.

*The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* by Mohja Kahf is the second novel that depicts the problem of power relations between parents and children. A story about Wajdy Shamy and Ebtehaj Shamy who migrate from Syria to America as Islamic preachers. The ways they raise their children in America and how the children respond to their parent's authority are the main points presented in the novel. Khadra Shamy and her brothers experience the complexity of their lives as Muslims in America. The complexity has been scrutinized by some researchers. Bujupaj (2016) analyzes how parents'

and daughters' relationships are depicted in two Arab-American novels. Bujupaj analyzes this issue from psychological and postcolonial perspectives. He finds that the multiple backgrounds lead to some oppression from parents toward their daughters. Parents' psychological history and their status as immigrants in the white country result in many challenges faced by their daughters.

The second research on this novel is about marginalization by Handayani (2020). In her analysis, Handayani (2020) discusses the issue of marginalization viewed from both textual and contextual perspectives. Referring to Gennet's narrative theory and the social background of the novel, she finds that the marginalization of Muslims happens in both domestic and public spheres. Furthermore, two studies on the novel refer to the feminist lens. Suraiya et.al (2018) state that Khadra Shamy as the main character utilizes negotiations in constructing her identity and rights as an immigrant Muslim woman in America. The main character's negotiations are discussed from an Islamic point of view. Similarly, Handayani (2021) examines the issue of female subjectivity in the novel. Her study shows that the main female character expresses her subjectivity as a way to respond to patriarchal values imposed by the family.

The aforementioned studies show that both novels have been analyzed from various perspectives. One of the studies has discussed the issue of power relations between parents and daughters from psychological and postcolonial views. On the other hand, this research applies a Foucauldian analysis. In addition, a comparative analysis of these two novels has yet to be done. Therefore, this study proposes an analysis of the issue of power relations between parents and children from a Foucauldian perspective.

According to Foucault, power relations are related to obedience in order to gain power manipulatively instead of repressively. Moreover, Foucault (2002) considers power as concrete practices that produce norms that are then reproduced and legitimized by the authorities like police, doctors, teachers, judges, etc. The norms are considered the basis of thinking in certain eras and places where the authorities control society. In this sense, the authorities can be associated with the government. As Foucault states:

*Basically, power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or their mutual*

*to political structures of the management of states, rather, it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be the director of the government of children, of souls, of community, of families, of the sick. To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others. (Foucault, 2002: 341)*

Foucault then further emphasizes the issue of immanence. In this case, that immanence of power exists in any kind of social relations. The relations can be in the family, in the government as well as in social institutions.

## II. METHODS

From the explanation above, this study is aimed to show how power relations between parents and children are presented in both novels. Therefore, some steps will be followed. The first step is collecting the data found in the novels and other sources. Moreover, the writer applies a close reading technique in scrutinizing the data related to the forms of power relations between parents and children as well as the responses toward power relations. Regarding the last procedure, the writer refers to the qualitative method. In this sense, the findings of the research are presented in the form of words and paragraphs instead of numbers.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Power Relations Between Parents and Children in Desni Intan Suri's *Aku Tidak Membeli Cintamu*

*Aku Tidak Membeli Cintamu* depicts a dynamic relationship within a Minangkabau family, particularly from Pariaman region in West Sumatera. This part elaborates on how the relationship is related to the power imposed by the parents toward the children. The relationship can be seen in the form of domination from parents to children. The mother's significant role in shaping children's life is portrayed by Suci's grandmother from her father's side. This still relates to an arranged marriage. The marriage of Suci's parents is arranged by the parents. As the grandmother states that the life of Suci's father will be better if he married Suci's mother (Suri, 2012: 83).

The dominant role is also portrayed by Suci's mother toward her children. This can be seen when she decides the best future for her children. She insists that the future wife of her son must provide the dowry as her son is a Bachelor:

“Kamu itu sarjana, Zak! Ditambah lagi kamu punya gelar adat. Gelar adatmu Sutan. Seharusnya kamu dibeli sekurang-kurangnya satu mobil dan satu rumah!” (Suri, 2012: 69)

Moreover, this power is also imposed on Suci's sister, Riana. In this sense, Riana has no power to refuse the arranged marriage by Suci's mother. The author describes the social background of the future husband as the main reason for arranging the marriage. Suci faces the same experience as her future husband has been determined by her mother. The power of the mother in deciding the future spouses of her children reflects the influence of cultural values. In this case, the novel portrays the matriarchal value. As Mahkota et.al (2020) states that *Aku Tidak Membeli Cintamu* exemplifies how the matriarchal-matrilineal system operates in the novel. *The women's (mother) side is considered as the main power in the family.*

Furthermore, the author depicts how the main female character, Suci, expresses her reactions to the dominations. Nevertheless, the author presents different reactions compared to her sister, Riana. Suci's reactions to arranged marriage will be discussed in the next subtitle.

### Power Relations Between Parents and Children in Mohja Kafh's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*

In Mohja Kafh's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, power relations are implemented in some forms. The first is domination based on several backgrounds such as religion, culture, race, social class, and gender.

As mentioned earlier. Khadra's parents are preachers. Therefore, they want to embrace the Islamic ways of life wherever they live. In Indiana, the preservation of Islamic teachings is implemented by sending the children to Sunday Morning School to learn Islam in depth. This preservation also happens when Khadra's mother, Ebtehaj, introduces hijab (a head covering worn in public by some Muslim women) to Khadra since she was a child. In this context, Ebtehaj as a mediator in instilling Islamic teachings that she believes wearing hijab is compulsory for Muslim

women. Khadra obeys Ebtehaj by wearing hijab and considered hijab as an important part of herself:

*...hijab soon grew to feel as natural to her as a second skin, without which if she ventured into the outside world she felt naked. (Kafh, 2006:63).*

Moreover, the domination of religion is also related to the strict rules in the social life of Khadra's family. As can be seen from Wajdy's prejudice regarding the American teenagers' lives that he considers are not appropriate for Muslims. As a result, Wajdy chooses a protective attitude towards Khadra. The prohibition for Khadra to stay at the house of his friend, Ginny Debs, a white American is proof of this power relation between Khadra and her parents (Kafh, 2006:47). The ways Wajdy and Ebtehaj impose their authority on their children are the indicators of power relations between parents and children. Their actions reflect that religion is considered an inseparable part of Muslim life. Therefore, they cannot disregard the Islamic teachings in their lives.

Cultural background is the second power relation between parents and children. Khadra's mother, Ebtehaj, depicts her assertive attitude toward American society by controlling the children's lives in making friends. Ebtehaj always asks questions if Khadra hangs out with his American friends. Therefore, Ebtehaj always reminds Khadra to be selective in making friends. Nevertheless, Ebtehaj opens up space for Khadra to mingle with the non-Muslim community like Livvy, a Christian due to certain conditions. This is not without reason because according to Khadra, Livvy's family is not much different from her family, namely not drinking alcoholic beverages (Kafh, 2006: 48). Ebtehaj gives Khadra the freedom to make relationships but only with people who were considered to have a common background of values. In other words, Khadra's freedom of social life is restricted.

The third form of power relation utilized by Khadra's parents is domination based on race. This authority occurs when Khadra's parents impose their thoughts on the importance of racial background on Khadra's brother, Eyad. This was seen when Eyad, wants to marry a black Sudanese Muslim woman, Maha. Nevertheless, Khadra states that "As Syrian Arabs like her, parents sure didn't think black was beautiful." (Kafh, 2006:76). This quotation shows that Khadra's parents' attitude

indirectly places Maha as an inferior Muslim. In other words, Maha is not as equal to the Shamy family because of the different skin color/race. The idea of controlling Eyad's future wife is similar to the characters' experience in *Aku Tidak Membeli Cintamu*. This represents the parents' domination in the children's marriage.

This domination is also presented when Khadra is faced with the decision made by her parents regarding her future husband. The gender background plays an essential role in encouraging Khadra's decision to marry Juma. Khadra, as a Muslim woman is not allowed to live alone apart from her parents as her father is offered to be a preacher in the South Bend region so Khadra had to follow them. This fact indicates the marginalization of women in the domestic domain (Handayani, 2020). The text also shows that Khadra is married to Juma because of Juma's social background. Juma's family has a good reputation (Kafh, 2006: 116). In this case, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* portrays the influence of social class in forming power relations between Khadra's parents and her.

Parents' domination is also depicted toward children's bodies. When Khadra decides to marry Juma, she undergoes an unhappy marriage. She plans to do an abortion. However, her father's domination is shown:

*"Well, I don't want to die in childbirth," Khadra said sarcastically. "I'm not suggesting you do so," he said quietly. "I'm saying, my mother sacrificed everything for a child. Sacrificed her own self." "Well, I am not your mother," Khadra shot back. "I don't want to be your mother." "I didn't raise you to speak to me in that tone," he snapped, as he rarely ever did.. (Kafh, 2006: 245-6)*

The domination of Khadra's body by her father implies that Khadra has no right to decide the best things for her own body. In this case, her body is not hers.

The dominations imposed by the parents in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* indicate how parents play important roles in shaping the future of their children. Handayani (2016) claims the roles as the identity construction process of the children, particularly as immigrant Muslims living in America where White people are the majority. Therefore, the intersection of religion, culture, race, social class, and gender constructs the lives

of the children.

### Responses towards Power Relations between Parents and Children

Characters in both novels depict various responses toward the power imposed by the parents. In *Aku Tidak Membeli Cintamu*, Suri presents resistance through the character, Suci. She voices her disagreement when her mother intends to arrange her marriage. This quotation below shows her opinion:

*Bagi Suci, sungguhlah sebuah hal yang memalukan bila memang uang jempunan akan menjadi uang hilang, karena sama saja artinya mencari kekayaan atau keuntungan pribadi dengan menjual seorang anak kepada orang lain. Bagi yang membeli, ini merupakan sebuah nilai prestige yang tinggi. Semakin tinggi nilai yang disodorkan semakin timbul rasa kebanggaan si pembeli karena mampu membelinya dengan harga tinggi (Suri, 2012:108).*

Suci criticizes the *Bajapuik* tradition as it only causes negative consequences to both families. Nevertheless, the *Bapajapuik* tradition is actually misperceived by the parents. As Lidya (2018) explains that parents in the novel consider dowry as a measure of family self-esteem or self-dignity. If a woman's family is able to prepare for a high amount of money, then she has the right to rule and dominate her husband as she has 'bought' him.

The resistance is also presented through the male character, Razak. As Suci's brother, Razak disagrees with the dowry given by the bride. He shows his disagreement although he has to face the consequences from his mother. The author depicts the effect:

*Tapi banyak yang menjadikan tradisi adat ini sesuatu yang harus dimaknai secara ekstrem. Banyak yang menjadikan sisrem uang jempunan ini sebagai ukuran martabat diri. Malangnya, itu pula yang dipahami oleh keluarganya. Tepatnya, keluarga dari garis keturunan bundonya. Razak, kakak laki-laki Suci satu-satunya, memahami adat yang sebenar adat karena ia lulusan Fakultas Hukum Jurusan Adat. Ia kokoh tidak mau dibeli dengan cara adat yang salah. Perkawinan Razak tetap berlangsung tapi*

*Meinar tetap pula tidak mendapat tempat di hati mertua perempuannya. (Suri, 2012: 71).*

In *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, the author also presents the response of children toward the power imposed by their parents. As the arranged marriage has been chosen for Khadra, she has no choices. The fact shows that her brother, Eyad, has been living in the college dormitory. If Khadra intends to live away from her parents, she has to get married. The position of being a Muslim woman who is not allowed to live away from her family puts Khadra in a weak position. In this case, Khadra accepts the arranged marriage.

The issue of resistance is shown when Khadra decides to do an abortion. This way is a form of her feelings toward her unhappy married life. Khadra thinks that the ambivalence of her father's way of raising children only puts her in a disadvantaged situation. As she states:

*You raised me to go out and learn, but deep down you still want me to be just like your mother. So where did you think all these contradictions would lead me if not to this frustration, this tone of voice? But I am not going to kill myself to fit into the life you have all mapped out for me. (Kafh, 2006: 245-6)*

The resistance shown by the children in the two novels indicates that the power imposed by the parents is not something taken for granted

### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Having analyzed the issue of power relations between parents and children in *Aku Tidak Membeli Cintamu* and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, the writer finds that there are various forms of power relations between parents and children. Domination based on culture is presented in *Aku Tidak Membeli Cintamu*. Meanwhile, religion, race, social class, and gender are the push factors for parents to express their power toward their children. In addition, domination towards the body is also presented in this novel.

In responding to the power, the authors present some responses of the children. In *Aku Tidak Membeli Cintamu*, the author criticizes the perspectives of the Minangkabau parents regarding the *Bajapuik* tradition through children. The



different perspectives and responses of children towards parents' power indicate that the *Bajapuik* tradition is not something *taken for granted*. Instead, the author presents Suci and Indra as the representation of children who question the Bajapuik tradition. On the hand, Riana's acceptance of the tradition shows her obedience to her parents. Nevertheless, Suci and Indra's attitudes trigger their parents' changes of perspectives toward the *Bajapuik* tradition. Similarly, Mohja Kafh's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* demonstrates both acceptance and resistance toward the power imposed by the parents. Acceptance shows obedience. Resistance indicates that power can be challenged and questioned although it comes from the parents.

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