

## **Power Dynamics in Ahmad Tohari's Novel "The Dancer"**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research concentrates on the interplay of power between the main character and other characters and the formation of the main character's identity as a result of her social interaction with the members of society. To complete the data analysis, five basic tenets of Foucault's theory of power (2006), Fundamental Nature of Power by Rummel (1976), and Theory of Identity Formation by Marcia (2005) are employed. This research highlights three major points as the finding of the data analysis which focuses on the main character protagonist, Srintil. First, the interplay of power between Srintil and other characters is considered as a strategy of interest and not being possessed by particular parties. Srintil's active participation in exercising and resisting the power in her social interaction depicts that she is responsive and susceptible character. The previous finding leads to another conclusion that Srintil's identity is dynamic and highly influenced and shaped from external factors within her social domain. Third, Srintil fails to identify herself as a result of lacking an understanding and anticipation of her expectation and society demands. According to the analysis, it can be deduced that young adult character's identity is fluctuative and exceedingly affected by power relation in social interaction.

**Keywords:** *slips of the ear, music, lyrics, lexical, syntax*

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesian literature experiences significant growth from year to year. The development of Indonesian literature is recognized and divided into five periods, Balai Pustaka period (1920-1940), Pujangga Baru period (1930-1945), the '45s period (1940-1955), the '50s period (1955-1970), and the '70s period (1965-1984) (Pradopo, 1995). Those periods have distinctive features and characteristics that distinguish each from another. Moreover, the '70s period is particularly interesting, because as Pradopo (1995) said, this period tends to focus on human exploitation as an individual rather than social, to emphasize on subculture with local culture as a background, and to voice human rights against oppression that arises from society and other individuals. Those features are presented in Ahmad Tohari's novel *The Dancer* published in early 1980s.

*The Dancer* by Ahmad Tohari is written with Central Java culture as the background. The novel tells about the life in a remote and poor village around 1950-1960s when the people

still believe in mystical things. The story is about Srintil, a beautiful young *ronggeng*, who is highly respected by the other villagers. Becoming a *ronggeng* means getting the highest social status, but it is also accompanied by great sacrifice. She must give up her dreams to be a wife and a mother because *ronggeng* is demanded to serve and to entertain people.

This novel can be considered as young adult literature since it is related to self-development of an adolescent. Furthermore, based on Owen's theory (2003), *The Dancer* has two criteria indicating young adult literature. He states that young adult literature has particular genre such as sex, family, and society demand as its common issues and young adult protagonist as the main character. Like other young adult characters in general, the main character of this novel faces several difficulties concerning the issues mentioned previously to quest her identity. In her effort to form her identity, Srintil tries to negotiate her own desire to be an ordinary woman with society interests which demand

her to follow the rules of a ronggeng. In other words, there are the interplay of power in Srintil's social interaction with other characters.

The interplay of power becomes the main concern in this research since it captures several textual evidence in the novel which depicted the exercise of power. For that purpose, this research will use Foucault's theory related to power relation. According to Foucault, power is everywhere. It has its own existence, yet will soon appear when there is an action between individuals. Power is not owned, conquered, or held but exercised. Power is not a property of a dominant group or class (Foucault, 1983). It can be concluded that power relation is an action as a response to another action and arises because there are interactions among people. Power do not come from a group or institution but "intelligible in terms of the techniques through which it is exercised" (McHoul & Grace, 1993:65). There are many forms of power in society such as economic, administrative, military, and so forth. What they have in common is they are exercised using certain techniques of

application which refer to the truth. Foucault (cited in McHoul & Grace, 1993) also states that power already controls human life process, such as births, deaths, sexual relations, sickness, disease, and so on without people realizing that they are governed by the power itself. According to Foucault (McHoul & Grace, 1993), power arises from interaction among people that affects every individual who is involved in it and also shapes their personality. For that reason, power's perspective by Foucault can be applied in analyzing power relation in *The Dancer* novel, considering the main character (Srintil) acts upon the power exercised by the others and forms her identity.

In addition, in analyzing identity development of Srintil, Marcia's (cited in Moshman, 2005) theory of identity formation is found relevant. He emphasizes that in the early phase of adolescent life, there are four stages of identity statuses that signify the process of exploration and asserting commitment experienced by young adult, which are identity foreclosure, identity moratorium,

identity achievement, and identity diffused. This is in accordance with Srintil's character development in the novel who undergoes several exploration in order to have a fix commitment. Furthermore, Marcia's identity formation theory is in line with Foucault's identity perspective (cited in Goudarzi & Ramin, 2014) which states that individuals do not have fixed identity, yet rather influenced by social interaction where there are the interplay of power involved.

There has been limited use of Foucault's power theory in literary works analysis. On the other hand, French and Raven's theory of power (1959) has been applied by quite a large number of research. For instance is Rahmadi's research (2010) analyzing The Last Samurai movie script He finds that there are four types of power in the script: coercive power, legitimate power, expert power, and reward power. French and Raven's power theory is also used in analyzing power hegemony in Putu Wijaya's novel Pabrik by Wijakangka (2008). He states that there are two kinds of power, which are coercive

power and intensive power affecting characters' life in the novel.

Meanwhile, research on The Dancer has been conducted by Harnawi (2013). Using character perspective as its approach, her research is aimed to obtain a description of characters' image in the novel. She finds that the images of the main character (Srintil) in conjunction with other characters and with herself are different. Another research of the novel is also conducted by Yunita, Syam, & Wartiningih (2013) who used feminist literary criticism approach in arguing that there is injustice in gender such as in the forms of marginalization, stereotype, and violence experienced by the main character in the novel.

The previous research, as shown above, has not discussed the issue of power relation, which is one of the important things in the novel. In addition, the previous research do not treat the novel as young adult literature. Hence, this present research is going to examine power dynamics and identity formation in the novel using Foucault's theory.

This research will also treat the novel as young adult literature considering the main character of the novel is a young adult woman and can be projected on young adult readers.

In order to conduct this research, the following research questions are needed to be answered:

1) how is power exercised by the main character of *The Dancer*?

2) in what ways does the power dynamics signify the main character's identity formation?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Power**

The analysis of this research is guided by several theoretical frameworks regarding power relation and identity formation. To be able to comprehend more what is power and power relation, Foucault (as cited in Ballan, 2013) provides two way in understanding power relation. The first one is power is exercised within a network in society. It creates a system which connecting individuals. Second, individuals are the locus of where power and resistance are exercised and not merely an object. From the statements above, it can be

concluded that according to Foucauldian perspective, society and power relation cannot be detached, there is relationship of mutual dependence between two of them. Foucault rejects the idea that power is possessed by institution. It is not always depicted on how the powerful one oppresses the powerless, rather Foucault sees power as a process of interaction among people in society, including institution within it (Ballan, 2013).

In conducting his research on power relation, Foucault underlines several key points regarding the characteristics of power which also refer to Basic Tenets of Foucault's Perspective of Power. Those tenets are: 1) power is dynamic, 2) power produces knowledge, 3) power is not possessed but exercised, 4) power exist in social relationship, 5) power is inherent with resistance.

Since Foucault's theory of power has a broad scope, several theorists attempt to elaborate his theory of power and also support this research. Another discussion of power is conducted by Rummel (1976) who complements the

limitation in Foucault's theory of power, particularly regarding distribution of types of power in social relationship. In this context, the fundamental nature of power is found compatible in supporting Foucault's basic tenets of power.

Rummel emphasizes power as an effort or strategies in influencing others in order to get someone or group's interest and to achieve their goals. He divides power into two prominent categories based on the intention to create effects on others, which are identive power and assertive power. Identive power is the capability of individuals in creating effects which is also contributed in shaping their self-assertion, self-esteem, and even identity of individual. In addition, Rummel distributes assertive power into three more levels: environment, another's body, and another's self. In the other hand, Rummel is only focus on another's self which is divided into seven categories and another's body which is split into two types of power since environment level is already represented by assertive power itself. The seven categories of assertive

power are force power, coercive power, bargaining power, authoritative power, manipulative power, intellectual power, and altruistic power.

### **Identity**

Identity and power influence each other, especially when it comes to identity formation and power relation exercised in society. Identity can be said as something abstract. It has no definite form and meaning. Foucault (as cited in Goudarzi & Ramin, 2014), states that a person has no real identity within himself, yet identity is the result of interaction in society. Based on the statement above, it can be concluded that identity formation is strongly influenced by power relation. According to Foucault (1983) relationship between individuals cannot be separated from power relation, particularly when one party is more influential than others. Since power is productive and flexible, people can always exercise power and also do resistance in their social interactions. Those interactions make power change rapidly and constantly and it also affects personal identity.

In the context of identity formation, Marcia (as cited in Schwartz, 2001: 11-13) describes four different identity statuses that represent the extent to which individuals explore and deal with certain commitments. The first status is Identity Achievement, which is always associated with balanced thinking and mature interpersonal relationship. This status symbolizes the commitment that has been decided after going through a period of exploration. Marcia considers that Identity Achievement is the end point of identity formation process and it is indicated by successful identity crisis solution. In the other hand, even though individuals already experience exploration, some of them have not yet made commitment. Marcia mentions it as Identity Moratorium. At this stage of identity formation, individuals are not only opened to new experiences, but also to anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem because they have not found what they are looking for. Those categorized as moratorium status usually struggle with the crisis and still have unclear commitment.

The Identity Foreclosure is the third category of Marcia's identity statuses. Foreclosure is usually associated with inflexibility and authoritarian style, however, individuals with foreclosure identity status have been achieved self-esteem, life satisfaction, and psychological balance. The characteristic of the identity status are individuals who have made a clear commitment, values, and beliefs without experiencing prior exploration. Those achieved commitment without exploration are generally not anticipating other alternatives and not open to any possibilities. For instance, Identity Foreclosure is often occurred in adolescents whose they career are determined by their parents. They have almost no experience in exploration, yet already have a commitment without giving much thought or consideration.

The last identity status stated by Marcia is Identity Diffusion. At this stage of identity formation, individuals especially adolescents are not active in exploring various alternatives identity and also lack of

identity commitment. Identity diffusion is usually identified with lower psychosocial functioning, lack of direction and meaning as well as social and academic incompetence. This status is an example of how individuals become apathetic and do not have any passion for commitment. They typically have not experienced any identity crisis and "taking life one day at a time".

## RESEARCH METHOD

In conducting this research, Descriptive Qualitative method is used in order to provide detail explanations and quality analysis, substance, and human experience (Marvasti, 2014) in *The Dancer* novel. Since this research focuses on social relationship among the characters, Descriptive Qualitative method is considered appropriate to be applied. Another definition supporting this method is conducted by Merriam (2009: 13) who states that "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world".

In other words, Descriptive Qualitative research uses methods such as observation and case study that result in narrative and descriptive practices (Parkinson & Drislane, 2011).

The data collected in this research are the form of textual evidences, wherein in the process of classifying the data, the writer employs close reading strategy. Close reading strategy is a critical analysis to develop deeper understanding of the text's form and meanings (Burke, 2000). After reading the text carefully, the data are collected by selecting sentences, dialogues, and any literature elements such as characterization, plot, imagery, and point of view that related to the issues discussed in the research, particularly concerning the basic tenets of power and identity formation. The last step is categorizing all textual evidences based on the focus of the research.

The data are classified into three parts. First, data are categorized based on the social relationship between the main character and other characters. The second is categorizing any forms of resistance exercised by



the main character towards the dominant in society. And the last part is identifying formation of identity experienced by the main character.

P = Percentage

F = Frequency

N = Overall Number

### Examples of Data Analysis

The examples of the analysis can be seen as follows:

Table 3.1

#### Misperception of non words

Respondent	Actual Perceived Speech	Speech
1	You're on time	You're untield

In the misperception, the respondent [1 misperceives the word on time into untield. The word untield does not exist in English vocabularies and have no meaning.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Dancer portrays the development of a young adult character in achieving her identity in the midst of transition society. Srintil, as the main character and the focus of the analysis, grows up in traditional

society which still upholds the values from their ancestors and imparts the knowledge and the way to behave from natural guidance, yet she has to deal with the fact that there are diverse values embraced in larger society beyond the scope of her little hamlet. Srintil is insisted to be able to adjust to the discrepancies of ethical standard in both society.

In comprehending those values, Srintil has to involve in interaction with other characters in which she exercises and being exercised by power relation. The interplay of power experienced by Srintil is capable of changing her perspective, attitude, and even impacted on her decisions. Moreover, the three basic tenets of Foucault's perspective of power is considered applicable to employ the analysis the power relation occurred in the novel. The norms and behaviors acknowledged in society and followed by Srintil become an indicator of one Foucault's tenets that power produces knowledge. In addition, the interaction between Srintil and other parties where there are certain motives led to the

fulfillment of interests become a proof of the second tenet that is power exists in social relationship. The last tenet which power is inherent with resistance is signified by Srintil's performance in resisting the social system and oppressor characters. Those tenets are in accordance with the dynamics of power exercised in Srintil's life.

It is also can be seen from the society where Srintil lives in has its own binding regulations and become norms and customs embraced by its inhabitants. In consequence, Srintil as the part of the society has no other options than accepting it as moral imperative although practically Srintil might be oppressed by the normative behaviors. For instance, Srintil identified herself as a *ronggeng* is influenced by people expectation who wish for *ronggeng* existence. Furthermore, the situation and condition in Dukuh Paruk which instill certain values contributes in Srintil's comprehension that being a *ronggeng* is a privilege. Moreover, she has to be consistent with her choice by accepting the terms and customs of her profession. This

situation corresponds with one of Foucault's tenets of power which is power produces knowledge as can be assumed that there are common perceptions shared in society and becoming the standard of behaving of its members. Based on the information, it can be implied that there is a structure in social domain where Srintil lives which formulates fundamental norms and behaviors and also has the capability to direct or restrict the activities of its people.

The knowledge shared in the society is also impacted on Srintil's social relationship. Srintil cannot avoid any social interaction with other members of the society. However, those interactions often lead to expectations and personal interests that demand to be fulfilled and Srintil does not always have the capacity to meet the interests and expectancies. In some cases, the parties whose their interests are unable to be satisfied by Srintil will employ several methods. These methods are then defined by Foucault as one of tenets of power, namely, power exist in social relationship. However, Foucault's limitation in describing this tenet of

power cannot complete the process of data analysis in which he is not able to provide categories of power specifically while there are several evidences in this novel depicted diverse interplay of power in Srintil's social interaction. Moreover, in complementing the data analysis, another power theory is needed but still refers to Foucault's theory of power. In this context, the fundamental nature of power by Rummel (1976) is found apposite in supporting the data analysis since it classifies power into seven categories which are force power, coercive power, bargaining power, authoritative power, intellectual power, manipulative power, and altruistic power.

The fact that all Rummel's typology of power occur in Srintil's social interaction, indicates that Srintil represents a proactive individual who responds to every phenomena and also she is considered as an influential figure in the society which can be seen from a number of people who put their interest to her. This is also interrelated with Foucault's last tenet of power which

is power is inherent with resistance. Foucault (cited in Viriasova, 2006: 72) emphasizes on his theory that power relation is the entire concept of social relationship where both parties in the interaction have a chance to exercise power reciprocally because, in his perspective, Foucault argues that there will be no power relation if it was only one party who has single control in social interaction and it will turn into a process of unilateral coercion and violence.

Srintil's resistance is a manifestation of unconformity between power exercised toward her and her conscious that says there are gaps between Srintil and her opponent that put her in an unfavorable circumstance. In her efforts to struggle over her rights, Srintil keeps defying those parties who tend to continuously exercise their power by doing two kind of resistances, which are verbal and action. Verbal resistance employed by Srintil while she has to deal personally with particular parties that persist to impose their will over her by simply saying "no". However, Srintil's decision to resist in the form of action

is motivated by the demands and norms in society that seems to oppress her, such as when she runs away to avoid the ritual that exploit her maidenhead. The description above indicates that Srintil's act of resistance is prompted by the urgency of self-liberation as well as her identity formation.

Identity formation becomes the main issue of the second research question that underlines the influence of power relation within social interaction toward the main character's self-development. According to the data collection, there are several textual evidences that indicate vivid transformation of Srintil's personality which can be assumed that external factors become major contributor in shaping Srintil's conception, behavior, and how she identifies herself that also impacted on her identity formation.

Srintil experiences significant change of her identity, or it can be said that Srintil's identity is dynamics. In order to analyze profoundly Srintil's identity formation, Marcia's (2005) identity perspective is considered effective to

examine Srintil's exploration and commitment in constructing her self-concept. Marcia (2005) provides four types of identity formations which are identity moratorium, identity foreclosure, identity achievement, and identity diffused which portray the development stages in emerging adulthood period. Therefore, those types of identity formation is found relevant in Srintil's self-development. For instance, Srintil's initial character in the novel is drawn as conformist and submissive. The way she identifies herself as a ronggeng is the result of knowledge shared in Dukuh Paruk where she abides the rules and norms in her village. Srintil's status as a ronggeng is already well prepared by her grandparents and Dukuh Paruk inhabitants in which she does not have to bother seeking for identity since it is all already provided. It is consistent with Marcia's (2005) theory regarding identity foreclosure which emphasizes the process of an individual in forming identity where enacting a commitment but lacking in exploration.

Srintil has been given a commitment and accepted it without

any further consideration and explorations to possible identity alternatives. However, individual undergoes foreclosure identity hardly anticipating other possible identities and ends with self-dissatisfaction of not having much explorations. This condition is what Marcia (2005) affirms as questioning commitment. Individuals will tend to reconsider another alternative and attempt to build the commitment from their own exploration. In this stage, individuals will initiate the phase of identity moratorium.

In Srintil's case, she finds alternatives identity after being exercised by altruistic power by Rasmus. She starts to quit her job and resist the norms and behaviours in Paruk which reforms her identity from a conformist becomes an insurgent. She identifies herself not as a ronggeng anymore but as an ordinary woman in order to fit well with Rasmus' criteria of a woman. However, the new commitment does not take long since the society still entitle her as a ronggeng of Paruk and it turns that Srintil is exercised by several interplay of power which are

authoritative power by government official, intellectual power, and altruistic power by Paruk villagers that influence her decision to return to her previous job, yet with much stronger character and full support and acknowledgement from the society. Srintil's identity alters from an insurgent becomes a person with high self-confident and arrogant. She recognizes herself as a "born as a ronggeng" in which her status is fully supported by her society. Nevertheless, Srintil has to undergo a turning point of her life when she is imprisoned for two years of false impeachment. It happens because the government labels her as a part of propaganda party since she always perform in many events held by the party. This authoritative power exercised by government toward Srintil makes her losing her self-respect. Srintil gets traumatic injuries and avoids any contact with society, particularly with men. The power also turns her personality from an arrogant prig into an outcast. The epiphany in Srintil's life, shapes her identity becomes more cautious, mature, and prudent. She removes her ronggeng

title and with full consciousness, Srintil identifies herself as an ordinary woman again. She starts her life from the beginning, without being bothered by her past, Srintil tries to associate with others and open her heart for any possibilities of romantic relationship.

However, according to Marcia (2005), moratorium identity status is the most crucial phase because in this stage, it will be determined whether the individual is success in making commitment or fail in their efforts in which those probabilities will lead to identity achievement or identity diffused. Based on Srintil's self-development in the picture above, Srintil examines several explorations in her attempt to assign a commitment till she arrives in one conclusion that her purpose in life is to be an ordinary woman and someone's wife. However, the urge to enact her new commitment leads Srintil to make a rash decision without much consideration. Her innocent and ignorant makes her easily exercised by manipulative power where she puts her trust in a wrong person which ultimately causes her frustrated and loses her orientation. Srintil's attempt

in achieving new commitment is fruitless due to several factors which are unsupportive society which still recognizes her as a *ronggeng*, too high expectation, and Srintil unpreparedness in carrying out her new status where she is not ready of the risk she has to face over her choice. In the other hand, it can be concluded that Srintil's identity formation terminates in identity diffused.

Like other young adult literature in general, *The Dancer* concentrates in adolescence's life with parental and coming-of-age issues become the main concern (Cole as cited in McCurdy: 2013) and has particular characteristics in which the main protagonist will face with harsh, obnoxious, and distressing realities where their attempt to overcome those problems will lead to their quest of identity. As the main adolescence character, Srintil represents typical character development where she is involved in various social interactions that affect her identity formation. The fact that Srintil frequently changing her attitude and decision is inseparable with other characters'

influence that also have ulterior motives toward her which indicated in every decision that Srintil's made is related with other's interest. In addition, Srintil is portrayed to have the capability to resist almost every single power exercised toward her aside from authoritative power exercised by government. This is motivated by Srintil's circumstances who put government role in the peak of social system in which divergent view or action will consider as the form of disobedience and result in punishment.

As one of the most influential young adult literature in its era, *The Dancer* represents an adolescent character in the critical period of her identity formation. At this point, Srintil is prompted to be a prostitute in a very young age by her society in the form of manipulative and intellectual power in which she is persuaded and directed to fulfill Dukuh Paruk's people interest without having a chance to explore any identity alternatives. The hasty decision makes Srintil's insurgence becomes inevitable in which she refuses to be a single object of the

dominant system. On her first efforts to bring self-acknowledgement, she reaffirms her status and accentuates her authority so that she has the power to make decision on her own. However, the role of other characters in social domain cannot be disdained since they also exercise power relation over Srintil within their interaction which form her capacity in determining her choice. Furthermore, this novel emphasizes that power relation is not only influences young adult decision but also restricts their decision-making process. In Srintil case, it can be seen from Dukuh Paruk inhabitants attempt to thwart Srintil's intention to quit from her job. In the other hand, the interplay of power always trigger its agent potency to struggle and resist the system that confine their rights. Besides, power relation is the biggest contributor in shaping young adult identity.

Following the plot of the novel in which Srintil always change her commitments and personalities signify that Srintil's identity is vividly altering from conformist, insurgent, high self-confidence, losing self-respect, cautious and mature, and

ends with Srintil losing her sanity which indicates Srintil's failure in cohering her self-concept and expectation with society's interest and also in anticipating the risk of her action. In the other hand, The Dancer reflects that young adult identity is fluctuative in which their comprehension regarding selfhood is ingrained in their social interaction where the interplay of power exist.

## CONCLUSION

The research has disclosed three types of power: power formulates norms and behaviour, power is embedded in social relationship, and resistance as a respond to ongoing power relation. In addition, this research also finds that power relation is coextensive with identity formation.

Power formulates norms and behaviour refers to Foucault's perspective that power produces knowledge. This kind of power states that norms and behaviors are triggered by certain power in the form of knowledge and comprehension recognized by the society. It can be proved in The Dancer novel that the

custom in the village is originated from archaic law and tradition of the inhabitants' progenitor.

The second type of power which is power is embedded in social relationship is supported by Foucault's basic tenet of power, namely, power is exists in social relationship. Furthermore, the writer categorizes this power specifically into seven typology of power supported by Rummel (1976) which are force power, coercive power, bargaining power, authoritative power, intellectual power, manipulative power, and altruistic power. Those power occur in the interaction between the main character with other characters and become the indicator of power relation in the society of the novel.

Another indicator is the existence of the resistance as a respond to ongoing power relation which underlines that power relation and resistance is inseparable and complementary factors where usually happen in daily interaction. The act of resistance is also portrayed in the main character's reaction toward the power exercised by other character



which is classified into two types of resistance: verbal and action.

Those types of power in the previous description are found to have an impact on the main character's identity formation in which signified by the transformation of the main character's behaviour and perspective from submissive and conformist into insurrectionist and ends up failing in establishing her identity. This is supported by Marcia's (2005) identity theory in which the main character experiences three phases of identity formation: identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, and identity diffused.

The brief explanations above lead to the conclusion of this research. First, the interplay of power between Srintil and other characters in the society is a strategy intended to meet particular personal's interest rather than possessed by certain groups or individuals. The second one is Srintil's identity is dynamics and fluctuative as an effect of external factors, such as environment and social interaction. Third, Srintil's failure in identifying herself is driven by the lack of understanding between

her expectation and society demands and also anticipation of any consequences of her decision.

This research is expected to comprehend the readers that individuals are able to change their roles, particularly for those who are submissive and oppressed, since every relation of power can be resisted. Furthermore, this research aims to inform the readers, especially young adult, that individuals' identity is depend on their social interaction within society. People should aware with whom and how they interact with others as it will highly influence a person's identity formation.

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