



The Portrayal of Nyai Ontosoroh Struggle in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Bumi Manusia: A Study on Socialist Feminism*

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ABSTRACT

Nyai Ontosoroh is one of the main character in *Bumi Manusia* novel by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. She is a Javanese woman that was labelled by society as *Nyai* which is mean *gundik londo*. Her journey as *Nyai* brings obstacle and influence in her life as woman. Thus, this research aims to examine the forms of struggle of Javanese socialist feminist as portrayed in Nyai Ontosoroh character through *Bumi Manusia* movie. The researcher uses theory of socialist feminism that focus on the scope the class, sex, race and identity as common background of women's oppression. The analysis model of socialist feminism theory reveals the forms of oppression that occur during the colonialization and also the struggles to voice out women rights through the character of Nyai Ontosoroh. Thus, the result of the analysis reveal that there's a form of oppression in *Bumi Manusia* movie related to socialist feminism, it is gender based conflict. Thus, in the movie also depicted the forms of gender based struggle that has done by Nyai Ontosoroh.

Keywords: *Bumi Manusia*, Socialist Feminism, *Nyai Ontosoroh*

First Receive:

08 November 2022

Revised:

01 December 2022

Accepted:

02 January 2023

Final Proof Received:

18 February 2023

Published:

1 March 2023

How to cite (in APA style):

Santari, R D. (2023). The Portrayal of Nyai Ontosoroh Struggle in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Bumi Manusia: A Study on Socialist Feminism*. *ELITE Journal*, 5(1), 233-242.

INTRODUCTION

Bumi Manusia or known as *This Earth of Mankind* Novel is a novel by Pramoedya Ananta Toer that was adapted into a movie. It depicts the Indonesia condition during the Dutch colonization in 1880s and portrayed some social issues. According to Soekanto (2013:310) social conflict are issues that appear around the society, related to social values and social institutions. Thus, there are several conflicts in *Bumi Manusia* movie, they are: gender based conflict such as women marginalization and exploitation, social based conflict such as domestic violence, prostitution, race discrimination and inequality. Thus, Toer portrayed the conflict through the story of major characters like Minke, *Nyai* Ontosoroh and Annelies Mellema. Hence, the researcher is interested to examine one of the character in *Bumi Manusia* novel which is *Nyai* Ontosoroh.

Sanikem or well-known as *Nyai* Ontosoroh is a *Nyai* in *Buitenzorg*, Wonokromo. When she was 14 her father exchanged her with 25 *guilder*. Then she became a mistress of Herman Mellema, a dutch man. Thus, in the context of the movie, when there's someone

who married a *white man* and becomes a mistress, the society will be labelling that woman as *Nyai*. Moreover, the writer is interested to examine the character of *Nyai Ontosoroh* because some considerations below;

1) The gender stereotype that exist in the Bumi Manusia is that a woman who becomes a mistress of a *white man* is considered has a low self-worth and is seen only as an object, both physically and sexually. They cannot be equal to the others even though they live and married to the Dutch man. The figure below is a portrayal of *Nyai* in social hierarchy through the sitting position in social meeting. It indicates that the Netherlander who sit on the chair is holding the top tier position in society structure. Meanwhile the native, including *Nyai* must sit on the floor.



Figure 01. Sitting position in social meeting.

2) The social condition of women during the colonization who become the mistress of a Dutch man tend to experiencing the domestic violence. It may happen because the most Javanese women during that time is acted submissive as the result of Netherlander oppression. They have no other option, beside following their *white man* husband, even though they got exploited or got a domestic violence, such as being punch on the body. They even normalized any form of violence and the slavery practice. The evidence below is one of condition of a Javanese woman, a *Nyai* who experiencing the domestic violence on a street. The woman in the scene below was slapped by her Netherlander husband and there were no people that have courage to defend her.



Figure 02. condition of Javanese woman who experiencing exploitation as a *Nyai*

3) The gender discrimination that happen to the young women who were born as half mixed race, the result of the relationship between Netherlander and Indonesia's Native gain the discrimination from other people. they called those women as *Indies*. For instance, the case of Annelies Mellema, she is a daughter of *Nyai Ontosoroh* and Herman Mellema.

She always feels different from other people, since she cannot categorize herself as a pure Indonesia native or pure European descendant. Indonesian seen her differently because of her physical appearances that much match to the Netherlander. So, they set a distance from her. She keeps telling her mother that she wants to be considered as an Indonesian than an *Indies*. The evidence below is a scene and a dialogue where Annelies talks to her mother about her concern.



Figure 03. *Nyai Ontosoroh* and Annelies Mellema

Annelies	: I don't want to be mixed. I want to be like mama. A native.
<i>Nyai Ontosoroh</i>	: Sure, dear. (00:18:07 → 00:20:56)

Furthermore, due to some reasons above, *Nyai Ontosoroh* is the only woman in the Bumi Manusia universe that has stand out character. Even though she is labelled as Nyai, she has power and courage to defend herself in front of the Netherlands. It makes her so determined than the other women. She also the only woman who has consciousness to realize the injustice condition that is happened in the society, including gender conflict and marginalization. Thus, the traits in Nyai Ontosoroh quite odds because it's totally opposite than the other common Javanese women in that time who prefer to silent their voice and rights. Hence, is it possible that the characterizations which exist in *Nyai Ontosoroh* can be categorized as a form of struggle of Javanese woman and somehow can be viewed as form of socialist feminist struggle?

Thus, Socialist feminism is one of the feminist thought that focus in the social class, sex, race and identity as source of the oppression. According to Rosmarie Tong (2009:96) the concept of socialist feminist actually started off from the Karl Marx and Engels ideas who focus on the Marxist feminist. However, the socialist feminism shifts the perspective from Marx concept which not only class that become the source of women oppression. Hence, the socialist feminism as cited in Rosemarie Tong (2009:96) broadens the spectrum by understanding women subordination through integrated class and sex, the aspects of identity such as race/ethnicity or sexual orientation. In this context of course the women at that time is considered as a *konco wingking* and a slave. Next, the identity aspects also can be the source of oppression, indeed. They intertwined each other with the context of colonialization. Simone de Beauvoir added (1956:166) that under the oppression of circumstances, sometimes women does not know how to defend their self against the exploitation. Hence, when we link to the *Nyai Ontosoroh* case it can be drawn a research question:

1. How does the portrayal of *Nyai Ontosoroh* struggle from the lens of socialist feminism?

The objective of this study itself, is aim to examine the form of *Nyai Ontosoroh* struggle through the perspective of socialist feminism and her respond toward the oppression. This study also aims to evaluate the form of struggle that has done by the character whether can be considered as a movement of Javanese women during colonization or not. The writer believes, the significance study of this research are; first, to enhance the application model of socialist feminism theory, the second significance of this study is to give references for those who conducts on the analysis of feminism thought.

METHOD

There are four aspects from the method of research, they are: the first one is type of research, second one is data sources, third one data collection technique the last one is data analysis technique. At first, this research uses qualitative method. According to Creswell (2000:175-176) there are some inquiries that exist in the qualitative research, they are: first, the researcher as key instrument. It means that the researcher collects the data through examining documents and observing the object. Thus, all the data is collected by the researcher. The second one is interpretive. It means that the researcher makes an implication or conclusion from what they see, hear and understand. Moreover, the interpretation is not separated from the context of the research object. Therefore, this research uses the qualitative method by observing the *Bumi Manusia* movie. Hence, the researcher also done the interpretation of data unit through examining the object, without excluding the social or cultural context in the movie.

The second one, the data source of this research is *Bumi Manusia* movie. All the unit data is taken from the element of the movie such as scene and the dialogue. The third one, is the data collection technique. According to Creswell (2000:186) there are some approaches for data collection in qualitative research, they are observations, interviews, documents and audio-visual material. Hence, in order to collect the data unit, the researcher uses audio-visual material. it means that the data collection is done by examining the social circumstances and individual group in the movie. the form of data unit that the researcher taken are; symbol, practice/performances and discourse. These forms are found in the *Bumi Manusia* scene and the direct or indirect speech among the characters. The last one is data analysis technique. In conducting this research there are some steps, they are first the researcher observing the *Bumi Manusia* movie, including the scene and dialogue. Then, the researcher collecting the unit data based on the categorize forms such as symbol, practice or discourse. Next, the unit data that have been collected is analyzed through putting it in some variables of socialist feminism. Moreover, according to Rosemarie Tong (2009:96) the variables in socialist feminism thought that become the sources of women's oppression, they are; class, sex and the ethnicity or race. Therefore, after finding out the reasons of women's oppression through those variables, the researcher continues to examines the form of *Nyai Ontosoroh* struggle that she has done to fight the injustice that she experienced. The last one is, the researcher drawn the conclusion through the discoveries that has done.

FINDING

The finding of this research will be divided into two main discussions. The first one is about **the form of gender based conflict** that portrayed in the *Bumi Manusia* movie. The second finding, will be focus on **the form of gender based respond** that has done by *Nyai Ontosoroh* in order to fight the injustice. Thus, the researcher presented a table below to spread the finding:

No	Gender Based Conflict in <i>Bumi Manusia</i> movie	Gender Based Struggle by <i>Nyai Ontosoroh</i> in <i>Bumi Manusia</i> movie
1	The term of <i>Nyai</i> as form of women oppression on sex and class stratification.	<i>Nyai</i> Ontosoroh self-economic empowerment as struggle to ease women oppression and stereotype on sex and class stratification.
2	The term of <i>Indies</i> as form of women discrimination toward race or ethnicity	<i>Nyai</i> Ontosoroh public confrontation as struggle to fight the discrimination on race or ethnicity.

DISCUSSION

The discussion below will be presented the portrayal of analysis that has conducted by the researcher. There are four findings that are going to be discussed. Each depiction will have different concern and respond from the character of *Nyai* Ontosoroh.

a. The Term of *Nyai* as Form of Women Oppression on sex and Class Structure.

According to Rosemarie Tong (2009:4) women oppression on sex and class structure is related to the practice of capitalism. The concept is developed from the Marxist Feminism. Thus, in this case the researcher found that the term of *Nyai* in *Bumi Manusia* is connected to the capitalism. The capitalism presents itself in a form of oppression on the sex and class structure. the evidence below is portrayed the term of *Nyai* as form of women oppression on sex and class structure.



Figure 04. Nyai Ontosoroh attends the trials.

First evidence, the scene on figure four is the depiction of *Nyai* Ontosoroh attends the Landraad (Pengadilan Pribumi) to investigate her husband death, Herman Mellema. Previously, she found the body was poisoned in Koh Atjong brothel. Then, the Netherlander courts invites her to give a statement toward the case. When she is arrived at the court and wanted to go inside, one of a Dutch man asks her to take off her slipper and need to sit on floor not on the chair. it depicts that there is a class stratification. According to Karl Marx as cited in Suseno (2003:112) class stratification in the society divided the people into some classes and it formed the alienation. Moreover, due to the class stratification, Ontosoroh as the Nyai is treated differently in social events, for instance we can imply from the scene that

the practice of taking off the slipper and sit on the floor can be categorized as part of the oppression in the context of alienation between the women who are socially labeled as Nyai to all the Dutch men.

Nyai Ontosoroh: “Herman Mellema, the pure-blooded European, asked me to be his mistress. Between me and Herman Mellema there’s a bond of slavery that the law never bothered with. Is the bond of European slavery more righteous than honest love?” (01:47:22 → 01:53:16)

Second evidence, the dialogue above still occurs in the Landraad (Pengadilan Pribumi). Instead of solving the case of Herman Mellema death, the judges distracted with the relationship between Minke and Annelies (Ontosoroh’ daughter) and questioning their morals on living together in one house. Moreover, Nyai Ontosoroh is making the comparison a value of relationship between her and Herman Mellema to Minke and Annelies. Thus, the sentence: between me and Herman Mellema there’s a bond of slavery that the law never bothered with” indicates that there’s an oppression that Ontosoroh experienced. It can be seen from the word a bond of slavery. Hence, it relates to the concept of Critical Discourse Analysis by Teun Van Dijk (1983:20-43), it states that discourse reveals the power relations among the individuals and uncover the social position between them. Thus, we can imply from the relationship between Herman Mellema and Nyai Ontosoroh, there’s a power relation that explain one position toward another, in this case is the position of a woman, a Nyai.

b. Nyai Ontosoroh Self-Economic Empowerment as Struggle to Ease Women Oppression on Sex and Class Stratification.

In socialist feminism as cited in Rosemarie Tong (2009:111) the capitalism and the patriarchy is allied to oppress the women. They join together to exploits the women physically and sexually. However, in the Bumi Manusia movie, Nyai Ontosoroh has a conscious thought to fight the form of capitalism and patriarchy that exist in that time. For instance, Nyai Ontosoroh has done the self-economic empowerment. The self-economic empowerment itself is an effort to fight any form of oppression, in form of the economic activity. The evidence below shown the model of self-economic empowerment as truggle to ease women oppression on sex and class stratification.



Figure 05. Annelies, Ontosoroh, Minke sit together

Nyai Ontosoroh : “How can a woman, native, not a royal...”
Minke : “So, you learned all this on your own?”

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Nyai Ontosoroh : “life can provide everything to those who want to understand and are good at accepting.”
(00:38:12 → 00:42:33)

The dialogue above occurs between Ontosoroh and Minke. At one afternoon, they sit on a bench outside Nyai house. Minke is constantly feel amazed toward the Nyai activity. He is wondering how could a Javanese woman, taking care of this huge lands with numerous workers, also a milk factory. Thus, the words a woman, native indicates that native Indonesia during the colonialism doesn't have access to the capital resources. Even, it makes Minke asks more to the Nyai on the sentence “So, you learned all this on your own?”. We can imply that Minke who becomes one of HBS student, is feel amazed and unbelievable toward Nyai condition. Hence, besides she has the access to the lands and a factory, she manages all the financial matter in the family. She learns it all and empower herself later. Another depiction of Nyai Ontosoroh self-economic empowerment can be seen from the scene below:



Figure 06. *Nyai* Ontosoroh doing the finances.

The scene above is portrayed *Nyai* Ontosoroh doing the finance and banking matter in daily basis. It indicates that she has intelligence despite of her label as *Nyai*. In socialist feminism, the one way to fight against the oppression is through self-educating, so the women can empower herself. Hence, in *Nyai* Ontosoroh case, she becomes well-educated and lead her to have a realization, even though she is a *Nyai*, she has power in the economic area, because she runs it in everyday life. Moreover, things that *Nyai* Ontosoroh done can be considered as form of movement from Javanese woman, who educate herself to fight the stereotype during colonialism.

c. The Term of Indies as Form of Women Discrimination toward Race or Ethnicity.

According to Rosemarie Tong (2009:106) the identity such as race or ethnicity also become the source of oppression for the women. Thus, the term of *Indies* as form of women discrimination toward race/ethnicity concern about the existence of *Indies*. In *Bumi Manusia* movie, *Indies* define as children who were born from the relationship between a dutch man and a *Nyai* of Indonesia. They often called as half-mixed race child. The example of *Indies* teenager can be seen from the characters of Robert Mellema, Annelies Mellema and Suuhroof. Thus, in the society they dressed like a European, speak in a dutch language and befriend with mostly another dutch teenager. In the movie they rarely getting along with the native of Indonesian.

Therefore, the form of relationship and rules related to how *Indies* children must behave somehow create the problem and restriction. According to Erikson (1968) there are eight stages of psychosocial human development based on the ages and one of the stage that a teenager passes is called identity vs role confusion. Moreover, on the stage of teenager they

are in the process of looking for their identity. If there's something that prevent them to fully express themselves, it may create what we called as role confusion. Thus, the portrayal of women discrimination toward race/ethnicity related to the *Indies* teenager can be seen from the scene below through the performance of characters:



Figure 07. Annelies Mellema walking in a court.

Annelies Mellema, one of the *Indies* teenager and also Nyai Ontosoroh daughter. In the scene above, while they are attending the Landraad (Pengadilan Pribumi), they have to enter the building with different rules. For the Nyai Ontosoroh, she must walk on her feet without shoes and not standing. Meanwhile Annelies Mellema, she must walk with her shoes on and standing, since she is still categorized as dutch person. From the scene above, her facial expression looks sad because she has to be treated differently from her mother. It doesn't excite her, the way the dutch people making the discrimination rules even for the relationship between mother and children. Hence, the *Indies* do not have many choices and have to obey the rules.

d. Nyai Ontosoroh Public Confrontation as Struggle to Fight the Discrimination on Race or Ethnicity

In the socialist feminism concept, the women can be categorized as socialist feminist, when she is taking a role to fight the injustice. In this case Nyai Ontosoroh has a public confrontation that may be categorized as a form of struggle to fight the discrimination. The scene below is depicted a situation when Nyai Ontosoroh and Minke is prepared for a trial in Raad Van Justitie Soerabaia (Pengadilan Eropa Surabaya). The case that we have discussed in part c related to the *Indies* children now become the problem. After facing the discrimination between Nyai and her daughter Annelies, the Netherlander people want to take Annelies to the Amsterdam, because they consider that Annelies does not have a legal relative here. Thus, they consider Nyai, the mother of Annelies does not have rights toward her because her marriage status with Herman Mellema is illegal.



Figure 08. Nyai Ontosoroh sits with Minke

Nyai Ontosoroh: we will be the first native that fight in the white men court without a lawyer. With fighting, we are not completely lost. Are you ready?
(02:29:06 → 02:29:16)

Minke : (nodded his head).

Therefore, the form of Nyai Ontosoroh struggle to fight against the discrimination can be seen in the dialogue above. The sentence: we will be the first native that fight in the white men court without a lawyer indicates a strong will from the *Nyai* to get her daughter back, even though they differentiate Annelies social stratification as *Indies* and Ontosoroh as *Nyai*. Moreover, the words without a lawyer implies that *Nyai* does not need a representative that will help her in the court. She fully will fight the Netherlander on her own. Thus, another depiction of Nyai public confrontation to fight against discrimination can be seen from the scene and dialogue below:



Figure 09. Nyai Ontosoroh in a court.

Judge : Based on the evidence, the marriage between Sanikem and Herman Mellema is illegal. Therefore, Sanikem has no rights to all the wealth of Herman Mellema, including the rights on Annelies Mellema and Robert Mellema.

Nyai Ontosoroh : I refuse, your grace. I am Sanikem! I gave birth to them.
(02:30:29 → 02:30:56)

From the dialogue above we can see Nyai Ontosoroh public confrontation from the words I refuse, your grace. It indicated that Nyai is not afraid to the Netherlander like the common Javanese women. She knows how to defend herself when the rights to her children will be taken away from her. Moreover, from the figure 09 we also can see that she is attending the court alone without any lawyer next to her. It implies her power to face the problem, even though she may fail in the court. But, still she presents herself in the public to voice out her self-defense.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis above, we can conclude that there two portrayals in the Bumi Manusia movie related to the socialist feminism analysis, the first one is gender based conflict, including the oppression on women who become *Nyai* and the second one is gender based struggle that has done by Nyai ontosoroh as a woman struggle to ease the oppression and stereotype on sex and class structure. Thus, the study of socialist feminism in Bumi Manusia movie cannot be separated from the influences of colonialism and the consciousness of women during that time. moreover, Nyai Ontosoroh character can be categorized as the icon of socialist feminist that comes from Javanese woman who fight the exploitation and marginalization toward women and stereotype during the colonialism.

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