

## Power relations in the novel *My Name is Alam* by Leila S. Chudori

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### ABSTRACT

Exploring discursive formations in literary works allows researchers to analyze how language and discourse shape meaning, power dynamics, and cultural ideologies within a specific literary context. Understanding the discursive formations in literary works is crucial for comprehending the historical and social context in which these works were produced. This research aims to describe the forms and representations of power relations in the novel *My Name is Alam* by Leila S. Chudori. This is qualitative descriptive research where the data is interpreted using the genealogical and archaeological analysis methods promoted by Foucault. This method aims to uncover and understand hidden power dynamics in various aspects of human life. The research results prove that the author's statements were spread across various formations and became material for discussion. Two forms of power relations are being discussed; the first is the New Order government's practice of authoritarian power in its various policies, which limits human rights. Second, there is resistance from marginalized groups, namely political prisoners and their families. This form of resistance is an effort by marginalized groups to fight for equality and justice. The New Order government in Indonesia constructed a discourse to create a simulated space to legitimize its power within national memory politics. This simulated world is a blend of reality and fantasy constantly reproduced. As a result, the actual reality becomes obscured, and the symbols created are perceived as reality.



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## I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between history and Literature is still being discussed between writers and historians (Saxton, 2020: 13; White, 2014: 2). These two things are interrelated and

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influence each other in various ways. Historians sometimes use literary works as a source of information (Kuntowijoyo, 2006: 127), and writers often use historical events as the background for their creative process (Lukács, 1989; Slotkin, 2005: 224–225). As is known, the object that is worthy of being used as inspiration for the creation of a literary work is society and all the problems that occur, both within oneself and in the environment, including historical events (Nanda & Hayati, 2020: 11). Literature can offer an in-depth and subjective perspective on a historical event. In this case, a historical event that may not be wholly documented can be revived through literary works (Kuntowijoyo, 2004: 17; Stocker, 2019: 68).

As part of the creative process, the author will produce knowledge from a created discourse or discourse. Literary works are less critical than factual texts such as historical writings, news, or scientific articles. Each has a role in determining and directing a discourse. Likewise, Leila S. Chudori, a journalist and writer, takes inspiration from historical events, historical figures, and socio-political conflicts. This inspiration is used to develop storylines and characters in his literary works. Apart from that, various reading results with philosophical, social, cultural, and political themes also enrich the process of creativity, language creativity, and imaginative power in expressing opinions or views on a phenomenon. It is not surprising that several of his literary works have received awards at both national and international levels. One of his last works in 2023 is *My Name is Alam* (2023), which also uses several historical events during the New Order period as its narrative theme. The novel *Namaku Alam* is worth researching because this literary work presents valuable lessons regarding behavior, morals, and ethics toward fellow humans.

The novel *Namaku Alam* tells the story of a child political prisoner affected by the G 30 S tragedy. During his life, Segara Alam often received discriminatory treatment from his social environment. For Segara Alam, this discriminatory treatment was unfair because it had nothing to do with what his father did. Even when the G 30 S Segara Alam tragedy had not yet occurred. However, the political situation forced Segara Alam and his family to accept all forms of discriminatory treatment. The novel *My Name is Alam* presents many discourses on the power of the authoritarian New Order government, including discriminatory practices against political prisoners and their families. It cannot be denied that power played an essential role in forming discourse during the New Order era.

The discourses created by the New Order government were powers disguised, hidden, and veiled so that they seemed invisible. Of course, power, in this case, no longer works through oppression or physical force. The powers exercised by the New Order government were exercised and obeyed voluntarily within a state framework. In the network of power, there is political knowledge that can regulate, direct, and condition a

country according to specific goals. According to Foucault (2004: 32), knowledge is synonymous with power, and power arises based on a certain amount of knowledge, which gives birth to power. For this reason, Foucault (2004) calls power like two sides of a coin, a unity whose emergence demands the presence of another.

According to Foucault, power consists of three parts: state society, powerful-powerless, and marginal dominant. This power operates through five forms: operating in various aspects; arising from distinction, discrimination, and inequality; not in a superstructure position; intentional and covert; and power always produces anti-power. Foucault (2004) emphasized the importance of interpreting the relationships between discourses such as politics and economics, including discourse in literary works (Ayuningtias, 2019; Hussen, 2023; Kamariah et al., 2020; Latupeirissa & Tjahyono, 2021; Nasution, 2024). The discourse formations in literary works do not constitute a single retrospective unity but are a dispersion or diversity of various objects. Foucault (2004: 32) calls a discursive formation a system of dispersion. When a researcher tries to find discourse regularity by analyzing discursive formations, episteme can be found (Foucault, 2004: 191-192). This action intends to find a conceptual formation system in literary works.

Various literary works widely explore Foucault's concept of 'Power Relations.' Exploring discursive formations in literary works allows researchers to analyze how language and discourse shape meaning, power dynamics, and cultural ideologies within a specific literary context. By examining discursive formations, Hou (2021) can gain a deeper understanding of the historical and social conditions that influence the production and reception of literary texts. Schmidt (2020) argues that understanding the discursive formations in literary works provides valuable insight into the cultural and ideological values of a particular period or society. For this reason, Shkolnikov (2023) understanding discursive formations in literary works allows researchers to analyze how language and discourse shape meaning, power dynamics, and cultural ideologies within a specific literary context. According to Jalal (2001) studying discursive formations in literary works also allows for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between literature and society. Furthermore, understanding the discursive formations in literary works is crucial for comprehending the historical and social context in which these works were produced. This research aims to describe the forms and representations of power relations in the novel *My Name is Alam* by Leila S. Chudori.

## **II. METHOD**

This qualitative descriptive research examines the form and representation of power relations in the novel *Namaku Alam*. The data used is in the form of sentences and

narrative elements that describe the forms and representations of power. Next, the data was interpreted using Foucault's perspective with genealogical and archaeological analysis methods. These two methods investigate various power, knowledge, and subjectivity practices in historical and current contexts. This method makes it possible to understand the relationship between power, knowledge, and subjectivity in social and political dynamics (Foucault, 2004). This method aims to reveal and understand hidden power dynamics in various aspects of human life.

### **III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The government's efforts to control the political situation during the New Order era by purging the influence of communism in society became the beginning of the story in the novel *My Name is Alam*. This cleansing process was carried out by arresting and imprisoning people who had ties to the PKI and communist-based organizations. Many of the accused have fled, and authorities continue to seek information about the accused's whereabouts through their families or descendants. During the interrogation process, Ratna Surti Andandari, wife of Hananto Prawiro, had to languish for more than a month in a place in the area of Jalan Budi Kemuliaan and experienced several forms of violence. He had to bring a third child, and one of them, Segara Alam, was still a toddler (Chudori, 2023: 159). The interrogation process of Surti stopped after Hananto came out of his hiding place and was finally shot dead by the authorities (Chudori, 2023: 2).

People accused of the PKI would be imprisoned without going through a trial process, and when they left prison, they would have the title of political prisoner or political prisoner. After being released from detention, political prisoners still have to accept the negative stigma of being traitors to the state. Ironically, this negative stigma does not only apply to political prisoners but also to their descendants. Segara Alam had to accept the stigma of being a traitor to the state as a consequence of him being the son of Hananto, who was shot dead because he was considered a PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) sympathizer (Chudori, 2023: 48). The label of a traitor to the state is torture for the descendants of political prisoners like Alam because by attaching this label Alam must be familiar with all forms of discrimination that he must accept.

All forms of discrimination experienced by political prisoners and their descendants were the impact of the implementation of the New Order government program, namely "cleaning out elements of communism from the roots" (Chudori, 2023: 229). For this reason, the New Order government issued a screening policy for political prisoners and their descendants: clean themselves and the environment. This policy was socialized by

the government so that all people understood the dangers of the PKI and that its influence should not continue to grow in Indonesia.

This policy of cleaning oneself and having a clean environment makes things difficult for Alam and Bimo when they want to register at a new school. They have to answer several questions, one of which is about parental information (Chudori, 2023: 229). Surti, a mother from Segara Alam, does not want her child to be rejected from enrolling in the target school just because he is a descendant of political prisoners. A form of cultural resistance to this policy was to include the names of Aji Suryo and Retno as his parents (Chudori, 2023: 231). Another form of cultural resistance in the novel is removing Suryo's name after Aji's name to avoid being labeled a traitor to the state and avoiding the screening process to clean oneself and the environment (Chudori, 2023: 229).

Efforts to monitor political prisoners and their descendants in the novel *My Name is Alam* emerge through various narratives about the discriminatory treatment experienced by political prisoners and their descendants. Political prisoners and their descendants are a group that must be watched out for because they are worried that they could spread communism. Throughout their lives until high school, the characters Alam and Bimo had to get used to the stigma of being traitors to the state (Chudori, 2023: 49). Alam forms of resistance to the stigma of traitors to the country is to consider it as fate and a curse that they must accept gracefully. The stigma of traitors to the state created by political prisoners has led to the public's understanding that political prisoners and their descendants are a group of people who have committed grave sins against the country and must constantly be monitored and alerted. Political prisoners and their descendants should, as far as possible, refrain from taking actions that justify their conclusion that political prisoners and their descendants are a group of people who are guilty of their country. Alam was accused of being the wrong party when Alam hit Denny Perdana in response to Denny's behavior in abusing Bimo. This incident made Kenanga angry because, as a result of Alam's actions, the entire family would suffer the consequences (Chudori, 2023: 149). Instead of apologizing to Denny Perdana, Alam and Bimo changed schools (Chudori, 2023: 150). Alam's decision is a form of resistance to the discriminatory actions that befell her. This resistance is an effort to maintain Alam's self-respect and dignity. Alam knows everyone has the same right to be treated fairly and equally, regardless of characteristics or life history.

The discourse of irregularities in the implementation of democracy in Indonesia in the novel *My Name is Alam* is seen in the government's efforts to control reading circulating in society. In 1981 the Attorney General's Office banned several books from circulating in the community. These books are considered disturbing because they contain and teach a

particular ideology that does not follow the Pancasila ideology (Chudori, 2023: 270). Those who still possess prohibited reading books, let alone widely circulated books, will face legal consequences. The character Bang Joe is described as someone who dared to copy books and sold prohibited books secretly (Chudori, 2023: 273). Bang Joe's action was a form of resistance to freedom of expression, which was restricted entirely and limited during the New Order era. Resistance to freedom of expression is triggered by the desire to change circumstances that are considered detrimental to individuals or groups. Freedom of expression is a fundamental right in realizing a healthy democratic climate. Therefore, restrictions on freedom of expression can be a threat and destroy the implementation of democracy.

The practices of corruption, collusion, and nepotism highlighted in the film *Sang Guru* accurately depict life in the New Order era. In the novel, *My Name is Alam*, a businessman like Arya Pradana is depicted as one who experiences various conveniences and privileges because of his closeness to high-ranking officials. For example, in business, he can win a license without a tender (Chudori, 2023: 126). The lifestyle of the children of entrepreneurs also has common characteristics, namely, living a life entirely of luxury, not caring about the rules, and living as they please (Chudori, 2023: 127). A form of resistance to corrupt practices is collusion. Moreover, nepotism is the attitude of entrepreneurs who always maintain harmonious relations with high-ranking officials. The method used could be to buy luxury goods from state officials.

During the New Order era, cultural corruption was a phenomenon that was commonly seen but became a significant but disturbing problem. Corruption has become part of a country's culture or endemic. Corruption is embedded in government structures and systems (systemic). Corruption has become rampant in various aspects of economic, social, and political life (widespread). Corruption has even robbed people of their economic, social, and cultural rights. Kurniawan (2022) corruption is a crime that is difficult to find criminals (Crime without Violation) because corruption is in an area that is difficult to penetrate. Corruption is complicated when obtaining proof procedures where the modus operandi is systematic and continuous (Syuraida & Purwaningsih, 2015).

The New Order government's domination extended to the writing of history. Historical events should only be one version and directed to suit the government's wishes according to the expression that says history controls the rulers of its time (Chudori, 2023: 12). The government wants the flow of historical events to be controlled. The New Order government's version of historical discourse can strengthen the New Order government's position (Chudori, 2023: 20). During the New Order era, the writing of Indonesian history

was still covered in fog. Unfortunately, the Indonesian people were not a nation that diligently wrote history (Chudori, 2023: 252). It is said that Alam figures will write the history of the aftermath of the G 30 S based on his photographic memory, which is his strength. Alam's actions are a form of cultural resistance to the government's monopoly discourse on history writing.

The ideal educational discourse is found in the image of the Putra Nusa school as free and independent, which, during the New Order era, such schools were rarely found (Chudori, 2023: 179). The beautiful image of the school creates a conducive learning atmosphere, and students are free to express themselves, which can produce meaningful student learning experiences (Chudori, 2023: 180). Apart from implementing the government-required curriculum, this school also directs its students to study intangible knowledge such as literature, philosophy, anthropology, and history. This is in line with Kirana Iswata and Yudono Yulianto's goal in establishing the Nusa Putra School, namely to produce individuals who have intelligent and competent character (Chudori, 2023: 178).

A form of resistance to the educational discourse designed by the government is to present an image of a school with graduates who are competent in academic life but are also skilled in debating and dare to express opinions. This can be observed in several parts of the story about the learning process of Alam and Bimo at the Putra Nusa school, which involves more reading, dialogue, and discussion activities (Chudori, 2023: 292), for example, regarding the works of great world and Indonesian writers such as Hegel, A.S. Neil, Ben Anderson, Ruth Mc Vey, Harold Crouch, Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Winston Smith, George Orwell, Chairil Anwar, R.A Kosasih, Toha Mochtar, Soekanto S.A., Djoko Lelono, Pramoedya Anan Toer, Rivai Apin and so on. Students who study intangible sciences such as literature, philosophy, anthropology, and history provide valuable knowledge and help students develop various skills and understanding necessary for real life.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

In the novel, *My Name is Alam*, the author's statements spread into various formations to become a discussion. Two forms of power relations form a discourse: the New Order government's authoritarian power practices and the resistance of marginalized groups, namely political prisoners and their families. The discursive formations built by the New Order government in the context of the Indonesian nation's memory politics aimed to form a simulacrum space that legitimized its power. The simulacrum world constructed by the New Order government is a world that combines reality and fantasy to be

duplicated over and over again. Of course, the actual reality becomes blurred, and the symbols created are believed to be reality.

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