

## Traces of Domination in Zoya Herawati's Fiction

Nadya Afdholy<sup>1\*</sup>, Setya Yuwana Sudikan<sup>2</sup>, Tengsoe Tjahjono<sup>3</sup>, and Bramantio<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Departement of Indonesian Language and Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Departement of Language and Literature Education, Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Departement of Indonesian Language and Literature Education, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia

\*nadyaafdholi@fib.unair.ac.id

### ABSTRAK

Fiksyen memiliki kekuatan untuk merepresentasikan realitas sosial, termasuk hubungan kuasa yang tercermin dalam berbagai bentuk penguasaan. Karya-karya Zoya Herawati, sebagai bagian dari sastra populer Indonesia, sering menggambarkan dinamika gender, ekonomi, dan budaya dalam relasi antar tokoh. Kajian ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis bentuk-bentuk penguasaan dalam karya fiksi Herawati, serta mengungkap bagaimana penguasaan tersebut dibangun dan dirundingkan dalam alur cerita. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah sosiologi kesusasteraan dengan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Data berupa kutipan naratif dan dialog dari beberapa karya dipilih secara purposif, lalu dianalisis menggunakan teori kuasa Pierre Bourdieu. Hasil kajian menunjukkan dominasi dalam karya Herawati terbagi dalam dominasi simbolik melalui budaya dan bahasa, dominasi ekonomi dalam relasi kelas sosial, serta dominasi patriarki dalam relasi gender. Pembacaan kritis mengungkap bahwa penguasaan bukan hanya sebagai alat penindasan, tetapi juga ruang simbolik bagi penentangan tokoh. Kesimpulannya, fiksi Zoya Herawati tidak sekadar menghadirkan kisah romantik atau kehidupan sehari-hari, melainkan juga kritik sosial yang kuat terhadap struktur penguasaan dalam masyarakat.

**Kata kunci:** Penguasaan, Fiksyen Populer, Hubungan Kuasa, Sosiologi Kesusasteraan, Zoya Herawati

### ABSTRACT

Fiction holds the power to represent social realities, including power relations reflected in various forms of domination. The works of Zoya Herawati, as part of Indonesian popular literature, often portray the dynamics of gender, economy, and culture within character relationships. This study aims to identify and analyze forms of domination in Herawati's fiction, as well as reveal how these dominations are constructed and negotiated throughout the narrative. The approach used is literary sociology with a qualitative descriptive method. Data, consisting of narrative excerpts and dialogues from several works, were purposively selected and analyzed using Pierre Bourdieu's theory of power. The findings show that domination in Herawati's works is divided into symbolic domination through culture and language, economic domination in social class relations, and patriarchal domination in gender relations. Critical reading reveals that domination functions not only as a tool of oppression but also as a symbolic space for characters' resistance. In conclusion, Zoya Herawati's fiction presents not only romantic or everyday stories but also a strong social critique of domination structures in society.

**Keywords:** Domination, Popular Fiction, Power Relations, Sociology of Literature, Zoya Herawati

## INTRODUCTION

Fiction is a subtle yet sharp social mirror, reflecting realities that are often difficult to uncover directly. Literature often captures everyday experiences, personal relationships, and invisible value systems-including forms of domination that are often taken for granted in life (Schachtner, 2020). Through seemingly simple stories, characters and conflicts, literature reveals layers of power hidden in social dynamics. Zoya Herawati, a female writer from East Java, writes fiction that focuses on the theme of social and domestic relations (Khurriyah, et al., 2021). With emotional narratives and natural dialogue, she presents female characters who live between the pressures of norms, love, hope, and inner wounds. Her seemingly simple stories-about family, love, and betrayal-hold subtle but real traces of symbolic domination: from power relations in the household, social expectations of women, to status battles in the workplace and friendships.

The domination present in Herawati's work is not violent or frontal. It emerges through ways of speaking, views, judgements, and social recognition that instil a sense of 'normalcy' in an unequal social order. In Pierre Bourdieu's terms, this is symbolic domination - a form of power that works indirectly through the cultivation of values, tastes and habitus (Charles & Schor, 2025). This power does not need physical coercion because it already operates at the level of individual consciousness. Therefore, reading literary works like this is important to understand how social systems work subtly and effectively in everyday life. This research uses the lens of literary sociology, specifically Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, to read Zoya Herawati's works. The aim is to identify forms of symbolic domination in the relationships between characters and understand how social structures are reproduced through narrative. Herawati's work is not just a fictional story, but a representation of the social field where agency and structure tug and fight.

Herawati writes from an interesting perspective: as a woman from East Java (Taum, 2022), a region with a strong social culture and relatively conservative power relations, especially in terms of gender. This background shapes her sensitivity as a writer, visible in the way she builds characters, chooses conflicts, and develops social dynamics in her stories. Her characters, most of whom are from the urban middle class, live under social stratification and symbolic pressure-the pressure to perform ideally, act according to gender norms, and maintain social status in the eyes of society. Theoretically, this research is important because it shows that literature is not an area free from critical analysis. On the contrary, literary works with a wide range of readers become an important arena for reproduction as well as resistance to power structures (Bourdieu, 1996). Practically, this research opens up space for readers to realise that domination in everyday life is not always present explicitly and loudly, but can appear through habits, tastes, even in love that feels sincere.

Re-reading Herawati's work using Bourdieu's theory can help to understand how individuals are conditioned in certain social structures while finding space for symbolic resistance. This research not only examines literary texts, but also analyses how power works in everyday life through language, narrative, and social recognition. Zoya Herawati's works are more than just love stories or family dramas; they are rich social arenas to analyse, opening new insights into symbolic domination in modern life. Bourdieu's theory of practice is the main foundation of this analysis. He developed key concepts such as habitus, capital and social field to explain how social structures are reproduced through seemingly natural everyday practices (Bourdieu, 2018). In a literary context, this approach enables a reading that connects fictional narratives to concrete social structures, specifically how individuals and groups engage in symbolic struggles to maintain or shift their position within a particular social field. This power does not need physical coercion because it already operates at the level of individual consciousness. Therefore, reading literary works like this is important to understand how social systems work subtly and effectively in everyday life. This research uses the lens of literary sociology, specifically Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, to read Zoya Herawati's works. The aim is to identify forms of symbolic

domination in the relationships between characters and understand how social structures are reproduced through narrative.

Herawati's work is not just a fictional story, but a representation of the social field where agency and structure tug and fight. Herawati writes from an interesting perspective: as a woman from East Java (Taum, 2022), a region with a strong social culture and relatively conservative power relations, especially in terms of gender. This background shapes her sensitivity as a writer, visible in the way she builds characters, chooses conflicts, and develops social dynamics in her stories. Her characters, most of whom are from the urban middle class, live under social stratification and symbolic pressure-the pressure to perform ideally, act according to gender norms, and maintain social status in the eyes of society. This study shows how a writer's position is not only shaped by the quality of the work, but also by the strategy in managing power relations in the literary field. However, these studies have not integrated Bourdieu's practice theory approach to unravel how social domination is symbolically constructed through fictional representations. This research fills the gap by combining narrative reading and social field analysis to place Herawati's work in the context of contemporary Indonesian cultural production. This research also offers a new way of understanding female characters in literature not only as victims or perpetrators, but as agents in a complex symbolic system - moving within limitations but still having room for symbolic resistance.

## METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with the theoretical basis of literary sociology. This approach was chosen because it is able to bridge between literary works as imaginative products and the social reality behind their emergence (Berger, 1977). Literary sociology, in this case, is used to examine how social structures, collective values, and power relations are manifested in Zoya Herawati's popular fiction narratives. The focus of the research is on the representation of symbolic domination in the text, especially in relation to women's experiences and subaltern positions in society. The main data sources in this study are five purposively selected works of Herawati's fiction, namely *Prosesi: Jiwa yang Terpenjara* (1999), *Derak-Derak* (2005), *Warisan* (2005), *Jamaloke* (2018), and *Rumah di Jantung Kota* (2020). These works were chosen because they present the complexity of social and political relations in the lives of the characters, especially female characters who face various forms of social and symbolic pressure in determining identity and life choices.

The data in this research was collected through documentation study techniques, with a focus on narrative quotations, dialogue, and plot structures that represent forms of symbolic domination. Data collection is done through close reading of the text, repeatedly and reflectively, to find patterns of power representation and symbolic mechanisms at work in the relationships between characters. The concept of symbolic domination is at the centre of this reading. Bourdieu defines it as power that operates through social recognition of dominant values without direct coercion (Bourdieu, 1989). In literary works, symbolic domination is present through narratives that contain ideologies about class, gender, and morality that seem natural and accepted. Herawati's works become a fertile space for the operation of symbolic domination because they are read by a wide audience and have a strong normalising power towards certain values.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through a critical reading of Zoya Herawati's fictional works, it is found that domination does not only appear in the form of explicit power, but also through symbolic mechanisms that are naturally accepted by the characters. Using Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital and symbolic domination, this research identifies three main forms of domination: economic, cultural and

social. Economic domination is reflected in unequal access to resources; cultural domination is seen in the use of social values to subjugate individuals; while social domination is seen in unequal interpersonal relations. All three are interrelated and mutually reinforcing in forming social hierarchies. Figures from marginalised groups, such as the Chinese community and Surabaya natives, are a clear illustration of how power works subtly but effectively. Zoya's narrative shows how social inequality is internalised, making resistance difficult because injustice is taken for granted.

## ECONOMIC DOMINATION

Economic domination in Zoya Herawati's work appears as a force that shackles the lives of many characters, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Poverty is not only the background, but also the main cause of the destruction of hopes and souls. One powerful image is of a woman brought from a quiet village to the hustle and bustle of the city, which 'could take away her freshness and ravage her soul.' However, the main factor causing her suffering is her mother's 'lifelong poverty' (Herawati, 1999, p. 3). This shows how poverty is not just a material problem, but the root of psychological and social suffering.

There is a deep sense of doubt and alienation in the face of a much larger force, as seen in the character's expression questioning whether 'only Yu Parni has Gusti Pangeran' amidst the 'massive extermination plan of leftists' that has been drawn up (Herawati, 2005, p. 25). This illustrates the economic dominance that correlates with organised political power to maintain the status quo. The voice of the marginalised lower classes went unheard, exposing a systemic imbalance of power.

The drastic changes in social status due to the economic crisis also reinforce this picture of domination. A character who 'went from being a production manager of a shoe factory with a salary of hundreds of thousands of rupiah, to being a housemaid for his own wife' (Herawati, 2005, p. 37). This transformation is not only a loss of material goods, but also of honour and social identity, confirming how economic domination takes away more than just resources.

Acts of robbery and looting by groups with greater economic and political capital also symbolise destructive domination. The thick smoke and the line of transporters that 'scrubbed every valuable item from people's homes' illustrate how this power ignores human values (Herawati, 2018, p. 74). This shows that economic domination often tramples on the dignity of others for its own sake.

Furthermore, the description of the struggles of the working class who have to fight hard while facing oppression from those in power also makes this domination clear. Pedicab drivers who 'shouted, cursed and swore,' worked with 'bated breath' to make a living, but at the same time 'traffic elements robbed them of their earnings' (Herawati, 2020, p. 8). This shows economic domination not only on a large scale, but also in everyday forms of oppression.

Overall, the economic domination depicted in Zoya Herawati's work is not only a matter of material inequality, but also a force that damages the soul, cuts off hope, and lowers human dignity. This domination perpetuates a social hierarchy that makes the poor even more marginalised. Through these realistic stories, readers are invited to feel not only the economic facts, but also the psychological and social impacts, emphasising the urgency of social justice and humanity.

## **CULTURAL DOMINATION**

Cultural domination in Zoya Herawati's works is reflected as a force that suppresses individual and group identities, especially those on the margins of social, political and cultural power. Her characters experience inner struggles and feelings of alienation due to social constructions that standardise norms, skin colour, gender, and expressions of thought. Through the experiences of her characters, Herawati not only shows the face of cultural oppression, but also the inner wounds it causes.

One of the most painful forms of cultural domination is experienced by a mixed-blood character who has to live with a strong social stigma. She recalled how as a child she was troubled, haunted by 'piercing stares' because her father had a different skin colour from her mother. Even when others called her 'ampyang'-a racial slur-she felt not only insulted as a person, but also 'hated everyone for no reason' (Herawati, 1999, p. 12). This kind of wound illustrates how racism and cultural stereotyping can shape shame and self-hatred, and kill a sense of community.

Meanwhile, cultural domination of women emerges through the reflection of Sulung, who begins to realise the unequal role of women in society. She sees that patriarchal ideas obscure women's position in the social and economic system. In fact, she realised that 'there is no fundamental and thorough study or research on the position of women,' and that 'the rations given are sometimes too low or even non-existent' (Herawati, 2005, p. 156). This anxiety shows a critical awareness of how patriarchal culture is the dominant system that marginalises women structurally and symbolically.

Furthermore, the institutionalised cultural dominance in the government system is also evident in the depiction of the relationship between the people and the state. A character in another narrative describes that the little people 'have no power, not even to ask questions' when the government makes controversial decisions (Herawati, 2018, p. 50). This shows the state's cultural hegemony in silencing criticism and normalising obedience, which makes people's voices not considered a legitimate part of the national narrative.

The overall experience of these characters shows how cultural domination is not only about control over discourse, but also the way power organises bodies, minds and social relations. Those who do not conform to the dominant standards-whether because of race, gender, or social status-will always be under pressure, often without space to speak out. In Herawati's work, cultural domination is depicted not through grand statements, but through the small wounds that continue to gape in everyday life. Thus, these works become a symbolic space of resistance to cultural domination that has limited human potential and dignity. Herawati invites readers not only to understand the suffering of her characters, but also to reflect on the cultural inequality that we often take for granted.

## **SOCIAL DOMINATION**

Social domination in Herawati's works exists as a force that slowly erodes human dignity, through racial discrimination, state repression, war violence, and intrigue in the workplace. Her characters are trapped in unequal social structures, forced to submit to norms and hierarchies that they did not choose, and often do not understand.

One of the most touching portraits of social domination is the experience of a mixed-blood character who feels 'confined by his environment because he has a father who is the same colour as his mother.' The 'piercing' gaze of society is a constant reminder that he is considered different, not fully accepted, and even nicknamed 'ampyang'-a derogatory nickname that fuels unwarranted

hatred (Herawati, 1999, p. 2). Such race-based social discrimination not only hurts personal identity, but also creates collective wounds that are difficult to heal.

Another form of social domination is present in the power relations between the people and the armed forces. In another narrative, a character describes how 'with uniforms and guns people can become *'gusti pangeran'* of others'-having the right to determine the life and death of others, taking away rights, and even defining truth unilaterally (Herawati, 2005, p. 26). This is a critique of authoritarian power structures that rely on symbolic domination and physical violence as a means of social control.

Systemic violence is also reflected in the experience of a character who is a victim of war. He voices his pain: 'the war has forcibly succeeded in tearing apart my teenage dreams' and 'ruthlessly snatched away all my hopes for the people I love' (Herawati, 2018, p. 62). War as an instrument of state domination and power is not only physically devastating, but also erases the human possibility to dream and love.

Social domination also comes in more subtle but still painful forms, namely intrigue and manipulation in the workplace. In one narrative, a character named Markidin chooses to resign from his job because he cannot stand the practice of slander and empty imagery for the sake of power ambitions. He is described as someone who 'swallows the whole issue back,' trying to understand why the people around him 'become strange' in an effort to achieve a position (Herawati, 2020, p. 6). This illustrates how corrosive social norms can undermine solidarity and integrity in a professional environment.

The whole story shows that social domination does not always come in the form of physical violence. It can take the form of ostracisation, slander, stereotyping, or even the imposition of a culture of silence. Herawati gives voice to the plight of those who are excluded, unheard and trapped in a marginalising social order. Her work provides a space for the voiceless to finally be heard-even if only through the pages of fiction.

Social domination in Zoya Herawati's fiction reflects a structural reality that is not only present in plain sight, such as through the state apparatus or militaristic system, but also works symbolically and systemically. This representation can be read through Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus* and *doxa* theoretical framework, where social structures work unconsciously, embedded in individual habits and perceptions. The mixed-blood character in Herawati's story, for example, not only experiences external discrimination, but also bears the burden of internalising the shame of her perceived 'flawed' identity. Racial slurs such as *'ampyang'* become symbols of contempt for self-worth, shaped by discriminatory *habitus* and the symbolic reproduction of cultural power.

This finding is in line with Kamilah (2024), who shows how symbolic capital is used by writers to penetrate unequal social arenas. Herawati, by utilising symbolic capital in the form of empathy and everyday narratives, not only deconstructs power relations, but also opens space for the resistance of her characters. In this context, fiction becomes a venue for discourse negotiation between domination and resistance.

The power relations displayed by Herawati are also rooted in a social structure that legitimises the role of the authorities as *'gusti pangeran'*. This position affirms the symbol of repressive power, where fear is used as a tool of social control. This is reminiscent of Husain's (2020) reading of literary works that frame patriotism in the shadow of futility, where power relations often manipulate people's loyalty to the state. Herawati shows how people even lose the right to ask questions, signalling a symbolic silencing of public reason.

The other side of social domination is also present through competitive and manipulative work dynamics, as seen in Markidin's character. The toxic work culture is a contemporary representation of soft domination, where individual existence is determined by performativity, not integrity. This shows continuity with Sungkowati's (2013) findings, which highlight how women authors in East Java present the world of work as a space of conflict between traditional values and the pressures of modernity. Herawati expands this spectrum by showing that structural pressures are not only experienced by women, but also men who are marginalised by the neoliberalism system.

This overall reading shows that social domination in Herawati's fiction is not single-layered, but intertwined: racism, patriarchy, militarism and capitalism form a social landscape that silences slowly. However, the strength of Herawati's fiction lies in presenting her characters as full human beings-not just ideological representations, but subjects who feel, doubt, and keep fighting. In this way, Herawati reaffirms the function of literature as a space for collective memory and a form of symbolic criticism of an unequal social order.

## CONCLUSION

Zoya Herawati's fiction consistently depicts various forms of structural domination experienced by marginalised social classes. Economic domination is seen in systemic poverty, labour instability, and exploitative relations with the state. Cultural domination is reflected in the marginalisation of racial and gender identities, and the lack of affirmative space for diversity. Social domination is seen in discriminatory practices, repressive power, and weak solidarity that leads to isolation. Herawati's work functions as a reflective medium that reveals social power relations through fictional narratives rooted in the reality of society. She uses the characters' experiences to criticise unequal social structures, making literature a means of empathy and symbolic resistance. Future research can develop an interdisciplinary approach with contemporary social theory and explore literature's relationship with public policy to understand the influence of representations of domination in fiction on social construction.

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