



The Discourse of Power and Human Rights in the Short Story Collection *Saksi Mata* by Seno Gumira Ajidarma

Nadia Vega Paputungan^{1*}, Asna Ntlu², Sitti Rachmi Masie³

¹²³Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia, Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, Gorontalo, Indonesia

*E-mail: nadiavegapaputungan@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the representation of power and human rights violations in the short story collection *Saksi Mata* by Seno Gumira Ajidarma, employing a discourse analysis approach. The collection depicts the repressive political and social climate in Indonesia, particularly regarding military violence in East Timor. The study utilizes Van Dijk's model of discourse analysis, which encompasses three dimensions: social context, social cognition, and text structure. The data collection technique employed was a literature review, while the data analysis method used was qualitative-descriptive, utilizing Van Dijk's discourse analysis approach. The researcher describes the short story's structure as well as the individual and social facts within it: 1) the human element—specifically the social reality—depicted in the short story *Saksi Mata* reflects the fiery spirit of the people of Timor-Leste in their resistance to break free from Indonesia; the population engaged in this resistance to achieve their independence; 2) the short story *Saksi Mata* centers on the theme of struggle and follows a linear (chronological) plot. The findings reveal that the texts in *Saksi Mata* offer sharp criticism of authoritarian and opaque power structures while highlighting serious human rights violations, such as infringements on freedom of expression, the right to life, and the right to humane treatment. The stories employ narrative, metaphor, and irony to expose oppressive power dynamics and shed light on the suffering of individuals caused by systemic injustice. The study concludes that literary works—specifically short stories—can serve as a form of symbolic resistance against hegemonic power and as a medium for voicing humanitarian values.

Keywords : power, human rights, short story collection

INTRODUCTION

One theory applicable to discourse analysis is Teun A. van Dijk's theory of critical discourse analysis (1993:02). Van Dijk is a linguist who has made significant contributions to the development of discourse analysis theory and methodology. According to Van Dijk, discourse analysis does not merely examine the formal structure of a text but also explores its social, psychological, and ideological implications within a broader social context. This approach enables a deeper understanding of how language and communication are utilized in social interactions and the construction of social reality. Van Dijk's theory views discourse through three dimensions: text structure, social

cognition, and social context (Setiawan et al., 2022:2). Within the textual dimension, the analysis focuses on the structures and strategies employed in the discourse to highlight specific themes. The analysis also encompasses the process of news text construction, which involves the individual cognition of the writer. Conversely, the social context dimension focuses on how discourse regarding a particular issue is shaped within society. Van Dijk categorizes text structure into three levels: macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure. Macrostructure refers to the global meaning of a text, which can be identified through its topic (Pratama & Abidin, 2020:2).

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Human rights are fundamental rights inherent to individuals from birth; they can be defined as rights inseparable from our nature as human beings. Without human rights, the rights of others would be violated, leading to numerous actions devoid of awareness or responsibility.

Short stories typically address a single major theme in depth, resulting in a limited number of characters. This limited number of characters allows the author to delve deeper into their personalities, link them to the central conflict, and convey the message more clearly. In this way, a short story can resonate with the reader's emotions, even within a brief span of time. With its concise and focused format, the short story is more than mere entertainment; it serves as an effective vehicle for conveying profound ideas—whether social, psychological, or philosophical in nature. Despite its limited scope, the story can still capture the complexities of everyday life, creating a compelling world within the confines of a brief narrative. A well-crafted short story offers a meaningful reading experience, inviting the reader to reflect on and feel the story's impact, however short its duration.

METHOD

The method employed in this study is descriptive-analytical. This approach involves describing facts and subsequently organizing them through analysis; it goes beyond mere description to provide adequate understanding and explanation. Using this method, the researcher analyzes and seeks to identify the social criticism present in the short story collection *Saksi Mata* by Seno Gumira Ajidarma.

The data collection technique employed was a literature review, while the data analysis method used was qualitative-descriptive, utilizing Van Dijk's discourse analysis approach. The researcher describes the short story's structure as well as the individual and social facts within it: 1) the human element—specifically the social reality—depicted in the short story *Saksi Mata* reflects the fiery spirit

of the people of Timor-Leste in their resistance to break free from Indonesia; the population engaged in this resistance to achieve their independence; 2) the short story *Saksi Mata* centers on the theme of struggle and follows a linear (chronological) plot.

This study analyzes four songs from a Gorontalo regional music album by Rizky Onefyt, as featured on his YouTube channel. The four songs are Hulondalo Lipu'u, Nga'ami Matolimou, Torabua, and Burungi Moputio. Rizky Onefyt appears here as an interpreter (vocalist/cover artist) rather than the original composer. The analysis employs Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, encompassing three levels of signification: denotation, connotation, and myth.

The songs selected for this study feature lyrics rich in cultural and social symbols that reflect the lives of the Gorontalo people. This selection was not made at random; rather, it was based on the fact that the lyrics contain diverse representations of regional identity, social values, life aspirations, and the emotional expressions of the Gorontalo community. Consequently, these songs serve as comprehensive data for illustrating regional traditional music—functioning both as a medium for cultural expression and as a vehicle for transmitting cultural values.

RESULT

1. Power in the Short Story *Saksi Mata* (Eyewitness) by Seno Gumira Ajidarma

This short story depicts events during the New Order era, a time when society struggled to achieve a better life. It portrays characters constrained by a lack of strength and power—specifically those in the position of "slaves" or members of the relatively weaker strata of society. *Saksi Mata* is one of the stories in the collection of the same name.

The short story "Saksi Mata" was authored by Seno Gumira Ajidarma and appeared in a collection published in 1994 by Benteng Pustaka. Seno Gumira Ajidarma wrote "Saksi Mata" based



on accounts from victims and eyewitnesses of the Dili Incident of November 12, 1991, in East Timor. According to Article 1, Paragraph 1 of Law No. 39 of 1999, human rights are a set of rights inherent in the very nature of human existence as creatures of God Almighty; they are His gift and must be respected, upheld, and protected by the state, the law, the government, and every individual to ensure the honor and protection of human essence and dignity. Seno Gumira Ajidarma's short story "Saksi Mata" clearly centers on the issue of human rights violations. The work not only reveals the atrocities that occurred but also portrays the suffering of individuals whose rights were stripped away by the arbitrary exercise of power. The following is an analysis of the 16 short stories contained in the collection *Saksi Mata* by Seno Gumira Ajidarma.

2. The Context of Human Rights

From the perspective of critical discourse analysis, excerpts from the short story *Saksi Mata* can be analyzed through three primary dimensions. Social identity here reflects a society under duress and injustice, where the figure of the "eyeless eyewitness" symbolizes ordinary people who have lost the ability to speak out and convey the truth. This signifies power imbalances and the denial of an individual's right to state facts. Politically, the courtroom setting—ostensibly a symbol of justice—instead presents an irony: the witness appears blind and bloodied, signaling repressive and manipulative legal practices wherein the judicial system is used to obscure the truth and uphold the authority of those in power. Meanwhile, the cultural context is conveyed through symbols of blood and empty eye sockets streaming red, implying the collective suffering and trauma that persist within the community. Blood, typically a symbol of life, here represents sacrifice and the social wounds embedded in cultural identity. Thus, the text offers a critique of social injustice, repressive political practices, and the cultural trauma that shapes the collective experience of society.

3. Implementing Research Methodology Findings in Indonesian Language Instruction

The findings of this research can be implemented in Indonesian language instruction by integrating literature as a medium for critical literacy, training students to view texts as reflections of social and political realities. In the classroom, educators can utilize narratives concerning power and human rights to hone students' critical thinking skills through in-depth analysis of the relationship between literary structures and their underlying historical contexts. Through discussion-based or problem-solving learning strategies, students are encouraged to understand how language functions both as an instrument of power and as a means to articulate human dignity; consequently, their language proficiency develops in tandem with a heightened moral sensitivity toward humanitarian issues.

Furthermore, these research findings can be applied through transformative creative writing activities, in which students re-examine themes of trauma and injustice by crafting personal works—such as essays or poems—to cultivate empathy. This shifts the focus of Indonesian language instruction from mere technical linguistic mastery to an interdisciplinary space for character education, capable of linking literary appreciation with an awareness of human rights. Ultimately, the use of materials rich in moral significance aims to shape a generation that is not only literate but also possesses the intellectual courage to critically challenge the abuse of authority and steadfastly uphold humanitarian values. Ultimately, the use of this material—rich in moral messages—aims to cultivate a generation that is not only literate but also possesses the intellectual courage to think critically about the abuse of authority and consistently upholds humanitarian values.

The research findings indicate that the work of Seno Gumira Ajidarma—specifically *Saksi Mata*—encompasses three contexts: text structure, social cognition, and social context. Across these

three contextual levels, 70 data points were identified that possess three levels of meaning.

DISCUSSION

Power in the Short Story *Saksi Mata* by Seno Gumira Ajidarma

From a social-contextual perspective, these short stories reveal how discourse is shaped and reconstructed within a society marked by power imbalances. Van Dijk (1998: 384) emphasizes two crucial elements within the social context: power and access. Power is manifested through actions such as military repression, public punishment, and the intimidation of citizens. This is exemplified by the passage: "They came in the dead of night, without a sound, and took Manuel and Maria to that old tree. There, bullets spoke louder than justice" (Manuel). The passage elucidates that the shooting beneath the tree constituted a form of public punishment; although carried out covertly, its impact was to instill psychological terror in the rest of the villagers. Meanwhile, access reflects the extent to which individuals or groups possess the ability to obtain information.

The Relationship Between Power and Human Rights

The collection of short stories under analysis portrays the complex relationship between power and human rights violations. This relationship can be examined through three discursive dimensions—social, political, and cultural—aligning with Fairclough's (1989:14–15) views on the social dimension, wherein literary texts expose how power is embedded within social structures to oppress marginalized groups. These stories do not merely record individual traumatic experiences; they also depict a society living under structural pressure, systemic violence, and political domination. Within the social context, stories such as *Saksi Mata*, *Sebatang Pohon di Luar Desa*, and *Manuel* demonstrate how collective trauma shapes the lived experiences of the community. In *Saksi Mata*, the witness who has lost. For instance, in

the passage "The eyewitness could no longer see, yet was still brought into the courtroom. When the judge asked what he saw, he could only point to his two empty eye sockets. There, justice was no longer a matter of what was witnessed, but rather of how power had gouged out a person's right to see the truth. The judge fell silent, the prosecutor fell silent, and the courtroom was filled only with the lingering, pungent stench of blood" (Ajidarma, 1994:9), the eyes serve as a symbol of individual powerlessness in the face of a repressive legal structure. This phenomenon underscores that unequal power dynamics not only curtail physical rights but also shape the social and psychological consciousness of the citizenry. Similarly, *Sebatang Pohon di Luar Desa* portrays the fear that continues to haunt the village in the aftermath of conflict; the river—once a playground for children—transforms into a symbol of threat, while the tree used for hangings becomes an emblem of enduring collective trauma. The story reveals that injustice and political violence leave a far-reaching impact on the social fabric, affecting even the younger generation, who are deprived of their sense of security and freedom.

Implementation of Research Methodology Findings in Indonesian Language Instruction

Implementing these research findings in Indonesian language instruction positions literature not merely as aesthetic material, but as an instrument of critical literacy capable of connecting students to socio-political realities. This strategy aligns with the ideas of Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970:71–72), which posits that education must be a "practice of freedom." Through this approach, teachers move beyond the "banking" method (mere information transfer) and instead engage students in critical dialogue regarding texts that depict injustice, enabling them to recognize and challenge the oppressive power structures embedded in the narratives. In the classroom, the use of narratives concerning power and human rights serves to hone Higher-Order



Thinking Skills. This is supported by Henry Giroux's perspective in *Theory and Resistance in Education* (2001:121–123), which emphasizes that critical pedagogy should train students to become "transformative intellectuals." By analyzing the relationship between literary structures and historical contexts—such as those found in the short stories of Seno Gumira Ajidarma—students learn that language is not a neutral medium.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion, it can be concluded that the short stories in the collection *Saksi Mata* present literary discourse as both a reflection of and a critique regarding power imbalances and social conditions. From a social context perspective, these texts illustrate how domination and access to fundamental rights shape the collective experience of society, including the trauma and fear endured by the people. From a social cognition perspective, narratives employing symbols, metaphors, and intense descriptions convey the author's views on injustice, allowing readers to grasp complex social realities as well as the implicit messages within the texts. Regarding the text structure, the application of macro-, super-, and micro-structures emphasizes themes of power and trauma, intensifies the emotional impact, and portrays the suffering of the populace under a repressive system. Overall, these short stories affirm that literature serves not merely as entertainment but also as a medium for social reflection and a critique of practices of domination.

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