

Nini Randa's Subjectivity in "Tango & Sadimin" Novel by Ramayda Akmal

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ABSTRACT

The idea of subjectivity enables women to think outside the mainstream ideology which perpetuates an oppressive patriarchal system. In the novel "Tango & Sadimin", Akmal tried to portray women's subjectivity through its women characters, especially Nini Randa. Therefore, the aim of this study is to find out the way this particular woman identifies and perceive herself, gain control and autonomy over herself, her subjectivity. As the theoretical framework, Todorov's theory (1985) is used to analyze the narrative structure and Lacanian's (1977) psychoanalysis with feminin perspective is used to analyze the process of finding, knowing, or identifying subjects' identity. Lacanian psychoanalysis' main point is the concept of desire which could be seen through three registers of The Real, The Imaginer, and The Symbolic. The finding shows that through the three registers, Nini Randa's subjectivity is depicted in the form of rebellion, resistance, independence, intelligence, dominance, negotiation, criticism, attempts to purify her body and suicide attempts.

Keywords: *Feminism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, women's subjectivity*

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is one of the ways that could be used to support feminist goals to make women's rights equal to men. Ramayda Akmal's second novel—"Tango & Sadimin"—can be considered to support that movement. The heart of the story is Nini Randa's psychological quest of seeking the meaning of her life. Nini Randa is portrayed as a woman who is struggling to define herself in her social surroundings that oppresses her, making her seek for her own subjectivity.

Subjectivity in Lacanian psychoanalysis is a "process of finding, knowing or identifying a subject's identity. The process of identification is driven by desire and it is influenced by unconscious energy" (Islahiyah, Anoegrajekti, & Mustamar, 2018, p. 1). Identity is the outcome of a series of identifications that one person takes on the gestures and language of those whom s/he identifies both desirable and ideal to craft a self-presentation. Meanwhile, subjectivity is further than that (Coats, 2004). Subjectivity is a "movement between that which we control and that which controls us" (Coats, 2004, p. 5). Meanwhile, Hall (2004) states that "subjectivity as a critical concept invites us to consider the question of how and from where identity arises, to what extent it is understandable, and to what degree it is

something over which we have any measure of influence in control" (pp. 3-4).

During child development, a son needs to realize his male sexual identity by repudiating his early identification with his mother. A son then identifies himself with his father whom he sees as the subject of his own will and desire, encouraging him to dominate rather than depending on. Meanwhile, a daughter can continue to identify with her mother because of the sameness of their gender, making the separation less absolute and her course of individuation often more ambivalent (Pfaelzer, 1999). This results in women becoming "seen-and forced to see themselves-as defective and "castrated" men. It is a regime of sexual "indifference," in which representation accords no specificity to the female" (Whitford, 1991, p. 104).

Because women are marginalized in Symbolic order—a register which Lacan said consists of language, beliefs, ideologies that give social identity and value system to an infant (Hall, 2004)—women are controlled by a patriarchal system thus they are often oppressed and not free to express themselves. But this does not mean women could not position themselves as a subject who has authority to control her own body, her own mind.

This means, women have to gain their subjectivity, in order to determine the direction of their own life.

Bracher (2017) believes that Lacanian theory can provide the kind of subjectivity that can be used as a basis of social meaningful criticism. It means his theory could be used for analyzing women's subjectivity for criticism based on feminist perspective. Wright (2000) states that "Lacan defines sexual position in terms of getting a place in the social as sexed subjects" (p. 18). This difference is believed by feminists to be the framework to know women's subjectivity. Grosz (2004) said psychoanalysis could be used to "help provide an explanation, or the beginnings of one, of women's social and psychical positions within patriarchal cultures" (p. 7).

Lacan's center of his psychoanalysis theory is theory about desire. This desire could be seen through his theory of three registers of The Real, The Imaginary, and The Symbolic. Dil (2009) states that Lacanian psychoanalysis which is basically formed from Symbolic and Imaginary fails to capture The Real. The Real is a phase where there is no absence, no loss, no lack. It is all about fulfillment and completeness in which there is no need that cannot be satisfied (Jalasutra, 2017). The Imaginary itself is a phase called mirror stage which provides an illusion of totality that is vital to the subject's entire mental development (Hardwig, 1997). Basically, this phase is about identification; when individuals reflect themselves on other individuals then identify themselves with that image and take it as their own identity. Identification is one of the important ways for the subject to get questions and experience changes through discourse (Bracher, 2017). Meanwhile, The Symbolic is a phase where a child finally could position himself in the adult world (Althusser, 1977).

Dil (2009) explained that The Imaginary and The Symbolic construct reality. When the reality fails to go, The Real becomes a void that promises the lost fullness to return. So, at The Imaginary and The Symbolic phase, individuals would desire to become 'being', just like Lacan suggests "man's desire is the desire of the Other" (Lacan, 1977, p. 201). Meanwhile, desire in The Real is a desire for something, situation, and object, that would gain back the lost fullness. Unconsciousness, which Lacan said is driven by desires, led someone to desire another thing and the chain will never stop. This is why "desire can never be satisfied; it is constant in its pressure, and eternal. The realization of desire does not consist in being 'fulfilled', but in the reproduction of desire as such" (Evans, 2006, p. 38).

Based on the explanation above, this study aims to explain women's subjectivity—how women identify, perceive, and gain control over themselves as could be seen through Nini Randa's character. The study uses Lacanian psychoanalysis in order to oppose and define her subjectivity. Previous study about "Tango & Sadimin" by Ramayda Akmal has not been found yet but

the study of women's subjectivity has been done quite a lot. The previous studies of women's subjectivity have been done by Mayasari (2009), Arrafah (2020), Elianna, Dwiningtyas, and Rahmijati (2014), Priyatna (2016); Benedicta (2015), Islamiyah and Koiri (2017), Wijayanti and Rusdiarti (2019).

Those studies analyzed how women (both in real life and literature) were portrayed, and how they identified themselves and gained their subjectivity regardless of their circumstances. Although women's subjectivity studies have been done many times, the women's situations that were expressed through literary work are based on different contexts of community. Therefore, it is still important to see another perspective of how women are able to become a subject in a patriarchal culture.

2. METHODS

To answer the problem, this study uses Lacanian psychoanalysis in feminism perspective. Campbell (2004) remarked "in its engagement with Lacanian epistemology, feminism encounters the theoretical and political desires of Lacanian psychoanalysis" (pp. 27-28). The analysis then uses Lacan's framework of three registers of The Real, The Imaginary, and The Symbolic to discover Nini Randa's subjectivity as a woman. Through those three registers, Nini Randa's process of finding, knowing, and identifying her own identity which was driven by desires and unconscious energy is analyzed. Through the process, it is analyzed whether Nini Randa is finally able to be free in expressing herself and exist as a subject. Before that, the narrative structure of "Tango & Sadimin"'s novel is analyzed in advance using Todorov's theory of structure. Todorov's (1985) narrative structure focused on three aspects which are syntax, semantics, and verbal aspect. This narrative structure analysis aims to understand the novel better as a whole.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Narrative Structure

Based on the analysis of syntax, it can be seen that Nini Randa is the subject that sets the story in motion. This can be proven from the story's plot and flow, which 50 out of 96 main functions describe her. It makes 52% of the main functions told about her story. The story itself started with Nini Randa's character and is driven by Nini Randa's complex relation with the other nine main characters.

Based on semantics aspect, Nini Randa's character in the novel was described as being mentally tough and physically strong, rude, ignorant, materialistic, cunning, having full of pride, high self-esteem, being vindictive, ruthless, and resentful. She is described as a woman who

was once exiled by the villagers but then turned to “evil-like” woman that feared by many. However aside from that, she is also easily anxious, scared, and not only good at hiding her feelings but also suppressing her own feelings. Time and place setting used in this novel shows realistic but imaginary time and place settings. The village as a place setting hints the low education and poor society in which Nini Randa lives in.

Meanwhile based on the verbal aspect, the point of view in this story used third-person omniscient point of view which can show subjective and objective views. This helps understand the growth and problems each character puts up with better.

The overall narrative structure of “Tango & Sadimin” shows each element in the story that builds a unified whole. The narrative structure also proves how Nini Randa becomes the most dominant and prominent character in this novel. Her growth—which changed her both physically and mentally— makes her ideal to become the object of analysis.

3.2. Nini Randa’s Subjectivity in Lacan’s Psychoanalysis: The Real, The Imaginary, and The Symbolic

Nini Randa was an abandoned baby and adopted by elder woman only two years long until the elder woman dies. She grew up alone with the help of fishermen and sand miners nearby. She spent most of her time in the forest, making her able to talk with spirits. This ability made her often called by villagers when their relatives died to order Nini Randa to talk with spirits and ask about unfinished business the deceased had. In return, Nini Randa got a sum of money. Although she lived in extreme poverty and had no one to rely on, Nini Randa never felt lack and lived her days in contentment.

Her wholeness was ruined by the appearance of Satun Sadat, who stole her money and raped her. Ironically, Nini Randa didn’t understand both the facts that she was raped and that the sum of money she had was valuable thus got stolen. This is the first time Nini Randa experienced this kind of thing and she felt strange. When Satun Sadat finally came several days later then raped and stole her money again, Nini Randa started to feel excited and wait for his return.

Unfortunately, nothing was like she expected, Satun Sadat went missing and never came back. Nini Randa is said to be the woman who was raped by Satun Sadat. It made her treated badly by the villagers. This also made her lose the ability to talk to spirits which made her feel so lonely. All these events make desire from The Real order arises. Nini Randa was longing to go back to when things used to be. This desire then pushed Nini Randa to desire another thing: to meet Satun Sadat and demand an explanation from him. Nini Randa wanted to know why villagers exiled her after Satun Sadat came to her hut.

This act shows Nini Randa’s effort to gain her subjectivity. Nini Randa question the villagers—as a symbol of the patriarchal system—whom blaming her. The act of blaming here perpetuate the idea that women are inferior being therefore always seen as the one at fault. Season had changed and Satun Sadat was nowhere to be seen. Nini Randa decided she can’t sit back at villagers who kept blaming her while she kept waiting for someone uncertain. So, Nini Randa decided to seek the answer by herself. This shows Nini Randa’s independence, which is part of her subjectivity.

Identification and desire of being that works in The Imaginary and The Symbolic Order makes her work hard to gain money. Only by that way, she could gain an identity which shifts her from someone who was raped, to someone who bought Satun Sadat. This identification clearly shows Nini Randa’s subjectivity. She feels at ease when she thinks of herself as the subject who bought him, showing that she is the one who controls Satun Sadat, not the other way around.

“Yang ia tahu, ia merasa perlu memiliki banyak uang supaya nelayan yang kemudian menjadi suaminya itu diam di rumah dan tetap tidur bersamanya. Alam dan sejarah hidupnya memberikan pelajaran bahwa lebih melegakan mendengar Nini Randa tidak diperkosa Satun Sadat, tetapi ia membelinya. Nini Randa membeli Satun Sadat” (Akmal, 2019, p. 31).

After Satun Sadat, Nini Randa desired to meet another man and settled down, which made her work harder to gain money. Nini Randa then met a fisherman and asked him to take her to his house and gave him money in exchange. However, rather than taking Nini Randa to his house, he built a house for Nini Randa and left her. Villagers started to mock her again, saying that after being raped now she was also deceived. Nini Randa reflected on what villagers said then denied their accusation, saying that she was not deceived, but enjoyed someone else’s husband. This identification also shows Nini Randa’s subjectivity. She denies the stereotypes that women are weak and not rational thus easily get deceived. Nini Randa firmly believes she is the subject and the one in control.

“Nini Randa kini dilihat pula sebagai perempuan yang bukan hanya pernah diperkosa, tetapi juga kemudian ditipu. Jika ia bisa bilang bahwa ia membeli lelaki untuk mengganti pemerkosaan yang dituduhkan padanya, maka wajar ketika akhirnya ia lebih nyaman menyebut dirinya menikmati suami orang ketimbang dianggap tertipu” (Akmal, 2019, p. 31).

After being left by that fishermen, Nini Randa discovered herself pregnant. She never had this kind of experience and no one ever told her either, so she simply thought it would be easier to live alone rather than live with a baby. She was trying hard to abort the fetus but

always failed to do so. When she thought of floating off the baby at the river, she hated the thought that villagers would mock her, so she thwarted her plan. Through the villagers, Nini Randa reflected and desired not to become someone that the villagers could mock and look down. Therefore, she surprisingly took pride in raising her baby. By this way, she clearly stated that she had never been raped nor deceived. This act shows Nini Randa's subjectivity. She stood up for herself, always positioned herself as someone who could not be looked down. She is consistent and determined to make herself stand out as the subject.

"Nini Randa membesarkan bayinya penuh kebanggaan sebuah rencana besar untuk semakin mengukuhkan bahwa dirinya, tidak pernah diperkosa apalagi ditipu laki-laki" (Akmal, 2019, pp. 32-33).

After giving birth, Nini Randa met Mandor who led a dam construction project. Nini Randa and Mandor then grew close. One day, Mandor and Nini Randa were having sexual intercourse. Nini Randa then offered some money as she usually did, but Mandor refused and said that he is the one who should give Nini Randa money. This realization makes her identify herself that she is the one who is valuable and should have been paid. Her new identity then led Nini Randa to have sexual intercourse with Mandor and some of his workers for money. This realization could be seen not only as Nini Randa be a mere male sexual object, but also as Nini Randa's subjectivity as she realized her own value and chose to have sexual intercourse for her own benefit. It shows Nini Randa as the subject who can autonomously determine the control of her own body.

But then, Nini Randa desired more than she already had. The way Mandor treated her, far different from the other men she had met before, made Nini Randa fell in love with Mandor and wished to have him by her side. Once the project ended, Nini Randa waited for Mandor's return but he never came back. This greatly put Nini Randa in despair. The villagers began to mock her again, worsening the condition. But later she remembered Mandor's words to her, saying that a valuable thing is always envied and hated by people.

Through Mandor, Nini Randa identifies herself as someone who is valuable, and it's natural for people to hate her. Nini Randa considers herself as someone who is highly valuable so that must be paid handsomely. As a very valuable item, she should not cry. This identification makes Nini Randa live her days in glory and take care of her daughter Cainah with full of pride. This case could be seen as Nini Randa being a sexual object for men and cannot control her own body anymore. Nini Randa thought that it was her destiny to be used and cannot choose her buyer. However then again, the way Nini Randa faced it could be seen as her effort to gain her subjectivity. Nini Randa thought high of herself,

considering herself as someone who was very valuable thus able to make her live with pride. This displays the effort and struggle of Nini Randa to exist as a woman being, despite being insulted, forgotten, and used.

Nini Randa's way to forget Mandor led her to become a prostitute. Not only that, she also became a brothel keeper who facilitated other prostitutes. The money Nini Randa gained from prostitution then made her secretly buy some rice fields to expand her business. She stepped as the first parent to put her child in school in order to mock the villagers. Now, not only did people mock her, but also thought her as a disease while secretly fearing her. She also could settle the conflict with Haji Misbah and its clan who came by villagers' request to destroy her prostitution business. Although Haji Misbah and its clan successfully destroyed the facilities, Nini Randa who raped Haji Misbah made him unable to come back and even gave him some sort of trauma. Nini Randa easily asked the sand miners and fishermen to build another hut for her.

This shows Nini Randa's subjectivity, as she has power and dominance (Hall, 2004). Even though being a prostitute made her become an object to men, Nini Randa used it to gain power to control her own life. She consistently positioned herself as subject. She had done what majority people could not do such as sending their children to school. The way she handled things like negotiating in buying rice fields and paying people outside the village to cultivate it shows her intelligence. The way she easily asked sand miners and fishermen to build another hut for her also shows that she is the subject who's in control.

At this phase, Nini Randa felt satisfied with her life as her identity had been firmly identified. For a while, she felt like she had already fulfilled her lack. However then, as Lacan said, desire cannot be fulfilled (Žižek, 1992). This started as Nini Randa desired to make Cainah like her; but even better. She wanted Cainah to be able to gain her subjectivity as in being able to choose a man wisely and carefully to have sexual intercourse with. Nini Randa wanted Cainah to pass all the pain she had gone through with various men in the past. However, Nini Randa failed to notice that school gave Cainah a different experience with her. Cainah desired what her friends got, as in getting proposed by a foreman. Cainah saw nothing wrong with being a prostitute, but she was also afraid of its uncertainty. She thought, if she got married like her friends did, she would be happy forever. Thus, she wanted Dana, the only friend left at her class, to be her husband.

Nini Randa never wanted Cainah to get married, let alone married to Dana, son of the famous beggars. Nini Randa then took Cainah out of school and built a hut for her, forcing her to become a prostitute. Cainah then ran away with Dana, leaving Nini Randa in agony. This event shows how Nini Randa's perspective of subjectivity was

completely denied by Cainah. Nini Randa did not realize that forcing Cainah her kind of subjectivity to choose man on her own but not to get married also grabbed Cainah's subjectivity to decide the path of her own life. This also makes Nini Randa feel like losing her subjectivity, because she felt powerless and that her life was not going to the direction she wanted to be.

After Cainah's absence, Nini Randa then did various crazy things to deal with the pain of being left. This act shows Nini Randa's desire to get a condition of wholeness, desire of The Real order. The appearance of Tango who resembled Nah so much made her feel like her long-lost daughter had come back. For a while, her desire to ease the pain caused by Cainah had fulfilled. However, the poor and homeless Cainah and Dana then returned and begged for help. This caused Nini Randa to feel like gaining back her power, as in a feeling of being needed and a feeling of in control again. Nini Randa helped them but also took revenge by killing Jagal—Cainah's favorite animal which she adored dearly—to let Cainah dan Dana live at its hut.

Nini Randa then had to face a second loss. Cainah had gone missing and nobody knew her whereabouts. Although Nini Randa looked careless outside, she secretly desired Cainah to come back. Nini Randa then used her mystical power to make Cainah back, but it was useless since Cainah no longer lived in the same world as her. The desire that cannot be fulfilled made Nini Randa live in agony again. Not only did she lose Cainah, but she was also reminded of her painful past. The arised pressure and anxiety made Nini Randa attempt to kill herself while doing her usual habit of soaking in hot water under burning fire.

Those events could be seen as Nini Randa slowly lost her subjectivity, as in feeling hopeless again. However, Nini Randa's habit of soaking in hot water after her business ended shows how her body gained subjectivity. This habit shows how Nini Randa purified herself and thus reclaimed her own body. Nini Randa's suicide attempt could also be seen as her effort to gain subjectivity, as in being in control of her own life and her effort to back to The Real, where she could not feel lack nor any pain. However, the failure of suicide attempt shows how the subjectivity that Nini Randa had formed and built for years robbed, as she realized that she was born unwanted at the first place and she also failed to take away her own life. This realization made Nini Randa thought that she never had any control of her own life since the beginning.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that there are three desires from The Real register and five identifications and desires from The Imaginary and The Symbolic order. Those desires show Nini Randa's subjectivity; as in perceiving herself, becoming aware of herself and what she is capable of, consciously positioning herself as the subject with high self-esteem,

exist as 'being' both in public and private sphere, and not being afraid of taking risks. Nini Randa's subjectivity is also similar to Esther's subjectivity in Mayasari's (2009) findings. Nini Randa's subjectivity is not only manifested in her thoughts and acts, but also through her body, just like Esther used her body to resist the dominance of patriarchal culture. It shows that women exert everything they have to exist as the subject.

4. CONCLUSION

In Nini Randa's character, women were portrayed living in a repressive patriarchal culture which always sees women as inferior beings. Nini Randa's journey of subjectivity was triggered from patriarchal culture that oppressed her thus led her to a rebellion. Her rebellion is an act to gain her subjectivity, forming her into a resistant, tough, critical, independent, dominant, and clever woman who knew how to negotiate, and always fought back. Nini Randa's subjectivity shows how women are able to live with pride. Not only from the way she thought, the way Nini Randa unconsciously used her body to gain back her subjectivity regardless of her profession as a prostitute also made her seen as an object to men. Yet, this story also shows that there is a price for her subjectivity. To be in control, she forced the idea of her own subjectivity to her own daughter which then made her end up losing her. Nini Randa's final thought – that she thought she had no control over her life since the beginning shows how women were badly oppressed so that no matter how hard women positioned herself as the subject. Somehow, they always ended up being the object. However after all, through Nini Randa, women's subjectivity is depicted as putting up a good fight to stand as a subject who is able to choose what is best for her own life and be fully responsible for it; as a subject who is able to live with pride regardless of any given situation.

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