

The Role of Western Education in Shaping Female Agency in *Bumi Manusia*

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ABSTRACT

Western education occupies an important place in *Bumi Manusia*, yet its role in shaping female agency has received limited scholarly attention. While previous studies have examined colonialism, gender inequality, and Nyai Ontosoroh's resistance, few have specifically explored how education serves as the driving force behind her intellectual transformation and resistance to social marginalization. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how Western education influences Nyai Ontosoroh's intellectual transformation and how this transformation enables her to challenge colonial and patriarchal oppression. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the study analyzes textual evidence from the novel through theory-driven thematic analysis informed by Giddens' Structuration Theory and the Postcolonial Feminist perspectives of Spivak and Mohanty. The findings reveal that literacy, knowledge acquisition, and critical awareness transform Nyai Ontosoroh from practical consciousness to discursive consciousness, strengthening her agency to make strategic decisions, exercise leadership, and resist systems of domination. The study concludes that Western education functions not merely as a means of acquiring knowledge but as a catalyst for intellectual empowerment, enabling resistance against social marginalization. These findings contribute to postcolonial literary studies by demonstrating the transformative relationship between education, female agency, and resistance in colonial contexts.

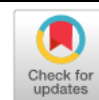
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INTRODUCTION

Education has long been associated with social change, particularly for women whose opportunities have often been limited by unequal social structures. In the Indonesian context, education has frequently been viewed as a means of expanding women's roles, fostering critical thinking, and strengthening their independence. The emergence of these ideas cannot be separated from the colonial context in which education occupied a contradictory position. For the Dutch colonial government, education was designed primarily to support the administration of the colony and maintain existing social hierarchies. Access to formal education was distributed unevenly according to race, class, and social status, leaving most indigenous people with limited educational opportunities. Women faced additional barriers because patriarchal values largely confined them to domestic roles and considered intellectual development less important than obedience and family responsibilities. Yet access to literacy, new knowledge, and different ways of thinking also produced an unintended consequence. Education became more than an instrument of colonial control, opening opportunities to question inequality and imagine roles beyond those imposed by colonial and patriarchal structures.

This paradox makes education an important lens for understanding women's agency. Drawing on Giddens (1984), this study views education not merely as the acquisition of knowledge but as a process that reshapes how individuals interpret their experiences, understand social structures, and act within them. From this perspective, education becomes the starting point of intellectual transformation.

As Wellek & Warren (1949) argue, literature reflects human experience and social reality through imaginative representation. This relationship is vividly portrayed in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Bumi Manusia*. According to Abrams (1999), the novel presents human life through characters, conflicts, and social interactions, making it an appropriate literary form for examining social issues. Set in the late Dutch colonial period, *Bumi Manusia* presents education as a contested space where knowledge is closely intertwined with power. Colonial society in the novel is governed by distinctions of race, legal status, and gender that determine who may learn, speak, and exercise authority. Within this unequal system, education becomes a means of negotiating colonial structures rather than merely a symbol of social prestige.

This perspective is most clearly embodied in Nyai Ontosoroh. Born as Sanikem and later forced into the position of a *nyai*, she begins her life with almost no control over her own future. Her legal status prevents her from receiving recognition despite her central role in managing Herman Mellema's household and business. Instead of remaining trapped in that position, however, she gradually reshapes her life through continuous learning. She learns to read Dutch books and documents, masters bookkeeping and estate management, and develops a critical understanding of colonial law. These experiences not only improve her practical abilities but also reshape how she interprets the unequal world around her, enabling her to question assumptions she once accepted without resistance.

Nyai Ontosoroh's transformation makes her one of the most compelling female characters in Indonesian literature because her struggle is rooted not in physical confrontation but in intellectual development. Her ability to lead a business, defend her family, and challenge discriminatory legal decisions grows from the knowledge she acquires throughout the narrative. These dimensions make *Bumi Manusia* an appropriate literary text for examining how Western education contributes to intellectual transformation and eventually enables resistance against social marginalization.

Scholarly discussions of *Bumi Manusia* have addressed a wide range of issues, particularly women's experiences under colonial rule, postcolonial identity, and the significance of education. One group of studies has examined the novel from feminist and postcolonial perspectives, emphasizing women's oppression, resistance, and the unequal power relations that shape Nyai Ontosoroh's life (Arwansyah & Saputra, 2021; Fadhilla & Ilma, 2023; Mahendra, 2023). These studies have demonstrated how gender and colonialism intersect to marginalize indigenous women, highlighting Nyai Ontosoroh's determination to defend herself against social injustice.

During the Dutch colonial period, education in the Dutch East Indies was highly stratified and primarily designed to preserve colonial power rather than provide equal educational opportunities for the indigenous population. Access to formal Western education was largely restricted according to race, social class, and legal status, with European and elite groups receiving privileged educational opportunities while most indigenous people, particularly women, remained excluded (Ricklefs, 2008). Nevertheless, the gradual expansion of colonial schools during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries introduced Western literacy, rational thinking, and administrative knowledge that unintentionally created opportunities for some indigenous individuals to challenge established colonial hierarchies (Coté & Westerbeek, 2020). This educational system became both an instrument of colonial domination and a medium for intellectual awakening, enabling marginalized groups to develop critical consciousness and negotiate new social identities (Vickers, 2022). Understanding this historical context is essential for interpreting *Bumi Manusia*, where Nyai Ontosoroh's intellectual development reflects the complex relationship between colonial education, gender, power, and resistance against social marginalization.

Another group of studies has explored the role of education in *Bumi Manusia*, but the discussion has largely centred on nationalism, intellectual awakening, or the educational development of Minke rather than Nyai Ontosoroh (Akbar, 2023; Sunardi et al., 2024). Although these studies acknowledge education as an important element in the novel, they generally treat it as a historical or ideological background instead of examining how

educational experiences shape Nyai Ontosoroh's intellectual development. As a result, the connection between education and women's agency receives relatively limited attention.

A further strand of research has discussed Nyai Ontosoroh as a symbol of resilience, independence, and female empowerment (Ependi & Suroso, 2023; Tyas, 2021). These studies provide valuable insights into her resistance against colonial and patriarchal domination. However, they tend to emphasize the outcomes of her resistance rather than the process through which her agency develops. Consequently, the role of Western education as a driving force behind her intellectual transformation remains insufficiently explained.

Although previous studies have contributed to understanding *Bumi Manusia* from feminist, postcolonial, and educational perspectives, an important aspect remains underexplored. Existing research generally discusses women's resistance, colonial oppression, and education as separate issues, leaving the relationship between Western education, intellectual transformation, female agency, and resistance against social marginalization insufficiently explored.

Addressing this gap, the present study views Western education not simply as formal schooling but as access to literacy, knowledge acquisition, and new perspectives that transform Nyai Ontosoroh's understanding of herself and the social structures surrounding her. Rather than treating agency as an inherent personal quality, this study argues that agency develops through an ongoing process of intellectual transformation. To explain this process, the analysis integrates Giddens (1984) Structuration Theory with the postcolonial feminist perspectives of Spivak (1988) and Mohanty (1984). Structuration Theory provides a framework for explaining how knowledge reshapes consciousness and enables purposeful action, while postcolonial feminism highlights how colonial and patriarchal structures shape women's experiences and the forms of resistance available to them. Combining these perspectives allows the study to examine not only how Nyai Ontosoroh resists marginalization but also how that capacity is gradually constructed through education.

Based on this perspective, the study addresses two questions: (1) How does Western education shape Nyai Ontosoroh's intellectual transformation in *Bumi Manusia*? and (2) How does Nyai Ontosoroh utilize the outcomes of her intellectual transformation to resist social marginalization? By answering these questions, the study offers a more integrated explanation of the relationship between education, intellectual transformation, female agency, and resistance in *Bumi Manusia*. The study also contributes to literary studies by demonstrating how Western education functions as a process of intellectual transformation through which Nyai Ontosoroh develops agency and negotiates unequal colonial structures.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine how Western education shapes the intellectual transformation of Nyai Ontosoroh and how that transformation strengthens her agency in resisting social marginalization in *Bumi Manusia*. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to interpret meanings, social relations, and ideological representations embedded in the novel rather than measure variables statistically (Creswell, 2014). The analysis was guided by Giddens' (1984) Structuration Theory and the postcolonial feminist perspectives of Spivak (1988) and Mohanty (1984), which provided the conceptual framework for interpreting the relationship between Western education, intellectual transformation, female agency, and resistance.

Data Source

The primary source of data was Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Bumi Manusia*. The data consisted of words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, narrative descriptions, and events related to four analytical categories: Western education, intellectual transformation, female agency, and resistance against social marginalization.

Instruments

The researcher served as the primary research instrument in collecting, selecting, classifying, and interpreting the data. To maintain analytical consistency, the analysis employed predetermined operational indicators derived from the theoretical framework. Western education was identified through three indicators: literacy, knowledge acquisition, and the development of new perspectives. Intellectual transformation was examined through the concepts of practical consciousness and discursive consciousness proposed by Giddens (1984), while the progression between these forms of consciousness was interpreted through the character's developing critical awareness.

Female agency was identified through setting personal goals, strategic decision-making, independent judgment, purposeful action, leadership and responsibility, and self-determination and autonomy. Resistance against social marginalization was examined through challenging legal discrimination, questioning patriarchal norms, economic independence, critical speech against injustice, negotiating unequal power relations, and defending dignity and personal autonomy.

Procedures

Data were collected through documentation and close reading of *Bumi Manusia*. The novel was read repeatedly to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the narrative, characters, and colonial social context. Relevant passages related to the research objectives were identified, recorded, and organized for analysis. The selected quotations included dialogues, narrations, character reflections, and events representing Western education, intellectual transformation, female agency, and resistance against social marginalization. Throughout the collection process, the quotations were continuously reviewed and refined to ensure their relevance to the research questions and consistency with the theoretical framework. The identified quotations were subsequently classified according to the predetermined analytical categories before being interpreted using Structuration Theory and Postcolonial Feminist Theory.

Data Analysis

This study employed a theory-driven thematic analysis following Boyatzis (1998), in which theoretical concepts guided both data coding and interpretation. Unlike inductive thematic analysis that develops themes primarily from the data, this approach began with concepts derived from Structuration Theory and Postcolonial Feminist Theory. The analytical process followed the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data condensation, relevant textual evidence was selected and classified according to the predetermined analytical categories. The organized data were then displayed systematically to identify relationships among Western education, intellectual transformation, female agency, and resistance.

Finally, the findings were interpreted by connecting the textual evidence with the theoretical framework to explain how Western education contributes to intellectual transformation, how that transformation strengthens female agency, and how agency enables resistance against social marginalization. Throughout the analysis, interpretations were continuously compared with the textual evidence to ensure consistency between the findings, the theoretical framework, and the research objectives.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are presented in accordance with the two research questions and interpreted through the theoretical perspectives outlined in this study. The first section explains how Western education contributes to Nyai Ontosoroh's intellectual transformation, while the second examines how this transformation develops into female agency that enables resistance against social marginalization. Each finding is discussed by relating textual

evidence from *Bumi Manusia* to the concepts of Structuration Theory and Postcolonial Feminism.

Western Education and Intellectual Transformation of Nyai Ontosoroh

This section addresses the first research question by examining how Western education shapes Nyai Ontosoroh's intellectual transformation through literacy, knowledge acquisition, new perspectives, practical consciousness, emerging critical awareness, and discursive consciousness. Guided by Giddens (1984) Structuration Theory, the discussion explains how these processes gradually reshape her understanding of herself and colonial society.

Literacy

For Giddens (1984), literacy provides access to knowledge that expands how individuals understand the world. In *Bumi Manusia*, Nyai Ontosoroh develops literacy through continuous exposure to the Dutch language and written texts.

"Di malam hari aku diajarinya baca-tulis, bicara dan menyusun kalimat Belanda." (Toer, 2002)

"At night he taught me to read and write, to speak, and to construct sentences in Dutch."

This quotation marks the beginning of Nyai Ontosoroh's literacy. By learning Dutch, the language of colonial administration, law, and business, she gains access to knowledge generally unavailable to indigenous women.

"Dia dengarkan bacaanku, membetulkan yang salah, menerangkan arti kata yang aku tidak mengerti.... diajarinya aku menggunakan kamus sendiri.... Kemudian diberinya aku jatah bacaan. Buku, Ann. Aku harus dapat menamatkan dan menceritakan isinya." (Toer, 2002)

"He listened to my reading, corrected my mistakes, explained the words I did not understand, and taught me how to use a dictionary. Later he assigned me books to read. I had to finish them and explain their contents."

This passage shows that Nyai Ontosoroh's literacy develops beyond basic reading into comprehension and interpretation. She is encouraged to understand unfamiliar vocabulary, use a dictionary independently, and explain what she has read. Using a dictionary and explaining the texts further develop her ability to interpret written knowledge independently.

Taken together, these findings show that literacy marks the beginning of Nyai Ontosoroh's intellectual transformation. Learning to read, understand, and interpret Dutch texts allows her to access new knowledge that had previously been beyond her reach. This literacy later becomes the foundation for acquiring practical knowledge in business, administration, and law.

Knowledge Acquisition

According to Giddens (1984), knowledge becomes meaningful when it is applied in everyday life. Nyai Ontosoroh's education therefore extends beyond literacy to practical knowledge in business, administration, agriculture, and law.

"Dia yang mengajari aku segala tentang pertanian, perusahaan, pemeliharaan hewan, pekerjaan kantor." (Toer, 2002)

"He taught me everything about agriculture, business management, animal husbandry, and office administration."

The passage reveals that Nyai Ontosoroh acquires practical knowledge through everyday activities in Herman Mellema's estate rather than formal education. She learns to manage agricultural production, business operations, and office administration, preparing her for responsibilities rarely entrusted to indigenous women.

"Kemudian diajarinya aku berurusan dengan bank, ahli-ahli hukum, aturan dagang." (Toer, 2002)

"Later he taught me how to deal with banks, legal experts, and commercial regulations."

This passage shows that Nyai Ontosoroh's learning extends beyond business management to banking, legal matters, and commercial regulations, enabling her to understand and engage with colonial institutions.

Taken together, these findings show that practical knowledge equips Nyai Ontosoroh with the competence to engage with colonial institutions and lays the foundation for new perspectives.

New Perspectives

According to Giddens (1984), learning not only increases knowledge but also reshapes how individuals understand themselves and their social world. In *Bumi Manusia*, this transformation changes how Nyai Ontosoroh values knowledge, understands her identity, and interprets her position within colonial society, preparing the next stage of intellectual transformation.

"Apa salahnya? Hidup bisa memberikan segala pada barang siapa tahu dan pandai menerima." (Toer, 2002)

"What is wrong with that? Life can offer everything to those who know how to learn and how to receive it."

The statement shows that Nyai Ontosoroh no longer sees learning as something limited to formal education. Instead, she views knowledge gained through experience as a path to personal growth, reshaping how she understands herself and her place in colonial society.

"Mama tumbuh jadi pribadi baru dengan penglihatan dan pandangan baru.... Aku bertanya pada diriku sendiri: adakah aku sudah jadi wanita Belanda berkulit coklat?" (Toer, 2002)

"I grew into a new person with a new way of seeing and thinking.... I asked myself whether I had become a brown-skinned Dutch woman."

This passage directly shows that education changes Nyai Ontosoroh's understanding of herself. Her question reflects an awareness that learning has reshaped her identity and the way she interprets her place in colonial society.

Taken together, these findings indicate that Western education reshapes not only Nyai Ontosoroh's practical abilities but also her understanding of herself and her place within colonial society. This new perspective prepares the next stage of her intellectual transformation by encouraging critical reflection on her own experiences.

Practical Consciousness

For Giddens (1984), practical consciousness develops through repeated everyday practices that emphasize adaptation rather than resistance. In *Bumi Manusia*, Nyai Ontosoroh demonstrates this stage as she gradually adjusts to her new responsibilities within Herman Mellema's household.

"Mama pelajari semua yang dapat kupelajari dari kehendak tuan-ku: kebersihan, bahasa Melayu, menyusun tempat tidur dan rumah, masak cara Eropa." (Toer, 2002)

"I learned everything my master wanted me to learn: cleanliness, the Malay language, arranging the house and bed, and European-style cooking."

The quotation illustrates that Nyai Ontosoroh initially develops her knowledge through everyday routines. The skills she learns reflect the everyday responsibilities expected of a *nyai*. At this stage, she adapts to her role through repeated practice rather than questioning the structure surrounding her.

"Semua pekerjaan rumah aku lakukan sendiri. Tak boleh ada saksi terhadap kehidupanku sebagai nyai." (Toer, 2002)

"I did all the household work myself. No one was allowed to witness my life as a concubine."

This passage shows that Nyai Ontosoroh develops practical competence through the everyday responsibilities imposed upon her. Although shaped by colonial and patriarchal structures, these routines gradually prepare her for a more critical understanding of her situation.

Taken together, these findings show that practical consciousness marks an early stage of Nyai Ontosoroh's intellectual transformation. These routines strengthen her practical competence and prepare the development of emerging critical awareness.

Emerging Critical Awareness

Giddens (1984) explains that critical awareness emerges when individuals begin reflecting on their experiences and recognize that unequal social conditions are shaped by existing structures. In *Bumi Manusia*, Nyai Ontosoroh reaches this stage as she begins to understand the unequal power relations surrounding her.

"Begitulah aku mulai mengerti, sesungguhnya Mama sama sekali tidak tergantung pada Tuan Mellema. Sebaliknya, dia yang tergantung padaku." (Toer, 2002)

"That was when I began to realize that I was no longer dependent on Herman Mellema. Instead, he had become dependent on me."

The quotation marks an important turning point in Nyai Ontosoroh's intellectual development. Rather than seeing herself as someone controlled by Herman Mellema, she realizes that her knowledge has changed their relationship, reflecting a shift from routine acceptance to critical awareness.

"Karena itu, Ann, kau harus kuat. Kalau tidak, orang akan sangat mudah jadi permainan...." (Toer, 2002)

"That is why, Ann, you must be strong. Otherwise, people will easily become someone else's plaything."

This statement shows that Nyai Ontosoroh's awareness has developed beyond her own personal experience. She understands how unequal power relations operate and encourages Annelies to recognize the same reality. Her advice reflects an understanding that unequal power can easily exploit those who are unable to defend themselves.

Taken together, these findings indicate that emerging critical awareness represents the stage where Nyai Ontosoroh begins to reinterpret her life experiences through a more critical understanding of power and inequality. These reflections prepare Nyai Ontosoroh to express her understanding openly in the stage of discursive consciousness.

Discursive Consciousness

For Giddens (1984), discursive consciousness is the ability to explain experiences and justify actions through rational arguments. In *Bumi Manusia*, Nyai Ontosoroh reaches this stage when she openly challenges colonial authority through reasoned arguments.

"Aku yang melahirkannya, membesarkan dan mendidik, tanpa bantuan satu sen pun dari Tuan-Tuan yang terhormat. Atau bukan aku yang telah bertanggungjawab atasnya selama ini? Tuan-Tuan sama sekali tidak pernah bersusah-payah untuknya." (Toer, 2002)

"I was the one who gave birth to her, raised her, and educated her without a single cent of assistance from you honorable gentlemen. Was it not I who had been responsible for her all this time? You gentlemen have never made the slightest effort for her."

Rather than responding emotionally, Nyai Ontosoroh justifies her position by referring to her responsibilities as Annelies' mother. She argues that these responsibilities deserve legal recognition, reflecting discursive consciousness through reasoned argument rather than emotion.

"Apakah guna sekolah-sekolah didirikan kalau toh tak dapat mengajarkan mana hak mana tidak, mana benar mana tidak?" (Toer, 2002)

"What is the purpose of establishing schools if they cannot teach what is right and what is wrong, what is just and what is unjust?"

This statement extends Nyai Ontosoroh's argument beyond her personal experience by questioning the purpose of education. She argues that education should cultivate moral understanding and justice rather than obedience, demonstrating her ability to connect personal experience with broader social issues.

Taken together, these findings indicate that discursive consciousness represents the highest stage of Nyai Ontosoroh's intellectual transformation. Education enables her not only to understand inequality but also to articulate that understanding through reasoned arguments. This intellectual development later becomes the foundation of her female agency.

Female Agency and Resistance Against Social Marginalization

The previous findings show that Western education transforms Nyai Ontosoroh's way of thinking through literacy, knowledge acquisition, new perspectives, practical consciousness, emerging critical awareness, and discursive consciousness. This transformation becomes the foundation of her agency and resistance. The discussion is divided into two related stages: the first examines the development of her agency, while the second explains how that agency is used to resist social marginalization within the colonial system.

Setting Personal Goals

Within Giddens (1984) framework, the ability to define personal goals can be understood as an expression of agency. In *Bumi Manusia*, Nyai Ontosoroh's agency first appears when she begins to establish her own aspirations.

"Ya, Ann, aku telah mendendam orang-tuaku sendiri. Akan kubuktikan pada mereka, apa pun yang telah diperbuat atas diriku, aku harus bisa lebih berharga daripada mereka, sekalipun hanya sebagai nyai." (Toer, 2002)

"Yes, Ann, I held resentment toward my own parents. I would prove to them that, despite everything they had done to me, I could become more valuable than they were, even if I was only a nyai."

This quotation shows that, rather than accepting the identity imposed upon her, Nyai Ontosoroh defines her own future by setting a personal goal to prove her worth. This marks the beginning of her agency.

"Mama belajar menghemat, Ann, menyimpan.... Dalam setahun telah dapat kukumpulkan lebih dari seratus gulden. Kalau pada suatu kali Tuan Mellema pergi pulang atau mengusir aku, aku sudah punya modal pergi ke Surabaya dan berdagang apa saja." (Toer, 2002)

"I learned to save money, Ann. Within a year I had managed to save more than one hundred guilders. If one day Herman Mellema returned to the Netherlands or drove me away, I would already have enough capital to go to Surabaya and start a business."

This passage shows that Nyai Ontosoroh supports her aspirations with careful preparation by saving money and planning for an independent future.

Taken together, these findings indicate that setting personal goals represents the first expression of Nyai Ontosoroh's female agency. These goals become the foundation for her later strategic decisions.

Strategic Decision Making

Giddens (1984) explains that agency is reflected in the ability to make strategic decisions when responding to social constraints. In *Bumi Manusia*, Nyai Ontosoroh demonstrates this capacity by carefully planning how to respond to the legal and social challenges created by the colonial system.

"Aku tak tahu banyak tentang hukum. Tapi kita harus mencoba melawan dengan segala daya dan dana." (Toer, 2002)

"I do not know much about the law. But we must try to fight it with all the strength and resources we have."

This quotation reveals that Nyai Ontosoroh recognizes the limits of her legal knowledge but chooses to rely on every available resource. Her decision reflects strategic thinking based on careful evaluation rather than emotion.

"Ia sodorkan padaku surat-surat, salinan dan asli, berasal dari Pengadilan Amsterdam...." (Toer, 2002)

"She handed me the documents, both original and copied, from the Amsterdam Court...."

This passage further demonstrates Nyai Ontosoroh's strategic approach to the legal dispute. By examining legal documents and official records, she prepares an informed response rather than acting impulsively.

Taken together, these findings show that strategic decision-making enables Nyai Ontosoroh to evaluate available resources before determining how to act. This careful preparation later supports the purposeful actions discussed in the following section.

According to Giddens (1984), agency also involves the ability to make independent judgments based on one's own understanding rather than simply following the expectations of others. In *Bumi Manusia*, Nyai Ontosoroh demonstrates this capacity by making decisions that reflect her personal judgment despite living within a colonial society that denies her legal authority.

"Kepentinganku sendiri tak perlu orang menilai, asal kalian mendapatkan apa seharusnya jadi hak kalian. Kepentinganku? Aku dapat urus sendiri." (Toer, 2002)

"There is no need for others to judge my own interests, as long as you receive what rightfully belongs to you. My own interests? I can take care of them myself."

This quotation reveals that rather than allowing others to decide what is best for her, Nyai Ontosoroh evaluates the situation according to her own judgment and prioritizes her children's rights without abandoning responsibility for herself.

"Kalau aku tak berhasil menyelamatkan perusahaan ini, aku akan merosot jadi nyai-nyai biasa yang boleh dihinakan semua orang.... Kehormatan itu bisa didapatnya hanya dari perusahaan ini." (Toer, 2002)

"If I fail to save this company, I will fall back into the position of an ordinary concubine whom everyone is free to insult.... My dignity can only be preserved through this company."

This statement further illustrates Nyai Ontosoroh's ability to evaluate the consequences of her situation before making a decision. Recognizing that the company protects both her dignity and social position, she makes its survival her priority.

Taken together, these findings indicate that independent judgment enables Nyai Ontosoroh to evaluate her circumstances according to her own understanding rather than relying on the expectations of colonial society. These judgments later guide the actions through which she confronts social marginalization.

Purposeful Action

Giddens (1984) states that agency becomes visible when individuals translate their knowledge and decisions into purposeful actions. In *Bumi Manusia*, Nyai Ontosoroh demonstrates this stage by acting on the decisions she has made to protect her family and strengthen the future she has built through education and experience.

"Nikah, Minke. Kau harus kawini Annelies. Tunjukkan pada dunia kau tidak gentar menghadapi mata setan pun." (Toer, 2002)

"Marry her, Minke. You must marry Annelies. Show the world that you are not afraid to face even the devil himself."

This statement demonstrates that Nyai Ontosoroh does not stop at recognizing the legal threat facing Annelies. Instead, she immediately encourages a concrete action that she believes can strengthen Annelies' position. Rather than remaining passive, she urges Minke to act according to the decision they have reached together. Her judgment is therefore translated into deliberate action.

"Dengar, Jan, setelah pesta ini Mama akan memperluas perusahaan, hendak mencoba di bidang rempah-rempah." (Toer, 2002)

"Listen, Jan. After this celebration, I am going to expand the company and begin working in the spice trade."

This passage further illustrates that Nyai Ontosoroh's agency extends beyond responding to immediate problems. Her commitment to expanding the business shows that she transforms knowledge into concrete action.

Taken together, these findings indicate that purposeful action represents the stage where Nyai Ontosoroh transforms knowledge and judgment into concrete action. By acting to protect her family and strengthen the future she has built, she demonstrates that agency is expressed through deliberate action rather than intention alone.

*The Role of Western Education in Shaping Female Agency in Bumi Manusia
Leadership and Responsibility*

Within Giddens (1984) framework, leadership and responsibility illustrate how knowledge enables individuals to organize social practices and influence their surroundings. In *Bumi Manusia*, Nyai Ontosoroh's leadership develops gradually as the knowledge she acquires enables her to manage Herman Mellema's business and earn the trust of those around her.

"Semua pekerjaan di dalam lingkungan perusahaan mulai diserahkan kepadaku." (Toer, 2002)

"Gradually, every task within the company was entrusted to me."

The responsibility entrusted to Nyai Ontosoroh shows her ability to manage important company affairs and organize social practices.

"Orang yang biasa memerintah, Minke, dengan bertimbang. Perusahaan lebih besar pun dia akan mampu pimpin. Tak pernah aku temui perempuan pengusaha seperti itu...." (Toer, 2002)

"She is someone who is accustomed to leading with careful judgment, Minke. She would be capable of managing an even larger company. I have never met a businesswoman like her...."

Unlike the previous quotation, this statement presents Nyai Ontosoroh's leadership from another character's perspective. This recognition confirms that her leadership is built on competence, sound judgment, and responsibility rather than legal status.

Taken together, these findings indicate that leadership and responsibility become important expressions of Nyai Ontosoroh's agency. Through knowledge and practical experience, she develops the competence to manage people and assume responsibility for the enterprise entrusted to her, strengthening her capacity to resist social marginalization.

Self-determination and Autonomy

Giddens (1984) further explains that agency includes the ability to determine one's own life despite structural constraints. In *Bumi Manusia*, Nyai Ontosoroh demonstrates this capacity by gradually freeing herself from dependence on others and asserting her own authority over the direction of her life.

"Tak ada keluargaku di Tulangan. Ada hanya di Wonokromo." (Toer, 2002)

"I no longer have a family in Tulangan. My only family is here in Wonokromo."

This passage shows that Nyai Ontosoroh consciously redefines her own identity. Rather than remaining tied to the family that once sold her into concubinage, she chooses to recognize the family she has built through her own experiences. This decision reflects self-determination because she defines her identity according to her own understanding rather than her past.

"Kalau pun dia nanti pulang ke Nederland aku tidak akan menghalangi, bukan saja karena memang tidak ada hak padaku, juga kami masing-masing tidak saling berhutang. Dia boleh pergi setiap waktu." (Toer, 2002)

"Even if one day he returns to the Netherlands, I will not prevent him from leaving. Not only because I have no legal right over him, but also because neither of us owes anything to the other. He is free to leave whenever he wishes."

This statement further demonstrates Nyai Ontosoroh's independence from Herman Mellema. Although aware of her legal limitations, she refuses to define her future through dependence on him. Her confidence rests on the knowledge and experience she has gained, demonstrating autonomy rather than dependence.

Taken together, these findings indicate that self-determination and autonomy become important expressions of Nyai Ontosoroh's female agency. This autonomy strengthens her ability to confront the forms of social marginalization discussed in the following section.

Challenging Legal Discrimination

From a postcolonial feminist perspective, colonial law denies indigenous women equal legal recognition (Mohanty, 1984; Spivak, 1988). In *Bumi Manusia*, Nyai Ontosoroh experiences this discrimination despite raising Annelies and managing the family business.

"Mamamu, hanya perempuan Pribumi, akan tidak mempunyai sesuatu hak atas semua.... Hukum tidak mengakui keibuanku...." (Toer, 2002)

"Your mother, being only an indigenous woman, will have no rights over any of this.... The law does not recognize my motherhood...."

The quotation shows that Nyai Ontosoroh's motherhood is denied because colonial law values race and legal status over lived responsibility. As a *Pribumi* woman and a *nyai*, she remains excluded from legal recognition despite caring for Annelies.

"*Biarpun tanpa ahlihukum. Kita akan jadi Pribumi pertama yang melawan Pengadilan Putih, Nak, Nyo. Bukankah itu suatu kehormatan juga?*" (Toer, 2002)

"Even without a lawyer, we will become the first indigenous people to challenge the White Court, my child. Is that not also an honor?"

Unlike the first quotation, which describes the discrimination she faces, this statement shows her direct response to it. Nyai Ontosoroh refuses to accept the court's authority despite knowing that the legal system favors Europeans. Her willingness to challenge the court reflects postcolonial female agency because she refuses to accept legal exclusion in silence.

Taken together, these findings show that Nyai Ontosoroh challenges legal discrimination by recognizing its injustice and refusing to submit to it. Although she cannot change colonial law, her legal awareness becomes an important form of resistance.

Questioning Patriarchal Norms

Mohanty (1984) argues that patriarchal traditions deny women autonomy by placing them under male authority. In *Bumi Manusia*, Nyai Ontosoroh challenges these beliefs by rejecting the treatment of women as property.

"*Begitulah, Ann, upacara sederhana bagaimana seorang anak telah dijual oleh ayahnya sendiri.... Yang dijual adalah diriku: Sanikem.*" (Toer, 2002)

"That, Ann, was the simple ceremony through which a daughter was sold by her own father.... The one who was sold was myself: Sanikem."

This quotation reveals the patriarchal practice that shaped Nyai Ontosoroh's early life. By recalling how her father sold her, Nyai Ontosoroh exposes the patriarchal belief that daughters can be treated as property rather than individuals with the right to determine their own lives.

"*Anakku tak boleh dijual oleh siapa pun....*" (Toer, 2002)

"My child must never be sold by anyone...."

This statement demonstrates Nyai Ontosoroh's rejection of the patriarchal values that once controlled her own life. Having experienced this injustice herself, she refuses to allow the same fate to happen to her daughter. This reflects her rejection of patriarchal authority and her determination to protect the next generation.

Taken together, these findings show that Nyai Ontosoroh transforms personal suffering into a conscious rejection of patriarchal values, demonstrating how intellectual transformation strengthens female agency in confronting gender inequality.

Economic Independence

Viewed through Mohanty (1984) critique of women's unequal positioning, economic independence reduces Nyai Ontosoroh's dependence on patriarchal authority. In *Bumi Manusia*, Nyai Ontosoroh demonstrates this through her control of the family business and its resources.

"*Perusahaan kita mulai berjalan baik dan lancar.*" (Toer, 2002)

"Our company began to run well and smoothly."

The quotation shows that the company's success results from Nyai Ontosoroh's competence, demonstrating her ability to sustain economic activities independently.

"*Semua dibeli atas namaku.... Dengan uang itu aku beli pabrik beras dan peralatan kerja lainnya.*" (Toer, 2002)

"Everything was purchased under my name.... With that money I bought a rice mill and other equipment."

This passage further demonstrates Nyai Ontosoroh's economic autonomy. By purchasing productive assets under her own name, she exercises control over economic

resources and challenges the assumption that women should remain financially dependent on men.

Taken together, these findings show that economic independence strengthens Nyai Ontosoroh's agency. Her financial independence not only strengthens her personal autonomy but also challenges the colonial and patriarchal structures that attempt to restrict women's roles to domestic dependence.

Critical Speech Against Injustice

Spivak (1988) argues that reclaiming the ability to speak is an important form of resistance for marginalized women. In *Bumi Manusia*, Nyai Ontosoroh openly criticizes the colonial system and the injustice it produces.

"Siapa yang menjadikan aku gundik? Tuan-tuan bangsa Eropa, yang dipertuan." (Toer, 2002)

"Who made me a concubine? You European gentlemen, Your Honors."

Rather than blaming herself, Nyai Ontosoroh identifies colonial authority as the source of her marginalization. In doing so, she transforms personal experience into public criticism.

"Bagaimana bisa manusia hanya ditimbang dari surat-surat resmi belaka, dan tidak dari wujudnya sebagai manusia?" (Toer, 2002)

"How can a human being be judged only by official documents and not by their existence as a human being?"

This statement extends Nyai Ontosoroh's criticism beyond her own experience by rejecting the colonial belief that legal status alone determines justice. Instead, she argues that humanity should be the basis for judgment, exposing the inequality embedded in the colonial legal system.

Taken together, these findings show that Nyai Ontosoroh uses speech as a form of resistance by exposing injustice within colonial power and law. From Spivak (1988) perspective, reclaiming the ability to speak is itself an act of resistance against structures that silence marginalized women.

Negotiating Unequal Power Relations

From a postcolonial feminist perspective, resistance may also take the form of negotiating unequal power relations by strategically utilizing available social and institutional resources. Rather than confronting colonial authority solely through direct opposition, marginalized women may also exercise agency by navigating existing structures to challenge unequal power relations (Mohanty, 1984; Spivak, 1988).

"Mr.... mempelajari semua berkas Annelies, dan minta disewakan dua orang jurutulis untuk menyalin semua dokumen tersebut." (Toer, 2002)

"Mr. ... carefully examined all of Annelies' documents and requested that two clerks be hired to copy all the files."

The passage shows that rather than confronting the colonial court directly, Nyai Ontosoroh works through legal professionals and formal procedures. By preparing legal documents and official records, she navigates the colonial legal system instead of rejecting it outright.

"Lima belas lembar khusus dengan digaris pensil merah telah dikirimkan pada para ulama Islam terkemuka. Mereka harus ikut bicara." (Toer, 2002)

"Fifteen special copies marked with red pencil were sent to leading Islamic scholars. They had to take part in the discussion."

By seeking support from respected religious leaders, Nyai Ontosoroh expands her network beyond the courtroom. This cooperation strengthens her position and demonstrates that resistance can also be exercised through collaboration rather than direct opposition.

Taken together, these findings show that Nyai Ontosoroh navigates unequal power relations by making effective use of legal and social resources. This demonstrates that agency may also be expressed by working within existing structures while challenging their inequalities.

*The Role of Western Education in Shaping Female Agency in Bumi Manusia
Defending Dignity and Personal Autonomy*

For Mohanty (1984), resistance also involves reclaiming dignity and authority over one's own life. In *Bumi Manusia*, Nyai Ontosoroh restores her dignity through education and preserves it despite legal defeat.

"Segala yang kupelajari dan kukerjakan dalam setahun itu telah mengembalikan hargadiriku. Tetapi sikapku tetap: mempersiapkan diri untuk tidak akan lagi tergantung pada siapa pun." (Toer, 2002)

"Everything I learned and accomplished within that year restored my self-respect. Yet I remained determined to prepare myself so that I would never again depend on anyone."

This statement shows that education restores Nyai Ontosoroh's dignity and strengthens her determination to live independently. By rebuilding her identity through knowledge and hard work, she rejects the inferior status imposed by colonial and patriarchal society.

"Kita telah melawan, Nak, Nyo, sebaik-baiknya, se hormat-hormatnya." (Toer, 2002)

"We have fought, my child, as well as we could and with all our dignity."

Although she loses the legal battle, Nyai Ontosoroh refuses to let the court define the value of her struggle. By emphasizing dignity rather than victory, she preserves her self-respect despite colonial defeat.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that Nyai Ontosoroh's greatest achievement is not legal victory but the ability to preserve her dignity and autonomy. This confirms that Western education functions as the foundation of intellectual transformation, female agency, and resistance against social marginalization in *Bumi Manusia*.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that Western education plays a crucial role in shaping Nyai Ontosoroh's intellectual transformation and female agency in *Bumi Manusia*. Through literacy, practical knowledge, and critical awareness, she develops from practical consciousness to discursive consciousness, enabling her to understand, articulate, and challenge the colonial and patriarchal structures that marginalize her. As her intellectual awareness grows, she becomes capable of making strategic decisions, exercising leadership, achieving economic independence, and defending her dignity despite institutional restrictions. Although her resistance does not result in a legal victory, it demonstrates that agency is not measured solely by success in overturning oppressive systems but also by the ability to critically interpret, negotiate, and contest unequal social structures. Theoretically, this study contributes to literary and postcolonial scholarship by integrating Giddens' Structuration Theory with Postcolonial Feminist Theory. Structuration Theory explains the process of intellectual transformation and agency formation, while Postcolonial Feminist Theory highlights how colonial and gender oppression shape women's opportunities for resistance. Together, these perspectives provide a more comprehensive understanding of education as both an empowering force and a means of negotiating structural inequality in colonial literature.

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