

Conflict Reduction In The Mahadewa-Mahadewi Novel By Nova Riyanti Yusuf

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Abstract:

Background: Life in megacities reflects the paradox of modernity, where individuals grapple with overwhelming loneliness amidst constant hustle and bustle. This contradictory existence often leads to complex pressures and conflicts. Nova Riyanti Yusuf's novel *Mahadewa-Mahadewi* provides insight into these urban dynamics through its protagonist, Yukiko, whose life is marked by conflict and attempts at resolution. This article examines the theme of conflict reduction in the novel, employing existentialist feminism to analyze the relationships and conflicts among the main characters.

Material and Methods: A qualitative descriptive approach is used to investigate the processes of conflict reduction in *Mahadewa-Mahadewi*. The researcher serves as the primary instrument, collecting and analyzing data from the novel. The analysis focuses on Yukiko's character, exploring her strategies for managing and resolving conflicts, particularly in the context of societal norms and female stereotypes.

Results: The findings highlight Yukiko's complex character and her efforts to reduce conflicts despite her often extreme and socially challenging viewpoints. The novel reveals the persistence of patriarchal challenges and the difficulty of resisting female stereotypes. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of understanding and managing conflicts to foster harmonious coexistence in contemporary urban life.

Conclusion: In conclusion, *Mahadewa-Mahadewi* illustrates the inevitability of conflict in human life and the necessity of conflict reduction strategies. Yukiko's journey, though fraught with challenges, emphasizes the role of self-control and understanding in managing interpersonal conflicts. The novel also critically examines societal views on women, highlighting the ongoing struggle against restrictive stereotypes and the complexities of feminist resistance in a patriarchal culture.

Key Word: woman; conflict; reduction; resistance

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I. Introduction

Life in megacities such as Jakarta, Singapore and Melbourne are often a reflection of the paradox of modernity (Reddy, 2017). On the one hand, individuals are faced with overwhelming loneliness in the midst of a crowd, while on the other hand they have to navigate in the never-ending hustle and bustle. This contradictory phenomenon creates complex life pressures, where humans are required to continue to adapt and maintain their existence. These contrasting conditions often trigger conflict, both internal and external (Dunaj, 2017; Rodai, 2012).

The novel *Mahadewa-Mahadewi* by Nova Riyanti Yusuf is a window that opens insight into the reality of urban life with all its dynamics. Through the main character, Yukiko, the author clearly describes how conflict is an inseparable part of urban life. The existence of conflict, as illustrated in this novel, is not only inevitable, but also a catalyst that drives the development of characters and story plots (Jehangir, 2012).

In this context, the concept of conflict reduction becomes very relevant. Conflict reduction can be understood as a series of methods and processes aimed at facilitating peaceful conflict resolution (Smriti et al., 2008). This is not just an effort to avoid or suppress conflict, but a more complex strategy to manage and reduce the negative impacts of the conflict. Conflict itself is something unpleasant that occurs or is experienced by someone (Thawala, 2022; Haidarravy, 2023).

Next, the conflict that arises in the novel narrative will be seen in the correlation of subject and object. The concept of existentialist feminism will be used to look further at the relationships between the main female characters in the conflict arena they create. Sartre in his book *Existentialism is a Humanism* states that the definition of existentialism refers to an understanding in the school of philosophy that places existence before essence. Beauvoir met Jean Paul Sartre, a philosopher who was famous for Sartre's philosophical theory of

existentialism, who later became Beauvoir's life partner and an inspiration in initiating her thoughts on existentialist feminism. This thought is expressed in his work entitled *Le Deuxieme Sexe* (The Second Sex) which also refers to Sartre's existentialist philosophical theory (Beauvoir, 1956: 7).

Simone de Beauvoir was born from the womb of existentialism. The contact with Sartre who brought three frameworks about what "is", namely *etre en soi* (being in himself), *etre pour soi* (being for himself), and *etre pour les autres* (being for others) does not necessarily make de Beauvoir exactly the same. For de Beauvoir, the existential way she thinks about life between humans is the third, *etre pour les autres* (being for others) (Zaman & Aeni, 2022: 261).

Yukiko, as the protagonist in the novel *Mahadewa-Mahadewi*, is the main subject in exploring the theme of conflict reduction. Her complex character, with a view of life that tends to be extreme and often clashes with social norms, makes her an interesting figure to study. Even though her actions often cause conflict, Yukiko is depicted as someone who means no harm and always tries to reduce the conflict she causes.

This article analyzes in depth how the conflict reduction process occurs in the narrative of the novel *Mahadewa-Mahadewi*. The main focus will be given to Yukiko's character, namely by exploring how she faces and tries to resolve the conflicts that arise as a consequence of her life choices. This analysis will not only highlight the conflict reduction strategies used in the novel, but will also relate them to the broader context of contemporary urban life, especially stereotypes of modern women. Female stereotypes refer to generalizations and assumptions about the characteristics, roles and abilities of women in society.

So far, society's views on women, for example regarding sexuality, have been more linked to norms of chastity and virginity, expectations about "appropriate" sexual behavior, as well as views about marriage and reproduction. Normative views about women refer to the expectations and standards that are considered "normal" or "should" for women in a society. In the novel *Mahadewa-Mahadewi*, a pattern of behavior is found that shows the main character Yukiko resisting this stereotype. Therefore, it is important to also pay attention to the existence of this figure in the context of feminism.

II. Material And Methods

This is descriptive research with a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach is a research procedure that produces data in the form of written or spoken words about people and observed behavior (Manab, 2014). This research aims to describe and explain several words related to conflict resolution in the novel *Mahadewa-Mahadewi* by Nova Riyanti Yusuf.

The object of this research is the novel *Mahadewa-Mahadewi* by Nova Riyanti Yusuf. Researchers act as key instruments for planning data, carrying out data collection, analyzing data, and reporting research results. In this case the researcher acts as a full observer and participant in searching for information regarding the results of the research being studied. The results of the analysis are then outlined in this article.

According to Manstead (2018), the material conditions in which a person grows and is raised determine how identity influences the way he thinks and feels about various things around him. Lower class people usually don't want to label themselves with socio-economic status. Instead, they have an interdependent self-concept. They often explain events based on situations and understand that life problems occur because of low self-control. This is different from middle class people.

The middle socio-economic class has more empathy and shows a helpful attitude. However, this is not something that occurs naturally, but is determined by the material conditions and resources owned. This means that the situation of feeling lacking in the lower classes shows an inability to produce resources. One of the social psychology theories is used to understand behavior as a function of individuals responding to the environment (Moscovici, 1972).

Conflict is something that cannot be separated from individuals. Etymologically, conflict comes from the Latin word "con" which means together and "fliegere" which means clash or collision. So, conflict in social life is a clash or difference in interests, desires, opinions, ideas, beliefs and so on which are difficult for each individual or group to understand. Conflict can also be defined as something unpleasant that occurs or is experienced by someone. Conflict can occur intrapersonally or conflict with oneself, between individuals, between individuals and their group or environment, or between groups (Bartos, 2002).

Conflict is actually something natural which within a certain time limit can have positive value for the development of life, for example to develop oneself so that one can continue to survive. However, conflict must still be managed well and carefully, because if it crosses the line it can have fatal consequences.

Conflict can be divided into five stages. The first stage is the potential stage, namely the emergence of differences between individuals or groups that have the potential to cause conflict. For example, one person is a free person while another person is a person who is very obedient to religious norms. Even though the two of them have not yet disagreed, they have the potential to cause conflict if brought together. The second stage is felt conflict, namely when different individuals or groups begin to feel and think about the differences between the two. The third stage is the conflict phase, namely when conflict of opinion begins to occur between the two,

usually in the form of disagreements when communicating. The final stage is when the conflict has had various impacts on a person's life, such as work, family, economy, friendships, and so on. For example, the free individual has started to be ostracized by his friends or even expelled from his job because of a conflict with someone who strictly adheres to these norms. The final stage is the result of the conflict, namely functional and dysfunctional (Afzalur, 1999; Blasi, 2009).

Conflict can be caused by various things, such as economics, politics, trust, romance, and so on. One of the causes of conflict related to this novel is sexuality. Sexuality is expressed through interactions and relationships with individuals of the opposite gender and includes thoughts, experiences, lessons, ideals, values, fantasies, and emotions. Sexuality relates to how a person feels about themselves and how they communicate those feelings to members of the opposite sex through their actions, such as touching, kissing, hugging, and sexual intercourse, and through more subtle behaviors, such as body gestures, etiquette, dressing, and vocabulary. Sexuality is different from sex which means gender. In history, psychology from the beginning has studied human behavior, one of which is sexuality. Sigmund Freud and his psychosexual theory became the basis for much research and psychological studies related to sexuality. Most people in the world adopt the view that sex is simply "inserting the penis into the vagina" in the context of marriage with the aim of preserving offspring. In modern society the purpose of sexual activity is not only to maintain offspring, but also recreation, expression of love, celebration and work. What needs to be understood is that every sexual behavior or activity is the result of an urge that exists within the individual, whether psychological, genetic, historical, social and cultural context (Jacobson, 2013).

Conflict management is a series of actions and reactions between actors and outside parties in a conflict. Conflict management has at least three stages. The first stage is conflict analysis, namely identifying the problems that occur, to determine the source of the causes and the parties involved. The second stage is conflict assessment. This stage is carried out to determine the condition of the conflict and its resolution. Third, conflict resolution. This stage is an action to resolve the conflict (Thamhain, 1975).

Conflict is something that cannot be avoided in life, even throughout life humans face and struggle with conflict, so it is very important to understand conflict and how to reduce conflict, one of which is through novels which will be discussed in this article.

III. Result And Discussion

The novel *Mahadewa-Mahadewi* tells the story of the main character named Yukako, who is often called Kako. Yukako is a mixed-race Japanese woman who works as a psychiatrist. His mother, Akiko, was a kabuki dancer. Kako's father and mother live in Darwin, Australia (p. 28). Their life is luxurious as they have yachts and boats. Yukiko is described as having a beautiful face, ideal body, independent, around 30 years old, and unmarried. Yukiko is not mentioned as being interested in a commitment such as marriage

Conflict 1: violating medical ethics by making a false diagnosis

As a psychiatrist, Yukiko has many patients, one of whom is named Reno. Reno is not actually a mentally ill person, but rather a person who was pretending to have mental illness in order to escape the law. Reno is a sniper and assassin who doesn't like seeing crime. He was ordered by someone anonymous to shoot a corrupt person who was at the hospital. But unfortunately, instead of shooting the corruptor, Reno accidentally shot an obstetrician and gynecologist (Dr Sonny). Reno was caught at the scene. Reno's wife, Dinda, is the younger sister of the director of the hospital where the incident occurred, Dr. Rudra. In order to save his sister-in-law from the law, Dr. Rudra suggests Reno to pretend to be mentally ill as he shot a complete stranger. Doctor Rudra asked for help from his subordinate and colleague, Yukiko, who is a psychiatrist at the hospital, to diagnose Reno with mental illness. This is where the first conflict emerged, when Reno shoot Dr Sonny and Dr. Rudra violates medical ethics to help his brother-in-law avoiding law. Dr. Rudra tried to reduce his brother-in-law's conflict by creating a new conflict that violates medical ethics and even violates the law. In an effort to reduce conflict, Dr. Rudra also dragged Yukiko, who was his subordinate, into another conflict.

Conflict 2: dating a married patient

The next story focuses on Yukiko and Reno's relationship. Even though she initially didn't agree with Reno's false diagnosis of mental illness, Yukiko felt comfortable when chatting with Reno, because she usually chats with mentally ill people, but now she is with a normal man. Yukiko is then told that she is dating Reno, even though Reno is a married man and Yukiko knows about this. This is a key conflict in this novel, when Yukiko's romantic desires conflict with existing norms. They were dating, even sleeping together even though medical ethics should not allow that to happen.

Conflict 3: going to prison

Yukako and Reno often make out at the hospital where Yukako works. This novel depicts in a sexual way how they have sex at work. Unfortunately, they were caught red-handed by Dr. Rudra while having sexual

relations. Doctor Rudra is very angry as Reno is the husband of his biological sister. Doctor Rudra then reported the incident to Dinda, who is Reno's wife. Dinda then reported Reno and Yukako to the police for adultery. The police came and Yukako and Reno were thrown into prison.

Conflict 4: pregnancy and abortion

It is said that Yukako was able to get out of prison thanks to the help of Leo, who bailed her out and hired a great lawyer. The next novel is told backwards, discussing Yukako's past. Leo was Yukako's boyfriend when he was in college. Leo and Yukako's relationship were often on and off due to various conflicts between them. Yukako became pregnant out of wedlock when she was with Leo, but she aborted the pregnancy as she was not ready to have children and still wanted to continue her studies as a doctor. Currently, Leo already has a wife, but it turns out he still has feelings for Yukako, and is even willing to let Yukako out of prison.

Conflict 5: betrothed with a gay man

After being released from prison, Yukiko went to Australia to meet her parents and apologize for dating someone else's husband, as well as to get away from Reno. Currently Yukako has been fired from her job by Dr. Rudra. Yukako was then betrothed by her parents to a man named Pras, but it turned out that Pras was gay and could not have sexual relations with Yukiko. Yukiko was very upset and contacted her close friend Gangga.

Conflict 6: having sex without love

Yukako's relationship with Ganga can be said to be friends with benefits or "FWB", that is, they are friends but have sexual relations for the sole purpose of pleasure without any love or status other than friends. According to Yukiko and perhaps several people, FWB is normal, but still taboo among Indonesian society. In Australia, Yukiko also met men through dating applications and had sex with a man named Dayat. In this phase, Yukiko already feels like she is a prostitute because she easily has sex with many men. Yukiko began to think whether she was hypersexual, which is a mental disorder, because she has high sexual desire and is difficult to control. As a psychiatrist, she began trying to treat herself.

Conflict 7: being the cause of men's arguments

Yukiko returned to Indonesia because she missed Reno and Leo. Yukiko finds it difficult to choose one of the two because she still likes both of them and doesn't want to lose either of them, even though both men already married. Finally, Leo and Reno fight over Yukiko. They fought until finally both died. The story then ends when Reno and Leo die. It is not told what Yukiko's fate will be in the future, whether she will become depressed or look for another male target. The author, Nova Riyanti Yusuf, who is also a psychiatrist, seems to tend to avoid resolution or ending. So, this ending allows for many interpretations.

Conflict Resolution

According to Wijono (1994), there are seven strategies for resolving internal conflict. Internal conflict is a situation where a person experiences psychological tension because of a conflict between two or more contradictory desires, needs, values or demands within him. The internal conflict resolutions in *Mahadewa Mahadewi* novel are as follows:

1. Create contacts and build relationships

When Yukako is annoyed with her boss (Dr. Rudra) who told her to make a fake mental diagnosis for her brother-in-law Reno, Yukako creates contact and builds a relationship with Reno. When Yukako was imprisoned, she made contact with her parents in Australia. When Yukako was upset because Pras, who she was betrothed to, turned out to be gay, Yukako also made contact with Gangga, who was her friend. Creating contacts and cultivating good relationships with friends or enemies can help alleviate problems.

2. Develop a sense of self-confidence and acceptance

Yukako tries to grow her self-confidence and accept herself that she can have sex with more than one person at once, and she can even have sexual relations without love.

3. Grow your own abilities/strength

Despite becoming pregnant out of wedlock and having an abortion, she managed to continue her life and her studies as a doctor. Without Yukako's very strong self-strength, of course she couldn't survive.

4. Determine goals

Yukako has determined that her goal in life is not to commit or get married, but to live happily. She was happy with her own choice. She did not follow the advice of her parents or friends.

5. Look for alternatives

When her match with Prasetyo did not go smoothly, she looked for alternative men, namely Gangga and Dayat. It turns out that these two men don't make Yukiko happy.

6. Choose an alternative

Of the various choices of men who came to her, Yukako finally chose the alternative of returning to Indonesia to meet Reno, the patient she loved very much.

7. Plan the implementation of the exit route

Yukako finally plans to look for Reno to straighten out what has happened so far.

Apart from resolving internal conflict, there is also external conflict found in the novel *Mahadewa-Mahadewi*. The following are three strategies for resolving external conflicts (Wijono, 1994), namely as follows:

1. Lose-lose strategy

This is a strategy used in this novel, where in the end Reno and Leo die, while Yukako also ends up not being able to be with the two men she loves.

2. Win-lose strategy

In this win-lose strategy, there are five ways to resolve conflicts. Following is the discussion.

- a. Withdrawal: Yukako withdrew to Australia after being thrown into prison by Dinda.
 - b. Reconciliation and peace tactics: Yukako tries to convince Leo and Reno to make peace and not fight, although this effort is fruitless.
 - c. Persuasion: Yukako also persuaded Leo and Reno to resolve the problem peacefully, but to no avail.
 - d. Coercion and pressure tactics: dr. Rudra puts pressure on Yukako, who is his subordinate, to give Reno a false diagnosis.
 - e. Bargaining: Leo tries to bargain with Yukako. He is willing to release him from prison as long as Yukako returns to him
3. Win-win strategy

Neutralizing emotions: Yukiko neutralizes her emotions of being disappointed with men by looking for another man.

Resistance to Stereotypes?

This section specifically examines the female point of view that is relevant to the main character, Yukako. Yukako was shaped by the author into an independent woman. The assumption is that Yukako will be shaped into a woman who is not "ordinary". Yukako is not a conventional Asian woman. The background of this character has been thought out in such a way as to support the role the author wants to create. This role is the role of an independent woman, but with the usual "recipe". The word ordinary is used to describe that many independent women are described as being materially inclined: rich, with a bona fide job, a capable family, and a high social class. Yukako represents all of that.

Beauvoir in her book said that women are not necessarily born as women but to become women. This is a form of Beauvoir's resistance to the relationship between men and women, where men label themselves as The One while women are positioned as objects and used as The Other (Beauvoir, 1956:15). This was later also confirmed by Tong (2009:244)

"Among the feminists who have pondered women's association with nature is Simone de Beauvoir. She urged women to transcend their links to nature in order to overcome their status as the other, or second, sex. De Beauvoir believed woman's identity as the other is derived partly from her biology especially her reproductive capacity and partly from her socially imposed child rearing responsibilities. De Beauvoir did not view woman's body as woman's friend. On the contrary, she viewed woman's body as fundamentally alienating, as an energy drain leaving women too tired to participate in the kind of creative activity men enjoy"

Women are considered The Other as an effort to oppress women in the social environment. It is very likely that women will remain The Other in a socialist society, just like women in a capitalist society because women's oppression is more than just an economic factor, but more importantly an ontological factor. This is related to the context built by the author in developing the main character Yukiko in the novel *Mahadewa-Mahadewi*.

Stereotypes are unbalanced assessments of a group of people that reduce a person to character traits that tend to be exaggerated and negative (Barker, 2004: 415). Yukako is an agent used to challenge stereotypes of Asian women which are contextual to patriarchal culture. Beauvoir in her theory offers three strategies to affirm the existence of women as equal to men, including: 1) women must work in order to develop themselves, 2) women must become intellectuals, and 3) women must reject subordination and become agents of social transformation. At this stage it can be said that Yukako is successful. The conflicts that have been described are proof that Yukako is able to tear apart the conventional female order and perpetuate its existence. Working women, women with promiscuous sex, adult women who do not want to marry, and women who are able to "get a man" are things that are proof of resistance to the stereotype of women as second-class human beings.

Yukako appears with a discourse against everything that is considered taboo by most people. He is present in the context of making another offer which is actually quite common and widely done. However, the interesting thing is about the conflict over challenging these stereotypes. This then makes the subtitle of this article end with a question mark (?). Again, conflict will be the keyword to answer this question. The relationship between conflicts and the end of the conflict will determine the success of stereotype resistance.

A Failed Independent Woman

The formulation of the conflict in the next discussion leads to the main problem which refers to the main character, namely Yukako. In this section we will look at the position of the main character as a woman in the subject and object relationship. In the previous subsection, resistance to stereotypes was discussed. Free women in this context are women who succeed in fighting these stereotypes. Resistance can be said to emerge clearly through existing conflicts because the conflict in this novel is actually the result of Yukako's resistance efforts.

Yukako is a failed independent woman. Yukako has efforts to become an independent woman, but her efforts always fail. This is probably due to Yukako was unable to fully "obey" the resistance she made. Resistance to stereotypes turns out to be accompanied by resistance to oneself. The proof is that Yukako is always in a state of doubt. In every conflict narrative that appears, Yukako is shaped into a woman who chooses in a state of doubt. Resistance will be successful if there is autonomy within the resistor, which means the character must be aware that she is fighting against something. Yukako fails in doing this.

This failure is based on what Yukako calls love. Yukako tries to be a subject, but always positions herself as an object. Yukako falls in love, but is unable to face the consequences of love. This resistance should occur in a state of awareness of these consequences so that women will remain able to stand as subjects who are able to face the consequences of love. Yukako is unable to face the consequences when she loves a male character. Yukako tends to get stuck in a state of not knowing which one to choose. This means that he is not in a condition of being a subject because the subject will always know what he wants. Indecisiveness in the consequences of love is proof of the failure of Yukako's freedom. Next is about lust which manifests in sexual relations. Yukako tries to position herself as a woman who needs sexual satisfaction, meaning that Yukako will stand as a subject who is looking for a man who will be the object of her satisfaction. However, Yukako again failed to position herself as a subject. Yukako is always in a sorry state and tends to get into trouble after her sexual satisfaction is channeled. Yukako is unable to fully become an autonomous subject in objectifying objects.

IV. Conclusion

Human life cannot be free from the conflicts, therefore it is important to understand the conflicts that exist in our lives and those of others to be able to reduce the conflicts we experience. The reduction of conflict in this novel emphasizes Yukako's self-control when meeting people close to her, especially patients, ex-boyfriends, friends, people she knows on dating applications, and people her parents have matched with. Probably this is why the title of this novel is "Mahadewa-Mahadewi", as every human being has elements within themselves to complement each other (both ideas, character, experience, perspective, and so on). The author also uses gay characters as a comparison to show that humans in pairs are not just different genders.

In the end, the author who tried to discourse about women or feminism failed due to the emergence of conflicts experienced by the main character. The main character always breaks before getting what she wants as a woman who wants to fight stereotypes and be free. The conflicts in this novel are evidence of the failure of resistance to female stereotypes in a patriarchal culture.

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