

**Gendered Power Relations in the Death on the Nile Film (2022):  
A Critical Discourse Analysis****Relasi Kuasa Berbasis Gender dalam Film The Death Of The Nile (2022):  
Analisis Wacana Kritis****Vayevienda Muhammad<sup>1</sup>, Mundi Rahayu<sup>2</sup>**

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## ABSTRACT

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Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami representasi dan dinamika relasi kuasa yang berbasis gender, sebagaimana tertuang dalam film "Death on the Nile" (2022). Secara khusus, artikel ini memfokuskan pada peran dan norma sosial yang mempengaruhi relasi gender di antara para karakternya. Untuk mencapai tujuan tersebut, penelitian ini menerapkan Analisis Wacana Kritis (AWK) Fairclough yang memungkinkan kita untuk mendalami relasi kuasa di antara karakternya. Analisis Wacana Kritis Fairclough ini mencakup analisis mikro (teks), meso (produksi dan konsumsi teks), dan makro (konteks sosial) yang akan diaplikasikan dalam film. Hasil analisis ini menunjukkan bahwa relasi kuasa yang berbasis gender dalam film ini digambarkan melalui relasi kuasa dalam hubungan perkawinan, di mana konsep kontrol dan kepemilikan merefleksikan norma norma sosial yang ada di dalam masyarakat. Relasi kuasa dalam hubungan cinta ini memainkan peran penting dalam dinamika hubungan kedua belah pihak, dan memperlihatkan bagaimana perasaan yang kuat dan perasaan ketergantungan sangat terlihat dalam praktik sosial. Selain itu, relasi orangtua-anak juga menjadi sorotan dalam analisis ini, karena relasi kuasa orang tua terhadap anak terus berlangsung meskipun anak-anak tersebut telah dewasa. Temuan ini memberikan dasar untuk penelitian selanjutnya terhadap film ini, dengan mempertimbangkan berbagai aspek yang lain seperti faktor-faktor sosial, ekonomi maupun budaya yang mempengaruhi representasi gender dalam film ini.

**Abstract**

*This research aims to get the understanding of the representation and dynamics of gendered power relation in the film "Death on the Nile" (2022), by focusing on the social roles and norms that influence the gender relation among characters. The research applied Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which enabled us to go deeper on the power relation of the characters. The CDA framework consists of the comprehensive analysis, from the micro (text), mezzo (production), and macro (social context) analysis that can be applied in analysis of the film. The results have proven that gendered power relations in this film were depicted through the power in marriage relationship, where the concepts of control and ownership reflected the social norms of the society. Power in love relationship also play an*

*important role in relationship dynamics, highlighting how strong feelings and dependency can influence the social practice. In addition, power in parent-children relationship can continue even after children become adults. These findings provided a foundation for further research on the representation of gender-based power relations in film, taking into account the other aspects such as the social, economic, and cultural factors that influenced gender representation.*

## 1. Introduction

Gender and its power dynamics have become increasingly relevant and controversial nowadays. According to Judith Butler, gender is a socially constructed phenomenon that emerges through repeated actions and behaviors, such as the way people dress, speak, and interact, that is constantly enacted and reinforced by social norms (Encyclopedia Britannica). In general, the concept of gender refers to the characteristics in individuals, both men and women, shaped by social and cultural factors or socially constructed (Rahayu, 2022). The concept greatly gives impact on how we understand gender roles in society, and on the other side, films have an important role in reinforcing or undermining these norms. Film is an influential medium in shaping people's perceptions and understanding of gendered power relations. Films are often recognized for their capacity to give impact and mold perceptions since they offer valuable lessons and perspectives to their audiences (Hayes, 2013). As stated by Feizabadi (2014), films have great potential in influencing the gender identity of individuals, both men and women. Films can be a mirror that reflects the power relations. Gendered power relations refer to the way power is distributed between the sexes and how this distribution affects social, economic and political relations (Gunnarsson, 2016).

Films are platforms that reflect, depict, and even reinforce gender stereotypes and power hierarchies. As stated by Yulin et al. (2022), films can reflect and reinforce gender stereotypes and power hierarchies. For example, films by Jean Renoir often show the unfair treatment of women by men, which ultimately affects their potential and future roles (Nevin, 2021). In post-reformation Indonesia, many films highlight the topic of gender, power and sexuality in the social and political context. The setting helps creating a paradox where bodies of different genders are perceived as "the other," leading to confusion of subjects' identities regarding their bodies and true identities (Fatmawaty, 2022).

It is important to understand how films from different cultures and contexts can shape our perceptions of gender and power by reflecting and reinforcing cultural stereotypes and societal attitudes. They act as powerful cultural stimuli that can change the film audience' attitudes and behaviors, and society at large (Chudzicka-Dudzick, 2022). For example, Pakistani Punjabi films often portray the Jatt group as the dominant standard of masculinity, while other groups are measured by the extent to which they can resemble this Jatt group. The research on masculinity reveals how norms of masculinity are shaped to demonstrate the superiority of the Jatt group, over women, and over men from lower social groups (Sevea, 2014).

From those literature review, there was no article discussing the gendered power relation in detective films, while the films mostly involve women and men, and the gendered power relation in the main plot. That is why, this research focuses on the question, how power relations among genders are depicted in the film "Death on the Nile" (2022). Power relation refers to the dynamics and interactions between individuals or groups that involve the exercise of power, influence, and control over others (Mulyani, 2022).

The current research explores the gendered power relation in a popular detective film, *The Death on the Nile*. To understand this issue, it uses critical discourse analysis (CDA), which emphasizes the role of language in practice of society and power. CDA is often used in various research fields such as politics, media, and social sciences (Pešić, 2023).

## **2. Gender in Hollywood Detective film**

Gender plays an important role in shaping stories, characters and themes in Hollywood detective films. Female detectives, in particular, have brought exciting innovations and challenges to the genre. The presence of women as investigators has changed our perspective on Hollywood detective films, creating a unique and sometimes unexpected mix of genre elements. These films often cross the boundaries of other genres, such as chick flicks, melodrama, horror, comedy, romance, or adventure, because of the female protagonists in them (Murray, 2014). Gender also plays a significant role in the way Hollywood films depict vigilante justice, with male protagonists often portrayed as heroes seeking revenge, while female protagonists are less commonly featured in mainstream films of this genre (Paul, 2018). Gender is what decides how people are seen in society. According to Eckert (Eckert and Ginet, 2003) in (Rizki & Fauzi, 2022), gender means the roles and conditions that society expects from women and men. It's also about the differences in what men and women do and are responsible for."

The presence of female investigators in Hollywood films has been shown to disrupt the basic structure of the genre, both in terms of visual imagery and narrative. The female investigator can operate in four different modalities: as a courageous Adventurer, as a powerful Avenger, in an entertaining Comedic mode, or in an Affective mode that stirs the audience's emotions, and each articulates femininity in a different way (Murray, 2014). The study written by Willis states that the portrayal of female characters in detective films becomes gender stereotypical and contributes to the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Willis, 2023).

In addition, in the 1940s, Hollywood crime films explored gender roles using music. The soundtracks in these films cleverly influenced the way we see characters in the context of gender roles in American society. The music in these films plays an important role in portraying the characters' feelings and directing the development of the story, ultimately influencing and questioning various aspects of the narrative in these films (Haworth, 2012).

The current study delves into the women and men as the actors involved in a crime event in a detective story *The Death on the Nile*, in which the women and men have the same possibility as the perpetrator and the victim. In such complicated gendered relationship, the male detective did his job to investigate the case, to find out the murderer.

### 3. Discursive Analysis in Film

Discursive analysis in film involves examining the language, power, and social structures represented in films. This approach can provide insights into specific aspects of the film under discussion, the content that appears on screen, and the extent to which the audience can learn from the film (Dent, C., 2021). Discursive analysis in film involves examining the argumentative patterns and inferential processes that enable the interpretation of the filmic text (Wildfeuer, 2018).

In addition, the other analysis on documentary film "Kiruna - A Brand New World" which examines the conflicting human-nature relationships articulates that the film represented the discursive-material struggles dealing with the identities of three parties - the land, the city, and the mine - and the interconnection intertwined relationships among those three (Carpentier, 2021).

The other discursive analysis can be seen in Hausa Language Use in Kannywood Films. This film studies Hausa language by applying the theory of communication strategies in applying the language devices, such as figurative language, code switching, and coded language. This analysis shows how these devices are used deliberately and consciously by the characters, revealing their language skills and proficiency (Aichatou, A.N., 2021).

Finally, Foucault's discourse theory is applied in the article Discursive Practices in Combat Girls which examines the reality construction in Contemporary German film. The study denotes that the interconnection between text and image in the film builds three dominant discourses, that constructs the perspectives of self-fulfillment, encourages people's social reintegration, and adherent of the democratic system. The discussion on the film finds that there is a particular social agenda behind the reality's social construction in the films (Wiedemann, 2019). This research highlights the importance of discursive analysis in understanding the construction of narratives in diverse films, revealing how the films speak about power, identity, and social relations in society.

### 4. The Detective Film *Death on the Nile*

"Death on the Nile" is a detective film narrates the new couple, named Simon Doyle and Linnet Ridgeway who decide to take a romantic trip on the Nile River on a luxury yacht along with their family and friends such as the famous detective Hercule Poirot (Kenneth Branagh), Bouc (Tom Bateman), Rosalie Otterbourne (Letitia Wright) and Euphemia or Bouc's mother (Annette Bening). At the beginning of the film, Simon Doyle falls in love with Jacqueline de Bellefort, a woman from the French aristocracy who has fallen into poverty. Despite the difference in their social status, Simon and Jacqueline are engaged and intend to start a new life together. However, things get complicated when Jacqueline introduces Simon to her friend, Linnet Ridgeway. Simon cannot resist Linnet's charms, and eventually he leaves Jacqueline to marry Linnet. The new couple take a romantic trip on the Nile on a cruise, along with Linnet's friends who hold many secrets. Unfortunately, the pleasant trip turns into a nightmare when Linnet is murdered. Renowned detective Hercule Poirot, who is also on holiday and travelling with them, must uncover the mastermind and perpetrator behind this tragic event and solve a complex puzzle amidst growing suspicion and tension among the passengers of the cruise.

## 5. Method

The current research employed qualitative descriptive focusing on the film studies. This study applied the concept and method of CDA by Norman Fairclough, in which the concept of "discourse" refers to spoken or written language used to convey messages, ideas, or narratives in a social context (Hassen, 2016). Fairclough's CDA is a method for analyzing texts, discourses and social practices in order to understand the relationships of power, ideology and social change contained therein. CDA focuses on the interaction between language, society, and power, and is often used in various fields of research, including politics, media, and social science (Pešić, 2023). According to Fairclough (in Rahayu, 2016), the analysis is done through three kinds of analysis. Those are micro, mezzo and macro levels of analysis. The micro analysis refers to the language features analysis paying attention to small details of language such as words, metaphors, and the like. The mezzo analysis refers to the analysis of looking at how one discourse relates to another, such as the ideas or concepts used in the text. The macro analysis observes the social political context that affects the discourse. CDA helps us understand the role of language in communication to reflect and influence social reality, especially in the context of the film "Death on the Nile" (2022), where visual and verbal language is used to depict gender relations in the context of power.

Michael Foucault's theory of power were also in use here, in which it defined the concept of power which manifested by the networks around institutions, can be seen in social interactions, and involving various parties (Rahayu, et al., 2014). It implies that power relations are more profound than we usually realize. Power relations also referred to as "strategic games of freedom" and domination and rule. Overall, the central idea of power can be found in the concept of power as a "strategic game of freedoms", which is relevant to explore gender representations in the film. The data to be used comes from the film "Death on the Nile" (2022), which includes snippets of scenes, conversations, and other visual elements.

Data collection process involved visual observation and textual analysis of the film "Death on the Nile" (2022), including notes on dialogues, and images in the film. In the analysis steps, we will look for important elements in the film related to the representation of gender and power, including characters, conversations, and images. The analysis is done through the coding of the text in the analysis, of micro, mezzo and macro analysis. Through the levels of analysis, the question of gendered power relation can be answered.

## 6. Findings and Discussion

### 6.1 Power in Marriage relationship

Power in marriage refers to the married people's ability to influence or control the other spouse's behavior, decisions, and actions (Hallenbeck, 1966). The relationship between Simon Doyle and Linnet Ridgeway reflects such gender power dynamics, in which Linnet as a woman with huge financial assets has control over her spouse, Simon Doyle. Linnet as a wealthy and influential female character plays a dominant role in the relationship. Linnet has great control and power due to her financial assets, while Simon who was previously the ex-husband of Jacqueline, becomes dependent on Linnet's finances. Linnet gained wealth and high social status

because she was the sole heir. It is clear here that financial resources define the power dynamics in the marriage. It is in line with the previous study (Zhuge, 2022), where one partner has significant financial resources or potential income, they may have more power in decision-making.

Linnet Ridgeway and Simon Doyle marriage relationship is important to analyzed to show the power relation between them. When they celebrated their wedding, and in one occasion Simon Doyle openly delivered a speech on the mystery of why Linnet Ridgeway wanted to marry him. Simon said in his speech that many people consider their marriage is something awkward, because of the different social status between him and Linnet.

Simon's statement on the case of motivation behind Linnet Ridgeway' marriage highlights the incompatibility between Linnet and himself. He considers that he has a low social status and does not deserve to be juxtaposed with Linnet Ridgeway. The use of the word "hell" shows the confusion over the decision to marry the two of them. This view may reflect Simon's belief that their different social status makes their marriage difficult for people to understand.

The dialogue also denotes that Simon also feels and articulate it clearly that he does not have valuable things in relationships. Simon indicates that he feels inferior in the relationships. This also illustrates Simon Doyle's doubts and awareness of limitations that may affect his beliefs in the relationship that is considered appropriate within the society norms. Because of these feelings, he also worries and insecure that he may lose his partner someday.

Simon Doyle's statement indicates that there are several things to be concerned. Simon uses very emotional language when talking about his marriage to Linnet Ridgeway, thus creating a very dramatic atmosphere. He also seems very confused and unsure why Linnet, who has a higher social status than him, would marry him. Simon even describes himself as not smart, not romantic, and not having enough money or a good family background, so he feels unworthy to marry Linnet. Nonetheless, Simon wanted to emphasize to all the invited guests that he loved them all very much. In this case, Simon tried to build an emotional connection with his wedding guests.

In macro analysis, we can draw a line that wealth and social status has been an important factor in a marriage. Although Simon felt a bit inferior feeling, he wanted to gain the support and understanding of all his wedding guests to strengthen their social ties in the celebration. The marriage relationship gets a trouble when Linnet knows the presence of Jacqueline de Bellefort, who is also her old friend. Linnet uses her power to do everything possible to get Jacq off the ship. This led to an argument between Linnet and Simon.



Figure 1: Linnet argued with Simon Doyle

*Linnet : I know she tried to kill us. I want her off the ship now.*

*Simon : She already had a ticket to board here. Bought ahead. There's nothing we can do.*

*Linnet : I don't care!*

In that conversation, Linnet uses assertive languages in arguing, showing her power or control over the situation. She wants to get rid of Jacqueline, whatever the price. She said the phrases “Name a price!” Linnet thinks Jacq is a threat. She cannot accept the reason of Jacq’s presence. This reflects that gender norms place women in certain roles and that Jacqueline's constant disruption of Linnet's relationship may refer to social expectations about the role of a woman.

In the discursive analysis, Linnet uses strong and assertive language to show her will. This also reflects an attempt to take control, power over the situation in order to achieve her desired goal. It also shows the financial power that Linnet has. She believes that with her money she can control the situation.

On macro social analysis, Linnet's social interactions reflect the control and power in her relationships. Financial factors almost always play an important role in relationships and power-making. However, social construction of power is also defined by gender, as seen from the following scene and discussion.



Figure 2: Linnet, Simon, Linnet's cousin (standing) and Rosalie are in conversation

*Rosalie : You were the first girl who ever told me. that a woman can run her affairs as well as a man or better. Don't tell me that score changed with one little husband.*

In the scene above (Figure 2) Rosalie reminded Linnet that a woman can manage her affairs even better than a man. This reflects the concept of gender equality and the potential for women in managing their own affairs. Rosalie’s reminder aims at strengthening Linnet attitude, so that she would not change her capability after her marriage to Simon. Discursively analyzed, Rosalie’s statement reflects a positive view

of women's ability to manage their affairs. It demonstrates a belief in gender equality and the capacity of women to cope with roles usually performed by a man. Rosalie's statement "don't tell me" shows that she has doubts that Linnet's views on gender equality have changed as a result of her marriage. This can raise concerns about how marriage can affect a woman's decisions.

## 6.2 Power in Love Relationship

Power dynamics can influence emotional inhibition and expression during conflict in love relationships. In romantic couples, individuals who feel lack power tend to be to inhibit their emotions and shows passive responses when there is a conflict between the spouses (Alonso, et al., 2021). In this film, the character Jacqueline has previous love relationship with Simon Doyle, and their romantic relation shows the dynamics, such as the elements of jealousy, manipulation, and power shifts. When Hercules Poirot first meets Jacqueline, she immediately conveys her feeling when she sees Simon Doyle married to her friend Linnet Ridgeway.



Figure 3: Jacqueline talks to Poirot

Jacqueline talks to Poirot, trying to convince herself that Simon still loves her and that the love is still there, even if he's dazzled by Linnet (Figure 3). It reflects Jacqueline's confidence in the relationship and trust in love. "Love that fierce doesn't vanish" Jacqueline emphasizes that her love is strong and does not easily disappear despite trials. Her statement describes love as something that cannot be stopped or switched off easily, illustrating the intense nature of love. Jacqueline states the analogy of the heart as the organ of love, and if love stops it dies. This shows her view that love is an important part of humanity. In discursive analysis, Jacqueline shows that her love is strong and unwavering, illustrating that love is perceived as an enduring force.

The power of emotions and relationships represented by Jacq shapes the views and actions of individuals in the context of romance (love relationship). In addition, self-reliance and confidence portray the determination to remain strong and independent even in the face of challenges. The next scene is when Hercules Poirot retreats from the party on the ship, Poirot accidentally meets Jacqueline. Jacqueline conveys her feeling to Simon.

Jacquelin expresses her strong feeling of love relationship to Simon. She refers to the historical practice in the time of pharaohs in ancient Egypt, in which the pharaohs' wives were buried alive with their dead pharaoh husbands. This reflects the strength and sacrifice that might be expected of women in certain cultures and times. Citing the historical stories of pharaoh shows that Jacque still loves Simon so much that she is



ready to sacrifice like the dead pharaoh's wife in order not to be separated from her husband. This may reflect how women in this context are connected to social norms.

In micro analysis we can find out the strong influence of emotions in love relationships. The emotion is expressed through the historical metaphor of pharaoh's wife's sacrifice. The action of sacrifice is especially expected by the particular social norms and expectations in history that affect women's roles and identities.

To convince her love feeling, Jacq talks to Simon. Jacq still believed that Simon still kept his feelings for her. However, Simon confirmed to Jacq that he felt that the actions taken by Jacq were stupid.

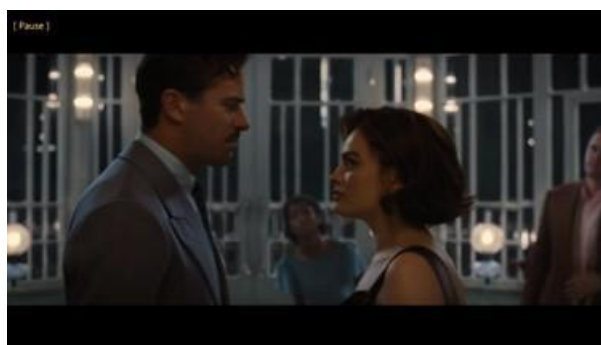


Figure 4: Simon and Jacqueline have a chat

Simon's response reflects an expression of power over Jacqueline. He uses assertive and derogatory words such as "fool" to demean Jacqueline (Figure 4). His statements show his dominance in this conversation and illustrate the unequal relationship between them. Jacqueline, on the other hand, tries to end the conflict with her statement "Simon, that's enough". She may feel threatened by Simon's dominance and seeks to stop any further confrontation.

This reflects the shifting role of power in this conversation. This conversation reflects the tension in the relationship between Jacqueline and Simon. This conflict may be related to differences in social status, jealousy or other social factors that affect the dynamics of their love relationship. In addition, this conversation also reflects gender norms that influence the way they speak. Simon tries to dominate and patronize Jacqueline, whereas Jacqueline tries to end the conflict more calmly.

### 6.3 Power in Parent-child Relationships

Mother plays a significant role in regulating their children's marital relationships. They can influence their children's perception of their own marriages and their ability to navigate marital conflict (Moo-Yee, 1995). In the film, Bouc and Euphemia, Bouc's mother have a mother-son relation in which Euphemia interferes in Bouc's relation with Rosalie. Bouc's mother asked Hercules Poirot for help to investigate her son's relationship with Rosalie Otterbone, because she disapproves the relationship, and she is curious about the relationship.



Figure 5: Poirot gathers Bouc family and Rosalie' family

Finally, Poirot took the initiative to gather the two families, as we can see in the Figure 5. "You did this to me?" shows Bouc's expressing of disbelief and questioning his mother's actions in assigning Poirot to investigate him. This shows that Bouc does not agree and he feels disappointed to her. However, the mother strengthens her position and power as a mother to the son. Moreover, Bouc's mother admits that she has done worse than Bouc thought.

In discursive analysis, Bouc's mother shows her power over her son. She said "I've done far worse" refers to Bouc's mother's past experiences that involved a mother's actions or decisions. This reflects the parental figure in the family who has a strong influence and power in determining the relationship of her children. The way parents speak and act reflects that they have power over their children, especially mothers. In this film, the mother is represented as the actor that has significant authority in the family. She always uses strong narrative denoting that she kept the power in the mother-son relationship.



Figure 6: Bouc' mother debates her son

Bouc and his mother's argument shows that the mother has a skeptical view of love. She criticizes the clichéd view of love and describes love as complicated, full of negative emotions, and can even fail. The arguing mother and son also shows the different point of view. Bouc thinks that love should have value and positive impact, whereas madame Bouc describes love as complex and multifaceted.

## 7. Conclusion

Through the analysis of the film "Death on the Nile" (2022), we can summarize that the power relation can be in the form of marriage relation, love relation, and mother-son relation. In this film, Linnet Ridgeway and Jacqueline de Bellefort, are female characters who have strong character each other. In marriage relationship, Linnet has bigger power than her husband, Simon. However, the murder of Linnet shows that the power she has got (the sole heir, the finance, and wealth) cannot prevent her to be the victim of the crime. This shows how marriage often reflects control and ownership, which is governed by social norms.

In the love relationship, we have proven that this relationship is complicated and involving more emotional aspect. Jacq's love to Simon cannot be omitted as soon as Simon gets married with Linnet. Though Jacq knows that Simon has got married to Linnet, which is her old friend, Jacq still wants Simon back. In Jacqueline's relationship with Simon, the power of love is the dominant factor. Jacqueline expresses her strong feelings and dependence on her relationship with Simon. This reflects how emotions and emotional connectedness can play an important role in relationship dynamics. The last aspect is power relationship in mother-son relationship, which denotes the power of a mother in the relation to her son. Since beginning, the mother has been portrayed as someone who is ready to interfere in her son's life. She feels meaningful, full of life when the son runs his life as the mother expects. Since a child, a mother is usually dominant and determining the son's life. After the son grown up, the mother can not get rid of the dominant role in the family.

In addition, the relationship between Bouc and his mother in this film also illustrates the power dynamics between parents and children. Madame Bouc as a mother has the power to decide to investigate her son's relationship, even though her son is an adult. This shows that power in the parent-child relationship can continue even when the child has grown up. In social situations, the interaction between Hercule Poirot and Linnet Ridgeway shows how social norms play a role in power dynamics. Overall, this analysis reveals the complexity in how the film portrays gendered power relation. The film features strong female characters, but also still maintains existing stereotypes and social norms. Through this understanding, it is important to continue to push for more inclusive and diverse gender representations in the media, especially film. Through this understanding, we can build a foundation for change towards more comprehensive gender equality.

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