

Power Relations in the Social Interaction of Employers and Domestic Workers of Different Ethnicities in Bengkulu City

Eni Khairani¹, Jabal Tarik Ibrahim², Rachmad Kristiono³, Ledyawati Djakfar⁴

¹Student at Sociology Doctoral Program, University of Muhammadiyah Malang

²Professor at University of Muhammadiyah Malang

³Associate Professor at University of Muhammadiyah Malang

⁴Associate Professor at University of Muhammadiyah Bengkulu.

Corresponding Author: Eni Khairani

ABSTRACT: *This study aims to analyze and conceptualize inter-ethnic social interactions in the perspective of power relations between employers and domestic workers due to differences in status, which are assumed to result in discriminatory behavior, symbolic violence and shifts in the ethnic identity of domestic workers. The theory used as an analytical tool is Foucault's power relations theory. The method used in this research is a qualitative method with a descriptive type. Data was collected through field observations, in-depth interviews and documentation. The research subjects consisted of 50 people, consisting of 36 domestic workers, 14 employers. The results showed that the pattern of interaction between employers and domestic workers has various forms. The various forms of interaction are due to the difficulty of communication. Power relations are also a factor that contributes to the interaction between employers and domestic workers. The inequality of power that occurs in a social relationship where there is a hierarchy within it, making the interaction between employers and domestic workers, has an impact on the daily lives of both. Power relations significantly affect changes in domestic workers' identities.*

Keywords: *Power relations, domestic workers*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Interactions between ethnic groups with different cultural backgrounds are always characterized by an adjustment process that is not easy to do. One side of the relationship is the understanding between the two or more ethnic groups with different cultural backgrounds, while on the other side, the understanding is needed so that harmonization is expected. This difference in cultural background causes interactions between ethnicities with different cultural backgrounds to be something that is inevitable, no matter how small the differences are. Therefore, in every intercultural interaction, a process is needed that can provide an understanding of the meaning conveyed, so that misinterpretation can be avoided.

A major problem in the social interaction of ethnically different cultures is errors in perception caused by cultural differences that affect the perception process. When a message is interpreted in a different culture, there can be differences in meaning, not the intended meaning. In other words, differences in cultural backgrounds tend to disrupt the interaction process because there are differences in habits, values, and norms that are used when interactions take place. Therefore, the meaning received is likely to be not fully, if at all, understood by those with different cultures. The impact is that difficulties arise as a result of not being able to understand each other's messages properly, this is as revealed by Hafid (in research, 2016) which reveals that social interaction can have an influence on the parties involved in the process. The process of social interaction based on different cultural backgrounds also has an influence or impact on the individuals involved in the process. This is also expressed by Rahman *et al* (Rahman, Fitriah and Mulyana, 2018) who revealed that the process of social interaction will easily change ethnic identity. The messages conveyed slowly change the ethnic identity of individuals. Moreover, the pattern of unequal relationships in a social interaction process is also able to change the ethnic identity of certain individuals or groups. The results of Nugraha's research (2018) reinforce this opinion, that unequal social relations can lead to power relations between two parties with different social strata. Often changes in ethnic identity develop in conditions where one ethnicity is weaker in position, this tends to trigger conflict. Conflict will be muffled when the position of the weaker ethnic is in a state of submission or slowly undergoing identity change.

One of the visible phenomena regarding this social interaction process is the existence of domestic

workers. Its existence reflects the interaction process of people who have different socio-cultural backgrounds. Astuti's (2019) research study reveals that the work as a domestic worker is able to provide great benefits for women who have this profession. They get a comfortable condition even though doing work as a domestic worker is not an easy job (Astuti and Octaviani, 2019). This is a unique phenomenon of interaction between domestic workers and employers. On the one hand, the existence of domestic workers is important in a household, while on the other hand, their existence, which is different from their socio-cultural background, often causes various unpleasant actions experienced by their employers. This is the uniqueness of the interaction between domestic workers and employers as a social fact that occurs in Bengkulu City.

Based on *empirical evidence*, the majority of domestic workers in Bengkulu City are people who have different socio-cultural backgrounds from their employers. Generally, they come from immigrant ethnicities such as Javanese or Sundanese, which are the majority immigrant ethnicities in Bengkulu City. Different cultures have different value systems. The way in which they interact with each other will depend on the cultural background, such as language, rules and norms. These differences will affect the process, meaning, manner and outcome of the interaction. When an order in the form of a work instruction 'washing' for example, is delivered by the employer, then the order is responded to by the domestic worker; at the same time, the domestic worker responds by looking at the employer. The employer can immediately feel offended, because the cultural values that have been embedded by the employer do not allow a domestic worker to behave like that. This shows that the employer's interpretation of the domestic worker's behavior is considered challenging or reluctant to carry out his orders. In fact, the domestic worker's staring behavior could be a form of respect for the cultural values of the domestic worker, not a defiant attitude towards the orders conveyed by the employer.

The objective reality in Bengkulu City shows that domestic workers still hold a *subordinate* status. Domestic workers sometimes experience discrimination due to their different status as workers. Therefore, their existence as workers always has to submit and obey the orders of the employer as the person who employs them. Likewise in interaction, where there has been interaction between the dominant culture and the subordinate culture. Meanwhile, in daily interactions between domestic workers and their employers and family members, there is always cultural contact. When they interact, that is when the habits, values, and norms are shared between them (Fern, 2018); (Silvey and Parreñas, 2019); (Lalrempuii and Elizabeth, 2020).

This power relation is often the cause of discriminatory behavior due to the domination of the employer's culture with the culture of domestic workers as subordinates. Furthermore, the discrimination that occurs ultimately leads to ethnic transformation which causes changes in ethnic identity, in the social interactions of people who have different statuses between domestic workers and employers. So the problem is how the form of power relations in social interactions between employers and domestic workers of different ethnicities in Bengkulu City. The purpose of this research is to analyze and conceptualize inter-ethnic social interactions in the perspective of power relations between employers and domestic workers due to differences in status.

A. Concept Definition

The concept used in this research is the concept of power. Power is a very important concept in social science in general and in political science in particular. Political science assumes that the core of political power means fighting for and maintaining power. Power is closely related to influence or influence, power is generally in the form of a relationship in the sense that there is one party that controls and one party that is subject to it, one party gives orders and one party must obey these orders. Power is always synonymous with political issues which are considered to have two sides, namely power can be used to organize a just order for the good of the people (*masalah*) and power without a just order will not provide any benefit to human life (Pawito et al. 2003).

Foucault argues that power and knowledge are compatible and inseparable. The concept of power described by Foucault is related to different things about power proposed by previous sociological figures. Power for Foucault is not a relationship of property ownership, acquisition or privilege of certain individuals. Power is also not related to the state through repressive and coercive actions always the holder of power. Power is not related to institutions or structures and the power that one party has over another. Foucault elaborates that power is a complex strategic situation in society. Power is diverse and dispersed relations like a network that has a strategic scope. Power is seen as everything that perpetuates power relations (Kamahi, 2017).

In Foucault's view, power is related to the pattern of power relations in society. It is explained that power relations are relationships formed between certain actors who have an interest with different levels of power. Power relations are related to power relations from subjects to objects through various media. The power obtained is not in a repressive way, but in a *manipulative* and *hegemonic* way. Foucault (2007) defines power as a matter of real practices that create reality and patterns of behavior, producing areas of knowledge objects and special rituals of truth.

B. The Process of Social Interaction in Socio-Cultural Differences

Social interaction is strongly influenced by differences in socio-cultural backgrounds. The process of social interaction can also change an individual's ethnic identity as a result of exposure or influence from different cultures. The dominance of different cultures in the lives of subordinated individuals will generally slowly affect the culture and identity of the individual. Identity according to Stella Ting Toomey (2009) is a self-reflection or reflection of self that comes from family, gender, culture, ethnicity and the socialization process. Identity basically refers to a reflection of ourselves and other people's perceptions of us.

Gardiner W. Harry and Kosmitzki Corinne (2009) see identity as a person's self-definition as an individual who is distinct in behavior, beliefs and attitudes. Identity originated from the theory of social identity proposed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979. Tajfel and Turner sought to identify the minimal conditions that would lead members of a group to discriminate against members of another group.

Budi Susanto (2003) proposes two important reasons related to identity. *First*, identity is something that is inherent in a person's life wherever and whenever they are. *Second*, identity is about belonging, which is a concept of self-similarity with a number of people and what distinguishes it from other people. Based on this opinion, identity ownership is not only a 'marker' and differentiator between individuals and others, but also as a jargon that he has guaranteed and is part of a certain group. *Contemporary identity theories*, as expressed by Morissan (2014: 130), state that there is no category of identity that is outside the social construction by culture. This means that a person or individual gets an identity construction based on what the group has built and offered. Daniel Perret (2020: 17), states that in fact individuals never stop forming and reshaping their group identity and their own identity by putting forward characteristics that allow them to adapt themselves as well as possible to certain social situations.

II. METHODOLOGY

This research uses the constructivism paradigm. This paradigm outlines that social reality is the result of intersubjectivity or agreement between subjects. Ontologically, this constructivist paradigm views social phenomena and their meanings as produced through social and continuous interaction. This paradigm will be able to provide a more specific version of reality and support researchers in providing exposure in the process of data collection and analysis in an inductive, interpretive and constructivist manner. This research uses a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach was carried out by using the support of interview guides, observation processes, documentation, *in-depth interviews* and extracting the *life history* of certain informants in this study.

Data collection techniques were carried out using in-depth interview methods, observation and documentation of research subjects who became informants, consisting of 50 informants, which were divided into 13 employers, 37 domestic workers. While the determination of informants is carried out using purposive techniques, namely determining the criteria for research subjects who will be used as informants first. Furthermore, the research subjects who have been determined to be informants are observed, as well as in-depth interviews.

Furthermore, the data that has been collected through in-depth interviews is analyzed interactively, with the stages of data reduction, data display, conclusions and verification. While the analytical knife used to explain the phenomenon of field research is using Foucault's power relations theory. According to Foucault, power is related to the pattern of power relations in society. Power relations are relationships formed between certain actors who have an interest with different levels of power.

III. DISCUSSION

A. Patterns of Interaction Between Domestic Workers and Employers in the Work Environment

The pattern of interaction between employers and domestic workers has various forms. The different languages used make the social interactions that occur also vary. Domestic workers who have the same home language or regional language as the employer will not experience problems in communicating and interacting, but those with different languages will initially have difficulty interacting and communicating with the employer. The pattern of interaction between employers and domestic workers is strongly influenced by the social, cultural and economic context.

The interaction that occurs between employers and domestic workers is influenced by differences in social class or the existence of a social hierarchy in the relationship. This is characterized by the employer's higher position in the social structure. Inequality is very visible in this relationship pattern. Employers and domestic workers establish an unequal relationship based on the power possessed by the employer. This unequal pattern of social interaction will affect the way of communication and decision-making patterns in households where domestic

workers live. The employer will be very dominant in determining the policies he applies in his household. Domestic workers who are only subordinates.

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that the pattern of social interaction between workers and employers in the work environment is influenced by various things. Social hierarchy, communication, recognition and appreciation, work agreements, domestic workers' welfare, culture and values are the main aspects found in this study and have a significant role in shaping the pattern of social relations between employers and domestic workers. Unequal or balanced social relations are largely determined by the existence of a tightly held social hierarchy in society. A society that emphasizes a high position or social class will tend to disrespect other individuals with a different or lower social class than themselves.

B. Forms of Power Relationships in the Interaction Process of Domestic Workers with Employers

These power relations have a huge impact on domestic workers' well-being and can influence how they interact with their employers. Creating awareness of these issues is important for building a more equitable and respectful work environment. Power relations in social interactions between employers and domestic workers are complex and often influenced by factors such as social, economic and cultural status. Power relations that occur can be caused by various factors. One of the main factors that cause power relations to emerge in the lives of employers and domestic workers is power inequality. Inequality of power occurs in a social relationship that has a hierarchy in it, namely there are differences in social class or social layers in society. In this research study, the form of social hierarchy that occurs is the employer who is the upper class and domestic workers who are the lower class. Generally, the relationship between employers and domestic workers has striking inequalities. Employers have full control over working conditions, including the wages to be given to domestic workers, working hours and the description of tasks that employers give to domestic workers. Based on research by Bhamra and O'Connor (2023), these inequalities can create a sense of powerlessness among domestic workers, who often avoid voicing their dissatisfaction. The existence of social classes results in unequal relationships in society. This is particularly true in social classes that do not have full access to the formal sector economy. Domestic workers who have minimal skills and limited education have limitations that result in them having to work in the informal sector. The lack of equal access to employers means that they have to accept various injustices that make them economically powerless.

C. Efforts to Overcome the Impact of Power Relationships in Social Interactions Between Domestic Workers and Employers

Efforts to address the impact of unequal power relations between employers and domestic workers should involve awareness raising, legal protection, strengthening worker organizations, skills training, community advocacy, and public awareness campaigns. With this comprehensive approach, it is hoped that the conditions of domestic workers can be improved, and they can obtain the rights they deserve. Power relations between employers and domestic workers significantly influence changes in domestic workers' identities. Social stigma, economic dependency, and cultural norms often shape the way they see themselves. However, processes of resistance and empowerment also provide opportunities for workers to build a more positive identity. Understanding these dynamics is important for developing policies that support domestic workers' empowerment and recognition of their value in society. Power relations between employers and domestic workers are a complex and layered issue. To create meaningful change, collaboration between workers, advocacy organizations, and government is required. Awareness of the issue is important to improve working conditions and enhance the lives of domestic workers. Power relations between employers and domestic workers have a significant impact on domestic workers' identities. These power dynamics often shape how they see themselves, their role in society, and their relationship with the outside world.

Michel Foucault's theory of power relations offers an insightful perspective on how power is not only possessed, but also produced and acquired through social practices, institutions and interpersonal relationships. In the context of the relationship between employers and domestic workers, some of Foucault's key propositions can be applied to understand the power dynamics at play. Foucault argues that power is not something that is owned by one party, but is a relationship that is distributed throughout society. In the context of employers and domestic workers, this means that power operates in everyday interactions and not just in formal structures. In his book *"The History of Sexuality, Volume 1"* (1976), Foucault emphasizes that power operates in social relations and can be seen in everyday practices. This is relevant in understanding how the employer-domestic worker relationship is shaped by ongoing interactions. This means that the interactions that occur between employers and domestic workers continuously in everyday life, where the interactions that occur are interactions with the existence of status boundaries, cause the social relations that are established are distant social relations. This distant social relationship is a concrete form of power relations as described by Foucault, which not only occurs in formal structures, but also in non-formal structures in everyday life between employers and domestic workers.

In addition, Foucault suggests that surveillance is an important form of power. In the context of domestic workers, employers often supervise and control workers' actions, which can shape workers' identities and behaviors. In *"Discipline and Punish"* (1975), Foucault discusses how surveillance can shape individual behavior. This is reflected in the way employers supervise domestic workers' work and daily lives, which affects how workers see themselves and their roles. Foucault argues that identities are shaped by power practices. In the context of domestic workers, their identity as "maids" is often internalized as a result of existing power relations. The study *"The Birth of Biopolitics"* (2004) is used by Foucault to outline how power shapes individual identities through narratives and social practices. Domestic workers may internalize their identities based on how they are treated by employers and society.

Foucault also emphasized that where there is power, there is always potential for resistance. Domestic workers do not just accept their position; they can resist and challenge existing power relations. Foucault states that resistance is an integral part of power relations. Many domestic workers seek to fight for their rights, which can change the dynamics of the relationship with the employer. Foucault reveals how power varies in social and historical contexts. In the context of employers and domestic workers, these power relations can change depending on time, place, and socio-economic conditions. In *"Society Must Be Defended"* (1997), Foucault explains how historical context affects power relations. This means that the dynamics between employers and domestic workers can be different in different places and times, depending on larger social and economic factors.

IV. CONCLUSION

1. The power relations between employers and domestic workers in social interactions are influenced by social, cultural and economic contexts. The difference in status makes the power relations that are built very strong because one party feels that it has full power, while the other party feels weak and dependent.
2. These power relations have a major impact on domestic workers' well-being and can influence how they interact with their employers. Creating awareness of these issues is important for building a more equitable and respectful work environment. Power relations in social interactions between employers and domestic workers are complex and often influenced by factors such as social, economic and cultural status. Power relations that occur can be caused by various factors. One of the main factors that cause power relations to emerge in the lives of employers and domestic workers is power inequality. Power inequality occurs in a social relationship where there is a hierarchy within it, namely there are differences in social class or social layers in society.
3. Unequal power relations between employers and domestic workers cause a variety of impacts on the lives of domestic workers and employers. In other words, the impact of unequal power relations between employers and domestic workers can have significant consequences for both parties, as well as the work environment as a whole.
4. Power relations between employers and domestic workers significantly influence changes in domestic workers' identities. Social stigma, economic dependence, and cultural norms often shape the way they see themselves. The resistance process that occurs as a result of power relations provides an opportunity for workers to build a more positive identity.

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