



## **OVERCOMING MARITAL DEPENDENCY IN DOMENICO STARNONE'S "TIES" 2017**

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### **Abstract**

This study is an analysis of a novel entitled *Ties* (2017) by Domenico Starnone. This analysis explores the issue of wife's dependency on the husband. The aim of this study is to explain the circumstances that have led the character to become dependent on her husband by applying feminist literary theory. The results of this study show that there are three circumstances, namely traditional gender roles, economic dependency and emotional dependency.

**Key words:** *Ties*, Marital Dependency, Feminism, Traditional Gender Roles

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

As humans, we constantly rely on others and cannot live by ourselves. Therefore, we motivated to establish intimate relationships. There are several types of relationship styles in our lives, and probably the most important one is marriage. Marriage is an interesting topic to talk about. The concept of marriage entails an authorized union, recognized both legally and socially, between a man and a woman, that is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs, and attitudes that prescribe the rights and duties of the partners (Britannica, 2023). In basic terms, marriage can be defined as the union of a man and a woman, assuming the roles of husband and wife, who become father and mother to the children their sexual union produces (Anderson, 2013).

There are numerous topics related to marriage that can be discussed, one of which is wife's dependency on husband. In marriage, woman as a wife tended to depend on their husbands, especially when they have little work experience (Killewald, 2016). A wife who only works in household might be more dependent to the husband. However, some women are less dependent than others on their husbands for financial support, status and self-esteem (Kalmuss & Straus, 1982).

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Marriage and patriarchal culture are related to each other. In the traditional societal construct shaped by patriarchal norms, marriage is perceived as a predetermined fate rather than a voluntary decision for women (Winarti & Kusuma, 2017). Patriarchy is a men-centered social system. Patriarchy means a social structure in which men's actions and thoughts are more dominant than women. It is a system in which women are exposed to the periphery of economic dependence, violence, domestication, and decision making (Adisa, Abdulraheem, & Isiaka, 2019). According to Walby (in Sultana, 2011), within the patriarchal mode of production, housewives assume the role of the producing class, whereas husbands assume the role of the expropriating class. Despite the physically demanding, ceaseless, and repetitive nature of their labor, the work performed by housewives is often devalued and not recognized as legitimate work. Consequently, housewives are perceived as dependent on their husbands.

In patriarchal culture, there exists inequality between men and women. Patriarchal culture does not provide equal access to economic and non-economic resources for women (Astuti, Indrawati, & Astuti, 2006). This inequality is especially reflected in the area of the family where the father or eldest male is designated as the authoritative figure known as the "head of the household." (Soman, 2009). Dobash and Dobash (Tonsing & Tonsing, 2019), argued that patriarchy produces gender inequality in marriage and the family setting, and patriarchal norms are often linked to wife assault, and wife beating, which can be viewed as one form of men's exercise of control over women. Consequently, women are expected to conform to conventional gender roles, including obedience, upholding the family's reputation, and performing household chores.

The societal expectations regarding the specific behaviors and responsibilities assigned to individuals based on their sex are referred to as gender roles. Wienclaw (Zahro, 2014) defines gender roles as how men and women act in society; act within the norms of behavior. For example, a woman might engage in the traditional feminine gender role would be to nurture her family by working full-time within the house rather than taking employment outside of the home. Men, on the other hand, are presumed by traditional views of gender roles to be leaders. The traditional view of the masculine gender role, therefore, suggests that men should be the heads of their households by providing financially for the family and making important family decisions (Blackstone, 2003).

The issue of wife's dependency on the husband can appear in literary works, since literary works are human's creation. Literary works serve as a means of conveying human concepts, emotions, and depictions of individuals or objects. Literary works have significant influences in the society. Moreover, it has potentials to make social construction of the people or the society. Literature itself is "the imitation of social reality" (Wellek & Warren, 1949).

In this paper, the researcher will try to analyze a novel entitled *Ties* (2017) by Domenico Starnone. Domenico Starnone (born 1943) is an Italian writer, screenwriter, and journalist. He was born in Naples and lives in Rome. He is the author of thirteen works of fiction, including *First Execution* (Europa 2009) and *Via Gemito*, winner of Italy's most prestigious literary prize, the Strega. *Ties* was

originally written in Italian and translated into English language by Jhumpa Lahiri in 2017 and won the inaugural edition of The Bridge Prize for best novel.

*Ties* tells the marriage story of Vanda and Aldo. After years of their marriage, Aldo has committed infidelity with a young girl. Vanda, who puts her husband at the center of her life and depends herself on her husband, suffers after Aldo reveals his infidelity. Aldo left and abandon her and their children. As the impact, she faces challenges in managing the responsibilities of caring for her children, maintaining the household, handling financial obligations, and navigating daily life, because she depends on her husband.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher is interested in discussing what circumstances that lead Vanda to be dependent on her husband and how does Vanda attempt to overcome her dependency. Feminist approach is used to conduct this research. This approach is deemed appropriate because this novel's issue of wife's dependency on husband and the attempt to overcome it.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

The study is conducted by using a qualitative descriptive method. Qualitative descriptive method is a research method that provides a better understanding of the related phenomena. The aim of qualitative descriptive studies is to provide a detailed overview, using simple language, of particular experiences encountered by individuals or groups (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). Based on the explanation, the researcher will use qualitative descriptive research in conducting this research. The object of this research is a novel by Domenico Starnone entitled *Ties*. *Ties* is originally written in Italian and was translated by Jhumpa Lahiri. *Ties* tells the marriage story of Vanda and Aldo. After years of their marriage, Vanda has to face her husband's infidelity. Vanda, who is dependent on her husband, struggles to be independent after her husband left her. This novel was published in 2017 by Europa Editions. The research will take the data of this research from the novel *Ties* (2017) by Domenico Starnone. The data will be collected by citing quotes from the novel *Ties* (2017) in a form of phrases, sentences and paragraphs by this following procedure: Reading the novel *Ties* (2017) by Domenico Starnone repeatedly using close-reading technique. Identifying the data related to the research questions. Classifying the data related to the issue of the causes Vanda to be dependent on her husband, how Vanda's dependency depicted, and her effort to overcome dependency in marriage through feminist perspective. Analyzing the data based on feminist literary theory. Data analysis in *Ties* will use feminism theory. With research questions that discuss the circumstances that have led wife to be dependent on the husband and how does the character attempt to overcome it, feminist theory will be needed to analyze it.

## **C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Circumstances That Have Led Vanda to Become Dependent on Her Husband**

#### **4.1.1 Traditional Gender Roles**

In the novel *Ties* (2019) by Domenico Starnone, Vanda is portrayed as a dependent person. This is caused by the traditional gender roles in patriarchal

society she lives in. Gender roles are societal expectations and norms regarding behaviors and responsibilities that are typically associated with women and men (Çuhadaroglu, 2021). It can be seen from the quotation below:

*“I holed up to study, and my wife entertained them with great imagination, dedicating herself to housework all the while. I never saw anything wrong with the way things were going, and Vanda herself never complained, even when we were besieged by that culture of deinstitutionalization—what an ugly word—of everything. We were both raised to believe that things were naturally supposed to be a certain way. It was natural that our marriage should last until death separated us. It was natural that my wife should have no job other than housework. And even now that everything seemed to be in transition—a pre-Revolutionary phase, people said—it was inconceivable that mothers would stop taking care of their children. (p.49)*

From the quotation, it can be revealed that the patriarchal culture is still strong in the society she lives in. The husband will be the backbone of the family and provide the family financially, meanwhile the wife will take care of household chores. This traditional gender roles were instilled in them. This can be seen from the quote *“It was natural that my wife should have no job other than housework”*. The society has restricted the wife by forcing her to follow the traditional gender roles. This makes Vanda has no chance of working outside so she does not have her own income and causes her to be dependent on her husband.

The quotation above reveals the traditional gender roles that are found in the society Vanda lives in. This is supported by the quotation below:

*“She couldn’t believe that she—she who had put me at the center of her life, who’d slept with me for years, who’d given me two children, who’d seen to my every need in an exemplary manner—had been set aside for an unknown woman who would never be able to take care of me in that same devoted way.” (p.45)*

The quotation above shows the position of the husband in the family. Traditionally, the husband assumes the role of the head of the family by virtue of being the primary income earner or the breadwinner (Mensah, 2022). The husband’s position is in the center of family because he is the breadwinner. Therefore, the wife should devote herself to her husband in every aspect of her life. The wife’s jobs are simply to serve the husband and nurture children.

#### **4.1.2 Economic Dependency**

The next circumstances that lead Vanda to be dependent on her husband is Vanda's economic dependency. The concept of economic dependency refers to a situation in which an individual or group is reliant on another individual or group for financial resources or support. In the context of marriage, economic dependency is often discussed in relation to wives and their husbands.

Historically, many societies have been structured in a way that promotes economic dependency of women on men. This has been particularly true in patriarchal societies, where men are traditionally the primary breadwinners and women are expected to focus on household duties and child-rearing. As a result, many women have found themselves economically dependent on their husbands, with limited opportunities for education, employment, and financial independence.

The effects of economic dependency can be significant. Studies have shown that economic dependence can lead to decreased self-esteem and agency among women, as well as increased risk of domestic violence and abuse (Pompper, 2014). It can also make it difficult for women to leave abusive or unhealthy relationships, as they may not have the financial means to support themselves and their children (Radford, 2015). The previous point is supported by the quotation below:

*“Is it possible that you don't realize the weight you've dumped on top of me? Have you forgotten that I don't have a job, that I don't know how to get by?” (p.5)*

It can be seen that Vanda has no job at all. From this, it can be concluded that she is economically dependent on her husband. This makes her feel an overwhelming financial burden after her husband left her. This is because she has no personal income and was dependent on her former husband. And when her husband left her, she became confused about how to meet her and her child's needs.

*“Then I told myself that it was an era of change; even you theorized that we needed to shake things up, that maybe I was too caught up in household chores, in managing our money, in the children's needs.” (p.3)*

From the above quote, it can be seen that Vanda's only job is taking care of the household, and she is solely focused on her role as a housewife. She does not have a personal income and relies solely on her husband. This is because fulfilling the financial needs is her husband's responsibility, while her role is to manage the money used to finance their daily life and their children. This may indicate an economic dependence that Vanda has on her husband.

Due to Vanda's economic dependence on her husband, she experiences difficulties in meeting her daily needs. It can be seen from the quotation below:

*“I have to pay the gas and the electricity. There's the rent. And two kids. Come back right away.” (p.4)*

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Vanda is experiencing difficulties in supporting herself and her children. This is because she does not have her own income. She suddenly has to bear the financial burden of the family, which is her husband's responsibilities before. The urgency expressed in the last part of the quote, "Come back right away," can also be interpreted as a need for immediate financial support or assistance. This urgency further emphasizes the economic dependency Vanda might have on her husband.

#### 4.1.3 Emotional Dependency

The last circumstances that lead Vanda to be dependent on her husband is Vanda's emotional dependency. Emotional dependency can be described as a behavioral pattern in which an individual relies on another person to fulfil their emotional needs. This reliance can reach a level where the person becomes excessively needy or clingy. Emotional dependency can occur in any type of relationship, whether it's romantic, familial, or platonic.

Individuals who are emotionally dependent may struggle to regulate their own emotions, and may rely on the other person to provide them with a sense of security and self-worth. They may fear abandonment or rejection, and as a result, may go to great lengths to keep the other person close, even if that means sacrificing their own needs and desires.

There are six areas of emotional dependency namely separation anxiety, affective expression, modification of plans, fear of loneliness, borderline expression, and seeking attention (González-Jiménez & Hernández-Romera, 2014). In addition, emotional dependency may cause negative impact such as anxious-depressive symptoms, obsessive thoughts, sleep difficulties, and withdrawal from social interactions and recreational activities, may be brought on by emotional reliance (Arbinaga, et al., 2021).

Here are several signs of Vanda's emotional dependency on her husband:

##### 1) Separation Anxiety

The first Vanda's emotional dependency is separation anxiety. It can be revealed from the quotation below:

*"Enough, sorry, I'm going overboard. I know you, I know you're a decent person. But please, as soon as you read this letter, come home. Or, if you still aren't up to it, write to me and explain what you're going through. I'll try to understand, I promise. It's already clear to me that you need more freedom, as it should be, so the children and I will try to burden you as little as possible. But you need to tell me word for word what's going on between you and this girl." (p.1)*

From the quotation above, it can be revealed that Vanda is emotionally dependent to her husband. This is proven by the separation anxiety which she feels. The confession of her husband's infidelity makes she fear of losing her husband. However, because of her dependency, Vanda tries to accept her husband infidelity and beg her husband to come back. It also can be seen that Vanda does

not blame her husband, but blame her husband's mistress. She does this just to make her husband come back.

The point of the quotation above is supported by the quotation below:

*"At the time I told myself that you were doing nothing wrong: the girl was lovely, we can't control our eyes, sooner or later a glance slips out. (p.3)*

It can be revealed from the quotation that Vanda attempt to comprehend her husband's affair. She still does not blame her husband, but instead blame herself. Even if her husband Vanda really does not want to lose her husband. In order not to lose her husband, she made efforts starting from understanding, comprehending and negotiating her husband's affair. This is also supported by the quotation below:

*"Let's talk about it, you can't leave me in the lurch. I need to know about this Lidia. Does she have her own place, do you sleep there? Does she have what you were looking for, what I no longer have, or never did? You snuck off, avoiding speaking to me clearly at all costs. Where are you? The address you left is in Rome, so is the phone number, but you don't respond when I write, the phone keeps ringing. What do I have to do to find you? Call one of your friends, come to the university? Start screaming in front of your colleagues and students?" (p.4)*

It can be seen from the quotation above that Vanda expresses feelings of fear and distress about the possibility of being left by her husband. She is anxious about her husband's relationship with someone named Lidia, and she is seeking clarity and reassurance about the situation. The quote indicates a fear of being "left in the lurch," which means being abandoned or left without support. Vanda's repeated attempts to reach out to her husband through writing and phone calls, and the lack of response, indicate a fear of losing contact and connection with her husband.

## 2) Fear of Loneliness

The next sign of Vanda's emotional dependency on her husband is the fear of loneliness without her husband, depicted in the quotation below:

*"I'm afraid. The house is isolated, you know how it is in Naples, it's a scary place. At night I hear noises, laughter, I don't sleep, I'm worn out. What if a thief gets in through the window? What if they steal the television, the record player? What if someone who's angry with you kills us in our sleep for revenge?" (p.5)*

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Vanda's emotional dependency on her husband manifests as feelings of insecurity when they are

apart. The fear of loneliness is a sign of an emotionally dependent person. It is the fear of being without a partner, the need for a partner to experience emotional stability and security, and the perception of being alone as something frightening (González-Jiménez & Hernández-Romera, 2014). Vanda's fear of loneliness is apparent in her worries about safety, potential harm, and the loss of distractions that bring comfort without her husband.

This is also supported by the quotation below:

*"I'm getting more scared. I'm scared that you'll contrive to transmit the spite you harbor toward me to the children, to our friends, to everyone. You want to isolate me, cut me out completely. And, what matters most, you want to avoid every attempt to reexamine our relationship."* (p.5-6)

From the quotation above, it can be seen Vanda's fear of loneliness. She expresses her increasing fear and worries about being isolated and cut off from others by her husband. This fear of being alienated or cut out completely from her social circle creates a sense of loneliness and emotional isolation.

### 3) Seeking Attention and Borderline Expression

The last sign of Vanda's emotional dependency is seeking attention and borderline expression. It can be revealed from the quotation below:

*"I killed myself. I know I should write, I tried to kill myself, but that would be inaccurate. For all intents and purposes, I died. Do you think I did it to force you to come back? Is that why, even under those circumstances, you were careful not to show up for even five minutes in the hospital? Were you afraid of getting backed into a corner? Or were you afraid of looking straight-on at the mess you'd made?"* (p.10)

From the quotation, it can be revealed that the impact of her husband's infidelity, as experienced by Vanda, is significant. This led Vanda to attempt suicide with the aim of capturing the attention and garnering sympathy from her husband once again. This is a borderline expression of an emotionally dependent person. For individuals who are emotionally dependent, the potential breakup of a relationship can be extremely devastating, often leading them to engage in self-harming behaviour and expressing a desire to cause harm to themselves, which is related with the characteristics of a person with borderline personality disorder (González Jiménez & Hernández-Romera, 2014).

## D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This chapter concludes the analysis of this research. This research reveals the circumstances that have led the character to become dependent on her husband and how the character attempt to overcome her dependency in the novel *Ties* by



Domenico Starnone. This research focuses on one of the characters in *Ties* by Domenico Starnone, named Vanda.

In this study, it was found that Vanda is depicted as a dependent wife. There are three circumstances that have led Vanda to become dependent on her husband. The first circumstance is the traditional gender role instilled in Vanda which requires her to be a wife who only take care the family and household chores. The second circumstance is economic dependency because Vanda has no job and her own income which causes her to experiences difficulties in meeting the children and her daily needs when. The last circumstance is emotional dependency with the signs of separation anxiety, fear of loneliness and seeking attention and borderline expression.

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