

INNER CONFLICT AND THE SEARCH FOR MEANING IN LIFE: A HUMANISTIC ANALYSIS OF *WUNI* NOVEL BY ERSTA ANDANTINO**

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the dynamics of inner conflict and the search for meaning in life experienced by the character Jaka in the novel *Wuni* through a humanistic psychology approach. Inner conflict in the novel functions not merely as a narrative aesthetic element, but also as a representation of the character's existential struggle in confronting social pressures, past trauma, and inherited cultural and spiritual values. This research employs a qualitative descriptive method using content analysis techniques applied to the novel text. The data consist of narrative units containing inner conflict and the search for meaning in life, which are systematically coded to enhance analytical validity. The findings indicate that Jaka's inner conflict is closely related to his inability to fulfill fundamental psychological needs, such as safety, social acceptance, and self-esteem. These conflicts subsequently drive the character into a process of searching for meaning through inner reflection, spiritual experiences, and confrontation with ancestral heritage. This process ultimately leads Jaka toward self-acceptance and self-actualization, as conceptualized in humanistic psychological theory. The findings affirm that *Wuni* represents literature as a medium of human reflection that integrates psychological, cultural, and spiritual dimensions. This study is expected to enrich literary studies grounded in humanistic psychology and contribute to literature education oriented toward the development of humanistic values.

Keywords: *inner conflict; search for meaning in life; humanistic psychology; Wuni novel*

INTRODUCTION

Literature plays an essential role in education, not merely as an aesthetic artifact that offers linguistic beauty and narrative structure, but also as a reflective medium for understanding human experience in a deeper and more meaningful way. Literary works represent the complexity of life, ranging from personal struggles to the social and cultural dynamics that surround individuals. Through the reading and analysis of literary texts, learners are invited to explore human values, comprehend inner struggles, and reflect on the attitudes and life choices faced by fictional characters. In this way, literature contributes significantly to the development of emotional sensitivity, empathy, and character formation among students (Wellek & Warren, 1956; Foster, 2003; Denham, 2024; Chalimourda, 2025). In the educational context, literature learning is not solely aimed at improving students' abilities to appreciate and analyze texts, but also at fostering self-awareness and understanding of life realities. Literary texts frequently present conflicts, moral dilemmas, and existential questions that are closely related to students' lived experiences. When students encounter such issues through fictional characters, they are provided with a safe space to contemplate human experiences without having to undergo them directly. Therefore, literary studies hold substantial potential as a medium for values education, self-reflection, and personality development (Hartman, 1980; *Education Sciences*, 2025; Qi & You, 2025). One important aspect that often emerges in literary works is the inner conflict of characters. Inner conflict represents psychological tension arising from the confrontation between personal desires, social norms, cultural values, and spiritual beliefs embraced by individuals. Such conflicts are not always explicitly stated, but manifest through doubt, anxiety, fear, and the search for meaning in life. In literary education, characters' inner

conflicts constitute meaningful material because they allow readers—particularly students—to recognize and understand emotional struggles that closely resemble their own life experiences. Thus, the analysis of inner conflict is not merely academic in nature, but also reflective and educational (Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1961; *Cognitive Dissonance and Inner Conflict*, 2025). The psychology of literature approach provides a relevant framework for examining such inner conflicts. Literary psychology views literary works as representations of human psychic life that can be analyzed using psychological theories. This approach enables readers to understand characters as subjects possessing complex emotions, motivations, and internal conflicts. In the context of literary education, the psychology of literature helps students develop critical and empathetic thinking skills while relating characters' experiences to real human life situations (Wellek & Warren, 1956; Schneider, 2015).

The novel *Wuni* presents the character Jaka as an individual who experiences prolonged inner conflict resulting from tensions between personal aspirations, Javanese cultural values, and mystical experiences surrounding his life. Jaka is depicted not only as confronting external problems, but also as a subject who continuously struggles with questions of identity, life purpose, and the meaning of existence. His inner conflicts manifest in forms such as indecision, anxiety about the future, strong attachment to ancestral traditions, and uncertainty in determining his life direction. The complexity of these conflicts makes *Wuni* a relevant object of in-depth analysis, particularly from a humanistic psychology perspective within the context of literary education (Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1961; Frankl, 2006). Previous studies on the novel *Wuni* have tended to focus on aspects of mysticism, representations of local culture, or the social conflicts underlying the narrative. These studies have made valuable contributions to understanding the cultural richness and symbolism of the novel. However, research that specifically links characters' inner conflicts to the process of searching for meaning in life through a humanistic psychology perspective—especially within the framework of literary learning—remains relatively limited. This research gap indicates the need for a more integrative analysis that views inner conflict not merely as a psychological symptom, but as a process of self-awareness formation and the internalization of humanistic values (Chalimourda, 2025; Denham, 2024).

Humanistic psychology, as developed by Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and Viktor Frankl, offers a relevant theoretical foundation for such analysis. Maslow emphasizes self-actualization as the highest human need after basic needs are fulfilled; Rogers highlights the importance of congruence between lived experience and self-concept; and Frankl views the search for meaning in life as the core of human existence, particularly when individuals confront suffering and inner conflict. From a humanistic perspective, humans are seen as beings with the potential to grow and the capacity to assign meaning to their life experiences. Therefore, inner conflict is understood not as pathology, but as an integral part of personal growth (Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1961; Frankl, 2006). Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the inner conflict and the search for meaning in life experienced by the character Jaka in the novel *Wuni* using a humanistic psychology approach. The focus of the analysis is directed toward the forms of inner conflict experienced by the character and the accompanying processes of meaning-making. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich literary psychology studies, particularly those oriented toward humanistic perspectives. Practically and educationally, the study seeks to demonstrate that literary works can function as learning resources that encourage reflective thinking, empathy, and the internalization of humanistic values in literary education settings (Schneider, 2015; *Education Sciences*, 2025).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive-analytical method combined with a hermeneutic method. The qualitative approach is chosen because this research focuses on understanding meaning, interpretation, and the in-depth exploration of psychological phenomena experienced by literary characters, rather than on statistical measurement of variables. The descriptive-analytical method is used to systematically describe the data while simultaneously analyzing it based on relevant theoretical frameworks, whereas the hermeneutic method is applied to interpret literary texts deeply and contextually. Through this approach, the study aims to reveal the inner conflicts and the process of searching for meaning in the character's life in a comprehensive and contextual manner (Gadamer, 2004; Ricoeur, 1981; Palmer, 1969). The analysis is centered on the literary text as a representation of the character's inner experiences constructed through narrative language. From a hermeneutic perspective, literary texts are understood as symbolic spaces that contain psychological expressions, cultural values, and the author's worldview manifested through characters. Therefore, the interpretation of inner conflict and the search for meaning in life is conducted through a dialogical interaction between the text, its context, and the researcher's horizon of understanding, while paying close attention to the coherence between narrative structure, characterization, and the surrounding cultural context (Gadamer, 2004; Ricoeur, 1976). The data source of this study is the novel *Wuni*. This novel is selected because it narratively presents a main character who experiences intense and prolonged inner struggles, making it highly relevant to the focus of the study. The research data consist of textual units that contain expressions

of inner conflict and the search for meaning in the life of the character Jaka. These textual units include sentences, dialogues between characters, inner monologues, and the narrator's descriptions that explicitly or implicitly represent the character's psychological condition. Within the hermeneutic framework, these textual units are treated as symbols whose meanings are interpreted in layers through close and in-depth reading (Palmer, 1969; Ricoeur, 1981). The data collection technique used in this study is the reading and note-taking method. The researcher reads the novel *Wuni* carefully, intensively, and repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the plot, character development, and the dynamics of emerging conflicts. This repeated reading process aligns with the hermeneutic principle of the hermeneutic circle, which emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between understanding individual parts of the text and the text as a whole. Each textual segment that indicates inner conflict or the search for meaning in life is recorded and assigned a specific code to facilitate data management (Gadamer, 2004; Palmer, 1969).

Data coding is conducted using two main categories. The code **KB** is used to mark data related to the inner conflict experienced by the character Jaka, while the code **PMH** is used to identify data that indicate the process of searching for meaning in life. This coding system assists the researcher in systematically grouping the data and facilitates data tracing during the analysis stage. From a hermeneutic perspective, coding is not intended to mechanically reduce textual meaning but serves as a tool to organize the interpretive process in a systematic manner (Ricoeur, 1976). The data analysis technique is carried out through several interrelated stages. The first stage is data reduction, which involves selecting the most representative and relevant textual units related to inner conflict and the search for meaning in Jaka's life. The second stage is data categorization based on key concepts in humanistic psychology, particularly self-actualization as proposed by Maslow, self-congruence according to Rogers, and the concept of meaning in life formulated by Frankl. At this stage, interpretation is conducted by considering the relationship between the text, theory, and cultural context (Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1961; Frankl, 2006; Ricoeur, 1981).

The third stage is data interpretation, which involves interpreting the categorized textual units by linking them to the theoretical framework of humanistic psychology and the Javanese cultural context underlying the novel *Wuni*. Interpretation is carried out in a descriptive-argumentative manner through a critical dialogue between the text and the researcher, as emphasized in the tradition of philosophical hermeneutics. This process not only highlights the psychological aspects of the character but also considers the cultural and spiritual values that influence how the character interprets and gives meaning to life experiences (Gadamer, 2004; Ricoeur, 1981). Data trustworthiness is ensured through persistent reading and consistency in interpretation. The researcher conducts repeated readings and rechecks the selected data to ensure their relevance to the research focus and narrative context. In addition, the use of direct quotations from the novel serves as a form of hermeneutic validation, allowing each interpretation to be traced back to its original source. Thus, the results of the analysis are expected to demonstrate adequate credibility and traceability (Palmer, 1969; Gadamer, 2004).

Results and Discussion

3.1 Jaka's Inner Conflict as a Humanistic Crisis

Inner conflict constitutes a dominant element in the narrative journey of Jaka in the novel *Wuni*. This conflict does not merely function as a driver of the plot, but also serves as a representation of the psychological crisis experienced by the character in the process of understanding his identity, life purpose, and relationship with his social and cultural environment (Wellek & Warren, 1956; Endraswara, 2013; Denham, 2024). Through inner conflict, Jaka is portrayed not only as confronting external problems, but as undergoing layered and sustained internal struggles. These struggles reflect a humanistic crisis, namely a condition in which an individual stands at the intersection between personal desires for growth and external value systems that constrain self-freedom (Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1961; Kaufman, 2020). Based on careful and repeated readings of the text, Jaka's inner conflict can be identified through a number of narrative statements that reveal tension between personal will and the pressures of Javanese cultural values, ancestral bonds, and spiritual experiences that accompany his life (Endraswara, 2011; Koentjaraningrat, 2009; Magnis-Suseno, 2003). This conflict does not emerge as a single occurrence, but develops progressively throughout the narrative and shapes the way the character perceives himself. Thus, inner conflict becomes a crucial space for understanding Jaka's psychological dynamics from a humanistic psychology perspective, particularly in relation to the incongruence between his actual experiences and his ideal self-concept (Rogers, 1961; Frankl, 2006; Chalimourda, 2025).

Table 1
Data on Jaka’s Inner Conflict in the Novel *Wuni*

No	Inner Conflict Data (Sentences from the Novel)	Page	Code
1	“Jaka felt as if his steps were always pulled back by something invisible, as though his life did not fully belong to him.”	45	KB-01
2	“He wanted to leave, yet the shadows of his ancestors and his mother’s voice continued to bind his thoughts.”	52	KB-02
3	“In the middle of the night, Jaka asked himself: was he a coward for staying, or a fool for hoping?”	78	KB-03
4	“Every decision he was about to make always felt wrong, as if any choice would wound something within him.”	83	KB-04
5	“Jaka felt guilty imagining a life different from the path that had been inherited by him.”	91	KB-05
6	“There was fear in his chest that if he stepped away, he would lose himself.”	97	KB-06
7	“His prayers never truly offered answers; instead, they added to the confusion in his heart.”	104	KB-07
8	“He was trapped between the desire for freedom and the fear of a curse he never fully understood.”	112	KB-08
9	“Jaka felt that his life kept moving, but his soul was left behind.”	118	KB-09
10	“In silence, he realized that the greatest conflict was not with the world, but with himself.”	126	KB-10

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that Jaka’s inner conflict centers on feelings of attachment, lack of freedom, and existential confusion. Data KB-01 illustrates the character’s subjective experience of feeling controlled by forces beyond himself. From a humanistic psychology perspective, this condition reflects incongruence between the character’s actual lived experiences and his ideal self-concept. Such incongruence generates psychological pressure and a sense of losing control over one’s personal life (Rogers, 1961; Schultz & Schultz, 2017; Denham, 2024). This conflict becomes more pronounced in data KB-02 and KB-05, which reveal Jaka’s desire to determine his own life path while being constrained by ancestral shadows and the maternal figure as representations of cultural and moral values. These figures reflect the internalization of Javanese cultural values that emphasize loyalty to origins, family, and tradition (Koentjaraningrat, 2009; Magnis-Suseno, 2003; Geertz, 1973). Within a humanistic framework, this situation places Jaka in a dilemma between the need for self-actualization and the demand to remain aligned with environmental expectations (Maslow, 1970; Kaufman, 2020). Meanwhile, data KB-03, KB-04, and KB-09 highlight the reflective dimension of inner conflict, as Jaka begins to question the meaning of his life choices and his own identity. The emerging doubt marks a phase of self-awareness, a stage at which individuals recognize the gap between the life they live and the life they desire. According to Rogers, this phase is crucial in psychological growth because it opens the possibility for transformation of the self-concept (Rogers, 1961; Hall, Lindzey, & Campbell, 1998).

Data KB-06, KB-07, and KB-08 demonstrate that Jaka’s inner conflict is also associated with fear, spiritual anxiety, and uncertainty regarding the meaning of life. Prayers that fail to provide clarity and fear of the consequences of life choices reflect an existential condition described by Viktor Frankl as suffering that demands meaning-making (Frankl, 2006; Madsen, 2021; Chalimourda, 2025). In this context, inner conflict does not merely serve as a source of psychological pressure, but also functions as a catalyst for the search for meaning in life. Overall, Jaka’s inner conflict can be understood as a humanistic crisis that encourages reflection, self-awareness, and the search for meaning in life. This conflict demonstrates that psychological suffering is not necessarily destructive, but may become a pathway toward personal growth (Maslow, 1970; Frankl, 2006; Denham, 2024). Within the context of literary learning, the depiction of Jaka’s inner conflict provides space for students to comprehend the complexity of human experience, while simultaneously fostering empathy and reflective attitudes toward life’s challenges (Endraswara, 2013; Ratna, 2015).

3.2 Mystical Elements as Triggers of Jaka’s Self-Awareness

Mystical elements in the novel *Wuni* play a crucial role in shaping the inner dynamics of the character Jaka. The presence of mystical experiences does not merely function as a narrative ornament or atmospheric enhancement,

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but rather as a symbolic medium that triggers self-awareness and existential reflection. Within the context of Javanese culture, mystical elements are often understood as spaces of encounter between the outer and inner worlds, between the rational and the transcendent (Geertz, 1973; Koentjaraningrat, 2009; Endraswara, 2013). Therefore, mystical experiences in this novel need to be interpreted hermeneutically as symbols of meaning-making struggles rather than as purely supernatural events. From a hermeneutic perspective, literary texts are understood as fields of meaning that are open to multilayered interpretation (Gadamer, 2004; Ricoeur, 1981). The mystical experiences encountered by Jaka become symbols of existential anxiety as well as means through which the character reinterprets his relationship with himself, his ancestors, and the inherited values of life. In this reading, mystical elements do not exist outside the character’s consciousness; instead, they emerge as manifestations of unresolved inner conflict (Ratna, 2015; Teeuw, 2015).

The uncanny experiences undergone by Jaka—such as feeling observed by unseen forces, fear of curses, and symbolic encounters with ancestral traces—intensify the condition of incongruence within the character. According to Rogers (1961), incongruence occurs when an individual’s actual experiences are misaligned with their idealized self-concept. In Jaka’s case, mystical elements accentuate this tension, as he perceives his life to be governed by forces beyond his own will (Rogers, 1961; Schultz & Schultz, 2017). However, as the narrative progresses, mystical elements gradually transform from sources of fear into catalysts for self-reflection. This process aligns with Frankl’s (2006) view that suffering and existential anxiety serve as starting points for the search for meaning in life (Frankl, 2006; Madsen, 2021). Mystical experiences prompt Jaka to question his position within the cosmic and cultural order, as well as to recognize human limitations in the presence of greater forces (Magnis-Suseno, 2003; Chalimourda, 2025). The relationship between mystical elements and the development of Jaka’s self-awareness can be summarized in the following stages of humanistic development.

Table 2
Stages of Jaka’s Humanistic Development

No	Development Stage	Textual Indicators	Data Code
1	Incongruence Crisis	Feelings of attachment, lack of freedom, conflict with ancestral will	KB-01, KB-02
2	Initial Reflective Awareness	Existential questioning of self and life choices	KB-03
3	Spiritual Anxiety	Fear of curses and supernatural signs	KB-08
4	Self-Confrontation	Mystical experiences forcing deep reflection	PMH-01
5	Awareness of Limitation	Acknowledgment of human powerlessness	PMH-03
6	Meaning-Making of Suffering	Acceptance of suffering as part of life	PMH-04
7	Reflection on Life Values	Re-evaluation of personal and cultural values	PMH-05
8	Self-Acceptance	Acceptance of inner conflict as part of identity	PMH-06
9	Meaning Integration	Integration of personal experiences and cultural values	PMH-07
10	Existential Reconciliation	Inner peace and holistic life awareness	PMH-09

Based on Table 2, mystical elements function as catalysts for the character’s psychological transformation. In the early stages, mystical experiences intensify anxiety, helplessness, and dependence on forces outside the self. This condition reflects an existential situation in which individuals have not yet developed reflective awareness of their life experiences (Rogers, 1961; Schultz & Schultz, 2017). In later stages, however, the same mystical experiences open spaces for contemplation and self-awareness, as the character begins to question the meaning of suffering and his position in life. This transformation of meaning indicates that mystical elements in *Wuni* operate as symbols of inner journeys rather than as mere narrative settings or dramatic effects. From a hermeneutic standpoint, symbols are not interpreted literally but understood as media through which hidden existential meanings are disclosed (Ricoeur, 1981; Gadamer, 2004). Consequently, mystical experiences become means through which Jaka reinterprets his relationship with tradition, ancestry, and himself. Thus, mystical elements in the novel *Wuni* can be understood as triggers of Jaka’s self-awareness that guide him toward existential reflection and the process of meaning-making in life. This reading reinforces the position of *Wuni* as a literary text rich in psychological and cultural dimensions, making it highly relevant for analysis within the framework of humanistic psychology and reflective literary education (Endraswara, 2013; Ratna, 2015).

3.3 Jaka's Search for the Meaning of Life

The search for the meaning of life constitutes a subsequent phase as well as the culmination of Jaka's psychological journey in the novel *Wuni*. After experiencing inner conflict and mystical encounters that destabilize his consciousness, the character begins to develop a new attitude toward suffering and life itself. At this stage, Jaka no longer seeks to avoid conflict but instead attempts to understand and consciously interpret it. This shift in attitude marks the character's psychological maturity in confronting life's realities (Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1961). From the perspective of Viktor Frankl's logotherapy (2006), the search for meaning in life is a fundamental human motivation that emerges particularly in situations of suffering. Meaning is not discovered through escape from conflict, but through the attitude individuals adopt toward unchangeable conditions. This perspective is relevant to Jaka's development, as he gradually shifts his life orientation from rejection to reflective acceptance. Suffering, once perceived as a burden, transforms into a meaningful experience that shapes self-understanding (Frankl, 2006; Madsen, 2021).

Jaka's search for meaning is marked by a transformation in how he perceives cultural origins and personal suffering. While at an earlier stage Javanese culture and ancestral bonds were experienced as constraints on freedom, they later become sources of self-understanding and life wisdom. This process reflects a dynamic dialogue between the individual and tradition, consistent with Gadamer's (2004) assertion that understanding arises from the fusion of personal experiential horizons with historical and cultural horizons (Gadamer, 2004; Magnis-Suseno, 2003). Accordingly, Jaka's search for meaning cannot be separated from the cultural and spiritual context that surrounds him. Meaning is constructed through a reflective process involving suffering, self-awareness, and acceptance of human limitations. This representation affirms that *Wuni* presents an existential journey aligned with humanistic psychology while also contributing significantly to the development of literary education oriented toward character formation and reflective awareness among students (Endraswara, 2013; Teeuw, 2015).

The textual data representing Jaka's search for meaning in life are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Data on Jaka's Search for Meaning in the Novel *Wuni*

No	Quoted Sentence	Page	Code
1	"If this suffering is indeed my path, then I must give it meaning."	112	PMH-01
2	"Jaka realized that fleeing from his origins only rendered his life empty."	135	PMH-02
3	"He no longer asked why, but for what purpose he must endure it."	164	PMH-03
4	"Life does not always need to be understood in order to be lived."	168	PMH-04
5	"Suffering is a harsh, yet honest teacher."	172	PMH-05
6	"He stopped resisting fate and began to enter into dialogue with it."	178	PMH-06
7	"The bitter experiences gave him direction."	181	PMH-07
8	"He chose to endure because he understood its meaning."	186	PMH-08
9	"The meaning of life grows from fidelity to the process."	190	PMH-09
10	"In the end, he made peace with himself."	195	PMH-10

Analysis of the data in Table 3 indicates that Jaka's search for meaning unfolds gradually and reflectively. The shift from asking "why" to asking "for what purpose" signifies a significant transformation in existential orientation. Jaka is no longer trapped in the search for causes of suffering, but instead begins to construct a meaningful life attitude. This shift aligns with existential-humanistic perspectives that emphasize individual attitudes toward suffering as the key to meaning-making (Frankl, 2006; Yalom, 1980). From a humanistic perspective, this condition reflects the process of self-actualization as proposed by Maslow (1970). Self-actualization is not always manifested through unlimited freedom, but through realistic acceptance of life conditions and the ability to assign meaning to experience. In Jaka's case, self-actualization emerges through awareness of limitations alongside personal responsibility for life choices, indicating psychological maturity and self-integration (Maslow, 1970; Kaufman, 2020). Jaka's search for meaning also demonstrates integration among personal, cultural, and spiritual dimensions. Javanese traditions, which initially served as sources of inner conflict, transform into ethical and existential foundations for the character. This process underscores that meaning does not arise in a vacuum, but through dialogue between individuals and the inherited values that shape them. This view is consistent with philosophical

hermeneutics, which positions understanding as the outcome of a fusion between personal and cultural horizons (Gadamer, 2004; Magnis-Suseno, 2003; Koentjaraningrat, 2009).

Thus, Jaka's search for meaning in *Wuni* represents a complete humanistic journey, from inner conflict and reflective awareness to existential reconciliation. These findings demonstrate that *Wuni* possesses strong potential as a literary learning text that fosters self-reflection, empathy, and deep understanding of the complexity of human experience (Ratna, 2015; Endraswara, 2013).

3.4 The Search for Meaning in Jaka's Life from a Humanistic Hermeneutic Perspective

The search for meaning in Jaka's life in the novel *Wuni* cannot be understood merely as an individual psychological response to suffering, but rather as an existential interpretive process that unfolds dialogically between the subject, lived experience, and the surrounding cultural–spiritual horizon of meaning. Within a hermeneutic framework, meaning does not appear as final or singular; instead, it is constructed through an ongoing process of understanding between parts and the whole (the hermeneutic circle) (Ricoeur, 1981; Palmer, 1969). Therefore, Jaka's search for meaning must be read as an interpretive process that evolves along with the character's narrative journey. According to Gadamer, understanding is always historical and shaped by *Wirkungsgeschichte* (the history of effects), which forms the horizon of the subject's consciousness (Gadamer, 2004). In this context, Jaka's consciousness is never neutral; it is shaped by Javanese cultural values, ancestral memory, and symbolically transmitted spiritual experiences. Thus, Jaka's search for meaning represents an encounter between the character's subjective horizon and the horizon of tradition embedded in the text (Ricoeur, 1981; Endraswara, 2011). Psychologically, this process aligns with Viktor Frankl's view that human beings are not driven solely by biological impulses or social needs, but by the will to meaning (*will to meaning*) (Frankl, 2006). However, *Wuni* demonstrates that this will to meaning does not always emerge in conditions of freedom and rational choice; rather, it often arises from constraint, fear, and unavoidable suffering (Yalom, 1980; Wong, 2012). Jaka does not seek meaning because he desires it, but because he is compelled by life situations that continuously challenge his very existence.

3.4.1 The Shift in Existential Orientation: From Rejection to Acceptance

The data presented in Table 3 indicate a significant shift in Jaka's existential orientation. In the early stages, suffering is perceived as something to be avoided or resisted. However, as the narrative develops, the character gradually transforms his perspective on these experiences. The statement, "*If this suffering is indeed my path, then I must give it meaning rather than fight it*" (PMH-01), serves as a crucial marker of this existential transformation. From the perspective of logotherapy, this change reflects a transition from a passive to an active attitude toward suffering. Frankl emphasizes that when individuals are unable to change a situation, they still retain the freedom to change their attitude toward it (Frankl, 2006). Jaka chooses no longer to position himself as a victim of circumstance, but as a subject responsible for the meaning of his own life (Batthyány, 2016). Hermeneutically, this shift reflects a *fusion of horizons*, namely the convergence between the character's subjective experiences and a renewed understanding of tradition and suffering that had previously been rejected (Gadamer, 2004). Jaka no longer reads his life experiences as meaningless burdens, but as existential texts that can be reinterpreted (Ricoeur, 1981). This process demonstrates that meaning in life is not discovered outside experience, but emerges from the courage to engage in dialogue with experience itself.

3.4.2 Reconciliation of Personal Identity and Cultural Origins

One crucial aspect of Jaka's search for meaning is the reconciliation between personal identity and cultural origins. Data PMH-02 indicate the character's awareness that escaping one's origins leads instead to existential emptiness. This realization marks a pivotal turning point in Jaka's relationship with tradition. In Javanese culture, individual identity is not understood atomistically, but as part of a network of genealogical and cosmic relations. Values such as *nrimo* (acceptance), *eling* (mindfulness), and *sangkan paraning dumadi* (awareness of origin and ultimate destiny) form a framework of meaning that emphasizes interconnectedness between humans, ancestors, and transcendent forces (Geertz, 1960; Magnis-Suseno, 1999; Koentjaraningrat, 2009). Initially, these values become sources of inner conflict, as they are perceived as constraints on personal freedom. Through reflection, however, the character begins to view tradition not as a shackle, but as a source of meaning (Endraswara, 2011). Within Rogers' humanistic framework, this process can be understood as an effort to achieve *congruence*, namely harmony between lived experience and self-concept (Rogers, 1961). Jaka no longer positions himself in opposition to tradition, but seeks to integrate his personal experiences with inherited values. This integration enables the character to live more authentically and holistically (Cain, 2010).

3.4.3 Suffering as a Medium for the Formation of Meaning

A deeper stage of the search for meaning becomes evident in data PMH-04 to PMH-07, when Jaka begins to perceive suffering as a medium for existential learning. The statement, “*He began to see suffering as a harsh but honest teacher*” (PMH-05), illustrates the transformation of the character’s perspective on painful experiences. This view is consistent with Frankl’s thought, which positions suffering as one of the primary pathways to meaning in life, provided that it is confronted with a meaningful attitude (Frankl, 2006; Batthyány, 2016). In this context, suffering is not naively glorified, but understood as an existential reality that demands ethical and reflective responses (Yalom, 1980). Hermeneutically, suffering functions as a symbolic text that opens new possibilities for understanding the self and life (Ricoeur, 1981). Jaka ceases to ask “why” and begins to ask “for what purpose” (PMH-03), a shift that signifies reflective maturity and existential awareness (Frankl, 2006).

3.4.4 Existential Reconciliation and the Integration of Meaning

The final stage of Jaka’s search for meaning is marked by existential reconciliation, as reflected in data PMH-08 to PMH-10. At this stage, the character is no longer fragmented between personal desires and external demands, but reaches a more stable form of self-acceptance. This acceptance is not passive resignation, but the outcome of prolonged reflection and intense inner dialogue (Rogers, 1961; Maslow, 1970). From the perspective of humanistic psychology, this condition indicates the attainment of contextual and culturally embedded self-actualization. Jaka’s self-actualization is not realized through radical freedom, but through fidelity to the life process and existential responsibility (Maslow, 1970; Kaufman, 2020). Thus, the search for meaning in Jaka’s life in the novel *Wuni* can be understood as a humanistic–hermeneutic process that affirms that meaning in life is neither universal nor ahistorical, but emerges from a dynamic dialogue between the individual, suffering, and tradition (Gadamer, 2004; Frankl, 2006; Ratna, 2015). The novel profoundly represents how modern Javanese individuals negotiate existential crises without relinquishing their cultural and spiritual roots.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the novel *Wuni* represents the complexity of human inner experience through the character of Jaka, who undergoes a psychological journey from inner fragmentation toward a more integrated and meaningful understanding of life. Through a humanistic psychological approach, the inner conflicts experienced by the character are not understood merely as narrative devices that drive the plot, but as existential processes that play a crucial role in the formation of self-awareness and personal growth. The tension between personal will and the demands of Javanese culture—rich in traditional values, ancestral bonds, and mystical beliefs—places the character in a condition of *incongruence*, namely a mismatch between actual experience and the expected self-concept (Rogers, 1961). However, rather than leading to psychological deterioration, these conflicts stimulate self-reflection and the search for meaning in life, rendering inner conflict a constructive and transformative psychological dynamic (Maslow, 1970; Frankl, 2006). The implications of this study suggest that the novel *Wuni* holds significant potential as an effective literary learning resource for fostering empathy, moral sensitivity, and students’ reflective abilities. The depiction of inner conflict and the search for meaning enables readers’ cognitive and affective engagement, while also encouraging a deeper understanding of the complexity of human experience within its cultural context. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its focus on a single main character and the use of a single psychological approach. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the analysis through interdisciplinary perspectives or comparative studies between *Wuni* and other literary works with similar themes, in order to enrich scholarly understanding of the relationship between literature, psychology, and character education (Gadamer, 2004).

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