

The Image of Women in the Novel *Tuhan Izinkan Aku Menjadi Pelacur* by Muhidin M. Dahlan and the Novel *Woman at Zero Point* by Nawa El-Saadawi: Comparative Literature Studies

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Abstract. This study discusses the image of women in the novel *Tuhan Izinkan Aku Menjadi Pelacur* by Muhidin M. Dahlan and Novel *Woman at Zero Point* by Nawa El-Saadawi using comparative literature studies. The problem to be discussed is how the image of women in the two novels is shown in three important aspects, namely the image of women as individuals, in the domestic environment, and in society. The purpose of this study is to reveal and compare the forms of women's images in the two novels. This study has relevance in the context of literary and gender studies because it discusses the image of women in literary works. The method used is descriptive qualitative with a comparative literature approach and data collection techniques in the form of library studies. The results of the study show that the image of women in both characters in their roles as individuals is that both characters experience inner conflict. The image of women in the domestic environment where both characters do not get a safe place in the family, even violence and harassment are carried out by their own family. Then the image of women in society is that women are often treated unfairly and experience oppression. This study shows that literary works can be a medium for social criticism of gender inequality, so that this study can contribute to the development of feminist literary studies

Keywords: Image, Women, Individuals, Domestic, Society.

1 Introduction

The image of women in literary narratives has always been a rich exploration material because it reflects individual struggles, domestic roles, and positions in the structure of society. Literature has long been a vessel for understanding and representing the existence of women. In line with that, Soekito explains that literature reflects human life and behavioral patterns over time, where each literary work reflects society and its era [5]. Literature, which is a reflection of the real world, plays an important role in revealing the representation of the existence of women, which of course depicts social conditions that are relevant to reality.

The novel *Tuhan Izinkan Aku Menjadi Pelacur* (TIAMP) and the novel *Perempuan di Titik Nol* (PDTN) are two literary works that depict the image of women. The authors

of the two novels try to describe the position of women as individuals, domestic, and society. The existence of women in the two novels is always interspersed with patriarchal culture and injustice that makes women victims. The image of women in the two novels is very important to be analyzed in depth.

The selection of material objects in the form of the TIAMP and PDTN novels is certainly based on several things. The TIAMP novel is a novel by Muhidin M. Dahlan which is often controversial because the theme raised is very sensitive and there are many wild thoughts in the novel, especially those related to religion. The TIAMP novel has also been adapted for the big screen with the title *Tuhan, Ijinkan Aku Berdosa* in 2023 which was directed by Hanung Bramantyo. Then the PDTN novel which is a novel from Egypt by Nawa El-Saadawi became a very popular novel. This novel has been translated into various languages which proves that this novel is liked by many people. Both novels raise the theme of women's struggles in facing injustice. Both novels also show the image of women represented by two main characters, namely Kiran and Firdaus.

Comparative literature studies are used to analyze the TIAMP and PDTN novels. Comparative literature is an effort to compare two or more literary works from one country with another country [7]. In this context, both novels come from different countries, where TIAMP is an Indonesian novel and PDTN is an Egyptian novel. The image of women in both novels certainly has differences due to the influence of social and cultural backgrounds.

There are several similar studies that are used as a literature review, including research conducted by Suprpto and Adelya (2023) which discusses the struggle of women in the novel *Perempuan di Titik Nol* [8]. Then a similar study was also conducted by Djameran and Nuraeni (2020) which discussed feminism in the novel *Perempuan di Titik Nol* [3]. Then the research conducted by Rokhmansyah (2016) which compared the views of the main characters on the profession of prostitutes in the novel *Perempuan di Titik Nol* and the novel *Tuhan Ijinkan Aku Menjadi Pelacur* [6].

This article will analyze and compare how the image of women as individuals, the image of women in the domestic environment, and the image of women in society from the two novels. The purpose of this study is to describe how the existence of women, especially as individuals, the domestic environment, and society. This research is also expected to contribute to the field of literature, especially those related to women's issues.

2 Methods

This study uses a qualitative descriptive research method with a comparative literature approach. Qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words observed from the phenomena that occur [1]. This method was chosen to allow for in-depth analysis of narrative texts in order to identify, interpret, and compare the images of women in the two novels. The primary data in this study are the full texts of the novels *Tuhan Ijinkan Aku Menjadi Pelacur* by Muhidin M. Dahlan and *Perempuan di Titik Nol* by Nawa El-Saadawi. Meanwhile, secondary data includes several sources such as journal articles and literary theory books that support the analysis of the image of women in both works. The data collection technique was carried out by carefully and repeatedly reading both novels to identify quotes, dialogues, narratives, and character descriptions that describe the image of women as individuals, in the domestic environment, and in society. Furthermore, data processing was carried out by analyzing the novel texts that were used as data and then comparing the images of women from the two novels.

3 Result and Discussion

The image of women in the *TIAMP* novel and the *PDTN* novel is represented by the main female characters in both novels, namely Kiran and Firdaus. Both characters experience various social, religious, and cultural pressures with different backgrounds. Discussions related to the image of women include the image of women as individuals, the image of women in the domestic environment, and the image of women in society.

3.1 The Image of Women as Individuals

The character of Kiran in the *TIAMP* novel was initially depicted as a religious woman who was devout, this can be seen when Kiran lived in an Islamic boarding school and Kiran who had a strong determination to practice and spread religious teachings for the good of the people. However, Kiran's stance as a religious woman was destroyed just like that. Kiran experienced various inner conflicts caused by her disappointment in God. Kiran, who was initially a religious woman, turned into Kiran who hated God so much.

"How my reason for living all this time is only and if only to serve God, purify myself, strive in life for the sake of upholding an ideal. But all those beliefs are invalid and stumble. How disappointed and heartbroken I am with a God who is like this" [2].

The quote shows an inner conflict within Kiran over her disappointment in God. The quote also shows an individual change within Kiran, who was initially a pious person,

shifting into a person who is very much at odds with religious norms and breaks the boundaries of social morality in order to find freedom for herself.

Meanwhile, the character of Firdaus in the PDTN novel is described as a strong, intelligent, and brave woman even though her surroundings always treat her unfairly. Firdaus is an individual who refuses to fully submit to the rules that actually limit her freedom as a woman.

“I have won over both, life and death, because I no longer have the desire to live nor am I afraid of dying. I fear nothing. Because during life it is our desires, hopes, fears that enslave us” [2].

The quote shows the individual strength of Firdaus which becomes his liberation. Firdaus who often experiences suffering and exploitation finally manages to free himself. Firdaus manages to place himself above the control of the norms that restrain him. Firdaus who is not afraid of death shows that he has the strength within himself and the belief that death is not a scary end, but a gateway to true freedom.

3.2 The Image of Women in the Domestic Environment

In the TIAMP novel, the image of women in the domestic environment leads to the religious environment and activism. The religious environment which should be a noble place is actually filled with hypocrisy. Kiran experiences mental and emotional stress caused by her disappointment with the people she trusts. Kiran as a woman is considered easily deceived so that she is persuaded to join the congregation. Until finally Kiran's trust is destroyed by those who should guide her. The domestic environment for Kiran is a place where her idealism is damaged and exploited for the personal interests of others who hide behind the cloak of religion.

The character of Firdaus in the TIAMP novel often receives unfair treatment and even harassment in the domestic environment, namely family and marriage. The unfair treatment includes Firdaus' father who always instills a patriarchal culture in his family, his uncle who abuses Firdaus when she is still young, and her husband who enslaves and commits violence against Firdaus.

“If one of his daughters died, Father would eat his dinner, Mother would wash his feet, and then he would go to bed, as he did every night. If it was a son, he would beat Mother, then eat his dinner and lie down to sleep” [4].

The quote shows how women are portrayed in the family. Girls in the family are always in a lower position than boys. A father who doesn't care if his daughter dies and when his son dies, he will blame the mother. This shows that women in a family dominated by patriarchy are always in the wrong position.

"At one point I saw my uncle's hand slowly moving from behind the book he was reading touching my leg. The next moment I could feel the hand exploring my leg to my thigh with trembling movements and very carefully" [4].

The quote shows how Firdaus was abused by her own family, namely her uncle. The family that should have been a place of refuge for her as a woman actually became a hell that was willing to do despicable things to a girl. Not only that, her uncle also exploited her by marrying Firdaus to an old man without Firdaus's own permission. In her marriage, Firdaus again received unfair treatment from her husband. Firdaus was made a slave who took care of the house and her husband, and Firdaus even experienced physical violence from her husband.

3.3 The Image of Women in Society

Both novels highlight the hypocrisy of society in viewing women. In the TIAMP novel, the character Kiran is seen as the scum of society because she is a prostitute. Some of the people who judge her are actually those who are Kiran's customers, from activists, politicians, to religious leaders. Kiran's image as a woman in society actually breaks down the hypocrisy of the most respected people.

Kiran's character in society also shows women's freedom. This can be seen when Kiran becomes a hangout in Malioboro until the early hours of the morning. Kiran's behavior refutes a stereotype in society that assumes that women should not go out in the middle of the night, Kiran becomes a representation of women who open society's minds that women do not always have to obey social norms that restrict their freedom.

The character Firdaus in the PDTN novel is an example of how women are viewed and treated in society. Firdaus is not only a victim of patriarchal culture but also someone who fights back. Society in this novel is dominated by men so that women are always in an "other" position. A woman's value in society is determined by the honor and chastity created by men. Women are taught to obey, be silent, and accept bad luck, including violence. Firdaus as a woman has become a victim of all the rules established by society and religion. For Firdaus, society is a place full of falsehood and injustice that curbs women's freedom

4 Conclusion

The novel Tuhan Ijinkan Aku Menjadi Pelacur and the novel Perempuan di Titik Nol are two literary works that depict the image of women represented by two main characters, namely Kiran and Firdaus. The image of women includes the image of women as individuals, in the domestic environment, and in society. The image of women as individuals, where Kiran is depicted as a woman who experiences a moral shift from being religious to someone who hates God, while Firdaus is depicted as a

strong, intelligent, and brave woman. The image of women in the domestic environment, where Kiran experiences disappointment with the congregation who are considered her own family, while Firdaus was raised by a patriarchal family, abused by her uncle, enslaved and beaten by her own husband. Then the image of women in society, where Kiran reveals the hypocrisy of society and becomes a symbol of women's freedom, on the other hand Firdaus lives in the midst of a society that glorifies patriarchal culture and Firdaus becomes a symbol of resistance against patriarchy and injustice.

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