

## Conference Paper

# The Life Struggle of Female Characters in the Novels of Abidah El Khalieqy (A Feminism Study)

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## Abstract

This research aimed to obtain an in-depth picture and understanding of the life struggle of female characters in the novels written by Abidah El Khalieqy. A qualitative descriptive research design was used with a feminist approach. The data in this research was the result of a study of the novels *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* and *Geni Jora* by Abidah El Khalieqy. The procedure used in analyzing research data was content analysis. The data validity analysis used the triangulation technique. Based on the results of research and discussion, it was found that the struggle to fight injustice was a struggle against 1) marginalization of women; and 2) subordination of women.

**Keywords:** female character, feminism, life struggle

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## 1. Introduction

A novel is created with various purposes regarding the existence of women in various cultural contexts as well as with various women's views and their world. Feminism literature is rooted in the understanding of women's inferiority. The key concept of feminism is equality between the dignity of women and that of men.

This research focused on the matter of feminism in the novels of *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (2001) and *Geni Jora* (2004). In her novels, Abidah El Khalieqy was solicitous to show the existence and independence of a woman. The author displayed the main characters as a form of struggle against the patriarchy system.

The study of women's life struggle in the novels by Abidah El Khalieqy (A Study of Feminism) served the purpose of obtaining an in-depth picture and understanding of the women's life struggle in the novels of Abidah El Khalieqy, which included: 1) the struggle against marginalization of women; and 2) the struggle against subordination of women.

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This research was worthwhile as an application of feminist literary critic theory about literary works in the form of novels. The results of this study could also add to the experience of students and teachers in terms of a deep appreciation of Indonesian literary works, especially the novels *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* and *Geni Jora* by Abidah El Khalieqy. In addition, it could be used as a model for gender-based literary learning.

Feminism was born in the early 20th century pioneered by Virginia Woolf. The term "feminism" is derived from the word "femine" (woman), meaning a woman (singular) who aims to fight for the rights of women (plural) as a social class. Women to be inside and outside all the symbolic structures that make up identity [1, 2]. On the other hand, Sugihastuti and Suharto [3] said that feminism is a movement of equality between men and women in all fields, i.e. political, economic, educational, social, or organized activities that defend women's rights and interests.

Furthermore, feminist literary criticism is generally associated with societal aspects of women's literary traditions, the experience of women in them, and the possibility of a woman's typical writing [4]. According to Selden [5], there are five problems that usually arise in relation to feminist theory, namely: (a) biological problems, (b) unconsciousness, (c) discourse, (d) experience, and (e) socioeconomy. The most important debate in feminist theory arises as the result of discourse problems as women are actually marginalized through the discourse that is controlled by men.

The development of women's studies related to the paradigm underlying the struggle or demand for gender concerns in Indonesia is outlined below: (1) The Concept of Women in Development (WID), (2) The Concept of Gender and Development, (3) The Concept of Gender Women Empowerment (PUG) or Gender Mainstreaming [6]. The gender perspective of this research is to explain the role of women with feminism problems in Abidah El Khalieqy's novels in relation to women's life struggle. What is meant by gender struggle is the effort made in the fight against gender inequality.

Marginalization is an accumulation of stereotypes, subordination, and overburden. According to Muniarti [7], marginalization is shifting women to the periphery. Women are depicted as weak, irrational, and less daring, and so unsuitable to lead.

In the household, society, and country, many policies are made with no regard for the importance of women. For example, the assumption that because women will later manage a household they do not have to study until higher education is a form of subordination. Subordination is an effect arising from the dominant position of men over women acquired through physical violence, coercion, structural violence (conducted by social institutions and economic power), and symbolic violence.

## 2. Methods

This study used a qualitative descriptive design with a view of “truth” as a deliberate delusion [8]. This feminist approach is used to understand the rules of society and the ongoing experience and autonomy of women in daily life [9]. The data in this study was the result of a review of the novels *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* and *Geni Jora* by Abidah El Khalieqy. The data analysis used in this research was content analysis. Content analysis is not just a manifestation of a text as Mayring [10, 11] suggests but emphasizes the interpretation of data. The triangulation technique, which is theoretical and logical, was used for data validity analysis.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. The life struggle of women in the novel *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*

#### 3.1.1. The struggle against marginalization of women

The struggle against the marginalization of women in the economic field is a process of marginalization of women’s position socially with the aim of impoverishing women so that women cannot act and express themselves as the women’s role is shifted from where it can be achieved. It was thus opposed by the figure of Annisa in the novel *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*.

In the economic field, Annisa wanted to be able to work and have her own income. By working at the beginning or at the end of the month she would receive a salary. She did not want to depend on men.

*“And if I go to the office, my shirt is fragrant and neat unlike Lek Sumi all day in the kitchen; her body smells and her clothes are oversized. If I go to the office, everyone looks at me with respect, they do not cover their nose if I pass as they cover their nose near Lek Sumi, because of the smell of onions and shrimp paste. And at the end of the month, I receive a salary.” (Perempuan Berkalung Sorban, p. 15)*

Annisa held that if she went to the office, her clothes were neat and tidy unlike Lek Sumi who was in the kitchen all day; her body smelled and her clothes were oversized. If Annisa went to the office, everyone looked at her respectfully; they did not cover

their nose if she passed as they closed their nose near Lek Sumi because of the smell of onions and shrimp paste.

In the domestic sphere, women also have the right to refuse, accept, or initiate in intimacy with their husbands.

*"A wife also has the right and freedom to refuse and accept." (Perempuan Berkalung Sorban, p. 139)*

Annisa's body always held rejection, as well as her soul, while in touch with Samsudin. Annisa never felt ready when invited to have sex with Samsudin. When women were not ready, for Annisa this hurt, she even felt abused. However, Annisa did not dare to refuse.

### 3.1.2. The struggle against subordination of women

Annisa fought for her right to avoid subordination in determining decisions in her life like men. Annisa had proved to herself that she was capable of doing great things, even beyond what men could achieve.

*"Although it has passed, long ago, childhood saved many stories. Sometimes fun, but more often annoying. And now that I've got the title, I have Mahbub, my only child, that story often appears in accordance with the knowledge I got from the sheets of my life book." (Perempuan Berkalung Sorban, pp. 1-2)*

Annisa had a desire to ride a horse. Her desire to learn to ride a horse had surpassed the supreme tone of her father's anger. Annisa was forbidden to ride a horse because she was female, and the ability to ride a horse should only be owned by a man. However, Annisa thought otherwise, that she had the same right. To realize that desire, she trained to ride the horse with her uncle, namely Lek Khudhori.

*"Yes, why, Pak? Can't I? Kak Rizal also learned to ride horses." (Perempuan Berkalung Sorban, p. 7)*

Annisa thought that whatever happened she must be able to learn to ride a horse. She would still learn to ride horses. Annisa's dream of being able to ride a horse was to equate her to Aisha or Princess Budur who could lead an army at war, to be like Tjut Njak Dhien who was also great, and she also wanted to be as great as Queen Balqis or Hindun bint Athaba. Moreover, being a leader meant that other people would be subservient. In fact, mighty men became obedient to her.

## 3.2. The life struggle of women in the novel *Geni Jora*

### 3.2.1. The struggle against marginalization of women

The root of gender inequality is related to the patriarchal culture. In fact, there are many women who are qualified in various fields in the public space, and not just adept at playing their role as mother and wife. In the political sphere, for example, women can have the same rights as men.

*"As in a fairy tale, the queens of Malukah, Khatun, they appeared little by little from the soft moans of yellowing pages in ancient books... they appeared... abdicating the throne from mother to daughter." (Geni Jora, p. 28)*

In the field of politics and government, women have equal opportunity to occupy certain positions, for example being the leader of a kingdom that does not have to be dominated by men.

### 3.2.2. The struggle against subordination of women

In the novel *Geni Jora* there was a subordination that placed the female characters in unimportant positions and had never been taken into account. The various forms of subordination that were handed down to women made the Kejora angry against men so that the idea of gender equality was championed by her. Kejora needed to fight for her rights and freedom in determining decisions in her life as a woman like men.

*"There is nothing in vain from rebellion. And nothing lasts from injustice. It always bears rebels with different types and models. And I think eradicating injustice is with a mirror on the face of the protagonist." (Geni Jora, p. 268)*

The situation of women who are in a superior position has never been taken into account. However, in today's development, it cannot be applied to women because today women tend to rebel. Their rebellion is not mere resistance. However, the rebellion is a form of gender struggle.

## 4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research and discussion, it was found that the struggle to fight injustice, among other things, is a struggle against 1) marginalization of women; and 2) subordination of women. The results of this study were expected to be useful

for teaching alternative appreciation of literature, that is, increasing the knowledge of culture, developing creation and taste, and supporting the formation of the character of learners. In addition, this study was expected to be useful for other researchers for subsequent research reference, so it can increase the range of literature research treasures.

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