

Exploring the Impact of Islamic Javanese Culture on Gender Discrimination in John Michaelson's Annisa

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Abstract: This research discusses gender discrimination in the novel *Annisa* by John Michaelson. The analysis focuses on women's struggle in a male-dominated environment, especially in Islamic Javanese culture. The discussion covered in this analysis includes women's characterization and discrimination that always appears in the novel. The method used in this thesis is a descriptive qualitative method. In addition, this research uses feminist theory. The analysis results show that discrimination obtained by the main character is an unresolved conflict with patriarchal society, especially her family and environment. Annisa rebelled against the existing situation but wanted equal status because she realized that living in an Islamic environment with Javanese culture made her aware of the limited space for movement. Findings suggest that discrimination takes the form of unfair treatment and stereotypes, leading to women's marginalization and subordination to men. The novel shows how Javanese culture plays a role in organizing social norms and influencing character interactions.

Keywords: *discrimination, woman, Islamic Javanese culture.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Women are seen as weak and are often underestimated by men, especially when living in a country where men are on the central throne, even though in life, women are no less critical in having roles, from conceiving and giving birth to educating and caring for children and husbands. The chapter argues that with daily mundane struggles, women fight the physical colonization of their land, society, and minds (Rithcer-Devoe, 2018). In existing cultures, such as Indonesia, women are constantly told that their lives will be in the kitchen and at home if they attend high school. Although the path is not easy, a woman must embark on it because it is "a significant inner journey to becoming a whole, balanced, and complete human being" (Murdock, 2020).

In Eastern cultures, there are several role models regarding women's curfews, how to play outside the home, and how to dress and look. Why should more dominant women get more pressure than men if, logically, the leader in the household will be a man? The social system in Javanese culture is patriarchal but not absolute. It means that in this social system, women have a position according to their nature. The novel discusses how women struggle for themselves in an environment that upholds men. The novel examines how Annisa's character lives in a male-dominated environment, starting from a family that has a religious family background because her father is a preacher and Javanese culture because she lives on the island of Java, eastern culture. After all, it tells about women's lives in Indonesia and Western culture because she has a lecturer named Peter from England. Religious understanding is one of the root causes of gender injustice.

In Javanese culture, according to Perdana(2021), having a daughter is like having a thorn in the flesh, which means parents must be careful in taking care of their daughters because girls in the future determine the family's progress. Carefulness in nurturing and looking after girls in Javanese culture is due to women holding manners or *unggah ungguh* because women in the future act as mothers who can teach children. Women in Java are defined as wanting data, always following the regulation in Javanese culture and *tata krama* that will make girls good at being mothers. Because in Javanese culture women must be *asah, asih, asuh*. Asah means the mother must have a broad insight into her family (Perdana, 2021), asih, and how to serve and love her children and husband. Related to this cultural tendency towards concealment of feelings is the movement towards indirectness or "indirection" in Javanese culture, as people often do not say what they mean (Cliford, 1976). Besides, Western and Eastern cultures have significant differences in various aspects. "*Fiqh*" lives by gender refers to a concept of fiqh that addresses women's concerns by interpreting Islamic teachings in the local Indonesian cultural context. It focuses on creating Islamic legal solutions with an emphasis on local principles (Agustina, 2021).

In literary works, discourse about women can be interpreted from the author's perspective on an issue displayed through the characters and characterizations raised in his work (Kurnianto, 2016). Events in a woman's mind can be used as a problem raised by an author through female characters in a literary work. The

female figure becomes the story's center, building a storyline (Ari Fitria, 2020). Women are often used as characters highlighted in a literary work because they have a role or are more inclined to the situation because women are considered to be more steeped in roles and more quickly adapt to the environment. Women are sensitive creatures, especially in feelings. The spotlight on women concerns the struggle. In their lives, equality in various fields is a tangible form that women have essential values in life. It has also unearthed many struggles that many women, who have been silenced, disempowered, and marginalized by their society, face when they resist traditional social and gender roles (Al-khatib, 2019).

The reason for using Annisa's John Michaelson is because it tells the story of a girl's struggle when she lives alongside a system that prioritizes men. It impacts her life, which is consistently underestimated, starting from her father underestimating her mother to the main character in Annisa's John Michaelson. The approach used is women's struggle related to liberal feminism, a movement of women who want to be equal to men in various fields. The conclusion is that women have equal rights in life in terms of economics, education, politics, and others. The same rights as women are always seen as number two by various existing perceptions. Through the use of a liberal feminist approach and the theory of women's struggle in the literary work of Annisa's John Michaelson, it is hoped that readers can understand how a woman fights for her rights in a male-dominated environment.

2. METHOD

In this research, the writer uses a feminist approach. The feminist approach can be seen from the angle of women's struggle with gender discrimination, reflected in a story as a novel. Wollstonecraft (2014) says this British feminist focused her struggle on improving women's education. She fought so that women could be more rational and play a role in the economic and social fields. It was a hard struggle, as women were traditionally valued for their domestic services, not their minds. Wollstonecraft developed her skills on a meager income (Wollstonecraft, 2014). The novel is a reflection of society. Wollstonecraft realized that this was detrimental to both men and women. Whereas if women get their rights, they will emulate the virtues of men, which will benefit both of them (Wollstonecraft, 2022).

It was taking a research design using qualitative descriptive because qualitative is a method that uses sentences, quotations, and words. Qualitative methods are appropriate because this research uses literary works, while descriptive is the depiction of characterization in literary works subject to research. In collecting data, first, the writer reads the novel Annisa by John Michaelson repeatedly and analyzes women's struggle in male-dominated. Then, the writer underlines and highlights the related data through the novel's character actions, statements, thoughts, and dialogues. Third, the author classifies the data appropriately: the types, causes, and research problems of women's struggle. Finally, the writer takes a conclusion.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Depiction of Annisa's Character

The depiction of character and characterization will discuss the introduction of character and characterization from literary works. In novels, character and characterization are depicted through statements, sentences, and dialogue between characters. The central character is called a protagonist whose conflict with an antagonist may spark the story's conflict. The protagonist is the central character with whom we generally sympathize. The antagonist is the character or force against which the protagonist struggles. Minor characters are unlikely to be used as viewpoint characters. States that the minor characters' appearances in the literary work will be brief and infrequent, but that does not mean they cannot shine whenever they are in the spotlight (Pope, 2005).

A dynamic character changes significantly during the story. Changes that qualify a character as dynamic include changes in sight or understanding, commitment, and values. It is said to be dynamic because the nature of the character changes, especially Annisa. Annisa is an obedient girl and does not act much when difficult; she prioritizes her parents over her education, so she has to struggle to get up to complete her education. However, she hears news related to her father's second marriage, which makes her rebel by living outside the rules made by her father.

3.1.1. Physical of Annisa's Character

In a literary work, character portrayals are described in writing. We relate to the characters based on what they say and do (or think and feel if we can access their inner monologue), not what they look like. *"Annisa sighed and adjusted her headscarf. She was tall and slim like her mother, dark-skinned and serious like father, with that same flat nose of his as well."* (Michaelson, 2015, p. 10). The quote above describes Annisa's physical condition in the novel, where her physique is half similar to her father and mother. From these physical characteristics, women often cause discrimination; one is stereotyping, which is seeing from a perspective, one of which is a character's body shape or physicality.

The physicality of a character is not always seen from the body shape alone but also from what the character is wearing. *"where an attractive young woman in a pale green headscarf had just appeared"* (Michaelson, 2015, p. 27). He described Annisa's characteristics when Peter met Annisa in Singapore at the Botanic Garden, where Annisa and her mother were after the control and decision about Ibu Ria's recovery from cancer.

The character is depicted chiefly written in literary works. Annisa, an Asian woman, is an ideal woman with a firm face because it is passed down from her father. Body shape influences how the character is treated in addition to the status of the essence. In addition to body shape, the clothes often used, from headscarves, dresses, and pants to accessories that the character uses, can be a particular characteristic of the essence.

3.1.2. Characteristics of Annisa's Character

A character trait is a literary term for adjectives and descriptions writers use to add personality and depth to characters. In fictional stories, character traits serve some purposes, Helping readers connect and identify with a character. The portrayal of Annisa's characteristics in the novel shows us that becoming an Islamic Javanese woman should be obedient, patient, and polite.

In a sub-chapter of the novel, Annisa tells about how Annisa's character is portrayed. The depiction can be through dialogue or explanation. One of them is with the explanation, *"Even though they said it was God's will, Annisa still blamed her father for her mother's cancer"* (Michaelson, 2015: 9). The quote from the explanation of the first sub-chapter, namely Annisa's disappointment with her father for prioritizing work over the health of her mother and wife. It can be categorized into stereotypical values, where a man can behave according to what they want without having to think about the long-term actions of what he does.

However, which human is not tired of a test, Annisa's character explains how she and her nature in this chapter in an explanation *"Annisa almost gave up on the situation"* (Michaelson, 2015: 9), explaining how to be in the lowest part of life after accompanying Ria's mother to treatment for healing from cancer suffered, in the course of treatment the time spent is approximately a year. The statement supports the section, subordination, which is a position under pressure following the title Struggle of Annisa as a Female Character in a Male-dominated, where the role of the man or father is higher than Annisa, and her mother in the treatment session to Singapore did not get permission from Mr. Ghozali. However, it was done for Mrs. Ria's recovery until Annisa was willing to leave her education for a while.

Women have delicate feelings, as in the statement, *"Annisa sat through the next ten minutes with a smile concealing her shame and disappointment."* (Michaelson, 2015:37). This explains how women's sensitivity can lead to discrimination, such as subordination, due to women's position in male domination and women's gentle nature. *"Annisa had spent the whole weekend cooped up in her bedroom"* (Michaelson, 2015:48). Annisa takes her time with this statement as she processes her father's second marriage and her mother's blindness to all of this. The fact that it was neatly covered up without regard for the future effects, especially for Annisa, in this incident can be a discrimination of women regarding stereotypes of Annisa.

"Yes, she had always been stubborn, but as far as he knew, she had never strayed from the path before. She was a good, dutiful daughter" (Michaelson, 2015:54). The above trait is the portrayal of Annisa's character in the novel, which is seen from her father's side because many changes envelop Annisa when there is a news related to her father's second marriage.

In addition to the physical characteristics of a character, there are also traits. Character depicts a human being, meaning the author can pour physical descriptions and traits into his work. Annisa is a woman raised in a family with an Islamic background and Javanese culture. She shows that politeness and respect for others are upheld. This trait becomes a supporting factor for the character later to get, sometimes, the discrimination in male domination.

3.2. Depiction of Annisa's Discrimination Experience

Discrimination against women is common. Society often attaches differences, denials, and restrictions to gender reasons. Fauzia (2019) says that women struggle. Through the female characters in the novel, the women have made many efforts to gain chances to get their rights. Discrimination often occurs against women, including marginalization, stereotyping, subordination, violence, and burden. This study uses three of the five types of discrimination, namely marginalization, subordination, and stereotyping, due to environmental factors and supporting characteristics by the research title, namely the struggle of women in male-dominated. There is a second marriage in the discrimination in John Michaelson's Annisa and how Annisa's character fights against discrimination.

3.2.1. Stereotyping of Being Woman

Stereotyping involves representing and evaluating others in ways that ratify and endorse unequal social relations (Pickering, 2015). In John Michaelson's Annisa, *"Annisa had spent the whole weekend*

cooped up in her bedroom" (Michaelson, 2015:48). Annisa takes her time with this statement as she processes her father's second marriage and her mother's blindness to all of this. The fact that it was covered up so neatly without regard for the future effects, especially for Annisa, in this incident can be a discrimination of women regarding stereotypes of Annisa. Annisa can only do what is soothing because her life in male domination is enough to make her depressed because, in terms of male perspectives, women are easy to melt, so according to Mr. Ghazali, his obedient son can understand and understand the decision about the second marriage that exists.

"Annisa kissed his hand and watched him leave the room. Shame he could not apply the same principle to coming home on time. However, then, her father was often inconsistent. Do this, and he would tell his audience, do that. Give love and warmth to your partner. Don't be stingy with your affections. It's your duty" (Michaelson, 2015:31). The quote above shows how women are governed by existing customs or culture, namely kissing hands as a sign of respect for elders. However, Mr. Ghazali rarely practices what he teaches the audience in his work: love and compassion. People always underestimate women's rights because of the lack of judgment towards women physically, *adab*, and knowledge.

Javanese society is a layered society. A layered society has complex manners because they have specific rules that can regulate their community members. Because of this, Javanese society has a social order that regulates its members constantly to be used as guidelines and not ignored so that it is embedded in the person as an identity (Turahmat, 2019). *"Was her mother no longer good enough for him? Was it because in thirty years of marriage, she had only managed to produce a single, lowly daughter?" (Michaelson, 2015:31).* In Javanese culture, women are indeed considered to play the most critical role in household life, in several factors highlighted, perhaps from the way they dress or the cleanliness of the house. However, what happens if the house is safe and clean, and suddenly the husband wants to marry because his desires are not fulfilled. In the quote above, Annisa wonders if her mother is so bad that her father remarried. Whereas in the social environment, especially in Javanese culture, there are many social penalties for marrying more than one, one of the targets of social punishment is the child.

A stereotype is a judgment in perspective in this research can be seen in Annisa's novel. How Annisa responds to her father's second marriage, realizing that she lives in a culture that prioritizes men but should not abuse that right for pleasure. It makes Ibu Ria, Annisa's mother, feel discouraged at being denied her rights as a mother and wife. Likewise, Annisa is seen as a child for entering into a second marriage without her consent, even though it is parents and children in a family. As Maula (2016) said, the challenges for Indonesian Muslim women from active in cultural, religious, and political factors perception of a divide between private and public spheres has hindered women's participation in any factors. In contrast, their cultural and social status, primarily shaped by religious beliefs, further impacts their involvement in political activities.

3.2.2. Marginalization of Being Woman

In gender inequality, marginalization is defined as the marginalization of a group, making it seem as if it does not exist. This results in the marginalized party losing the rights they should get. It is also experienced by women when this marginalization process occurs. Women are worse off than men in this gender injustice. For example, in the household life experienced by Annisa, as a child, she always obeys what is arranged by her father as the head of the family; in the struggle of women in male domination, Annisa obeys the rules that apply as a woman with an Islamic background and eastern culture, namely wearing closed clothes and not coming home late at night, as in the following quote Annisa wears a veil or closed clothes because she is in the house.

"He gathered his notes and made a beeline for the doorway, where an attractive young woman in a pale green headscarf had just appeared. A spark of recognition set the lights of his memory banks blinking. Singapore. The Botanic Gardens. She had been walking around the Cool House with her mother and her aunt." (Michaelson, 2015:27)

The quote above describes Annisa wearing a hood outside the house and Peter, the lecturer's memory of Annisa accidentally meeting at the Botanic Garden. Marginalization is where a group is put second; in the novel, there is a quote where Annisa's father prioritizes ratings on television rather than accompanying Annisa's mother for treatment because Annisa's father, or Pak Ghazali, prioritizes his career.

There is an assumption that men have essential roles in all aspects because women do not have important roles. It can be said that women have only been subjected to poverty and marginalization. The suppression of women's natural abilities through education emphasizes the qualities needed to glorify and serve men rather than enhancing their natural abilities as human beings. She realized this resulted from the strong male dominance in society that encouraged women to be passive, pay more attention to their appearance, and neglect all other important matters, even though Wollstonecraft supported equality between the sexes in certain areas of life. Annisa's frustration is unstoppable as she says, *"This has to be a joke" (Michaelson, 2015:43).* How can a strategy for a second marriage be neatly organized, without the

knowledge of one's only child, whether children should not know how and what their parents are doing. The disappointment can be seen in Annisa's eyes and tone of voice. This factor is also included in marginalization, which limits women to men.

Marginalization is the basis of the novel, Annisa explains many cultures used, and the background of the main character is Islamic culture, Java, where the culture has many restrictions, especially in the social environment. Starting from how to dress up, eat, talk, and so on.

3.2.3. Subordination of Being Woman

Mary Wollstonecraft suggested that women and men should be treated as rational beings and form a social order that competes based on reason, not material. Subordination is gender inequality where one gender has a higher position than the other. Usually, it is women who are in the number two position. Thus, subordination is defined as a social process in a society that raises a policy on women so that it does not consider that women are essential, which positions women and their work lower than men (Rafli, 2017). That kind of comparison between gender shows that there is gender relation. The gender constructions are like binary opposition of men and women that involves a hierarchy (Benneth, 2004). Women have delicate feelings, as in the statement, *"Annisa sat through the next ten minutes with a smile concealing her shame and disappointment."* (Michaelson, 2015:37). This explains how sensitive women are, which can lead to discrimination such as subordination, because of women's position in male domination and the gentle nature of women.

The subordination of women occurs because of gender differences that stem from ideas of men who view women as intellectually and physically less capable than men, compared to men. As has been explained in the previous discussion, Mr. Ghazali considers women to be inferior. The evidence is when he asks his wife to follow all his wishes without caring about her wishes. As happened to Annisa and her mother, because of this reason, they decided to fight against subordination.

"But this was Ghazali. He expected everyone to think the same way he did; when it turned out not to be so, he was at a total loss. Like when he had spoken to her about taking another wife. He automatically assumed she would agree because he had felt his reasons were good and fair." (Michaelson, 2015:52-53). Moreover, the quote above shows how Mr. Ghazali wants to remarry and has control over whether or not to agree to remarry. It is the same as judging that women are inferior to men. Women have the right to control their self-esteem. The novel's statement shows that male dominance in Eastern culture is substantial. In Surah An-Nisa verse 3, Allah says: *"If you fear that you will not be able to do justice to the rights of orphans (when you marry them), marry any other woman you like: two, three, or four. However, if you fear that you will not be able to do justice, marry only one or an enslaved woman you own. That is closer to not doing injustice."*

The above verse is the legal basis for the permissibility of polygamy in Islam and a warning to those who do it. If you are worried that you will be unable to do justice, then monogamy (having one wife) is sufficient. Allah also says that it is the best way to avoid being unjust. Reporting from the book *Fiqh Munakahat* by Abdul Rahman Ghazaly, scholar Rasyid Ridha views polygamy as bringing more risks or harm than benefits. Because there is jealousy, envy, and complaining in human nature, this disposition will quickly appear in polygamous family life. So, conflict can be triggered in a polygamous relationship and endanger the integrity of the family.

Subordination is the position below. The position of women should be more recognized. The Struggle of Women: To be free from being a married woman, women must first recognize that they are oppressed, are "the other" in society, and have no life for themselves (Beauvoir, 1949). In the novel, Annisa tells Annisa's resilience against this underestimation. She started by trying to finish college to wanting to protest what she experienced after many people understood what her father did.

4. CONCLUSION

Research on John Michelson's novel *Annisa* revolves around sexism and women's struggles in a male-dominated environment. This analysis focuses on the protagonist, Annisa, who faces discrimination and injustice in many aspects of her life, including her family and her patriarchal society. This study uses descriptive-qualitative methods and applies feminist theory to explore the representation of women in novels. In this novel, Annisa is portrayed as an Islamic Javanese woman, obedient, patient, and polite. Analysis showed that Annisa experienced discrimination due to patriarchal norms and societal expectations. Although she rebels against these norms, she recognizes the limitations placed on her conduct in the Islamic environment accompanying her Javanese culture and desires equal status. Findings suggest that discrimination takes the form of unfair treatment and stereotypes, leading to women's marginalization and subordination to men. The novel shows how Islamic Javanese culture plays a role in organizing social norms and influencing character interactions. In summary, this study explores the gender inequalities and challenges women face in the male-dominated society depicted in the novel *Annisa*. The

findings highlight the struggles of women surviving a society where opportunities and freedom of movement are limited and underlined the need for greater gender equality and empowerment.

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