

BREAKING DOWN THE GENDER CONSTRUCTION: FEMINIST CRITICISM IN *SINAR MATA IBU* BY HARRIS EFFENDI THAHAR

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Abstract: *The division of roles and distinctions between the traits of men and women are products of the construction of gender in a deeply ingrained society. Because each sex can exhibit masculine or feminine traits depending on the circumstance and condition, these roles and characteristics cannot be used as a binary opposition in practice. The short story "Sinar Mata Ibu" features gender roles that are prevalent in our culture. The text of this short story, however, contains resistance that subverts gender construction when viewed from a feminist perspective. This narrative text makes the claim that both women and men can exhibit both feminine and masculine traits.*

Keywords: *gender construction, feminism, short stories, narrative texts*

Abstrak: Konstruksi gender di dalam masyarakat yang sudah mengakar telah membentuk pembagian peran serta perbedaan karakteristik perempuan dan laki-laki. Pada praktiknya peranan serta karakteristik ini tidak dapat dijadikan suatu oposisi biner karena masing-masing jenis kelamin dapat memiliki karakteristik maskulin maupun feminine tergantung dari situasi dan kondisinya. Salah satu cerpen yaitu "Sinar Mata Ibu" memuat konstruksi gender yang ada di dalam masyarakat. Akan tetapi, dengan menggunakan perspektif feminisme, teks cerita pendek ini memuat perlawanan yang mendobrak konstruksi gender tersebut. Teks naratif ini memuat wacana bahwa karakteristik feminine dan maskulin dapat dimanifestasikan baik oleh perempuan maupun laki-laki.

Keywords: konstruksi gender, feminisme, cerita pendek, teks naratif

INTRODUCTION

It makes sense that men and women have different gender-related characteristics from one another regarding biological anatomical differences. But there is one distinction between the two that has more to do with construction than nature. These variations are due to gender. As Bell Hooks notes in his article "Understanding Patriarchy" (2004), gender is a socially constructed division that classifies the fundamental characteristics of men and women:

As their daughter I was taught that it was my role to serve, to be weak, to be free from the burden of thinking, to caretake and nurture others. My brother was taught that it was his role to be served; to provide; to be strong; to think, strategize, and plan; and to refuse to caretake or nurture others. I was taught that it was not proper for a female to be violent, that it was "unnatural."

Several alternative gender constructions between men and women can be deduced from Hooks' remark above. Men are typically tied to strong, logical, rational features whereas women are typically attached to fundamentally weak, emotional, maternal traits and perform a function to serve. Dulay (2007:4) asserts that society categorizes men as masculine and distinguishes women by using feminine terms. The masculine is associated with being powerful, strong,

logical, and assertive in the public sphere, whereas the feminine is associated with being timid, passive, engaged in family conflict, sensitive, and irrational.

This gender construction brings up the issue of unfairness, which hurts both the male and female sides as well as the female side as the submissive. Such problems are frequently encountered in many aspects of daily life, from the family to the larger community. The role of the media, including print, electronic, and even digital media, includes broadcasting topics pertaining to gender construction and the injustices it causes.

One form of media where gender concerns might arise is literary works. Maria Josephine Kumaat Mantik's dissertation, *Gender in Literature*, was one of the studies that brought up gender themes in literary works. *Analyse of a Mega-Mega Drama* (2006), her research aims to expose the author's ideological underpinnings for her literary creations. Also, it was discovered that there were differences in the traits of male and female figures and their respective responsibilities in society. There are traits of figures that support the gender constructs that are prevalent in that society, and some even break down them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender can be understood as a result of biological and anatomical variations that promote the emergence of cultural elements. Early in 1977, a number of London feminists, according to Showalter (1989), abandoned the usage of antiquated terms like patriarchy and sexism in favor of gender discourse. Marhumah (2011) stated that gender theories can be broadly divided into two categories. The first category of natural theories holds that biological causes are what determine the differences in roles between men and women. The male anatomy, differs in a number of ways, with women playing a major influence in determining the social roles of both sexes. Because they are typically viewed as having greater potential, being stronger, and being more productive, men play a significant role in society. The second category is the nurture theory group, which believes that sociocultural variables play a larger role in determining the variations in social roles and character between men and women. According to this viewpoint, power dynamics that have been upheld by men for generations are what establish the labor division between men and women in society rather than biological reasons. Conflict theories and feminist ideas back up this perspective.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses feminist perspectives, particularly those related to gender constructions, to analyze short story narrative texts. It is an analytical descriptive qualitative study. By examining passages from the short story, this study seeks to identify instances where gender construction discourse encounters resistance in literary texts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Sinar Mata Ibu is a short story that takes place in a familial setting. It features three primary characters that emerge frequently. They are "I", "mother", and "wife". These three figures demonstrate diverse attitudes toward gender structures, whether they are breaking or affirming them. Several of the quotes in this short narrative demonstrate that neither men nor women are preoccupied with gender conceptions. Women are not always feminine, and males are not always masculine. Both men and women are the same, in the sense that they are both human beings with feminine or masculine characteristics. In this short story, the character of "Wife" has masculine tendencies, but the characters of "Mother" and "I" (as husband and a man) demonstrate feminine traits.

In the short story "Sinar Mata Ibu", the "mother" is described as an elderly woman who is senile and chatty. Some quotes in the short story reflect the mother character's feminine traits, such as being sensitive, emotional, and irrational. Furthermore, her mindset formulated the notion that she cemented the construction of gender. The following quote exemplifies the femininity of the mother character, who adores her youngest son:

"Istri Rudi itu tidak bisa masak. Kasihan Rudi. Dia itu sejak bayi hingga jadi mahasiswa tak pernah merasa enak makan, kecuali masakan Ibu, " kata ibu mertua saya itu kepada saya.

"kasihan Rudi, istrinya tidak telaten merawat suaminya. Anak-anak dibiarkan manja sama Bapaknyanya. Padahal, bapaknyanya capek, kan?"

"That Rudi's wife can't cook. Poor Rudi. Since he was a little boy until being a student, he never felt like eating well, except eating Mom's cooking, " my mother-in-law told me.

"Poor Rudi, his wife is not properly taking care of her husband. The children were left playing around with their father. I'm quite sure their father must be tired, right?"

The two lines above demonstrate the mother character's feminine attitude, which is very emotional when she believes her child does not receive adequate attention from his wife. In a roundabout way, the mother character confirms the gender construction that men as ordinates must be so well and perfectly served. Furthermore, the sentence " The children were left playing around with their father. I'm quite sure their father must be tired, right? ", represents the mindset of mothers who believe that caring for children, including playing with them, is the wife's responsibility (mother). In fact, there is nothing wrong with a father showing his love for his children and being fully involved in nurturing them. Father's role in a family is commonly constructed as a breadwinner. This division of labor is one of the gender constructions. Necessarily, raising children is a responsibility shared by both parents in order for them to develop physically and mentally to their full potential. This demonstrates the injustice men experience as a result of ingrained gender constructs in society because the father loses their bonding with his child due to gender role expectations.

Moreover, fathers should be no longer just the family's breadwinners, according to a

psychological study done by Septiani et al. (2018). Father figures are crucial in childcare to prevent negative or deviant behaviors that have recently started to occur in the younger generation. This study employs quantitative methods and distributes a scale to children in their late childhood that measures the development of moral intelligence as well as the role of the father in parenting. To determine the correlation relationship, statistical analysis of measuring devices is performed. Based on the value of $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$), the findings of this study indicate a correlation between the development of a child's moral intelligence and the role of the father's involvement in parenting. Additionally, father involvement has a 36% positive impact on a child's development of moral intelligence. As a result, it is anticipated that the father figure will be able to directly influence how children are raised.

Sejak kepergian Rudi, ibu sangat berubah. Pandangan matanya terlihat kosong. Ibu jadi pendiam dan amat perasa. Dan, ibu bisa tidak tidur semalaman jika siangya tidak ada yang bersedia mengantarnya ke kuburan Rudi di bulan pertama setelah kepergian Rudi. Di bulan pertama itu, kalau hari tidak hujan, acara ziarah ke kubur itu menjadi wajib bagi ibu. Kami, mantu-mantu ibu secara bergantian mengantar ibu ke pemakaman umum yang terletak di pinggir kota. Selain menangis dan berdoa di kubur Rudi, ibu bercakap-cakap dengan batu nisan. Gerombolan pengemis, petugas kebersihan pemakaman, dan penjual kembang seperti sudah menjadi langganan ibu. Untuk itu kami selalu membekali ibu uang receh secukupnya. Soalnya ibu hampir-hampir tidak mengenal lagi nilai mata uang. Ibu akan memberikan lembaran uang berapa pun jika ada pengemis meminta, tidak peduli lembaran lima puluh ribuan, atau seratus ribuan.

The mother has changed dramatically since Rudi's death. Her eyes appeared to be blank. Mom became quiet and refined. And, if no one is willing to drive her to Rudi's grave in the first month after Rudi's death, mom can't sleep all night. If it didn't rain during that first month, the mother's pilgrimage to the grave became mandatory. We, as the in-law, took turns accompanying her to the public cemetery on the outskirts of town. The mother spoke with the tombstone while crying and praying at Rudi's grave. Mothers' subscriptions seemed to have turned into swarms of beggars, funeral janitors, and flower sellers. As a result, we always give dimes to mothers to try. Mom, you see, has almost forgotten the value of money. Mom will give any sheet of money to any beggar who asks, whether it is fifty thousand or one hundred thousand.

The aforementioned quote captures the mindset of the character Mother; her heart is so tender that it is simple to give way to such profound sadness. In the face of tragedy, she also tends to behave irrationally. These attitudes are evident in the actions mentioned in the quote, which include talking to the tombstone. One of the attitudes that denote femininity is this one. But whether or not it is considered feminine, it is only natural for a mother to be devastated when she loses her beloved child. What matters in this situation is how the character handles the tragedy. It is possible to deduce from the quotation that the mother holds her daughter-in-

law responsible for her son's illness. At this point, we can examine how the mother character treats her son as a special one to be served while holding her daughter-in-law partially responsible for issues that are not logically her fault. It also depicts a mother character who lacks the ability to think clearly and prioritizes her emotions, highlighting a feminine trait. On the other hand, it also demonstrates how social inequalities can be produced by ingrained gender constructions in society.

Along with the mother character, the fundamental qualities of women—such as loving and a soft heart—that are constructed in gender differences are actually seen in the men represented by the character "I" (Husband) in this short story. "I" was described as a loving son-in-law to his in-laws. This is demonstrated in the following passage.

Kalau sudah begitu, saya akan menarik istri saya dan memintanya untuk bersabar dan bersikap baik dan santun pada ibu. Apalagi akhir-akhir ini ibu mulai nyinyir, suka lupa, sekaligus pendiam. "Semua tingkah laku aneh itu harus disikapi dengan kesabaran seorang anak yang berbakti," saya bilang.

When that happens, I'll stop my wife and ask her to be patient, kind, and considerate toward Mom. My mother has recently developed a smirk, a tendency to forget things, and a quiet demeanor. I said, "All such odd behavior must be dealt with with the patience of a filial son.

The aforementioned quote demonstrates that men are capable of having tender hearts. The character Aku breaks the gender stereotype that says men should be assertive and shouldn't be whiny or compassionate by trying to take care of her mother-in-law's feelings. The way the character is presented also suggests that he is a man who pays close attention to details and is extremely sensitive, particularly to shifts in his in-laws' demeanor. Of course, this mindset runs completely counter to the gender construct that says men were not made to be sympathetic toward other people's woes. This is supported by the passage below:

The mother was silent. When I went out wanting to neutralize the atmosphere, with a smile as kind as possible to her, my mother looked at me as if asking for protection from the "threat" of sin that my wife threw out of control. I took my mother to eat with me. I coded my wife to serve lunch even though it was only ten o'clock that Sunday. Mom obeyed.

The mother kept quiet. My mother looked at me as if she were asking for protection from the "threat" of sin that my wife had allowed to spiral out of control when I went out to try and calm the situation with the kindest smile I could muster toward her. I ate dinner with my mother. Despite the fact that it wasn't even 11:00 that Sunday, I told my wife to serve lunch. Mom complied.

The character's behavior reveals a profoundly sensitive nature toward those around him. The attitude of the character is extremely contradictory if it follows the gender construction pattern. Whether intentionally or not, the character has embedded himself into domestic sphere. The character also notices and eliminates everything connected to the chaos that prevails in the

home. As a result, both men and women have the option of being feminine or masculine. Nothing is predetermined or created by society; everything is a matter of choice. In contrast, the wife, a female character, actually represents a man's masculine attitude in terms of gender constructs like rational, firm, and frontal. The wife character is described as a wife who tends to spout out every utterance with logic without considering the feelings of the person who hears it and is not particularly sensitive to changes in her own mother's attitude. The quote that follows demonstrates the wife's capacity for logical and rational thought:

. "Ah, apakah artinya kertas-kertas itu. Lebih baiklah dikasihkan kepada orang yang lebih membutuhkannya," jawab ibu ketika istri saya menyoal ibu setelah nekat memberikan uang lima puluh ribuan kepada pengemis buta di gerbang pemakaman.

"Banyak yang dapat dilakukan dengan uang sebanyak itu, Bu. Uang sebanyak itu bisa untuk jajan si Oni seminggu. Atau untuk membeli keperluan dapur," kata istri saya

. "Apa kamu kekurangan uang? Uang pensiun papamu masih banyak di bank. Sudah lama ibu tidak mengambilnya. Kamu mau, atau kamu perlu? Berapa?"

"Bukan begitu, Bu. Itulah yang mengajar kami dulu supaya hidup jangan boros."

"Kalau untuk akhirat, ibu mau boros. Itu semua bakal diganti Tuhan dengan imbalan yang berlipat ganda di sorga. Ibu sekarang mau ke sana," ujar orang tua itu dengan mata berlinang.

. Ah, I wonder what those papers mean. When my wife questioned my mother about giving \$50,000 to a blind beggar at the cemetery gate, she said, "It's better to give it to those who need it more.

"Ma'am, you can do a lot with that amount of money. The Oni snacks can be purchased weekly with that amount of money. Or to purchase kitchenware," my wife said

"Do you need more money? Your father's pension still has a sizable amount in the bank. It has been a while since Mom picked it up. Are you required to or do you want to? What amount?"

"No, Mom, that's not it. My mother was the one who first taught us to live simply.

Mom wants to live lavishly in the afterlife. God will replace it all with a greater reward in heaven. The old man with tears in his eyes said, "Mom wants to go there right away.

Mother's attitude of wasting so much money on beggars every time she visited Rudi's grave was rationally responded to with the character's (wife) complaints. Her attitude demonstrates her ability to manage the household economy, such as considering that money squandered by her mother could be used for her children's needs or daily needs. Although it may appear that she is unappreciative of her mom's feelings, her attitude demonstrates that women, like men, can think logically and efficiently. The character can determine what is not and should be done under certain conditions, particularly the attitude of the mother, who is too extravagant to waste money on beggars on a regular basis. She can also be insensitive and even callous in expressing her thoughts, causing the gender construction to collapse. In contrast, her attitude can be compared to "the husband" character as a man who is being kind-hearted to face a

similar condition. In conclusion, both men and women can be tough, insensitive, or even soft-hearted and emotional.

The next quote describes the wife's reaction to her mother's senility with blunt words. If in the gender construction, women must speak the word meekly, then the wife's character has broken the construction with the following quote:

Hampir tiap hari Yeni memberi ibu apel atau jeruk. Nanti, ketika ibu ingin makan buah itu, hilang. Tanya sama dia, selalu bilang tidak tahu. Siapa lagi kalau bukan dia, orang kampung rakus itu? Coba!"Istri saya tertawa ngakak."Kok, kamu tertawa?" "Habis, saban Kak Nurma menelepon saya, pasti ada saja yang diceritakannya tentang ibu. Nah, di antaranya buah-buah itu sering ditemukan sudah membusuk di dalam almari pakaian ibu. Kadang-kadang kalau pembantu itu membersihkan kolong tempat tidur ibu, juga sering ditemukan apel busuk, jeruk busuk. Jadi, ibu jangan sembarang tuduh orang mencuri. Katanya mau beribadat. Itu kan menambah dosa jadinya. Ya, enggak?"Ibu lama terdiam.

Mom typically receives apples or oranges from Yeni every day. The fruit was gone when the mother went back to eat it later. Ask him; he always claims not to know. If not him, who else is that vile villager? Try it!" My wife chuckled aloud. Why are you laughing, I ask. After all, Sister Nurma must tell me something about my mother every time she calls. Well, the fruits are frequently discovered among them in the mother's closet rotting. When the maid cleans the mother's bed, rotten fruit is occasionally discovered there as well. Mothers don't always accuse people of stealing, therefore. He claimed that he desired to pray. That would make the sin even worse. Yes, no?" mother kept quiet.

The above quote describes the situation in which the mother character expresses her complaint, which is then met with a rebuttal from the wife character. The heartless relationship of the wife's figure reveals the most logical answer to the mother figure. When compared to the gender construction that has prevailed in society thus far, it is a very taboo subject. The wife's character is capable of distinguishing between what is good and bad. Despite the fact that she was confronted with her own mother, she still wouldn't justify her mother's act of accusing others without evidence. This logical way of thinking is inversely proportional to her own husband's soulful attempt to understand all of his in-laws' behavior, even though he knows it is wrong.

CONCLUSION

"Sinar Mata Ibu" is a short story about a phenomenon that defies gender construction. It can be concluded from the characterization that men and women can have both masculine and feminine characteristics, and there is nothing better. The binary opposition of men's and women's fundamental nature differences that society constructs is precisely broken down in this short story. They are both human beings who act in accordance with their respective

personalities, irrespective of their sex. Both men and women are likely to have masculine and feminine traits. Both are the decisions made by each individual in addressing a problem, rather than being deliberately chosen or constructed by society.

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