

## Research Article

# Women's Struggle for Oppression in the *Cantik Itu Luka* Novel by Eka Kurniawan

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**Abstract:** This study aims to describe the form of struggle of the main character Dewi Ayu in the novel *Cantik Itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan. In the novel, Dewi Ayu fights against the oppression of women and the steadfastness of the main character fighting for women's rights. In society in general, gender differences make women looked down upon by men. The problem in this study is How did the oppression of women occur in the post-colonial period according to the novel *Cantik Itu Luka* By Eka Kurniawan? What is the position of women, especially those who are still young in the novel Beautiful That Wound?, and How is the resistance of women in fighting for their rights?. In this study using the approach of the flow of feminism. Feminism is an effort to equalize the position between women and men. This type of research is descriptive qualitative.

**Keywords:** Struggle, women, oppression, feminism.

## A. Introduction

Literature is an embodiment of the existence of life in society. It is through this literary work that the author in expressing his ideas. In other words, literary works, as well as other works of art and in itself the entirety of human creation, are at once produced by society and culture (Ratna, 2007: 266). So that between, literature, society, and culture have a close relationship. This can create a novel. The novel is also used as a conveyance of the author's ideology to the reader. The idea that the author expresses is receptive by the reader. The novel *Cantik Itu Luka* (herein after abbreviated as *CIL*) is the work of Eka Kurniawan, an alumnus of Universitas Gadjah Mada, he has published four novels, four collections of short stories, and one essay in the course of his writing career. His works have also been translated into more than 30 languages, and earned several awards. This *CIL* novel has been translated into Japanese and Malaysian. This novel has been reprinted several times and still has received widespread appreciation from the public, the media, especially literary critics.

Kurniawan often uses vulgar language in his novels and raises issues of sexuality or gender, always telling stories about injustice towards women through the character in the novel. Kurniawan also invites readers to laugh at the suffering of the character. This is meant to laugh not to mock, but to invite the reader to look more at reality. The assumption that women have always been the second sex is also very much highlighted. This is an understanding of how the rights and role of women are reflected in literary works. This *CIL* novel is a novel that has psychiatric elements that are depicted in every event experienced by the main character. There are realist and magical elements making *CIL* novel difficult to guess its direction and form. The style of language used is also vulgar. This is what makes readers sometimes feel a little uncomfortable, but that is the characteristic of Eka Kurniawan.

*Cantik Itu Luka* tells the story of Dewi Ayu who was forced to become a prostitute in the late colonial period. Her life continued to be lived until she was crowned as a prominent prostitute in

Halimunda, a village on the outskirts of the coast. Dewi Ayu was blessed with 4 children during the time she was a prostitute, without a husband and the marriage process. The eldest child to the third child Dewi Ayu inherited the beauty from her mother, namely Alamanda, Adinda, and Maya Dewi. However, unlike the youngest, Dewi Ayu's youngest child has a bad appearance. This different destiny made Goddess Ayu happy and thought that her youngest child was named the Beauty. By giving this name, Dewi Ayu hopes that the Youngest will not have the same fate as herself and her three other children.

This is because, during the colonial period, there was a lot of oppression that occurred. Moreover, many of the opposing parties need the venting of their lust. Because in his country, the affairs of lust are commonplace. And our country at that time was a country that was being colonized. That's why it was easy for the colonists to take beautiful young women employed in brothels. Later it will be used as a "Sex doll" by the men.

The study of Feminism was used in this study because this study examines things related to the oppression of women that occurs in the *CIL* novel. And the struggle of women to defend their rights is more highlighted in this study. We'll go into it further on those things. Research on *CIL* has indeed been widely studied. This proves that *CIL* is one of the novels that has received a lot of attention from Indonesian Literature lovers. Therefore, the selection of literary criticism of feminism in research is very suitable. Because of the rejection of women towards men that occurs in *CIL* novel. From what has been explained, the reason why researchers chose the object of study of *CIL* novel is the first reason, to find out the oppression of women in the colonial period. The second reason is the struggle of women to defend their rights by resisting.

## **B. Methods**

The type of research used is a qualitative descriptive type of research. This qualitative approach as a whole makes use of a way of interpretation by presenting in a descriptive form words. Novels that describe case studies are studied and these results can identify the achievement or non-achievement of the female character referred to by the researcher. The most important characteristics of a qualitative approach according to Ratna (2011: 47-48) are (1) paying attention to the part of meaning and message according to the nature of the object, namely study culture (culture), (2) prioritizing the process rather than the results of research to avoid the dynamic meaning, (3) there should be no distance between the subject and the object of research. (4) researchers who are open in design with a temporary nature. Similarly, the research framework must be temporary, and (5) research is natural in various social and cultural contexts respectively.

The data obtained are in the form of quotations containing aspects of oppression of women and the struggle of women even though the work done is considered taboo by society in the text of the *CIL* novel. Sumebr data in this study is the text of the novel *Cantik Itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan, published by Gramedia Pustaka Umum, Jakarta, the twentieth printing of April 2020 with a thickness of 505 pages. In addition, reference books on theories used in this study and other journals related to the same theory or the same novel but different research results make it an important data source in completing this research.

A journal written by Yulianti (2007) entitled "Psychoanalysis in Beautiful That Wound by Eka Kurniawan". The purpose of Yulianti's research is to describe the sexuality behavior of the five female characters in *Cantik Itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan using a psychoanalytic approach. These five female characters are tied to a blood relationship, but have different sexuality behaviors. Psychoanalysis brings this research to see texts that exist in literary works called latent texts. So, the writing contained in the novel is able to present something that belongs to the subtext.

Another case with the Journal written by Zakiyah (2019) entitled "Aesthetic Elements of Stylistics in the Beautiful Novel *Cantik Itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan". Zakiyah examines the aesthetic style

elements of the stylistic style in the novel. The two aspects that can be seen are (1) through the systematic linguistic system of literary works, followed by total meaning, (2) examining the aesthetic features of the work directly while distinguishing it from ordinary language. So, this research conducted by Zakiyah refers more to the aspects of her language.

When viewed from the theory used by researchers, researchers use the theory of feminist literary criticism. This is because, the perspective that can be seen and researched from this *CIL* novel is about women. Another journal related to Feminist theory is a journal written by Muhammad Mukhlis entitled "The Image and Nature of Women in Marie Benedict's *The Other Einstein* Novel" (Review of Literary Feminism) which examines the image of women in the novel, then the existence of equalities between women and men, recognition of women's works and roles, and equal opportunities in education. Another journal that discusses feminism is the one written by Damayanti (2014) entitled "Balinese Women's Sexuality in Caste Hegemony: A Study of Feminist Literature in Two Novels By Oka Rusmini. In the journal, Ida examines the description of the sexuality of balinese women in caste hegemony in the novel by Oka Rusmini, namely the *Tarian Bumi* and *Kenanga* novel.

From various existing journal sources, the problem that the author will write is very simple, namely the matter of the oppression of women described by the figure of Dewi Ayu, and how is the struggle of women in this case to defend their rights? The purpose of this study is to identify women's struggles from the oppression carried out by men in the *Cantik Itu Luka* novel by Eka Kurniawan.

Because this study has a dominant perspective looking at women, the approach chosen for this study is feminism. Geofe (via Sugihastuti and Suharto, 2010:18) states that feminism is a theory that talks about the equality and equality of men with women in all fields, which prioritizes the rights and interests of women. Therefore, researchers examine the existence of deviations in this novel in prioritizing women's rights.

## **C. Results and Discussion**

### **1. Data Analysis Results**

In the data analysis carried out by researchers, there are several forms of women's struggle with various sentence markers in the character's dialogue and description of this *CIL* novel. The specific purpose of this study is (1) to describe the oppression that occurs in women in the novel. (2) describes the form of women's struggle in this case the main character is the reference during the colonial period in the *CIL* novel.

### **2. Discussion**

Based on the analysis of the data above, an explanation of the acquisition of results from the study is needed as follows:

In *CIL* novel, the character of Dewi Ayu is the central character or the main character depicted by Eka Kurniawan. The figure of Dewi Ayu reflects how she negotiated with the invaders to maintain her life. In this case, she was forced to become a prostitute from the colonial period to the end of the *cumatnya*. Kurniawan described the beautiful figure of Dewi Ayu as an angel, she was separated from her family and was made a captive by the Japanese invaders at that time. Because of the war with the colonists, the girls were taken care of in the largest place of prostitution in Halimunda.

“Mama kalong's place of prostitution has existed since the time of the massive opening of the colonial army barracks.” (Kurniawan, 2020:85)

In addition, the oppression that occurs, with the violence experienced by Dewi Ayu is not only in physical form. But mentally too. Under the circumstances it did not make Goddess Ayu just give up

on the situation. When his family tried to save themselves from the Japanese army, he actually persevered.

... Dewi Ayu who suddenly "I won't go". "Don't be a fool, kid," Hanneke said, "Japan won't miss you". (Kurniawan, 2020: 62)

The repression occurred when Dewi Ayu became a prisoner of the Japanese army. At that time, Mrs. Van Rijk, the mother of Ola, was dying and had to get treatment. But it must be exchanged for the service of sex lust. Ola rejected it. "the commander would give me medicine if I slept with him" (Kurniawan, 2020:71).

There is courage by Dewi Ayu when she is going to help other women who are about to die. She is willing to replace Ola to give his body to exchange for medicine.

"I replaced the girl who was just now, Commander. You sleep with me, but give her mother medicine and a doctor. And Doctor!". (Kurniawan, 2020:71)

It is very noticeable how ruthlessly the Japanese army enforces women. From this the theory of feminism criticizes the attitudes of men who can arbitrarily trick women into getting something. Kurniawan is skilled in drawing the figure of Dewi Ayu, a Dutch-Indonesian girl who has determination and courage even though the risk is that she is worried about her woes.

Another reasoning is Dewi Ayu struggle to maintain her life while in custody. He searched for food from the cowshed, namely leeches. Because in the custody it is fed only twice.

"It is not the leeches we eat, but the blood of cows", Said Dewi Ayu. Kurniawan (2020:66)

There is another struggle of the woman that Kurniawan described by the character Dewi Ayu when a month in the place of prostitution she became the first woman to become pregnant. She kept the child he was in his arms, the reason he was because he had no family. Even though it is a mother's instinct. It is actually her high sense of motherhood.

Mama Kalong suggested aborting the womb. "Think of your family", the woman said. Dewi Ayu then said "As you suggest, Mama. I think of my family and the only thing I have is only this boy in the belly". (Kurniawan, 2020:94)

Dewi Ayu feminine figure is actually very attached to her. He also has 3 children who resemble him as a Dutch descendant, the Ayu face. His three children were named Alamanda, Adinda, and Maya Dewi. Even Dewi Ayu still made prostitution her job. Nonetheless she had a maternal side as well.

"They can't be prostitutes," she told Mirah. (Kurniawan, 2020:109)

In the text is depicted the struggle of a woman who wants her children not to be prostitutes like her mother. Dewi Ayu gives her daughter an indirect picture of how women are treated unfairly and become only objects of perverted men.

#### **D. Conclusion**

It can be concluded that from the above expressions, it has supported the two focuses of this research, namely feminism: an expression in the form of oppression that occurs due to war. There was coercion and struggle for women's rights during the Colonial period. In this text there is a negative labeling of women, how Dewi Ayu ended up selling her own body to survive. The coercion was initially painful to turn into a profession he was engaged in until the end of his day. But there is another picture that the feminine side in Dewi Ayu also exists that is, when she is pregnant she

retains the baby she is carrying. This is the picture of the maternal side attached to her. The image indicates that the labeling of prostitutes on Dewi Ayu does not take away the true soul of a woman.

This shows her unwillingness to have a beautiful child, having a bad child apparently far makes her happy because it saves from the depraved lust of men. From the existing exposure it can be concluded that the text in this novel shows the feminist side of women in the adoption behind the feminine mask for the venting of male sexual desire.

**Conflicts of interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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