

## FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM ON DEWI SARTIKA'S *DADAISME*

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**Abstrak.** Dalam perspektif feminisme, novel *Dadaisme* karya Dewi Sartika (2004) menggugat dominasi lelaki sebagai kelas satu masyarakat maupun lelaki dalam dunia fiksi. Dari sudut pandang semua feminisme (liberal, radikal, marxist, sosialis), *Dadaisme* tetap sanggup menunjukkan gugatan dan perlawanannya terhadap dominasi lelaki dalam *kanon* sastra maupun dalam kehidupan konkret di masyarakat. Penolakan tersebut berwujud keberanian wanita untuk: pertama, berselingkuh membalas selingkuh kaum pria; kedua, menolak pernikahan; ketiga, menolak dijadikan benda pelunas hutang. Tindakan penolakan pertama bernilai negatif (melemahkan perlawanan), sedang tindakan kedua dan ketiga positif (memperkokoh perlawanan).

**Kata kunci:** kritik sastra feminis, patriarki, dominasi, subordinasi

### Introduction

*Dadaisme*, a novel written by Dewi Sartika, may be more appropriately analyzed from the feminist perspective. There are at least four reasons for using this perspective. *First* as a novelist, Dewi Sartika is indeed a human being with woman gender—and she is known to promote feminism, that is, a movement to promote the subject and to defend the need of women (Darma & Budi, 2004). *Second*, *Dadaisme* discusses issues on life problems which relate with woman's life, namely forced marriage, polygamy, affair (Truly, forced marriage, polygamy, and affair are also man's matters, in society, however, a social perception grows strongly that mostly woman becomes the victim). *Third*, the dominant figures in the novel are women, namely Yusna, Nedena, Isabela, and Yossy. In this case, the reason to present mostly woman gender is particularly linked with the first and second reasons above. *Fourth*, even though it is perhaps not too significant, but "the future of novel is on the woman hand," (Sapardi Djoko Damono, 2004), and not on man's. this statement is surely not an exaggeration. From 75 scripts of novel competed in the "Novel Writing Competition 2003" whose jury team included Prof. Sapardi Djoko Damono, Prof. Budi Darma, Maman S. Mahayana, the three winners are women, namely Dewi Sartika (*Dadaisme*), Abidah El Khalieqy (*Geni Jora*), and Ratih Komala (*Tabula Rasa*) respectively (Damono, 2004).

Further discussion on the feminist's tracks in *Dadaisme* is presented more elaborately in the following section.

### Feminism in *Dadaisme*

#### Affair in Feminist Perspective

*Dadaisme* can be considered as a reaction on repression towards woman by various patriarchal values (cf. Kurnia, 2004). In feminism, even patriarchy becomes ideology—which is protested. Dewi Sartika's literary work in this case proves it: the emergence of woman to protest cultural stylistics. This protest contains two arguments.

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First, the author, Dewi Sartika, in her work, represents cultural stylistic protest about her group, women. Second, the acts of the characters in the novel: Yusna and Isabella, for example, are properly considered as a protest representation, even for Isabella, more precisely as revenge.

“Bagaimana dengan perempuan-perempuan yang dulu Uda?” tanyaku dengan suara perlahan. ...

“Ya, dari awal mereka hanya merupakan bagian dari pengujian. Aku juga ingin menguji apakah diriku normal atau tidak ... hehehehe! Aku becanda, aku tidak pernah mencintai mereka!” jawabnya sambil mencubit pipiku lembut. “Aku terlalu sayang padamu, Bella!”

Aku juga menyayangimu Uda, tapi izinkan aku untuk menyayangi laki-laki lain. (Sartika, 2004: 75—76).

Isabella, Rendi’s wife, in this quotation may want to say, ‘If one man or a husband can love many women, who do not have to be his wife, why a woman or a wife cannot?’ Finally, Isabella indeed has an affair with Asril, her ex-boy friend in High School (Sartika, 2004: 36—38). Even though secret affair never gets moral justification, Isabella wants to claim for equal rights between woman and man.

From the perspective of liberal feminist, the affair is not the woman’s fault (Darma and Budi, 2004). It means, to face a husband’s affair, the wife should not cry or repent. If the love of the husband can be shared, why wife’s love cannot. And Isabella tries to prove that statement.

In Marxist feminist perspective, *unaffairness* source is the social concept rooted strongly that woman is man’s (Darma and Budi, 2004)—and not in reverse. Therefore, if Rendi can freely taste many women’s virginity only with the motive of “testing libido normality”, this is clearly *unaffairness*—and must be protested. In this case, having affair becomes the answer. For that reason, Isabella’s and Asril’s affair must be understood as an effort to create right balance. If it is right, all parties have to be judged right and if it is wrong, all must be blamed.

### Marriage Refusal in Feminist Perspective

Yusna, Rendi’s fiancée and Isabella’s sister, refuses to become a “payment of family gratitude debt” by getting married with Rendi, the bad tempered son of Sutan Bahari, the wealthy figure at Pariaman. She refuses to get married with a man who is of her family’s choice, not of her own. In short, Yusna’s refusal in becoming the determined party by others indicates a confirmation that she wants to determine her choice herself.

“Ambo indak mau menikah,” cetus Yusna tiba-tiba yang membuat Etek Is memalingkan wajahnya ke arah Yusna.

“Ngece po, tuh Yus?”

“Yusna indak mau jadi nak daro. Yusna indak mau menikah dengan Rendi!”

Etek Is menggeleng-gelengkan kepalanya, lantas tersenyum. “Ado-ado saja kau tuh, Yus ...”

Yusna berpaling geram. Di dalam kepalanya telah tumbuh suatu gagasan. Sebuah gagasan yang nantinya akan membalikkan dua takdir antara dirinya dan saudara kandungnya: Isabella. (Sartika, 2004: 75—76).

The quotation that states *Etek Is* “*Ado-ado saja kau tuh, Yus ...*” (“you must be kidding, Yus”) proves that woman’s refusal to get married is not a choice. *Etek*’s response to Yusna obviously shows that *Etek* does not take her statement seriously. It proves how powerful gender social construction is, and the condition that a daughter indeed only becomes the determined party who is never able to determine for herself. This determinant condition is well-accepted by society, even by those who are the victims, namely women, so in this case *Etek Is* brings out that statement. As a woman, *Etek Is* is clearly hegemonized by gender social construction in her society (i.e. Minang).

From the liberal feminist point of view, woman backwardness is purely her own fault. Despite her feeling to be victim, she should support and never think of protesting, as it is reflected and experienced by *Etek Is*. In this case, like a thief in an unlocked house, the guilt is directly pointed to the host, while the thief himself is not mentioned as the mostly guilty person.

In radical feminist perspective, the fault is pointed to system which makes man the winner (patriachal ideology) (Darma & Budi, 2004). Man always gets the privilege. Man is permitted to play around with many women, but woman has only to be true with one man. A daughter must obey her father, but a son has more freedom. When a son refuses to get married, it is considered proper. However, if a woman refuses to get married with a man of her parent’s choice, she is considered to have bad manners. There is a double standard of manner towards son and daughter. In this case, Yusna protests and refuses to get married with Rendu.

Woman refusal to get married, in the Marxist feminist view, actually means woman refusal to be in a party owned by others (Kurnia, 2004; Darma & Budi, 2004). Woman—particularly daughter—really has subordinated fate: merely “owned”—and so she is also “determined” by “her owner.” Parties who are called owners are in layers: father, *mamak*, brother, husband, boyfriend, the master, director, officer (cf. Budianta, 1998). Therefore Yusna’s refusal in getting married actually means a refusal toward the social construction: refusal “to be owned” by his father, his *mamak*, and his fiancée (Rendu).

### **Daughter as Gratitude Debt Payment**

Woman is an object—in its real meaning—or at least is considered to be the same as an object (by man). In social feminist perspective, it is said that the involvement—moreover un-involvement—of woman in production process has no meaning. Yet if it has meaning, the meaning has no value, it does not add anything (Darma & Budi, 2004).

Maka, Yusna pun—lalu digantikan adiknya, Isabella—harus tunduk menjadi pelunas hutang budi keluarga. Seperti dalam kutipan berikut.

“Yusna, Ayah pernah berhutang budi pada Sutan Bahari, kau tahu, bukan, *kato papatoh kito*, budi tak boleh dilupakan sampai mati. Sutan Bahari menginginkan menantu berdarah Minang dan secara adat meminta kesediaan Ayah ... Ayah pikir Rendu cocok denganmu ...”

“Tapi Ayah ...”

“Mamak *piki* itu putusan yang bijak. Yusna mendapat calon suami yang sesuai. Mamak juga setuju sekali,” Mamak Bagindo Utih mulai berbicara. Yusna hanya bisa diam. (Sartika, 2004: 41).

In social feminist perspective, daughter is equal with apparatus and production materials. It means that daughter is equal in value with dead things. Because of that condition, her participation or absence does not get any meaning—or if it gets, it is useless. Woman, in this case is nothing!

Being an “object”, *Yusna hanya bisa diam* (Sartika, 2004: 41). She is only permitted to listen and accept the decision of her father and *mamak*. Even Yusna has no right to speak. For that reason, when she tries to answer, words which are said only “*Tapi Ayah ...*” because it is soon interrupted by her *mamak*, Bagindo Utih. Although the person who will get married is Yusna, strangely who dominantly states the agreement is her father (*Ayah pikir Rendi cocok denganmu*) and *mamak* (*Mamak juga setuju sekali*). Yusna has no right to speak at all (Lee 1997; Hall 2001). Yusna is being captive by the patriarchal ideology dominance.

Since finally Yusna refuses and escapes herself, therefore *Dadaisme* is obviously coloured with protest and refusal toward gender social construction determinism. If a novel is believed to represent the author’s idealism opinion, *Dadaisme* clearly represents feminist obsession of Dewi Sartika, the author of *Dadaisme*.

## Conclusion

Even though *Dadaisme* is seen by some as a novel that contains some weaknesses as a literary work (Saidi, 2004), in feminists perspective, *Dadaisme* performs some quality of a qualified novel. This novel protests man’s dominance as the first class in the society as well as in fiction world. From the point of view of all feminism (liberalism, radicalism, marxism, socialism), *Dadaisme* remains presenting protest and opposition towards man’s dominance in the canon of literature as well as concrete life in society.

One interesting point to wonders is the fact that *Dadaisme* is closed with the act of Nedena committing suicide—while as a matter of fact Nedena is a woman figure who in her calmness protests against the normal dominance created by man. This point may be the weak point of the novel *Dadaisme*. The regretful incident that Nedena is dead by committing suicide at Aleda’s practical room (page 230) can be seen as the author’s unnecessary and sudden insistence on ruining her own constructed protest discourse build from page 1 to 229. Why must the condition be like that? Why should Nedena commit suicide? The readers may build some free interpretation, but the person who knows best of it is certainly the author herself, Dewi Sartika.

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