



## **Postcolonialism Contemporary Indonesian Novels: Unending Feminism?**

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DOI: 10.53103/cjlls.v4i4.168

### **Abstract**

So far, research efforts on literary feminism have developed in Indonesia. However, few find that Indonesian literary feminism is relevant to postcolonialism. For this reason, this study aims to examine postcolonial feminism in Indonesian literature, especially the novel *Karsa* by El Alicia. The data taken in this study is in the form of text quotes that show feminism and postcolonialism. The source of the research data is the novel *Karsa* by El Alicia. Data collection techniques in this study by listening and recording. The research method used is hermeneutic. The results of the study stated that the novel *Karsa* by El Alicia represents the spirit of feminism brought by the main character and support from other characters, especially in the field of education. Rights in social freedom and choosing work also appear to be exercised by the main character. The discourse of feminism in the novel is influenced by the history of Dutch colonialism. An important implication of this research is that literature can contribute to the discussion of feminism and postcolonialism.

Keywords: Feminism, Postcolonialism, Novel, Colonial, Women

### **Introduction**

Literary works can be viewed through many theories, both today and in the previous colonial era. When studying literary works during the colonial period, the theory of postcolonialism is usually used. Etymologically, postcolonialism comes from the words "post", "colonial", and "ism". Literally, the word means understanding of theories born after the colonial era (Adipurwawidjana, 2019; Anwar, 2017; Pamungkas et al., 2023). Agree with that, (Ine Septianesi et al., 2022; Luthfi, 2022) said that the term "post-colonialism" is rooted in the words "post-", "colonial" and "-ism", literally meaning understanding of theories born after the colonial era. According to Endraswara, works after the colonial period, which reflect colonialism (old and modern) need to be viewed using postcolonial glasses (Dewi, 2017; Novtarianggi1 et al., 2020). So, it can be understood that postcolonialism is a story that has been past about colonization from other nations packaged in a literary work today. Postcolonial is a term that refers to the time after the colonial itself.

Contemporary Indonesian novels are literary works that tell the lives of many characters by describing them with the same thing in the present, namely telling life outside their time. According to Purba the term contemporary literature can be interpreted as contemporary literature, contemporary literature, today's literature (Maria, 2009; Grace, 2023). The novel *Karsa* by El Alicia is a contemporary Indonesian novel that depicts past lives, but this work will only be published in 2023. This novel revolves around the struggle of feminism similar to the present. Etymologically, feminism comes from the word *femme* (*woman*) which means women who have the goal of fighting for women's rights in social class. Feminism is a women's movement that demands equal rights between women and men in terms of political, economic, social, or organized activities. Khairah and Murtadho stated that in feminist literature, women are the main characters who are the central themes discussed and studied, this aims to eliminate genre and marginalization of women (Mus & Suparman, 2018; Suhendra & Nuur, 2023).

From the era of the 80-90s until now, gender issues are still a topic that continues to be discussed in various world lives. Although the movement for gender equality has been carried out thousands of times, this is still a conversation. This problem then made Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak put forward an understanding called postcolonialism. One of the analytical sciences Spivak uses is feminism. The basis of Spivak's view of postcolonial feminism stems from the complete rejection of women in life in colonies or former colonies, where women at the time bore the brunt of oppression. Gayatri Spivak in her essay (*Can Subaltern Speak?*) states that subaltern cannot speak, what is meant is that women in various colonial contexts do not have a conceptual language to speak because there are no ears from colonial or indigenous men to listen to them (Saputri, 2019; Satritama & Ahmadi, 2023). Subalterns are levels that exist in society, especially in the lower classes, namely groups of people who are subject to ruling class hegemony. Postcolonial feminism examines women in the third world who experience colonization, both from western nations and by others because they are part of colonialists (Priskardus Hermanto Candra, 2019; Titiek, 2018).

The novel *Karsa* by El Alicia tells the story of the main female character named Anjani who marries a Regent from Sleman during the colonial period. At that time, Anjani firmly refused to be pinged and wanted to live freely like men. This novel describes how Anjani's struggle to defend women in the field of education, this she proved by teaching women secretly. Anjani often smuggled reading books created by the Dutch for him to read secretly. Until finally all the efforts she made were known by her husband and the husband fully supported Anjani. After years of marriage, Anjani and her husband had four children. In a bothered situation taking care of children, Anjani still took the time to teach at the small school he built. But in the end, Anjani had to sacrifice herself to defend her husband and protect her children until she had to be exiled and during exile Anjani died of her illness. According to the author, this is a form of feminism, which agrees with (Lestari et

al., 2021; Maulid, 2022) which states that feminism not only discusses women's rebellion against injustice but feminism studies as a role carried out as a woman in the world of education, the world of work and the world of the household. The story in the novel *Karsa* by El Alicia tells how Anjani struggles in the world of education and household.

Feminism and postcolonial influence have high relevance, so this study aims to determine the representation of feminism and postcolonial influence on feminism in El Alicia's novel *Karsa*, especially in the main character. This research uses feminism and postcolonial theory to determine feminism and postcolonial influences on feminism. The benefit of this study is to describe the representation of feminism in El Alicia's novel *Karsa* and explain the postcolonial influence on feminism in El Alicia's novel *Karsa*.

### **Research Methodology**

This research is an attempt to explore El Alicia's novel *Karsa* in a feminist perspective. Research data in the form of text that needs to be interpreted. For this reason, based on the characteristics of the data, it is appropriate if qualitative methods with a hermeneutic approach are used in research. Because, hermeneutics is a method that uses a type of qualitative research by interpreting and analyzing texts. According to Sulaiman Ibrahim, hermeneutics is the science and art of constructing meaning through rational and imaginative interpretation of raw materials in the form of texts (Hadi, 2020; Ridlo & Prastyo, 2023). This method analyzes the data and produces research in the form of descriptions. The data taken in this study is in the form of text quotes that show feminism and postcolonialism. The source of the research data is the novel *Karsa* by El Alicia. Data collection techniques in this study by listening and recording. The listening technique is done by listening to *Karsa* which is related to postcolonial feminism. The recording technique is carried out by stating the findings of data containing postcolonial feminism. The data analysis technique used is data collection by listening and recording things that are directly related to the research problems contained in *Karsa*. After that, presenting and analyzing the data so that the data that has been collected is organized and arranged in a systematic pattern which is then outlined in the form of a description of the data accompanied by existing evidence (Hardianti & Pamungkas, 2023). The final step is the withdrawal of conclusions or verification used as the final stage to determine evidence based on the findings contained in the discussion.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Feminism in El Alicia's *Karsa***

The novel *Karsa* by El Alicia tells the situation of women in the background of colonialism who experience limitations in the fields of education, social, and freedom. This

limitation was then fought by Anjani as the main character, he rebelled a lot against these rules. Although he was a nobleman, he always wanted freedom, such as not wanting to be pinged, smuggling a lot of reading books, and even running away secretly from his home, this he did on his own initiative. This issue agrees with Kridalaksana which states that women in feminist theory have their own activities and initiatives in order to fight for these rights and interests in a movement to demand their rights as full human beings (Aris Kartika, 2011; Hasriani, 2018; Wibowo & Pamungkas, 2023). Anjani always did things related to freedom until finally he was invited by Rekso, the regent of Sleman whom Anjani met for the first time when he was climbing the fence of his house. After the marriage took place, Anjani was still a figure who wanted to be free of men, she did not want to walk squatting in front of her husband, she still smuggled books, wrote articles and sent them to publishers, even she had the courage to teach women outside the home. This is actually very much supported by Rekso. This is in agreement with Zulkarnain & Wiyatmi, (2018) which states that it is important to remember that gender equality is a joint effort involving everyone, including men. The struggle for gender equality must be carried out with cooperation, either from women alone or from men and women, with this society as a whole will become more just and inclusive. The cooperation carried out by Anjani and her husband is to advance education by building a small school so that Anjani can teach comfortably, even Rekso helped Anjani to apply for assistance to the government so that her small school was built again. This can be seen in the following table:

Table 1: Feminism

No	Forms of Feminism	Quotation	Information	Data and Page Codes
1.	Right to freedom	... He came out of his room cautiously, knowing that Rama, Mother, Mbak Rara, or his two older brothers found themselves sneaking out.	Women deserve the freedom not to be pinged and leave the house freely like men.	Krs.D2.19
2.	Right to freedom	Anjani immediately rushed into a bookstore that also sold paper, pen and ink.	Women deserve the freedom not to be pinged and leave the house freely like men.	Krs.D3.29
3.	Right to freedom	Anjani jumped through the high wall and down past the mango tree behind it.	The struggle of the main character in the right to freedom over himself to equate rights with men who have never been pinged.	Krs. D23.388
4.	Social rights	"Next time, the road will be normal, Ni," said the mutual quietly. "There is no angry Rama or Mother".	Other figures' support for women's social rights is the same as men's.	Krs.D5.77
5.	Social	"An bumiputra woman	Women's struggle in	Krs.D21.332

	rights	obviously wouldn't write such an article..." "Shouldn't you be afraid of <i>Meneer</i> ? Other figures' support for women's social rights is the same as men's. bab it turns out that even an bumiputra woman can be a threat," replied Anjani calmly which again caused shocked breaths and whispers behind her.	expressing facts in the form of articles.	
6.	Social rights	"What brother is doing is the best for this land. When in exile later, remain a free spirit, even if the body is shackled" said the Lord Resident again with his earnest gaze.	Support from other figures to women's struggle for truth.	Krs.D22.336
7.	Work	Anjani never dreamed of becoming a teacher. His dream is to become a journalist.	Women have the right to have equal work as men in the colonial period.	Krs.D7.101
8.	Education and employment	It was Asih who continued her struggle at the small school by becoming a permanent teacher there.	The struggle of female characters in continuing education schools for women. As well as an equivalent job with men at the time.	Krs. D20.328
9.	Education	"Yes, <i>nothing</i> , Mbak. Reading books can add insight. Who knows, later he can be educated like Raden Ayu Kartini, the son of the regent of Jepara".	Women deserve proper education/knowledge like men.	Krs.D1.17
10.	Education	Anjani also prefers to spend his time in his room, drawing, writing articles, or reading his smuggled books.	Women deserve proper education/knowledge like men.	Krs.D4.58
11.	Education	Anjani taught Asih to read Latin letters with the help of shabby paper and pen. He even taught the girl how to spell and write the correct Roman letters.	The struggle of the female protagonist to meet the educational needs of other female characters.	Krs.D6.101
12.	Education	"It seems that your wife values education issues very much. Does he teach?..... "Why don't you propose the construction of this small	Support from other figures for the right to education for women.	Krs. D8.140

		school to the central government to support?" asked Tirta again, making Reksa turn his head with an interested face.		
13.	Education	... to teach children outside the residence.	The movement of the main female figures to equalize the right to education of women who are not priyayi.	Krs.D9.144-145
14.	Education	"Kangmas <i>isn't</i> angry for your second and third confessions, but the first one? It's fatal, Ni."	Support from other figures for gaining knowledge (by reading smuggled books) and voicing opinions (writing articles) from female figures.	Krs.D10.145
15.	Education	..., because almost all of his students were women from childhood to adulthood.	The movement of female characters to get education like men.	Krs.D11.146
16.	Education	"You can teach outside the residence"	Support from other figures for the right to education for women.	Krs.D12.155
17.	Education	"Instead, Kangmas has prepared a simple building near where you used to teach. There has also been Kangmas prepare a blackboard."	Support from other figures for the right to education for women.	Krs.D13.155
18.	Education	"Your students are getting more and more, Ni. You need a more decent place for your school. Kangmas advises you to send the application letter directly to the central government, Ni." Mutual explained again.	Support from other figures for the right to education for women.	Krs.D14.167
19.	Education	"Reksa <i>doesn't</i> want a wife who is good at batik, sewing or who masters Cenethini Fiber, ma'am. Reksa wants women who are good-hearted, courageous and insightful." Mutual explained again.	The defence movement against his wife (educated women at the time).	Krs.D15.191
20.	Education	Despite having a family and having children, Anjani still did not leave his school, which has now been expanded with the permission	The struggle of female figures for proper education for women at that time and support from other figures for	Krs.D16.268

		of the government itself. Anjani received financial assistance from women activists, both londo and bumiputra, as well as from the regent Sulaiman, who is her own husband.	proper education for women.	
21.	Education	"And Ratih, you will continue to carry out that punishment tomorrow, after school."	Women have the same right to proper education/knowledge as men.	Krs.D17.272
22.	Education	"Asih, as long as I'm away, please continue my ideals in that small school" Anjani said again holding her lips trembling violently.	Women's struggle to maintain proper education for women.	Krs. D18.327
23.	Education	"Ndoro Ayu's dreams and traces will always be eternal"	The support and struggle of other female characters for the struggle of the main character in continuing the education school for women.	Krs.D19.328

Information:

Krs: Karsa

D1-D23: Finding data

Based on data 1 the author clearly illustrates that Anjani is a free woman. Anjani doesn't want to be pinged in her room all day and she doesn't want to be a woman who is looked down upon by anyone. Anjani proved that women are not just for male appendages. Women are far from that view. Anjani's evidence included the movement for the right to freedom. Freedom is part of feminism where women and men with different essences have the same rights in terms of freedom (Ilaa, 2021; Qomariah, 2019). Freedom belongs to all races, including freedom in social life. Freedom for women is supported by Reksa which is evidenced when the man does not mind when Anjani continues to carry out activities that are not appropriate for women in the colonial era. Freedom in terms of work is also evident when Anjani has dreams of becoming a journalist. Although this was not done, his courage deserves appreciation. Women's work is not only taking care of the kitchen, in the view of feminism women are free to choose all forms of work including work done by men. Women can determine their fate, choose their jobs and study as highly as possible (Ilaa, 2021; Muslimah et al., 2019). In feminism, work is something that should be equated between women and men. Women are free to choose the job they want.

Anjani's struggle and movement to fight for women's rights was not limited to that, she was helped by her husband to build a school to teach education to women living around her residence. At first, Anjani only taught secretly under a tree with a leaf frond blackboard.

However, Reksa, who later found out about this, supported his wife's activities and built a small school. This is so that Anjani can teach comfortably. Reksa support for feminism in education illustrates how much she cares about women. Education is important, especially for women who will later teach the first education to their children. Thus, women should have the same rights as men in the field of education. Women have the right to be highly educated to guide their children well. Not only men can get higher education but women also have the right to pursue higher education (Wati, 2024; Yovita et al., 2022). Education in human life will greatly affect how the potential and development of a country. With equitable education, a country will have good potential. It is so proud to know how much Anjani's struggle in the world of education is very big. In addition to teaching women around her residence, Anjani also reads a lot of books that she secretly smuggles from her husband and in-laws. By reading her smuggled books, Anjani became an intelligent woman and had a rational mind. Feminism is present in the world of education where women must be educated in order to make them intelligent (Mawlid, 2022; Nuraeni & Sulastri, 2024). The story in *Karsa's* novel continues until Anjani is gone, Anjanilah's trusted courtier who continues the struggle of Ngoro Ayu. This is the reason why the feminism she fought for did not arrive. Because he had not experienced glory, Anjani was destined to die.

### Postcolonialism in *El Alicia's Karsa* Novel

The novel *Karsa* by El Alicia is set in colonial where the author depicts the struggle of feminism which is spiced up with a love story between Anjani and Reksa. Reksa was the regent of Sleman during the Dutch colonial period. The relationship between *Karsa* and the study of postcolonial theory is evidenced by sentences or conversations of characters which show that these are things that contain colonialism. The novel *Karsa* by El Alicia is a newly published work, but the story in it is set in colonial and there is an effect of colonialism in it. Such cases are called postcolonialism. Postcolonialism is an understanding that pays attention to analyzing the colonial era (Angraini, 2019; Azizan, 2023). After researching *Karsa* that contains postcolonialism, this can be proven through the following data:

Table 2: Poscolonialism in El Alicia's *Karsa*

No	Quotation	Information	Data and Page Codes
1.	Scholarships from the Dutch government have been obtained.	The sentence indicates the colonial period.	Krs. DPos01.34
2.	Her observative parents considered Kartini too liberal, too imitating Londo's thoughts that did not fit with noble and brazen thinking as a woman. From then on, his parents hid	The sentence indicates the colonial period.	Krs. DPos02.34



	books deemed 'dangerous'.		
3.	If Anjani confessed that she read Max Havelaar's book, would her husband get angry and confiscate all his smuggled books? Is her husband as conservative as his family? Can Kangmas Reksa accept the fact that Anjani is now following in the footsteps of Raden Ayu Kartini?	The sentence indicates the colonial period.	Krs.DPos03.93
4.	"Secondly, Anjani wrote many articles and read Dutch books," said Anjani again.	The sentence indicates the colonial period.	Krs. DPos04.145

Information:

Krs: Karsa

DPos01-DPos04: Finding data

Based on data 2, colonialism deserves to be one part of the theory used in this study. Because there is a colonial effect from the Netherlands. This can be seen in the data of Krs.DPos01 which states that this novel contains Dutch colonialism. The author describes it through sentences that mean that scholarships from the Netherlands are very difficult to obtain. In addition, the second data also describes Dutch colonialism which states that Anjani's parents strictly forbid their children to read books written by Dutch people. This is because the book can provide advanced thinking, and rational thinking, and is considered a liberalist thought. This is considered inappropriate for those nobles who highly value civility and behavior as women who are delicate and always submissive. The third and fourth data prove that the main character is very happy to read books written by Dutch people that he has been smuggling. Although this was strictly forbidden by his parents, Anjani still read books written by Dutchmen. This book belonging to the Dutch people certainly contains knowledge and makes people's minds more open. Therefore, reading and studying it can make humans have a change in views caused by colonialism itself. The main character in *Karsa* is very brave to smuggle and read Dutch books because he wants to have a rational mind in order to equate women in an intelligent way. The struggle for feminism carried out by the main character is carried out in an intelligent way, namely by teaching women, not by physical resistance. This is due to the thinking of figures who prioritize rationality due to reading many books by Dutch people. This is as stated by Suryawati et al. (2021) that some feminism is influenced by colonialism. This is in line with (Anggraini, 2019) which states the characteristics of colonialism which can be seen from at least four things, namely: (1) examining the reflection of colonial colonialism, (2) examining ideological reflection, (3) examining power hegemony, and (4) examining hegemony from the gender aspect. The gender aspect is emphasized in this study, where the discussion in this study shows postcolonial feminism.

### Conclusion

The novel *Karsa* by El Alicia is a modern Indonesian novel that represents the spirit of feminism. The storyline of female characters depicts the struggle of women to carry out gender stereotypes. The representation of feminism is dominated by the spirit of education by the main character. Rights in social freedom and choosing work also appear to be exercised by the main character. Likewise with other characters who support the spirit of feminism carried out by the main character. The feminist movement is carried out by the main character in a clever way, namely teaching women to read and teaching other sciences. The discourse of feminism in the novel is influenced by the history of Dutch colonialism. The author describes postcolonialism in the form of conversations and sentences stating the occurrence of Dutch colony. Evidenced by sentences that indicate the existence of scholarships from the Netherlands and books written by Dutch people.

This research is expected to have implications for readers to get important information about feminism influenced by colonialism and can add knowledge both for researchers themselves and for readers regarding literary analysis, especially postcolonialism feminism. The results of this research are expected to be used to add insight into feminism which is not only a political movement but moves in the world of literature. As well as adding insight into postcolonialism and can be used as reference material to add information about literary works, feminism, and postcolonialism, especially in the novel *Karsa* by El Alicia. However, this research is still limited to hermeneutic methods with feminist and postcolonialism approaches. For this reason, it is very possible that there will be differences in interpretation if El Alicia's novel *Karsa* is studied in another perspective. Therefore, it is very necessary to study the novel *Karsa* by El Alicia using other sciences.

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