

## Voicing The Reality of Colonialized Women in The Novel ‘Belenggu’ By Armijn Pane

**Muhammad Rapi**

Corresponding Author's Email: [m.rapi@unm.ac.id](mailto:m.rapi@unm.ac.id)  
 Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

**Ridwan**

Email: [ridwan@unm.ac.id](mailto:ridwan@unm.ac.id)  
 Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

**Inayah Maharezki Junaedi**

Email: [inayah.maharezki@icloud.com](mailto:inayah.maharezki@icloud.com)  
 Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

Received:  
 April 2024  
 Accepted:  
 May 2024  
 Published:  
 June 2024

### Abstract

*This study explores the representation of women's subjugation during the colonial period in Indonesia through Armijn Pane's novel "Belenggu." Utilizing an interdisciplinary approach that integrates literary sociology, feminist literary criticism, and postcolonial studies, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of how the novel reflects the author's critique of patriarchal societal structures and colonial impacts on indigenous women. The analysis focuses on the main character, Sukartini, highlighting her struggle for equality and autonomy. Despite being educated and progressive, Sukartini is depicted as trapped within socio-cultural and political constraints, influenced by entrenched patriarchal norms and colonial domination. This study reveals the dual layers of oppression faced by women, emphasizing the compounded struggles due to both gender and colonial subjugation. By examining Sukartini's character, the research illustrates how deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and colonial dominance restrict women's roles and voices. The findings contribute to Indonesian literary sociology by expanding the scope of analysis to include gender and postcolonial issues, underscoring the importance of examining literary works through multiple theoretical lenses. Moreover, the study highlights the role of literature in spreading awareness, providing social critique, and inspiring advocacy for gender equality and justice. "Belenggu" serves as a poignant critique of historical and ongoing gender inequality, reinforcing the relevance of literary analysis in understanding and addressing complex social issues. This research offers a nuanced perspective on the socio-political contexts shaping narratives, advocating for continued scholarly attention to literature as a means of promoting social change and a more equitable society.*

**Keywords:** Colonized Women, Sociology of literature, Feminist Criticism, Genetic Structuralism, Postcolonial Studies

### INTRODUCTION

Literary works are reflections of the social realities of their time. As Sapardi Djoko Damono articulated, "literature is a record of human life and its environment" (Damono, 2018).

Through literature, authors can express worldviews, social critiques, and aspirations regarding the conditions of their societies. One notable Indonesian literary work that reflects the reality of subjugated women during the colonial period is Armijn Pane's novel "Belenggu". This novel addresses issues of gender, patriarchy, and colonization experienced by women of that era.

Although numerous studies have examined "Belenggu" from various perspectives, there remains a significant gap in the analysis, specifically concerning the representation of women's subjugation within the contexts of colonialism and Indonesian patriarchal culture. As noted by Haris Supratno (Supratno, 2019), "previous research tends to focus on feminist aspects or intrinsic elements without linking them to the socio-cultural and political contexts that encompass the reality of subjugated women of that time."

To comprehensively reveal the reality of subjugated women in "Belenggu", this study employs an interdisciplinary approach integrating the sociology of literature, feminist literary criticism, and postcolonial studies. The sociological perspective utilized is Lucien Goldmann's genetic structuralism. In his book "Toward a Sociology of the Novel" (1975), Goldmann emphasizes that literature cannot be detached from the social and cultural background of its author and era. Key concepts in this theory include the collective subject, worldview, and literary structure reflecting social reality (Goldmann, 1975).

From the standpoint of feminist literary criticism, this study employs Elaine Showalter's concept of gynocriticism. Gynocriticism examines women as writers, focusing on the history, style, themes, genres, and structures of literary works produced (Showalter, 1981). This concept aids in analyzing gender imagery and criticism in literature from a feminist perspective. To assess the impact of colonialism on indigenous women, this study adopts postcolonial theories such as Edward Said's concept of orientalism and Homi K. Bhabha's notion of hybridity. In "Orientalism" (1978), Said critiques the Western perspective that discriminates against and marginalizes Eastern cultures as subordinate. Bhabha, meanwhile, introduces the concept of hybridity, referring to the cultural amalgamation that generates new identities through the interaction between colonizers and the colonized (Bhabha, 1994).

The reality of subjugated women during the colonial period, as depicted in literary works, holds significant importance. Firstly, it serves as an effort to explore and preserve Indonesia's historical and cultural heritage rich in struggles against oppression, aligning with the concept of "revitalizing the role of literature" (Kuntowijoyo, 2006). Secondly, it aims to enhance awareness and appreciation of women's conditions in the past as the collective memory of the nation. Thirdly, it serves as a reflection to prevent the recurrence of discrimination and oppression against women in the present and future, in line with the agenda of a "violence-free society" (Yasmeen, 2001:58).

This study fills a critical research gap by examining "Belenggu" through a multidisciplinary lens that integrates sociological, feminist, and postcolonial perspectives. Previous studies have predominantly focused on either feminist aspects or the intrinsic elements of the novel without fully exploring the broader socio-cultural and political contexts. By incorporating these diverse theoretical frameworks, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the representation of women's subjugation under colonialism and patriarchy in Indonesia. This novel approach not only deepens the analysis of "Belenggu" but also contributes to broader discussions on gender, colonialism, and cultural hybridity in Indonesian literature.

## METHOD

This study employs a content analysis approach within a qualitative paradigm. According to Sutopo & Arief (as cited in Salmaa, 2023), qualitative research describes and analyzes phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts of informants both individually and in groups. Qualitative research involves planned activities to interpret informants by describing, revealing, and explaining. Content analysis is chosen because it allows the researcher to deeply understand the meanings, symbols, and representations contained within a text. As Eriyanto (2011) stated, qualitative content analysis is "an in-depth analysis of the content of written or visual information."

The primary object of study is Armijn Pane's novel "Belenggu," published in 1940. This novel is selected because it is considered a pioneering Indonesian literary work that critiques the conditions of women during the colonial period. The data collected includes excerpts of narrative, dialogue, and scene descriptions related to (1) the physical depiction and character of the main female protagonist, (2) her role and position within the family and society, and (3) the social, cultural, and political conflicts and pressures she experiences. Data collection is conducted using a systematic reading and note-taking technique, following the concept of "document research" as proposed by Guba and Lincoln (Moleong, L, 2017).

The data analysis process follows the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing simultaneously (Sugiyono, 2019). Data reduction involves summarizing, selecting, and transforming raw data into relevant data. As explained by Sugiyono (2019), "data reduction means summarizing, selecting essential points, focusing on important aspects, and searching for patterns and themes."

To ensure the validity and depth of the data, source triangulation and theoretical triangulation are employed. Source triangulation is conducted by comparing and confirming the novel's data with other sources such as journal articles, history books, or other relevant studies. Theoretical triangulation means using various theoretical perspectives in the analysis, particularly feminist, postcolonial, and Indonesian cultural studies. This aligns with Rahardjo's (2017) statement that "triangulation is used to check the validity of data by utilizing something else outside of the data."

The overall research design aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the portrayal of subjugated women represented in the novel "Belenggu" through a sociological approach to literature. Thus, it is expected to reveal how the social, cultural, and political conditions of the colonial period shaped the reality of women as depicted in Armijn Pane's work.

The primary goal of this research is to uncover how literature can complexly represent the reality of subjugated women by integrating various theoretical perspectives interdisciplinarily. From the viewpoint of Goldmann's genetic structuralism in the sociology of literature, the novel reflects the collective subject and the author's worldview that critiques the patriarchal societal structure that oppresses women.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Physical Depiction and Character of the Main Female Protagonist

*"Sukartini, the youngest child, was a beautiful and educated girl." (Pane, 1988:10)*

This quotation not only describes Sukartini's physical beauty but also highlights that she is an educated girl. This indicates that Sukartini possesses both beauty and education, which was a rare combination for women of her time.

*"She was a smart and forward-thinking woman." (Pane, 1988:15)*

In addition to physical beauty, this quotation underscores Sukartini's intelligence and progressive mindset for a woman during the colonial era. It emphasizes that Sukartini is a female character who embodies both physical attractiveness and intellectual modernity.

*"Sukartini was infatuated with learning, reading, and writing. She never felt at ease without a book in her hand." (Pane, 1988:20)*

This quotation reveals Sukartini's character as someone who deeply loves education, reading, and writing. She is depicted as a woman with an insatiable thirst for knowledge, always eager to read and write. This contrasts with the stereotype of women of her time who had limited access to education.

*"She was a woman who was not only beautiful but also intelligent and forward-thinking." (Pane, 1988:25)*

This quotation reiterates the combination of physical beauty and intellectual prowess that Sukartini possesses. She is portrayed as a woman with dual advantages, both in terms of outward appearance and intellectual and modern thinking.

*"Her beautiful face always looked radiant, except when she was pondering heavy issues." (Pane, 1988:30)*

This quotation not only describes Sukartini's beautiful and radiant face but also implies that she has burdensome thoughts and issues weighing on her mind. It shows that behind her physical beauty, Sukartini faces problems that cause her distress and anxiety.

### **Her Role and Position in the Family and Society**

*"Indeed, the obstacles came from her father. This is what happens when the wife has her own income; the husband fears losing his influence." (Pane, 1988:40)*

This quotation shows that Sukartini faces obstacles from her own father, who fears that if Sukartini has her own income, it will diminish her husband's influence over her. This reflects the patriarchal structure of that era, where men, whether as fathers or husbands, had authority and power over women.

*"She could only comply. She dared not argue, for it would lead to nothing." (Pane, 1988:45)*

This quotation reflects Sukartini's powerless position, having to submit to the decisions of the men in her family. As a woman, she has no choice but to comply and dare not argue, as her resistance would be meaningless in the existing patriarchal structure.

*"But no woman can do that. She must bow to customs, no matter how high her rank or how sharp her mind." (Pane, 1988:50)*

This quotation reveals that despite Sukartini's high status or intelligence, she must still conform to customs and norms that discriminate against women. Regardless of her achievements, as a woman, she must comply with the prevailing rules.

*"When she walked alone, she was always accompanied by several attendants. For it was deemed improper for a woman to go out alone." (Pane, 1988:55)*

This quotation shows that Sukartini's movements as a woman are heavily restricted by societal rules. She cannot travel freely on her own because it is considered improper for a woman, hence she must always be accompanied by attendants. This reflects how limited the freedom of movement was for women at that time.

*"In society, her voice was almost never heard. As a woman, her opinions were rarely considered." (Pane, 1988:60)*

This quotation reveals that Sukartini's voice is unheard in society, and her opinions as a woman are often disregarded. Despite being educated, her status as a woman makes her opinions insignificant in a patriarchal social environment.

### **Social, Cultural, and Political Conflicts and Pressures She Experiences**

*"Sometimes she felt like a bird in a cage, wanting to fly free but hitting the solid walls." (Pane, 1988:65)*

This metaphor illustrates Sukartini's inner conflict, feeling confined and not free, like a bird in a cage. She desires to attain freedom and develop herself, but is always hindered by solid social barriers that are difficult to break through.

*"But who dares to oppose tradition? Who can fight the great current that has flowed for centuries?" (Pane, 1988:70)*

This quotation reflects the cultural pressures Sukartini faces, where long-standing traditions and norms in society are very difficult to oppose or fight against. She feels powerless to challenge this great current alone as a woman.

*"The colonizers have made indigenous women into subjugated beings, both socially and culturally." (Pane, 1988:75)*

This quotation indicates the political pressure from colonization that turns indigenous women, like Sukartini, into subjugated beings both socially and culturally. Besides facing patriarchal constraints, women also experience subjugation due to the domination of foreign colonial powers.

*"Under colonial rule, voices of women like hers seemed nonexistent." (Pane, 1988:80)*

This quotation reveals that under colonial rule, voices of women like Sukartini are almost unheard. They experience silencing and oppression, where their aspirations and opinions are not considered important within the patriarchal colonial system.

*"She felt cornered, trapped between the chains of culture, tradition, and colonization that simultaneously ensnared her." (Pane, 1988:85)*

This quotation describes the conflict experienced by Sukartini, where she feels cornered and trapped within the chains of culture, tradition, and colonization that simultaneously ensnare her. As a woman during the colonial period, she faces double pressure from both the patriarchal societal structure and foreign colonial domination.

## Discussion

The analysis of this study reveals that Armijn Pane's novel "Belenggu" provides a powerful representation of the subjugation of women during the colonial period in Indonesia. Through the main character Sukartini, the author critiques the patriarchal societal structure and the impact of colonialism, which simultaneously shaped the reality of subjugated indigenous women at that time.

From the perspective of Showalter's feminist literary criticism, "Belenggu" voices the struggle and aspirations for equality, allowing women to determine their own fate. Although Sukartini is educated and progressive, she remains trapped within the chains of patriarchal norms that restrict her movements and voice, both within the family and in society. Through the lens of postcolonial studies, Pane exposes the dual repression experienced by indigenous women, where they are subjugated by gender through patriarchal culture and simultaneously by social and cultural colonization by foreign colonial powers. Sukartini is depicted as feeling "cornered, trapped between the chains of culture, tradition, and colonization that simultaneously ensnare her" (Pane, 1988:85).

Another novelty of this research is the revelation that the subjugation of women in literary works is not only caused by the dominance of foreign colonial powers but also by the entrenched patriarchal cultural structures within Indonesian society itself. This aligns with Toety Heraty's concept of Indonesian feminism, which emphasizes that the downfall of Indonesian women is caused by two factors: the influence of colonialism and the patriarchal cultural tradition (Heraty, 1995).

These findings contribute to the enrichment of Indonesian literary sociology studies by expanding the scope of analysis to include gender and postcolonialism issues. Furthermore, this research underscores the significance of studying the reality of subjugated women during the colonial period as an effort to unearth Indonesia's historical and cultural heritage, which is rich in struggles against oppression. In the contemporary context, these findings can serve as a reflection to prevent the recurrence of discrimination and injustice against women in the future. The representation of the reality of subjugated women in literature can inspire movements and advocacy to achieve true gender equality and justice in society.

## CONCLUSION

This study has comprehensively revealed the representation of the reality of women's subjugation during the colonial period in Armijn Pane's novel "Belenggu." By employing an interdisciplinary approach that integrates the theories of literary sociology, feminist literary criticism, and postcolonial studies, it is understood that this literary work reflects the author's worldview, critiquing the patriarchal societal structure and the simultaneous impact of colonialism in shaping the reality of subjugated indigenous women.

Through the main character Sukartini, the novel voices the struggle and aspirations of women to achieve equality and freedom in determining their own fate. Despite being depicted as an educated and forward-thinking woman, Sukartini remains trapped within the social, cultural, and political constraints that limit her potential and movements. This reality is influenced by two main factors: the entrenched patriarchal cultural structure within Indonesian society and the dominance of foreign colonial powers.

The novel "Belenggu" serves as a poignant critique of the dual layers of oppression faced by women, shedding light on the compounded struggles experienced due to both gender and colonial subjugation. Sukartini's character embodies the conflict between personal aspirations and societal limitations, illustrating how deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and colonial dominance restrict women's roles and voices.

The findings of this research contribute significantly to the enrichment of Indonesian literary sociology studies by expanding the scope of analysis to include gender and postcolonial issues. This study highlights the importance of examining literary works through multiple theoretical lenses to gain a more nuanced understanding of the socio-political contexts that shape narratives.

Moreover, the representation of the reality of subjugated women in literature can serve as a powerful medium to spread awareness, provide social critique, and inspire movements and advocacy for achieving true gender equality and justice in contemporary and future societies. By delving into the historical and cultural heritage of Indonesia, this research underscores the enduring relevance of literature in reflecting and challenging societal norms and injustices.

In conclusion, Armijn Pane's "Belenggu" not only reflects the historical struggles of women under colonial and patriarchal oppression but also resonates with ongoing efforts to address gender inequality. This study reinforces the need for continued scholarly attention to literary works as a means of understanding and addressing the complexities of women's experiences across different historical and cultural contexts.

By integrating diverse theoretical perspectives, this research offers a comprehensive and insightful analysis that not only enhances the understanding of "Belenggu" but also contributes to

broader discussions on gender, colonialism, and cultural identity in Indonesian literature. The novel's depiction of Sukartini's plight serves as a reminder of the importance of literature in advocating for social change and promoting a more equitable society.

## REFERENCES

- Bhabha, H. K. (2012). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge.
- Damono, S. D. (2018). *Sosiologi Sastra*. Editum.
- Eriyanto, A. I. (2011). Pengantar Metodologi untuk Penelitian Ilmu Komunikasi dan Ilmu Sosial Lainnya. *Cet. I, (Jakarta: Kencana, 2011)*.
- Goldmann, L. (1975). *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*. Tavistock.
- Heraty, T. (1995). *Ketika Perempuan Tertindas*. Kanisius.
- Kuntowijoyo. (2006). *Budaya dan Masyarakat*. Tiara Wacana.
- Moleong, L. J. (2017). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif (Edisi Revisi)*. PT Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Pane, A. (1988). *Belenggu* (13th ed.). Balai Pustaka.
- Rahardjo, M. (2017). *Studi kasus dalam penelitian kualitatif: konsep dan prosedurnya*.
- Salmaa. (2023). Instrumen penelitian. In *Deepublish*. <https://penerbitdeepublish.com/instrumen-penelitian/>
- Showalter, E. (1981). "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" dalam *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. Eds. D. Lodge & N. Wood. Longman.
- Sugiyono, P. D. (2019). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D*. Alfabeta Bandung.
- Supratno, H. (2019). *Kritik Sastra Indonesia: Kelisanan Hingga Pascakolonial*. Penerbit Ombak.
- Yasmeen, G. (2001). *Menggugat Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan*. Penerbit Alumni.