
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Deconstruction of Femininity in Islamic Boarding Schools in the Novel Hati Suhita by Khilma Anis: Work, Desire, Image, Symbol, and Beauty

Leny Dwi Astuti¹ ✉ | **Wiyatmi²**

¹*Pascasarjana Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, DIY and Indonesia*

²*Wiyatmi, Pascasarjana Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, DIY and Indonesia*

Corresponding Author: Leny Dwi Astuti, **E-mail:** lenydwi.2020@student.uny.ac.id

| ABSTRACT

Gender issues in pesantren can be seen in both men and women. Femininity in pesantren is characterized by passivity to limit women's movement. In novels related to pesantren, the female figure is usually depicted as someone who ends up experiencing powerlessness. However, in the novel Hati Suhita, the author tries to describe women as intelligent, brave, critical, etc. The assumption that arises is that Khilma Anis deconstructs femininity. This study aims to identify and explain the deconstruction of femininity in Islamic boarding schools in the novel Hati Suhita by Khilma Anis. This research uses a critical analysis method with a postmodern feminism approach. There are five forms of deconstruction of femininity in the novel Hati Suhita, namely feminine work, feminine desire, feminine symbols, feminine image, and feminine beauty. Femininity is practiced by female and male characters. Deconstruction of femininity shows that femininity has advantages and disadvantages.

| KEYWORDS

Deconstruction; femininity; boarding school

| ARTICLE DOI: [10.32996/ijllt.2022.5.5.10](https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2022.5.5.10)

1. Introduction

The themes in pesantren are widely studied in Indonesian novels. Some of them, namely *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih*, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, *Negeri 5 Menara*, *Perempuan Berkalung Surban*, etc. In 2019, a writer named Khilma Anis managed to package a novel with a pesantren theme and insert several historical and cultural stories. The novel, entitled *Hati Suhita*, was published in 2019, and within a year, it was already in its XII printing. The novel is assumed to describe the deconstruction of femininity. The naming of female characters in the novel *Hati Suhita* is very interesting and contains educational values about historical facts. This is illustrated by the way the author uses the names of the female characters *Suhita* and *Rengganis*.

Based on historical facts, *Suhita* is one of the female figures of Indonesian feminism. If in history, *Sri Suhita* was a female figure from the Majapahit kingdom from 1427 to 1447 (Wiyatmi, 2020: 5). Furthermore, in the novel *Hati Suhita*, the character *Suhita* is described as a woman who is able to lead a boarding school. Meanwhile, *Dewi Rengganis*, in historical fact, is a female figure from the Argopura kingdom. *Dewi Ratna Rengganis* is known as the beautiful daughter of *Tanah Parahyangan* (Nurfaidah, 2016: 1). Then, in the novel *Hati Suhita*, the character of *Rengganis* is also described as a woman who is beautiful, smart, intelligent, and dares to lead.

Women in the novel *Hati Suhita* are described as intelligent, powerful, brave, and critical. It is assumed that the author deconstructs femininity in pesantren. The author has a background in formal education at state universities and non-formal education in several Islamic boarding schools since childhood. The author wants to fight for the rights of women and men related to education, work, and power.

Khilma Anis' novel discussed here is the novel entitled *Hati Suhita*. There are several reasons related to the selection of these novels. The first reason is that the author of the novel *Hati Suhita* is a woman who has a formal educational background at universities and non-formal education in several Islamic boarding schools since childhood. That means the author has very qualified knowledge and experience in packaging the story in the novel with the theme of the *pesantren*. The second reason, the author is assumed to deconstruct femininity by describing women who are intelligent, powerful, brave, and critical. The author also deconstructs femininity in men by describing men who are crybabies or cry easily. The third reason is that the novel has received appreciation and interest from readers both within the *pesantren* and outside the *pesantren*. This can be seen within a year, the novel translucent to the XII printing. The main aspiration of deconstruction is to deal with meanings that are marginalized, ignored, or hidden. The search form of deconstruction helps to see what is hidden by history or what is prohibited by rearranging the elements that are suppressed (Haryatmoko, 2016: 214). Faruk (2008:40) explains that deconstruction is a method of reading texts that are carried out in a careful manner so that conceptual differences that are made into a part and are the basis of the text fail based on inconsistent and paradoxical purposes in the text (Widyantoro, 2021: 3).

There are several goals to be achieved by deconstruction. First, deconstruction offers a way to identify contradictions in the politics of the text, thereby helping to gain a higher awareness of the existence of forms of inconsistency in the text. Second, deconstruction treats text, context, and tradition as a means that can open up new possibilities for change through impossible relationships. Tradition does not limit new ways of interpretation. It allows creativity because tradition opens up new possibilities by addressing the trajectory of the text. Third, deconstruction helps improve critical thinking skills and see ways in which experience is determined by an ideology that we are not aware of because ideology has been built or integrated into the language. Fourth, deconstruction is considered successful if it is able to change the text, make it foreign to readers who already consider themselves familiar, and makes eyes widen when marginalized meanings are exposed (Haryatmoko, 214-216).

Tong (1998) explains that feminism is a school of thought and a social movement that views the importance of gender equality and justice because, in a patriarchal society, women tend to be marginalized (Wiyatmi, 2021: 42). Postmodern feminists regard femininity and women as "other" is not a disadvantage. Precisely with this position, they can observe with a wider lens about masculinity and femininity, values, and practices constructed by patriarchal society. With deep observation and critical thinking, they can find out the effects of masculinity for men and femininity for women (Zulkarnain, 2018: 110).

One of the deconstructions of femininity is that of Helene Cixous. Cixous invites women to write things that have been hidden, marginalized, and forbidden. When writing, actually, women are in a more advantageous position than men because men have a masculine burden (Cixous, 2008: 53). The masculine burden referred to here is the desire to plan, prepare, and compose written materials as if at war. The masculine burden is also related to the masculine image, namely rational and knowledgeable. Unlike men, women do not have a feminine burden. If you want to write or produce good writing, women do not have to be beautiful (Cixous, 2008: 53). With deconstruction, Cixous is able to liberate women from the veil of femininity that has been considered detrimental and oppresses women to become something that benefits women (Zulkarnain, 2018: 110). Women in feminine theory refer to sexual differences which are purely biological, while feminism is a term for social construction for women (Humm, 2002: 153). A study entitled "Luce Irigaray's Postmodern Feminism: Women's Liberation from Patriarchal Language" by Pratiwi et al. concluded that in this era, there are many things that women can do to implement the values of Luce Irigaray's postmodern feminism.

A novel is an imaginative work that tells the whole side of the problems of the life of a person or several characters (Kosasih, 2012: 60). Between authors and the works they produce, it is very relevant to be studied in more depth so that the discourse represented by the novel in words, sentences, language style, themes, and characterizations appears. An author is usually good at assembling reality in the form of fiction. Authors generally write works based on their life experiences as a source of inspiration (Adnani, 2016: 115).

2. Literature Review

This research is relevant to the research entitled *Deconstruction of Femininity in Novels by Eka Kurniawan: From Work to Beauty*. The research was conducted by Jaka Ahmad Zulkarnain and Wiyatmi in 2018. The similarity with this research is the same method and approach but different research subjects. This research is relevant to the research entitled *Women's Resistance Against Traditions in Islamic Boarding Schools Critical Discourse Analysis Against Women's Novels with Turbans*. The research was conducted by Kamila Adnani, Wening Udasmoro, and Ratna Noviani in 2016. The research has the same method. However, different approaches and research subjects.

3. Methodology

This study used the qualitative research method. This research uses the critical discourse analysis method with a postmodern feminism approach. Critical discourse analysis is used to find out how men and women are presented in Khilma Anis' novels. The

questions in this study are (1) how is the deconstruction of femininity for women in the novel *Hati Suhita* by Khilma Anis? and (2) how is the deconstruction of femininity for men in the novel *Hati Suhita* by Khilma Anis?

The steps taken in this research are as follows. First, carefully read the novel *Hati Suhita* by Khilma Anis. Second, note the forms of femininity that appear in female characters or in male characters in the novel *Hati Suhita*. The data in this study are words, phrases, and sentences that indicate the existence of femininity. Third, note the inconsistency of femininity, the reversal of the hierarchy of femininity, and the new meaning of femininity. Fourth, grouping the data into several categories to facilitate data analysis. The grouping is based on the similarity of the theme of deconstruction of femininity, for example, in terms of work, desire, symbol, image, and beauty.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Deconstruction of Feminine Work in Islamic Boarding Schools in the Novel Hati Suhita

Khilma Anis deconstructs feminine work by presenting 2 female characters who are intelligent, brave, powerful, and critical. The first character is Alina Suhita in the novel *Hati Suhita* a woman who has higher power and position than her husband, Gus Alberruni. Alina Suhita is a smart, brave, and powerful woman. This can be seen from his work or position as chairman of the Al-Anwar Islamic Boarding School, the head of the Diniyah Madrasah, and the leader of the Al-Anwar Islamic Boarding School, as in the following quote.

"... Meanwhile, my father-in-law only has one son, who doesn't understand that he is expected to inherit his kingdom. I am the one who has to carry everything" (Anis, 2019: 57).

From the quote, it can be seen that the female figure, Alina Suhita, is more powerful and able to lead the Al-Anwar Islamic Boarding School compared to her husband. In general, the boarding school will be inherited and managed by the son of the owner of the boarding school. However, in the novel *Hati Suhita*, the author deconstructs work that should be entrusted to men; instead, it is entrusted to women because the son of the heir to the throne is unable to manage it. Apart from being powerful, Alina Suhita is also described as intelligent and brave in leading a boarding school, as in the following quote.

"... I lead diniyah and lead junior high schools" (Anis, 2019: 307).

"... while all the hut affairs are in shambles. The daily manager is confused about this question; that's what I don't know. The management of diniyah asked for this and that which I did not know. Many guest guardians and guardians of students come while I don't understand at all how you have been dealing with them all this time." Said Gus Birru (Anis, 2019: 351).

Khilma Anis also deconstructs feminine work by presenting the second character, namely Rengganis, in the novel *Hati Suhita* as a woman who has a position as editor-in-chief of a magazine, is highly educated, and is able to lead a male team. This is contrary to the work of men who are supposed to be female leaders, but in the novel *Hati Suhita*, Rengganis is described as being able to lead men, as in the following quote.

"Rengganis seems to be active in an LSM dealing with migrant workers, Gus. He became the editor-in-chief of the magazine. He networked a lot with activists from other LSM, perhaps to make his work easier. He rarely picks up the phone and replies to WA now, maybe because he often represents his organization in network work. This is my email that has not been answered for a week, even though it is important. He said he was busy building a network with institutions that have the same issue. When I asked him where he was, he said he was researching data in the field for the baseline. When it was time to collect someone's book introduction, he refused because he was busy working on a funding proposal. Sometimes he is busy reporting the news. It's getting busier, Gus." (Anis, 2019: 142).

Besides being able to lead men, Rengganis is also described as a woman who is intelligent and critical. His critical thinking can be seen in Rengganis' work as a writer, which highlights the role of women in the following quote.

"Well, it's okay, your writing is good. Always highlighting the role of women and their strengths. This is very typical. I heard your writing also echoed to other campuses. ..." (Anis, 2019: 201).

The intelligence of Rengganis figure is described by the way he gets recommendations from lecturers to continue studying in the Netherlands, as in the following quote.

"I want to study in the Netherlands. As long as someone recommends. Haha. Everyone there wants to see ancient texts about pre-colonial women and other texts about Indonesia." (Anis, 2019: 253).

In addition to the characters Alina Suhita and Rengganis, the author also deconstructs feminine work by telling the stories of great female characters who are able to lead the world. This can be seen from Gus Birru's chat with Rengganis. Gus Birru tells the story of great women who rule the world, as in the following quote.

"Once in a while, get out of pre-colonial women's themes, Nduk. Write about the female ruler of the world, from Hathepsut, Queen of Egypt. Continue Nefertiti, Puduhepa, Bathsheba, Mary, Christina, and others. It doesn't matter if you're not interested in literature. But you have to learn how cool those girls are in building civilizations and leading big countries." (Anis, 2019: 208).

4.2 Deconstruction of Feminine Desire in Islamic Boarding Schools in the Novel *Hati Suhita*

Feminine desire is deconstructed by describing a man who cannot be seduced, seduced, or even has no desire for his wife. This is certainly contrary to the desire of men in general, one of the goals of marriage is to have intercourse with his wife and have children. Gus Birru is a man who has no male desire for his wife, as quoted below.

"When he entered the room, his expression had changed. He slowly turned off the aromatherapy, then came closer and said softly, "You don't have to work so hard. I don't know when," said Gus Birru to Alina Suhita" (Anis, 2019: 27).

"Actually, I could have fucked him that night too. He's already mine. Her body too. But I can not tear a woman's body without love. ..." (Anis, 2019: 135).

Deconstruction of femininity in the novel *Hati Suhita* is also depicted through the character Alina Suhita who has no desire to drink feminine herbs. This is contrary to the desire of women in general, who want their feminine area to always be a doormat, neat, and comfortable, as in the following quote.

"But I know I don't need to invite desire anymore because it will hurt myself. He is always cold when I want to, thought Alina Suhita (Anis, 2019: 30).

"All of my children and putu who have had chromo, really don't tell me to drink this, son. That's great for married women. Makes sweat smell good. Keep tight and doormat. It's even more delicious."

"Drink, Lin"

"No, Gus"

(Anis, 2019: 256)

4.3 Deconstruction of Femininity Symbols in Islamic Boarding Schools in Novel *Hati Suhita*

There are two deconstructions of symbols of femininity in the novel *Hati Suhita*. First, the deconstruction of masculine symbols is inferior to femininity in the novel *Hati Suhita*. In general, warriors consist of brave men; strong warriors are invincible. However, in the novel *Hati Suhita*, deconstruction occurs, namely the historical depiction of female warriors who are stronger and able to defeat male soldiers, which Rengganis told Gus Birru, as in the following quote.

"The prowess of the female soldier even surprised VOC officials to see Soldier Estri's skill as a cavalry soldier. He, who is military-trained, can be amazed to see female Javanese soldiers shooting salvos in a regular and precise manner." (Anis, 2019: 199).

Second, the symbol of masculinity losing to femininity is also seen in the novel *Hati Suhita*, namely the story of the king unable to marry Dewi Mundingsari, which was told by Permadi to Gus Birru. The king can usually choose a wife according to his wishes and desires because the king is a symbol of power. However, in *Hati Suhita*'s novel, there is a deconstruction of femininity symbols that can beat masculine symbols, as quoted as follows.

"Dewi Mundingsari in Sekondar fiber, is told as a woman who is magically hot. No Javanese king was able to marry her." (Anis, 2019: 149).

4.4 Deconstruction of Feminine Image in Islamic Boarding School in Novel *Hati Suhita*

There are two ways that Khilma Anis uses to deconstruct the feminine image. First, there is 1 male character who has a feminine image, namely Gus Birru, who is weak when he is sick and when his wife says she wants to go home to her parents, as in the following quote.

"He's helpless. My hand was lying under his cheek. Touching his beard. He seeks comfort there ..." (Anis, 2019: 73).

"This is Mas Birru, who immediately lost his strength when I said I wanted to go back to my mother's house..." (Anis, 2019: 113).

In addition, Gus Birru is also described as weak with his attitude that he does not dare to invite his friends to come to his wedding with Alina Suhita, as in the following quote.

"When my wedding day arrived, I didn't have any friends to invite. I'm ashamed. I, who always shouted loudly about opposing oppression, turned out to be unable to fight against my own matchmaking. I was so insulted. I who always shout about the struggle for human rights, it turns out that I can't fight for my own future human rights" (Anis, 2019: 133).

From this quote, it can be seen that Gus Birru is a weak man and needs a woman to strengthen him. Of course, this is contrary to the masculine image that is always dashing and brave.

Second, Khilma Anis presents a female character who fights against the feminine image, such as being shy. There are two female characters who have a brave image, namely Rengganis, in the novel *Hati Suhita* as shown in the following quote.

"I am quiet; he (Rengganis) is cheerful. I'm closed; he can get along with anyone. Have you met this woman in the past? I want to give up. But I remember Aruna said that my name is Suhita, I am the queen. I cannot lose" (Anis, 2019: 91).

From the quote from Alina Suhita, Rengganis is described as a brave woman who is not shy because she is able to get along with anyone.

4.5 Beauty Deconstruction in Islamic Boarding School in Novel *Hati Suhita*

There are two ways to deconstruct beauty by Khilma Anis in the novel *Hati Suhita*. First, beauty does not always benefit women. This can be seen from the beautiful and smart Rengganis character, who is unable to have Gus Birru. The beauty of Rengganis is inferior to the silence of Alina Suhita, who is not as beautiful as Rengganis, as in the following quote.

"Aruna once said, the proud Mas Birru will be subdued by the feminine charm of Javanese women that has been embedded in my body and soul. But today, I know Mas Birru didn't just melt because of that. He liked the chanting of my *ngaji*, and this touched me. Because every time I remember Rengganis, I feel small and inexperienced. I don't have any weapons to melt Mas Birru's heart. I didn't complain to anyone. I always try to *mikul duwur and jero* even though my heart is broken. It turns out that silence and my *ngaji* are the most sacred heirlooms in my battle." (Anis, 2019: 354).

Second, beauty does not always benefit women; it is also seen in the fate of Alina Suhita, which is assumed by Aruna Citrawati. Aruna says that although Alina Suhita is beautiful, her life is full of burdens. Alina Suhita's beauty does not benefit Alina as in the following quote.

"Alina is beautiful full of charm. But his life is full of burdens. Only with me, he laughed so hard his mouth was visible. Only with me did he dare to burp. Only with me, the spoons clinking while eating. Apart from me, he's very calm. I myself don't know, whose calm is it from who" (Anis, 2019: 47).

From this quote, the author deconstructs beauty by describing the beauty that actually harms women. The author also describes that the perfection of women (the character of Alina Suhita) actually makes her suffer, as in the following quote.

"I think Alina is the perfect girl. Turns out I was wrong. She suffered more than any woman. Is there anything more painful than being ignored by your own husband?! Not considered? Not seen? Not touched? And it's been months?" (Anis, 2019: 51).

The following table was created to make it easier to understand the results of the analysis.

Deconstruction

Deconstruction	Description	Figure
Feminity Work	Women lead Islamic boarding schools and madrasah diniyah	Alina Suhita
	Women lead the men's team and lead magazine editors	Rengganis
Feminine Desire	Women don't want to drink fast, doormat, and delicious herbal medicine	Alina Suhita
	Men are not tempted by wife's seduction	Gus Birru
Feminine Symbol	A woman so strong that even the king could not marry her	Dewi Mundingsari
	Women who dare to fight	Prajurit Wanita
Feminine Image	Men are weak and lose their strength when their wives ignore them	Gus Birru
	Brave girl	Rengganis
Feminine Beauty	Beautiful and smart woman, but can't have the person she loves	Rengganis
	Beautiful and perfect woman, but life is full of problems	Alina Suhita

5. Conclusion

This study aims to identify and explain the deconstruction of femininity in Islamic boarding schools in the novel *Hati Suhita* by Khilma Anis. This research uses a critical analysis method with a postmodern feminism approach. There are five forms of deconstruction of femininity in the novel *Hati Suhita*, namely feminine work, feminine desire, feminine symbols, feminine image, and feminine beauty. Femininity is practiced by female and male characters. Deconstruction of femininity shows that femininity has advantages and disadvantages.

The contribution of this research is to inform the reader that there is an example of deconstruction of femininity among Islamic boarding schools that are written in the novel "*Hati Suhita*." The deconstruction of femininity in the novel *Hati Suhita* by Khilma Anis is found in five forms of femininity, namely femininity work, femininity desire, femininity symbol, femininity image, and beauty. Khilma Anis shows that femininity can occur in both women and men. From the point of view of postmodern feminism, Khilma Anis describes femininity as not always detrimental to women.

The author hopes that this article can be a reference for researchers. In addition, the author suggests to researchers in the field of literature to continue research on the deconstruction of femininity in various works, for example, film, poetry, short stories, etc.

Funding: This research was funded by LPDP.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Adnani, K., Udasmoro, W., & Noviani, R. (2016). Resistensi Perempuan Terhadap Tradisi-Tradisi di Pesantren Analisis Wacana Kritis Terhadap Novel Perempuan Berkalung Sorban. *Jurnal Kawistara*, 6(2), 144-156.
- [2] Anis, K. (2019). *Hati Suhita*. Yogyakarta: Telaga Aksara.
- [3] Cixous, H. (2008). *White Ink: Interview on Sex, Text, dan Politics*. Stocksfield: Acumen.
- [4] Haryatmoko. (2016). *Critical Discourse Analysis (Analisis Wacana Kritis) Landasan Teori, Metodologi, dan Penerapan*. Jakarta: PT Raja Grafindo Persada.
- [5] Humm, M. (2002). *Ensiklopedia Feminisme*. Terjemahan Mundi Rahayu. Banguntapan: Fajar Pustaka Baru.
- [6] Kosasih, E. (2012). *Dasar-Dasar Ketrampilan Bersastra*. Bandung: Yrama Widya.
- [7] Nurfaidah, R. (2016). *Nyi Rengganis dan Taman Banjarsari Cerita Rakyat dari Jawa Barat*. Jakarta Timur: Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa.
- [8] Pratiwi, Ni Putu Sri, dkk. *Feminisme Postmodern Luce Irigaray: (n.d) Pembebasan Perempuan dari Bahasa Patriarki*. Diunduh melalui <http://ojs.unud.ac.id>.
- [9] Widyantoro, C M dan Yunita E. (2021). *Dekonstruksi Feminitas dalam Novel Jemini Karya Suparto Brata*. *Jurnal Baradha*, 17(1). Diunduh melalui <https://ejournal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/baradha/article/view/37670>.
- [10] Wiyatmi. (2020). Perempuan dalam *Kesusastraan Indonesia*. Seminar Nasional Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia Unpam. Diunduh melalui <http://openjournal.unpam.ac.id/index.php/SNS/article/view/7856/5020>.
- [11] Wiyatmi, W. (2021). *Memahami Motif Perkawinan Bidadari dengan Laki-Laki Bumi sebagai Spirit Feminisme dalam Foklore Indonesia*. *Diksi*, 29 (1), 41-50.
- [12] Zulkarnain, J.A. (n.d). *Dekonstruksi Feminitas dalam Novel-Novel Karya Eka Kurniawan : Dari Pekerjaan sampai Kecantikan*. *Poetika: Jurnal Ilmu Sastra*, 6 (2), 109-121