



# Portraits of Women in Exile and Colonization in the Novel *De Liefde*

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to reveal exile experiences and exile spirits encountered by women in the novel *De Liefde* by Afifah Afra. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method to obtain an itemized and detailed description of the exile experience and the exiled spirit that emerges in women. Mastery of language while in exile makes it easy to communicate, and the limitations of language mastery become a scourge. Someone exiled will also instinctively look for the 'same' group with his background, vision, and mission. Javanese women have a long history of racial and gender discrimination among themselves and colonial nations. While in exile, there is an erosion or erosion of self-identity that aims to eliminate his sense of nationality. Therefore, resistance is needed both from internal and external sources. Although seclusion is synonymous with misery, it does not hinder the spirit and desire of women to be in exile. They think exile is a symbol of the highest struggle.

**Keywords:** Colonial, Exile experiences, Women.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In colony settlements, women's bodies are not directly constructed as part of transgressive sexuality but became places of power discourse (Ashcroft et al., 2007). In the formation of colony settlements, women were used as a 'womb' to create a new colony population of white settlers, where women only served to give birth to the new generation. In Javanese culture (Arimbi, 2009; Sugihara & Katsurada 2002; Yulianeta et al., 2016), the role of women is reflected in three Javanese traditional proverbs are *konco wingking* (friend behind the house), *suargo nunut neraka katut* (wife will follow her husband wherever he goes, either to heaven or to hell), and *manak, masak, macak* (breed, cook, decorate). Therefore, women are closely related to mattresses (beds), kitchens, and wells (household work).

Women have limited access to a field of education (Loomba, 2015; Srimulyani, 2007; Mishra, 2005; Yulianeta, 2021). There are two arguments about education for women. First, educated women will be able to become better wives and mothers. Second, educated women must be taught not to overstep their boundaries and seize the authority of men. The sphere of women and education has become one of the colonial battles still felt today. Javanese women's education in the colonial era was inseparable from getting teachings to be a simple

woman, to be decent wives, to control how to behave and speak, and to body care to please their husbands. Even women, who came from noble families, did not get access to expanded education as men (Smith-Hefner, 2019).

Said's book title *Peran Intelektual: Kuliah-kuliah Reith Tahun 1993* (2014) explains the term exile used in various situations, contexts, and meanings. Long ago, a person was in seclusion because he contracted a contagious disease, till he was not touched socially and morally. A shift in meaning then occurred in the 20th century, where the definition of exile was synonymous with ostracism and punishment of extraordinary people, then turned into a cruel punishment for the whole nation and state. Exile be used as a punishment or as an impact of impersonal forces such as war, famine, or disease.

Kavolis (1992) states that exile is synonymous with activities that are male traits or a more suitable fate given to men. However, this trend is changing. Women also become subjects exiled. Not seldom the exile punishment received by women is related to myths. Isolation creates physical distance from the homeland (Das et al., 2021) means it also creates separation from relatives and familiar places (Said, 2014). Therefore, being in exile is an ironic situation, because it can assemble physical and psychological instability (Group, 2021). But for an intellectual, exile is a form of nature, where he has the

task of seeking relative freedom and various kinds of pressure. Exile creates the conditions of greater freedom of expression that sustain activists to release long-held pent-up feelings. Exile was a punishment habituated for independent political or intellectual activity in an identical nation-state system.

Based on this background, the research problem focused on the following questions: what is the experience and the spirit of women's exile in the novel *De Liefde* by Afifah Afra? While the purpose of this study is to describe and find out the exile experience and the exiled spirit of women in the novel *De Liefde* by Afifah Afra. The context of seclusion in this study is the political problems experienced by women during the Dutch colonial period. The image of women who often experience racial and gender discrimination because of the power relations between the West and the East cannot be off from cultural factors.

Previous research focused on the study of women and exile was also carried out by Rahayu and Weber. A study by Rahayu (2019) discusses women in the realm of imperialism contained in the tetralogy of the novel *Bumi Manusia* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. That novel depicts gender inequality and colonial imperialism against indigenous women. These women have a courageous attitude, are strong, full of struggle and enthusiasm, are religious, have broad insights, have big goals, and are critical. Another study by Weber (2019) revealed the experience of seclusion seen in the history of Cam's exile documented in the form of narrative poetry Cam diaspora. Cam's narrative depicts the past from the story of a life and family suffering from exile, nostalgia for the homeland, confusion after resettlement in a foreign place, and a hostile environment. Cam migrants underlined the existence of political forces, travel difficulties, adaptation challenges, and competition between other communities.

Both studies are related to this research, especially the problems of women's exile experiences during the colonial period. Afifah Afra's *De Liefde* novel presents an exile experience and spirit in her female character. The second novel in *De Winst's* tetralogy, published in the 2010s, contains the struggle of women in seclusion because they were considered a danger to the existence of the government of the Queen of the Netherlands. The image of women fighting for the interest of the marginalized is a form of resistance to the Dutch government.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This research used the descriptive qualitative method. Research data was obtainable by using reading and note-taking techniques. The research source is the novel *De Liefde*, the second novel in the *De Winst* tetralogy by Afifah Afra and published by Indiva Media Kreasi in 2010 in Surakarta. The steps of this research are to read

the novel in its entirety and repeatedly to gain a deep understanding, then proceed with hermeneutical reading to get more detailed text data. After reading, the next step is to record data that is by research needs by adjusting to the indicators of the problems raised. The next step is to classify the data according to the research indicator and then perform data analysis by referring to the theoretical basis used in the research. The last step is to make a conclusion.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. *The Woman's Life in Exile*

#### 3.1.1. *Language Experience*

Novel *De Liefde* by Afra describes quite a several situations of women in exile in communication or dialogue, whether with fellow internees, groups, or communities, the original residents of the place of exile, as well as with other immigrants. Afra's depiction in his novel shows the human experience in language, especially as an internment. Language problems are a specific problem in society because language can reflect existing habits of expression (Said, 2014).

There is an interesting phenomenon, where both come from Java but are likewise masters and exchange greetings using Dutch. Sekar also described having no difficulty adjusting to the Dutch language, even though he previously lived under the strict upbringing of the Solo palace. In addition to a history of education in the Solo palace, the influence of education at the Europese Lagere School, MULO, and AMS (Afra, 2010) is the reason for the fluent mastery of the Dutch language of the indigenous nobles. Groeneboer (1999) stated that Dutch as the instruction language in schools and its inclusion in one of the compulsory subjects serves as a gateway for knowledge to the West. It proves that the existence of the Dutch language at the time of the Dutch East Indies government could not be apart from the fields of education and livelihood. Indigenous people who receive education in Dutch can experience denationalization which causes them to lose contact with other indigenous people. The use of local languages is rated to continue and to introduce and preserve their mother tongue.

A language is a crucial tool used for communication. Sekar, as an intern, did not understand the conversations of a group of people who spoke German. That causes him not to be able to understand the discussion that has taken place. If the existence of the Dutch language is used as a gateway to the West and get a decent job, the Malay language acquires a function as a lingua franca and can be used as a social language. Context of the data, the German language was used by the group of people to discuss the political strategy to fight for the independence of the Dutch East Indies. They took advantage of the tense political conditions of Nazi Germany and the

Netherlands to achieve independence. However, among the natives, the German language still feels foreign, and only a few people master it.

### 3.1.2. Community Experience

The reality of a community indeed cannot be separated from the role of language in understanding each other's intentions. Therefore, the experience of language and society cannot untwist. The presence of community among exiles in exile can maintain close interpersonal relationships or a comprehensive network of friends (Das et al., 2021). The closeness built between exiles can heal the gloomy feelings of being away from one's homeland and loved ones. The life of exile is synonymous with a cruel and sad life. Therefore, the relationships are intentional to build in a community and contribute to maintaining their identity in exile.

Sekar received several invitations to join several organizations or communities containing exiled Indonesian movement activists. It emphasizes that a person in exile cannot detach from an association. Stay around people with the same background and identity becomes a basic need because they have been kept away from their homeland. For prisoners, being in exile no longer means being terminated, but they can still work and do things according to the will of their conscience even though their lives are at stake. The need for people in exile to be with a community that fits their background and identity can help them to remember why they left and lived in exile. In line with Das et al. (2021), leaving the homeland does not always mean separation or total severance. Outcasts can develop complex relationships to continue to maintain their identity. Religious institutions function the same as secular institutions, which serve as a means of hegemonic control or resistance. A person who is in the condition of tragedy and sad (in exile) raises the need for social and spiritual aspects.

Garendi dragged Sekar to join his movement, affiliated with the Nazi army. Sekar feels discomfort and incompatibility when he is in it. Even though they are both in the context of the Indonesian independence movement, there are different missions in achieving the same vision. In group relationships involving interactions between humans, it is undeniable and unavoidable that there will be conflict or hostility that occurs. That happens because of differences in a group.

### 3.1.3. History Experience

Indigenous people have a cultural and social portrait that is very different from Western nations. Indigenous culture in the colonial era, one of which was the existence of feudal culture. In feudal discourses, Javanese women often bear the title of *Konco Wingking*. The existence of traditional doctrines and confines aimed at women then raises a perspective that being a woman must be elegant

in beautification: wearing batik cloth, kebaya, and hairpins. Not only that, but patriarchal culture also beautifies the discourse of colonialism. The position of women in society is always below, never equal, or even higher than men. Women have much less opportunity to study than men.

Makmur et al., (1993) explained that in 1817 the first school for Europeans was opened, namely the Europeesche Lagere School (ELS) imitated the schools in the Netherlands. Willem Gymnasium high school opened in the 1860s, and from time to time, its name changed to Hogere Burger School (HBS). The opportunity for schooling for indigenous children started at Inlandsche School (HIS) and was reorganized into an ELS-level school in the 1914s so that they could continue to Meer Uitgebreid Lager Onderwijs (MULO). In 1919, Algemene Middelbare School (AMS) was opened, as a continuation of MULO, for students preparing to enter college.

Even though Sekar is an indigenous from the nobility, it cannot be separated from discrimination. Start with the differences in nationality, skin color, eyeballs, and hair. Not to mention the nobility status attached to the Surakarta royal family was meaningless if faced with the power of the Dutch East Indies government. Sekar gets discriminated against by his white friends. The patriarchal culture in Dutch East Indies began to manifest when ethical political education was implemented. The existence of a relationship with Europeans opened the idea of European feminism. Educated women who came from the elite then began to realize the oppression experienced by indigenous women.

Knowledge about gender equality, as seen from the image of western women, began to enter the colonial countries, one of which was the Dutch East Indies. Awareness of gender equality among Javanese women is not discovered, where Javanese women are still struggling to look beautiful behind the folds of batik cloth, Kebaya, and hairpins. Women were deliberately positioned below men in social caste. Meanwhile, white women have a more advanced image of being educated, intelligent, modern, and able to think critically.

During the Dutch colonial period, not all Dutch people suffered from the Indonesian people. There are people of Dutch descent who have an awareness that the suffering experienced by the Indonesian people is an act that is not right. In the novel *De Liefde*, the female character Everdine Kareen Spinoza is a lawyer who is troubling the Dutch East Indies government. Kareen tried to continue to defend the indigenous people who were oppressed and considered to have caused unrest for the Dutch people. His efforts to help the indigenous people drew various condemnations from the colonial government. Kareen also married a native who was an intern at Boven Digoel. In addition, Kareen also converted to Islam, following her husband's religion.

### 3.1.4. Identity Erosion Resistance Experience

According to Kavolis (1992), in the long term, exile affects the destruction of communities and languages. That makes his exile famous for his pain and painful infinity, his forgetfulness, detachment, and indifference to the terrifying sight of humans and inhuman, which is immeasurable except by himself. The problems experienced by the exiled people will continue to be more and more collective. Western efforts to erode the identity of the indigenous people in exile must be balanced with resistance efforts so that national identity does not just disappear. They would give ridicule, ridicule, and insults to a prisoner in exile.

Sekar received insults from a Dutch politician and was consciously rejected and dismissed by clenching his fists. That is an effort to protect one's identity as a woman and a native person. Women's skills in horseback riding, armed, and competing, were deliberately prepared to keep the palace safe from enemy threats, she also shows her toughness as a woman. Although riding, being armed, and fighting is identical to men, women also get this learning, and they are trusted to protect the palace with the skills and abilities given.

The onslaught of luxury, facilities, and connections during Sekar's stay at De Lente castle can indirectly accelerate the emergence of skepticism. A luxurious castle complete with all the furniture, networks, and relations of important people, a library containing many books, and offers to study at a renowned university are some of the subtle ways used by the Dutch government to erode Sekar Prembayoen's self-identity. To maintain national identity among the subtle attacks of the Dutch government while Sekar was in exile, he was constantly remembering and convincing himself who he was in the past. Whatever he had done to forge his mental and physical strength. These physical exercises are remaining not to lose their identity while in exile.

### 3.2. The Spirit of Women in Exile

Exile is synonymous with painful conditions, being far from family, being in a remote place, and being full of torture. However, all the scary news about the ins and outs of exile did not prevent women from being able to participate in the struggle for the national movement. The awareness to fight is no longer only owned by male activists but also by women. Educated women have great consciousness. Therefore, the spirit of women in exile is also not inferior to that of men.

Sekar and Kareen are two different female figures but have some similarities. Sekar is a Javanese woman from the Solo Palace, while Kareen is a Dutch woman from a prominent family. Both were disliked by the Dutch government because they helped people from the marginal classes. Boven Digoel is a sprawling and

terrifying natural prison. The shadows of malaria mosquitoes that continue to lurk, feelings of loneliness, the dangerous wilderness of Papua, and the many indigenous Papuans who clash between groups. The horror of Digoel as a natural prison did not stop Kareen from wanting to catch up with her husband. Even Sekar believed that exile was the highest form of resistance test against the colonial nation.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The woman of the intellectual character depicted by Afra has a strong self-identity evident from her experience in exile. Mastery of language while in exile makes it easy to communicate, and the limitations of language mastery become a scourge. Someone exiled will also instinctively look for the 'same' group with his background, vision, and mission. Javanese women have a long history of racial and gender discrimination among themselves and colonial nations. While in exile, there is an erosion or erosion of self-identity that aims to eliminate his sense of nationality. Therefore, resistance is needed both from internal and external sources. Although seclusion is synonymous with misery, it does not hinder the spirit and desire of women to be in exile. They think exile is a symbol of the highest struggle. There are no of the women's mythological experiences in the novel *De Liefde* found in this research.

Literary research with a postcolonial review can add to the study of Indonesian literacy and cultural literature. The postcolonial topics raised in this study have relevance to the history of Indonesia, being colonized by other nations. It is what makes Indonesian literary works have their characteristics. The construction of relations between the colonizers and the colonized as the main story has its postcolonial reading strategy. The hope is that the research can add to the repertoire of Indonesian literature that focuses on postcolonial and feminist reviews. This research needs to be developed and continued.

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