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THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN DURING THE DUTCH COLONIAL ERA IN THE ILLUSTRATIONS OF *RAGAM NI SI MARIAN*

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Abstract. Women face various challenges in every era. During the Dutch colonial period in Indonesia, women were often subjected to exploitation. The condition of women during that time is reflected in numerous novels through the representation of female characters depicted as weak, living lives filled with injustice, and lacking happiness. This representation of oppressed women is deconstructed through the character of Marian Bintang Nauli Hasibuan in the novel *Ragam Ni Si Marian*. Based on that, this study aims to uncover the representation and meaning of women during the Dutch colonial period as portrayed in *Ragam Ni Si Marian*. The study employs a multimodal approach to analyze the representation and meaning of women in the novel, using the *Reading Images* theory developed by Kress & van Leeuwen and text analysis based on Paul Gee's *Seven Building Tasks* framework. The findings reveal that the combination of text, images, and colors in *Ragam Ni Si Marian* offers a unique representation and meaning of women during the Dutch colonial period in Indonesia.

Keywords: Representation of Women, Dutch Colonial Period, *Ragam Ni Si Marian*, Multimodal.

INTRODUCTION

Women have always faced challenges in every era, including during the Dutch colonial period in Indonesia. The implementation of the Agrarian Law of 1870 opened opportunities for European capitalists to lease land in the Dutch East Indies, leading to the establishment of large plantations like those in Deli. Behind the global success of Deli's rubber production lay the exploitation of thousands of women brought by the colonial government from Java to serve as sexual companions for male plantation workers. This policy aimed to maintain the laborers' productivity (Toer, 2009: 296-297). Plantation owners were also encouraged to cohabitate with *nyai* or concubines to make their stay more comfortable. In the military, *nyai* were seen as a blessing, keeping soldiers away from prostitutes and thus reducing the risk of venereal diseases (Hellwig, 2007: 41-44).

The reality that women became *nyai* is a historical fact that cannot be erased. This condition is also often depicted in fictional works representing the state of women during that time. Representation is a social construction that requires exploration and deeper understanding of how meaning is formed in various contexts. Representation exists materially in writings, images, and books produced and interpreted within specific social contexts (Barker, 2005: 10). The representation of women as *nyai* carries a negative connotation, particularly in Indonesian culture, which upholds religious values.

Several literary works feature female characters as *nyai* or with other socially marginalized labels. For example, the character Gadis Pantai in *Gadis Pantai*, Nyai Ontosoroh in *Bumi Manusia*, and Ara in *Larasati* are depicted as concubines or prostitutes. Similarly, in *Parijs van Java: Darah, Keringat, Air Mata* by Remy Sylado, the character Gertruida becomes a victim of the prostitution business. Mirah in *Mirah dari Banda* by Hanna Rambe is portrayed as a servant, *nyai*, and laborer on a plantation.

In fiction set during the Dutch colonial period, women are often depicted as having low social status, experiencing oppression, and struggling against injustice. These portrayals are closely tied to the

influence of Dutch colonial power, where the colonizers' perspectives shaped social structures and power dynamics within colonized societies. Additionally, authors' personal experiences influenced how women were represented in these works. However, these representations are not a universal reflection of Indonesian women's conditions at that time. Instead, they serve as narratives highlighting the harsh realities faced by women during the colonial period.

Understanding the representation of women in the aforementioned works or other media is achieved through discourse analysis. Discourse analysis examines the structure of messages within communication, encompassing not only the transmission of messages from sender to receiver but also the creation of meaning by the producer for the audience (Hermawan, 2013: 3). One compelling approach is Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), a paradigm for studying language combined with other resources, such as images, scientific symbolism, gestures, actions, music, and sounds (O'Halloran, 2011: 121). For example, in the study *"Analisis Multimodal Representasi Ibu pada Feed Instagram @jokowi: Ibu Yang Berdaya (?)"*, researchers explored the constructed meanings of maternal representation in Instagram posts. Using Kress & van Leeuwen's *Reading Images* theory, the analysis revealed that the representation of mothers on President Jokowi's Instagram posts framed women as being relegated to the domestic sphere in the digital era (Utomo, 2023: 34). Another study, *"A Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) on Bidadari Bermata Bening Novel by Habiburrahman El-Shirazy"*, employed a multimodal approach to analyze the novel's cover design, combining Kress's *Reading Images* and James Paul Gee's *Seven Building Tasks* for text analysis (Yanda & Ramadhanti, 2018: 225).

To expand the use of a multimodal approach, particularly in representing negatively constructed women, this study aims to analyze the representation and meaning of women in the illustrations featured in the novel *Ragam Ni Si Marian*. This research seeks to enrich the discourse on women's representation during the Dutch colonial period. Written by Kartini Syahrir, the novel is set around the 1920s, during the Spanish flu pandemic in the Dutch East Indies. The protagonist, Marian, is depicted with a unique character compared to other female characters in the previously mentioned fictional works. Marian challenges the stereotype of women as sufferers, offering a fresh perspective on female representation. The novel's uniqueness is further enhanced by 12 illustrations by visual artist Melissa Sunjaya. However, this study is limited to analyzing four illustrations from the entire collection.

RESEARCH METHOD

Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan multimodal menggunakan teori reading image dari Kress & Leeuwen dan teori *Seven Building Tasks dari* Paul Gee. Reading image dari Kress & Leeuwen (2006: 18) meliputi aspek representational meaning, interactive meaning dan compositional meaning. Menurut Kress dan van Leeuwen (2002) bahwa warna adalah juga salah satu semiotic mode sebab makna sebuah warna bisa berbeda dalam konteks berbeda, dan dari warna-warna lainnya. Selanjutnya, analisis teks menggunakan teori Seven Building Tasks Paul Gee meliputi aspek yaitu significance, activity, identity, connection, relationship, politics, dan sign system and knowledge. Adapun novel yang dianalisa berjudul Ragam Ni Si Marian karya Kartini Sjahrir. Novel ditulis dalam bahasa Indonesia, terdiri dari 690 halaman, diterbitkan pada tanggal 29 Februari 2024 oleh Kompas Penerbit Buku. Novel ini memuat 13 ilustrasi, namun dalam penelitian ini dibatasi pada analisis empat ilustrasi yang dikaji menggunakan pendekatan multimodal. Empat ilustrasi gambar tersebut yaitu cover dan tiga ilustrasi gambar pada novel.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

1.1. Reading Image

1.1.1. Cover



Fig 1. Cover

In representational meaning aspect, the cover image features the faces of two characters split into two sections, with contrasting colors and patterns. This duality symbolizes a narrative of diverse identities. The left side portrays a woman with darker hues, while the right side depicts a man with lighter tones, symbolizing freedom and modernity. This representation underscores a contradiction between the two characters, reflecting inequality. Interactive meaning is conveyed through the use of indirect gaze and visual proximity. The split faces do not make direct eye contact, creating a reflective connection. The close distance between the faces and the red background evokes emotional intensity, implying a personal and introspective message. From a compositional perspective, the cover employs the principles of salience and information value to communicate its message effectively. The dominant red color is complemented by black, white, and light brown tones. Red is associated with positive meanings such as passion, love, energy, enthusiasm, excitement, warmth, and strength (Morioka et al., 2006). Black and white create contrast on the split faces, signifying duality or differences. From an orientalist viewpoint, darker skin represents Eastern identity, while lighter skin symbolizes the West (Martayana, 2019: 7). The light brown tones suggest warmth and humanity, reflecting specific cultural identities.

When connected to the novel's content, the dominant red symbolizes the positive energy, spirit, and resilience of the main female character, Marian Bintang Nauli Hasibuan. Marian is of Batak and Sundanese descent, her father hailing from Tapanuli and bearing the Hasibuan family name. Her father comes from a well-known merchant family in Sibolga and Barus, with ties to Dutch officials in North Sumatra. During his time in Garut, he collaborated on coffee plantation ventures with the family of Raden Arta Sutawinata and the colonial Dutch government. It was then that Marian's father met and married Marian's mother, Minarsih, the daughter of Raden Arta Sutawinata. Marian's family background indicates she is a native woman of noble lineage from Limbangan. Her native identity is further emphasized by Marian's dark-colored face and hands. Meanwhile, the male figure, Jan-Pieter, is a botanist specializing in tropical plants who works at the coffee plantation in Garut to ensure high-quality coffee production. Jan-Pieter was born in Priangan while his father was involved in developing coffee plantations in Garut. At the age of seven, Jan-Pieter and his family returned to the Netherlands, where they settled permanently. The duality in the cover art not only mirrors the contrasting identities and social standings of Marian and Jan-Pieter but also serves as a visual metaphor for the broader themes of the novel, such as colonial power dynamics, cultural hybridity, and the struggle for equality and individuality within the colonial framework.

1.1.2. Illustration

The representation and meaning of women in the novel *Ragam Ni Si Marian* will be examined through an analysis of the illustrations featured in the novel. Below are the illustrations:



Fig 2. Image 2



Fig 3. Image 3



Fig 4. Image 4

The representational meaning aspect in Fig. 2, the illustration depicts a nurse wearing a characteristic uniform, complete with a white hat and a red cross symbol, tending to a male patient. This visual representation highlights a healthcare activity, illustrating the interpersonal relationship between the caregiver (nurse) and the recipient (patient). The depicted action represents the role of women in the healthcare field. Regarding interactive meaning, there is no direct contact between the nurse and the audience, as the nurse's focus is directed toward the patient, creating a sense of empathy and engagement in her task. From a compositional perspective, the nurse and patient are the central focus, emphasized through contrasting lines and colors. The dominant navy blue conveys a sense of calm and formality, while white symbolizes cleanliness and professionalism, which are traits associated with nursing. The red symbol on the nurse's hat signifies health and safety, drawing attention to the nurse's crucial role. In relation to the novel, the nurse is Marian, and the male patient is Jan-Pieter. Marian works as a nurse at Cikini Hospital, while Jan-Pieter is hospitalized there due to the Spanish flu outbreak in the Dutch East Indies.

In Fig. 3, the representational meaning aspect is about portrays a woman enjoying a cup of drink, facing a scenic lake view with a mountain in the background. This depiction reflects a relaxed atmosphere and the natural beauty of Garut, known as the "Swiss van Java." The image of a woman enjoying a drink showcases elements of lifestyle, beauty, and luxury amidst nature. From the interactive meaning perspective, the woman does not directly face the viewer but focuses on the landscape ahead, creating a sense of privacy and inviting the audience to share in the serene moment. Regarding compositional meaning, the woman is the focal point, with the mountain and lake in the background serving as visual balance. The dominant blue tones convey tranquility and natural beauty, while the red accents in the woman's accessories highlight her as the main subject. In connection with the novel, the woman in Figure 3 is Marian. Jan-Pieter invites Marian and her siblings on an excursion to Telaga Bodas in southern Garut.

In Fig. 4, the representational meaning aspect is conveyed through an illustration showing a young girl holding the hand of an adult, set against the backdrop of a building labeled "Harmonie," with a musician playing nearby.. This scene conveys a harmonious and familial atmosphere within an organized social setting. Regarding interactive meaning, the young girl directs her gaze forward, evoking optimism and enthusiasm. From the compositional meaning perspective, the young girl is the central subject, with the "Harmonie" inscription on the building symbolizing social connections. The dominant blue color conveys tranquility and harmony, while the red elements in the child's clothing emphasize vitality and centrality. In connection with the novel, the young girl is Marian, while the adult male holding her hand is her father. They are depicted walking past a building in Batavia used by the elite for gatherings, dining, and dancing to popular European music and rhythms of the time.

2.1. Reading Text

The reading of this research text employs Paul Gee's *Seven Building Tasks* theory, which consists of seven aspects: significance**,** activity**,** identity**,** connection**,** relationship**,** politics**,** and sign system and knowledge. These aspects are presented in Table 1 below::

Table. 1 Reading Text *Ragam Ni Si Marian*

Aspect	Fig. 1	Fig. 2	Fig. 3	Fig. 4
Significance	The text *"Ragam Ni Si Marian"* highlights the word *"Ragam,"* which signifies diversity or complexity. This emphasizes that the story encompasses multidimensional themes. The phrase *"Ni Si Marian"* reinforces the meaning of locality and tradition, indicating that Marian is a woman deeply connected to a specific cultural heritage.	The text *"Koningen Emma Ziekenhuis Tjikini"* highlights the significance of the hospital in the Tjikini (Cikini) area as a symbol of modern healthcare during the colonial era. The use of Dutch reflects the strong connection with Dutch colonial rule.	The text *"Swiss van Java"* emphasizes the natural beauty and tourist appeal of Garut city.	The text *"Inang Borukhu"* is derived from the Batak language, where "Inang" means woman, and "boru" is a term used by parents to refer to their daughter.
Activity	The text indicates that the novel's story may address social and cultural practices related to women's roles, identity, and social relationships. The use of the term "Ni," which signifies origin or traditional ownership, highlights that the local cultural practices are being represented.	The text supports the activity depicted, which is medical care in a hospital setting.	The text supports the activity of enjoying the natural beauty, depicted through the mountain and lake scenery. This verbal text functions as tourism promotion	The text "Inang Borukhu" depicts the affectionate relationship between parents and their daughter. Meanwhile, the text "Harmonie" on the colonial-style building represents social and cultural activities.
Identity	Marian is represented as the main character, and through the name "Ni Si Marian," her identity is linked to a cultural context. This indicates that Marian's identity	The identity of the hospital is attached to the name "Koningen Emma," a Dutch queen, to emphasize the power relations between colonialism and modern	The identity of Garut is linked to "Swiss," highlighting how European influence is used to reinforce Garut's image as an exotic yet modern and	The identity of "Inang" as a mother in Batak culture becomes a focal point. This word also signifies the strong connection between women, family, and local culture.

Aspect	Fig. 1	Fig. 2	Fig. 3	Fig. 4
	is not only personal but also tied to specific cultural values, traditions, or communities.	institutions such as healthcare services.	"classy" destination.	The text "Harmonie" represents modern identity. Both texts showcase the blend of local identity and modernity.
Connection	The phrase "Ni Si Marian" connects the character to local traditions, while the use of the word "Ragam" bridges the story into a broader perspective, encompassing global dynamics such as feminism or colonialism.	This text connects the hospital institution with both colonial and indigenous communities in the Cikini area, creating a narrative that modern healthcare services are a contribution of the colonial government.	The text connects the reader with the European imagination (Swiss), creating an appeal for both colonial tourists and local people who wish to experience "Europe" in Dutch East Indies.	The text connects the local Batak culture with modern elements such as the "Harmonie" building and music, creating a blend of tradition and Western influence.
Relationship	The text illustrates that the novel carries a narrative with a political dimension, particularly related to the struggle of women.	This text illustrates the hierarchical relationship between colonial healthcare providers (Dutch) and the local community as beneficiaries, reflecting the power dynamics between rulers and the people.	This text creates an imaginative connection between Garut and Switzerland, giving the impression that Indonesia's nature is on par with European destinations. However, in the context of colonialism, it also reflects the superiority of Western culture.	The text shows the relationship between father and daughter within the affectionate context of Batak family traditions. At the same time, it represents the connection between local traditions and modernity, symbolized by the Western-style building.
Politics	The use of "Ragam" implies conflict or the struggle to challenge stereotypes or norms that limit women. The name "Marian," placed at the center of the	This text illustrates the politics of representation, where the name of the hospital is used to promote colonial superiority in the field of healthcare,	The text reflects the politics of colonial branding, positioning Indonesia as part of the European tourism narrative, and presenting the	This text reflects cultural politics, where Batak local culture is introduced within the colonial modern context. It shows how traditional values remain relevant despite being

Aspect	Fig. 1	Fig. 2	Fig. 3	Fig. 4
	title, reflects the position of women as the focal point.	reinforcing the dominant position of the Dutch in social life in the Dutch East Indies.	local nature as an object of exploration and consumption for colonial tourists.	influenced by modernity. The text "Harmonie" reflects the politics of social representation, where colonial public spaces are portrayed as places for cultural harmonization. However, it also reflects a power hierarchy, as these spaces were often accessible only to certain groups, particularly the colonial elite or local elites.
Sign system and knowledge	Text "Ni" as a traditional element signifies a local meaning system, while the word "Ragam" suggests the influence of broader knowledge. This positions Marian as a woman at the intersection of traditional and modern cultures.	The Dutch language in the text reflects the colonial sign system and knowledge. It also illustrates how modern institutions, such as hospitals, were introduced as part of the "progress" mission in the colonized territories.	The text "Swiss van Java" is part of the colonial sign system that associates places in the Dutch East Indies with Europe to enhance their appeal. It reflects how local geographical knowledge was reconstructed through a colonial perspective.	The text "Inang Borukhu" is a cultural symbol representing the role of women in Batak families. The text "Harmonie" on the colonial-style building is a colonial sign system that indicates the influence of Western modernity in local life.

3.1. Representation and Meaning of Women in the Novel *Ragam Ni Si Marian*

The novel *Ragam Ni Si Marian* is a work of fiction intertwined with social, political, economic facts, and inter-racial conflicts during the Dutch colonial era from 1900-1956. The main character, Marian Bintang Nauli Hasibuan, is a native Batak-Sundanese woman raised in an affluent family. Marian is an educated woman with Dutch schooling and a wide social circle within European society. She falls in love with Jan-Pieter, a Dutch young man working on a coffee plantation in Priangan. However, their love story faces significant challenges related to identity, politics, and inequality. The novel concludes with Marian marrying Willem, a Batak man who graduated from Leiden University.

In many colonial Dutch literary works, women are often depicted as suffering, coming from poor, uneducated families. One such representation is the figure of the *nyai*, a native woman involved in a relationship with a colonial man. However, Marian is uniquely represented in this story. She is portrayed as part of modernity and equal to the colonial nation. Marian attends the ELS (European School), which was designed for European nobles and affluent, distinguished indigenous people. After graduating from ELS, she continued her studies at AMS (Advanced Secondary School) and later trained to be a nurse. During her school years, Marian was known for her vast knowledge, fluency in Dutch, and her noble Bumiputera lineage. Although women are often associated with lower-status jobs, particularly in service sectors such as healthcare, Marian views her work in healthcare as a humanitarian calling. She works as a nurse at the Cikini Hospital (Koningen Emma Ziekenhuis Tjikini), one of the largest private hospitals in the Dutch East Indies.

Furthermore, women are represented as symbols of beauty and attractiveness, typically categorized by body shape and skin color. This ideal of beauty is often associated with having a slim body, fair skin, healthy eating habits, and clear eyes (Garcia & Widuwati, 2023). However, Marian does not conform to these beauty standards because she is depicted with dark skin, which challenges the constructed notion of beauty associated with fair skin. From an Orientalist perspective, dark skin is an identity assigned to Eastern peoples, while fair skin is associated with the West (Martayana, 2019). In the visual representations, Marian embodies the native woman, highlighting her unequal position compared to Jan-Pieter, who is from the Netherlands. The darker colors used in the visuals suggest a form of resistance to the societal beauty standard of fair skin. Instead of depicting Marian's beauty with light skin, her beauty is represented through the natural landscape of Telaga Bodas in Garut, known as "Swiss van Java." This scene also symbolizes that colonial tourism was reserved for certain social classes, such as Marian, a native woman from the upper class.

Marian is also represented as a symbol of affection between a father and his daughter. Her father fully supports his children's education, especially Marian's. In Batak society, which follows a patrilineal kinship system, gender inequality is often perceived. However, Marian's father is portrayed as a loving and caring father. On Marian's birthday, her father prepares an abundance of food, plays music on a gramophone, and serves small cakes as snacks. He always strives to give Marian the best, such as when he built a new house and created a spacious bedroom with a balcony overlooking the garden. The walls of the room were painted green and decorated with floral motifs, reflecting his concern for his daughter's comfort and taste. His love for Marian is evident even when faced with difficult situations. When he learns Marian is pregnant out of wedlock, he immediately acts to protect her by sending her to Buitenzorg (Bogor) to shield her from social pressure. He also contacts an obstetrician and arranges for an experienced midwife to assist Marian during her pregnancy. All these actions demonstrate Marian's father as a figure full of love, support, and responsibility for his daughter. His affection for Marian is reinforced by the dominant blue color in the imagery. Blue symbolizes peace, loyalty, masculinity, and knowledge (Morioka et al., 2006). The text "Inang Borukhu" in Figure 4, which means "my beloved daughter," further strengthens the bond of affection between father and daughter. Marian's experience of paternal love contrasts with that of Nji Paina in H. Kommer's novel *Tjerita Nji Paina*, where the character is forced to follow her father's will to avoid imprisonment (Harum, 2017).

The representation of women in this fiction highlights that women can be energetic, intelligent, affectionate, and lead fulfilling lives while standing equal to the colonizers. This portrayal offers a positive and humanistic perspective of women, a rare depiction in colonial-era novels. Such representations challenge the dominant colonial narrative, which often carries negative connotations. Colonialism was not only a political and economic system but also a process that shaped social perceptions, including the role and image of women.

CONCLUSION

The representation and meaning of women in *Ragam Ni Si Marian* portray a unique and progressive depiction of women compared to other colonial-era literary works. Marian, as the main character, is

depicted as an energetic, intelligent, compassionate woman with a social status equal to that of the colonizers. This narrative illustrates an indigenous woman who defies the stereotype of suffering and backwardness. Through Marian's educational background, her extensive social interactions, and her dedication to the field of healthcare, the work highlights the role of women in modernity. Additionally, the visual choice of depicting Marian with dark skin challenges the colonial beauty standard that prioritized fair skin, creating a new meaning of beauty that is more inclusive and contextual. The aspect of affection between Marian and her father also portrays an egalitarian and supportive family relationship. This representation not only emphasizes the humane side of women but also challenges the dominant colonial narrative that often placed indigenous women in subordinate positions. The novel offers a positive and humanistic portrait of women, strengthening their role as agents of change in the social, cultural, and political context of the colonial era.

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