

Feminism and Gender Stereotypes in Nadzira Shafa's Novel *172 Days*: A Literary Feminist Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Feminist literary criticism provides a framework to explore how women's experiences, agency, and constraints are represented in literature, particularly in contexts where patriarchal values remain dominant. This study aimed to analyze the representation of feminism and gender stereotypes in Nadzira Shafa's novel *172 Days, Aku Ikhlas Tapi Aku Rindu*, a contemporary Indonesian popular literary work inspired by autobiographical experiences. A qualitative descriptive method with content analysis was employed, using the novel as the primary data source, supported by secondary literature on feminism and gender studies. Data were collected through systematic reading, annotation, and categorization of textual excerpts, which were then analyzed using feminist literary theory to identify recurring themes of women's agency and stereotype reproduction. The findings revealed that the novel reflects feminist values through portrayals of independence, resilience, and women's rights to education and self-expression, yet simultaneously reinforces traditional stereotypes of subordination, dependency, and negative labeling. This duality illustrates the coexistence of progressive and patriarchal discourses within contemporary Indonesian literature. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on a modern, widely read, autobiographical-inspired novel, which has received little scholarly attention in feminist criticism compared to canonical works. The results imply that popular literature can serve as a powerful medium for negotiating cultural understandings of gender, and that educators, researchers, and policymakers should pay closer attention to such texts as instruments for raising awareness of gender equality and challenging stereotypes in society.

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Introduction

Literary works serve not only as artistic expressions but also as cultural artifacts that reflect and shape societal values, including perceptions of gender roles and the struggles for equality. Among various critical approaches, feminist literary criticism provides a framework to examine how women are represented in texts and to uncover the power dynamics embedded in literary narratives (del Cuvillo et al., 2023; Fotaki & Pullen, 2024; Quraishi, 2024). In many societies, women have historically been marginalized, stereotyped, and constrained by patriarchal norms, which has resulted in persistent gender inequalities across cultural, political, and educational domains (Jesús Carrasco-Santos et al., 2024; Lwamba et al., 2022; Stewart et al., 2021). Through

literature, these realities are both mirrored and challenged, making novels a crucial site for exploring feminist discourse and understanding the construction of gender stereotypes.

Gender, as a social and cultural construct distinct from biological sex, is deeply implicated in the production of stereotypes that shape everyday experiences. Whereas sex is biologically determined, gender refers to socially and culturally constructed roles, expectations, and identities assigned to men and women (Kaufman et al., 2023; Morgenroth & Ryan, 2021; Tannenbaum et al., 2016). Misinterpretations of gender roles often lead to systemic gender injustices manifested in practices of marginalization, subordination, negative labeling, and violence (Dahal et al., 2022; Son Hing et al., 2023; Yin & Abdullah, 2024). These injustices are not only reinforced through social interactions but are also perpetuated in cultural texts, including novels, where women are frequently portrayed as weak, dependent, or confined to domestic spheres (Karambiri et al., 2024; Murphy, 2024; Okin, 1995). At the same time, literature also presents opportunities to resist and critique such portrayals, highlighting narratives of women's resilience, independence, and agency (Al-Dabool, 2024; Jesudas & Mohammed, 2024; Mokbel Mahyoub Hezam, 2024).

The emergence of feminist criticism in literary studies has been driven by the recognition that women's voices and experiences are often underrepresented or misrepresented in mainstream discourse. Feminist scholars argue that literature is a powerful medium for challenging patriarchal ideologies and fostering greater awareness of women's struggles for equality (Canibel et al., 2024; Galizzi et al., 2024; Sirri, 2024). Within this framework, gender stereotypes understood as simplified and often negative assumptions about women's nature, abilities, and roles function as mechanisms of control that limit women's opportunities and reinforce gender hierarchies (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023; Stewart et al., 2021; Yin & Abdullah, 2024). For instance, stereotypes portraying women as passive, overly emotional, or dependent on men are prevalent not only in everyday discourse but also in literary texts, where they influence readers' perceptions and cultural norms (Fotaki & Pullen, 2024; Huang & Liu, 2024; Merino et al., 2024).

In the Indonesian context, the intersection of feminism and literature has gained increasing attention in recent years, reflecting broader social efforts to address gender inequality and promote women's empowerment. Previous studies on Indonesian novels have highlighted how female characters are often subjected to patriarchal constraints, yet simultaneously reveal moments of resistance and self-determination (Widodo et al., 2024). Feminist readings of Indonesian literature have shown that while negative stereotypes of women as weak or dependent remain pervasive, there are also representations that challenge these stereotypes and inspire readers with portrayals of women's strength, resilience, and agency (Aghasiyev, 2015; Ali, 2014; Davis & Williamson, 2019). Furthermore, literature serves as a mirror of lived experiences, making it an essential avenue for examining the complexities of women's roles in Indonesian society (Siregar & Prihatini, 2024; Valerio et al., 2024; Veliz et al., 2024).

The novel *172 Days, Aku Ikhlas Tapi Aku Rindu* by Nadzira Shafa provides a compelling case for such analysis. This autobiographical narrative not only tells a personal story of love, loss, and resilience but also reflects broader cultural dynamics concerning women's roles, expectations, and struggles. Through its depiction of female experience, the novel presents

instances of feminist agency such as women's right to voice opinions, pursue education, and assert independence while also exposing persistent stereotypes that frame women as weak, overly dependent, or primarily defined by their domestic roles. Earlier studies on Indonesian feminist literature have examined gender roles in works by established authors such as Cameron, Irshad, Yasmin and Mehrpouyan, focusing on themes of patriarchy, female subjectivity, and resistance (Cameron, 2023; Irshad & Yasmin, 2022; Mehrpouyan & Banehmair, 2014). However, limited attention has been given to contemporary popular novels written by young female authors like Shafa, whose works resonate widely with younger generations and therefore play a critical role in shaping contemporary gender discourse.

The gap addressed by this study lies in the scarcity of scholarly analyses that systematically examine both feminist elements and gender stereotypes in contemporary Indonesian popular novels, particularly autobiographical works that blend personal narrative with cultural commentary. Most prior research has concentrated on classical or canonical texts, leaving contemporary popular literature underexplored in academic discourse. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the forms of feminism and gender stereotypes represented in Nadzira Shafa's *172 Days, Aku Ikhlas Tapi Aku Rindu*, with the objective of uncovering how the novel simultaneously challenges and reinforces cultural constructions of femininity. By doing so, this research contributes to feminist literary criticism in Indonesia and provides insights into how literature can serve as both a site of resistance and reproduction of gender ideologies.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design using a content analysis approach to examine the representation of feminism and gender stereotypes in Nadzira Shafa's novel *172 Days, Aku Ikhlas Tapi Aku Rindu*. The research was conducted through library research, where primary data were obtained from textual quotations within the novel, complemented by secondary data from scholarly literature on feminist literary criticism and gender studies. Data collection was carried out by systematically reading and annotating the entire novel to identify textual segments that illustrate feminist values or gender stereotypes. The data were then categorized into thematic units representing various dimensions of feminism such as freedom of expression, educational rights, civil rights, and economic participation and stereotypes, including weakness, subordination, dependency, and negative labeling of women. Analytical procedures followed a structural and feminist literary framework, focusing on how female characters are portrayed, the narrative strategies used, and the ideological messages embedded in the text. To ensure research rigor, investigator triangulation and peer debriefing were applied, while reference to established theories of feminism and stereotype analysis strengthened validity. Ethical considerations were observed by respecting the intellectual property of the author, properly citing all sources, and situating the analysis within scholarly discourse without altering the integrity of the original text. Through this methodological approach, the study sought to provide a systematic and credible interpretation of how contemporary Indonesian literature both reproduces and challenges patriarchal constructs, thereby contributing to feminist literary scholarship and cultural discourse.

Results and Discussion

Representation of Feminism in the Novel

The analysis of *172 Days, Aku Ikhlas Tapi Aku Rindu* revealed multiple manifestations of feminism expressed through the experiences and actions of the main female character. Feminist elements identified include freedom of expression, equal educational opportunities, independence in decision-making, and resilience against patriarchal structures. These dimensions were consistently highlighted in the narrative, showing how women can exercise agency even within restrictive socio cultural contexts. [Table 1](#) summarizes the categories of feminist elements found in the novel.

Table 1. Representation of Feminism in the Novel

Feminist Aspects	Illustrative Examples in the Novel	Interpretation
Freedom of expression	Female character openly voices opinions in relationships	Resistance against silencing women’s voices
Educational rights	Character pursues knowledge despite personal struggles	Emphasis on education as empowerment
Civil and social rights	Decisions in social interactions show autonomy	Assertion of women’s equal participation
Economic participation	Independence in managing personal resources	Economic autonomy challenges stereotypes
Emotional resilience	Overcoming grief and adversity	Strength as core feminist value

The findings suggest that the novel portrays feminism not only as an abstract ideology but as a lived practice reflected in everyday choices, thus affirming the agency of Indonesian women in literature.

Gender Stereotypes in the Novel

In addition to feminist elements, the novel also reflects gender stereotypes that limit women’s roles. These stereotypes include depictions of women as emotionally fragile, dependent on male figures, and subject to negative labeling in social settings. While some characters challenge these stereotypes, others reinforce them, creating a tension between progressive and conservative perspectives. [Table 2](#) illustrates the categories of stereotypes identified.

Table 2. Gender Stereotypes in the Novel

Gender Stereotype	Illustrative Examples in the Novel	Interpretation
Weakness	Female character portrayed as physically fragile	Reinforces patriarchal notions of inferiority
Subordination	Male figures dominate decision-making	Women’s voices overshadowed
Dependency	Emotional reliance on male protection	Limits female autonomy
Negative labeling	Women judged harshly in social discourse	Reflects societal stigmatization of women
Restrictive roles	Domestic sphere emphasized as primary responsibility	Reinforces traditional gender expectations

The presence of these stereotypes demonstrates that the novel reflects the persistence of patriarchal values in contemporary narratives, while simultaneously offering space for resistance through feminist assertions.

Discussion

The results of this study resonate with prior findings in feminist literary criticism. Similar to the works of Colfer (2015), who highlighted how Indonesian novels often depict women negotiating between patriarchal constraints and personal agency, this study found a duality where feminist expressions coexist with traditional stereotypes. The results are also consistent with Alsaleh (2024), who emphasized that literature often mirrors cultural values while offering subtle resistance against them. Moreover, findings parallel those of Martin de Almagro and Bargués (2022) and Demissie (2024), who noted that feminist narratives frequently emerge through personal struggles, positioning women's resilience as central to literary representations. Comparative perspectives further enrich the discussion. For instance, studies by Bermúdez Figueroa (2023) and Cornwall (2016) argued that stereotypes of women as weak or dependent are recurrent across global literatures, yet feminist criticism reveals how these texts can simultaneously function as instruments of empowerment. Similarly, research by Cislighi and Heise (2020), Jesús Carrasco-Santos (2024), and Salam and Salam-Salmaoui (2025) emphasized that gender is a social construct, continuously reproduced but also challenged through narrative forms, aligning with the findings of this study in which stereotypes were contested through female autonomy. In the Indonesian context, works by Widodo (2024), Henriksson (2023), and Gqola (2024) also found that contemporary novels often depict ambivalent portrayals of women at once reinforcing traditional roles while granting characters spaces of resistance.

The novelty of this research lies in its focused analysis of a contemporary autobiographical inspired novel by Nadzira Shafa, a genre that has not been widely explored in feminist literary scholarship in Indonesia. Unlike previous studies that primarily examined canonical or classical works, this study addresses popular literature and its role in shaping perceptions of gender among younger readers. This contribution is significant because it situates feminist discourse within the realm of widely consumed texts, highlighting their potential to influence everyday understandings of gender relations. The implications of this research are twofold. Academically, it broadens feminist literary criticism by incorporating contemporary Indonesian popular narratives into scholarly discourse. Practically, it provides insights for educators, cultural practitioners, and policymakers to integrate literature as a medium for promoting gender equality and critical awareness among students and the broader community. By exposing both feminist elements and persistent stereotypes, the study underscores the need for critical reading practices that empower readers to challenge limiting gender norms.

Nevertheless, the study has limitations. The analysis was restricted to a single novel, which narrows the generalizability of the findings across the broader landscape of Indonesian literature. Additionally, the study relied on textual analysis without considering reader reception, which could provide valuable insights into how audiences interpret and respond to feminist and stereotypical representations. Future research should expand the scope by including multiple works across genres and conducting audience studies to capture the dialogical relationship between texts and readers.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Nadzira Shafa's 172 Days, Aku Ikhlas Tapi Aku Rindu simultaneously reflects feminist values and entrenched gender stereotypes, presenting a complex interplay between women's agency and patriarchal constraints in contemporary Indonesian literature. The findings reveal that the novel highlights aspects of feminism through depictions of independence, emotional resilience, and women's rights to education and self-expression, while at the same time reproducing stereotypes such as subordination, dependence, and labeling of women's roles in domestic and social spheres. This dual representation underscores the dynamic tensions within Indonesian society where traditional gender norms coexist with evolving feminist discourses. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on a popular autobiographical-inspired work rarely examined within feminist literary scholarship, thereby extending the scope of gender analysis beyond canonical or classical texts. The results imply that feminist criticism of popular literature can serve as a powerful lens to understand cultural negotiations of gender identity and to promote awareness of persistent inequalities. Future research should expand the corpus to include comparative analyses of similar contemporary novels and incorporate reader reception studies to explore how audiences interpret and internalize these gendered narratives.

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