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Exploration Of Humanist Values In Classical and Contemporary Indonesia Novels

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ABSTRACT

This research seeks to uncover the essence of humanist values embedded in two notable Indonesian literary works, Siti Nurbaya by Marah Rusli and Perahu Kertas by Dee Lestari, employing a hermeneutic framework. The investigation centers on four fundamental aspects of humanism: the pursuit of justice and resistance to oppression, expressions of love intertwined with sacrifice, the journey toward self-discovery and individual autonomy, and the bonds of solidarity and friendship. The hermeneutic method was selected for its capacity to provide profound interpretative insights, enabling a nuanced understanding of the texts while integrating their broader social and cultural underpinnings. The study reveals that Siti Nurbaya emphasizes themes of defiance against social inequities and patriarchal dominance, encapsulating the socio-political realities of the colonial period. Love and sacrifice in this novel are intricately woven into the fabric of profound social struggles. Conversely, Perahu Kertas offers a contemporary lens on the quest for self-identity and personal liberty, underscored by themes of solidarity and friendship that reflect the evolving dynamics of modern social interactions. Together, these works illustrate the shifting manifestation of humanist values in response to Indonesia's changing socio-cultural and historical landscapes. This research underscores the role of literature as a powerful vehicle for introspection and social commentary, capturing the complexities of human experiences. The insights gained from this study open avenues for deeper investigations into other literary works, offering opportunities to further expand the discourse on humanist values within the rich tapestry of Indonesian literary traditions.

Kata Kunci: humanist values, Indonesian literature, hermeneutics, *Siti Nurbaya*, *Perahu Kertas*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesian literature has consistently functioned as a lens through which the fluidity of societal, cultural, and intellectual currents is observed. Across generations, literary creations have captured the profound influence of social, political, and economic transformations on both individual lives and communal existence (Zaini, M. I. A., 2023). Beyond merely chronicling historical events, literature offers a reflective platform for exploring human values, philosophies, and lived experiences (Endraswara S, 2022). Acting as a conduit between eras, literature unveils layers of existence that conventional historical narratives often leave obscured. As a manifestation of cultural articulation, it holds a unique capacity to encapsulate the emotions, struggles, and aspirations of a society, resonating with both local identities and universal themes (Maharani, S. D., et al., 2023).

A recurring theme in Indonesian literature is the exploration of humanist values—principles that prioritize the recognition of human dignity, social equity, and individual freedom (Islami, W. N., et al., 2023). These values form the ethical framework for fostering harmonious relationships and lay the groundwork for achieving a fair and prosperous society (Hasbun, D., 2021). Within this paradigm, literature transcends its role as mere entertainment to become a powerful tool for education, encouraging readers to deepen their understanding and appreciation of fundamental human rights. Through its intricate narratives, multidimensional characters, and layered conflicts, literature conveys these humanist principles in ways that shape readers' perspectives and challenge their perceptions of the world (Engelina, F., 2024).

Humanist values encompass diverse dimensions, including the fight for justice in the face of inequity, recognition of individual rights and freedoms, solidarity amid societal divisions, and the nurturing of positive, supportive human relationships (Sakti, M. B., et al., 2023). Literary works often portray the struggles of individuals or communities striving to uphold their rights against a backdrop of injustice or social discord (Halimatusa'diah, P., 2021). This illustrates how literature serves as more than a mirror of reality; it acts as a catalyst for awareness and a call to action for societal transformation (Fajriani, S. N., & Widihastuti, R. A., 2024). By examining the humanist values embedded within literary texts, we gain profound insights into societal aspirations and critiques regarding humanitarian and social dynamics across different historical contexts (Hamdi, M. Y., & Santoso, H. D., 2021).

Indonesian literature has undergone profound transformations over time, marked by evolving writing styles, thematic depth, and shifting social perspectives. Within this dynamic literary tradition, two works from distinct periods—*Siti Nurbaya* by Marah Rusli and *Perahu Kertas* by Dee Lestari—offer compelling grounds for analysis (Zafira, H., 2024). Although separated by nearly a century, both novels explore facets of humanist values within their respective social and cultural milieus. The novel *Siti Nurbaya* (1922), recognized as a cornerstone of Indonesian literary heritage, serves as both a landmark of its era and a vivid reflection of the colonial socio-cultural and political landscape (Atikurrahman, M., et al., 2021).

This work confronts the entrenched norms of its time, particularly critiquing patriarchal traditions that constrained women's autonomy in choosing their life partners. Through the plight of its titular protagonist, Siti Nurbaya, the novel weaves a narrative of resistance against social injustice and oppressive gender norms. Her struggle encapsulates a moral and social dilemma, as she seeks to uphold her dignity and rights, often at great personal sacrifice. Embedded within this poignant tale are enduring humanist themes such as justice, self-sacrifice, and the assertion of human rights, making the novel a timeless exploration of universal values (Restiyani, A., & Rusdiarti, S. R., 2023).

In contrast, Dee Lestari's *Perahu Kertas* (2009) offers a modern lens through which the complexities of contemporary youth are examined, encompassing the social, cultural, and psychological challenges they face today. The narrative follows the journeys of Kugy and Keenan as they grapple with realizing their dreams and discovering their true identities. Along this path, profound humanist values emerge, such as authentic love, self-sacrifice, solidarity, and the pursuit of individual freedom. The interplay of differing social classes, the relentless pursuit of aspirations, and the nurturing of relationships rooted in mutual respect and understanding

between characters underscore the significance of personal autonomy and solidarity in navigating life (Saputri, L. C., & Laeliyah, Y. N., 2020). By juxtaposing these two novels, the study seeks to uncover and delve into four key humanist values that permeate *Siti Nurbaya* and *Perahu Kertas*: (1) justice and resistance against oppression, (2) love and selflessness, (3) the quest for self-identity and individual liberty, and (4) solidarity and friendship. Employing a hermeneutic approach, which prioritizes meticulous textual interpretation, this research endeavors to illuminate how these works encapsulate humanist ideals within their respective cultural and social frameworks, reflecting the evolving ethos of their times.

This study also seeks to explore the evolution of humanist values in Indonesian literature across different historical periods. In the colonial-era context of *Siti Nurbaya*, these values predominantly center on resisting social injustice and combating gender-based oppression, mirroring the societal challenges of that time. Conversely, *Perahu Kertas*, a product of the modern era, shifts its focus toward themes of self-discovery and the pursuit of personal freedom within a society that is increasingly open and multifaceted. This contrast offers fresh perspectives on how Indonesian literature, spanning both its classic and contemporary forms, has adapted to and articulated shifts in humanist ideals that resonate with the evolving needs and aspirations of Indonesian society.

In conclusion, this research aims to enrich the field of Indonesian literature studies by providing a fresh lens through which to examine the humanist values present in both classical and contemporary works. By considering the historical and social contexts of *Siti Nurbaya* and *Perahu Kertas*, the study emphasizes the enduring relevance of humanist ideals in addressing the social, cultural, and psychological challenges faced by Indonesian society over time. The goal is for readers to gain a deeper understanding of how Indonesian literature contributes to raising social awareness and advocating for human values, while also illustrating how these principles are expressed in literary creations that reflect the dynamic evolution of Indonesian society.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing the hermeneutic approach to examine the humanist values embedded in two significant Indonesian literary works: *Siti Nurbaya* by Marah Rusli and *Perahu Kertas* by Dee Lestari. The hermeneutic method was selected due to its capacity to uncover the deeper layers of meaning within texts, linking the social and historical contexts with the humanist principles represented in the works. By emphasizing detailed interpretation, this approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the moral and human values within the narratives, alongside an exploration of their literary structures and aesthetic elements (Isnaini, H., 2021).

Data collection involves a thorough and critical reading of both novels, extracting passages that reflect the humanist values central to this study. Additionally, the researcher will consult supplementary sources that explore the social, cultural, and historical contexts surrounding each work, aiming to deepen the understanding of the novels. This process helps uncover the meanings within the texts and their connection to the societal conditions present at the time of writing (Samsudin, S., 2019). The analysis begins by identifying key humanist values in the novels, such as justice, love, sacrifice, self-discovery, and solidarity, achieved

through examining the characters, dialogues, and narrative structures. Following this, a contextualization phase is conducted, comparing the social and cultural environments that shaped each novel. *Siti Nurbaya* is examined in the context of colonial and patriarchal social norms, while *Perahu Kertas* is explored within the framework of modern society, which prioritizes individual freedom and the quest for personal identity (Darmiyati Zuchdi, E. D., & Afifah, W., 2021).

To maintain the validity and reliability of the study, data triangulation was employed by cross-referencing the findings from both novels with additional literary sources. This method helps ensure that the analysis is both accurate and consistent, reinforcing a well-founded interpretation of the humanist values within Indonesian literature. By adopting this approach, the research aims to contribute significantly to the field of Indonesian literary studies, particularly in enhancing the understanding of how humanist values are represented in both classical and contemporary literary works (Ulfah, A. K., 2022).

RESULT AND DICUSSION

The findings of this research uncover four key humanist principles that are consistently present in the two Indonesian literary works examined, Siti Nurbaya by Marah Rusli and Perahu Kertas by Dee Lestari. Despite their significant temporal gap, with one rooted in the colonial period and the other in the contemporary era, both novels offer profound portrayals of human values that resonate with the social and cultural circumstances of their respective times. Below is an analysis of each humanist value identified in the two texts:

Justice and the Struggle Against Injustice

In *Siti Nurbaya*, the theme of justice and the fight against social injustice are central, vividly illustrating the colonial reality of gender oppression and patriarchal dominance. The protagonist, Siti Nurbaya, is depicted as a woman subjected to the whims of others, particularly in the realm of marriage. Her plight symbolizes the systemic inequality faced by women during that era, where autonomy and the right to choose were often stripped away. Siti Nurbaya's resistance transcends personal turmoil, representing a broader battle against entrenched societal oppression. Her actions embody a struggle against the structural injustices that limited women's rights and freedoms during the colonial period.

In contrast, *Perahu Kertas* explores justice through the lens of individual struggles, primarily focusing on the character of Kugy. The modern depiction of justice in this novel revolves around her quest to reclaim her personal freedom and rights amidst societal pressures. Kugy faces the constraints imposed by her family, community, and even her own self-doubt, all of which conflict with her aspirations to be a writer. The injustice here is more internalized, highlighting the modern challenges of self-expression within a society that often limits individuality. This shift from external, collective battles in the colonial context to personal, internal struggles in the modern world underscores how the concept of justice has evolved in Indonesian literature, reflecting the changing dynamics of social and individual freedoms.

Love and Sacrifice

The portrayal of love and sacrifice in these two novels unfolds through sharply contrasting lenses. In *Siti Nurbaya*, the relationship between Siti Nurbaya and Syamsul Bahri is marked by

tragic sacrifices. Siti Nurbaya is forced to abandon her yearning for true love in order to meet the expectations of her family and society. The narrative underscores how love, during the colonial period, was frequently overshadowed by societal pressures such as traditional customs and patriarchy, compelling individuals to choose between personal fulfillment and social duty.

On the other hand, *Perahu Kertas* presents love as a more liberated yet intricate emotional journey. The evolving relationship between Kugy and Keenan is shaped by their mutual efforts to understand their own identities and each other. The sacrifices they make are less about yielding to external demands and more about navigating personal compromises and preserving the authenticity of their love amidst their differences. This evolution in the depiction of love marks a shift from relationships dictated by societal obligations to those grounded in mutual respect and equality, reflecting the changing ideals of individual autonomy and personal freedom in modern society.

Self-Discovery and Individual Freedom

Self-discovery takes center stage in *Perahu Kertas*, where the characters, particularly Kugy, grapple with finding their life's direction amidst societal pressures. The novel emphasizes how crucial individual freedom is for young people in crafting their personal identity. Kugy is torn between living a life imposed by others and pursuing her aspirations as a writer. Her quest for freedom transcends physical boundaries, extending into intellectual and emotional realms, symbolizing the rise of individualism in the contemporary world.

In stark contrast, *Siti Nurbaya* presents a more survival-driven search for self, where individual freedom is heavily constrained by rigid societal conventions. Siti Nurbaya has limited agency over her life, yet her battle against injustice reflects her determination to find freedom, even within the confines imposed upon her. This contrast highlights the profound difference in how individual freedom is conceptualized and pursued between the colonial and modern periods, with the latter granting more room for personal autonomy and self-expression.

Solidarity and Friendship

In *Siti Nurbaya*, solidarity is embodied in the bonds between characters, particularly among women who provide mutual support in the face of oppressive forces. This collective unity serves as a powerful act of resistance against the patriarchal structures that dominate society, emphasizing the necessity of shared strength in confronting social injustice.

Conversely, *Perahu Kertas* delves into more personal and intimate friendships, notably between Kugy and Keenan, which play a pivotal role in their individual journeys of self-discovery. Their friendship becomes a sanctuary where they can openly express their dreams and confront life's difficulties together. This shift reflects how, in the modern era, solidarity and friendship are more individualized, yet remain crucial in fostering deep emotional bonds amidst a rapidly evolving society. Both novels highlight solidarity as a timeless force, though its form and function adapt to the distinct social landscapes of their respective periods.

This study offers fresh perspectives on the evolution of humanist values in Indonesian literature, spanning from the colonial era to contemporary times. By examining *Siti Nurbaya* and *Perahu Kertas*, it uncovers how views on universal themes such as justice, love, self-discovery, and solidarity have shifted, as portrayed by characters in differing social contexts and historical periods. For instance, the resistance to injustice in *Siti Nurbaya* mirrors the colonial-era social

realities, where patriarchal norms and gender inequality prevailed. In contrast, *Perahu Kertas* places greater emphasis on self-exploration and personal freedom, highlighting Indonesia's transition towards a more open society focused on individual autonomy in the modern era.

This aligns with findings from prior studies, such as the one by Wardani & Shofiyuddin (2024), which highlights how modern literature reflects the identity crisis faced by Indonesia's youth. Additionally, this research reinforces the idea that literature serves not just as entertainment, but also as a platform for social reflection, showcasing the evolving values within society. As noted by Azizah, R. N (2024), literary works offer readers an opportunity to contemplate human values and provide a lens through which to understand the social dynamics at play.

Furthermore, this research adds to the field of Indonesian literature by demonstrating how humanist values in literary works are dynamic, adapting to the evolving social and cultural landscape. For instance, while classical literature primarily highlights the external battles of individuals against societal injustice, contemporary works tend to focus on internal struggles, such as self-discovery and the pursuit of personal freedom. This shift aligns with the observations of Mukodas et al (2024), who noted that modern Indonesian literature increasingly delves into internal conflicts, mirroring the complexities of Indonesia's changing social and cultural fabric. This study enriches the conversation around humanist values in Indonesian literature, offering a deeper insight into how literary works not only mirror, but also critique and influence the social realities of their time.

Consclussion

This study uncovers how humanist values, including justice, love, self-discovery, and solidarity, are portrayed distinctively in Marah Rusli's Siti Nurbaya and Dee Lestari's Perahu Kertas. In Siti Nurbaya, the fight against social injustice and patriarchy emerges as a direct response to the colonial era's harsh realities, with love and sacrifice woven into the fabric of both societal and personal struggles. On the other hand, Perahu Kertas emphasizes the journey of individual self-discovery and freedom within a modern framework, where solidarity and friendship play crucial roles in supporting the characters' paths to understanding their identities.

he findings reveal that humanist values in Indonesian literature are fluid, evolving in response to social and cultural transformations. Siti Nurbaya embodies a collective resistance against systemic injustice, while Perahu Kertas illustrates individual struggles within a more intricate and liberated society. This contrast highlights the shift in human values from the colonial era to the contemporary period.This research significantly contributes to the study of Indonesian literature by emphasizing how literary works serve as both a mirror for societal reflection and a tool for critique. It also paves the way for further investigation into other literary works, enhancing the understanding of how human values adapt across different historical and cultural contexts.

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Confused You have used **dominate** in this sentence. You may need to use **dominant** instead.

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Missing "," You may need to place a comma after this word.

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Proofread This part of the sentence contains a grammatical error or misspelled word that makes your meaning unclear.

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