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ASIAN STUDIES

Women as agents of patriarchy in *The Girl from the Coast* (1991) by Pramoedya Ananta Toer

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Working Paper No. 76

Institute of Asian Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam

Gadong 2023

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Abstract:

Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *The Girl from The Coast* (1991) is a novel about women's struggles under Javanese patriarchy, highlighting the controversial culture of polygamy and 'practice wives' in colonial Indonesia. Previous studies of the novel have situated the character of The Girl as the victimised female under the Bendoro's dominance due to her gender and class position. However, these reviews overlook the other female characters - mBok, Mardinah and the mother - and their relationships with The Girl. This paper questions whether the female relationships in novel perpetuate internalised oppression and misogyny, or do they offer solidarity and resistance for the women living under the structure of Javanese patriarchy? It focuses on the female characters by exploring the relationships between The Girl and her servants, mBok and Mardinah, and her mother through the lens of intersectionality. I will first analyse the hierarchical power relations which permeate The Girl's relationships with the other female characters. Then, I will consider how internalised misogyny challenges female solidarity in these characters. Lastly, I will examine how the characters' acceptance of patriarchal values function as a means of survival for them. In conclusion, I propose that assessing these relationships through the lens of intersectionality will uncover the significant role of women in replicating and reinforcing Javanese patriarchy.

Keywords: intersectionality, Javanese literature, patriarchy, Pramoedya

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'But why?' she asked humbly. 'I'm no one, just a girl from the coast.'
'But you are everyone, Grandma,' the young Pramoedya told her. 'You are all the people who have ever had to fight to make this life their own.'
(Pramoedya Ananta Toer 2003: 280)

Introduction

Pramoedya Ananta Toer is revered as one of Indonesia's modern literary giants whose work unflinchingly exposes the nation's struggle against Dutch colonial rule and the condemnation of Suharto's regime. One of his novels, *The Girl from the Coast* (1991), marks the first and only surviving novel of a trilogy in which, the two subsequent novels were lost. The story chronicles events in the life of a fourteen-year-old unnamed protagonist, The Girl, who is forcibly married to a powerful nobleman called the Bendoro. The author's inspiration for The Girl's character came partly from his late grandmother's life stories as she was a victim of the culture of 'practice wives' (Puspita, 2008) - a custom that encourages Javanese noblemen to marry and divorce female commoners as a practice run before marrying into nobility. While the novel reveals how men reinforce Javanese patriarchy, this paper discusses the role of the Javanese female characters in facilitating their oppression and considers whether they perpetuate internalised oppression and misogyny or offer solidarity amongst themselves.

This review addresses the need to have a nuanced approach not only to women's stories within the Indonesian literary canon but also to their position in society historically. Although *The Girl from the Coast* (1991) centres on the struggle of Javanese women under feudal patriarchy, the novel has unfortunately situated the female characters at the margins. Many critics have confined their attention to The Girl's narratives to her experiences of marginalisation and subordination by

the Bendoro, even though he is absent for most of the text. There is a profound gap in the previous work that scarcely address the presence of the other female characters, namely, mBok, Mardinah, and the mother, whose stories arguably are the driving force of the novel.

The theoretical lens applied to this analysis is the theory of intersectionality. First articulated by the legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), the intersectional feminist approach is the understanding that multiple marginalised identities ranging from gender, class, or race can intersect with one another to produce a different level of oppression. Thus, intersectionality can explain how the specific marginalised identities of the female characters may influence different power dynamics amongst them. Drawing on intersectionality, I foreground and dissect the presence of mBok, Mardinah, and the mother and their relationships with The Girl. The first section is an analysis of the hierarchical power relations and subordination that occur between the female characters. This section will display how The Girl's role change from a village girl to nobility shifts the power dynamic between the servants and her mother, highlighting how the female characters' gendered experiences intersect with their class status. The second section will cover how the conflicts between the female characters and The Girl stems from internalised misogyny. It explores how the forms of solidarity between these characters are challenged by the female characters' projection of sexist and misogynistic values toward each other. The third section analyses how the acceptance of patriarchal values by the characters functions as a means of survival for lower-class women.

Literature Review

The Girl from the Coast (1991) is a novel that centres the struggle of Javanese women under feudal Javanese patriarchy. However, the discourse surrounding the novel, unfortunately, marginalises the female characters.

The Girl is situated as the victimised Javanese woman

The Bendoro's dominating presence as an oppressor is central in the discussions even when his character is absent for most of the novel. Some critics have relied on critically analysing the gender and class identities of the characters. In contrast, others have used the lens of postcolonialism to examine The Girl's oppression, thereby framing her role as the victimised female character.

Since the text is set in Dutch colonial times, examining the Javanese aristocratic culture at that time can help contextualise the novel. During the colonial period, the culture of the Javanese nobility, otherwise known as the *priyayi*s, was rampant with problematic practices concerning women, such as polygamy and child marriages. Kartodirdjo, Sudewo & Hatmosuprobo (1993) stated that *priyayi* men would have first wives (*garwa padmi*) and mistresses (*selir*) whom they took as second wives strictly to perform and maintain dominance over other *priyayi* men. Both upper and lower-class women were affected by these practices. This practice is reflected in the experiences of Indonesia's celebrated national hero, Raden Adjeng Kartini, who heavily criticised polygamous marriages (Dewi, 2012) since her mother and her were trapped in one. At the same time, child marriage was scrutinised as an 'ethical and moral' (Bemmelan 2019: 289) dilemma plaguing Javanese culture, where lower-class women were the main victims. Hence the experiences of Javanese women were represented as victims in *priyayi* culture.

Other literature explores the narrative of The Girl through her victimhood. For instance, the literary scholar Sofi's (2018) central argument of the text relates to how The Girl's identities were, in turn, created under these oppressive structures. Her conversion to the *priyayi* class has relegated her to conform to the life of a noble's wife, causing her to be entirely submissive to the Bendoro. Raybin (2009) echoes Sofi's view, noting the 'inherent powerlessness' (Raybin 2009: 186) that comes with being a lower-class woman to a *priyayi* man. Since The Girl is a 'poor girl from the village' (Raybin 2009: 186), she is silenced. Raybin noted that despite the Bendoro's rare presence in the household, his influence dominates every aspect The Girl's life.

Perwitasari (2009) critically examined the novel by considering Javanese women's oppression in feudal society. Traditionally, the Javanese women's role within the *priyayi* class is subordinate in the social hierarchy, with men controlling decision-making, breadwinning, and the family's lineage (Kartodirdjo, Sudewo & Hatmosuprobo 1993). By contextualising the patriarchal Javanese culture in the novel, Perwitasari concluded how the representation of The Girl as the fated victim of her circumstances was primarily due to her lower-class background.

Since class and gender are relevant issues in the novel, I find that Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality can be applied in interpreting the novel. As the theory investigates the intersections of 'multiple grounds of identities' (Crenshaw 1991: 1245) concerning the marginalisation of women of colour, the theory is useful in adding another dimension to understanding The Girl's oppression. It contributes to understanding power relations, especially

because the ‘analyses of power…reveal which differences (in identities) carry significance’ (Tomlinson 2013: 1012) when examining the intersections of marginalised identities.

Some scholars have also explored the text through other frameworks. For example, Rahmawati’s (2019) utilises the subaltern in postcolonial theory to explore The Girl’s marginalisation. She frames the Javanese woman portrayed by The Girl as the subaltern, since she is victimised as the Bendoro’s concubine, comparing their relationship to the role of the ‘colonised’ and the ‘coloniser’.

Some critics have offered an alternative reading to the text, which does not centre merely on the experiences of The Girl's subjugation but redirect their analysis of the character to her resistance against the structure of oppression. Wibisono, Waluyo & Subiyantoro (2018) illuminate The Girl’s resistance to the elitism with Bhabha's theory of mimicry. The authors argue that The Girl's appropriation of the elite *priyayi* education causes her to change her thinking. This resistance is most evident when The Girl refuses to leave her child behind when the Bendoro violently tries to separate them. Dewi's (2007) postcolonial feminist reading of the novel also identifies The Girl’s character as not passive to the practices of colonisation through her resistance against the Bendoro's dominance.

Female characters at the periphery

By focusing on the Bendoro’s character many of researchers have relegated the other female characters– mBok, Mardinah, and the Girl’s mother– to the periphery. Despite this, some critics who have briefly touched on the other female characters raises the question, why is it vital to analyse the female characters in the novel?

Historically, Javanese women who worked as domestic servants in the Netherland Indies were considered the ‘most subaltern’ (Lochen-Scholten 2000: 85). In postcolonial theory, the subalterns are those whose voices are denied due to their marginalised status and are ‘removed from all lines of social mobility’ (Spivak 2005: 475). Thus, these subaltern domestic servants never acquired space to vocalise their struggles which effectively highlights the difficulties of directly sourcing out their ‘historical voices and experiences’ (Lochen-Scholten 2000: 85) for documentation purposes. Not only that, but the study has also described how the native women of the colonial state were stratified by their class thus lower-class women were othered in matters concerning women's rights. The exclusion of domestic servants, both historically and within the

novel's discourse, speaks to the lack of representation of lower-class Javanese women, especially considering the other female characters present in the text - mBok and Mardinah - are domestic servants.

As demonstrated in Hellwig's (1994) study on multiple Indonesian literary texts, the representations of women in Indonesian literature have largely perpetuated patriarchal ideology rather than challenging them (Tahir, 2006). This argument applies to the female characters in the text.

Moreover, The Girl's mother is briefly analysed in Sofi's (2018) criticism which describes the separation between The Girl and her mother due to their class differences. Since The Girl is now a noble's wife while the mother is still a commoner, their relationship becomes more of a 'master and…maidservant' (Sofi 2020: 355) rather than a proper mother-daughter. Soliman's (2020) examination of the novel frames the mother as a character who perpetuates patriarchal beliefs toward her daughter by advising The Girl to obey her husband, thus reinforcing the stereotypical expectations of Javanese women's role as a wife. Similarly, Rahmawati's (2019) subaltern framing of the novel has characterised mBok as an enabler to The Girl's expected role as the obedient wife to the Bendoro. Even when attention is given to the female characters, this attention is limited to their status under the Bendoro's power in a patriarchal and feudal society.

In Dewi's (2007: 89) postcolonial reading of the novel, the other female characters, particularly mBok and Mardinah, are mentioned in passing simply as 'resourceful women' who must bear living in the patriarchal Javanese society, highlighting their survival traits. Only in Hellwig's (1994) analysis is the nuanced role of mBok, and her relationship with The Girl-- which steers away from the Bendoro's character-- is emphasised. mBok's 'broad experience and knowledge' (Hellwig 1994: 88) enables her to teach The Girl about her status as a lower-class woman who temporarily becomes a *priyayi*. mBok's lessons thus forms solidarity between them due to their common class background. Hellwig also adds how class status affects the way mBok is defined– solely by her ranking– evident in how she is only called upon as mBok, which directly translates to servant. Her character is technically nameless throughout the novel.

Review Summary

Previous studies focused on the narratives of The Girl's oppression, repeating the theme of her powerlessness in the face of the Bendoro's dominance. They examine The Girl's character primarily as a victim of patriarchal oppression. I argue that many scholars allude to the intersections of class and gender in their analyses of the text, and that Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality is applicable to understanding The Girl's marginalisation. At the same time, the discourse on the female characters focuses mainly on highlighting the power relations between The Girl and the Bendoro, reinforces the patriarchal treatment of The Girl. I will attempt to bridge the gap by addressing the other female characters and their relationships with The Girl, independent of the Bendoro's character.

Discussion

Hierarchy and female relationships

This section will cover the pervasive hierarchical power relations that permeate the female relationships in *The Girl from the Coast* from the perspectives of their class position, the town-village settings, and their social status.

The novel's criticism of classism offers insight into how strict hierarchies are formed in the relationship between servant and mistress. As The Girl transitions from a lower-class woman to the wife of a nobleman, she is forced to confront the rigid power dynamics that exist under Javanese aristocracy, as evident in the following quote:

> '*The servant bowed to her. A very low bow. Why was she bowing? A few moments ago, they had been equals. Why had the woman suddenly changed her behaviour? The Girl from the Coast was nervous, frightened, suspicious*.' (p. 12)

Here, mBok's bow becomes a physical declaration of her subordination to The Girl, resulting in The Girl experiencing extreme discomfort. Through her confusion, Toer emphasises The Girl's unfamiliarity with a culture that focuses on hierarchical class differences as she hails from the village. Since both their worldviews heavily differ, mBok's vast knowledge of aristocratic cultural values as a long-term servant in town gives her the power to indoctrinate The Girl into abiding by this hierarchy. If mBok perceives herself as a mere 'miserable servant' (p. 31), The Girl must fulfil another servant role but as the first lady. mBok convinces herself that for The Girl to be considered fit as the first lady, she must 'tame The Girl's wildness and to civilise her' (p. 36),

which explores how their relationship stems from the self-erasure of The Girl's lower-class background that she deems as inferior, to assimilate into the aristocracy. mBok's believes that the hierarchy between aristocracy and commoners is defined mainly through exclusiveness; she then prohibits The Girl from socialising with the other servants since they are 'mere slaves' (p. 34) to the upper classes. She even relays to The Girl that: '"The first lady doesn't just talk to anyone. She gives orders."' (p. 51), which reveals that the higher she is within the hierarchy, the more isolated she becomes. While the intersections of mBok's marginalised identities as a lower-class female servant could situate her as powerless and peripheral within the aristocratic spaces, her knowledge of upper-class Javanese culture enables her to marginalise The Girl within their relationship. She can do this by indoctrinating The Girl with her classist beliefs and grooming her to conform to the rigid class structure as a first lady. Thus, the hierarchies in gender relations are established through class knowledge.

Furthermore, Toer highlights how power struggle in the female relationships occur due to differences in class knowledge between the town and the village settings. Mardinah's position as both a servant to The Girl and the niece of the Bendoro puts her in an ambivalent situation where she is an upper-class woman who must serve a commoner. From their first encounter, Mardinah weaponises her class, status, and knowledge against the Girl. She announces how she is 'not a commoner' (p. 81) and that she 'can read and write' (p. 82) because of her background: a father who used to be a clerk. Mardinah's assertiveness signals a sense of superiority from having access to cultural capital, denied to The Girl. The class differences between mBok and Mardinah affect how Mardinah approaches servitude toward The Girl; she assumes a higher position regardless of her servant role. In the town, The Girl's identity as a lower-class Javanese woman further disempowers her as she is not afforded the knowledge and cultural capital accessible to upper-class Javanese women, unlike Mardinah. However, when the novel moves from the town to the village, the dynamic of power shifts from Mardinah to The Girl. At one point, she admonishes Mardinah:

> '"*If you're sensible, you'll see that I'm the Bendoro now.*" *says The Girl.*
> "*That's impossible! Impossible. I do have a title, even if it is the lowest title possible*."' (p. 104)

Since the village is The Girl's place of origin, she starts to recognise her dominance over Mardinah as the latter's cultural capital in the town is less relevant in the village. This instance indicates how social class and power in the text derive from class knowledge located spatially. By

declaring the title and role of the Bendoro against Mardinah in the village, The Girl's replication of patriarchal and classist values enables her to assert her dominance over Mardinah.

The text also highlights how class identity overturn family dynamics. After The Girl becomes the first lady, the hierarchy between The Girl and her mother shifts due to the unspoken rules of conduct between the upper classes and commoners. The Girl's relationship with mBok plays a huge part in this process because it is mBok who encourages the idea that class identity triumphs over any other identity in the hierarchy, including filial piety of daughter to mother. This idea is evident when The Girl confides with mBok about her mother, but mBok replies: '"…She is your mother, but she is also a commoner. She is no better than a servant."' (p. 52) From here, The Girl's co-optation into the upper-class lifestyle meant that she must abandon her life in the village before including her mother. When she returns to the village, The Girl reunites with her mother and asks her why she did not ask her to visit the village, to which her mother replies: '"How could we? You're married to a nobleman. It is not our place to tell you what to do."' (p. 52). Due to their unequal status, The Girl now has more power over the mother, thus their relationship can never return as normal mother-daughter.

Relations between the female characters are complicated by their class and status, which is explored through cultural capital, the unequal settings of the town and the village and the mother-daughter relations. The Girl's relationships with the female characters are sustained through this complex of class, status, and patriarchy.

Misogyny and female solidarity

I turn to the relationships of the female characters, which evolve through internalised misogyny. I argue that the practice of internalised misogyny in the novel contributes to the absence of female solidarity.

The female characters who accept the objectification of women as property become spiteful toward one another. It is mBok's objectification of women and relegating women to stereotypical gender roles that have taught The Girl to objectify herself. In one of their interactions, mBok says that women own nothing but '[t]he commitment to care for their husband's property' (p. 56) and regard themselves as 'their husband's property' (p. 56). Though initially sceptical, The Girl internalises this sexist belief that 'she was [the Bendoro's] property' (p. 56). Since lower-class women can be taken and replaced easily as practice wives for upper-class males under Javanese

feudalism, the idea of property in this sense can be interpreted as direct ownership of lower-class females by upper-class males. The property mBok refers to can also be the valuable assets that the Girl holds, as evident in the following quote:

> '"*Life is easy for a young woman, Mas Nganten,*" *the servant said on one occasion,* "*especially when she is beautiful. Forced labour is a thing of the past.*" *The mockery was obvious, but the Girl made no reply.*' (p. 71)

To mBok, youth and beauty are the only two valuable assets of sexual desirability that the lower-class females can commodify for the upper-class males through marriage. However, mBok's negative projection of The Girl's youth and beauty is because she is envious that The Girl can afford to escape oppressive circumstances by commodifying her assets. mBok's means of teaching The Girl to objectify herself, then, can be seen as her way of viewing how women become effectively disposable, especially coming from a middle-aged and lower-class Javanese woman who ends up being discarded. Rather than rejecting such misogynistic categories, however, mBok's internalisation of this misogyny leads her to view herself as a different class and property from The Girl. She does not recognise that The Girl is similarly oppressed. Due to this, mBok's objectification of women as property has led her to become an agent of misogyny.

Despite both characters being lower-class females, there are discrepancies between the level of oppression that mBok and The Girl experienced. Due to youth and beauty acting as social currency and symbols of upward mobility, The Girl's marginalisation offers her some respite living within the luxuries of the upper classes. In contrast, mBok's oppression signals the hardship of someone stripped of her womanhood and humanity after being forced into harsh labour.

Moreover, internalised misogyny breeds feminine rivalry and discourages friendship. When Mardinah introduces herself to The Girl, they are considered equals in all aspects except status. However, The Girl's instincts urge her to be sceptical of Mardinah's presence thinking that she was 'too young' (p. 81) and 'too pretty to be [her] servant' (p. 81). With the argument presented earlier, mBok's lessons have conditioned The Girl to internalise sexist beliefs that seep into how she interacts with other women. Again, the recurring reference to youth and beauty for the female characters become a central part of their gender identities. When they travel to the village, The Girl's insecurity becomes more apparent as it stems from the awareness of being replaceable as a practice wife. She scornfully says to Mardinah: '"Offer yourself to him. It wouldn't matter whether he was your uncle or even your father. You'd only be a practice wife. You'd like that wouldn't

you?"' (p. 104). The Girl feels threatened when she meets a woman who is equal to her in youth and beauty, so she treats Mardinah in the same way that mBok treated her. The Girl degrades Mardinah's feminine prowess with contempt due to her role as The Girl's potential replacement, as she understands how difficult it is for Javanese women to sustain themselves amongst the upper classes. Thus, female rivalry becomes an intrinsic part of internalised misogyny and causes friction in the relationship between Mardinah and The Girl.

Islamic religious values also play a part in encouraging the cycle of internalised misogyny. Toer indicates how piousness is valued in Javanese culture, further reinforcing the expectations of women's subservience toward pious men. One of the reasons The Girl's mother allows her daughter to marry the Bendoro is his piousness. She tells The Girl: '"You're fortunate. You'll be the wife of a pious man."' (p. 3) then later tells The Girl how pleasing the Bendoro with The Girl's services as a wife 'is what the Almighty wants' (p. 111). Here, religious obligations become a way for Javanese women to internalise the stereotypical gender roles ascribed to them. The mother affirms the belief that The Girl should be blessed to be the wife of a powerful and religious man regardless of the inequities of the marriage.

Moreover, The Girl then internalises the misogyny legitimised by Islamic religious values to justify Mardinah's forced marriage with the village storyteller, Dul. The teaching of internalised misogyny here becomes cyclical as it moves from mother to daughter, especially about stereotypical gender roles in marriages. In a sense, religious obligations influence the way The Girl handles Mardinah's union through the concept of fate: '[f]ate treated [them] so differently' (p. 158) and argues that since 'Allah made the storyteller' (p. 158) he can become a good husband for Mardinah. The Girl urges Mardinah to fulfil her role as the conventional Javanese village wife who must work like 'the other women' (p. 159) and 'wait on the beach' (p. 159) for her husband to come home. Her internalised misogyny lends her to diminish Mardinah's autonomy through fate and God's will. The denial of Mardinah's autonomy by The Girl mirrors how The Girl's mother also refused to acknowledge her autonomy when marrying her off to the Bendoro. Whether in a town or village, the teachings of religion become the catalysts for misogyny to breed, as expressed by the women's treatment of each other, further encourages divisiveness.

Javanese patriarchal values and survival

In the novel, the acceptance of patriarchal values can be interpreted as the female characters' normalisation and glorification of male-centred culture. However, I argue that the female characters' acceptance of these values is a means for their survival in conditions of poverty and deprivation.

Toer showcases how domestic abuse is normalised within Javanese culture, where the female characters readily endure to overcome privation. In the previous discussion, mBok can be considered one of the perpetrators of the stereotypical gender roles in the novel. When asked by The Girl if any of her husbands have ever beaten her, she answered:

> '"*Perhaps Allah created a woman, Mas Nganten, so that man could beat her... What is a beating now and then compared to everything else a man has to do for his wife and children?*"' (p. 61)

Her narrative as a two-timed widow explains her belief in what it means to be the ideal Javanese wife, which extends to revering her former husbands as the breadwinners even if it means she has to suffer abuse. mBok buys into this belief as a coping mechanism for a powerless Javanese wife from a lower-class background. Her strong belief in faith has exacerbated her acceptance of abuse after the failure to meet expectations of a wife and her inability to bear children. While there is a sense of helplessness in confronting the morbid reality of this abuse, it is arguable that mBok makes sense of patriarchal oppression to fulfil her religious obligations, like The Girl and her mother I referred too earlier. She justifies her view by relating it to The Girl's father, who is 'prepared to face death every single day of his life' (p. 61), thus teaches The Girl that by accepting abuse under the guise of men's sacrifices for their wives act as a necessary evil that they must persevere. Here, mBok demonstrates how she becomes the victim of class and gender oppression in her marriages. Her husbands' abuses against her are an outlet for their anguish under poverty. In this case, mBok is navigating survival under patriarchal and class exploitation.

On the other hand, the novel displays how the female characters' acceptance of patriarchal values is critical to their release from poverty. This instance is evident when the mother chooses to silence The Girl when she is sent to the Bendoro's mansion, saying, '"Hush, don't cry. Don't cry. You'll soon be the wife of a great man."' (p. 2). Even though the mother acknowledges her young daughter's subjugation to an older and more powerful man in a marriage, she sees this path as a necessary sacrifice for her daughter's future. The reason behind her choice is because she abides by the same role in her marriage. She relates to The Girl: '"Even if she lives in a shabby

old hut, even if she isn't happy, a woman's duty is to learn to make her husband happy'" (p. 41). The mother's dependence on her husband signals the recurring theme that men are the provider whereas women have no say in the financial matters of the household. Thus, the mother's worldview is limited to serving her husbands' needs even if it means self-sacrifice in enduring poverty. However, there is a difference in how the mother views The Girl's marriage. The mother's relief that '"[h]er daughter has safely escaped the fishing village"' (p. 3) convinces her to see the union as an opportunity for her daughter to not fall into the trap of an impoverished marriage in the village. Here, the mother assumes that in a forced and oppressive marriage with the Bendoro, The Girl suffers less than herself simply because she gets to serve a husband who has access to material wealth.

Conclusion

The Girl from the Coast (1991) highlights how the female characters, namely mBok, Mardinah, and the mother, perpetuate internalised oppression and misogyny in their relationships with The Girl. Previous studies of the novel have centred on The Girl's marginalisation under the Bendoro. While they recognise the historical exclusion of domestic servants and lower-class Javanese women under Dutch colonial rule, they have overlooked the roles of these female characters. This paper attempts to fill the gap by focusing on these female characters and their relationship with The Girl, by drawing on Crenshaw's intersectional feminist lens to make sense of the interplay of class and gender in feudal Javanese society.

First, I argue how the hierarchy and power dynamic of traditional Javanese patriarchalism are reflected in female relationships. Secondly, I discuss how internalised misogyny is pervasive amongst the female characters and influences their interactions with each other through the objectification of their womanhood as property and the commodification of their youth and beauty. I argued that religious values also contribute to the reproduction of this misogyny. Thirdly, I suggest that the female characters' acceptance of Javanese patriarchal values – dignifying the roles of husbands and overlooking domestic abuses – enables them to tolerate oppression and poverty. Finally, by foregrounding the roles and relationships of The Girl with mBok, Mardinah, and her mother, I highlight the lack of representations of Javanese women in literature. I suggest that future studies investigate this novel by applying the postcolonial feminist approach to explore the extent to which the Dutch colonial period influenced Javanese patriarchy.

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