

**REPRESENTATIONS OF MALAY WOMEN
IN DINA ZAMAN'S SELECTED SHORT STORIES:
A FEMINIST STYLISTIC ANALYSIS**

by

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Nazima Versay Kudus
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metodologi yang diutarakan kerana ia mampu menafikan ideologi yang dianggap sebagai kebiasaan dan stereotaip.

REPRESENTATIONS OF MALAY WOMEN IN DINA ZAMAN'S SELECTED SHORT STORIES: A FEMINIST STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

ABSTRACT

This study attempts to find out how Dina Zaman uses language to represent Malay women characters in the selected short stories. In addition, it aims to assess whether the author has challenged or reinforced stereotypical representations of her characters.

The theoretical framework engaged in this study includes feminist literary criticism and stylistics and the combinative tools as proposed by Sara Mills (1998) that is Feminist Stylistics. Theories that underpin this framework are linguistic theories of M.A.K. Halliday's Social Semiotic Theory of Language (1978) and Roger Fowler's Critical Linguistics Theory (1979).

In investigating their representations, the tripartite linguistic levels of analyses (the word, the clause and the discourse) as proposed by Mills (1998) have been adopted. The linguistic features investigated in selected short stories comprise naming, transitivity and characters/roles respectively.

From the analyses at various linguistic levels and linguistic options, it is clearly revealed that the author has deconstructed the ways in which the Malay women characters are usually represented in narrative texts. Finally, I recommend the related stakeholders to utilise the proposed methodology so that they not only

inform themselves but also others of the need to deconstruct accepted or stereotypical representations of women.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter aims to contextualise how Malay women are represented using a feminist stylistics approach. To achieve this aim, the present chapter presents the statement of problem, the author's writing background and review of literature concerning her work, purpose of the study, research objectives, research questions, limitations, significance of the study, definition of terms and plan of study.

1.1 Statement of Problem

The discussion of the Malay female/woman has received considerable attention among researchers in recent years. One of the common sites where the Malay woman is being discussed is through literary texts.

Zawiah Yahya (1988) in her study of Malay characters in Malaysian novels in English from the Second World War to 1984 written mostly by Malaysian male writers of Indian and Chinese descent, reveals that most Malay women are not only portrayed as minor characters but they are also under exposed. And, if at all, they are exposed, they are perceived as "helpless appendages to men" (83). On the whole, the projection of the Malay women character is simplistic in these novels, as they are cast in stereotypical roles and their individualities are not made prominent. Ungku Maimunah Mohd Tahir (1992) points out that the early years of literary arena was dominated by Malay male writers as they are the one who have more formal education than women. Their writings mainly offer insights

to the man's world and generally avoid the subject of women in their writings. As such Ungku Maimunah herself offers perception of the ideal Malay women through her analyses of five novels by three women writers. She concludes that the ideal woman has versatile personality; she is in control of her life and she moves beyond her domestic sphere that had previously confined her (18). Christine Campbell's (2004) study of Malay women authored novels published from the 1960s to the 1990s discloses a depiction of Malay women pursuing work-paid career and hence contributing to more participative roles in nation-building, in areas such as journalism, politics and government (292-293). Campbell sees these new depictions of Malay women as a contradiction as they still face restrictions in their workplaces (294). These two different projections of the Malay women are what Campbell labels as 'contrary visions' (310).

Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf contends that the 1980s-1990s witnessed not only the birth of more Anglophone (Malay) women writers but also more assertive themes (2001: 144, 2003: 261-261). The situation is similar to those women who write in the Malay language. However, the former is, to some extent, much bolder in their depictions of Malay women characters. Che Husna Azhari and Elinna Majid are among the best examples but the most vocal one is Dina Zaman. Dina Zaman, in particular, expounds on themes that are tabooed in Malay society such as Malay women's sexuality and the female body and challenges stereotypes and questions patriarchy by portraying characters that do not belong to mainstream society (i.e. housewives, politicians). She foregrounds marginalised positioned

women such as the immigrant women, domestic helpers and sexually frustrated women through issues of sex and sexuality. Lately, Dina Zaman's creative works received much critical acclaim by local researchers.

Having said this, I argue that there are at least three gaps or unexplored terrains in the available studies on Dina Zaman's work. First, very often her work is judged from an ethical or a moralistic perspective (societal or religious mores). This is because of her inclination to use "taboo words" or profanities regarded by the gatekeepers of the language and the literati world as bordering on pornography and, as such, they are unsuitable for the reading consumption of the public. A similar fate was experienced by a renowned Malay language writer, 1982 National Laureate, Shanon Ahmad's novel *Shit* that contained offensive language with reference to those in power. As Amir Muhammad (1999) states, fellow writers either remain muzzled or chided Shanon's bad language.

Second, analyses also tend to highlight the changing identity of Malay women (i.e. from traditional to modern). Dina Zaman's women characters are being compared to modern Malay women characters. The latter has received much attention already especially by Khoo Gaik Cheng (2006: 125-157) who devotes a whole chapter in her book *Reclaiming Adat* to modern Malay women characters in Anglophone literary works (and cinematic productions).

Mazni Muslim and Nasirin Abdillah (2004) also looked at themes of the three contemporary writers, Che Husna Azhari, Dina Zaman and Elinna Abdul Majid but utilised criticism from an Islamic framework. Their findings demonstrate that these writers focus on different issues affecting the different strata of the Malaysian society; Che Husna's works concern the Kelantanese people, Dina highlights on marginalised women and Elinna on high society. However, they all embed Islamic viewpoints in their creative writings. Dzeelfa Zainal Abidin (2005) focuses on the fragmented Malay-self in the selected works by Dina Zaman, Karim Raslan and Huzir Sulaiman. She evaluates the degree of Malayness portrayed by the protagonists from the selected texts on the basis of the three essential makeups that make them constitutional 'Malay', which are, the practice of the religion of Islam, the Malay language and the Malay *adat*. Dzeelfa concludes that although the protagonists are Malays, they convey images that are not typical of the general Malay society. Each character differs in the intensity of the three practiced categories. This suggests that the attributes of race are not fixed and always in a state of flux and can be reconfigured and reconstituted from time to time.

In an essay by Ruzy Suliza Hashim and Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf (2003), both scholars chart the changing perceptions of masculinities by tracing male images from classical chronicles, *Sejarah Melayu* and *Tuhfat al-Nafis* to the contemporary fictions by four selected writers namely Syed Adam Aljafri, Che Husna Azhari, Dina Zaman and Karim Raslan. Texts from both different time

frames demonstrate that Malay men are still the privileged characters compared to women. The change observed in modern texts is men no longer hold maternal attributes as portrayed in the court narratives such as crying and mothering a child. Feminine traits in modern texts are reserved for gay men such as Karim Raslan's Mahmud or the transvestite in Dina Zaman's Midah. Khoo Gaik Cheng (2006) analyses cinematic works of independent film producers and modern/post-modern Anglophone literary works of Rehman Rashid, Salleh ben Joned, Karim Raslan and Dina Zaman. Khoo who interweaved insights from literary and cultural framework observes the changing images of the Malay gender in relation to modernity and nation building.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study to find out how Dina Zaman, one of the most prolific Malay Anglophone writers in Malaysia uses language to represent Malay women and the extent to which her selected texts challenge or reinforce stereotypical representations of Malay women characters. Specifically, I will use a feminist stylistics methodology by analysing how naming (at word level), transitivity (at clause level) and characters/roles (at discourse level) challenge or reinforce stereotypical representations of Malay women characters. In doing so, Dina Zaman's ideological stand in relation to Malay women will be revealed. In addition, a stylistic analysis would provide the appropriate tools to study representations and the perspectives, motivations, thought processes, emotions, behaviours, needs and wants of the women characters. It will also enable me to

study voice and agency through the language that is used in these texts. This explicit linguistic investigation can provide the reader with a rich source of understanding and comprehension of the lives of women often categorised as the 'other'. In the words of Peter Verdonk, stylistics "prompts a different kind of response: one which in a way more individual, more creative (2002: 16)." By analysing the patterns (if any) displayed of her characters, readers can be made aware of the consistent depictions of the Malay women characters that are being marginalised by society.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To show how Dina Zaman employs naming to represent Malay women characters in her short stories.
2. To show how Dina Zaman employs transitivity to represent Malay women characters in her short stories.
3. To show how Dina Zaman utilises characters/roles to represent Malay women characters in her short stories.
4. To show whether Dina Zaman challenges or reinforces stereotypical representations of Malay women in her texts.

1.5 Research Questions

1. How does Dina Zaman employ naming to represent Malay women characters?
2. How does Dina Zaman employ transitivity to represent Malay women characters?

3. How does Dina Zaman utilise characters/roles to represent Malay women characters?
4. To what extent does Dina Zaman challenge or reinforce stereotypical representations of Malay women in her texts?

1.6 Limitations

This study has two main limitations. First, it limits the research on Dina Zaman's selected short stories in her anthology of short stories *Night and Day* (1997). The texts are "The Kacang Puteh and Assam Lady", "Ani" and "The Fat Woman". The reason for choosing these texts is because they deal specifically with Malay women characters. Second, this study aims to examine only three linguistic features such naming, transitivity and characters/roles to show how Malay women are represented in these texts.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study hopes to create awareness among readers that text is the product of ideology. And ideology is established through the linguistic choices made by the author. It is through the analysis of language and linguistic devices that readers will be made to understand whether the author has challenged or reinforced the stereotypical representations of Malay women in her writings. As Norman Fairclough puts it, by foregrounding the linguistic code employed in such texts, readers can 'demystify' and 'denaturalise' ideologies that are ingrained in everyday discourse (1989). Also as stated by Paul Simpson (1993: 6),

1.8.2 Malay

The definition of what constitutes Malayness in the Malaysian context is based on the constitution of Malaysia. Article 160 of the Federal Constitution of 1957 defines Malays as “people of Malay race who citizens of Malaysia who profess Islam, speak the national language and practise Malay culture (Sheridan & Groves 1987: 421).”

1.8.3 Gender

In common usage, ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ tend to be used interchangeably. They are however, different. ‘Sex’ is defined as the biological determined physical characteristics of human beings. The assignment of one’s sex that is ‘male’ and ‘female’ is based on a person’s genitalia. Gender, on the other hand refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that are given by society. The basic division of gender is categorised as ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’.

1.8.4 Patriarchy

The word patriarchy is derived from the word ‘patriarch’ meaning father, ruler of the family and tribe. Sylvia Walby (1990: 20) defines patriarchy as “a system of social structure and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women.”

1.8.5 Stereotype

The OED (1995:1504) defines stereotype as “a fixed or image that many people have of a particular type of person or thing, but which is often not true in reality.” The predetermined idea is often based on a general characteristic of an individual, group or object and is made to overgeneralise the others. As a result, the categorised individual is treated routinely based on this idea. Stereotypes can be either positive or negative, but they are all unfair and misleading and often confused with ‘reality’. Women, for instance, are constructed in the binary form or homogenized as meek, weak and passive while men assertive, strong, and active.

1.9 Plan of study

This research is divided into five chapters. The first chapter provides a general introduction to the object of study. The second chapter examines and evaluates literary and linguistic theories related to this study. The third chapter concerns the methodological procedures, operationalising Sara Mills’ three tiered linguistic levels of analysis, namely analysis of naming, transitivity and character/roles. The fourth chapter presents and discusses the findings of each level of analysis. The final chapter ends with the summary of the research questions, implications and recommendations for various stakeholders, suggestions for future research and a general conclusion.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

The first part of this chapter discusses theories drawn from feminist literary criticism and stylistics. This is then followed by a discussion of Mills' Feminist Stylistics framework, which is a combinative tool of the earlier disciplines. The second part reviews related literature on stylistic analysis and feminist stylistics. The final section discusses theories that underpin Feminist Stylistics, which include M.A.K. Halliday's Social Semiotic Theory of Language and Roger Fowler's Critical Linguistics.

2.1 Feminist Literary Criticism

Criticism in the modern sense, "is to examine the conditions on which it exists, calling into question the assumptions it is based on". It differs greatly from its traditional definition, which is "[a] negative assessment or evaluation (Cameron 1990: 2)." The contemporary approach is more specialised and has been interdisciplinary, drawing insights from various disciplines, theories and perspectives where, as Edward Said (1980: vii) argues is "often tendentious theoretical mode of discourse." Maggie Humm asserts that criticism is feminist when it "reads writings and examines the ideology ... [of] existing disciplines, traditional paradigms about women, nature or social roles, or documents such work by others" from the standpoint of women (1989: 40). One of the sites of feminist criticism is literature. Feminist literary criticism is concerned with the examination of literary texts to "deconstruct the politics of patriarchy as it is

represented in language (Humm 1989: 121). For instance Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1971) draws attention to writings of canonical writers such as D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller and Norman Mailer and their misogynist attitudes towards women in their novels.

Feminist criticism is divided into three time frames. The first wave of feminism took pace in the early part of the century. The concern of that period was the "enfranchisement of women" (Green & LeBihan 1996: 230), as it demanded civil rights for women (i.e. education, voting, property rights etc.). It was also known as the suffrage movement.

The second wave was from the 1960s to 1990s. Prominent advocates were Simone de Beauvoir, Ann Oakley, Kate Millet, Juliet Mitchell and Germaine Greer. The four main concerns of the second wave were

the continued exclusion of writing by women from publication and mainstream academic study, [the] representations of women in (usually canonical) texts by writers of either gender, the representations of women of women's unique experience in their own writing [and] the development of appropriate modes of language and form represent these unique experiences

Green and LeBihan (1996: 230-231)

The third wave, which began its movement since 1990, is regarded as the anti-humanist tradition, which opposes the reading of women's experiences in a monolithic way. This feminist practice acknowledges the diversity and plurality of women's spaces and experiences which are uniquely theirs by drawing ideas

from theorists such as Kumari Jayawardena, Gayathri Spivak, Homi Bhaba, Julia Kristeva, Amina Wadud and others. As a result, there have been diversities within the feminism movements to take into account the unique diversity of women's experiences as women are distinct on a number of factors such as beliefs, history and culture. Among the recent feminist literary approaches within the third wave movement are black African women writing and Islamic feminism. There are many key themes in the feminist critique. Among them are the issues of gender, patriarchy, stereotype and silence.

2.1.1 Gender

In the past forty years, the issue of sex-gender has been one of the concerns in feminist literary criticism. Simone de Beauvoir's in the chapter of her most acclaimed book, *The Second Sex* first published in France in 1949, states the following:

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.

(1978: 267)

The assignment of gender identity is no longer a stable attribute in today's world. Ann Oakley (1972) explains that gender is not a fixed concept but is determined by three social mechanisms of gender socialisation, which are through manipulation, canalization and verbalisation. To Judith Butler (1990: 25), gender

