



Patriarchal Power in Abidah El Khalieqy's Novel *Kartini*: A Feminist Literary Criticism

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bentuk-bentuk kuasa patriarki yang direpresentasikan dalam novel *Kartini* karya Abidah El Khalieqy dengan menggunakan perspektif kritik sastra feminis. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan kritik sastra feminis. Data penelitian berupa kata, frasa, kalimat, dialog, dan narasi yang menunjukkan adanya praktik, relasi, serta bentuk-bentuk kuasa patriarki terhadap perempuan dalam novel. Sumber data utama penelitian adalah novel *Kartini* karya Abidah El Khalieqy, sedangkan data sekunder diperoleh dari berbagai literatur yang relevan dengan kajian feminisme, patriarki, gender, dan kritik sastra feminis. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui pembacaan intensif, pencatatan, dan pengklasifikasian data. Analisis data dilakukan melalui tahap identifikasi, klasifikasi, interpretasi, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kuasa patriarki dalam novel direpresentasikan melalui beberapa bentuk, yaitu subordinasi perempuan, pembatasan kebebasan, dominasi laki-laki dalam pengambilan keputusan, stereotip terhadap perempuan, serta kontrol terhadap pendidikan dan kehidupan sosial perempuan. Novel *Kartini* tidak hanya menggambarkan perempuan sebagai pihak yang mengalami ketidakadilan, tetapi juga menghadirkan perjuangan perempuan dalam memperoleh pendidikan, kebebasan berpikir, dan kesempatan menentukan kehidupannya sendiri. Melalui tokoh Kartini, Abidah El Khalieqy memperlihatkan bahwa pendidikan dan kesadaran kritis menjadi instrumen penting dalam melawan struktur patriarki. Dengan demikian, novel *Kartini* dapat dipahami sebagai karya sastra yang mengkritisi ketimpangan relasi gender sekaligus menegaskan pentingnya emansipasi dan pemberdayaan perempuan.

Kata kunci: kuasa patriarki, novel *Kartini*, Abidah El Khalieqy, feminisme, kritik sastra feminis.

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a form of human expression that cannot be separated from the realities of social life. Through literary works, authors can represent various issues that develop within society, including injustice, power relations, gender inequality, and social relations between men and women. Therefore, literary works should not only be viewed as aesthetic creations but also as spaces for expressing criticism of social realities. In this sense, literature can function as a medium through which social relations, cultural values, and power structures are represented and critically examined. Recent studies of literary works demonstrate that gender relations and patriarchal domination remain important subjects in contemporary literary criticism,

particularly in relation to women's representation, sexuality, discrimination, and resistance (Dinanti & Tjahjani, 2021; Yulianeta & Ismail, 2022).

One of the issues frequently represented in literary works is the unequal relationship between men and women. In societies influenced by patriarchal systems, men tend to be positioned as having greater authority, while women are often placed in subordinate positions. Such inequality can be observed in various aspects of life, including family, education, employment, social relations, and decision-making. Recent feminist literary studies have shown that women's subordination may appear through marginalization, stereotyping, violence, unequal social roles, and restrictions on women's autonomy (Mukhibun & Wardani, 2023; Widayanti et al., 2024; Tanjung & Hayati, 2025). These

findings indicate that gender inequality in literary texts is not merely an individual problem but is closely connected to broader patriarchal structures.

Patriarchy is essentially a system of social structures and practices through which men exercise power and dominance over women (Walby, 1990). Patriarchal domination does not always appear in the form of direct physical violence but can operate through social norms, traditions, gender roles, institutions, and cultural practices. Walby (1990) conceptualizes patriarchy through several interconnected structures, including relations within the household, paid employment, the state, sexuality, violence, and cultural institutions. Recent literary studies further demonstrate that patriarchal domination may be expressed through control over women's sexuality, social roles, marriage, cultural expectations, and access to decision-making (Dinanti & Tjahjani, 2021; Sheheryar, 2024; Faiz & Koca, 2024). Therefore, patriarchal power can operate both structurally and culturally.

This issue becomes particularly significant when examined from the perspective of feminist literary criticism. Feminist literary criticism examines the representation of women in literature, the ways in which gender relations are constructed, and the relationship between literary texts and patriarchal social structures. Showalter (1977) significantly contributed to the development of feminist literary criticism by emphasizing the importance of examining women's literary experiences and the historically marginalized position of women within literary traditions. Recent studies continue to demonstrate the relevance of feminist literary criticism in examining women's representation, gender inequality, and resistance in literary texts (Yulianeta & Ismail, 2022; Mukhibun & Wardani, 2023; Pasaribu et al., 2025). A feminist approach therefore enables readers to examine literary texts by considering women's experiences, positions, identities, and struggles within particular social and cultural contexts.

Women's resistance is another important dimension of feminist literary studies. Resistance may take the form of intellectual awareness, education, negotiation, rejection of oppressive norms, or direct challenges to patriarchal authority. Studies of *Tarian Bumi*, *Amba*, *Larung*, and other literary works demonstrate that female characters can function as active subjects who negotiate and challenge patriarchal structures (Tiwery et al., 2024; Pasaribu et al., 2025; Suharyo et al., 2025). Similarly, recent research has shown that women may negotiate patriarchal norms rather than simply reject them, particularly in relation to marriage, family, religion, and cultural expectations (Faiz & Koca, 2024; Utami & Istiani, 2025). These studies strengthen the argument that women's resistance should be understood as an active process of negotiating power and constructing autonomy.

Education is also an important dimension of women's emancipation. Patriarchal systems may limit women's educational opportunities by prioritizing domestic roles and reproducing assumptions about women's appropriate social functions. From a feminist perspective, education can become a means through which women develop critical consciousness, independence, and agency. Recent research on women's emancipation has demonstrated that education can function as an important strategy for challenging religious and cultural forms of patriarchy (Utami & Istiani, 2025). In literary representations, educational aspirations therefore become closely associated with women's efforts to challenge restrictive gender norms.

Abidah El Khalieqy's novel *Kartini* is particularly relevant to this discussion because it represents the struggle of a woman who challenges social and cultural restrictions through education, intellectual development, and critical awareness. Kartini is widely recognized as a female figure associated with education, freedom of thought, and women's equality during a period when women's social mobility and

opportunities were heavily restricted by social and cultural structures. Through the portrayal of Kartini's life, the novel presents various issues concerning gender relations, tradition, education, family, and women's position in society.

Previous research has directly examined gender issues in Abidah El Khalieqy's *Kartini*. Windasari et al. (2023), for example, examined gender roles and forms of gender discrimination in *Geni Jora* and *Kartini*. Their study identified marginalization, subordination, stereotypes, violence, and women's roles in domestic and public spheres. More recently, Devi et al. (2025) examined the struggle for gender equality in *Kartini* through Sara Mills' Critical Discourse Analysis. Their findings indicate that Kartini is represented as moving from a passive object toward an autonomous subject through linguistic expressions related to cultural, customary, and educational issues.

These previous studies are important because they establish that *Kartini* contains significant representations of gender inequality and women's struggle. However, the present study differs in its analytical emphasis. Rather than focusing primarily on gender discrimination or critical discourse representation, this study specifically examines **patriarchal power** and the mechanisms through which it operates in the novel. The analysis focuses on women's subordination, restrictions on women's freedom, male dominance in decision-making, limitations on women's access to education, gender stereotypes, and women's resistance to patriarchal structures. In this respect, the present study seeks to complement previous research by placing patriarchal power at the center of the analysis.

The representation of Kartini's struggle is important because it illustrates the tension between social structures that restrict women and women's awareness of their right to determine their own futures.

Women are not merely positioned as objects who passively accept social rules; rather, they are also represented as subjects capable of thinking critically, questioning injustice, and resisting oppressive structures. Such resistance can be understood as part of a broader feminist struggle to challenge gender inequality and establish greater autonomy for women (Walby, 1990; Tiwery et al., 2024; Suharyo et al., 2025). Recent research also demonstrates that female characters can challenge patriarchal hegemony by developing subjectivity and negotiating social expectations (Jannah & Handayani, 2026).

Based on this background, this study focuses on **patriarchal power in Abidah El Khalieqy's novel *Kartini***. The study employs feminist literary criticism to identify the forms of patriarchal power represented in the novel and to analyze women's resistance to such forms of domination. The analysis specifically examines women's subordination, restrictions on women's freedom, male dominance in decision-making, limitations on women's access to education, gender stereotypes, and women's resistance to patriarchal structures.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the background described above, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What forms of patriarchal power are represented in Abidah El Khalieqy's novel *Kartini*?
2. How are women's subordination and restrictions represented in the novel *Kartini*?
3. How does the female protagonist resist patriarchal power in the novel?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to:

1. Describe the forms of patriarchal power represented in Abidah El Khalieqy's novel *Kartini*.
2. Analyze the forms of women's subordination and restrictions represented in the novel.
3. Describe the forms of women's resistance to patriarchal power represented in the novel.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a **qualitative descriptive method**. This method is appropriate because the research data consist of words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, narratives, and events found in Abidah El Khalieqy's novel *Kartini*. Qualitative research is appropriate for literary analysis because it enables researchers to interpret textual data within their social, cultural, and historical contexts.

The study adopts **feminist literary criticism** as its analytical approach. This approach is employed to identify representations of women and analyze power relations between men and women within the literary text. Feminist literary criticism pays particular attention to women's representation, gender relations, women's experiences, and the ways literary texts may reproduce or challenge patriarchal assumptions (Showalter, 1977). Recent studies have applied feminist literary criticism to examine women's subordination, gender stereotypes, patriarchal domination, and women's resistance in literary texts (Mukhibun & Wardani, 2023; Sheheryar, 2024; Tanjung & Hayati, 2025).

The primary data source is Abidah El Khalieqy's novel *Kartini*. Secondary data consist of books, scholarly articles, research journals, and other relevant references concerning feminist theory, patriarchy,

gender, and feminist literary criticism. The theoretical framework primarily draws upon Walby's (1990) concept of patriarchy and Showalter's (1977) contribution to feminist literary criticism. Recent studies concerning women's resistance and patriarchal hegemony are also used to contextualize the analysis (Tiwery et al., 2024; Pasaribu et al., 2025; Suharyo et al., 2025; Jannah & Handayani, 2026).

Data were collected through several stages. First, the researcher read the novel comprehensively to understand its content and narrative context. Second, relevant passages concerning patriarchal power were identified. Third, the identified data were recorded and classified according to the analytical categories. Fourth, the data were interpreted from the perspective of feminist literary criticism.

Data analysis was conducted descriptively and interpretively by connecting textual evidence with concepts of patriarchy and feminism. The analysis focused on identifying recurring patterns related to women's subordination, restrictions on women's freedom, male dominance, educational inequality, gender stereotypes, and women's resistance. The credibility of the findings was established through repeated reading of the novel and by examining the consistency between the textual data, narrative context, and theoretical framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Women's Subordination

One of the forms of patriarchal power represented in the novel is women's subordination. Subordination places women in positions considered inferior to men and limits their authority in determining matters concerning their own lives. Within patriarchal social structures, women's subordinate positions may be maintained through family practices, cultural expectations, and institutional

arrangements (Walby, 1990). Similar patterns of subordination have been identified in recent feminist literary studies, particularly in relation to gender discrimination and women's social positions (Mukhibun & Wardani, 2023; Widayanti et al., 2024; Tanjung & Hayati, 2025).

In Kartini's life, such subordination is represented through social rules that restrict women's freedom and mobility. Women are expected to comply with family expectations and traditions without having equal opportunities to determine their own life choices. This condition demonstrates that women's positions are shaped not only by their individual abilities but also by deeply rooted social structures.

Kartini develops an awareness of these conditions. She begins to question why women are expected to accept various restrictions while men are given greater freedom. Such questioning marks the emergence of Kartini's critical awareness of gender inequality. From a feminist perspective, this awareness is important because recognizing unequal power relations constitutes an initial step toward challenging patriarchal structures.

2. Restrictions on Women's Freedom

Patriarchal power is also manifested through restrictions on women's freedom. Women's ability to determine their activities, education, social interactions, and future lives is often controlled by social and familial norms. Such restrictions illustrate how patriarchal structures can regulate women's choices and limit their autonomy (Walby, 1990). Recent research similarly demonstrates that patriarchal norms can regulate women's bodies, sexuality, relationships, and social roles (Dinanti & Tjahjani, 2021; Sheheryar, 2024).

These restrictions demonstrate how women's bodies and lives can become

objects of social control. Women do not possess complete autonomy in making decisions because their lives are frequently influenced by male authority and established traditions. In this context, patriarchal power does not necessarily depend on direct coercion but can be reproduced through cultural expectations and accepted social practices.

Within this context, Kartini emerges as a figure who attempts to expand women's space for freedom. Her desire to obtain education demonstrates that freedom of thought is an essential component of women's struggle for emancipation. Her intellectual development allows her to question established assumptions about women's roles and positions.

3. Male Dominance in Decision-Making

Another manifestation of patriarchal power is male dominance in decision-making. Within patriarchal systems, men are frequently positioned as heads of families and primary decision-makers, while women are expected to comply with those decisions. Such arrangements reflect the unequal distribution of authority between men and women within patriarchal social structures (Walby, 1990).

Such dominance is not limited to relationships between husbands and wives but can also occur in relationships between fathers and daughters and within broader social structures. The authority granted to men may determine important aspects of women's lives, including education, marriage, social mobility, and personal choices. Studies of patriarchal norms have similarly shown that women's decisions may be constrained by family expectations and socially established gender roles (Faiz & Koca, 2024; Tanjung & Hayati, 2025).

The novel *Kartini* illustrates how decisions concerning women's lives can be determined by family structures and social norms. Women's ability to make

independent choices is restricted because male voices possess greater social legitimacy.

Through Kartini's character, the author emphasizes the importance of providing women with opportunities to express their voices and participate in decisions concerning their own lives. This representation challenges the assumption that authority and decision-making should primarily belong to men.

4. Restrictions on Women's Access to Education

Education constitutes one of the central issues in Kartini's struggle. In societies strongly influenced by patriarchy, women's education may be regarded as less important than men's education. Such unequal access to education contributes to the reproduction of gender inequality because knowledge and opportunities for personal development are distributed unequally between men and women.

Women are frequently directed toward domestic roles, whereas men are given greater opportunities to pursue education and develop their abilities. This distinction reinforces gendered expectations regarding the appropriate roles of men and women.

Kartini challenges this perspective. For her, education is a means of developing women's awareness and capabilities. Educated women are better equipped to understand themselves, their social environments, and the structures that restrict their lives.

From a feminist perspective, the struggle for women's access to education represents a struggle against structural inequality. Education does not merely provide knowledge; it also enables women to become active subjects within social life. This perspective is consistent with feminist criticism, which emphasizes women's agency and challenges representations that reduce women to passive or subordinate

roles (Showalter, 1977). Recent research likewise identifies education as an important strategy for women's emancipation and resistance to patriarchal structures (Utami & Istiani, 2025; Devi et al., 2025).

5. Gender Stereotypes

Patriarchy also operates through gender stereotypes. Women are often constructed as individuals who are expected to be gentle, obedient, submissive, and primarily concerned with family interests. Such expectations contribute to the construction of gender roles that place women in restricted social positions.

These stereotypes can cause women who possess critical perspectives or seek to determine their own paths in life to be perceived as violating established social norms. In this way, gender stereotypes function as cultural mechanisms through which patriarchal expectations are reproduced. Recent research on literary representations of women has similarly identified stereotypes as an important mechanism of gender discrimination (Yulianeta & Ismail, 2022; Mukhibun & Wardani, 2023; Windasari et al., 2023).

Kartini emerges as a figure who challenges these constructions. She demonstrates that women are capable of thinking, learning, expressing opinions, and contributing meaningfully to society.

Therefore, the representation of Kartini in the novel functions as a critique of perspectives that restrict women's identities exclusively to domestic roles. Through Kartini's intellectual development and social aspirations, the novel challenges conventional assumptions concerning women's capabilities.

6. Resistance to Patriarchal Power

Women's resistance constitutes an important aspect of the novel. Resistance does not necessarily take the form of direct

or open confrontation. It can also be expressed through education, intellectual awareness, the courage to articulate opinions, negotiation, and efforts to create greater social space for women. Recent studies of women's resistance in literature demonstrate that female characters can challenge patriarchal structures through rebellion, negotiation, critical awareness, and the construction of female subjectivity (Tiwery et al., 2024; Faiz & Koca, 2024; Pasaribu et al., 2025).

Kartini primarily resists patriarchal structures through intellectual development and education. She does not simply reject tradition; rather, she seeks forms of social life that enable women to develop while maintaining meaningful social and cultural values.

This form of resistance demonstrates that feminist resistance can operate through different strategies. Rather than simply opposing men or rejecting cultural traditions, women's resistance may involve challenging unequal power relations and creating opportunities for greater autonomy. Such a perspective is compatible with Walby's (1990) understanding of patriarchy as a system of social structures that can be reproduced and transformed through social practices.

The representation of Kartini's resistance therefore positions her not merely as a victim of patriarchal structures but as an active subject who negotiates, questions, and challenges the limitations imposed upon women. This interpretation is also consistent with recent research showing that female characters may transform from marginalized objects into active subjects who challenge dominant patriarchal discourses (Devi et al., 2025; Jannah & Handayani, 2026).

7. Education as a Strategy for Women's Emancipation

In the novel, education functions not merely as an academic activity but as a strategy for women's emancipation. Education provides women with knowledge, critical awareness, and opportunities to participate more actively in social life.

Kartini recognizes that women's powerlessness is partly associated with limited access to knowledge. Consequently, education becomes a means of developing awareness and independence.

This perspective demonstrates that social transformation can begin with a transformation in ways of thinking. When women are given opportunities to learn, they acquire greater capacity to understand social structures and advocate for their rights. Recent research concerning female emancipation also emphasizes the role of education in challenging patriarchal and religiously grounded social structures (Utami & Istiani, 2025).

Therefore, education becomes an important symbol in Kartini's struggle against patriarchal power. The emphasis on women's intellectual development also corresponds with feminist literary criticism's broader concern with recovering women's voices, experiences, and agency within cultural and literary representations (Showalter, 1977; Pasaribu et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that Abidah El Khalieqy's novel *Kartini* represents various forms of patriarchal power that affect women's lives. These forms of power are manifested through women's subordination, restrictions on freedom, male dominance in decision-making, limitations on women's access to education, and gender stereotypes. These forms of domination can be understood through the broader conceptualization of

patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices that produces unequal relations between men and women (Walby, 1990).

The findings are consistent with recent feminist literary studies that identify subordination, marginalization, stereotyping, violence, and restrictions on women's autonomy as recurring manifestations of patriarchal power in literary texts (Mukhibun & Wardani, 2023; Widayanti et al., 2024; Tanjung & Hayati, 2025). At the same time, the analysis of *Kartini* demonstrates that patriarchal domination is not only represented as a form of oppression but also as a structure that generates women's critical awareness and resistance.

The novel does not merely portray women as victims of patriarchal structures but also represents them as subjects who possess awareness and the capacity to resist. Kartini is portrayed as a woman who attempts to overcome social limitations through education, critical thinking, the courage to express her ideas, and the pursuit of gender equality. This finding is consistent with recent research emphasizing women's resistance, negotiation, and transformation from marginalized objects into active subjects (Tiwery et al., 2024; Faiz & Koca, 2024; Devi et al., 2025; Suharyo et al., 2025).

From the perspective of feminist literary criticism, *Kartini* can be understood as a critique of social structures that position women in subordinate roles. The representation of Kartini's struggle demonstrates the importance of women's voices, agency, education, and critical consciousness in challenging gender inequality. This perspective is consistent with the development of feminist literary criticism, which seeks to examine women's representation and challenge the marginalization of women's experiences in literary and cultural traditions (Showalter, 1977; Yulianeta & Ismail, 2022).

The present study also complements previous research on Abidah El Khalieqy's *Kartini*. Windasari et al. (2023) focused on gender roles and forms of gender discrimination, while Devi et al. (2025) examined the struggle for gender equality through Sara Mills' Critical Discourse Analysis. The present study extends these discussions by specifically foregrounding **patriarchal power** and examining its manifestations through subordination, restrictions on women's freedom, male dominance, educational inequality, gender stereotypes, and women's resistance.

Therefore, Abidah El Khalieqy's work does not merely revisit Kartini as a historical figure but also reconstructs the struggle of women against patriarchal power. The novel conveys the message that women have the right to access education, express their opinions, determine their own life choices, and participate equally in social life. Through the representation of Kartini's intellectual and social struggle, the novel provides a critical reflection on the persistence of patriarchal structures and the importance of women's emancipation.

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