

The Existence and Independence of Women in the Novel *Isinga* by Dorothea Rosa Herliany: A Review of Feminist Literary Criticism

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ABSTRACT

Literary works are a means for authors to convey thoughts, ideas, ideas and even criticism of phenomena and problems that occur in society. The issue of women in society is one of the exciting topics raised in literature. The novel *Isinga* presents the issues of Papuan women related to the existence and independence of women and their efforts to realize their existence. This research is qualitative, and the data analysis method is hermeneutic. The consequences of using hermeneutics are bound to two things: first, ascertaining the content in a word, sentence, text, and so on, and second, understanding the forms of instruction contained in the symbols. The research results show that Papuan women have a very high existence as individuals and social beings. Papuan women have an independent attitude formed due to circumstances that force their awareness to maintain their existence. Efforts made by women to realize their existence and foster women's independence include (1) trying to learn new things, (2) opening a business/trading in the market, (3) providing counseling for women and adolescents, (4) providing skills training for women and adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

Literary works are a means for authors to convey thoughts, ideas, ideas and even criticism of phenomena and problems that occur in society. Many things are seen, felt, and experienced by the author as a member of society. The issue of women in society is one of the exciting topics to be used as material for writing literary works. Many scholarly works raise women's issues. One of them is the novel *Isinga* by Dorothea Rosa Herliany.

Isinga tells the story of the Aitubu people who do not recognize life outside the Papua region. The Aitubu community distinguishes between men's and women's residences. The division of labor between men and women is evident to the people of Aitubu and those in the surrounding villages in the valley of the Megafu Mountains. Men were instrumental in acquiring communal land (plantation land) and could serve as army members in inter-village wars. Women, on the other hand, were the means of procuring children. Women also work in the plantations opened by men and raise their children. This double work of women often made them depressed because they were forbidden to speak and complain (Herliany, 2015).

Based on the outline of the story's content, there are exciting things to be studied further, namely how the novel depicts women's existence and independence in Papuan society. The existence and independence of women are essential to study because they can be used as an example for women in general so that they can exist and be independent in any situation.

Describes how the novel's female characters resist a restrictive social environment. In addition, Sabrina and Hayati (2020) in their research noted the prevalence of domestic violence faced by Papuan women and how they struggle to exist and be independent. Silitong (2017) also highlights the importance of education as a tool for women to achieve independence, as shown in her study of the novel. Thus, literary works function not only as a mirror of social reality but also as a medium to inspire change and strengthen the existence and independence of women in various contexts. Search that is relevant to this study is research written by Nugroho, A., Suseno, S., & Prabaningrum, D. (2021), Sumartini, S., & Prabaningrum, D. (2021), Ridwan, R., Nensilanti, N., & Hamid, R. A. (2024), and Pratiwi, R. I., & Putriani, R. (2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's Existence

Existence means existence or being (KBBI online). In this meaning, existence is related to humans as living beings. Humans are humans who have consciousness, humans who have to do something, humans who can plan and do things, and humans who can be themselves. Women's existence is the awareness that women have to realize their ideals as women whose existence is equal to men.

Women's Independence

Independence is standing alone without depending on others (KBBI online). Independence can also be defined as the ability to stand alone with

courage and responsibility for all behavior as an adult person carrying out his duties and obligations.

Women's existence and independence are essential concepts that refer to their ability to stand alone and actualize themselves in various situations. According to the perspective of feminism, women's existence and independence are the central axis underlying the women's emancipation movement against injustice and oppression rooted in patriarchy. Sugihastuti and Sugiharto (2002), in their book "Feminist Literary Criticism: Theory and Application," explain that women's struggle to achieve independence often faces significant obstacles from entrenched social and cultural structures. This opinion is in line with Fakhri's (2003) thoughts in "Gender Analysis & Social Transformation," which states that patriarchal social structures create inequality and hinder the existence of women in public and private areas. Djajanegara (2000) also asserts that feminist literary criticism functions to highlight inequality and advocate social change for the advancement of women. In conclusion, the existence and independence of women is not just idealism but an urgent need to achieve gender equality. Some relevant literature is written by Hardiningtyas (2016) in the journal "Aksara."

METHODOLOGY

Wellek and Warren (Chamamah-Soeratno, 2001) mentioned that even though it remains in the In terms of scientific integrity, literary research has a distinctive methodological truth that has its measure. The method of literary research is chosen after considering the nature of literary works that show universal symptoms with their uniqueness (Chamamah-Soeratno, 2001). In this research, the data analysis method is the hermeneutic method. The consequences of using hermeneutics are bound to two things: first, ascertaining the content in a word, sentence, text, and so on, and second, understanding the forms of instruction contained in the symbols (Bleicher, 2003). The data source in this research is the novel *Isinga*. The data are sentences indicating women's existence and independence in the novel *Isinga*. As for data analysis and interpretation, the data was analyzed using a narrative research approach.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following is a discussion of the research results of Dorothea Rosa Herliany's novel *Isinga*, which describes the existence and independence of women in Papua and the efforts made to realize the existence and foster women's independence.

Women's Existence

The female characters in the novel *Isinga*, both the primary and additional characters, show their existence as independent women. Irewa's character, since childhood, has been accustomed to helping her mother in critical ceremonial activities in the village. Likewise, Irewa's mother is heavily involved in various traditional ceremonial activities, as shown in the following quote.

Irewa Ongge was seen running from the top of the mountainside to the field below. The little girl then joined the crowd. As she ran on the dusty ground, her skin became dull. She was alone. Her mother, Mam Kame, had arrived first, bringing vegetables to be included in the stone-grilled food. Like some other women, they brought vegetables or other tubers to be included in the pile of stone-grilled food (Herliany, 2015, p. 8).

The little Irewa character is also an inquisitive woman with a high spirit of learning.

...Because school was new to the Aitubu people, on the first day of school, many Aitubu children watched from outside. Most were boys. Only one was a girl, Irewa. In the following days, the curiosity was over. There were fewer who came. One or two remained for a long time. Irewa remained there. She was never bored. She loved listening to all the lessons given to the students in the classroom ((Herliany, 2015, p. 16).

Little Irwa is different from other children of the same age. She was passionate about learning, even if she only listened to lessons outside the classroom. She was the only girl interested in accepting something new in her life and found it helpful.

Women's Independence

The novel *Isinga* depicts Papuan women who are very independent. They are fearless, tired, and not dependent on men. Women have an essential role in the survival of their lives and households. The excerpt below depicts a woman who never gave up despite being badly injured.

He stayed there for four days and nights, neither eating nor drinking. He was hit by an arrow while looking for wood at the forest's edge. No one knew about it. Enduring the pain, the woman ran into the forest. She kept going and came to this forest in Onef Hamlet. Moreover, five arrows were stuck in her body. She pulled them out one by one. Afterward, she made a hole in the ground with the remaining energy and went inside. This was the way of self-defense known to Iko's people. The ground can absorb the blood dripping from the body. That way, he survived (Herliany, 2015: 43).

The quote above depicts a woman still trying to save herself, even though many arrows have pierced her body. She did not just give up. With the rest of her abilities, the woman tried to dig a hole as a place of self-defense to survive before being helped by others.

Another form of independence is shown by the character Irewa. As a wife, she has many tasks and is never helped by her husband.

How to catch fish was something new that Irewa had to learn in order to adjust

to living in Hobson. Irewa already knew how to process (*menokok*) sago but was not good at it. Irewa was good at helping her mama work the betatas and vegetables in the fields (Herliany, 2015, p. 58).

As such, Irewa immediately learned many things. The new thing was about the lake. Mama Fos Malom told her that Hobone women catch fish using nets. The nets must be made by themselves, and if they are damaged, they must be repaired by themselves. ... (Herliany, 2015, p. 59)

"All Hobone women can dive, and so should you. Now you are a Hobone," she said. For days and weeks, Irewa learned to overcome her fear of water. Getting used to the water of Lake Ilom. Then, she spent hours learning how to go underwater. Diving the Hobone woman way. ...Over time, Irewa came to love diving. She did not always catch fish. Irewa has also been able to row a boat. This is an everyday thing that Hobone women do besides gardening and processing sago (Herliany, 2015, p. 60).

As a person living in a new place with a different geographical system from where she lived, Irewa had to adjust. She had to learn many things that had never been done in her home place. With great enthusiasm, Irewa did it all to become a good woman according to the customs of the Hobone people. Everything Irewa did, learned, and did was done alone without the help of her husband.

After the men of the village open the sago plantation, the next plantation must be taken care of by a woman. This is Irewa's job ((Herliany, 2015: 60).

So, Irewa's other job was to take care of the pigs. Feeding them so that they live well and give birth. Then, the pigs multiplied (Herliany, 2015, p. 61). All women in the mountains of Megafu must provide food for their families. No matter what the circumstances, the task must be done. There was never a Megafu man preparing food for the family (Herliany, 2015, p. 62).

The quotes above show that Papuan women must be independent women under any circumstances. Women have many tasks that must be done without the help of men. If they are going to fish, the net is damaged, the women must repair it themselves. As seen in the following quote.

In the forest, Irewa fetches firewood. If the wood is significant, she has to split it with an axe. If there are fruits that can be picked, she also takes them. After that, Irewa cooks. Then she goes to the river. The gourd bags at home are filled with water from the spring. That is the drinking supply for the family. Irewa then feeds the pigs. If the net she used that day were broken, she would fix it (Herliany, 2015):64).

From the quote above, it can be seen that Papuan women have extraordinary independence. This is also shown when Papuan women are about

to give birth. A Papuan woman must be able to give birth to her child alone without the help of others. It is embedded in women's beliefs that they will be ashamed if they still depend on others in childbirth. Because for the Papuan people, childbirth is an ordinary thing, not something special. The quote below explains this.

Many Megafu women went into labor alone. If they gave birth in a residential place, there was usually a Mama who was used to helping women give birth (Herliany, 2015, p. 64). For all Megafu women, childbirth is an ordinary event. Like any other natural event. Every woman will give birth. Megafu women continue to carry out their daily chores until their wombs are large.

Women tell each other how to get the baby out. Mothers. Fos's mother. Neighboring mothers. Women of the same age. They did their births. All the women knew how. There is no feeling of fear. There is a shame if you cannot do your labor (Herliany, 2015, p. 71).

For Iko's people, these strong people, pregnancy, and birth are everyday events that happen to all families. Repeated. Since the ancestors. Everything happens like that (Herliany, 2015, p. 91).

Women maintain the balance of humans with other humans. Humans with nature. Humans with the spirits of ancestors (Herliany, 2015, p. 91).

From the various quotes above, it can be seen that Papuan women have an independent attitude formed due to circumstances that force their awareness to maintain their existence as women or homemakers. Papuan women are tasked with maintaining a balance between humans, humans with nature, and humans with ancestors. This shows that Papuan women have a very high existence as individuals and social beings.

Women's Efforts in Realizing Existence and Fostering Women's Independence in Dorothea Rosa Herliany's Novel Isinga

Papuan women have made many efforts to realize their existence. Women try to learn new things that have never been done before. This can be seen from the actions taken by the character Irewa. Since childhood, she has had a high curiosity. She often listened to lessons delivered in class, even though she only listened from outside the classroom. This shows a high enthusiasm for learning new things.

...Because school was new to the Aitubu people, on the first day of school, many Aitubu children watched from outside. Most were boys. Only one was a girl, Irewa. In the following days, the curiosity was over. There were fewer who came. One or two remained for a long time. Irewa remained there. She was never bored. She loved listening to all the lessons given to the students in the classroom (Herliany, 2015, p. 16).

From this quote, it can be seen that Irewa is a representation of Papuan women. Irewa, since childhood, has made efforts to realize her existence as a woman. Likewise, when she was married, Irewa learned many new things to be a wife in a new place/environment.

As such, Irewa immediately learned many things. The new thing was about the lake. Mama Fos Malom told her that Hobone women catch fish using nets. The nets must be made by themselves; if they are damaged, they must be repaired. ...(Herliany, 2015: 59).

In this case, Irewa, women learn many new things, such as rowing, diving, fishing, and repairing broken nets. All of these are jobs and experiences that she had never done at all when she was unmarried. She had to learn these new things because, after marriage, she lived in a new environment that differed geographically from her original environment. Irewa did all this to maintain and realize her existence as a wife.

In addition, Irewa also trades vegetables and fish caught from the lake to fulfill the needs of her household and pay her children's school fees. She does this because her husband refuses to provide for her and her children.

Irewa saw a different life. She had only been eating betatas, kale, and fish, but now she was no longer bored eating them. Irewa followed the other women. When she has more betatas, taro, and kale from her fields, she takes them to the market. It is hard to carry everything in a token. However, Irewa has been used to carrying heavy tokens since she had children. Irewa also catches fish. There is more than she needs, and she takes it to the market (Herliany, 2015, p. 148).

The quote above shows how efforts are made by Papuan women so that they, as wives, can still provide for their household needs. Likewise, this effort is part of her efforts to make herself still exist as a mother who is fully responsible for her children. Likewise, the quote illustrates the independence of a wife (woman) who does not depend on others (husband).

Irewa, a *yonime* (peacemaker of hostile parties), has another awareness of making various efforts about being a *yonime*. Over time, the lives of Papuans have also changed. There were many prostitutes there. This troubled Irewa and other mothers in Papua. Irewa tried to do many things to open the minds of Papuan women about the dangers of prostitution for men, women, teenagers, and children. Together with the new sub-district head and her twin sister, who is a doctor, she conducts counseling and concrete actions to prevent prostitution and the outbreak of venereal diseases.

Irewa is now more aware of herself. In the past, *yonime* was asked to maintain the harmony of society in two villages. Irewa now thinks she does not want to be bound to just those two villages. The need for the present time is to also think about the harmony of where she is currently located. Irewa feels called to be a person who influences and changes the views of others.

Irewa began to express her opinion on prostitution. She recounted her experience when she contracted syphilis. She said that even if a woman only had sex with her husband, she could get a venereal disease. She also invited the women traders in the market to oversee their sons (Herliany, 2015, p. 157).

Irewa continues its activities. Maintaining harmony. Now, with the help of Jingi, she provides knowledge to women in rural areas. The experience she first shared at the market was also passed on to other women in other places. Jingi adds in terms of health. Jingi and Irewa continue to move from one area to another. Irewa organizes her time to do that when all the work at home has been completed (Herliany, 2015, p. 159).

From the various quotations above, it can be seen that there are efforts from Papuan women to ensure that they can still exist as a healthy society and avoid dangerous disease outbreaks. They are aware of the importance of maintaining health and household harmony.

To foster the independence of teenagers and women in general, Irewa and other women leaders provide counseling and training to teenagers.

Many women from different villages came there. However, they never come on time. Apart from their homes being far away, it was also because many did not know the time. Irewa does not question that. However, she still organized the activities to start at the appointed time. Even though there were only a few women... (Herliany, 2015: 194).

Some of Ms. Selvi's friends in the old group came there. They invited the women in the village to come to Marya Room to teach the teenagers to make tokens. Not from bark, which is rare. But from wool and manila yarn. Irewa looks for teenagers who might be interested. Her son, Ansel, helped to find interested teenagers. Then, it was passed on to teenagers from other schools (Herliany, 2015, pp. 194-195).

Irewa and several other women provided education and skills training in making tokens, a unique traditional Papuan bag made from bark fiber, usually from the wood of the pendulum tree, Nawa tree, or forest orchid. The training is intended to enable Papuan women and teenagers to utilize their free time, acquire skills, and earn an income from their labor to become self-sufficient.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Papuan women have an independent attitude that is formed due to circumstances that force their awareness to maintain their existence as women or as housewives. Papuan women are tasked with maintaining the balance between humans, humans with nature, and humans with ancestors. This shows that Papuan women have a very high existence as individuals and social beings.

Efforts made by women to realize their existence and foster women's independence include: (1) women try to learn new things, (2) women open businesses/trade in the market, (3) women provide counseling for women and adolescents, (4) provide skills training for women and adolescents. Future research can examine the relationship between ecosystems and the environment that affects women's existence in novels oriented toward ecofeminism.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future research on the existence and independence of Papuan women can delve deeper into the intersection of ecofeminism, cultural sustainability, and

environmental justice. By examining the intricate relationships between women, their natural environment, and their cultural heritage, researchers can uncover how ecological challenges, resource management, and cultural practices shape the roles and resilience of Papuan women. For instance, exploring how environmental degradation impacts traditional practices, market activities, and women's leadership roles can highlight their adaptive strategies and contributions to ecological conservation. Additionally, analyzing literary works or oral traditions through an ecofeminist lens can provide rich insights into how Papuan women's identities and roles are represented and connected to their natural surroundings. This research can illuminate the transformative potential of women as agents of ecological and cultural sustainability, offering new frameworks for understanding gender, environment, and cultural dynamics in Papua.

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