



Cultural Representation and Women's Issues in the Film Wadjda: A Feminist Perspective

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Abstract

The film "Wadjda" is a distinctive work that provides insight into the lives of Saudi Arabian women, particularly within the context of a society deeply entrenched in patriarchal norms. The character of Wadjda symbolizes women's empowerment and embodies the ongoing struggle against inequality, highlighting the daily challenges women face in confronting gender discrimination. This study aims to analyze the representation of culture and women's issues, with a particular emphasis on the theme of gender equality as presented in "Wadjda". Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, this research primarily focuses on the film "Wadjda", directed by Haifaa Al-Mansour in 2012, and is analyzed through the lens of liberal feminist theory. Data collection utilizes the listen-read-record technique for the research object, while data analysis incorporates data reduction, data presentation, and verification methods. The findings reveal seven key issues related to gender inequality: the accessibility of freedom primarily for men, limited access for women due to unjust social norms, public harassment of women, women's aspirations for freedom and equality, the imbalance of power affecting the treatment of women, patriarchal traditions that restrict women's autonomy, and inequalities in marriage. This research is anticipated to contribute to the discourse on social change towards gender equality, as well as provide a deeper understanding of feminism through media representations, particularly in illustrating women's struggles within a culture that constrains them.

Keywords: Culture, Women's Issues, Film, Feminism

Abstrak

Film Wadjda merupakan karya yang unik menawarkan perspektif tentang kehidupan perempuan Arab Saudi, terutama dalam konteks masyarakat yang kental dengan norma patriarkal. Karakter Wadjda menjadi simbol pemberdayaan perempuan yang berjuang untuk melawan ketidaksetaraan, serta menggambarkan perjuangan sehari-hari perempuan dalam menghadapi diskriminasi gender. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis representasi budaya dan isu perempuan dengan fokus pada kesetaraan gender yang diangkat dalam film Wadjda. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, dengan sumber utama penelitian adalah film Wadjda yang disutradai oleh Haifaa Al-Mansour pada tahun 2012 dan dianalisis dengan pendekatan teori feminisme liberal. Metode pengumpulan data menggunakan teknik dengar-baca-rekam terhadap objek penelitian. Sedangkan analisis data menggunakan reduksi data, penyajian data

dan verifikasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan ada tujuh isu utama terkait ketidaksetaraan gender: kebebasan yang lebih mudah diakses oleh laki-laki, kurangnya akses perempuan akibat aturan sosial yang tidak adil, pelecehan publik terhadap perempuan, keinginan perempuan untuk kebebasan dan kesetaraan, ketidakseimbangan kekuasaan yang mempengaruhi perlakuan terhadap perempuan, tradisi patriarkal yang membatasi otonomi perempuan, serta ketidaksetaraan dalam pernikahan. Penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan kontribusi pada diskusi tentang perubahan sosial menuju kesetaraan gender, serta memberikan wawasan lebih dalam studi feminisme melalui media, khususnya dalam menggambarkan perjuangan perempuan dalam budaya yang membatasi mereka.

Kata Kunci: Budaya, Isu Perempuan, Film, Feminisme

INTRODUCTION

Family and Kabilah (tribal) values are highly valued in Saudi Arabian society. This has historically been reflected in beliefs such as putting the honor of one's tribe and family before oneself. It is very private and very protective of its tribe members, especially women ¹. Previously women in Saudi Arabia were at the lowest position worldwide. In addition, their rights were prone to neglect. The ban on women traveling alone and driving vehicles restricted their freedom in social settings, leading to resistance from women's groups in Arabia. However, some reforms have been implemented in recent years and significant changes have taken place. Giving women more rights, such as driving and access to a wider range of employment opportunities. However, gender equality issues such as unequal access to legal rights and personal freedoms are still the main challenges faced by women in Saudi Arabia ².

The concept of gender itself refers to the social roles, status, behavior, functions, responsibilities, and identities of men and women related to culture in society ³. Gender is not only related to biological differences that exist between humans, but also to social constructions that are influenced by culture, traditions, norms, and perceptions of society ⁴. Gender covers many aspects, including behavior, social roles, self-expression, personal identity, preferences, and sexual orientation. In

¹ Kemlu, "Profil Masyarakat Dan Budaya Arab Saudi," kemlu.go.id, 2018, https://kemlu.go.id/riyadh/id/pages/profil_masyarakat_dan_budaya_arab_saudi_/638/information-sheet.

² Pramana Ajie Putra and Januari T Pratama Nurratri, "UPAYA ARAB SAUDI MEWUJUDKAN KESETARAAN GENDER DALAM TUJUAN PEMBANGUNAN BERKELANJUTAN MELALUI PROGRAM ARAB VISION 2030," *Jurnal Hukum & Pembangunan Masyarakat*, vol. 15, 2024.

³ M. Rizki Aula, "Isu Gender Mengenai Keterwakilan Perempuan Dalam Kehidupan Politik Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Politikom Indonesiana* 8, no. 2 (2023): 186–201, <https://doi.org/10.35706/jpi.v8i2.9859>.

⁴ Taufan Anggoro, "Konsep Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Islam," *Afkaruna* 15, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.18196/AIJIS.2019.0098.129-134>.

the reality of everyday life, society experiences differences in social roles between women and men, which have an impact on differences in status, roles, and positions in society, with men being socially more likely to have advantages over women ⁵.

In some countries gender-related problems occur at an alarming rate. Every effort has been made including changes in the participation of women in all areas of life. In South Asia patriarchy plays a central role in maintaining gender inequality. Research in Sri Lanka the main trigger of gender inequality is triggered by patriarchy. Likewise, research in Iran also emphasizes the strong patriarchal social structure and systemic oppression faced by women ⁶. With many women's issues in the public arena, women sometimes feel like a minority ⁷. Women are aware of injustices against women in the family and society, but they have different views in terms of analyzing the causes of injustice and determining the goals and forms of struggle. Women are often negatively stigmatized, they are always silent because what they say is not always heard ⁸.

Saudi Arabia has passed the Personal Status Law (PSL) on March 8, 2022 which is being called a major reform by the authorities, perpetuating the male guardianship system and codifying discrimination against women in most aspects of family life, Amnesty International said today, as the world marks International Women's Day. But according to Habe Morayef, Amnesty International's Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa PSL Morayef, Amnesty International's Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, even this is a step towards progress and equality ⁹. In 1990, the Hai'ah Kibar al-Ulama in Saudi Arabia banned women from driving as it was deemed incompatible with Islamic injunctions, sparking fears of negative repercussions such as adultery. Protests ensued, including 40 women driving in Riyadh, but were stopped by police and fired. In 2007, human

⁵ Aula, "Isu Gender Mengenai Keterwakilan Perempuan Dalam Kehidupan Politik Di Indonesia."

⁶ Dewi Nadia Cyntia, "SUARA SETARA: Tantangan Dan Dinamika Ketidaksetaraan Gender Di Asia Selatan," *bandungbergerak.id*, April 11, 2024.

⁷ Vira Jasmine Saputri, "Peran UN Women Melalui Program Kampanye #HEFORSHE Sebagai Upaya Keterlibatan Laki-Laki Dalam Melakukakan Kesenjangan Terhadap Perempuan Di Indonesia Tahun 2019-2022," *Az-Zahra: Journal of Gender and Family Studies* 4, no. 2 (July 1, 2024): 132, <https://doi.org/10.15575/azzahra.v4i2.28092>.

⁸ Anisa Alifia Rahmadanti and Nadia Salza Abelia, "Pengaruh Terpaan Informasi Isu Perempuan Dalam Konten Youtube She For Her Terhadap Tingkat Pengetahuan Di Kalangan Remaja," *Jurnal Interaktif* 14, no. 1 (2022): 8-14, <https://doi.org/10.21776/ub.interaktif.2022.014.01.2>.

⁹ Amnesty, "Saudi Arabia: Personal Status Law Codifies Discrimination against Women," <https://www.amnesty.org/>, March 8, 2023.

rights activists such as Wajeha al-Huwaider restarted the campaign against the ban, drawing international attention. The Saudi government responded with repressive punishments such as detention and flogging for women who violated the policy¹⁰.

The problem of gender inequality occurs in many countries, so the United Nations established Gender Equality as one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 5). Despite government efforts to address gender-based discrimination, women and girls are still often marginalized, especially in rural areas¹¹. Gender equality is a human rights principle and a prerequisite for sustainable development. Goal 5 of the SDGs emphasizes the importance of achieving gender equality and empowering women and combating discrimination. Achieving SDG 5 is considered essential to support the other SDGs, and requires support and collaboration from various stakeholders, including the public, private and civil society sectors.

Previous research belongs to¹² discusses the hagemony of gender equality in Hanung Bramantyo's Kartini film in his article explaining the acceptance or reception of the Islamic world on the concept of gender equality. The study concluded that Hanung Brahmantyo's Kartini film succeeded in becoming an effective medium in disseminating values and ideas about gender equality, and in Islam also interprets that dynamic and progressive things can be a driving force for the emergence of gender equality. This provides optimism for the future of Indonesia in creating gender equality, as envisioned by Kartini.

Another study belonging to¹³ discusses the analysis of women's struggles in rejecting patriarchal culture in the film Marlina the Killer in Empat Bebek, in his article explaining the reality of social inequality in Sumba shows how women dare to fight against patriarchal culture which is misused for personal gain, without respecting the existence of women, by continuing to practice deviant traditions. The research concludes that women must dare to fight for justice, even though they have

¹⁰ Vauza Rista, "Arab Saudi: Aturan Mencekam Dan Kebebasan Perempuan," kumparan.com, May 24, 2021.

¹¹ Dika Dona Syahputra, Melly Br Bangun, and Silvia Mariah Handayani, "Budaya Patriarki Dan Ketidaksetaraan Gender Dalam Pendidikan Di Desa Bontoraja, Kabupaten Bulukumba," *Sustainable Jurnal Kajian Mutu Pendidikan* 6, no. 2 (December 16, 2023): 608–16, <https://doi.org/10.32923/kjmp.v6i2.4028>.

¹² Muhammad Fahmi, "Hegemoni Kesetaraan Gender Pada Film Kartini Karya Hanung Bramantyo," *Musawa Jurnal Studi Gender Dan Islam* 19, no. 1 (September 28, 2020): 85, <https://doi.org/10.14421/musawa.2020.191.85-97>.

¹³ Victoria Philly Juliana Sumakud and Virgitta Septyana, "ANALISIS PERJUANGAN PEREMPUAN DALAM MENOLAK BUDAYA PATRIARKI (Analisis Wacana Kritis-Sara Mills Pada Film 'Marlina Si Pembunuh Dalam Empat Babak')," vol. 14, 2020, <http://journal.ubm.ac.id/>.

to get out of their comfort zone and face risks without being trapped in deviant traditions.

Another research by Djilzaran Nurul Suhada¹⁴ discusses feminism in the dynamics of Indonesia's gender struggle, in his article explaining about feminists who strive to realize a world without operations, domination, discrimination, and violence. The study concluded that the feminist movement is also carried out by men, not only by women, because realizing gender equality is a shared responsibility, and the New Indonesian Men's Alliance is an example of an organization that supports feminism in Indonesia by trying to make men aware of the importance of an equality perspective, thus avoiding violence and domination against women and men. Referring to previous studies, the purpose of this research is to enrich the understanding of feminism theory, with a focus on gender equality in Wadjda Film.

Gender equality provides equal opportunities for everyone to achieve their dreams, regardless of gender. True strength is not defined by gender, but by determination and courage. When all genders have equal rights in decision-making, we create a fairer world. This struggle is not just about gender, but about humanity giving every individual the opportunity to dream and achieve without limitations. Similarly, the movie Wadjda raises the theme of gender equality in women. This Saudi-German film, written and directed by Haifaa Al-Mansour, is the first feature film to be shot in Saudi Arabia and the first feature film made by a female Saudi director.

Wadjda is a movie that tells the story of a 10-year-old girl living in the suburbs of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Despite living in a conservative environment, Wadjda is a cheerful child who always wants to challenge the boundaries around her. When she saw a beautiful green bicycle for sale, she was desperate to have one so she could beat her friend Abdullah in a race, despite her mother forbidding her to do so out of concern for society's views. Determined to realize his dream, Wadjda tried to raise money on his own, though his efforts often failed. However, her hope was rekindled when she learned that there was a cash prize in the Qur'an memorization competition at her school. With an unwavering spirit, she devoted herself to winning the competition, although the challenges were not easy, especially for a child like Wadjda who was known to throw tantrums.

¹⁴ Djilzaran Nurul Suhada, "Feminisme Dalam Dinamika Perjuangan Gender Di Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Sociology, Education, and Development* 3, no. 1 (June 30, 2021): 15-27, <https://doi.org/10.52483/ijsed.v3i1.42>.

The movie Wajdja is interesting to study because it offers a unique perspective on the daily lives and challenges faced by young women in Saudi Arabia, especially in a conservative society. Through a simple yet powerful story, Wajdja provokes in-depth discussions on issues of gender, freedom, and the role of women in the Islamic world, while inviting viewers to reflect on the importance of social change in a rigid environment. With this in mind, the theory of feminism is used to examine the movie Wajdja. Through the character of Wajdja, the film shows how women are restricted by social norms, such as the prohibition of cycling simply because of gender, which reflects the control over women's freedom and bodies that is a central issue in feminism. Wajdja, who tries to overcome these restrictions to gain her freedom, symbolizes women's empowerment, in line with the goals of feminism.

Representation is the process of interpreting a sign and is an important concept in social communication. This process involves the use of various media such as dialog, writing, video, film, and photography to convey meaning¹⁵. Representation utilizes signs such as images, sounds, and others to connect and describe something. The core of representation theory is the role of language in connecting and conveying meaning to others. Stuart Hall emphasizes that representation plays an important role in the formation of culture, where culture includes shared experiences. People are considered to belong to the same culture when they share the same experiences, signs and concepts and use the same language in communication. A key element of representation is the process by which meaning is produced and shared among members of a group within a culture¹⁶.

Gender is often a common issue in various regions of the world because equality has not been fully achieved, especially in relation to women's empowerment¹⁷. Women and girls are often considered a marginalized group, deprived of their basic rights and opportunities. Gender inequality, caused by social norms and

¹⁵ Fitri Syahbana, "REPRESENTASI BUDAYA MISTIS DALAM DIALOG FILM-FILM PENDEK KALIMANTAN SELATAN: KAJIAN ANTROPOLINGUISTIK (REPRESENTATION OF MYSTICAL CULTURE IN DIALOGUES OF SOUTH KALIMANTAN SHORT FILMS: AN ANTROPOLINGUISTIC STUDY)," *Sastra Dan Pembelajarannya* 14, no. 1 (2024): 2089–0117.

¹⁶ Tjhing and Ariati.

¹⁷ Anisya Dea Selly, Putri Hergianasari, and Novriest Umbu Walangara Nau, "ANALISIS SIDE EVENT W20 DALAM MEWUJUDKAN KESETARAAN GENDER DI MANOKWARI PAPUA BARAT," *Administraus* 7, no. 1 (January 31, 2023): 114–28, <https://doi.org/10.56662/administraus.v7i1.203>.

patriarchal traditions, is still prevalent in most families¹⁸. The majority of developing countries are still struggling with gender equality issues. Governments in developing countries are often seen as weak due to inconsistent law enforcement, lack of transparency in the government system and discrimination against certain groups.

Gender issues have long been a global concern, marked by the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the UN Assembly in 1948, followed by various other declarations and conventions. The UN General Assembly passed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1979, which became the legal basis for protecting women's rights¹⁹. Women's human rights were reaffirmed at the 4th World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. The conference discussed 12 main areas of global concern, namely: 1) women and poverty; 2) education and training for women; 3) women and health; 4) violence against women; 5) women in armed conflict; 6) women and the economy; 7) women in power and decision-making; 8) institutional mechanisms for women's advancement; 9) women's human rights; 10) women in the media; 11) women and the environment; and 12) girls²⁰. Gender equality is achieved when women and men have equal and fair access to the benefits of development without discrimination between them. Gender equality is a process and fair treatment of women and men, where there is no role standardization, double burden, undervaluation of one gender, exclusion, or violence against both, both in governance and social life²¹.

In his book, Beauvior states that a woman is not born as a woman, but rather forms to become a woman. Inequality in the relationship between men and women occurs because men consider themselves The One or the main one, while women are positioned as The Other or the other²². Feminism is a movement that seeks to fight for women's equality and rights, so that they can stand as equals between women and

¹⁸ Zahrah Sausan Qizaz Rizqi et al., "Kepemimpinan Perempuan: Perintegrasian Isu Gender Di Desa Togean Wilayah Indonesia Timur - Sulawesi Tengah," *Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat* 06, no. 02 (September 2024).

¹⁹ Gusti Mahfuz, "Dua Belas Isu Kritis Perempuan," *mmc.kalteng.go.id*, December 5, 2018.

²⁰ Mahfuz.

²¹ Selly, Hergianasari, and Nau, "ANALISIS SIDE EVENT W20 DALAM MEWUJUDKAN KESETARAAN GENDER DI MANOKWARI PAPUA BARAT."

²² Yessy Meivitasari and Ken Widyatwati, "Bentuk Ketidakadilan Gender Dan Perlawanan Tokoh Kinanti Dalam Novel Layangan Putus (Kajian Feminisme Eksistensialisme Simone de Behaviour)," *Diglosia: Jurnal Kajian Bahasa, Sastra, Dan Pengajarannya* 6, no. 4 (November 2, 2023): 1071-80, <https://doi.org/10.30872/diglosia.v6i4.798>.

men²³. This means that women have the capacity to play a role and participate in all fields, including public, economic, social, cultural, and educational activities, and have equality in enjoying various facilities and development results. Feminism also gave rise to a movement that aims to uncover the ideology of gender-based oppression, find the root causes of women's oppression, and encourage the creation of true liberation for women²⁴.

One of the most well-known feminist movements is liberal feminism. This movement emerged in response to a change in vision and principles in the feminist movement. Liberal feminism developed in the 18th century with the concept of a just society, which encourages equality in self-development between women and men²⁵. Liberal feminism is used to analyze how women are portrayed in the film, especially in the context of equal rights and opportunities²⁶. The main assumption of liberal feminism is that "all human beings, both men and women, are created equal and in harmony, so oppression between them should not occur". Liberal feminism argues that the patriarchal system can be overcome by changing the attitudes of individuals, especially women in their relationships with men. Women must realize their rights and dare to fight for them. To see in detail about gender equality in the movie "Wadjda" above, researchers used the theory of liberal feminism.

METHOD

Descriptive qualitative research method is a type of research used to study research objects that are natural or in real conditions, without being regulated as in experiments. The purpose of this method is to provide a structured overview or

²³ Linus Sumule and Naomi Sampe, "Eksistensi Perempuan Sebagai Integrasi Kesetaraan Hak Yang Holistik: Studi Kasus Terhadap Janda Di Jemaat Bethel Polongaan," *Jurnal Teologi* 6, no. 1 (2024): 30.

²⁴ Khoniq Nur Afiah, "FEMINISME DALAM PESANTREN KAJIAN KRITIK SASTRA FEMINIS DALAM NOVEL DUA BARISTA KARYA NAJHATY SHARMA," *Gender Equality: International Journal of Child and Gender Studies* 7, no. 1 (March 31, 2021): 104, <https://doi.org/10.22373/equality.v7i1.8900>.

²⁵ Susilawati Susilawati, Udin Kamiluddin, and Lilik Herawati, "Representasi Perempuan Dalam Film Habibie & Ainun 3 Karya Hanung Bramantyo: Kajian Feminisme Liberal," *Disastra: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia* 6, no. 2 (July 13, 2024): 278, <https://doi.org/10.29300/disastra.v6i2.3454>.

²⁶ Rifa Aulia, Yusro edy Nugrihi, and Teguh Supriyanto, "ANALISIS FEMINISME LIBERAL PADA TOKOH UTAMA DALAM NOVEL 'AMBA' KARYA LAKSMI PAMUNTJAK," *Lingua Rima* 13, no. 1 (March 2024): 189-200.

description that is detailed, factual, and accurate ²⁷. The data source of this research is the movie “Wadjda” directed by Haifaa Al-Mansour aired in 2012. In this study, data collection was carried out using the technique of listening-reading-recording, namely the author watched and read the entire object of research, then later filtered by recording each segment related to the issues raised in this study. The data analysis technique uses data analysis techniques in accordance with Miles & Hubberman, namely there are three stages during the analysis process, data reduction, data display, and data verification.

DISCUSSION

After analyzing the film “Wadjda”, the research results obtained 7 conversation data on cultural representations and women's issues based on the study of liberal feminism.

Table 1. 7 conversation data on cultural representations and women's issues

Data Number	Conversation	Translation
1	هل تعتقد أن بإمكانك مطاردتي؟	You think you can catch me
2	لو كنت أمتلك دراجة هوائية لعلمت	if I had a bicycle, you would know
3	تعال معي! أريد تلك التفاحة	Hey! Come with me! I want that apple
4	أريد دراجة هوائية حتى أتمكن من التسابق مع عبد الله	I want a bicycle so I can race with Abdullah
5	سائقنا إقبال وقح للغاية، فقد صرخ في وقت سابق في وجه عائشة أنا كاسياخان، وهي تبكي منذ ثلاث ساعات	our driver Iqbal is very rude, earlier he yelled at Aeisha I'm kasiahan, she's been crying for 3 hours
6	كان يجب أن يتم تزويجهما منذ زمن طويل، فامرأة كهذه لا تسبب سوى المشاكل	they should have been married off long ago, women like that only cause trouble
7	أريد ولداً وكل شيء سيكون على ما يرام، لكننا نعلم أن ذلك لن يحدث	I want a son so everything will be fine, but we know that won't happen

²⁷ Siti Nurmuzdalifah et al., “Analisis Feminisme Dalam Film Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wijck,” *JBSI: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia* 3, no. 02 (December 18, 2023): 172–81, <https://doi.org/10.47709/jbsi.v3i02.3294>.



Picture 1. Wadjda was walking to school

Picture 1 tells us that when Wadjda was walking to school, he met Abdullah who was also heading to school. Abdullah who was nosy, took Wadjda's bread and ran. Wadjda also ran after him to reclaim his bread, after successfully getting his bread back, Abdullah ran back to get his bicycle, while Wadjda continued walking to school. Abdullah's antics did not stop there, he also pulled the hijab that Wadjda was wearing. Wadjda ran after Abdullah who was cycling to get her hijab back, but ended up falling. Abdullah mocked Wadjda because she couldn't catch up with him on his bike. "You think you can catch me?" Abdullah's words show that he is aware of his advantage of being able to ride a bicycle which makes him faster and freer. The sentence expressed by Abdullah shows the inequality between Wadjda and Abdullah which reflects the different access to freedom and opportunities based on gender. In this situation, Abdullah as a boy has a clear advantage, namely the freedom of movement by cycling. While Wadjda, a girl, is hampered by social norms that limit her freedom. Abdullah's words "you think you can chase me?" show that he realizes he has access to greater freedom that allows him to move faster and freely, while Wadjda does not have the same access. Liberal feminism argues that men and women are equal and deserve the same rights and opportunities as men. Therefore, women's rights, which are ontologically equal to men, become a natural thing to fight for.



Picture 2. Wadjda's frustration

Picture 2 tells of Wadjda's frustration at being belittled by Abdullah because women are not allowed to ride bicycles. The resentment can be seen on Wadjda's

slightly angry face. Seeing Abdullah leave her, Wadjda mutters “if I had a bicycle, you would know”. This muttering is not without reason, reflecting inequality due to unfair access to rights and opportunities. This lack of freedom for women occurs because of social norms or restrictions that limit women's roles and access to riding.

Liberal feminism asserts that women should have equal opportunities in accessing resources, freedom, and activities that support self-development without gender restrictions ²⁸. Women's access to bicycles is seen not only as a means of transportation, but also as a symbol of the right to mobility, independence, and freedom that all people should have regardless of gender. Liberal feminism supports Wadjda's freedom to break these restrictions and demand equal access. Given that the right to move freely and independently is a fundamental right that should be available to everyone.



Picture 3. Wadjda was returning home from school

Picture 3 tells the story of when Wadjda was returning home from school and passing by the houses being built, a builder suddenly teased Wadjda. “Hey! Come with me! I want that apple”. This action made Wadjda feel uncomfortable, as the comment was not only inappropriate, but showed a demeaning and harassing attitude. This situation reflects the challenges that women often face in public spaces, where they are often subjected to teasing and harassment for no apparent reason.

Feminism emphasizes the importance of women's freedom to move in public spaces without facing harassment or unwanted temptation ²⁹. Attitudes of harassment indicate social norms that degrade women, who are often considered objects of attention and temptation, rather than equal human beings who deserve security. In liberal feminism, harassment in public spaces is considered a form of

²⁸ Muyassaroh Muyassaroh, “Dimensi Gender Dalam Novel-Novel Indonesia Periode 1920-2000-an Berdasarkan Kajian Kritik Sastra Feminis,” *KEMBARA Journal of Scientific Language Literature and Teaching* 7, no. 2 (October 28, 2021): 366–87, <https://doi.org/10.22219/kembara.v7i2.16558>.

²⁹ Nicho Vransiska Andrian, “Ketidakadilan Gender Tokoh Perempuan Dalam Novel Hati Suhita Karya Khilma Anis : Kajian Kritik Sastra Feminisme,” *Repository Unair*, 2020.

discrimination that narrows women's freedom and inhibits their ability to participate fully in social life. This situation shows the importance of the role of society and the law to protect women's right to live their lives without fear or discomfort due to demeaning attitudes from others.



Picture 4. Wadjda was waiting for Umma to cook for lunch

Picture 4 tells the story of when Wadjda was waiting for Umma to cook for lunch, he showed a hopeful look on his face, as if he wanted something. Seeing this expression, Umma asked what he wanted. Wadjda answered hopefully “I want a bicycle so I can race with Abdullah”. The answer reveals Wadjda's simple, yet meaningful dream, where she hopes to experience the same freedom and equality as men like Abdullah. This simple wish highlights that women's desire for equal rights in life is a basic right that must be respected. Her desire to ride a bike shows a desire for independence and freedom, which is often considered easier for men to achieve in a patriarchal society.

Liberal feminism emphasizes the right of every individual regardless of gender to have equal opportunities to live life to the fullest³⁰. It encourages an environment that allows women to participate in all aspects of life, including activities that are considered only for men. By providing equal opportunities for women to have physical and social freedom, liberal feminism seeks to create a just society that respects the potential and rights of individuals regardless of gender.



Picture 5. Umma was cooking lunch

³⁰ Gazali Gazali, Ulinsa Ulinsa, and Iqlima Iqlima, “Mengungkap Bentuk Dan Fungsi Feminisme Liberal Dalam Novel Bulan Terbelah Di Langit Amerika Karya Hanum Salsabiela Rais,” *Aksara* 35, no. 2 (December 22, 2023): 249, <https://doi.org/10.29255/aksara.v35i2.889.249--263>.

Picture 5 tells the story of when Umma was cooking lunch, she also called her friend Leila. They are talking about the driver who takes them to school every day. Umma says “our driver Iqbal is very rude, earlier he yelled at Aeisha I'm kasiahan, she's been crying for 3 hours”. This situation reflects the imbalance of power and how women are often treated disrespectfully in a society that does not prioritize gender equality. It shows that women are often perceived as more docile or lacking the power to defend themselves, so some people feel entitled to treat them harshly. Feminism condemns this kind of behavior, as it reinforces women's position as weaker or submissive, especially when they depend on others for their daily lives.

Liberal feminism argues that it is important for women to have more access to independent and safe mobility options, so that they are not dependent on others who may abuse their position ³¹. Liberal feminism also emphasizes the importance of respect and equality in social interactions between men and women because condescension can affect women's comfort and safety in everyday life ³². Liberal feminism encourages legal protections and social changes that can reduce this power imbalance, such as giving women equal access to means of mobility, autonomy, and the right to feel safe and respected in the workplace and in other social interactions ³³.



Picture 6. Wadjda listening to Umma

Picture 6 shows Wadjda listening to Umma who is calling Leila from her room. Leila tells her about Abeer, Mariam's daughter, who was caught meeting a man and is now dealing with the religious police. Umma responds “they should have been married off long ago, women like that only cause trouble”. Listening to the conversation Wadjda was worried because she had helped deliver Abeer's letter to

³¹ Ikhlasih Dalimonthe, *Sosilogi Gender* (Bumi Aksara, 2021).

³² Amin Mudzakkir, *Feminisme Kritis: Gender Dan Kapitalisme Dalam Pemikiran Nancy Fraser*, ed. Andi Tarigan (Jakarta: Penerbit Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2022).

³³ Nila Istighfarah and Rifma Ghulam Dzaljad, “ANALISIS WACANA KETIMPANGAN DAN KEKERASAN PEREMPUAN PADA PEMBERITAAN KOMPAS.COM (OKTOBER 2022 – JANUARI 2023) DALAM PERSPEKTIF TEORI FEMINISME LIBERAL,” *MEDIALOG: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 7, no. 1 (February 2024).

the man. In their tradition, women who have reached puberty are not allowed to meet a man who is not their mahram.

The tradition that prohibits women from meeting men who are not mahrams without supervision is a social control that indirectly places women in a position of lack of freedom and even vulnerability to social and legal sanctions. In feminist terms, these restrictions reflect how women's roles and choices are often governed by patriarchal norms that emphasize women's compliance with rules over their autonomy. The idea that women should be married off immediately so as not to cause trouble indicates a perspective that judges women based on their marital status rather than seeing them as individuals with the right to make their own choices. Liberal feminism argues that women have the right to choose their own life paths and personal relationships without pressure or intervention from society or family ³⁴. Liberalism supports women's freedom to determine their associations, creating a society that respects individual rights over rigid traditional values so that everyone can live according to their own choices and will ³⁵.



Picture 7. Umma and Wadjda's father get into an argument

Picture 7 Umma and Wadjda's father get into an argument about family finances. During the argument, Umma questions the dowry that her father gave her for her marriage to another woman. Her father says "I want a son so everything will be fine, but we know that won't happen". The sentence reflects a patriarchal bias that often assumes that sons are more valuable or important successors in the family. It also expresses the desire for boys to be the solution to problems and maintain family harmony.

³⁴ Pijar Maulid, "Analisis Feminisme Liberal Terhadap Konsep Pendidikan Perempuan (Studi Komparatif Antara Pemikiran Dewi Sartika Dan Rahmah El-Yunusiyah)," *Jurnal Riset Agama* 2, no. 2 (August 25, 2022): 305–34, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jra.v2i2.17534>.

³⁵ Nurul Izzah, "Kebebasan Perempuan Dalam Perspektif Santri Dayah Putri Muslimat Samalanga," *Repository Ar-Raniry*, September 2024.

Liberal feminism sees this situation as a form of inequality in marriage, where women's needs and views are often not prioritized. This approach supports the rights of women like Umma, to have the freedom to make family-related decisions, including child planning and financial independence without the influence of restrictive norms. Liberal feminism wants equal rights in marriage, where women can have equal roles and are not limited by gender expectations that require them to always fulfill the needs or desires of male partners, such as the desire to have a son ³⁶.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that the analysis of the film *Wadjda* makes an important contribution to enriching the understanding of feminist theory, particularly in relation to gender equality. The film can be an effective tool to illustrate the struggle to challenge patriarchal norms and show how awareness of the importance of gender equality in a particular cultural context. This research emphasizes the relevance of feminism in the context of everyday life, while encouraging further discussion on social change towards equality.

Based on the analysis of *Wadjda*, seven cultural representations and women's issues were found that are relevant to the study of liberal feminism theory. These findings include: (1) freedoms that are often easier for men to obtain than women in a patriarchal society, (2) women's lack of access due to unfair social rules, (3) harassment of women that often occurs in public, (4) women's desire for freedom and equality, (5) power imbalances that make women often treated disrespectfully in a society that does not prioritize gender equality, (6) traditions that reflect patriarchal control that limit women's freedom and autonomy, (7) inequality in marriage. These results confirm how *Wadjda*'s film depicts the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal social system, while voicing a desire for change towards gender equality.

The author realizes that there are many shortcomings in this research. This research is limited to liberal feminism. Therefore, future researchers are advised to enrich the theoretical approach by integrating various schools of feminism so as to expand the contextual analysis of cultures that raise similar issues.

³⁶ Desty Ramadhanty, Helen Susanti, and Paramita Winny Hapsari, "Feminisme Liberal Dalam Gerakan Perubahan Sistem Nama Keluarga Berbeda Bagi Pasangan Menikah Di Jepang," *IDEA: Jurnal Studi Jepang* 5, no. 1 (2023).

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