

## Emotional Agency as Feminist Resistance: Re-reading Hayati in Hamka's *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck*

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines how Hamka's *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck* critiques patriarchal structures within Minangkabau society through the character of Hayati. Although Minangkabau culture is widely recognized as matrilineal, previous studies have primarily focused on social conflict, morality, or cultural hierarchy in the novel, leaving the question of how love functions as a form of feminist agency largely unexplored. Addressing this gap, this article investigates how Hayati's emotional commitment and personal choices can be interpreted as forms of feminist resistance within a restrictive cultural framework. Using a qualitative research design and close textual analysis informed by liberal feminist theory, the study examines selected passages from the novel to identify patterns of emotional agency, moral negotiation, and resistance to patriarchal authority. The findings suggest that although Hayati's autonomy is constrained by communal expectations and patriarchal norms, her emotional resilience, refusal to fully conform to imposed marital decisions, and continued defense of her romantic choice represent subtle but meaningful acts of resistance. The study argues that love in the novel operates not merely as a romantic motif but as a narrative space where women assert moral autonomy and challenge patriarchal control. By foregrounding emotional agency as a form of resistance, this research contributes to feminist literary criticism and offers a renewed interpretation of Hamka's work within broader discussions of gender and cultural power in Indonesian literature.

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## 1. Introduction

Hamka's *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck* (1938) is widely recognized as an influential work in Indonesian literature due to its exploration of social hierarchy, cultural identity, and moral conflict. Set in early twentieth century Indonesia, the novel portrays the tension between individual desires and collective expectations, illustrating how rigid cultural norms and inherited values shape and often constrain personal destiny. At the center of the narrative is the tragic relationship between Zainuddin, a young man of mixed Minangkabau and Makassar heritage, and Hayati, a Minangkabau woman whose life is governed by the strict expectations of her society. Their relationship reveals the social pressures that regulate personal relationships and moral conduct within a traditional community.

Minangkabau society is widely known for its matrilineal kinship system, in which lineage and inheritance pass through the female line. Despite this system, social authority in many aspects of communal life remains strongly influenced by patriarchal structures. Decision making in areas such as marriage arrangements, inheritance management, and communal

leadership is often dominated by male authorities. As Rosidah et al. (2025) explain, this situation produces a cultural paradox in which women occupy a symbolically central position in lineage while simultaneously experiencing limitations in social autonomy. Within this framework, Hayati's character reflects the broader experience of women whose social roles are culturally respected yet practically constrained.

This study examines Hayati's position within these sociocultural conditions through the perspective of liberal feminist literary criticism. Liberal feminism emphasizes individual autonomy, equal rights, and the expansion of women's opportunities within social institutions (Tong & Botts, 2009). In literary studies, this theoretical perspective is frequently used to analyze how female characters negotiate agency, express autonomy, and respond to patriarchal expectations embedded in cultural narratives. By applying this framework, the study investigates how Hayati's emotional choices and personal commitments reflect a negotiation between social obedience and individual desire.

Previous studies on *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck* have contributed significantly to understanding the novel's themes of social hierarchy, morality, religion, and cultural identity. However, many of these analyses primarily emphasize sociological conflict, religious discourse, or moral values within the narrative. Female characters, particularly Hayati, are often interpreted as representations of cultural victimhood rather than as individuals who actively negotiate patriarchal authority. As a result, relatively limited attention has been given to the role of emotional commitment and relational choice as possible forms of resistance within the narrative.

This gap is important because feminist literary criticism increasingly recognizes emotional expression and relational decision making as meaningful sites of agency within restrictive social structures. Hayati's persistence in loving Zainuddin despite social restrictions functions not only as a personal emotional attachment but also as a subtle challenge to the cultural norms that attempt to regulate her choices. Through this perspective, love can be interpreted not merely as a romantic element in the narrative but also as a space where personal autonomy and social expectation come into conflict.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how Hayati's emotional commitment and relational choices function as forms of feminist resistance within the patriarchal framework represented in the novel. Employing close textual analysis, the research explores how Hamka embeds critiques of gender inequality within the narrative structure of the novel. By situating Hayati's experience within the patriarchal logic of Minangkabau society, the study demonstrates how the novel reflects the broader tension between cultural heritage and women's autonomy (Teeuw, 1980; Mahayana, 2015). The central argument of this research is that Hayati's actions, including her emotional loyalty, moral reasoning, and selective defiance of social expectations, represent a subtle form of feminist resistance within a cultural context that provides limited space for female autonomy.

Ultimately, this study situates *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck* within broader discussions of gender, identity, and power in Indonesian literature. The analysis highlights how literary texts can function as sites of cultural reflection and critique, revealing the ways in which women's experiences in fiction both reflect and challenge the social structures that shape their lives.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Feminist Literary Criticism

Feminist literary criticism emerged as a response to centuries of male-dominated literary discourse, seeking to critique gendered power dynamics and elevate women's voices in literature. As Muyassaroh (2021) notes, the feminist movement both as a socio-political force and a critical lens, challenges systemic injustices by reexamining narratives, character roles, and thematic structures that sustain male dominance. Feminist literary criticism interrogates the ways literature both reflects and reinforces societal norms, offering counter-narratives that center women's experiences and subjectivities (Plain & Sellers, 2007). Literary history further shows that women's representation has long been shaped by restrictive patriarchal frameworks, which later prompted the emergence of feminist reinterpretations of female agency in literary texts (Purwarno & Efrizah, 2025).

Feminist literary criticism examines how literary texts construct, reproduce, or challenge gendered power relations. According to Barry (2017), feminist criticism seeks to uncover the ideological assumptions embedded in literary narratives that shape the representation of women and reinforce patriarchal authority. By analyzing character roles, narrative perspective, and symbolic structures, feminist literary criticism reveals how literature both reflects and critiques social inequalities related to gender.

This study aligns with the liberal feminist tradition, which emphasizes individual rights, autonomy, and legal equality. Rooted in the Enlightenment's rationalist principles, liberal feminism advocates for reforms that ensure women's access to education, work, and self-determination (Purwarno et al., 2021; Rahma et al., 2025). In literature, this perspective highlights how female characters navigate public and private spaces, negotiate agency, and resist social conventions.

Within feminist literary studies, liberal feminism provides an important analytical framework for examining women's autonomy and individual agency. Tong and Botts (2009) explain that liberal feminism emphasizes women's right to education, legal equality, and personal freedom within social institutions. In literary analysis, this perspective highlights how female characters negotiate personal desires, moral reasoning, and social expectations while attempting to assert their autonomy within restrictive cultural systems.

Liberal feminism is particularly relevant to this study because it focuses on women's autonomy, personal choice, and the right to self-determination within social institutions. Unlike radical feminism, which views patriarchy as an all-encompassing system requiring structural dismantling, liberal feminism emphasizes reform and the expansion of individual freedoms within existing cultural frameworks. This perspective is especially useful for analyzing characters such as Hayati, whose resistance does not take the form of overt rebellion but emerges through moral reasoning, emotional commitment, and the defense of personal choice. However, feminist scholars have also noted that agency expressed within restrictive systems may coexist with internalized patriarchal values. This tension between autonomy and constraint is central to understanding Hayati's character and forms the analytical basis of this study.

Examples of feminist literary work that foreground women's inner resilience include *Perempuan yang Menangis kepada Bulan Hitam* by Dian Purnomo (2020), which portrays

women's refusal to accept patriarchal restrictions. Similarly, *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* by Andina Dwifatma (2021) examines how traditional expectations challenge female identity formation, while *Ada Serigala Betina dalam Diri Setiap Perempuan* by Ester Lianawati (2020) explores psychological empowerment as a path to liberation. These narratives underscore feminist criticism's ongoing effort to surface the lived complexities of women under systemic pressure.

## 2.2 Patriarchy in Minangkabau Society

Although Minangkabau society is often presented as matrilineal where lineage and property are passed through women, it remains fundamentally patriarchal in practice, particularly in the spheres of decision-making, religion, and marital arrangements. Hamka's *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck* articulates this paradox, showing how patriarchal power is exercised under the guise of cultural tradition.

As Valentina and Safitri (2022) explain, while women nominally inherit property, true authority lies with male figures, especially the maternal uncle (*mamak*) and community elders. This results in what they describe as "symbolic power" for women honored in ritual but excluded from substantive decision-making. This dissonance is a key feature of Hayati's world, where cultural identity conceals gender-based subordination.

Hamka's critique thus extends beyond individual injustice; it indicts the cultural structure that marginalizes women under the pretext of honoring them. Through Hayati's constrained choices, the novel invites readers to reflect on the disconnect between cultural reverence for women and their limited agency in real life.

## 2.3 Existing Studies on *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck*

A growing body of scholarship has examined Hamka's novel from various disciplinary perspectives. Abbas et al. (2024) compare female protagonists in American and Indonesian literature namely Alexandra in Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* and Hayati in *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck*, highlighting their respective strategies for navigating societal constraints. Ahmad Ridhai Asis and Burhanuddin (2022) use a critical literary approach to position the novel as a commentary on both personal suffering and broader socio-political oppression.

Ramadani and Nurholis (2023) adopt a sociological lens to examine how social class, religion, and family hierarchy shape character development and conflict, particularly Hayati's constrained autonomy. Hidayat et al. (2021) analyze the film adaptation of the novel, emphasizing how cinematic mise-en-scène underscores Minangkabau customs that restrict female agency. Meanwhile, Falah et al. (2020) conduct a comparative literature study between *The Great Gatsby* and Hamka's novel, revealing how both texts link romantic failure to cultural pressures and class divides.

Together, these studies underscore the novel's enduring relevance as a critique of structural oppression, revealing how patriarchal norms intersect with love, class, and cultural expectation. However, few of these works explore love as a vehicle of feminist resistance an analytical gap this study seeks to address.

## 2.4 Love as Feminist Resistance

While love is traditionally framed as an emotional or romantic ideal, feminist scholars have reconceptualized it as a potentially transformative act that challenges hierarchical power structures. Literary analysis also demonstrates that systems of domination are often embedded within cultural and narrative structures, making even constrained acts of resistance crucial interpretive sites (Efrizah & Purwarno, 2026). Postcolonial scholarship further suggests that indigenous and local narratives frequently function as cultural counter discourses that articulate subaltern agency and resilience within unequal power relations (Efrizah, 2025). Drawing on bell hooks, Biana (2021) argues that love grounded in care, accountability, and mutual respect can subvert patriarchal dominance by re-centering the emotional needs and dignity of women.

In the context of *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck*, several scholars address this dynamic. Nurmuzdalifah et al. (2023) contend that although Minangkabau society practices matrilineality, it structurally reinforces male authority, especially in decisions about women's romantic lives. Andriyanti et al. (2023) explore gender stereotypes in the film adaptation, illustrating how female characters are constructed as passive or submissive under the gaze of patriarchal values. Maijar et al. (2021) extend this analysis by examining how traditional customs deny women the right to choose their own partners, highlighting the limitations placed on women's autonomy.

Through Hayati's unwavering emotional commitment and her refusal to abandon her love for Zainuddin, love emerges not merely as an affective experience but as a form of ethical and social resistance. This study builds on existing literature by asserting that Hayati's emotional agency is not apolitical, but rather a feminist assertion of selfhood within a culture that seeks to silence it.

## 3. Method

This study employs a qualitative research design using textual analysis to examine representations of feminist resistance in Hamka's *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck*. Qualitative literary research enables scholars to interpret narrative structure, character development, symbolic meaning, and sociocultural context through close engagement with the text (Zhang, 2023). This approach is appropriate for investigating how literary narratives articulate gender relations and forms of resistance embedded in character interactions and emotional expression.

The primary data source of this study is the novel *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck* written by Hamka and published by Bulan Bintang. The analysis focuses particularly on passages involving the character Hayati and her interactions with other characters, especially in situations related to love, marriage, and social expectations within Minangkabau society.

Data were collected through systematic close reading of the novel. Passages containing expressions of emotional conflict, negotiations of romantic commitment, resistance to patriarchal expectations, or moral dilemmas experienced by Hayati were identified and documented. These passages were then organized into thematic categories, including emotional agency, responses to patriarchal authority, and negotiations of personal autonomy.

The analytical procedure was conducted in four stages. First, relevant textual excerpts were identified through repeated close reading of the novel. Second, the excerpts were classified according to thematic patterns associated with feminist resistance and emotional agency. Third, the selected passages were interpreted using concepts derived from liberal feminist theory, particularly those concerning autonomy, individual choice, and resistance to institutional constraints. Finally, the interpretations were contextualized within the sociocultural framework of Minangkabau society in order to understand how patriarchal norms influence the characters' decisions and relationships.

Through this methodological framework, the study provides a detailed interpretation of how narrative dialogue, emotional commitment, and character interaction function as literary mechanisms through which subtle forms of resistance to patriarchal authority are expressed.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Results

#### 4.1.1 Patriarchal Norms in Hayati's Social Environment

The analysis of *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck* reveals that patriarchal norms are embedded in both explicit social customs and implicit moral expectations within Minangkabau society. These norms regulate women's behavior through community expectations, family authority, and cultural traditions that prioritize lineage and social status over individual choice.

A key moment illustrating this social constraint appears when Hayati expresses her concerns about loving Zainuddin:

*"Saya ingat kekerasan adat di sini... akan banyak kehalangannya jika kita bercinta-cintaan. Saya takut bahaya dan kesukaran yang akan kita temui..."*  
(p.34)

This statement demonstrates Hayati's awareness that her relationship with Zainuddin conflicts with established adat norms. Her fear of "danger and difficulty" indicates the presence of strong social pressures that discourage romantic relationships considered culturally inappropriate.

The influence of patriarchal customs becomes more explicit when a community elder questions Zainuddin's eligibility as a marriage partner:

*"...mamanya tidak tentu entah di mana, sukunya tidak ada... ke mana cucu kita berbako?"* (p.71)

This statement reflects the importance placed on lineage and clan identity in determining social acceptance. Zainuddin is rejected not because of personal character but because his maternal lineage is unclear, making him socially unsuitable according to Minangkabau adat standards.

Together, these passages demonstrate how patriarchal values operate through social expectations surrounding marriage, family honor, and lineage. Within this framework, Hayati's romantic autonomy is restricted by communal judgments and cultural traditions that prioritize social order over personal choice.

#### 4.1.2 Love as Emotional Commitment

Another significant pattern identified in the text is Hayati's consistent expression of emotional commitment toward Zainuddin despite social restrictions. Her declaration of love illustrates this commitment:

*"Saya cinta akan dikau... saya bersedia menempuh segala bahaya yang akan menimpa..."* (p.35)

Through this statement, Hayati openly affirms her feelings and expresses willingness to endure potential consequences. The passage demonstrates that emotional attachment remains strong even when confronted with social barriers.

Hayati's defense of Zainuddin also appears when she challenges the justification for rejecting him:

*"Bukankah Zainuddin manusia? Bukankah dia keturunan Minangkabau juga?"* (p.39)

These rhetorical questions reveal her attempt to question the social logic used to exclude Zainuddin from acceptance within Minangkabau society. By emphasizing shared humanity and cultural heritage, Hayati expresses disagreement with the rigid application of lineage-based judgments.

These passages show that emotional commitment becomes a recurring theme in Hayati's characterization. Her loyalty to Zainuddin continues even when social expectations discourage the relationship.

#### 4.1.3 Negotiating Female Respectability

Hayati's struggle also appears in her efforts to maintain moral respectability while defending her relationship. This is evident in the following statement:

*"Perhubungan kami suci... tidak melanggar sopan santun"* (p.39)

Here, Hayati emphasizes the moral integrity of her relationship. By describing it as "pure" and respectful of social norms, she attempts to defend her feelings while still acknowledging the cultural standards imposed upon women.

Her emotional confrontation with her uncle further highlights the tension between personal desire and family authority:

*"Mengapa engkau sampai hati membunuh Zainuddin dan membunuh kemenakan engkau sendiri?"* (p.39)

This moment represents a rare instance in which Hayati directly challenges the authority of a male family figure. Her words reveal the emotional impact of decisions made by family elders regarding marriage and social reputation.

These passages illustrate the complex position Hayati occupies: she seeks to defend her feelings while simultaneously navigating strict expectations regarding female virtue and obedience.

#### 4.1.4 Loyalty and Emotional Endurance

Hayati's emotional resilience becomes particularly evident in her farewell to Zainuddin:

*"...biar engkau pergi sejauh-jauhnya pun, namun jiwamu telah dekat dengan jiwaku... kematianlah yang akan menceraikan perjanjiannya itu"*  
(p.42)

This statement emphasizes her enduring emotional connection despite separation. The language of spiritual unity suggests that her commitment persists beyond physical distance and social obstacles.

The theme of emotional loyalty reappears in her final message to Zainuddin:

*"...ampuni saya... cintai saya kembali sebagaimana cintaku kepadamu dan jangan saya dilupakan"* (p.131)

In another passage she declares:

*"...kekayaan itu belum pernah ku berikan kepada orang lain... ialah kekayaan cinta"* (p.130)

These final expressions reinforce the centrality of love in Hayati's identity. Her words indicate that emotional devotion remains a defining aspect of her character even after experiencing social rejection and personal loss.

Overall, the textual analysis reveals recurring patterns related to patriarchal social expectations, emotional commitment, moral negotiation, and enduring loyalty in Hayati's narrative arc.

## 4.2 Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Hayati's experiences in *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck* reflect the complex interaction between patriarchal social structures and women's emotional agency within Minangkabau society. Although Minangkabau culture is widely recognized for its matrilineal kinship system, the novel illustrates that authority in matters of marriage, social status, and moral judgment remains largely dominated by patriarchal norms. This paradox creates a cultural environment in which women are symbolically valued yet practically constrained in exercising personal autonomy.

From the perspective of feminist literary criticism, such representations reveal how literary narratives reproduce and critique gendered power relations. As explained by Peter Barry, feminist criticism seeks to uncover the ideological assumptions embedded within literary texts that regulate women's roles and reinforce patriarchal authority. In Hayati's case, her character embodies the tension between personal desire and communal expectations. Her romantic relationship with Zainuddin becomes controversial not because of moral wrongdoing but because it threatens the social hierarchy established by lineage and family prestige.

These findings also resonate with previous scholarship on the novel, which has often emphasized themes of social hierarchy, cultural identity, and moral values. However, most existing analyses tend to interpret Hayati primarily as a passive victim of cultural restrictions.

By contrast, the present study highlights how her emotional commitment and moral reasoning function as subtle forms of resistance. This perspective expands earlier interpretations by demonstrating that agency in literary narratives does not always manifest through overt rebellion but may also appear through emotional conviction and ethical defiance.

From the standpoint of liberal feminist theory, Hayati's declarations of love represent attempts to assert personal autonomy within restrictive social conditions. Liberal feminism emphasizes individual rights, personal choice, and the pursuit of equality within existing social institutions. According to Rosemarie Tong and Tina Fernandes Botts, liberal feminist thought foregrounds women's efforts to achieve self-determination while negotiating institutional constraints. Hayati's repeated defense of her relationship with Zainuddin reflects this struggle for emotional and moral self-definition.

At the same time, the results reveal the limitations of such resistance. Hayati's agency operates primarily at the emotional and moral level rather than at the structural level. Her need to justify the "purity" of her relationship demonstrates how women must often frame their autonomy in terms that remain acceptable within patriarchal cultural codes. This negotiation illustrates the constrained nature of female agency in societies where women's behavior is closely linked to family honor and social stability.

The emotional dimension of Hayati's resistance also aligns with contemporary feminist discussions about the social regulation of emotions. Scholars such as Sara Ahmed argue that emotions are shaped by cultural norms that guide individuals to align their desires with dominant social expectations. Hayati's fear of violating adat, her hesitation in expressing love, and her efforts to justify her relationship demonstrate how emotional experiences are influenced by broader ideological structures.

Nevertheless, the novel also presents love as a potential site of resistance. Hayati's unwavering loyalty and final expressions of emotional truth reveal how personal relationships can challenge rigid social hierarchies. This interpretation resonates with the feminist conception of love articulated by bell hooks, who describes love as a practice that affirms dignity, recognition, and human freedom. In this context, Hayati's refusal to abandon her emotional commitment can be interpreted as an assertion of moral autonomy within a system that attempts to regulate women's choices.

Ultimately, Hayati's character should not be reduced to a simple dichotomy between victimhood and empowerment. Instead, she represents a complex negotiation between cultural conformity and personal resistance. Her story illustrates how women may assert agency through emotional resilience, ethical reasoning, and the defense of personal values even when structural power remains beyond their reach.

Through this analysis, *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck* emerges not only as a tragic love story but also as a critical reflection on gender relations within Indonesian cultural traditions. The novel reveals the contradictions of a society that symbolically centers women within a matrilineal system while simultaneously limiting their authority over personal and relational decisions. By foregrounding Hayati's emotional agency, this study contributes to feminist literary scholarship and offers a renewed interpretation of Hamka's work within broader discussions of gender, culture, and power in Indonesian literature.

## 5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Hamka's *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck* presents a nuanced critique of patriarchal structures embedded within Minangkabau society. Through qualitative textual analysis guided by liberal feminist literary criticism, the research reveals that patriarchal authority in the novel operates through both visible social institutions such as lineage-based marriage rules and communal expectations and internalized emotional pressures experienced by women.

The findings show that the character of Hayati embodies a complex negotiation between constraint and agency. Although her choices are limited by cultural expectations and patriarchal authority, her emotional loyalty to Zainuddin, her moral defense of their relationship, and her willingness to question social exclusion represent subtle yet meaningful forms of resistance. Rather than depicting open rebellion, the novel portrays how emotional conviction, moral reasoning, and rhetorical questioning can function as alternative modes of feminist agency within restrictive cultural systems.

Furthermore, the analysis highlights that love in the narrative functions not merely as a romantic theme but as a symbolic space where women assert emotional autonomy and challenge patriarchal control. Hayati's experience illustrates the paradox of a society that recognizes matrilineal identity while still maintaining male-dominated authority in social decision-making. In this context, Hayati's emotional persistence reflects what Ahmed (2024) describes as a form of feminist agency that emerges through emotional commitment, refusal, and the insistence on maintaining one's affective truth within restrictive social norms.

Overall, this study contributes to feminist literary criticism by demonstrating how emotional agency can operate as a form of resistance in literary representations of patriarchal culture. By reinterpreting Hayati as a character who negotiates and challenges social constraints rather than simply enduring them, the research offers a renewed perspective on Hamka's novel as a critical reflection on gender, culture, and power in Indonesian literature.

Future research may further explore representations of emotional resistance in other Indonesian literary works in order to deepen the understanding of how cultural narratives negotiate gender and power within diverse social contexts.

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