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Queenship Across Empires: A Postcolonial Feminist Reading of Syair Siti Zubaidah Perang Cina and Virgil's The Aeneid

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Abstract

This study conducts a postcolonial feminist comparative analysis of queenship in two epic traditions: the Malay narrative poem Syair Siti Zubaidah Perang Cina and Virgil's Aeneid. Scholarship on both texts has rarely examined the intersection of gender, power, and empire through a cross-cultural lens, though studies such as Andaya (2013), Liaw (2011), and Salleh (2010) on Malay literature, and Giusti (2018), Farrell and Putnam (2014) on The Aeneid have explored women's roles and political symbolism within their respective traditions. Addressing this gap, the paper asks how female agency and moral authority operate within patriarchal and imperial frameworks in Southeast Asian and Roman epic traditions. In Syair Siti Zubaidah Perang Cina, figures such as Siti Zubaidah, Sajarah, and Siti Rukiah demonstrate intelligence, courage, and strategic leadership, transforming loyalty and alliance into instruments of political power. Conversely, The Aeneid confines its women--Dido, Creusa, and Lavinia--within a male-centered imperial destiny, where their heroism is constrained by love, fate, or dynastic duty. Drawing on postcolonial feminist theorists including Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) and Gayatri Spivak (1988), this study interprets Syair Siti Zubaidah Perang Cina as both a local expression of female heroism and a counter-discourse to colonial and patriarchal readings of Malay identity. By juxtaposing Southeast Asian and Western classical epics, the paper contributes a new perspective on queenship and gendered authority, revealing how cultural and historical conditions shape women's empowerment and vulnerability across imperial and indigenous contexts.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural analysis; Gendered Authority; Postcolonial Feminism; Syair Siti Zubaidah Perang Cina; The Aeneid