

Patriarchal Hegemony in the Novel “Women at Point Zero” by Nawal El Saadawi: A Feminism Study and Its Correlation with Islam

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Abstract

This study aims to describe and analyze the forms of patriarchal hegemony in the novel *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi. The patriarchal hegemony is then correlated with the teachings of Islam, which are often seen as supporting the domination of men. It is a literary criticism that analyzes and interprets literary work. Sylvia Walby's six structures of patriarchy theory and Gramsci's theory were used to analyze the data. The data were taken from the written work of *Woman at Point Zero* English Translation published in 2007. Data were taken by identifying, classifying, and analyzing the data by decoding them with the theories. The result of this study shows the variety of gender injustice and biases in the form of physical, verbal, sexual abuse, marginalization, and exploitation of women in the work. The implication of the research is to provide concrete evidence that Islamic teaching never provokes man domination and patriarchal practices over the woman.

Keywords: *feminism, gender equality in Islam, hegemony, patriarchy*

1. INTRODUCTION

Culture is the result of ideas obtained from the habits of a group of people, which have lasted a long time to become traditions and customs that people believe to something accurate and difficult to change. The cultural value system is believed to be the highest value system in customs implemented in a community group's daily life (Koentjaraningrat, 2015).

This is none other because the culture in society is considered something of value and worth. A culture's existence strongly influences society's behavior and habits (Setyowati et al., 2021).

One of the cultures that has historically been attached from hundreds to thousands of years ago, which consciously or unconsciously has always emerged in society, is patriarchal culture. Patriarchy is a nickname for systems, social structures, and practices that position men as the more dominant party than women (Walby, 2014). This indirectly leads to the emergence of social classes related to gender comparison, where men occupy the first class and women as the second class sex who will always be under men. Sakina et al. (2017) stated that this patriarchal culture is not only faced in present times, but patriarchy has existed since the past. Patriarchal culture had come up in almost any recorded history books that it was always men who became the leaders of past kingdoms. Meanwhile, women will become concubines who serve the king, as if they only function as mere lust gratification.

Various patriarchal practices are numerous and even considered normal to happen in every line of life. Patriarchal culture and social values in almost any place in the world require women not to participate in politics or government areas. It considers politics an area where only men are more suitable to lead and make decisions (Nurcahyo, 2016). Besides that, as a gender inequality bias, women often get discriminatory treatment, restrictions, exploitation, marginalization and also violent behaviour in the form of verbal, physical, or even sexual (Apriliandra & Krisnani, 2021).

In contrast to patriarchy, Islam addresses equal positions between men and women. As a universal religion, Islam provides guidance and comprehensive principles for human life. It becomes guidelines and the foundation of human life itself. These principles are sourced from Islamic law, the first main source of which is the Qur'an (Kholis, 2016). Through Qur'an, Allah SWT provides many explanations and affirmations regarding the position of men and women.

Ironically, the hegemony of male superiority that occurs in this society is often still associated with religious orders. This is in line with Nurrochman (2016), who says that discriminatory attitudes towards women are still often present until nowadays, one of which is caused by the misunderstanding of religious teaching. Many Muslim men with extreme beliefs consider themselves superior to women. They constantly recline their thoughts on religious teachings. One of the verses in the teachings of Islam that is widely used as a shield/protector against the misunderstanding of some of the patriarchal people is QS An-Nisa' verse 34.

QS An-Nisa' verse 34 explains that man is the leader of woman. However, not all understandings in the verses of the Qur'an can be explained to the extent of textual understanding. Another thing that needs to consider is the development and changes in the pattern of people's behaviour ultimately require a change in the values or principles that apply to them (Kholis, 2016). Thus, the interpretation of a verse cannot only be done textually but must adapt to the circumstances and changing times.

As a result of the patriarchal bias that occurs from time to time makes, women have a special view of carrying out a movement. This movement is known as the feminist movement. Feminism is a belief, movement and effort to fight for the equal position of

women and men in a patriarchal society (Suwastini, 2013). Feminists who care about gender equality demand a progressive change in the position of women (Nurcahyo, 2016). This brings various efforts made by women all over the world of various ages to try to achieve their goals. One of the efforts that until now can be directly felt is the benefits of composing the doctrines of feminism in a written work.

Many feminists, when the state and society around them keep silence of their physical movements, they will choose to carve their voices into written form. One of the famous feminist figures whose writings are still very popular among women feminists is Nawal El-Saadawi. Nawal El-Saadawi was the former Director of Health Education and Editor-in-Chief of Health Magazine in Egypt in 1972, whom the Minister of Health forcibly dismissed due to his writings deemed unfavourable to the rulers at that time. However, as a writer and feminist writer, she does not hesitate to continue to produce works that can raise the awareness of the thinking of many women. One of her phenomenal works that are very thick in discussing gender bias and discrimination against women in her era is entitled "Woman at Point Zero". This novel is a work based on a true story of a female prisoner named Firdaus, who will be hanged after killing a pimp, to protect herself from a danger, at that time. Nawal describes the entire life story of Firdaus, with all the inappropriate treatments she got from men, in a clear and detailed manner until the day of her death.

From the novel, there are a lot of patriarchy practices that people may understand after reading the novel. Several studies have been already discussed concerning the novel *Woman at Point Zero*. Suparman (2019) analyzes gender inequality in the social, political and economic fields as well as the form of resistance of the main character in the novel *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal el-Saadawi. In his research, he found three types of gender injustice experienced by women represented in the novel *Woman at Point Zero*, namely: (1) gender inequality in the social field in the form of acts of violence, humiliation, harassment and insults from men against the main character in the novel; (2) gender inequality in the political field in the form of restrictions on obtaining education and being involved in the political sphere; and (3) gender inequality in the economic field in the form of the workload experienced by the female lead in this novel is very hard to survive.

Meanwhile, Setyowati et al. (2021) proposes the forms of patriarchal culture and analyze the life of Firdaus figures in the middle of patriarchal culture in general. This study portrays the representation of domestic patriarchy treats women arbitrarily in the form of circumcision before menstruation, and the consequences for women who do not do circumcision are being ostracized in society, even when the women have become adults, no one is allowed to marry them. It does not stop there; the representation of public patriarchy also shows that there are limits to the education that a woman can take and jobs salaries of marginalized female workers rather than the salaries or wages of male workers.

Moreover, Sabariah (2020) also analyzes the domination and subordination of men to women in the novel *Woman at Point Zero*. The results of the study show a dominance of men in various aspects over women, namely: (1) in the educational field, in the form of stereotypes and subordination; (2) in the legal field, in the form of patterns of domestic violence, subordination, disguised violence, and violence in prostitution; and (3) in the work field, reflected in the pattern of giving workloads to women, stereotyped patterns, marginalization, and subordination. It is also in line with Heriyanti et al. (2020) who

explores the existence of women in the novel "Woman at Point Zero" by using Simone de Beauvoir's concepts of existential feminism which is represented by the main female character named Firdaus. The character of Firdaus is so brave in making decisions regarding the fate of his own life and trying to get out of the patriarchal culture presented in the novel, in which so discriminatory and manipulative. However, Firdaus is able to show her existence as a woman to get the freedom and the right to choose her own way of life, which is to become a prostitute. As a prostitute, she managed to find her own existence and made herself a subject, her existence was recognized and she could exist standing on her own power.

Based on previous study novel *Woman at Point Zero* portrays feminism. Through this, it reveals the central of idea or insight, behaviour or main the character's life (Rohmana & Anggrainy, 2022). This study focuses on its gender bias and patriarchal hegemony in the life of the main character in the novel (Firdaus), then describe their relevance according to Islam. Thus, the novelty of this research lies in how Islam views the patriarchal power in the novel *Woman at Point Zero*.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study is a literary criticism as the researcher interprets and analyzes the literary work. It employs a sociological approach for the analysis and Sylvia Walby's six structures of patriarchy theory along with Gramsci's theory. The researcher took the data by identifying, classifying and analyzing the data by elucidating the data with the theories. This study analyzed the novel's patriarchal structures and elucidate such media in succeeding patriarchal hegemony in the novel (Naufina, 2021). This study describes the symptoms and events that occur in a study to obtain a deeper discussion of the patriarchal hegemony contained in the novel "Woman at Point Zero" by Nawal el-Sadaawi.

The data in this study are in the form of sentences explaining scenes, dialogues between characters, and/or monologues performed by the main character, or it may say the words, phrases, and sentences in the novel "Woman at Point Zero" written by Nawal El Saadawi translated by Sherif Hetata into English in 2007. The data was analyzed by collecting the written evidence in the novel *Woman at Point Zero* regarding the existence of patriarchal hegemony as stated in the hegemony theory of Antonio Gramsci and Sylvia Walby (Naufina, 2021). Then the data is synthesized with the theory and concludes the analysis of the research results. This novel was chosen since there is a strong belief that is reflected in the culture of society in the novel that Islam supports patriarchal acts committed by men against women.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Basic Concept of Patriarchal Hegemony

The term hegemony comes from the Greek "egemonia", which means to lead, leadership or power that exceeds other powers. Hegemony is a form of controlling a particular group through consensual intellectual and moral leadership. According to Gramsci, hegemony is a view of life and a dominant way of thinking in which a concept of reality is disseminated in society, both in organizational and individual movements (Setiawan, 2019).

Patriarchy is a social system that places men as the main power holders and dominates in political leadership roles, moral authority, social rights and property control (Saputri, 2020). Patriarchy sees men in a value system that is above women and influences other aspects of society so that men often dominate the social structure in society as the first-class gender and women as the second-class gender (Omara, 2004). As long with those ideas, Walby defines patriarchy as social culture systems and practices which make dominated sphere is focus on (Aulia, 2019). So it can be concluded that patriarchal hegemony is the authority or mastery of the ideology which states that men are always above and dominate women, then women will never be equal to men.

The existence of this patriarchal hegemony, in the end, caused various problems which is immediately inflicted on women. Susanto (2015) stated that this culture is one of the causes of many discriminatory treatments, restrictions, exploitation, and violent behaviour against women. Culture has a vital role in balancing an ideology that creating society beliefs towards the domination roles between men and women (Naufina, 2021). The persistence of this patriarchal belief has resulted in some women accepting their nature under the view of women's authority under men and seeing this patriarchal perception as something that should be committed (Rokhimah, 2015). Patriarchy always marginalizes women due to the belief that woman is in an inferior position (Susanto, 2015).

This patriarchal hegemony occurs at all levels of society, worldwide, and from time to time. The grip of patriarchy will never be lost in society, whether it eventually becomes a conscious or unconscious trait. Thus, as a countermeasure that becomes the emergence of a feminist movement that echoes justice for women. However, as the feminist movement grows, patriarchal culture will not be eliminated forever.

3.2 The Position of Men and Women in Islam

In Islam, men are leaders for women, as Allah SWT says in QS An-Nisa verse 34, which means:

"Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allāh has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allāh would have them. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance- [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them [lightly]. But if they obey you [once more]..." (Surah An-Nisa: 34).

If interpreted textually, the verse explains that men have the right to be women's leaders, and women are not entitled to be leaders of their people and men. However, following the previous explanation, the verses meaning from the Qur'an cannot necessarily be interpreted textually. This is because of the difference between the status quo at the time the verse was revealed and the today's status quo.

Masri (2021) stated that the verse explains that Islam put men as leaders for women, not because women are in an inferior position, but because Allah SWT gives certain advantages to men that women do not have. Although women also have advantages that men do not have, the advantages of men are considered to be able to accommodate heavier

responsibilities than women. So, that is why Islam gives a statement that men are leaders of women.

In this case, Al-Hibri also emphasizes the understanding of the verse on the meaning of the word *qawwamun*, which refers to the notion of guiding and paying attention. This can also be interpreted as an act of friendship rather than domination over others (Kholis, 2016). Additionally, Qur'an Surah Al-Baqarah verse 228 stated that:

"...Wives have the same rights as the husbands have on them in accordance with the generally known principles..." (Surah Al-Baqarah: 228)

Unintentionally, this verse explains how women have the equal position with men in any kind of aspects in life (Alhareth et al., 2015).

The same thing is also proven by the hadith of Rasulullah SAW, which means:

"The best of you are those who are best to their wives, and I am the best of people to my wives." - (HR. At-Tirmidhi).

This hadith clarifies that Islam explicitly provides guidance that men should never demean women. Rasulullah SAW, as *uswah hasanah* for all people in the world, always gives an example of good behaviour to women and even privileges them.

Allah SWT says in Q.S Al-Hujurat verse 13, which means:

"... We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the noblest of you in the sight of Allāh is your most righteous ..."(Surah Al-Hujurat: 13).

This verse emphasizes the equality between men and women before God, and there should be no forms of inequality between them. Munawir Sjadzali explained that the verse implies equality between men and women, who are the origin of mankind which later developed into many nations and tribes (Kholis, 2016). Then added, the sentence "Indeed, the noblest of you in the sight of Allāh is your most righteous" explains that men are not nobler unless he is pious, and so are women.

In short, according to Islam, the positions of men and women are equal. Islam never differentiates both men and women. Even Islam prioritizes women.

3.3 Patriarchal Hegemony in the Novel "Woman at Point Zero" and its Correlation with Islam

Based on the data analysis, the various kinds of patriarchal hegemony contained in the novel *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi consist of: verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, marginalization, and exploitation of women. Patriarchal hegemony in this novel is also depicted in the figure of men who control both small and big things and the power position in society. Here, it shows the straight way to Walby's theory which stated that patriarchal practices in culture and society can be found in any kind of fields, such in term of philosophy, religion, education, and the norms of tradition (Walby, 2014).

(1) Aspects of verbal abuse define as violence in the form of yelling, refusing, insulting, humiliating, cursing, and frightening by using inappropriate words (Indrayati &

PH, 2019). Various treatments that indicate verbal abuse in the novel *Woman at Point Zero* (WaPZ) experienced by Firdaus are evidenced by the following two events and dialogues:

"... Don't forget what a nose she has. It's big and ugly, like a tin mug. In addition, she has inherited nothing and has no income of her own. ..." (p. 58)

"... but he jumped up and slapped me on the face, saying, "How dare you raise your voice when you're speaking to me, you streetwalker, you low woman?" (p. 79)

The quote describes the occurrence of verbal abuse in the form of swearing, which is indicated by bold sentences, against Firdaus, who is a woman.

(2) The next aspect of patriarchal hegemony is the physical abuse experienced by Firdaus in the novel. Physical abuse is an act of violence in the form of physical actions such as hitting, pinching, twisting, slapping, kicking, burning, biting, cutting, punching or even dousing with hot water (Anggraeni & PH, 2018). Various treatments that indicate the existence of physical abuse in the WaPZ novel experienced by Firdaus are proved by the following two incidents:

"On one occasion, he hit me all over with his shoe. My face and body became swollen and bruised ... my uncle told me that all husbands beat their wives, and my uncle's wife added that her husband often beat her." (p. 70)

"One day he hit me with his heavy stick until the blood ran from my nose and ears." (p. 72)

These two incidents show that Firdaus experienced physical violence in the form of beatings without rational reasons on her face and body to the point of bleeding from the nose and ears. Ademiluka (2018) stated that physical violence or physical against woman refers to all acts that a person carries out to hurt another whom he/she is/was in a relationship, such as between husband and wife or boyfriend and girlfriend. In this case, it was experienced by Firdaus and her husband.

(3) The third aspect is sexual abuse which Firdaus in the WaPZ novel very often experience. Maslihah (2006) in her writing stated that sexual abuse is a sexual violence against children, including touching or kissing the child's sexual organs, sexual acts or rape of children, showing pornographic media/objects, and showing the genitals of children and so on. Various treatments that indicate sexual abuse in the WaPZ novel experienced by Firdaus are proved by the following two incidents:

"A little boy called Mohammadain used to pinch me underwater and follow me into the small shelter made of corn stalks. He would make me lie down beneath a pile of straw and lift my galabeya. We played 'bride and bridegroom'. From some part in my body, where exactly I did not know, would come to a sensation of sharp pleasure." (p. 18)

"My uncle's great long fingers would draw close to me after a little while and cautiously lift the eiderdown under which I lay. Then his lips would touch my face

and press down on my mouth, and his shaking fingers would feel their way slowly upwards over my thighs.” (p. 32)

Two incidents experienced by Firdaus in childhood and adolescence show that Firdaus experienced sexual violence without him knowing it. Noviana (2015) stated that there are two categories of sexual abuse, namely familial abuse (sexual violence where the victim and perpetrator are still in the nuclear family) and extra-familial abuse (violence perpetrated by other people outside the victim's family). In the two incidents above, familial abuse was carried out by her uncle and extra-familial abuse was carried out by her childhood friend, Mohammadein.

(4) The next aspect is marginalization. Marginalization means placing or shifting to the periphery. Marginalization is a process of neglecting the rights that should be obtained by marginalized parties (Derana, 2016). In this case, the marginalized actors are men, and the marginalized victims are women. The marginalization in this novel is divided into three, namely marginalization in education, economic, and political aspects. One statement that shows the marginalization of education in the WaPZ novel is:

“El Azhar was an awesome world peopled only by men, and my uncle was one of them, was a man.” (p. 31)

Then the existence of economic marginalization is shown in the following sentence:

“When they pronounced the word 'patriotism', I could tell at once that in their hearts, they feared not Allah and that at the back of their minds, patriotism meant that the poor should die to defend the land of the rich, their land, for I knew that the poor had no land.” (p. 42)

Then, the political marginalization was first coined by Antonio Gramsci whom stated that marginalization are those subordinated by the dominant power structure and being excluded from all political representation (Sabbah, 2020). In the following sentence, it is shown that all the rulers at the time Firdaus life is man. Indirectly, this sentence brings the fact that woman were not allowed to participate in political agenda. The sentence that shows a political marginalization in the novel is shown in the following:

“I discovered that all these rulers were men. What they had in common was an avaricious and distorted personality, a never-ending appetite for money, sex and unlimited power.” (p. 41)

(5) The fifth aspect of patriarchal hegemony in the WaPZ novel is exploitation. The exploitation of women means taking advantage of all things attached to women, both images and signs attached to them (Wicaksono, 2013). In this novel, the dominant or widely encountered exploitation is sexual exploitation or using women's bodies for the benefit of certain parties. This can be seen in the following incidents:

“He would come back in the middle of the night, pull the cover away from me, slap my face, and then bear down on me with all his weight. I kept my eyes closed and

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abandoned my body. It lay there under him without movement, emptied of all desire,
pleasure, or even pain, feeling nothing." (p.80)

*"Then one night, his body seemed heavier than before, and his breath smelt different,
so I opened my eyes. The face above me was not Bayoumi's. "Who are you?" I said.
"Bayoumi," he answered. I insisted, "You are not Bayoumi. Who are you?" "What
difference does it make? Bayoumi and I are one." Then he asked, "Do you feel
pleasure?" (p. 80)*

*"He gave a short laugh and kissed me on the lips. "Sharifa's fooling you, and making
money out of you, while all you get out of it is a pain." (p.94)*

Two incidents of exploitation experienced by Firdaus above, the first is that his body is used as mere lust by Bayoumi and his friends, and the second is that his body is used as a paid prostitute while Firdaus receives nothing but Sharifa enjoys the money behind Firdaus' prostitution. These conditions are conceptualized as prostitutions since these are a sexual exploitation reflecting unequal power between men and women (Chamley & Nkhoma, 2020).

Apart from the five aspects above, there is one quote states that all these violences are based on the teachings of their religion, which in this case, they are Muslims. In addition, as a woman, Firdaus is not allowed to argue when experiencing violence from her husband. The text excerpts that state are:

"I said my uncle was a respected Sheikh, well versed in the teachings of religion, and he, therefore, could not possibly be in the habit of beating his wife ... The precepts of religion permitted such punishment. A virtuous woman was not supposed to complain about her husband. Her duty was perfect obedience." (p. 70)

As explained in the previous subsection, Islam has never taught inequality between the positions of men and women. Even western historian, Will Durant, acknowledges Muhammad's merit in improving women's rights and highly recognizes the position of women (Rakhmat, 1999). Things like what happened in the novel were nothing but the result of culture and customs created by their people, not sourced from religious law.

Furthermore, misunderstanding the interpretation of the verses in the Qur'an can also be one of the factors that cause people's mindsets to eventually deviate from the truth of the religion itself. The lack of understanding and interpretation of Islamic teaching sources is also vital factor that causes gender inequality (Supriyadi et al., 2019). Meanwhile, Islam never considered women are more inferior than men. Thus, it can be concluded that every violence and arbitrary action in this novel has nothing to do with the teachings of Islam. Islam highly upholds peace, equality and women themselves.

4. CONCLUSION

Analysis of the patriarchal hegemony in the novel Woman at Point Zero by Nawal El Saadawi consists of verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, marginalization, and exploitation of women. Sexual abuse is divided into two, namely familial abuse and extra-

familial abuse. There are three kinds of marginalization of women that appear in this novel, namely marginalization in the field of education, marginalization in the economic field and marginalization in the field of political appearance.

Then, there was one of Firdaus' uncle's words stated that all violence against women was based on nothing but religion, which in this research had been proven that it is not true. But only assumptions and misinterpretations of characters and culture raised the characters at that time. In fact, Islam highly upholds equality and never makes a superior position of men over women.

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