



## Patriarchal gender relation in Mahfuzh's Yauma Qutila Az-Za'im

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### ABSTRACT

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This study aims to examine gender relations in Najib Mahfuz's work *Yauma Qutila Az-Za'im*. A descriptive qualitative method is employed, with the analysis contextualised within the socio-historical background of the novel and supported by insights from scholars on Arab society, notably Hisyam Syarabi and Halim Barakat. The findings reveal that the gender relations depicted in the novel deviate from traditional patterns typically found in a patriarchal society. Mahfuz portrays a more democratic model of gender relations, where the head of the family no longer holds the central role in decision-making. From a neopatriarchal perspective, this reflects the evolving nature of patriarchal gender relations in modern Arab society. Nevertheless, patriarchal values persist within the gender dynamics of the novel, manifesting through stereotypes and assumptions that influence the characters' decisions.

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### Introduction

In the context of the Arab world, the gender roles of men and women have been regulated by men in Arab society long before the arrival of Islam. These rules were passed down from generation to generation through oral tradition. Mothers in traditional Arab societies taught their children traditional female roles such as managing the household, nurturing, serving, and satisfying their husbands. Similarly, fathers taught their sons how to be providers and protectors of their children and wives, including safeguarding all the women in their household (al-Mutawah, 2005: 3). Theoretically, the dominance of male figures in gender relations and the subjugation of women to male desires and control indicate that Arab society is a patriarchal society.

From a feminist perspective, patriarchy is the cause of women being marginalized. Not only in the social world, women are also marginalized in the world of texts. The marginalization of women's roles in literary works and women as writers of literary works inevitably occurs in the

world of Arab writing. The depiction of marginalization is perhaps similar to what Virginia Woolf expressed in *A Room Of One's Own*. She said that women are everything in men's works, but they are ignored in history (Benstock, et. al., 2005: 154). Women are so interesting to men and are perhaps "the most discussed animals in the world" (Woolf, 1929). Before the issue of gender equality and feminism developed, women were nothing more than objects in texts whose names were never heard as historical actors. This similar view is also held by Nawal as-Sa'dawi, an important icon of Arab feminist writers. She even radically stated that every male author is always the same in maintaining the oppression of women (Oersen, 2005: 3). Thus, as-Sa'dawi considers that the patriarchal mindset is so embedded in the minds of male authors that it is continuously maintained, even entering the world of texts (Sa'dawi, 1980: 165-166).

Several case studies of Mahfuz's works show that he was concerned with the issue of gender equality in Arab society, especially in Egypt. For example (al-Mutawah, 2005) shows that Mahfuz uses myths and rhetorical devices to discuss the issue of gender equality in the novel *Awlad Haratina*. Hossini and Namrata (2012) conclude that Mahfuz uses a strategy of realism to reveal the unfair social reality for women in the novels *Ziqaq al-Midaq*, *Miramar*, and *Baina al-Qishrain*. In these three novels, it is shown how men dominate and women resist domination. Cooke (1993 in Mondal, 1999: 2) even said that Mahfuz was a feminist in the early days of his writing.

On the other hand, there are indeed those who doubt Mahfuz's support for gender equality for Arab women. Although he did not provide a definite conclusion, Oersen (2005) showed that Mahfuz did pay attention to women's issues in his four novels, *Sulasiyyat al-Qahirah* (*Baina al-Qasrain*, *Qasru asy-Syauqi*, and *as-Sukriyyah*), and *Zaqaq al-Midaq*. However, he repeatedly quoted as-Sa'dawi's views and continually questioned Mahfuz's support for gender equality. A more negative view regarding the way women's images is expressed in Mahfuz's work, the *Cairo Trilogy*, was put forward by Mondal (1999) who stated that Mahfuz's writing style is a neopatriarchal writing style. A similar view was also put forward by Hafez (1995) when talking about Mahfuz.

Apart from the issue of Mahfuz's support for gender equality, his novels are considered social criticism. In particular, the novels he wrote in the 1960s and after Egypt's defeat in the 6-day war in 1967 showed his anger towards social conditions. Prose related to Egypt's critical period that culminated in the assassination of Anwar Sadat is indeed not considered an important contribution, but it is a historical record of its time (Allen, 2004: 12).

Most of Mahfuz's works are social reflections of his time and have a realistic character. One of his novels that also displays this relationship is a novel entitled *Yauma Qutila az-Za'im*. Munthe (2000: xviii-xix) said that this novel is a real picture of the darkness of Egyptian society during Anwar Sadat's reign. According to him, when this novel was published, Mahfuz was in a phase

when he began to worry about the loss of his country's direction. In this phase he began to create short but prosaic and realistic romance stories.

The realistic short romance in Mahfuz's work is clearly visible in the novel *Yauma Qutila az-Za'im*. This novel was published during Mubarak's reign in 1985, exactly four years after Anwar Sadat's death. Broadly speaking, this novel tells the story of a love affair that had to fail due to economic conditions by making the assassination of President Anwar Sadat part of the climax of the novel's storyline.

Gender relations in Egyptian society also experienced a shift. This last issue is certainly also depicted in the text, something that is a basic assumption in feminist literary criticism. Although not Mahfuz's main work, it is an important source for revealing changes in gender relations in Egyptian society during Sadat's era. Starting from the interest in the controversy whether Najib Mahfuz was pro or contra gender equality and the real conditions of women during the implementation of *al-Infitāh*, the author took the novel *Yauma Qutila az-Zaim* as the subject of study. Specifically, how it depicts gender relations during the final days of Anwar Sadat's government, in the first phase of implementing the *al-Infitāh* policy, which is ultimately expected to reveal Mahfuz's attitude towards the issue. So far, the writing that specifically examines the novel *Yauma Qutila az-Za'im* is done by Achmad Adhim entitled "*Riwayah Yauma Qutila az-Za'im li Najib Mahfuz (Dirasah Adabiyah Ijtimaiyah)*". This study uses a sociology of literature approach, and focuses on the types and causes of social conflict in the novel. Adhim (2011: 75) concludes three types of conflict in this novel, namely family conflict, love conflict, and ideological conflict. The causes of conflict are poverty, faith, differences of opinion, egoism, under pressure and emotion. Adhim's research is an application of social conflict theory to describe sociological elements in literary works. A study using the Feminist Literary Criticism approach to Mahfuz's work was once conducted by Fandi Akhmad Nurdiansyah entitled "*Revealing Feminist Thoughts in the Novel Zuqaq al-Midaq by Najib Mahfuz*". Nurdiansyah (2008) tried to reveal feminist thoughts in the novel with the help of feminist theories such as Sarah Gamble, Maggie Humm, Kamla Bhasim, Nighat Said Khan, and Soenardjati Djayanegara. The results of his research show that elements of feminism are found in the novel *Zuqāq al-Midaq*. Vidia's study (2010) on the Comparison of Female Heads of Families in the Novel *Pervaja Ljubov* by I.S. Turgenev and *Gone With The Wind* by Margaret Mitchell: A Feminist Review. This study describes the similarities and differences of the characters Zinaida and Scarlett, and most importantly proves the hypothesis that the author's gender greatly influences the depiction of female characters who act as heads of families in both novels. Rajdrian Bebasari's (2008) writing on the Abortion Decision of Elja Smirnova in the Drama Script *Hari Ulang Tahun Smirnova* by Ljudmila Stefanovna Petrusevskaja: Feminist Analysis. This study aims to prove that Elja Smirnova has freedom and independence as

a woman who uses her body rights through the decision to have an abortion in the drama script Hari Ulang Tahun Smirnova by Ljudmila Stefanovna Petrushevskaja. Siska's (2009, Journal) Writing Analysis of Gender Injustice in the Novel "My Name is Hiroko" by N.H Dini (A Study of Feminist Literature). Thesis FKIP Tadulako University. This study aims to analyze the problem of gender injustice in the novel My Name is Hiroko. In the novel My Name is Hiroko, N.H Dini also talks about the social life of Japanese society between men and women, family, and nightlife that have an influence on Hiroko using the basis of feminist theory.

This paper complements previous research on the aspect of patriarchal gender relations found in the novel Yauma Qutila az-Za'im by Najib Mahfuz with a feminist literary criticism approach within a neopatriarchal framework.

## **Method**

This study used the library research method (literary study) using qualitative descriptive. Collecting data by searching from various sources, both books, journals, or articles related to the research theme.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **The Definition of Patriarchal Gender Relations**

Basin (2014) defines gender relations as "the relations of power between women and men which are revealed in a range of practices, ideas, representations, including the divisions of labour, roles, and resources between women and men, the ascribing to them of different abilities, attitudes, desires, personality traits, behavioural patterns, and so on". In general, most societies implement a patriarchal gender relation pattern. Patriarchal gender relations are based on the concept of patriarchy. Patriarchy means the power of the father or patriarch. Initially, this term referred to a type of social structure within the family led by a patriarch. Today, the term patriarchy more often refers to male dominance over women. Patriarchal gender relations vary from place to place and change over time.

Sharabi (1988) uses a specific term to describe patriarchal gender relations in modern Arab society. He calls it "neopatriarchy". Arab modernization, in relation to Europe, began between the 19th and early 20th centuries in Egypt and the Fertile Crescent. This modernization coincided with the emergence of neopatriarchal societies. Theoretically, the process of modernization aligns with the decline of patriarchal cultural values, given that patriarchy is traditional in nature. Modernity has aspects that are very much in contrast to patriarchy. Thus, efforts to achieve women's rights should become more pronounced in modern societies. However, modernization in Arab countries does not reflect this. Patriarchal structures and values continue to persist alongside the process of modernization.

## The Shifting of Patriarchal Gender Relations

The depiction of patriarchal gender relations in Yauma Qutila az-Za'īm can no longer be considered a traditional patriarchal gender relation. In patriarchy, power relations are based on the concepts of authority, obedience, and dependency (Sharabi, 1988: 41). Authority is held by the male head of the household, while obedience and dependency are experienced by younger men, children, and women. Patriarchal thinking is based on hierarchy and dominance (Warren in Tong, 2010: 359). In Yauma Qutila az-Za'īm, Sulayman Mubarak and Muhtashimi Zaid are heads of households, but both are heads of households without authority.

Muhtashimi is Alwan's grandfather and lives in the same house with Elwan's parents, Fawwaz and Hana. While Muhtashimi still views himself as an elder in the Elwan family, he no longer positions himself as an authority. When Elwan wishes to become engaged to Randa, he asks Muhtashimi to speak to his father and mother.

لما نجحنا في الثانوية العامة في عام واحد قُلت لجدي: أريد أن أخطب رندة سليمان جارتنا. جدي قال لي إنه على أيامه لم يكن يُباح الكلام في الخطبة قبل أن يستقل الشاب بحياته، ولكنه وعد بمفاتيح بابا وماما في الموضوع كما وعد بتأييدي.

"I told my grandfather that I wanted to get engaged to our neighbour, Randa Sulayman. My grandfather told me that, in his day, one was not allowed to talk about an engagement before one became totally independent. But he promised he would open up the subject with Father and Mother. He also promised to give me a hand."

Muhtashimi does not explicitly forbid Elwan's desire; he merely suggests that Elwan delay his intention to get engaged to Randa until he is financially independent. When Elwan's engagement is on the brink of failure, the characters involved ask Muhtashimi to make a decision. Muhtashimi refuses. This is similar to when Zainab, Randa's mother, says:

—الحب يضلُّ يا محتشمي بك، أصبح الحب في هذه الأيام إلهًا. هل تزوّجت أنت عن حب يا محتشمي بك؟ هل تزوّج فواز بك عن حب؟  
—ولكنهما يؤمنان به.

"Love misleads, Muhtashimi Bey. And, nowadays, love has become a god. Was yours a love match, Muhtashimi Bey? Was Fawwaz Bey's a love match?"

"But they believe in it".

Muhtashimi represents a patriarch who is still aware of his moral responsibilities as the head

of the household. He invites Elwan to discuss his engagement issue with Randa. Although Elwan seeks his advice and both of Elwan's parents ask Muhtashimi to persuade Elwan to break off the engagement, Muhtashimi still says:

فقلت بتسليم: افعل ما تراه صوابًا.

"Do what you think is right," I replied.

Despite his moral responsibility as the elder in the Elwan family, Muhtashimi emphasizes the importance of providing choices.

A similar situation is experienced by Sulaiman Mubarak, Randa's father. Sulaiman can actually be categorized as an irresponsible father within the framework of traditional patriarchy. When Randa discusses Anwar 'Allam's proposal with her parents, Sulaiman leaves the decision to Randa and her mother

.وعرضتُ الموضوع على والديّ مساءً. وقالت أُمِّي بلا تردُّد: على خيرة لله.

وقال أبي: تُوافق على ما تُوافقين عليه.

I discussed the matter with my parents that evening. "That's just fine," said my mother without any hesitation.

"We'll go along with whatever you say," said my father.

Sulaiman emerges as a father who is open to differing opinions. This democratic attitude is illustrated, for example, in his interactions with Randa. This is evident in the following text:

وصمت قليلاً ثم قال: أنا عارف أنك لا تُوافقين على رأيي كله، فافعلوا بزمانكم وليفعل بكم ما يشاء، ولكننا متفقان على رفضالقتل.

He kept quiet for a while and then added:

"I know you don't entirely agree with me, so suit yourself. However, we do agree on the principle that it is wrong to kill."

In the traditional Arab family concept, the father holds authority and responsibility. This is largely because he is the property owner and breadwinner. Both his children and his wife are bound to him. As a husband and father, he expects respect and unquestionable obedience. He is at the top of the authority pyramid, making him the *rabb al-usrah* (head of the family). In contrast, the mother is assigned the role of homemaker (Barakat, 1993: 100-101).

The attitudes of Muhtashimi and Sulaiman Mubarak that challenge the traditional conceptions of the head of the household seem to be related to the changes in Arab society that have influenced family relations. The state's increasingly active role in providing employment and education has

gradually shifted this pattern. Democratization within the family has begun due to the emergence of competing socioeconomic units, female workers, and children migrating to cities for work and education. In other words, patriarchal tradition is in a state of transition. Fathers are increasingly loosening their grip on family life and choosing to share authority and responsibility with other family members (Barakat, 1993: 100).

### The Portrayal of Neopatriarchy in Yauma Qutila az-Za'im

Mahfuz demonstrates how the traditional family structure has changed. The entire family structure presented by Mahfuz is a nuclear family, with the exception of Alwan's family. Mahfuz represents Barakat and Syarabi's analysis regarding the development of the nuclear family, which tends to become a trend in urban areas.

Mahfuz also shows that he does not uphold the concept of patriarchal gender relations within the nuclear family or in interactions between genders. The only character who explicitly expresses allegiance to patriarchal concepts is Zaynab, Randa's mother. However, Randa's parents do not blame her when she decides to divorce Anwar 'Allaam. In fact, they advise her not to remain silent. Democratic attitudes are also demonstrated by the characters in their interactions, as previously mentioned. If authority, dominance, and dependency are significant concepts in patriarchy, then it is clear that Mahfuz does not employ these concepts in interpersonal relationships. Powerful characters like Zaynab and Julistan, and those who go against the grain, like Randa and Sana, are not sufficient to suggest that women have been liberated from the shackles of patriarchy in the novel.

A more radical and somewhat different understanding emerges when the analysis is linked to the concept of neopatriarchy. At the structural level, the depiction of a patriarchal society becomes clearer. The characters are bound by stereotypes that are firmly entrenched in Egyptian society. These stereotypes are so strong that they force the characters to succumb to their circumstances. Randa wishes to make her decisions based on a belief in non-traditional gender relations.

ثم بمزيد من الحدة: إني رشيدة، اخترت سبيلي بملء حريتي، ولن أندم علشيء.

And then, more sharply: "I am of age and have made my choice of my own free will, and I will not regret anything".

In the end, she becomes trapped in these traditional patriarchal stereotypes.

الكفاءة يجب أن تشمل المال والاحترام. أنور علام يملك الاثنين... وهو على الأقل مقبول وغير مُنقَر شكلاً، والفجوة

بين عُمرينا معقولة لدرجة .

There should be both money and respectability. Anwar Allam has both. Had he been a dubious

person, it would have probably been known already. At least, he's acceptable and not physically repulsive. The age difference between us is not unreasonable.

Here, Randa's reasoning is entirely rational. She considers wealth, honour, and physical appearance as sufficient conditions for accepting Anwar Allam and breaking off her engagement with 'Alwan. On the other hand, the qualities she deems sufficient are precisely those valued in a man from a traditional patriarchal perspective. Although she ultimately rebels and divorces Anwar 'Allaam, Randa initially criticises Sana's obstinate stance towards her husband, which results in her divorce. She later comes to understand Sana's situation when the divorce is finalised. This experience with her sister influences Randa's decision to avoid stubbornness, adopting a more adaptive attitude that enables her to be better accepted by those around her. A similar situation arises when Randa passively agrees to her father's suggestion to consult a lawyer.

From one perspective, Randa's struggle for love represents a form of resistance against modern patriarchy. She does not confront individual patriarchal figures directly, as Mahfuz depicts the characters as 'democratic.' Rather, she challenges the dependent economic system and the patriarchal stereotypes that persist within it. Randa's resistance endures until the conclusion of the narrative, where she defends Elwan in court. However, Mahfuz refrains from offering a conclusive resolution, leaving Randa unable to realise her hopes for love despite her determined resistance.

Among all the male characters, only Sulayman Mubarak refrains from expressing patriarchal stereotypes, whether implicitly or explicitly. This can be attributed to his atheism, which allows him to adopt a clear, rational stance on social change. In contrast, Muhtashimi continues to feel a moral obligation towards Elwan's future, despite being aware of his own lack of economic capacity and his dependence on Elwan, his son, and his daughter-in-law for support.

Elwan never admits to being a supporter of patriarchy, nor does Anwar 'Allaam. Anwar 'Allaam even states that rationality should be the guiding principle. However, their attitudes and decisions indicate that patriarchy has become part of their unconscious. On the one hand, Elwan is pressured by his financial incapacity, which can be interpreted as a lack of self-confidence in being the head of the family and breadwinner. He also feels uncomfortable when he perceives Randa as being more intelligent than him. He is depicted as an intelligent intellectual servant but is still trapped in patriarchal stereotypes. Through Elwan, Mahfuz portrays a character who adopts modern ideas but is unaware that he has been socialised into patriarchal values. This leads him to believe that his concerns and decisions about the future of his engagement with Randa are entirely justified.

Stereotypes ultimately lead them to make decisions that do not align with their true desires. Additionally, Elwan and Randa's attitudes and decisions are not purely matters of stereotype. The absence of authority, obedience, and dependence needs to be linked to economic issues as well as



patriarchal stereotypes. Neither Sulaiman Mubarak nor Muhtasyimi has the economic capacity to solidify their authority within the family. Anwar 'Allaam's patriarchal mindset remains dominant when he treats his wife, Randa, as a 'business tool'. Julistan's independence is also due to the wealth she inherited from her husband. In the past, she was still an obedient woman. Similarly, Zainab's encouragement for her children to marry wealthy men is one way to ensure that patriarchy endures in the modern world, as marriage to a rich man is one form of patriarchal modification.

Mahfuz does not clearly depict the attitudes and decisions of these characters as part of their agreement with the patriarchal system, where men are supposed to be more dominant and therefore bear moral responsibility. The real issue is economic conditions. Nevertheless, Mahfuz still uses patriarchal stereotypes to make the characters' decisions understandable. These two conditions are what cause Randa to lose in her struggle against patriarchy. Mahfuz successfully highlights the shift in the concept of patriarchy within the real lives of modern Egyptian society, presenting equality between men and women. However, the characters remain powerless under the pressure of stereotypes and economic crisis. He allows gender stereotypes to destroy the lives of his characters, leaving them without resolution. Regardless of whether the use of these stereotypes is part of Mahfuz's ideological beliefs, within the framework of neopatriarchy, patriarchal values are implicitly maintained in *Yauma Qutila Az-Za'im* in a more modern form.

## Conclusion

Mahfuz's *Yauma Qutila Az-Za'im* presents a democratic model of gender relations that contrasts with the traditional patriarchal concepts of authority, obedience, and dependence. The head of the family no longer holds a central role in decision-making. Viewed from a neopatriarchal perspective, this form of gender relations aligns with the evolving Egyptian society that serves as the background of the novel. Mahfuz still employs patriarchal assumptions and stereotypes, even if they are not strictly reflected in the characters' behaviour. He attaches these stereotypes to all characters except Sulayman Mubarak. Feminist literary criticism using the 'image of women' approach in modern Arab novels needs to be linked to the concept of neopatriarchy. This type of writing can offer different insights into the perspectives of Arab novelists on gender relations. Neopatriarchy allows for an analysis of the work to reveal assumptions and stereotypes that may be indirectly employed within the text.

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