

BAD EFFECT OF PATRIARCHAL CULTURE IN NAWAL EL SADDAWI'S NOVEL *WOMAN AT POINT ZERO*

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Abstract

This study raises the theme of patriarchal culture experienced by the characters in Nawal El Saddawi's novel *Woman at Point Zero*. The novel is considered a feminist novel because it reveals many dimensions of oppression against women and the characters' struggle against gender discrimination to get their rights. Firdaus is the main character, who lives her life in a very tight patriarchal culture from pre-marriage, marriage, and post-marriage. The research in the novel is motivated by the social reality of patriarchal ideology ingrained in society so that women are always in the realm of domesticity. The purpose of this research is to explain the bad effects of patriarchal culture to the protagonist. The data obtained from the novel are analyzed using a qualitative descriptive method because it is used to describe and interpret the subject matter. The findings of this study indicate that there are three bad effects of patriarchal culture in the novel: violence against women, subordination, and sexual exploitation.

Keywords: *patriarchal culture; sexual exploitation; sociology of literature; subordination; violence*

1. Introduction

A patriarchal culture is one where there is gender inequality between men and women. This patriarchal system has dominated the culture of society and has led to gender inequality and other inequality that affects various aspects of human activities. Men have a role as the main control in society, while women have little influence or can be said to have no rights in general areas of society, both economically, socially, politically, and psychologically, even including the institution of marriage. As we have seen, the continuity of patriarchal culture still exists in Indonesia and in several other countries. With this culture, women clearly do not have the freedom to exercise their rights and do not have the freedom to choose something based on what they want. The restrictions on the role of women in patriarchal culture make women feel shackled and discriminated against. This inequality between the roles of men and women is one of the structural barriers that causes individuals in society to not have equal access. One small example that we can see is the existence of this patriarchal culture in the family. Cultural values that construct the thoughts of mothers about having sons. Because if he

gets a girl, he must be willing to have an abortion or surrender his child to an abortion institution. There are threats and direct violence, both beatings and harassment. Not only that, patriarchy also limits other rights, namely the right to education. Women are considered unworthy of access to education like men. This is supported by the fact that women will manage household affairs later. Limited knowledge and expertise will certainly make it difficult for them to find work, especially formal jobs.

As a result, their economic status will be quite low, so they are desperate to take shortcuts, namely doing something negative in order to restore their economy.

Since the past, the culture of society in the world has placed men at the top of the hierarchy, while women have been in the second class. This patriarchal culture does not only stop at home or in the family but also becomes a culture that exists in society and the country. The patriarchal culture is socialized in society because it gains legitimacy from various aspects of life, be they state or religion. An example is found in El Saddawi's book, entitled *Woman at Point Zero*. In the book, it is clear how helpless a woman is in running her life because of this patriarchal culture. This is the main point of the author's research. The author will reveal the impact of patriarchal culture on women, and explain how unfair that culture really is.

This novel tells the story of a woman named Firdaus. Her father is a poor and illiterate farmer. Firdaus often helps her parents in the fields. Since childhood, Firdaus has lived under pressure and has received immoral treatment from her friend Muhammadain and her uncle. After her parents died, Firdaus lived with her uncle, who was a sheikh in Cairo. However, Firdaus is getting more and more immoral acts from her uncle. Firdaus was sent to junior high school. Firdaus was a smart kid. Instead of sending Firdaus to college, her uncle actually married Firdaus to a man she deserved to call her father. The man's name was Sheikh Mahmoud. He was a rich man, had a foul-smelling boil, and was very calculating.

This study discusses the effects that occur in patriarchal cultures. The bad experiences that Firdaus has to go through are violence, subordination, and sexual exploitation.

As we know, patriarchal culture has had so many bad effects on women. Not only adults, but also children, become victims. The gender inequality that is upheld in patriarchal culture has made women have to continue to submit to men's orders even though they don't want to. Patriarchal culture is a culture where men have a higher position than women. In this culture, there are clear differences regarding the duties and roles of women and men in social life, especially in the family. From this perception, women are considered to only be able to stay at home to continue their offspring and take care of children while doing housework, which is categorized as domestic work that can only be charged to or done by women. Meanwhile, men are perceived and placed to function productively, as breadwinners in the public sphere.

Rokhmansyah, quoted by Siti and Sakina (2017:72), says, "The men have a role as the main control in society, while women have little or no influence and are said to have no rights in the territory of the general public." The patriarchal culture is depicted too. In literary works, it means literary works come from the history and socio-culture of a nation, and the author is a member of the public. The presence of literary works does not escape from human life or community (Widayati, 2019). In creating literary works, the author often takes real events in the community (Ratnaningsih, 2018), for example in the novel *Woman at Point Zero*.

There are seven negative effects of patriarchal culture, as explained by Suryadi (2010), namely: (1) discrimination against women, (2) exploitation of women, (3) marginalization of women, (4) women's subordination, (5) stereotypes of women, (6) violence against women, and (7) a heavier workload and a longer workweek.

From some of the explanations above, it can be concluded that patriarchal culture is a culture that is embraced by a person or group of people on the basis of fatherly or male lineage. Therefore, this type of culture only emphasizes men as the main reference, and women as an additional part of the cultural process.

The dark experiences discussed in this study are violence, subordination, and sexual exploitation. To begin with, violence is an act that refers to an inhuman attitude or behavior so that it can hurt other people who are victims of the violence and also, of course, harm the person who commits violence because it will surely harm the person who commits violence and be punished according to applicable law. "Violence is the biological child of coercion, which is manifested through coercion; acts of violence are carried out by a group against another group that can cause death, because they can injure the body, injure the body psychologically, harm, and be a threat to personal life, such as suicide (Baryadi, 2012: 34–35)". Furthermore, subordination is an assessment that one gender is inferior to the other. Subordination is more common in women and puts them in an inferior or lower position. For example, men are considered more competent at holding managerial positions than women. In addition, sexual exploitation, namely sexual acts for women where women surrender themselves because of coercion, threats of violence, or violence, Exploitation is the act of using other individuals for self-interest purposes (Joni, 2006).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sociology of Literature

The sociology of literature is the study of a literary work and its relationship to society. In short, sociology is the objective and scientific study of humans in society and the review of social institutions and processes. Literature, on the other hand, also deals with human beings in society with regard to their undertaking to adapt to and change society.

Sociology and literature, therefore, share the same issues. The novel, as one of the major genres in literature, can be regarded as an effort to recreate the social world; relations between human beings and their families, environment, politics, the state, and others. Their distinction: while sociology makes an objective analysis of society, literature penetrates into the surface of social structure and expresses human beings' ways of comprehending their society with their feelings.

Sociology is instrumental in elucidating how each literary work is rooted in a certain social and geographical environment where it can perform specific functions and that there is no need for any judgment of value. That is why certain literary pieces may grow in one place but not elsewhere. According to Soekanto (1982), the development of attention to society, as described above, occurs in every society in this world. As well as sociology, literature also deals with humans in society and their efforts to change that society. Thus, literary works can be considered an attempt to re-create the social world, that is, human relations with family, environment, politics, country, economy, and so on. It can be concluded that sociology can provide a clear and useful explanation of literature, and one might even say that without sociology, understanding of literature is incomplete (Damono, 1979).

The purpose of sociological studies in literature is to get a complete picture of the relationship between authors, literary works, and society. According to Tyas (2018), the sociology of literature is an understanding of literary works by considering social aspects. Societal aspects are an indicator of the totality of the work contained in the story built by the author. In principle, the sociology of literature is an interdisciplinary study between sociology and literature, which demands that both have the same object, namely humans in society.

Based on the explanation above, of course patriarchal culture is included in the phenomenon of sociology literature. Because the novel *Woman at Point Zero* has a patriarchal cultural background, the researcher uses the sociology of literature in her research.

2.2 Theory of Patriarchy

Walby (1990), in her book *Theorizing Patriarchy*, defines patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women. She describes patriarchy as a system because patriarchy contains the idea that every male is always in a dominant position over women. Patriarchy also considers biological factors; body differences between women and men also emphasize the division of different roles. Patriarchal culture is one where men have a higher position than women. Such an ideology has persisted for quite a long time, even today. In this culture, there is a clear distinction between tasks and the roles of women and men in social life, especially in the family. At first, patriarchy is used to refer to a type of "dominated family by men", namely the house mastered patriarch's grand ladder by men (Bhasin, 1996:1).

Patriarchal culture influences community mindsets. Differences in gender have given birth to various injustices, both to men and especially to women. Women are seen as more important to work in the domestic sector, cleaning the house, cooking, washing, and raising children. Thus, the myth of occupational segregation that has been embraced in society, namely that women only take care of the household and men only earn a living outside the home, can be eliminated gradually. (Mulia, 2014:47).

In fact, women are also human beings who should have the freedom to voice their voices, choose and make decisions, and do what they want. In general, women tend to be excluded from high-paying jobs because of their gender; the jobs that women can take have been determined by men (Bhasin, 1996:6). This patriarchal culture has forced women to live a decent life. Even though there have been so many cases of the impact of this patriarchal culture, the government has still not been able to solve this one problem, considering that patriarchal culture has existed since ancient times.

The concept of patriarchy combines the concept of gender relations and then develops into two views. First, it includes injustices that often occur in relationships based on gender. Second, draw attention to the relationship between different aspects of gender relations, which then form the social system.

2.3 The Effect of Patriarchy

As we know, there are so many impacts that occur on this cultural patriarchal system. According to Wiyatmi (2012), there are so many serious problems experienced by women, including violence against women, double burden, marginalization, subordination, stereotypes, and exploitation. "There are several forms or manifestations of gender inequality, namely marginalization or the process of economic

impoverishment, subordination or the assumption of being unimportant in political affairs, the formation of negative stereotypes, and violence." (Fakih, 2016)

The following is a clearer description of the manifestations of gender inequality.

1. Marginalization

According to Fakih (2016:13), marginalization is a process that results in poverty. However, there is one form of impoverishment for one particular gender. This form of impoverishment can take the form of evictions, natural disasters, or exploitation processes. Marginalization comes from several things, such as government policies, beliefs, religious interpretations, traditional beliefs, habits, or scientific assumptions.

2. Subordination

Subordination, according to Mansour Fakih, is the assumption that women are irrational or emotional so that they cannot appear to lead, which can result in the emergence of attitudes that place women in unimportant roles. One example of a form of subordination is a husband who always makes a decision without considering his wife.

3. Stereotypes

Stereotype is the labeling of a certain group, in this case, women. One form of stereotype is the assumption that women who often dress up are considered to be trying to attract the attention of men.

4. Violence

Violence is a gender injustice in the form of an attack or assault, physically or mentally, against someone. Basically, violence arises from the assumption that there is unequal power between men and women. Violence consists of several forms: rape, domestic violence, child abuse, genital mutilation, prostitution, pornography, enforced sterilization, molestation, and sexual and emotional abuse.

From the several theories above, the focus of research on the effects of patriarchal culture that will be discussed in the novel *Woman at Point Zero* is only three: violence, subordination, and sexual exploitation.

3. Research Method

The research method used in this study is qualitative research. The qualitative research method is research that describes and analyzes phenomena, events, social activities, views, beliefs, and thoughts through words and language.

In this research, the author discusses the effects of patriarchal culture in Nawal El Saddawi's novel *Woman at Point Zero*. This study uses the survival theory proposed by Siti and Sakina (2017) to describe the meaning of patriarchal culture expressed in written form. The author uses a descriptive qualitative research method to conduct an analysis in which the method is based on data and not numbers. Therefore, the author's design was used in this study, and the findings were carried out in a descriptive form.

Cresswell (2014) states that qualitative research is research that is used to examine human and social problems. The researcher will report the results of the research based on the analysis data obtained, which is then described in detail in the research report. The focus of this research method is words.

The attention of qualitative research is more focused on human elements, objects, and institutions, as well as the relationship or interaction between these

elements, in an effort to understand an event, behavior, or phenomenon (Mohamed, Majid, & Ahmad, 2010).

The main data in this study were taken from the novel El Saddawi, *Woman at Point Zero*, and the data sources came from the phrases and sentences of the novel.

4. Discussion

The effects of patriarchal culture felt by the protagonist are found in the novel *Woman at Point Zero*. The name of the protagonist is Firdaus. The subject matter is about the protagonist's experience as a victim in a patriarchal culture. They are violence, subordination, and sexual exploitation. The analysis of each effect and the experience of the protagonist as a victim of patriarchal culture found in the selected novels are described further below.

4.1 The Effects of Patrial Culture

4.1.1 Violence against a Woman

Violence is any act that denigrates, insults, harasses, and attacks a person's body or reproductive function because of an imbalance of power or gender relations, which can result in psychological and physical suffering, including those that interfere with a person's reproductive health and lose the opportunity to carry out education safely and optimally.

Violence in a broad sense refers to physical or psychological acts committed by a person or group of people either intentionally or unintentionally, directly or indirectly, personally or structurally. What is meant by structural violence is violence that occurs within social structures, such as oppression by authoritarian states, systems that make society unfair, and so on.

“Then she brought a woman who has a small knife or maybe a razor. They cut a piece of flesh between my thighs. I cried all night”.
(El-saddawi, 1975:17).”

Based on the quotation above, Firdaus receives torture from a woman who is brought to her house. It is clear that the woman takes a small knife, and immediately the knife is headed towards her. Physical violence against women is shown by cutting a piece of flesh between Firdaus' thighs. This activity causes Firdaus to feel pain due to direct physical contact. It leaves wind and blood scattered everywhere.

“On one occasion, he hit me all over with his shoe. My face and body became swollen and bruised. Then I left the house and went to my uncle's house”. (El-saddawi, 1975:70)

Firdaus' husband personally commits the violence. The physical violence can be seen in how Firdaus's husband treats her. A large shoe is flung towards her face and body. It leaves swelling and bruises almost all over her body. Firdaus, who at that time just tries to endure the pain, ends up running away to her uncle's house because she feels that her husband's treat is too far away.

“One day he hit me with his heavy stick until blood came out of my nose and ears. Then I went but not to uncle's house”.
(El-saddawi, 1975:72)

The quotation above proves that the violence is still carried out by her husband. This physical violence can be seen when her husband beats her with a stick so hard. The hit makes Firdaus' nose and ears bleed. With sobs and tears around her face and ears, she leaves her husband again, but this time she does not go to her uncle's house. With bruised eyes and bloodstains in her ears, no one pays attention to her.

“I spoke in a low tone, but suddenly his big and strong hand slapped me with a very hard slap. The slap was the hardest slap I've ever received to my face. My head swings from one side to the other”.
(El-saddawi, 1975:79)

The physical violence is also committed by one of Firdaus' new friends. That physical violence can be seen when Bayoumi's big hand slaps Firdaus' face hard and blindly. Bayoumi thinks that Firdaus speaks in a high tone, and such a tone is inappropriate for a lowly woman. That slap is the hardest Firdaus has ever felt. Not only does Bayoumi slap her face, but Bayoumi also gets angry and continues to torment Firdaus with his own hands. Even, Firdaus' head is swinging. This makes Firdaus completely helpless at that time. Even though Firdaus tries to fight back, her strength will not be able to match the body and big fingers of Bayoumi.

“He then locked me up. And when he came home in the middle of the night, he pulled the cloth covering my body, slapped my face, and laid his body on top of me with all his body weight”.
(El-saddawi, 1975:80)

The quotation above makes it seem as if the torture that Firdaus feels is endless. This time, Bayoumi locks her in a dark room and lets her sleep without any mat and only with a cloth covering her body. Not satisfied, Bayoumi re-enters the dark room and then carries out the next torture. The physical violence can be seen when Bayoumi's big hand again slaps Firdaus's face with great force. Like having no pity at all, Bayoumi still does the same thing, and he even betrays Firdaus, who is much smaller than him. With such a large body, Bayoumi lays his body on top of Firdaus's so that Firdaus feels extremely cramped due to Bayoumi's weight.

“The next moment he punched me with his strong fist to the stomach so hard that I immediately lost consciousness”.
(El-saddawi, 1975:80)

Bayoumi still uses physical violence. It is clear that Bayoumi hits and punches Firdaus' stomach so hard that Firdaus loses consciousness. He has taken such actions many times. This violence really makes Firdaus lose her awareness and enthusiasm to live her life.

4.1.2 Subordination

Subordination of women is defined as being secondary to women who are weaker or lower than men, so that the position, function, and role of women seem to be lower than men's. According to Sultan (2012), women's subordination is a situation where a power relationship exists and men dominate women. “Men are superior to women, and women are part of men's property, so women should be controlled by men, and this produces women's subordination. It is clear that this subordination can lead to injustice in social life. As a result of subordination, the role of women is marginalized. Another consequence of this subordination is that even though women work outside the

household, They are still burdened with domestic and social jobs without being accompanied by a fair division of labor between men and women. This often happens in our environment, where women do have duties that are extremely busy and strenuous. In other words, the workload of women is greater than that of men. In addition, women are very vulnerable to gender-based violence, both in the household and in public. Firdaus also experiences the same thing. From childhood to adulthood, she has always been a victim and received some injustice like that, both in the family and in social life. She felt tired of always being at the bottom, so she forced herself to leave the house where she lived after her parents died.

"Father won't go to bed without having dinner first, no matter what. Sometimes when there was no food in the house we would all go to bed on empty stomachs. But he always gets food".
(El-saddawi, 1975:26)

It is clear that there is injustice in a family where fathers and children have very different positions. Firdaus and her sister endured hunger all night just because they had to fill their father's stomach. Even though sometimes there is a lot of food, they are still not allowed to eat. Injustice like this is clearly found in a patriarchal system. Firdaus's night is in contrast to her father's. His stomach is always filled with food, so he can sleep comfortably at night. This happens because this system views the position of men as always being on top, and they are always prioritized in other matters.

"I can still paint the future with the colors that I like. But it is mine to freely decide, and change as I wish". (El-saddawi, 1975:37)

It is clear how Firdaus's life is always in confinement. Even in her own life, she does not have the freedom to express herself. Her whole life has been unfairly arranged by her family. She wishes that there is still time for her to color her own world, decide things according to her decisions, and change everything based on her will.

"I can also know that all those who rule are men".
(El-saddawi, 1975:41)

She is despairing because she says only men can rule. Only men have a higher position than women. Only men are considered for that higher position. Injustice like this is one of the impacts of patriarchal culture.

"Father used to rule over the furnace room in winter and gave me the coldest room. Uncle occupies a bed for himself, while I have to sleep on a wooden cot". (El-saddawi, 1975:76)

The quotation above shows how inequality between genders is described. It is clear how Firdaus' father and uncle treat her. When it is winter, Firdaus has to endure the cool of the night without any heat at all because her father controls the firebox room so that her father will feel warm. Firdaus has to endure the pain of sleeping on wood because her uncle has taken over her bed. Under such conditions, Firdaus will endure and try to be strong, even though sometimes she is very cool at night.

"I work in the fields, work at home, and eat my father's leftover food with my mother. And if my father doesn't leave food, then I will go to bed without dinner". (El-saddawi, 1975:103)

It shows how Firdaus lives. She has to work outside and must continue her work at home while her parents just sit quietly at home. Even though she is tired from working outside, like in the fields, she still has to be forced to finish housework like making bread dough and others. The injustice increases when, even though she finishes all the work, even for dinner she has to get it from her father's leftovers. If her father did not leave some of the food, then she would be forced to sleep on an empty stomach and full of exhaustion.

“You lowly and poor employee, who is worthless, running after the bus to get on it. I will take you in my car because your feminine body has aroused lust. It is an honor for you to be wanted by an official of an honorable rank like me”. (El-saddawi, 1975:122)

Firdaus' self-esteem is humiliated by a man. Even though she has become an employee of a company, it is still not uncommon for her to get this kind of treatment. Still, men consider women lowly just because of the clothes that make up their bodies. In fact, like normal female workers, she also wore the same clothes. She is demeaned and forced into it by a high-ranking and hopeful official.

“Men impose deception on women, and then punish them for being deceived, oppress them to the lowest degree, and punish them for falling so low, tie them in marriage and punish them with hard labor throughout their lives, they beat them with humiliation and beatings”. (El-saddawi, 1975:142)

Men have described how Firdaus thinks of men. Those who take full part in the lives of women When all the good mistakes lower the self-esteem of those who commit them, it is still women who will be punished for their crimes. When they are the ones who take their whole lives in a marriage agreement, they are still the ones who will be shown insults and beatings every day. It's as if the whole world and everything in it are silent and blind, as if they do not see that justice. In fact, if you look at it, it is women who will be the victims and those who will feel the negative effects of the harassment they do. But still, even so, it is women's self-esteem that is always in question and will always be looked down upon by society.

“They want to feel themselves as a noble person. And reminds me of the fact that I am a lowly person”. (El-saddawi, 1975:146)

Based on the quotation above, it is clear how Firdaus described herself at that time. She sees all men insisting on living in a respectable or noble way. But she remembers again that what she has gone through all this time—selling herself for money and being hit by various insults—was done by those who wanted to live a noble life.

“How did you become one of the masters? A woman who lives alone cannot be an employer”. (El-saddawi, 1975:158)

The quotation proves how men look down on and do not give Firdaus the opportunity to become employers. This injustice happens only because Firdaus is a woman and only lives alone. Even so, Firdaus still has the desire and dreams that one day she will become a master.

"To university? Somewhere where she would sit next to the boys? A sheikh and pious man like me would send a nephew to mingle with the male crowd?". (El-saddawi, 1975:56)

It can be clearly seen that women are given the right to go to school but are limited, they do not need to pursue higher education up to university. Moreover, the university is a place for respect. It is inappropriate for women to be side by side with them. This is just an alibi because men realize that they do not want their position to be equaled by women because they are afraid that women will become smart creatures that they cannot control.

4.1.3 Sexual Exploitation

Sexual exploitation is an activity that involves both men and women, for the sake of money, one party's pleasure, profit, or other considerations, or because of coercion or the influence of adults, individuals, syndicates, or groups, related to sexual relations or behavior that causes lust. In the novel *Woman at Point Zero*, Firdaus also found several sexual exploitation activities.

"Men don't know the value of a woman, Firdaus. It is the woman who determines her worth. The higher you put a price on yourself, the more he realizes your true worth. He will be prepared to pay with what he has. And if he doesn't have it, he will steal from others to give you what you ask". (El-saddawi, 1975:88)

It is told that Sharifa invites Firdaus to make money by selling Firdaus' body to men who are thirsty for their lust. It is hoped that Firdaus will get what she wants as long as she obeys Sharifa's words.

"It was really warm in her house, and she helped me undress, took off my shoes which were full of mud, then bathed me in warm water and soap. Then he supported me onto the bed. I closed my eyes as I felt his weight pressing against my chest and stomach, and his fingers moving across my body". (El-saddawi, 1975:91)

The quotation above includes the aspect of women's exploitation because it shows the exploitation of Firdaus' body by a male practitioner who meets her when Firdaus leaves Syarif's place. This man treats Firdaus politely and kindly. An unknown man brings Firdaus to his house. He helps Firdaus from feeling cold, but what he does is the same as other men's. He uses Firdaus's body for sexual satisfaction. Firdaus experiences exploitation of the man's body. Firdaus's body is used for his own satisfaction without thinking about their relationship status.

"If Firdaus marries Sheikh Mahmoud and he is willing to pay a hundred pounds, I will be able to pay all my debts and will buy some clothes for Firdaus". (El-saddawi, 1975:58)

The uncle and his wife sell Firdaus to someone much older than her. Instead of being in a marriage relationship, her uncle actually takes advantage of Firdaus' body to pay off all his debts. Even though the man who is going to marry Firdaus has a very foul-smelling boil on his nose, her uncle still lets her go just because of money. This exploitation is characterized by how his family sells her only for their own profit.

5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the bad effects of patriarchy experienced by the protagonist in the novel *Woman at Point Zero*, it can be concluded that three bad effects of patriarchy are found in the novel, namely violence against women, subordination, and sexual exploitation. Discrimination against women is considered to violate norms without thinking about the conditions of the victims, as emphasized by the author. Such actions are very common in real life and in society. The protagonist must be forced to kill a high-ranking official because she is forced to have a relationship. She ends up fighting and killing him. The protagonist prefers to accept the hanging sentence given by the police rather than receive leniency from the president because she feels hurt by the treatment of all the men around him. The protagonist, Firdaus, experiences the bad effects of patriarchal culture found in this novel, sexual violence, subordination, and being a victim of sexual exploitation.

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