

## DECONSTRUCTION OF GENDER STEREOTYPES IN *QALBU AL-LAIL* BY NAJIB MAHFUZ (JACQUES DERRIDA'S DECONSTRUCTION STUDY)

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Gender phenomenon is one of the issues that is always relevant to study in the world of Arabic literature. Although there have been many studies that reveal this phenomenon, not many have analyzed it from a deconstruction perspective. Based on this gap, the article discusses the idea of deconstructing female gender stereotypes in the novel *Qalbu Al-Lail* by Najib Mahfuz. This research employs descriptive qualitative research, which examines the gender deconstruction contained in the novel *Qalbu Al-Lail* by Najib Mahfuz with the deconstruction approach initiated by Jacques Derrida. The results show that through deconstruction interpretation, this novel contains the idea of gender deconstruction represented in the character of Huda Sadeeq. The deconstruction is depicted by the female character who is educated, moral, and thinks critically and rationally. In the novel, Najib Mahfuz describes the discourse on gender that occurs in the Arab World, especially Egypt. Until this century, it is still a separate problem that is still being fought by various groups, especially feminists. Through deconstructive reading, the authors find that there are structures that show oppositional ideas between men and women scattered in the novel. These structures build discourses and stereotypes of women, which then lead to the idea of gender deconstruction contained in the novel, which is represented through the characters of female characters. The novel *Qalbu Al-Lail* contrasts men and women. A feeble, crying woman and a stoic, resilient guy represent the ideas. Women with no education are contrasted with men with higher education. Unemployed women who do housework are contrasted with employed guys who don't. Men who reason rationally contrast with women who rely on emotions. This opposition portrays women as sexist and immoral.

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## INTRODUCTION

In his novel *Qalbu Al-Lail*, Najib Mahfuḏ represents the subordinate position of women. This position is depicted through the female characters in the novel, which shows that the patriarchal culture that still dominated Egypt at that time. This paper aims to examine the gender discourse in the patriarchal society in Egypt as told by Najib Mahfuḏ in his novel. This study is interesting because the gender issues expressed by Najib Mahfuḏ are still a hot topic of discussion among scholars, especially feminist literature observers. Women in the Arab World, especially Egypt, have not received the same opportunities as men, such as the opportunity to get higher education. The Global Gender Gap Report states that Egypt is one of the Middle Eastern countries that has a low level of gender equality, which is at position 136 out of 145 countries, ranking 135th in the gender gap in its role in the economic field, as well as position 115 in opportunities for women's education and political contribution (Ilmy, 2020). These two things become obstacles for women in Egypt to fight for gender equality.

Problems regarding gender and patriarchy have been deeply rooted in the social structure of the Arab nation since pre-Islamic times until this century. The phenomena that occurred in several periods of time show that the existing structure of gender relations in society places women in a subordinate and inferior position. The position of women in the Pre-Islamic period, as mentioned in various studies, shows that the representation of women has a low position and is less valued and not recognized for their human rights. This is reflected in some of the oppression of women in the Pre-Islamic period such as the act of burying baby girls alive, women are the property of men, do not have inheritance rights, even themselves are used as inheritance items (Buana, 2021).

Meanwhile, the reality of patriarchy in Arab countries in this modern century is seen in several cases of women who experience discrimination, limited access to the public sphere and education. This has become an issue championed by several writers in several of their works, such as Nawāl Al-Sa'dawī, Salwā Bakr, Mikhail Nu'aimah, and several other writers who raise women's issues in the surrounding social environment. A Yemeni feminist figure, Najūd Alī tells her personal story as a woman living in a patriarchal society. She experienced oppression and injustice caused by the arbitrary and authoritarian attitude of the men in her neighborhood. At the tender age of 10, she was forced to marry a man three times her age and experienced physical and sexual violence. Her writing, which was published in 2010, received attention from various parties (Alī, 2010).

In this patriarchal society, there are gender discourses that create a hierarchy between men and women. The hierarchy illustrates that men have a higher position than women, and have the authority to regulate women who have a lower position. Thus, the hierarchy reflects a domination that is only owned by those who are strong, namely men. Men are characterized as creatures who prioritize ratios. Thus, it is men who must make decisions. Because with ratios, men are considered to be able to think objectively and reasonably. Men then receive a special position in the form of reverence because of their characteristics and roles. In his concept of deconstruction, Derrida states his rejection of binary oppositions that assume that something has a higher position (superior) than its opposition (Lubis, 2014). The binary opposition system ultimately places something inferior to be marginalized. Therefore, the deeply rooted binary opposition system needs to be dismantled. Deconstruction, as conceptualized by Derrida, provides an opportunity for the marginalized to gain their position.

In relation to deconstruction, Derrida explains that there is no stable center in a text. The emergence of post-structuralism in the reading of literary works marks the emergence of a plurality of meanings in literary texts. Literary texts are not just expressions of the author's ideas, but texts that contain the meaning of a certain ideology or interest (Pertiwi et al., 2020). There is no absolute meaning in literary texts. Literary texts will always produce multiple interpretations. Multiinterpretation will arise if a text is interpreted continuously by different readers. As long as the process of reading the text continues by different readers, different meanings will continue to emerge. These meanings will give rise to new interpretations when connected with various events or situations of human life. These new interpretations in the view of poststructuralism are part of the process of the presence of signs, from objects, binary oppositions, myths, historicity, ideology, human consciousness (Bahardur, 2018).

The emergence of deconstruction theory in the era of post-structuralism initiated by Jacques Derrida raises another side in the interpretation and research of literary texts. Therefore, this research aims to uncover the meaning of deconstruction contained in Najib Mahfuz's *Qalbu Al-Lail* Novel. Through deconstructive reading, structures will be found that show oppositional ideas between men and women scattered in the novel. These structures build discourses and stereotypes of women, which then lead to the idea of gender deconstruction contained in the novel which is represented through the characters of female characters by the author in his work.

Based on the social and literary facts above, the issue of gender inequality in the context of the Arab World, especially Egypt, has not been studied by researchers. Therefore, this study is intended to contribute to gender inequality, especially the deconstruction of women's gender by referring to the work of the famous Egyptian novelist Najib Mahfuz. There are many studies that discuss gender discourse, stereotypes attached to women, and some ideas that deconstruct the discourse found in previous studies. Some of these studies specifically examine literary works and their relation to gender issues, especially the dominance of men over women who are depicted imaginary with certain characters and settings in literary works. The relevant analysis was conducted by Marina Larasati who studied the acts of domination that occur between genders in the novel *Drupadi* by Seno Gumira Ajidarma (Larasati, 2018). This research combines Derrida's hermeneutic and deconstruction methods to reveal hidden and marginalized meanings in the text. Based on the research data, it can be concluded that the deconstruction is found in *Drupadi*'s actions that deconstruct the injustice committed by men against her, depicted in the title oppositions, in-text oppositions, binary oppositions, additional meanings, and iterability of the text.

Similar research was conducted by I Gusti Ayu Andani Pertiwi, I Nyoman Darma Putra, Ida Ayu Laksmi Sari who studied the deconstruction of gender ideology in the novel *Out and Grotesque* by Natsuo Kirono (Pertiwi et al., 2020). This research combines feminism and deconstruction approaches in analyzing the data that has been collected. The form of deconstruction of gender ideology displayed by the author in both novels is gender ideology that follows the times. Each character is depicted as no longer being affected by the conventional social order of Japanese society regarding how men and women should be. Instead, they choose to go with their own rules of life.

## **METHOD**

This research is a descriptive qualitative research, which examines the gender deconstruction contained in the novel *Qalbu Al-Lail* by Najib Mahfuz with the

deconstruction approach initiated by Jacques Derrida. The data sources used in the research are textual data in the form of words, phrases, and clauses contained in the text of the novel, and also contextual data in the form of facts and social situations that support the analysis. The data of this research will be collected by listening method and note taking technique. The listening technique is done to listen to the use of language in the novel, not only related to the use of spoken language, but also the use of written language (Mahsun, 2005). The research analysis stage based on the deconstruction approach is to first enter the structure of the work (Margareth, 2012). Then map the ideas that are patterned with hierarchical binary oppositions contained in the text, and bring up a rejection of the hierarchy and discourse.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Derrida's Deconstruction of Logocentrism and Binary Opposition Hierarchy**

Deconstruction is a concept of reading texts initiated by the Algerian philosopher Jacques Derrida. Deconstruction criticizes structuralism that is too confined to the single and stable meaning of the text (Al-Fayyadl, 2005). In literary texts there is no absolute meaning. Literary texts will always produce multiple interpretations. Multiinterpretation will arise if a text is interpreted continuously by different readers. As long as the process of reading the text continues by different readers, different meanings will continue to emerge. These meanings will give rise to new interpretations when connected with various events or situations of human life. These new interpretations in the view of poststructuralism are part of the process of the presence of signs, from objects, binary oppositions, myths, historicity, ideology, human consciousness (Bahardur, 2018).

Deconstruction is Derrida's rejection of logocentrism, which believes in a stable center. Logocentrism is a large system that makes logos the center. This logocentrism is not neutral, because it is shaped by a patriarchal culture that behind it all shows power. According to Derrida, there is no stable meaning of text/discourse (Al-Fayyadl, 2023). Logocentrism and phonocentrism as metaphysics of presence present something that is not present. Therefore, Derrida deconstructs it from within to reveal this absent presence. Deconstruction is a new way of reading texts by shifting the "center" or core in the text to the periphery and placing the ideas on the periphery to the central position.

Derrida rejects the oppositional thinking conceptualized by structuralist thinkers, especially Saussure. Through his concept of the sign, Saussure states that the relationship between things is never natural, but there is always a sign that mediates. The relationship between the *signifier* and the *signified* is arbitrary, temporary and changing. A signifier appears based on a certain context, which is not always in sync with the object being signified. Therefore, according to Derrida, there is no transcendental signifier in a text. Every signified always produces new signifiers that refer to other signifieds. This makes "presence" unable to be represented in full so that it experiences a delay (*defferal*) (Al-Fayyadl, 2023).

In addition, Derrida criticizes the concept of binary opposition conceptualized by structuralist philosophers. Binary opposition is a perspective in which there is a solid boundary line between conceptual oppositions, such as right and wrong, meaningful and meaningless, center and periphery (Sarup, 2008). According to Derrida, this binary opposition is a legacy of Western philosophy that uses a black-and-white thinking model. This black-and-white logic (binary opposition) was used by Saussure in his

structural linguistics, by eliminating the diversity of language use (parole). Derrida criticizes Saussure in the word speech that is positioned with the word writing, where in that structure the word speech is superior to the word writing (Derrida, 1967). The oppositional logic determines the existence of something that is considered and its opposition is considered wrong. The opposition is reflected in opposites such as: presence versus absence, identity versus difference, male versus female, speech versus writing, rational versus emotional, and so on.

The existence of this form of binary opposition indicates a hierarchy, where one thing is more privileged than its opposition. In this hierarchy, the first term is superior to the second, for example identity is superior to difference, men are superior to women, speech is superior to writing, and so on (Lubis, 2014). The hierarchy is actually conditional, because in the view of post-structuralism language is seen as unstable (Latifi, 2015). This privileging contains great power and makes it transcendent (Margareth, 2012). In logic, which contains a binary opposition structure, it indicates that there is something superior and its opposition is considered inferior. Therefore, according to Derrida, these systems and structures need to be dismantled and deconstructed. This deconstruction is a way for the inferior and marginalized to achieve equality and shift to the center.

### **Discourse Construction and Female Stereotypes**

In issues of gender and patriarchy, women are characterized by certain stereotypes. Customs and traditions in the patriarchal system shape the idea that women are characterized as weak, irrational, timid, and always prioritize emotions and feelings (Hakim et al., 2023). This is inversely proportional to men who are characterized as strong beings and have rational characters, so they deserve to be leaders. These stereotypes eventually lead to gender inequality and inequality between the two (Ma'shumah, 2012). This is reflected in the reality of a patriarchal society that places women in domestic and household roles. Therefore, women are considered unnecessary to get access to education. Education is considered only necessary for men.

The novel *Qalbu Al-Lail* by Najib Mahfuz tells the story of an Egyptian man named Ja'far Ar-Rawi. After the departure of his parents, he lives and is cared for by his grandfather who is a very rich and respected religious leader. His grandfather taught him religious and moral values and, like many religious leaders, sent Ja'far to Al-Azhar University to continue his education. His life changed when he suddenly fell in love with a lower-class woman who came from an immoral family and had a habit of committing crimes such as killing and stealing. He left his grandfather and his education to marry her. After marrying the woman he became a man who was carried away by worldly things. He became an alcohol and drug addict and lost his religious values. However, she left him and Ja'far remarried an educated upper-class woman. Long story short, he got involved with politics and accidentally killed his political opponent and his life ended up in prison. After getting out of prison he lost both his family and friends and descended into madness.

The novel contains a number of ideas that characterize women with several stereotypes. At the beginning of the story, the author presents a female character who contains misogynistic ideas. Misogynistic is an idea that hates women and portrays women as bad characters (Febriyanti et al., 2020). This idea is found in the character of Marwana. It is told that Marwana comes from a lower-class and uneducated family. The lack of access to education resulted in his bad and immoral behavior. Her family has bad

habits such as stealing, robbing, drug dealing and several other criminal acts. The woman caused Ja'far (the main character) to become a man who was originally obedient to become a dissident and far from religious values. In the end, the woman destroyed the man's life. These ideas are found in the following quote:

وأعجب لطاقتي في معاشرة الفوضى ، فأنا لا أتذمر على حين مروانة لا تحسن تنظيف الشقة، ولا طهي الطعام، وتمضى حافية نصف عارية منتفشة الشعر ، تتحدى الخيال وتناقز الهواء، وتسحبني من يدي لزيارة أمها وقريبها العجوز في معسكر الشياطين...

*I was surprised by my ability to live in a messy house. I did not complain about Marwana's inability to cook or keep a neat and clean house, how she went to the house half-naked and disheveled, defiant and ready to fight with the wind. She often grabbed my hand and dragged me to visit her mother and her elderly relatives, who lived in that demon camp. (Mahfuz, 2015)*

ليضحك المخرف ويقول لي: "ألم يكن الأفضل أن تعمل إماما الجامع؟" أو يبارك بطن زوجتي قائلا للجنين : "شرفنا وكن قاتلا ، فقد ضقنا باللصوص والمهربين!" ويسخر من أصلى الكريم قائلا : "من جدك الراوي؟ أنا جدك الحقيقي، واهبك هذه المرأة الجميلة التي تمتص قذائف غرائك الشريرة..."

*The senile old man would laugh at me and say, 'Wouldn't you rather be an imam in the mosque?' Or he would bless my wife's belly and say to the unborn child 'Honor us by becoming a murderer.' We are sick of thieves and smugglers.' He would sometimes make fun of my noble origins by saying, Your grandfather was not al-Rawi. I am your real grandfather. I donated this beautiful woman to you, the woman who sucked out your evil instincts. (Mahfuz, 2015)*

The female stereotype found in Marwana's character contains an element of hatred towards women. Women in Marwana's character are considered as destroyers and carriers of disaster for men's lives. Ja'far who originally had a good life was suddenly destroyed because of this woman. This misogyny ultimately puts women in a position that is not valued by men. In addition to women being stereotyped as misogynists, the character of Marwana is also characterized by several other images. Such as the idea that women do not need to study in some formal education. Formal education is only for men. Instead, women only need to study at home, learning homework and weaving. Women in Marwana are also characterized as having a morality crisis because they come from bad families and lack access to education.

### **Construction of Oppositional Hierarchy in the Text of Najib Mahfuz's *Qalbu Al-Lail* Novel**

As described above, the deconstruction conceptualized by Derrida is his rejection of structuralist ideas. Structuralism, among others, believes in the existence of binary opposition relations. This binary opposition does not only presuppose two contradictory things, but makes something superior to others. So that in binary opposition there is a hierarchy between the two structures. The binary opposition itself is a formation of the patriarchal system, namely the existence of a dominant or powerful system that determines and regulates something else (Margareth, 2012). The binary opposition formed by the patriarchal system is then realized in a patriarchal society, which is a

system that considers that men are the organizers and rulers. Thus, a hierarchy emerges, which is caused by men having the highest position. In gender studies, this binary opposition is reflected in the relationship between men who are positioned with women.

Based on its structure, the novel *Qalbu Al-Lail* raises ideas that are patterned with binary opposition. The idea of opposition between men and women creates a hierarchy where men are superior, and women are in an inferior position that is marginalized. This idea is represented in the character of a weak, often crying woman who is contrasted with a strong, never crying man. Women who are illiterate and uneducated are contrasted with men who are educated and have access to higher education. Women who do not work and have the obligation to do housework are contrasted with men who work and do not have the obligation to take care of housework. Women who rely on feelings and do not have the habit of thinking are contrasted with men who always think rationally. This is illustrated in the quote:

"لقد عشقت العقل وقدسته فأحببت تبعا لذلك الحقيقة، العقل هو ما يعمل بالمنطق والملاحظة

والتجربة ليصل إلى حكم نقي تماما مما يخل بالمنطق والملاحظة والتجربة، وهو ما أسميته بالحقيقة."

*Ja'far cleared his throat and said, "I love the mind passionately, I venerate it, and it leads me to love the truth. The mind works with logic, observation and experience to reach a pure judgment, completely free from the constraints of logic, observation and experience. This is what I call truth. (Mahfuz, 2015)*

These ideas largely put men in a superior position, giving rise to a hierarchy where men have a higher position than women. Men are portrayed as creatures who always prioritize ratios, so with their ratios men are considered to be able to think objectively and reasonably. Men are characterized by strength, courage, prowess and prowess (Hespi Septiana et al., 2023). Therefore, men receive respect and privileges because of their roles and traits. This is reflected in the quote:

"وقلت لها المرة: للرجل احترامه"

*I once said to her, 'a man must be respected'. (Mahfuz, 2015)*

This is different with women. Women have reversed traits and roles from men. Women are represented as heartless, weak and timid creatures. Women deserve shelter and protection from men. So in the end, women only deal with domestic roles, namely household affairs. The idea shows that in the hierarchy of binary opposition, men have a higher hierarchy than women. In a patriarchal society, women are inferior people who must be under the control of men. In the Arab world, women's inferiority is reflected in official statistics in the Arab world in education, employment, and morality across 24 countries in the Arabian Peninsula (Latifi & Udasmoro, 2020). In this case, Spivak refers to these inferior women as *subaltern* (Gandhi, 2001) whose voices are not heard and cannot express their opinions.

## **Deconstruction of Binary Oppositions and Stereotypes of Women**

The binary opposition that contains hierarchy as described above is one of the discourses criticized by Derrida. According to him, this hierarchy is a legacy of western philosophy that makes something inferior in the hierarchy marginalized. Therefore, this

ingrained hierarchy as a legacy of western metaphysics must be dismantled and deconstructed. This is reflected in the construction of the discourse of the patriarchal system that makes women an inferior party that is marginalized and subordinate. Derrida criticizes structuralism that views gender relations with clear dividing lines. Men are the basic principles and women are their marginalized opponents (Eagleton, 2005). In this case, deconstruction is a way to shift the marginalized party from an inferior position. Women as the marginalized and inferior party in Derrida's view are entitled to get their rights, so in this case women should be entitled to get access to education, work roles, politics, as obtained by men.

Based on the stereotype of women presented in the character of Marwana, this novel portrays women in a misogynistic manner and describes women as creatures with intellectual crisis and immoral. On the contrary, the novel contains the idea of gender deconstruction represented in the character of Huda Sadeeq. The deconstruction can be seen in the following quote:

وكانت هدى تساعدني فهي مثقفة، حاصلة على شهادة مدرسة أجنبية، درست مبادئ العلوم والرياضة والآداب واللغات كما درست العربية على يد مدرس خصوصي وهي غاية في الذكاء والاستيعاب، وقد ساعدتني أكثر مما ساعدني أي مدرس خصوصي. وكانت تقول لي: "الشهادة لا تهم في ذاتها، ولكنها الوسيلة الوحيدة المعترف بها للعمل، ثم إنها تضيف على الدراسة جدية أكثر..."

*Huda helped me. She is educated and has a degree from a foreign school. She has studied the basics of science, math, literature and languages. She once studied Arabic with a private tutor. She is very intelligent and understands her lessons well. He helped me more than any teacher. He would tell me, 'The degree itself doesn't really matter, but it is the only acceptable way to get a job. Formal education also provides more serious character education. (Mahfuz, 2015)*

This shows the author's rejection of the discourse that women do not need to pursue higher education. This can be seen in the character of Huda, Ja'far's second wife after divorcing Marwana. Huda's character presented in the novel has an inverse image to Marwana, where Huda is portrayed as an educated and respectable woman. This idea also deconstructs the discourse that considers education only for men, but men and women have the same right to learn. It also emphasizes that the education obtained will affect one's character and morality. In a study written by Sanger & Kasingku (2023), stated that education is a basic role in shaping a person's character and morality, especially in their role in society (Sanger & Kasingku, 2023). Therefore, the morality of a person, especially women, is influenced by the access to education obtained.

In addition to the issue of access to education, the novel also deconstructs the discourse that assumes that rational and critical nature is only owned by men. this can be seen in Huda's expression to Ja'far, her husband:

إنى ديمقراطية، وأرى الديمقراطية نظاما لا ينقصه كي يبلغ الكمال إلا الرعاية الإنسانية الجماهير الشعب! وإنه لا يداخلني شك في أنالمواطن الإنجليزي مثلا يتمتع بحياة أفضل من المواطن الروسي...

*I believe in democracy," he said, "and I consider the democratic system to be a mere loss of human protection from the masses in order to achieve perfection. I have no doubt that British citizens, for example, have a better life than Russian citizens. (Mahfuz, 2015)*

Discourses that contain images of women as beings who do not think rationally and logically, put women in a subordinate position so that women are not given access to important roles. This is deconstructed by the existence of women who are educated and prioritize rationalism in action. In addition, the discourse of women who are considered burdensome and feminine is deconstructed with the character of women who are honorable, wise, and calm. This is emphasized by Huda who helps provide access to education to her husband, which was delayed due to her marriage to Marwana. Some of these ideas emphasize the author's rejection of several discourses that put women in a marginalized position. The novel is also a criticism of the patriarchal system that is still widely fought, especially by Arab women, especially in Egypt. The issue has become a separate problem faced by the Arab world, and is still being fought for until this century. This can be seen in the social reality of Arab women today, who still experience violence, oppression, and marginalization. Arab women have difficulty voicing their rights and have very limited access to public space. Therefore, the patriarchal system needs to be dismantled and deconstructed in order to achieve a balance between the roles of men and women.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on its structure, the novel *Qalbu Al-Lail* raises oppositional ideas between men and women. These ideas are represented in the character of a weak, often crying woman who is contrasted with a strong man who never cries. Women who are illiterate and uneducated are contrasted with men who are educated and have access to higher education. Women who do not work and have the obligation to do housework are contrasted with men who work and do not have the obligation to take care of housework. Women who rely on feelings and do not have the habit of thinking are contrasted with men who always think rationally. This opposition gives rise to a discourse of women who are portrayed as misogynistic and immoral.

However, through the meaning of deconstruction, this novel contains the idea of gender deconstruction represented in the character of Huda Sadeeq. The deconstruction is portrayed by a female character who is educated, moral, and thinks critically and rationally. The idea of deconstruction rejects the construction of patriarchal discourse formed from a binary opposition structure in which there is a hierarchy that places men as superior parties and women as inferior parties who are marginalized. This inferior position creates gender inequality that prevents women from obtaining their rights, such as access to education, the economy, and roles in the public sphere. Discourses that are considered absolute need to be deconstructed so that women can get their rights. This is in line with the concept of deconstruction initiated by Derrida, that the inferior and marginalized parties should be able to get their rights, so that equality between superior and inferior parties is achieved. The deconstruction conceptualized by Derrida is a way for women as marginalized parties to achieve equality and get their rights and roles in the public sphere.

## **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

The first author is fully responsible for the implementation of the research, including problem formulation, data collection and analysis, and writing the article. The second and third authors act as supervisors who provide direction, conceptual input,

and corrections to the content and structure of the manuscript. All three authors approved the final manuscript.

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