

Female Resistance in Nawal El Saadawi's Zeina: Sara Mills' Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

The novel Zeina by Nawal El Saadawi describes the social reality of Egypt, where there is injustice and discrimination for women. This research aims to find out the form of Egyptian patriarchy, the author's ideology and describe the subject-object position and author-reader position contained in Zeina's novel. This research is a descriptive qualitative research. There are two data sources, namely primary data sources in the form of Zeina's novel, and secondary data sources in the form of relevant literature and supporting research. The analysis technique used is qualitative analysis technique through three ways, namely: (1) data reduction, (2) data presentation, and (3) conclusion drawing. Data collection techniques are reading and writing techniques. The data collection is done through several stages, namely: (1) reading the novel carefully, (2) recording the contents of the novel that are considered important, (3) looking for other data relevant to the study conducted, and (4) grouping the findings. The data were analyzed descriptively using Sara Mills' Critical Discourse Analysis theory. The results of the study are the discovery of a form of patriarchy where women are treated harshly and unfairly, the author's ideology in the form of ideology in the context of fighting patriarchy through female characters who are described with their respective forms of resistance. And found 7 quotes that describe the position of the subject and object in the storytelling in Zeina's novel. In addition, it can also be seen that the position of the author and reader is placed in the storytelling using Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis. This study highlights how literature, such as Zeina, exposes patriarchal oppression and inspires resistance through feminist narratives. By analyzing subject-object dynamics, it empowers readers to challenge societal norms. Additionally, it reinforces the transformative potential of storytelling in fostering critical awareness, promoting gender equality, and encouraging broader discourse on women's empowerment in patriarchal societies.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis, feminist narratives, gender equality, patriarchy, women's empowerment*

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature has a function as a medium for representing people's attitudes, views, and responses to the surrounding environment (Ikhwan, 2020). Literary works are a tool to express the ideas and thoughts of a writer. Literary works emerge as a form of authorial expression with a combination of reality, creativity and authorial experience (Asyifa & Putri, 2018). The social reality presented through the text in a literary work to the reader is a

description of various social phenomena that have occurred in society and are represented by the author in different forms and ways.

Novels are literary works that describe a person's life journey, culture, politics, and other aspects. The topics discussed in novels vary, one of which is the topic of gender. What is meant by gender here is how men and women are viewed or evaluated in a societal structure. Gender is the distinction between the roles, behaviors, and temperaments of men and

women according to culture/society through the interpretation of biological differences between men and women. In this gender issue, feminism was born as an effort to eliminate injustice against women. The presence of literary works that contain feminist content can make readers aware of forms of gender injustice such as marginalization, subjugation, stereotyping, and ideological socialization of gender role values.

Nawal El Saadawi's *Zeina* is a novel that describes the social reality of the Arabs at one time. Arabs are known for their strong patriarchal culture. Arab countries have customs and cultures where men are the center of life and women are always underdeveloped (Hagk & Kholilah, 2018). Nawal El Saadawi is a female novelist and feminist from Cairo, Egypt. She was born in an environment where men were dominant in all aspects of life. Through her literary works, she wanted to fight for women's rights, freeing women from various forms of harassment, discrimination, and marginalization caused by the patriarchal system (Kultsum, 2017). One of her novels, *Zeina*, tells the life of a woman named Bodour and Zeina bint Zeinat under the pressure of Arab patriarchal culture. Both characters are forced to confront patriarchal oppression in their own way.

As a social reflection, it does not rule out the possibility of discourse practices in a literary work. Critical Discourse Analysis is a communication analysis tool that is full of gaps, namely the existence of inequality and inequality between participants. Gabsi (2015) in (Ahmadi et al. 2023, h.33) said that CDA is closely related to dimensional discourse related to the abuse of power, injustice, and inequality, and ideology is a prominent theme in CDA. *Zeina's* novel, which was studied using Sara Mill's Critical Discourse Analysis theory, is considered suitable because *Zeina's* novel fulfills the characteristics of Sara Mills' feminist perspective approach. Research on novels using Critical Discourse Analysis theory is still very limited. This makes the researchers interested in using novels as objects of research studies. Moreover, the novel used in this study is an Arabic novel that tells how patriarchal culture occurs there with an author named Nawal El

Saadawi who is a feminist figure as well as a famous Egyptian novelist. She writes her novels based on her life experiences in Egypt where men are dominant in all aspects of life. So that Critical Discourse Analysis with Sara Mills' feminist perspective approach is considered suitable to be used as a surgical tool in discussing the *Zeina* novel. Sara Mills' feminist perspective approach focuses on the discourse about women, how women are presented in texts, novels, short stories, pictures, photos, or news.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a method used to understand language not only as a means of communication, but also in its use of various things for the benefit of a party, such as the practice of power strategies because language has a non-transparent and implicit nature (Haryatmoko, 2019). According to Eriyanto (2001) in (Hibtiyah 2022, p.146) CDA can also be called a linguistic study that is closely related to context, which is used for certain practices and purposes and by certain groups or institutions in which there is also a practice of power. Eriyanto in (Azwar et al., 2021, p.52; Surahman et al., 2022, p.58; Suryana 2022, p.21) reveals several characteristics of Critical Discourse Analysis. These characteristics are as follows: (1) action, discourse is understood as an action. This understanding associates discourse as a form of interaction that aims to influence, argue, persuade, refute, form reactions, etc.; (2) context, there are three centers in the understanding of discourse according to Guy Cook, namely text, context, and discourse. Discourse here is interpreted as text and context simultaneously; (3) historically, by providing historical context, a text discourse will be understood; (4) power, critical discourse analysis sees power as discourse control. A group or individual can control other groups or individuals through discourse; and (5) ideology in the form of texts, conversations, and others. Ideology becomes the central concept of critical discourse analysis.

In conducting this research, the researcher reviewed previous literature relevant to the study being undertaken. These prior studies analyzed women in various contexts, including mass media, literary works, and real-life situations, using Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis. Among the topics

explored were women's resistance (Sumakud & Septyana, 2020; Maghfirah & Sobur, 2023), women's image (Andriana & Manaf, 2022; Atikah, 2024), women's roles (Isninadia & Yuhdi, 2023; Jamaluddin, 2019; Sobari & Faridah, 2017), violence against women (Angi et al., 2023; Rahmawati et al., 2024; Sadiyah et al., 2023), objectification and stereotypes of women (Andriana & Manaf, 2022; Laeli, 2024; Lapiana & Kasih, 2022; Novianti et al., 2022; Wardani et al., 2016), and discrimination against women (Novitasari, 2019; Sari, 2019).

The research conducted has similarities and differences with the research contained in the literature of previous studies. The similarity between the research studied and previous research

lies in the theoretical perspective used. The difference lies in the object and purpose of the research. The purpose of this research is to see how the patriarchal form of Egyptian society and the author's ideology through the efforts made by the main female character in Zeina's novel as well as the position of the subject-object and the position of the reader-writer. This analysis is then connected to the reality and socio-cultural context of Arab society where there are many phenomena of gender inequality between men and women. The stereotypes of women that regard women with closed eyes where women are considered weak and backward. So this makes women compete to prove the untruth of this perspective.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Research Design

The type of research in this study is descriptive research. Descriptive research is a type of research that aims to provide a picture (description) of a certain phenomenon objectively, presenting a number of information about various social conditions (Purba & Simanjuntak, 2011). The method used is a qualitative method. This is because the data results in this study are in the form of quotations in Zeina's novel, not in the form of numbers or counts. According to Bognan and Biklen (1982) qualitative data analysis is an effort made by working with data, organizing data, sorting it into manageable units, synthesizing it, looking for and finding patterns, finding what is important and what is learned, and deciding things that can be told to others (Fauziyah & Nasionalita, 2018). The data sources in this research are primary data sources and secondary data sources. The primary data source is the novel Zeina by Nawal El Saadawi. The secondary data sources are literature and notes that support and are relevant to the research conducted.

2.2. Data Collection

The data collection technique used in this research is reading and writing technique. In collecting data, several stages were carried out, namely: (1) reading the novel carefully, (2) recording the contents of the

novel that are considered important, (3) looking for other data relevant to the study conducted, and (4) grouping the findings. After the data is collected, the next step is to analyze the data descriptively using Sara Mills' Critical Discourse Analysis theory.

2.3 Data Analysis

This research is a descriptive study using Sara Mills' Critical Discourse Analysis theory. The data analysis technique used in analyzing qualitative writing data is the qualitative analysis technique of Miles & Huberman (1992) which used three ways, namely: (1) data reduction, which is the selection of main points, summarizing the focus on important things, and looking for themes and patterns. The data that has been reduced will provide a clearer picture and make it easier for researchers to collect data. After reducing the data, the next stage is describing or presenting the data; (2) data presentation, data presentation here is in the form of data presentation with the necessary information, drawing conclusions and taking action; and (3) conclusion drawing (Ahmad & Muslimah, 2021).

3. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Sara Mills' Critical Discourse Analysis model looks at how actors' positions are displayed in the text. There are two core concepts in Sara Mills' analysis,

namely the position of subjects and the position of writers and readers (Yani et al., 2022). The first concept used is to see the position of the subject who gives an interpretation of an event to others who become the object being interpreted. This position will later form a text or image in society, while the second concept does not only look at the author's side, but tries to explore how the text is received by the reader. The storytelling and positions placed and displayed in this text make one party become legitimized and the other party not legitimized. That way we will get how the text structure and meaning are treated in the text.

Based on the formulation of the problem, the following research results were obtained.

Women's Resistance to Patriarchal Culture in Zeina's Novel

Zeina presents the social reality that exists in Egypt. This novel is one of Nawal El-Saadawi's pen stabs for the patriarchal culture that grips each society. Saadawi highlights and skins the ulcers of culture and tradition in the form of oppression of women, feudalism, hypocrisy in religion, exploitation of religion and the name of God for political, economic interests, personal egoism, and other socio-cultural diseases that exist in society.

There are two female characters who are highlighted in the novel, Bodour and Zeina. Both are forced to confront patriarchal oppression in their own ways. Zeina is the child of an extra-marital relationship between Bodour when she was a student and Nasim, a militant political activist. As an illegitimate child, Zeina was abandoned since her birth and forced to live on the streets. However, later on she became a famous singer and entertainer who always caught the attention of her fans, especially men. Meanwhile, Bodour tries to achieve a better life after giving birth and leaving Zeina. She married Zakaria al-Khartiti who was an ambitious journalist, but both were trapped in an unhappy marriage.

Bodour assisted her daughter Mageeda in creating an article entitled 'Egypt's Number One Woman Award on Women's Day'. Zeina who managed to captivate and gain the love of the Egyptian people from her

work as a singer and entertainer. However, one day Ahmad ad-Damhiri, who is the son of Bodour's uncle, tried to rape Zeina. Bodour as Zeina's biological mother tried to prevent that from happening. So she decided to tell her dark story to Mahmoud who is a talented writer. Knowing about the disgrace, Zakaria, who is Bodour's husband, was furious. In the middle of the night, they argued in a low, stifled voice. Mageeda, the daughter who had known about her parents' quarrel for a long time, couldn't take it anymore and chose to write an article about her father who was the biggest liar.

Muhammad was the closest person to Mageeda in the magazine. Mageeda told the things he experienced to Muhammad who was a journalist. Through Muhammad, Mageeda was able to publish an article about Zeina Binti Zeinat in the Resistance Revolution newspaper. Soon there were massive demonstrations carried out by the Egyptian people to uphold justice and freedom in their society. And Zeina bint Zeinat walked among them, becoming one of the members of the demonstration.

Subject-Object Position

In this novel, Saadawi focuses on the victimization of women. The representation of women in the novel is greatly influenced by the author in her narration of a series of events in the novel within the framework of her ideology.

"If Bodour cried, Zakaria raised his hand and slapped her. Bodour never raised her hand to slap him back. She bowed her head, hiding her tears or laughter. He hid his desire to raise his hands high and be showered with punches and slaps on his face."

The quote presents Zakaria as the subject and Bodour as the object. Bodour, Zakaria's wife, never retaliated to the slaps given by her husband Zakaria. As a woman and wife, she could only accept the blows and slaps from her husband. She also bowed her head and hid her tears or laughter.

"Women are allies of the devil. Cleanliness is part of faith and filthiness is part of women."

In the quote above, it is explained that women are allies of Satan and part of the dirt. The subject in the data is a male character named Zakaria, and the object is women. In this quote, we can see the author's ideology in the form of women's position in the eyes of men.

"Every student has a famous father. They wrote his name next to his name on the blackboard. Each of them felt proud of his father, his grandfather, his father's uncle, his mother's uncle, or any man known in the family".

The quote above illustrates how the social strata of Egyptian society is based on the high responsibility of male leaders. This also shows a form of patriarchal culture where the position of men is upheld compared to the position of women in a family. It is mentioned that there is pride if each student has a father, grandfather, uncle, or any man in their family has a high social status. In the data above, the author who is in control of the course of the story in Zeina's novel is the subject. The women become the object of the story.

"She was nine years younger than her husband Zakaria al-Khartiti, but he looked younger than her by a year or two. Perhaps it was because he was a man. Perhaps it was because there was nothing in her body to indicate virginity. She had no menstrual period and no interruption of menstruation. Nor does she have menopause and aging. She does not get pregnant nor does she give birth. She does not bear household duties, children, and a bad reputation. There is nothing that makes a man a disgrace except the empty money in his pocket when he has sex with a woman of the night in a prostitution house".

In the quote above, the author is the object and Zakaria is the subject. It can be seen that the author expresses his ideology by presenting the figure of a husband named Zakaria al-Khartiti who looks younger than his wife. This happens because Zakaria is a man who does not experience menstruation and does not bear household duties. In contrast to the wife as her nature becomes a woman and a housewife which makes her look older than her husband.

"In the first experiment, a woman gave up in the end. Although she resisted, resisted, and resisted, although she was a woman with strong muscles, in the end she stopped resisting, lying under him without power and strength".

In the quote above, it can be seen how the author tells the figure of Zakaria who attempted sexual harassment. The author who tells the form of resistance from the character is the subject, and the woman who is told is the object. The quote above tells how the woman who was raped by Zakaria. It is described that the woman rebelled with all her might, but her efforts were unsuccessful until she finally gave up because she did not have the power and strength to fight Zakaria.

"There was something buried deep since she was a child. Something akin to fear, defect, or disgrace, the feeling when a woman's eyes look into the eyes of her master. The master has the right to hit his servant. Men have the right to hit women. The reverse is not allowed".

From this quote, it can be seen that the author describes the injustice or marginalization of a female character named Zeina. Zeina who buried her feelings for the injustice she had received. Where she sees men hitting women, but women are not allowed to do the same to men. In this case, the author becomes the subject and the woman treated unfairly becomes the object.

"Music is an act of the devil, like dancing and singing. Singing is the work of prostitutes, not honorable women".

The quote above is a form of discrimination against women's work. The author expresses his ideology through the character Zakaria who discriminates against women's work. He argues that women who make music, dance, and sing are not honorable women, but prostitutes. In this case, the author becomes the subject and the women who are treated unfairly as objects.

Author-Reader Position

Nawal El-Saadawi as the author of the novel Zeina

acts as the mastermind of the plot of the novel. As the mastermind of Zeina, Nawal has knowledge about many things, especially the discrimination of women in the social conditions of Egyptian society. Nawal herself is a doctor and also an Egyptian feminist figure. In this novel, she puts herself in the third person point of view. In the third person point of view, the author has the ability to know everything. This means that the author can penetrate time and space, has the freedom to enter the minds of all the characters, and also knows what will happen to the characters (Perwitasari, 2009).

In the author's position, a detailed and brief description of the forms of injustice and discrimination experienced by women in a series of stories is presented. The author tries to present witnesses in a series of events that occur in the novel. The author wants to voice what is felt or experienced by female characters who are raped and committed unfairly. As for the reader's position, it is a position that looks at how the reader places himself in the text displayed. In the position of the reader who is placed as a character who experiences injustice and is also a victim of harassment, the reader will feel how the figure of a weak woman has no power and strength against men. Men who have power and strength will easily choose, determine, and do what they want. In addition, readers will also feel that women must be strong and fight for justice and honor so as not to be seen as weak by others who have power and are more dominant.

4. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

Zeina's novel illustrates how Egyptian patriarchy takes the form of social conditions in Egyptian society where women are marginalized compared to men. The power of a man in a family determines the strength of the social strata in his society. Meanwhile, if women have higher power than men, they are not considered proud, even labeled as a disgrace. The novel also tells how women who are victims of sexual harassment are powerless to fight back because they are weak.

From the analysis that has been done, it is found that there is a form of patriarchy where women are treated harshly and unfairly, the form of the author's ideology

contained in the novel is ideology in the context of fighting patriarchy through female characters who are depicted with their respective forms of resistance. And by using Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis, 7 quotes were found that illustrate the position of the subject and object in the storytelling in Zeina's novel. In addition, it can also be seen that the position of the author and reader is placed in the storytelling.

This study highlights how literature, such as Zeina, exposes patriarchal oppression and inspires resistance through feminist narratives. By analyzing subject-object dynamics, it empowers readers to challenge societal norms. Additionally, it reinforces the transformative potential of storytelling in fostering critical awareness, promoting gender equality, and encouraging broader discourse on women's empowerment in patriarchal societies.

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