

GENDER CONSTRUCTION AND THE VALUES OF DEEP FEMINISM SCHEHERAZADE GOES WEST FATIMA MERNISSI

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Abstract:

By focusing on the story of a late 20th-century Arab woman who wrote about her journey to the west. Fatima Mernissi, in *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems* (Mernissi, 2001), with her intellectual journey seeks and concludes answers to her questions about the gender code of European-American philosophy and popular culture by deconstructing not only Western male orientalist fantasies about Muslim women but also the "harem of Western women" of hypervisibility and body shaming. She goes a step further by exploring and dismantling patriarchal norms by crossing this apparent "East-West" difference through modes of critique of secular and Islamic feminists. She produces, and distributes texts, to advance the "double criticism" of local and colonial patriarchy into a continuous analysis in her travel notes. This article stipulates that the author analyzes the contents of the literary works studied with the critical discourse analysis approach model by becoming a facilitating framework, and in the end, the methodology comes from ways of knowing based on social construct and cultural values that are the author's study.

Keywords: *Fatima Mernissi, Gender, Feminism, Islam, Western*

Introduction

Gender is the social meaning given to sex. Related to gender is the concept of gender identity, which is an individual's perception, and subjective experience, gender, and gender expression, namely how a person communicates gender to the outside world. Gender, gender identity, and gender expression are not inborn. Gender also tends to be less stable and more flexible than sex. Gender order is a patterned system of ideological and material practices, carried out by individuals in society, in which power relations between women and men are made, and remade, as something that has meaning. Through the gender fabric of a society, forms or codes of masculinity and femininity are created and recreated, and the relationships between them are regulated¹.

From a more critical academic perspective in social sciences, masculinity is understood as a form of power relation², both among men themselves and between men and women. Instead of essentialism, masculinity is said to emerge

¹ Tripp, Alayo, and Benjamin Munson. "Perceiving gender while perceiving language: Integrating psycholinguistics and gender theory." *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science* 13.2 (2022): e1583

² Mudzakkir, Amin. *Feminisme Kritis: Gender dan Kapitalisme dalam Pemikiran Nancy Fraser*. Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2022.

from the social context in which men live, for example, from their position in the various institutions and organizations of their society and/or within the context of socially available discourses about gender. Feminism is a women's movement that wants to remove women from conditions that are not profitable for them, both socially, economically, and politically. Feminism comes from the Latin word *femina* which means having a feminine nature.

In the traditional understanding of the word, gender refers to sex, both male and female, separated by the usual binary categories of masculine and feminine qualities. However, as a concept in the social sciences, gender has acquired new meanings and meanings, especially in the formation of identities which bring serious ideological-political consequences. Conceptually, gender represents the structure of power and relations between the sexes in society. This indicates the many realities faced by different social groups divided into their gender roles, political attitudes towards issues related to women, marriage and divorce, security and well-being, leadership positions in organizations and sexual preference, to mention some of them³.

Meanwhile, identity is a concept that is difficult to understand, has a strong appeal to modern humans, professionals to groups that often deal with, who are usually uprooted from their original culture and traditions. Identity is a complex subject, because it contains categorization, if not part of the category, humans in a subjective framework that distinguishes "male" and "female"; "normal" and "gay": "us" and "they". Hence identity refers to social markers that differentiate and divide people according to how they see themselves and others⁴.

The starting point of gender studies is (or was) a criticism of the assumption of binary sexuality, the notion that the distinction between the two 'genders' is a natural fact, 'real' represented in the body. The feminist movement does not criticize this biological assumption of the sex binary concept, but the often accepted biological determination of culturally conditioned traits as 'gender-based qualities'⁵.

Here, feminists criticize the traits used to justify unequal and unfair treatment of women. On the one hand, they debunk myths of femininity which, from an evolutionary point of view, are derived from traditional stereotypes such as the myth that all women are 'nurtured' from birth in a biologically determined way. On the other hand, they criticize that, through continuous decline, the traditional division of labor between the sexes contributes to the reinforcement and perpetuation of myths about biologically conditioned traits of gender⁶.

Gender is much more complex. Gender is socially constructed and expressed. This includes one's internal sense of self as female, male, or neither (gender identity), which is the external communication of one's gender identity

³ Botella, Carmen, et al. "Gender diversity in STEM disciplines: A multiple factor problem." *Entropy* 21.1 (2019): 30.

⁴ Sofjan, Dicky. "Pancasila and the Dignity of Humankind." *International Journal of Interreligious and Intercultural Studies* 1.1 (2018): 1-3.

⁵ Djalilova, Zarnigor. "Gender Differentiation Of Discourse Elements As Indicators Of Positive And Negative Evaluations." *International Bulletin of Applied Science and Technology* 2.12 (2022): 55-63.

⁶ Press, U. G. M. *Interseksi Gender: Perspektif Multidimensional Terhadap Diri, Tubuh, dan Seksualitas dalam Kajian Sastra*. UGM PRESS, 2021.

through clothing, hairstyle, behavior, and voice (gender expression), as well as the cultural expectations placed on a person, gender sex of a person (gender roles)⁷.

Gender appears in communication studies as "sex", a binary anatomical variable associated with differences in communication tendencies and practices⁸. The study of difference then integrates theoretical developments in gender identity associated with biological sex categories and towards a theory of cultural difference as an acquired or social product implying a strong link between the symbolic and empirical domains—that is, between socially constructed images of femininity and masculinity and the "real life" behavior of women and men, and the ethnicity/culture of majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and positions.

In a long struggle, feminism found many obstacles, contradictions, debates, and different views about the meaning and purpose of women's struggles. According to Naomi Wolf, "One of the biggest problems in Feminism is that many women fear that feminism has become a set of rigid rules about the attitudes and types of behavior that are supposed to exist if you want to be a feminist. This condition is the same as women who hate men then formulate from one side only, as well as those who hate what they consider to be feminists⁹. Ignoring fear and hatred like this is a mistake that will slow down the feminist movement. Hence continuous study and observation is needed to continue to respond to differences and debates about the roles of men and women in society, with the aim of finding ways to minimize these differences and debates.

In a society where women are represented as something, women are trapped in behaving as they are represented. Normatively, women accept the representation created for them. The trapping of women in behavior represented by patriarchal culture can also occur in those who fight for women's alignments. The struggle of women to elevate their dignity and build a new image, consciously or not, is sometimes trapped in attitudes and actions that degrade and marginalize women¹⁰.

Muslim feminists deconstruct the interpretation of the Koran, which was previously full of patriarchal interpretations. With a critical view that does not stop at one meaning, they explore cultural history and the causes of the revelation of verses. In this research, historical records were found regarding the existence and movement of women which further strengthened women's struggles to obtain justice in Islam. Muslim feminists such as Fatima Mernissi, Riffat Hasan, Leyla Ahmed and Amina Wadud, as well as Asia Djebar from Algeria, share the same

⁷ Basit, Lutfi, and M. I. Kom. *Lensa Gender Di Media Massa: Meta Analisis Politisi Perempuan*. Umsu press, 2022.

⁸ McLean, Kate C., et al. "Personal identity development in cultural context: The socialization of master narratives about the gendered life course." *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 44.2 (2020): 116-126.

⁹ Maghfiroh, Devi Laila, and Moh Zawawi. "Resistensi perempuan dalam Film for Sama: kajian Timur Tengah perspektif feminisme Naomi Wol." *Nusa: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa dan Sastra* 15.4 (2020): 506-520.

¹⁰ Nuryanti, Reni, and Bachtiar Akob. *Perempuan dalam Historiografi Indonesia (Eksistensi dan Dominasi)*. Deepublish, 2019.

notion of human existence. They believe that men and women have the same rank and position, according to the contents and themes of the Qur'an¹¹.

According to Roald and Anne Sofie, feminism is the awareness of women and men about the existence of oppression and exploitation of women in society, public and domestic, which is followed by conscious action to change these situations and conditions¹². Attention and efforts to change the fate of women make a person a feminist. Furthermore, Roald and Anne Sofie explained that feminism does not stop at human awareness or only focuses on women, but takes further action and builds awareness of the existence of men, because men in certain cases also experience similar actions. Such awareness also builds tolerance towards men.

Research Method

The research method used in this study is a descriptive method and is presented qualitatively and the research approach used in this study is critical discourse analysis (CDA) or critical discourse analysis. CDA sees discourse – the use of language in speaking and writing as a form of 'social practice'. Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between particular discursive events and the social situations, institutions, and structures that frame the discursive events that shape them, but also shape them. That is, socially constitutive and socially conditioned discourse is a situation, an object of knowledge, and social identity and the relationship between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps maintain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to changing it. Because discourse is so socially consequential, it raises important issues of power. Discursive practice may have major ideological effects – that is, it can help generate and reproduce unequal power relations between (for example) social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent roles or positions in society¹³.

CDA can be defined as a fundamental analysis in analyzing the opaque and transparent structural relationships of domination, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language¹⁴. In other words, CDA aims to critically investigate social inequality as expressed, shaped, legitimized, and so on, by the use of language (or in discourse).

The theoretical framework focuses, among other things, on power relations within organizations. This is actually an important object of interest in sociological studies, which cannot be ignored when analyzing the role of gender in social life. At the same time, this approach focuses on discursive practice and ideological production, reproduction and justification of gender domination relations.

¹¹ Bahri, Samsul, and Nurshadiqah Fiqria. "Pengaruhutamaan Gender dalam Penafsiran Al-Qur'an Menurut Amina Wadud Muhsin." *Jurnal Ilmiah Al-Muashirah* 19.2 (2022).

¹² Roald, Anne Sofie. "Feminist reinterpretation of Islamic sources: Muslim feminist theology in the light of the Christian tradition of feminist thought." *Women and Islamization*. Routledge, 2021. 17-44.

¹³ Ziskin, Mary B. "Critical discourse analysis and critical qualitative inquiry: data analysis strategies for enhanced understanding of inference and meaning." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 32.6 (2019): 606-631.

¹⁴ Silaswati, Diana. "Analisis wacana kritis dalam pengkajian wacana." *METAMORFOSIS| Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra Indonesia dan Pengajarannya* 12.1 (2019): 1-10.

Following this socio-discursive approach, discursive practice is seen as an expression of organizational structure as well as the means by which organizational members create this structure and provide coherence to daily practice. Organizations are understood here not only as social collectives where shared meanings and practices are produced, but also as 'battlefields' on which various groups compete to try to form organizations in ways that serve their own interests. Gender is clearly involved in this competition, and organizations thus emerge as a fundamentally gendered structure¹⁵.

Fairclough and Wodak divide discourse analysis into three dimensions, namely text, discourse practice, and socio-cultural practice¹⁶.

1. Text is used as a form of representation of something that contains a certain ideology so that the text is disassembled linguistically because we want to see how a reality is displayed or formed in a text that carries a certain ideological message, how the writer constructs his relationship with the reader (either formally or informally, closed or open), and how an identity is to be displayed (the identity of the writer and the reader).
2. Discourse practice is a dimension related to the process of text production and consumption. The text production process leads to the creator of the text. Through which text is produced (created) and consumed (received and interpreted) – is seen as an important form of social practice that contributes to the formation of the social world including social identity and social relations. Partly through discursive practices in everyday life (the process of producing and consuming texts) there is social and cultural reproduction and change. the text maker. Meanwhile, the consumption of text depends on experience, knowledge, social context which is different from that of the creator of the text or depends on the reader/viewer.
3. Socio-cultural practice is a dimension related to the context outside the text. Like the context of the situation. Context related to society, or culture, and certain politics that influence the presence of the text.

Results and Discussion

Text Content Analysis

The theme of Mernissi's book is the figure of Scheherazade from *One Thousand and One Nights*, known to many as the woman who stops a cruel king from killing him by enticing him with a never-ending chain of stories.

She saves not only herself but also an entire kingdom by slowly changing the mind of the chief decision maker, the King. The British author A. S. Byatt is correct when she stresses that although the story "appears to be a story against women" at first, because of the enormous inequality between Scheherazade and her husband, the woman ends up completely taking over. 11 Ultimately, the King both renounces his macabre project of beheading his

¹⁵ Abdussamad, H. Zuchri, and M. Si SIK. *Metode penelitian kualitatif*. CV. Syakir Media Press, 2021.

¹⁶ Fairclough and Wodak. "Media and ideology in the Middle East: A critical discourse analysis." *Digest of Middle East Studies* 28.1 (2019): 23-47.

brides at dawn, and — through Scheherazade's subtle influence on his beliefs, motivations, and inner psyche — acknowledges that he was completely wrong in being angry with women

*In *The Thousand and One Nights*, Shahrayar officially admits that a man should use words instead of violence to settle his disputes. Scheherazade commands words, not armies, to transform her situation, and this adds yet another dimension to the tales as a modern civilizing myth. They are a symbol of the triumph of reason over violence.*

The text here presents a continuing analysis of the position of women in the contemporary Islamic world. Mernissi made significant contributions to the theorizing of gender roles and sexual identity in the Islamic world. Fatima Mernissi's book about a woman who has the ability to dominate and influence a caliph among hundreds or even thousands of women in a harem, shows that women's intelligence and intelligence play a more important role than just physical beauty. Youth and physical beauty do not always open opportunities for women to perform successfully.

One Thousand and One Nights begins as a tragedy of betrayal and revenge, and ends as a fairy tale, thanks to Scheherazade's intellectual capacity to read her husband's mind. Changing the mind of a criminal intent on killing him by telling him stories is a great accomplishment. In order to succeed, Scheherazade must master three skill strategies: control over large amounts of information, the ability to clearly understand the thoughts of criminals, and the determination to act in cold blood. The first skill is intellectual, requiring a lot of knowledge. The second talent is psychological: the ability to change a criminal's mind using only words. Using dialogue to disarm a killer is a bold strategy, and to be successful, the victim must have a good understanding of the villain's possible moves and know how to integrate them into ongoing events, such as in a game of chess. How to keep talking at night without making a fatal psychological miscalculation? Just like a military strategist, who used her knowledge to foresee future events, Scheherazade had to guess, and guess accurately, because the slightest mistake would be fatal. Scheherazade's last talent is controlling her fear. Scheherazade only survives because she is a super intelligent strategist.

In Mernissi's idea, women who only rely on their physical appearance will become the prey of men. This expression is related to the historical tracing he has observed on the women confined in the harem. So a strategy and women's intelligence are needed to realize their struggle, by building a new image. Mernissi's idea is in line with the idea of Naomi Wolf who wants women to no longer be seen only from physical beauty, but wants women's intelligence to also be taken into account.

Mernissi is interested in how Scheherazade is contrasted in Eastern and Western literature, and the way Westerners misunderstand the idea of a harem. In Western literature, film, and art, harems are depicted as places where women are dominated, and where men are able to achieve their fantasies because women are taught to obey them. Mernissi, on the other hand, argues that Scheherazade is an alluring figure in Eastern literature precisely because she was intelligent and resisted sultan domination. Instead of being a dominant woman, she is hailed as a

strong woman who uses her intelligence to rule over politically and economically stronger men.

...in much of Western imagination, Matisse and others like him were in control of both time and female beauty. In the Orient, men use space to dominate women; Imam Khomeini, for example, ordered women to veil when stepping into public space. But in the Occident, men dominate women by unveiling what beauty ought to be. And if you don't look like the picture they unveil, you are doomed

Here Mernissi explores how harem fantasies were transformed into aesthetic representations by renowned Western artist, Matisse. By reading what the harem actually represents in Muslim culture and what it represents in the Western imagination, contemplation of the complex fantasies and desires that haunt the Western soul. In Mernissi's view, Western women are associated with the ideal of beauty, namely women in the image of beauty in images whose main purpose is to please the eyes and senses of men. Differences about what is happening in the Muslim world, as both a legal system and a culture, are imbued with the idea that the feminine is an uncontrollable force. This debate is relentlessly focused on women because women represent foreigners within Umma, the Muslim community. It is not surprising that the first decision of Imam Khomeini, who paradoxically declared Iran as an Islamic republic in 1979, ways to ask women to wear the headscarf.

Furthermore, she also observes how the entry of women fills academic spaces instead of leading due to the subordination of women who choose to take the 'rudder' by expressing thoughts by writing and writing, they are the modern version of Scheherazade.

The basis of misogyny in Islam is actually quite weak, resting only on the distribution of space. If women invade public space, male supremacy is seriously jeopardized. And in actuality, modern Muslim men have already lost their power base, as their monopoly over public space has been eroded with the massive entrance of women into scientific fields and the professions.

In texts filled with patriarchal ideology, men are always shown as powerful, intelligent, independent, rational, and decision-making figures. In contrast, women appear marginalized, unintelligent, emotional, and dependent, highlight physical beauty more than brain intelligence, and appear more often as sex objects. Texts like this are rejected and criticized by Muslim feminists who want a different discourse on women, namely women who are imaged as having the courage to resist male domination and who build new images about them¹⁷.

Mernissi, who focuses a lot of her research on the history of women and the reasons for the revelation of verses and the emergence of hadiths, the results of her research strengthen her belief that it is patriarchal culture that marginalizes

¹⁷ Uswatina, Ely Dian, et al. *Power Perempuan dalam Mencegah Kekerasan Seksual*. Penerbit NEM, 2021.

women. According to Mernissi, apart from exposing women's oppression and exploitation, feminism needs to reconstruct women's roles and positions, then socialize them in various cultural representations. He even suggested that women control the media to build a new image of their people. A new image of women who have the same strength, ability and potential as men.

Discourse Practice Analysis

Text production

Based on her background, Mernissi was born in 1940, in Fez, Morocco. She came from an upper-class family, leaving behind the "harem," or the practice of living in extended family households that maintained strict gender segregation by limiting the post-pubescent female member's access to the outside world.

Fatima Mernissi learned from her grandmother that the opportunity to cross partition is a sacred privilege. on a journey both physical and mental, who spent most of his life traveling determined to "use his wings" and leave behind a legacy of gendered helplessness. Mernissi with her work, *Scheherazade Goes West*, expresses the author's unique experience as a free and independent Moroccan woman who is faced with the strangeness and unexpected distractions of Western culture. Her often surprising discoveries about conditions and attitudes toward women around the world make for compelling, and deeply narrative.

Eastern and Western harems of sexuality share a need for power and control, but they differ radically: in one culture gender is associated with submission and a lack of intellectual exchange, while in another "the most effective weapon against male domination is words." and contests of self-determination. This began the author's research into the psychological differences between people in the East and West.

Mernissi is as intelligent as Scheherazade—and her understanding of sexual politics, both East and West, Lives an independent life, freely traversing continents. The sociologist says Western culture has its own ways of silencing women.

The first edition of this book was published in English in the Washington Square Press publisher in 2001 and has been translated into various languages including Arabic, Catalan, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish, Urdu.

Text consumption

In his writings on life in the harem, gender, and public and private spaces. *The Western Women's Harem*, is an essay from his book, *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems* which addresses the repression and pressure that women face in various societies based solely on their physical appearance. Mernissi crossed boundaries to understand, to challenge herself and her traditions, to embrace a larger world. The harem he portrayed was a physical prison, but the female characters he portrayed within the prison were strong and inspiring. Mernissi becomes a wanderer, the advice Yasmina gives her, in telling her a story from Scheherazade from *One Thousand and One Nights*.

Comparatively, Mernissi talks about Western feminism and its historical background. The West has its own version of the harem, the essence of which is the ontological inferiority of women, sexual inequality is based on the belief in the

biological inferiority of women. In Islam there is no such belief in the inferiority of women. Instead, the entire system is based on the assumption that women are powerful and dangerous creatures.

Sociocultural Practice Analysis

Situational level

Misconceptions about the Harem in common people's perception that harm as a place of male sexual fantasy and male domination. Mernissi examines elements of Eastern and Western culture, art, and history to explore the role of harems, arguing that harems have always been places of women's resistance to domination through intelligence, narrative, and the power of words. And, as Mernissi puts it in his book, "*Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems*, The harem thrives in the Western world. Westerners may see oppression in the burqa, but as Mernissi sees it, Western women face a different form of tyranny.

She sees parallels in the global struggle between the sexes: Muslim men try to control women by dictating their access to public space; Western men seek to control women by dictating their access to femininity. In the West, he says, beautiful women are reserved, let alone thin, iconic images trapped in a painting or a beer commercial.

What he saw disturbed him: passive women, trapped in their surroundings. None of the resistance, the intellectual debate, the turmoil between the sexes that has been part of Arab culture since the shrewd Scheherazade thwarted her husband's murder by distracting him with captivating stories for 1,001 nights (2001). What she read disturbed her even more, especially the musings of Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher who said that a woman's beauty was to be found in her silence. Then Edgar Allan Poe, who killed Scheherazade's character in his version of the story "*The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade*".

Mernissi refused to be silent. He is constitutionally incapable of doing so. Instead, he talked and talked and talked. A well-known feminist and professor of sociology at the Mohammed V University in Rabat, she has spent much of her career trying to cross boundaries, jumping from culture to culture, seeking solidarity in finding common ground. Like Scheherazade trying to disarm through storytelling.

Institutional

With all eyes on the Islamic diaspora, Mernissi finds herself on a mission to rehabilitate the image of the Muslim world, and in particular, the image of Muslim women. She wants Westerners to understand that Muslim women are diverse, with different religious roles in their lives. And religious extremists can be found everywhere. Muslims are not stuck in the Stone Age, they are also concerned with modernity and reform.

One of the most striking points made by Professor Mernissi is that the Koran clearly states that women are equal to men and that when Muslim men restrain women, it is because of their deep-rooted fear of such basic equality. Western men began to subscribe to Kant's opinion, which stated that women

should not study mathematics, history or geography because this knowledge would damage their beauty.

Through discussions of cultural, psychological, etymological, and historical factors, Mernissi makes an all-encompassing argument for the power of Islamic women, ignoring the Western notion that Islamic women are inherently more oppressed than their Western counterparts. Mernissi goes so far as to say that the need to be smaller in Western culture is no different than wearing the veil in Eastern cultures, making it clear that there is work to be done in both parts of the world.

Sociocultural

To understand the dynamics in the Muslim world today, that nothing goes against the principle of equality, which is considered a divine rule. What is debatable is whether Sharia, the law inspired by the Qur'an, can or cannot be changed. The debate is therefore reduced to "who" makes the laws.

Mernissi in his writings also mentioned that in an Islamic society, politicians can manipulate almost anything. But so far, no fundamentalist leader has been able to convince his supporters to abandon Islam's core values, the principle of equality between human beings, regardless of gender, race or creed. Women in most Islamic countries can participate in the decision-making bodies of their respective countries, but only indirectly. One can easily predict that women will spark even more violent debates in the coming decades, as globalization forces Muslim countries and their citizens to redefine themselves and create new cultural identities, rooted more in economics than religion. The fear of the feminine represents a threat from within; debates about globalization, external threats; and both discussions will certainly focus on women.

Conclusion

Fatima Mernissi focuses more on the history of women and the reasons for the revelation of verses and the emergence of hadiths, the results of which strengthen her belief that it is patriarchal culture that marginalizes women. According to Mernissi, apart from exposing women's oppression and exploitation, feminism needs to reconstruct women's roles and positions, then socialize them in various cultural representations. He even suggested that women control the media to build a new image of their people. A new image of women who have the same strength, ability and potential as men. Analyzing the role of the state in determining the role, activities and scope of women, and exploring the harmful consequences of state-supported inequality - not only for women but also for the creative and spiritual life of a culture, also points to the existence of an Islam that is more open to its historical origins, from which later constructs emerge as part of an embedded inheritance. Mernissi emphasized the importance of women's emancipation for the development of the world, especially the Arab and Muslim world.

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