

REDEFINITION OF POWER BY RAHIMA IN NADIA HASHIMI: “THE PEARL THAT BROKE ITS SHELL”

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Abstract. Women as victims of sexist oppression is a global issue that needs attention from women around the world. This study covers three issues that relate to women as victims of sexist oppression. Those three issues are sexist oppression experienced by Rahima, solidarity gained by Rahima, and power exercised by Rahima in the novel entitled *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* by Nadia Hashimi. Through qualitative methods, the researcher analyzes and describes characters' utterances and narrations from the narrator that indicate the existence of sexist oppression, women's solidarity, and women's power. The results showed that Rahima was successful in exercising her power to end the sexist oppression she experienced.

Keywords: sexist oppression, women's solidarity, women's power

Abstrak. Perempuan sebagai korban penindasan seksis merupakan isu global yang perlu mendapat perhatian dari perempuan di seluruh dunia. Kajian ini mencakup tiga isu yang berhubungan dengan perempuan sebagai korban penindasan seksis. Ketiga isu tersebut adalah penindasan seksis yang dialami Rahima, solidaritas yang diperoleh Rahima, dan kekuasaan yang dijalankan oleh Rahima dalam novel berjudul *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* karya Nadia Hashimi. Melalui metode kualitatif, peneliti menganalisis dan mendeskripsikan ucapan karakter dan narasi dari narator yang menunjukkan adanya penindasan seksis, solidaritas perempuan, dan kekuatan perempuan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Rahima berhasil menggunakan kekuatannya untuk mengakhiri penindasan seksis yang dialaminya.

Kata Kunci: penindasan seksis, solidaritas wanita, kekuatan wanita

INTRODUCTION

The issue of gender will never be separated from the issue of violence and discrimination against women. Until now, violence against women is a big problem that is still common throughout the world. According to the United Nations Women report, the violence against women tends to increase during the pandemic. The National Commission for Women stated that the root of the problem of violence experienced by women is the unequal relationship between men and women, where women have a position below men. This inequality occurs because the patriarchal system is still developing in society. Patriarchy is described as a system of social structures and

practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women (Walby 1990: 20). The patriarchal system that is still attached makes men have control and power over other family members.

Apart from the patriarchal system, the oppression experienced by women is also inseparable from the element of sexism. Sexism is prejudice or discrimination based on sex or gender and is especially perpetrated against women and girls. According to bell hooks (1984: 47) "between women and men, sexism is most often expressed in the form of male domination which leads to discrimination, exploitation, or oppression". This opinion is reinforced by Natasha Walter about sexism in her book which entitled *Living Dolls: The Return Of Sexism*. Natasha defines sexism as "discrimination perpetrated against others" based on their gender, mostly women" (Walter, 2013: 4). Sexism contains assumptions and actions that men use to dominate women. This understanding was born from a society that was patriarchal. The existence of the concept of sexism itself seems to maintain male dominance (patriarchy) where men are considered superior to women. This difference will divide the tasks between men and women, where women are often positioned to take care of household chores while men work outside the home. Women are often seen as feeling creatures who always use their feelings rather than logic. This is the reason why women are considered unfit to serve as leaders. In contrast, men are considered more intelligent and competent so that they often become leaders and dominate in many fields. "Therefore, male domination over women is not only happened in domestic field but also in public field or in general society" (Kulsum, 2017: 4). Men seem to have greater power because they are given the privilege of being able to regulate, control, and dominate others.

The concept of power which is identical to the act of controlling, regulating, and dominating often creates misunderstandings in society. Where people think that women who demand equal rights and justice are often accused of wanting to dominate or outperform men. Women who join the feminist movement are considered to make men their enemies. Meanwhile, the biggest enemy of the feminist movement is the mindset and actions that lead to oppression. In line with this situation, bell hooks (1984) created a new definition of power. Power in the feminist movement is defined as the ability to live a creative and assertive life. Women can explore their potency and have the opportunity to determine their own lives without being controlled by other parties. This needs to be straightened out so that society understands the main goals of the feminist movement. Actually, the main goal of the feminist movement is to stop all forms of oppression. The feminist movement does not see men as enemies or opponents at all. Instead, women want to work together to create power as a form of resistance to sexist oppression.

hooks (2002) also believes that feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression. She believes that is definition gives a broad understanding about feminism as it does not imply that men are the enemy of women but all the sexist thinking and action is the problem. Feminism presents the concept of women's solidarity

as a strategy to end oppression. According to bell hooks (1984), women should start thinking about living and working in solidarity. The bond of solidarity between women will increase a positive self- concept so that violence and oppression against women can be overcome easily. Women's solidarity can be built by sharing potency, empathy, and passion. It is also necessary to carry out a special strategy that can eliminate all social differences in women. Women must be seen as equals by eliminating differences in sexism, racism, and classicism that separate women from one another.

The oppression of women does not only occur in real life. This phenomenon is also often found in literary works such as a novel. One of the novels that describe the oppression of women is a novel entitled "The Pearl That Broke Its Shell" by Nadia Hashimi. It is a novel about a young girl named Rahima who struggles against oppression. Rahima lives in Afghanistan where the oppression of women is still common due to the inherent patriarchal culture from generation to generation. "Nowadays the condition has improved considerably. Some of the women in the MiddleEast are standing up and trying to fight for their rights" (Indri Octarinanda, 2020: 57). Rahima struggles to free herself from oppression through the bonds of solidarity between herself and her aunt. Her efforts to free herself from oppression cannot be separated from the support of her aunt, Khala Shaima. Based on the description above, this study aims to redefine the concept of power. Where the power possessed by female characters is not used to dominate or control men but solely to end oppression. Here, Rahima will be the character who redefines the definition of power. Through the bonds of women's solidarity, Rahima was able to free herself from oppression.

Through the explanation that has been explained previously, There are some researches that use *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* by Nadia Hashimi as the data, one of them is discussing about toxic masculinity and patriarchy (Rahayu, et.al, 2022). the writer interested in examining three things; the sexist oppression experienced by Rahima, solidarity gained by Rahima and power exercised by Rahima in *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* by Nadia Hashimi.

METHOD

This study used the qualitative research method because the aim of this study is to find out certain phenomena about sexist oppression, women's solidarity, and power. Qualitative research itself is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell (2014: 4). In this study, the writer uses technique of analysing data which is proposed by Robert K. Yin in analysing the data of this study. According to Yin (2011, 178-179) in qualitative study there are five phases of data analysis, namely compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding. The data of this study are character's utterances and narrations from the narrator that indicate the existence of sexist oppression, women's solidarity, and power. *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* by Nadia Hashimi is the source of data in this study. The writer also uses secondary data such as articles, books, thesis, and news from the internet. The writer use the theory from bell

hooks 1984 to support the statement in this study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Sexist oppression experienced by Rahima in *The Pearls That Broke Its Shell*

In the pearl that broke its shell Rahima is described as a girl who lives in inequality. The inequality she experience stems from the patriarchal system that is still inherent in her family. The patriarchal system gives privileges to men to hold the highest power. In the novel, it is narrated that Rahima's father and husband are parties who always dominate other family members. They have the authority to determine what Rahima can and cannot do. This domineering act leads Rahima to sexist oppression. Here is the sexist oppression experienced by Rahima.

a. No Safety Guarantee for Outside

At the beginning of the story, Rahima is seen walking home from school in a hurry. She walked briskly to avoid the boys who often wandered around the bakery. The boys often annoy the girls who pass by, as explained in the quote below:

“They hung around waiting for us to come out of our classrooms. Once off school grounds, a boy might dart between cars and pedestrians to tail the girl who’d caught his eye. Following her helped him stake his claim. This is my girl, it told the others, and there’s only room for one shadow here.” (Hashimi, 2014),

From this quote, it can be seen that the boys often seduce girls by following the shadow of the girl they like. This made the girls including Rahima feel scared and uncomfortable. However, society thinks it is the girls who are trying to attract the attention of the boys. This act is a form of sexism, where Rahima whose position as a victim becomes the party blamed by the community. This is reinforced by the quote below:

“The boys meant it to be flattering. But it frightened the girl since people would have loved to assume that she’d sought out the attention.” (Hashimi, 2014)

The above quote proves that girls do not get protection from society. On the other hand, society often corners girls for mistakes they did not commit. Rahima's status as a woman is the root of the sexist oppression she experiences. This is in line with bell hooks 1984, the term sexism refers more to the oppression experienced by women.

B. Forced To Marry

When Rahima was 13 years old, she was forced to marry a warlord named Abdul Khaliq. It is said that Abdul Khaliq was a warlord who had the greatest influence in Kabul. His power and wealth made everyone respect him. Meanwhile, Rahima is described as a girl who comes from a family with a low economic level. Her father had to work alone to support his wife and five daughters. Their economic condition is getting worse because Rahima's father is a drug addict, he often spends a lot of money just to fulfill his addiction to drugs. The problems experienced by Arif's family made Abdul Khaliq take the initiative to help him. Abdul Khaliq came to Arif's house and tried to offer help. This can be seen from the dialogue below:

“And you came to me recently talking concerns. That you have of your young women at home and not enough money with which to provide for them. I have been thinking about your situation and am here to offer a solution.” (Hashimi, 1984)

From the dialogue, it can be seen that Arif feels unable to support his children. This

condition was used by Abdul Khaliq to take advantage by marrying one of his children. It is explained from the dialogue below:

“We must often think of what is in everyone’s best interests. In this case, you have a young woman whom my son would like to honor as his wife. Our family is large and well respected, as you know. Your daughter would do well to join our family and a union between us would be cause for celebration. Of course, as a result, you would be better able to provide for your family as well.” (Hashimi, 2014)

From the quote above, Abdul Khaliq's father explained that his son wanted to marry one of Arif's daughters. He will give some property to Arif if he is willing to marry Rahima to Abdul Khaliq. Abdul Khaliq's power and wealth made Arif unable to refuse the offer. From the proposal, Arif tried to take as much profit as possible. This can be seen from the quote below:

“Well, my family traditionally asks for a large bride price for our daughters and I am embarrassed to bring up matters of money with a man such as yourself, but it is something that I cannot brush under the carpet. This goes back generations and to break from what our ancestors...” (Hashimi, 2014)

The quote above shows that Arif is trying to take advantage of his daughter's marriage. He was willing to sacrifice his daughter's happiness with wealth. Arif feels he has the right to manage his daughter's life. This is reinforced by the dialogue below:

“It’s none of your business what I’m going to do! They’re my daughters and I’ll do what’s right for them. It’s not as if you’re capable of doing anything.” (Hashimi, 2014)

From the data presented above, it is clear that Rahima is experiencing sexist oppression. She is forced to marry an old man she does not love. As a daughter, Rahima has no right to make her own decisions. She is required to obey all of her father's orders even though it violates her rights as a woman. As Bell Hooks said, lower-class women often experience sexist oppression because they are considered weak. The voices of lower-class women are often not heard and are ignored. It is clear here that one of the causes of the sexist oppression of women is social class.

3. Treated As A Sexual Object

After marrying Abdul Khaliq, Rahima has a new status, namely a wife. As a wife, Rahima has a responsibility to fulfill her husband's needs, one of which is sexual needs. One night Abdul Khaliq ordered his third wife, Shahnaz, to take Rahima to her room. Shahnaz said:

“Your husband has asked for his new bride. You’d be making a big mistake to keep him waiting. That’s my best advice to you.” (Hashimi, 2014)

Shahnaz ordered Rahima to leave immediately, so that Abdul Khaliq would not be angry. Hearing Shahnaz's words made Rahima even more scared. As seen in the quote below:

“I panicked. I didn’t want to be alone here. I wanted to go back to my dark room and my small mattress. I felt out of place and I hated wearing a dress. It felt unnatural, awkward.” (Hashimi, 2014)

From the quote above, it is clear that Rahima feels uncomfortable in that situation. Rahima is forced to wear clothes she doesn't want to wear. This was done to satisfy her husband. As a husband, Abdul Khaliq feels he has the authority to demand that his wishes be fulfilled. As can be seen from the quote below:

“I am your husband and this is your home. When I ask for something, you make it happen. In return, you will be given shelter and have the privilege of being wife to Abdul Khaliq.” (Hashimi, 2014)

The quote shows the attitude of Abdul Khaliq trying to control Rahima. Rahima is required to be an obedient wife. In return Rahima was able to get a place to live and the privileges of being the wife of Abdul Khaliq. For Rahima this is not an advantage because from the start she did not love Abdul Khaliq and did not want this marriage. In addition, Abdul Khaliq also treated Rahima badly, as explained in the quote below:

“When my pants came down, I began to cry, which didn’t faze him in the least. I was humiliated. I stood before him, weak and vulnerable, my arms doing their best to cover as much as they could.” (Hashimi, 2014)

From the quote above it can be seen that Abdul Khaliq did not respect Rahima. He continued to take off Rahima's clothes even though Rahima was crying. Abdul Khaliq did not care about his wife's feelings and pride. He did this to satisfy his personal desires. Here it is very clear that Rahima is a victim of sexist oppression, which is, being treated as a sexual object. This is in line with the opinion of bell hooks (1984) who argues that sexism teaches women to be sex objects for men. A wife has an obligation to meet the sexual needs of her husband even though she is treated as a sexual tool or object. A husband who should be a protector for his wife actually becomes the biggest fear for his wife. Men need to remember that women are creatures that have souls and feelings. Women are not things they can use as they please.

B. Solidarity Gained By Rahima in *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*

In the novel "The Pearl That Broke Its Shell" it is narrated that Rahima is a girl who does not get enough attention from her parents. This made her aunt, Shaima, take the initiative to always help and love Rahima. Shaima is the only person who always makes sure that Rahima's needs are properly met. This is evidenced by the narration below:

“Khala Shaima supervised everything—making sure we were doing satisfactorily in school, that we had proper clothing for the winter, and that lice hadn’t nested in our hair. She was a safety net for anything our parents might not have been able to do for us.” (Hashimi, 2014)

The quote above shows Shaima's concern for Rahima. Shaima treats and loves Rahima very well, more than Rahima's biological parents. The empathy that Shaima gives to Rahima creates a bond between them. This bond makes Rahima stronger to survive in difficult times.

Shaima's support continued even after Rahima became Abdul Khaliq's wife. Shaima often visits Rahima to talk and exchange ideas. One day Rahima told Shaima that Abdul Khaliq's first wife, Badria, had been elected to the parliament. Badria was ordered by Abdul Khaliq to go to Kabul and carry out her duties. Hearing this, Khala Shaima advised Rahima to go to Kabul with Badria. According to Shaima, Rahima deserves to be a member of parliament because she can read and write, unlike Badria who is illiterate. At first Rahima was hesitant about the suggestion until she heard Shaima's advice.

“But in Kabul you’ll see different things. It’s an education of sorts. See how people live there, see the buildings and see what the parliament is doing. It’s an opportunity for you.” (Hashimi, 2014)

The dialogue above shows that Shaima is trying to motivate Rahima by giving a picture of the life that Rahima will see in Kabul. Shaima doesn't want Rahima to waste

an opportunity that will change Rahima's life in the future. Hearing stories from her aunt about Kabul made Rahima excited and confident to be able to go to Kabul with Badria.

According to bell hooks (1984) women should start thinking about living and working in solidarity. The data described above shows the bond of solidarity between Rahima and her aunt. Shaima is a character who plays an important role in growing Rahima's spirit and self-confidence. The empathy, motivation, and support that Shaima gives form a bond of solidarity that is able to grow strength in Rahima. This is in accordance with the opinion of bell hooks (1984) that the bonds that occur between women to be based on shared strengths and resources. The solidarity that was successfully built resulted in a positive self-concept that made Rahima able to face difficulties in her life. Then Rahima uses the power she has to free herself from sexist oppression.

C. Power Exercised By Rahima In *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*

Abdul Khaliq granted Badria's request to make Rahima her assistant in Kabul. While in Kabul, Rahima used her free time to learn many things. She often visits the training center with the other members.

“We alternated every day. One day she would teach basic English, and the following day we were back on the computer, learning to navigate the Internet or type notes. I thrilled at being a student again and longed for a real classroom, one full of boys my age whom I could learn with, joke with and play soccer with.” (Hashimi, 2014)

The quote above shows that Rahima learned many things while in Kabul. She got new knowledge. Here Rahima uses the opportunities and strengths she has to improve herself. This is in line with Bell Hooks (1984) that power is defined as the ability to live a creative life, where a woman can explore the potency that exists within herself.

In addition to gaining a lot of new knowledge, Rahima also made many new friends. This makes Rahima more often interact with other people. She heard many stories about women who were victims of sexist oppression like herself. The women managed to stop the sexism by escaping to the women's shelter. These stories inspire Rahima to do the same.

“Ms. Franklin and I had gone directly from the teahouse to a women's shelter she had located. It wasn't the shelter that we'd heard about. It was another one, one much further from the parliament building and on the western outskirts of the capital.” (Hashimi, 2014)

The quote above shows that Rahima dared to make big decisions in her life. She secretly went to a shelter very far from Kabul. This shows that Rahima has successfully used her power to stop sexist oppression. Bell hooks says that power is the ability to live an assertive life, it means women have the opportunity to determine their own lives without being controlled by other parties. Here Rahima has exercised her power by making her own life choices without being controlled by others. In addition, Rahima also did not use her power to dominated Abdul Khaliq but she used her power to free herself from sexist oppression.

CONCLUSION

The analysis above shows that Rahima experienced some sexist oppression such as no safety guarantee for outside, being forced to marry, and being treated as a sexual

object. The sexist oppression she experienced created a bond of solidarity between herself and her aunt, Khala Shaima. The solidarity that Rahima received was in the form of empathy, motivation, and support. The support from Shaima succeeded in growing strength in Rahima. In the end Rahima uses her power to escape to the women's shelter and she is free from sexist oppression

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