
WOMEN'S LIBERTY IN RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE (NAWĀL AL-SA'DĀWĪ'S FANTASY IN ZĪNAH)

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to reveal Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī's fantasy and to find out why she builds a fantasy of women's autonomy in religious discourse as depicted in her latest novel, *Zīnah*. This study focuses on the concept of fantasy in Žižek's theory of subjectivity, which sees fantasy as a screen covering the lacks and inconsistencies of the shackling Symbolic. Fantasy is also an estuary of meaning that confirms the existence of a divided and dialectical subject that continues to move in search of self-fulfillment. The research method is hermeneutic, namely by interpreting the actions and fantasies of al-Sa'dāwī as a subject. The analysis shows that al-Sa'dāwī's fantasy is her realization of a transcendental humanist religious discourse which gives women full autonomy, internally and externally. *Zīnah*, the main character in the novel, is a symbol of this autonomy. Internally, *Zīnah* has been set free from the patriarchal shackles of religious discourses. Externally, *Zīnah* is able to change the structure and create a new humanist, transcendental, and progressive structure in religious discourse to liberate human beings. *Zīnah* is al-Sa'dāwī's fantasy to cover up the lacks of The Symbolic, the estuary of meaning, and confirmation of her existence as a divided and dialectical subject.

Keywords: *liberty, woman, religion, Zīnah, Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī, fantasy*

ABSTRAK

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengungkapkan fantasi Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī dan mengapa Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī membangun fantasi otonomi perempuan dalam wacana agama yang tergambar dalam novel terakhirnya, *Zīnah*. Penelitian ini memfokuskan pada Fantasi yang ada dalam teori subjektivitas Žižek. Fantasi adalah layar yang menutupi kekurangan dan inkonsistensi dalam the symbolic yang membelenggu. Fantasi juga muara makna yang mengukuhkan eksistensi subjek yang terbelah dan berdialektik yang terus bergerak untuk mencari pemenuhan diri. Metode penelitian adalah hermeneutik dengan cara menafsirkan tindakan dan fantasi Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī sebagai subjek. Hasil analisisnya, fantasi Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī adalah terwujudnya wacana agama humanis transendental yang memberikan otonomi penuh perempuan, internal dan eksternal. Tokoh *Zīnah* adalah simbolisasi otonomi tersebut. Secara internal, *Zīnah* telah terbebas dari belenggu patriarki wacana agama. Secara eksternal, *Zīnah* mampu mengubah struktur dan membuat struktur baru yang humanis, transendental, dan progresif dalam wacana agama untuk membebaskan manusia. *Zīnah* adalah fantasi Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī untuk menutupi kekurangan the symbolic, muara makna, dan pengukuhan eksistensinya sebagai subjek yang terbelah dan berdialektika.

Keywords: *kemerdekaan, perempuan, agama, Zīnah, Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī, fantasi*

INTRODUCTION

The hegemony of masculine Islamic discourse continues to roll. There are various studies on discrimination against Muslim women in different countries, including studies on the oppressive orthodoxy of Islamic law (Issaka-Toure, 2016; Mattingly, 2019; Salaymeh, 2019), the patriarchal hegemony of Arabic and Islamic-Iranian works of literature (Dadīsy, 2017; El-Miniawi, 2021), the supremacy masculinity in modern Islamic politic (Muhibbu-Din, 2019), and discrimination against diasporic-Muslim women in Canada (Marcotte, 2010; Sulaiman et al., 2018).

Seeking for women's liberation, criticisms of the masculinity of religious discourse has finally been arising. These include criticisms of the masculinity of religious discourse in Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Sharma, 2006). Such as liberation from the masculinity of Moroccan Islamic theology (Boumlik & Gray, 2018), the movement and struggle for Islamic feminism (Hesová, 2019), the feminism movement of Malaysian muslims (Mir-Hosseini, 2019), gender struggle in Indonesian novels from patriarchal Quranic interpretations (Muzakka & Suyanto, 2020), the struggle of female Iranian theologians of the 19th and 20th centuries (Rahbari, 2020), and the gender-Islamic criticism of Middle Eastern literature (Hearty, 2015).

In her effort to liberate women, Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī came up with a different, unique strategy. In their effort to liberate women, most Muslim feminists would describe women as a group that still struggles toward gender equality. However, al-Sa'dāwī, through her fantasy describes the conditions of fully sovereign women humanized human being, fully present, and independent in her actions and decisions with high autonomy.

It is important to study Al-Sa'dāwī's thoughts, that gave birth to this fantasy of freedom as it voices the optimism and high confidence of a subject. Al-Sa'dāwī's fantasy can not be separated from her convictions that women's autonomy is a historical and theological fact. Historically, women's autonomy has existed in the matriarchal structure since the beginning of human history which later formed a matriarchal culture (before patriarchy and class systems emerged). Theologically, the substance of all

religions always carries the main mission of upholding human autonomy, both men and women. Therefore, the idea of gender-biased verses in scriptures is a contextual idea related to a number of historical-particular factors, not a universal idea in religions (Al-Sa'dāwī, 1974, 1980; Al-Sa'dāwī & Newson-Horst, 2008; Al-Sa'dāwī & Rauf Izzat, 2000). The autonomy of humanized women was also practiced during the time of Prophet Muhammad. (Al-Sa'dāwī, 2003: 53-73; Latifi, 2019).

Among Al-Sa'dāwī's works which presents the fantasy of women's autonomy is *Zīnah* (official English title *Zeina*, translation by Amira Nowaira, Saqi Books, 2011). Written in 2009, *Zīnah* is Al-Sa'dāwī's final novel. It tells the story of the radical upheaval and resistance of female characters against the masculinity of religious discourse. The novel tells two major lines about the lives of its two main female characters, mother and child -Badūr and Zīnah-, which are filled with upheaval, resistance and struggle. Badūr is a literary criticism professor of high standing and popularity. Still, she suffers from being positioned as an object of domestic violence due to a patriarchal interpretation of religion. Zīnah, on the other hand, gets separated from her mother (Badur) since infancy due to her illegitimate status as a child born out of wedlock. However, Zīnah grows to become a talented and extraordinary girl capable of bringing changes to her country.

The purpose of this research is to reveal the thoughts of Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī in relation to her fantasy in creating a fully autonomous women in religious discourse. This fantasy is important to study because it describes her freedom as a subject that is capable of breaking through the patriarchal order of religious discourse that has eliminated women's autonomy for thousands of years. The research's twofold question is: How did Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī's fantasy create autonomous women in religious discourse and why did she create this fantasy? This study employs the theory of fantasy in subjectivity using hermeneutics as a qualitative research method.

According to Žižek, the subject exists and is capable of existence. The three phases of the subject's subjectivity are The Real, The Imaginary, and The Symbolic. The subject continues to move in search of self-fulfillment by destroying The Symbolic lacks which confines him. To cover up The Symbolic inadequacy and tyranny, the subject then builds

fantasies as well as becomes an estuary of meaning and interpretation (Žižek, 2008b).

Fantasy is an important concept in Žižek's theory, for it becomes a screen covering the Symbolic lacks worsened by the Big Other to the level of tyranny. According to Žižek, among the veils of fantasies there is a "transcendent scheme" which does not notice the drive in hallucinations similar to Kant's schematics of transcendence: a fantasy is our desire and it teaches us how to desire. In Descartes's philosophy, the role of fantasy is as a mediator between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, between formal symbolic structures and the positivity of objects we find in reality. Fantasy provides a scheme that fills the empty spaces opened by the formal symbolic structures (Žižek, 2008a: 7). Lacan mentions "traversing the fantasy"; the subject suspends the fantasy frame of unwritten laws that make the subject free to choose (Žižek, 2008a: 39).

In the relationship between fantasy, drive, and desire, drive emerges when it receives a spider web of laws or prohibitions that must resist *jouissance*, i.e. physical or intellectual pleasure. Fantasy is the narrative of this primordial loss since it enters this process of denial and since the emergence of the symbolic laws. Fantasy very much limits and separates the drive from desire, fantasy provides a rationality for the inherent *deadlock* of the drive (Žižek, 2008a: 43).

Žižek mentions the truth of desire, and the knowledge of fantasy. The drive or desire opposition is similar to that of truth/knowledge. In psychoanalysis, the knowledge of drive that cannot be subjectified assumes the subject's "fundamental fantasy", a special formula that regulates his access to *jouissance* (Žižek, 2008a: 53).

In the context of this research, the fantasy developed by Al-Sa'dāwī as a subject is a fantasy that liberates women and gives them autonomy in religious discourse. In Žižek's perspective, the masculinity of religious discourse that confines women is the Symbolic, and the space of liberation for women whom the subject longs for is the Real. As a subject, Al-Sa'dāwī continues to seek fulfillment in her divided-self by fighting against the Symbolic.

The hermeneutics is recognized as one of the various methods of analysis that can provide flexibility to literary critics or researchers in interpreting the text they observe, both ethically (from outside) and emically (from within and idiographically)

(Endraswara, 2013: 179–180). The hermeneutic style chosen here is the emic one, which is the presentation of interpretation based on data.

Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī is a controversial novelist who was born in Kafr Thahla -Egypt- in 1931. Her works of fiction and of nonfiction are mainly concerned on social, political, and historical themes, as well as the theme of women's liberation themes (Al-Tamīmī, 2005). Her writings are courageous, they break down the sacred boundaries and were often labeled as propagandist, apostate, and infidel. Due to the sharpness of her words, she lost her job as the director-general of the Egyptian ministry of health's education department. Her works were censored, she became a fugitive and went into exile before being put in jail. Al-Sa'dāwī is a guest professor at various universities in Europe and America and has received many international awards in literature and other fields (Royer, 2001).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Fantasy of Transcendental-Humanist Religious Discourse and the Autonomy of Women's Subjectivity

The novel *Zīnah* tells the story of resistance against patriarchy, included in which is the masculinity of religious discourse. The two main characters in the novel, Badūr, and Zīnah, symbolize the struggle to uphold women's autonomy. Their stories represent a historical, unbroken, and uniting chain. Badūr is a mother who has dreams and ideals of liberty for herself, her daughter, and all women as well as humankind. On the other hand, Zīnah is a manifestation of her mother's dream: a representation of an autonomous female figure in religious discourse. With strength, courage, and hard work, Badūr manages to go through difficult life struggles. Likewise, Zīnah, with her integrity as a humanized subject like a man who is endowed with reason, thoughts, feelings, motivation, desire, will, and freedom, possesses autonomy and self-sovereignty.

In Žižek's theory of subjectivity, before the subject builds his fantasies he will fight back and deconstruct the patriarchal religious discourse. For Žižek, literary works are the author's radicalization of The Symbolic. This can be seen in the actions of the main characters. In *Zīnah*, Badūr put up a fight.

The female figures deconstruct the masculinity of religious discourse. The figures of Badūr, Sāfi,

and Badriyah fought back and deconstructed the patriarchy of religious discourse in their own ways. Badūr criticizes, rejects, and resists the shackles of patriarchal theology; that a woman was created from the rib of a man, that it is in woman's natural disposition to be sinners and filthy, and that God is male (Al-Sa'dāwī, 2010: 163–165, 184–185, 242). Sāfi deconstructs the shackles of religious laws by showing her courage to marry repeatedly, choose her husbands, and divorce her patriarchal husbands (Al-Sa'dāwī, 2010: 100–101). Badriyah is firm in fighting the shackles of the discourse of religious eschatology (heaven and hell) which is masculinely constructed (Al-Sa'dāwī, 2010: 177).

According to Žižek, in the inconsistencies of the Other that appear in the Symbolic, there are three levels. First, there is a lack in the Other, an inconsistency of symbolic rules as it is penetrated by the *jouissance*. Second, the fantasy formula presents a screen that hides inconsistencies. Third, the effect of signification as domination by fantasy. For Lacan, the function of fantasy is as the absolute signification. Fantasy bases our experience of the world as something consistent and meaningful (Žižek, 2008b: 137–138).

As a subject that performs subjectification, Al-Sa'dāwī builds a religion-based humanist-transcendental feminism as her fantasy. Ever since she was a child, she had fantasized about another world that does not differentiate between human beings based on their gender, religion, nationality, position, and wealth (Al-Sa'dāwī & Rauf Izzat, 2000: 12). For Al-Sa'dāwī, in the current era of science, the important role of religion lies in its spiritual nature to achieve happiness. Human happiness does not lie in the physical aspect alone, but as affirmed by psychologists, the true happiness and health of the human soul lies in the human ability to use his intellect to achieve honesty (*al-ṣidq*), justice (*al-'adālah*), freedom (*al-ḥurriyyah*), and love (*al-ḥubb*) for one another (Al-Sa'dāwī, 1974: 307–308). Therefore, in the essence of religious teachings, many religions affirm that God is love. Allah's love means that humans should honor human connections on the principles of truth, honesty, justice, freedom, and equality (Al-Sa'dāwī, 1974: 310).

The basic principles of universal religious values and ethics as believed by Al-Sa'dāwī are put in the novel *Zinah* as quoted below.

اللَّهُ يَرْمِزُ إِلَى الْعَدْلِ الْجَمَالِ وَالْحُبِّ وَالْحُرِّيَّةِ، لَا فَرْقَ بَيْنَ وُلْدٍ وَبِنْتٍ أَوْ مُسْلِمٍ وَقَبْطِيٍّ أَوْ غَنِيِّ وَفَقِيرٍ.

(Al-Sa'dāwī, 2010: 240)

Allah symbolizes justice, beauty, love and freedom. There is no difference between boys and girls, Muslims and Coptic Christians, the rich and the poor.

Al-Sa'dāwī adopts Erich Fromm's thought in his *Psychoanalysis and Religion* that religion can be distinguished into two kinds. First, humanistic religions (*al-adyān al-insāniyyah*), namely religions based on the love (*al-ḥubb*) between human beings and God and this "love" helps humans to use their reason and innate powers to bring happiness to one another and encourage the betterment of their community. Second, authoritarian religions (*al-adyān al-istibdādiyyah*), namely religions based on the fear (*al-khawf*) of God. It has the characteristic of being able to block reason manifesting of the four basic principles above. It puts forward the concept that humans are full of sins, weakness, and mistakes, and therefore must submit to God Almighty since they do not have any positive potentials or strengths (Al-Sa'dāwī, 1974: 310–311).

Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī underlines the characteristic of Erich Fromm's humanistic religion that humans do not fall into external forces outside of themselves. This means, Allah resides in human and it is human's responsibility to maintain the justice, truth, wisdom, honesty, freedom, and love within so that the essence of these qualities can be realized into perfect happiness and mental bliss. For this reason, the realization of the four basic principles of humanity above is the only way for humans to get closer to Allah, the attainment of a comprehensive self-essence. This is the core of a humanistic religion (Al-Sa'dāwī, 1974: 311).

In Islam, human dignity is emphasized by his *caliphatic* (God's representative) responsibility on earth; namely, he must give mercy to the rest of the world (Q.S. Al-Baqarah (2): 30–31; Al-Anbiyā' (21): 107). In Christianity, the highest human form is confirmed by its existence as a pro-creation with God and helping all beings. In Judaism, humans are created to complete creation itself (Sharma, 2006).

For Al-Sa'dāwī, the autonomy of women's

subjectivity in humanist-transcendental feminism aims to uphold humanism characterized by the liberation and transcendence containing real-transcendental actions of humanity. Theocentric humanism is its ontology, liberation is its epistemology as an act of human liberation, while transcendence is the axiological base of its values. God's *Being* as a reflection of the values of justice, freedom, beauty, honesty, and monotheism is the estuary of values in the fight for women's humanity.

The Character Zīnah; Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī's Fantasy of Humanist-Transcendental Feminism Symbol

In the humanist-transcendental feminism paradigm, the figure of Zīnah as an ideal woman is described by Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī as having two kinds of autonomy, internal and external. The Internal autonomy refers to a woman who has been set free from the patriarchal structure of religious discourse, whereas external autonomy refers to a woman who is then able to create a new structure, capable of fighting for women's liberty and humanity from various oppressive systems and ideologies, be it economic, political, social, or cultural.

Before Badūr is forcibly married to the highly patriarchal Al-Khartiti, she has an affair with her lover Nasīm, who shares the same idealism; he is humanist, visionary, and religiously progressive. Zīnah is the fruit of Badūr's illicit love with Nasīm on a night during the peak of the Egyptian revolution. However, before the two were formally married, Nasīm died as a patriot on the battlefield. The construction of religion prohibits illegitimate children from being allowed to live, which is why Badūr hides her pregnancy and the birth of her child. After the baby is born, Badūr leaves it on the street to keep it alive. Despite the long suffering and sacrifice of parting with her baby, as well as the shackles of patriarchy in a marriage that she has to endure, Badūr maintains her ideals, hoping that Zīnah will be able to realize her dreams in the future; namely of bringing change to Egypt toward a dignified religious life with high respect for human values.

On the baby in Badūr's womb, Badūr and Nasīm's put their great hopes for an Egypt that adopts a reform based on towards a humanist-transcendental religion. This notion that can be seen in the following quotation.

سَيَكُونُ لَنَا طِفْلَةٌ نُسَمِّيهَا زِينَةَ الدُّنْيَا، أَوْ طِفْلٌ نُسَمِّيهِ زَيْنَ الْعَالَمِينَ، يَغَيِّرُ
الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةَ وَيَنْتَهِي الظُّلْمَ وَالْفَقْرَ وَالْمَرَضَ

(Al-Sa'dāwī, 2010: 278).

We will have a child, if our child is a girl, we will name her Zīnah al-Dunyā (world jewelry), if he is a boy we will name him Zain al-Ālamīn (jewelry of the universe), who will change the world and the hereafter, remove darkness, poverty, and disease.

Badūr's hopes and dreams do come true. The beatings and hardships of life on the streets turn Zīnah into a strong girl. The egalitarian, democratic, and inclusive values she learns from her environment, and the care of a female music teacher whose perspective on religion was humanistic, made her the star and famous artist in her country. Zīnah is strong, intelligent, brave, mature, and balanced enough to be able to escort Egypt toward the gate of total revolution (Al-Sa'dāwī, 2010: 270).

The figure of Zīnah, beautiful and humanized, is sovereign, and gifted with perfect sensibility and taste, has extraordinary musical talent and great courage, and gathers thousands of admirers from all over the country. In fact, she has the ability to bring about a revolution in Egypt and direct its change in a fascinating fashion. The following quotation illustrates this.

زِينَةُ بِنْتُ زَيْنَاتٍ، فَتَانَةٌ مِنْ نَوْجٍ غَيْرِ عَادِيٍّ، تَبْدُو عِبْقَرِيَّتَهَا فِي أَسْطِ حَرَكَةٍ
حَيَوِيَّةٍ رُوْحَهَا تَرْفَعُ رُوْحَنَا إِلَى السَّمَاءِ، الْخَانِئَا تَفْتَحُ فِي عَفْوِنَا أَجْرَاءَ مَظْلَمَةٍ
جَمَاهُا، ذَكَوْهُا، صَوْتَهَا، إِيقَاعُهَا، أَغَانِيهَا، حَدِيثُهَا، كُلُّ ذَلِكَ السِّحْرُ الَّذِي
لَا تَعْرِفُ اسْمَهُ بَعْدُ. رُبَّمَا لِأَنَّهَا طَبِيعِيَّةٌ تَمْلِكُ إِعْجَازَ الطَّبِيعَةِ، لِأَنَّهَا تَتَحَرَّكُ
مِنْ رَشَاقَةٍ مِنْ أَسَاقٍ مَعَ حَرَكَةِ الْأَرْضِ حَوْلَ الشَّمْسِ، مَعَ نُورَاتِ الْعَبِيدِ
فِي التَّارِيخِ، لِأَنَّهَا جَاءَتْ مِنْ قَاعِ الْمَدِينَةِ وَصَعِدَتْ إِلَى قِبَةِ السَّمَاءِ، لِأَنَّهَا
، حَوَلَتْ أَصْعَبَ مَأْسَاةٍ إِلَى انْتِصَارٍ مُفْعَمٍ بِالْبَهْجَةِ وَالتَّرَاءِ

(Al-Sa'dāwī, 2010: 271–272)

Zīnah the daughter of Zīnāt is an artist from an unusual class. Her genius appeared in the

simplest movement. Her spiritual dynamism lifted our souls to the sky. Her melody opened our brains from various dark parts. Her beauty, her intelligence, her voice, her dance, her songs, her words, were all magic whose names we do not know. Perhaps because of her natural fate, for she moved with dexterity in consistency with the movement of the earth around the sun, along with the various slave rebellions in history, for she came from below and rose to the dome of heavens, for she was able to turn the worst of sufferings into glorious victories.

According to Žižek, among the veils of fantasy is the “scheme of transcendence”, namely the way fantasy does not recognize the drive in hallucinations, which is similar to Kant’s scheme of transcendence: a fantasy is our passion and it teaches us how to desire. The role of fantasy in Descartes’ philosophy is as a mediator between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, mediating between formal symbolic structures and the positivity of the objects we find in reality. It provides a scheme that fills in the blanks initiated by the formal symbolic structure (Žižek, 2008a: 7).

What Nawāl al-Sa’dāwī did in her process of subjectification in the form of fantasy is a scheme of transcendence. It occupies a blank cue that allows the subject to hide lacks as symbolic inconsistencies. Al-Sa’dāwī’s creation of Zīnah such a perfect, wholesome, transcendent subject is the estuary of meanings aimed by Al-Sa’dāwī’s subjectivity, the sparks of the Real that she yearns. It turns the dynamic movement of the subject into a boost toward a change in Egypt.

The Character Zīnah; Fantasy of the Internal Autonomy of Humanist-Transcendental Feminism

Internal autonomy is the autonomy possessed by a religious woman as a subject that has been set free from the shackles of patriarchal and oppressive discourses of theology, law, and religious eschatology. The internal autonomy of Zīnah is seen in the following quotation.

مُنذُ طُفُولَتِهَا فِي الشَّارِعِ كَانَتْ الْمَوْسِيقَى تَسْرِي فِي جَسَدِهَا مَعَ آيَاتِ
الشَّعْرِ، يَرْقُصُ مَعَهَا الْأَطْفَالُ الْبَنَاتُ وَالْأَوْلَادُ، لَمْ يَعْرِفُوا الْإِجْبَاسَ
وَرَاءَ الْجُدْرَانِ الْأَرْبَعَةِ، تَحْتَ سُلْطَةِ الْأَبِ وَالْأُمِّ، لَمْ يَعْرِفُوا نَارَ الْآخِرَةِ
وَلَا جَنَّةَ عَدْنٍ

(Al-Sa’dāwī, 2010:190).

From her childhood on the streets, music had flowed through her body with verses of poetry. She danced with girls and boys. They knew not the feeling of being confined within four walls, of being under the rules of father and mother; they knew not of hell in the afterlife nor the Garden of Eden.

The author’s words above describe Zīnah’s liberty and freedom that grow and develop on the streets, in an environment free from the shackles of patriarchal interpretations of religious discourse, which can be found school’s formal education as non-formal education in families, both of which generally inherit patriarchal values. Zīnah is able to grow as a humanized female subject. She has a wholesome sensibility, and soul, as well as a strong physique. She possesses love, honesty, sincerity, idealism, struggle, courage, a spirit of optimism, and determination.

In the relationship between fantasy, drive, and desire, the drive will emerge when the urge gets entangled in a spider-web of laws or prohibition by which *jouissance* must be rejected. Fantasy will become the narration of this primordial loss once it enters the process of rejection to the emergence of law. In this state, fantasy very much limits and separates drive from desire. In other words, fantasy provides a rationality for the inherent *deadlock* of the drive (Žižek, 2008a: 43).

Zīnah’s internal autonomy is Al-Sa’dāwī’s fantasy that describes the rejection of the drive of law that shackles the *jouissance*. Fantasy becomes a mediator that regulates between drive and desire. With this fantasy of Zīnah’s internal autonomy, Al-Sa’dāwī thus builds a world of significance, a world of meaning that can serve as a cover for the inconsistencies of the rules of the symbolic as the Other.

In her fantasy, the strength of Zīnah’s character, who has become a wholesome and humanized subject which reflects her internal autonomy, can be seen in the following quotation.

كَانَتْ تَضْحَكُ بِكُلِّ قُوَّتِهَا عَلَى الضَّحْكِ، مِثْلَمَا تَغْنِي بِكُلِّ قُوَّتِهَا عَلَى الْغِنَاءِ،
مِثْلَمَا تَعْرِفُ بِكُلِّ قُوَّتِهَا عَلَى الْعَرَفِ، مِثْلَمَا تَنْشُدُ الشَّعْرَ بِكُلِّ قُوَّتِهَا عَلَى
إِنْشَادِ الشَّعْرِ، تَفْعَلُ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ بِكُلِّ كَيْهَلِهَا، بِكُلِّ مَا فِيهَا مِنْ جَسَدٍ وَرُوحٍ

وَعَقْلٍ، يَرِنُ صَوْتَهَا فِي الْكَوْنِ لَا يُشْبِهُ أَيَّ صَوْتٍ، لَمْ يَسْمَعْ أَحَدٌ ضَحْكَةً
مِثْلَ ضَحْكَتِهَا، ضَحْكَةً أَمْرَأَةٍ اِمْتَلَتْ نَفْسَهَا، لَمْ تَعُدْ مَمْلُوكَةً لِأَحَدٍ، اِمْرَأَةٌ
أَفْلَسَتْ مِنْ قَبْضَةِ الْقَضَاءِ وَالْقَدَرِ، مِنْ قَبْضَةِ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ، مِنْ
قَبْضَةِ الزَّمَانِ وَالْمَكَانِ. تَرِنُ ضَحْكَتَهَا غَرِيبَةً غَيْرَ مَأْلُوفَةٍ، مِثْلَ حِلْمِ السَّعَادَةِ
غَيْرِ الْمَفْهُومَةِ، مِثْلَ حِلْمِ الْحُبِّ الْمُسْتَحِيلِ

(Al-Sa'dāwī, 2010: 226)

She (Zīnah) laughed with the power of her laughter, as when she sang with all her singing power, as when she played music with all her musical power, as when she recited poems with all the power of her poetic chants. She acted in all things with all of her strength, with all that were in her body, soul, and mind. Her voice echoed in the universe, unlike any other sound and no one had ever heard such laughter, the laugh of a woman who was able to control herself and not be controlled by others. A woman who was free from the grips of *qadha* and *qadar*, the grip of heaven and earth, the grasp of time and space. The strange echo of her laughter was beyond description, like a dream of incomprehensible happiness, like a dream of impossible love.

It is also related in the novel that Zīnah does not have academic credentials, does not wear high heels, and does not reverently wear hijab on her face. Zīnah has no interest in applying beauty powder, or any other make-up, or wearing a bracelet or anklet, as reflection of Al-Sa'dāwī's criticism on capitalist feminism (Gökarkısel & McLarney, 2010). Zīnah never puts any color on her lips or eyelids. Even more, Zīnah does not consider herself beautiful, strong, or talented, the way the thousands of people who greatly admire her do. For Zīnah, her autonomy is natural because she thinks that the autonomy has always been inherent in herself as a human being (Al-Sa'dāwī, 2010: 232).

Lacan highlights that there is a universal *symptom*. Anything can be a path of the *symptom*. *Symptom* is Lacan's final answer to the eternal philosophical question, "Why is there something that replaces nothing?" This something which is instead of nothing is indeed the *symptom* (Žižek, 2008b: 77).

This *symptom* has a form, one of which is

fantasy. When everything is non-existent, and reality is also nothing, because everything is just a mirror reflection that never explains and brings out its own existence, and the reality of our universe only contains endless markers and signs, then Lacan asserts that what transcends this non-existence is the *symptom*. It is this *symptom* that replaces nothingness. For this reason, fantasy becomes an estuary of meaning.

The Character Zīnah; Fantasy of External Autonomy of Humanist Transcendental Feminism

Once described as having internal autonomy, Zīnah is then described as having external autonomy. As an expression of her external autonomy, Zīnah is progressively able to criticize religious phenomena that are constructed passively and destructively. These verses, created and chanted, by Zīnah describe this.

كِفَايَةُ دِينٍ عَاوِزِينَ تَمُوتُونَ
كِفَايَةُ طُقُوسٍ عَاوِزِينَ غُمُوسُ
كِفَايَةُ صِيَامٍ وَصَلَا عَاوِزِينَ مِيَهُ وَهَوَا
كِفَايَةُ كَنَائِسٍ وَ مَسَاجِدٍ عَاوِزِينَ مَدَارِسَ

(Al-Sa'dāwī, 2010: 306)

It is enough, a religion that is short of provisions
It is enough, a ritual ceremonies that lacks of danger

It is enough, fast and prayer that lacks water and air

It is enough, churches and mosques which lack of schools

Zīnah sings those words in front of thousands of spectators and fans who criticize religious constructions that do not represent the religion's humanist and revolutionary substance. The established religious discourse has not initiated a humanist, visionary, and progressive socio-cultural order that encourages progress toward a high and dignified human civilization.

Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī would not stop criticizing the state, government, and religious discourse that had been constructed in a patriarchal and domineering fashion. She purports that the essence of religion emphasizes women's autonomy and encourages the emergence of a humanist and progressive order of

values. The patriarchal discourse attached to and placed upon religion is due to thousands of years of patriarchal culture spawned by economic and political factors (Al-Sa'dāwī, 1974, 1980; Al-Sa'dāwī & Rauf Izzat, 2000). Before the emergence of the patriarchal culture, namely in pre-historic times, women had high positions in society and were fully humanized. The gods were symbolically female, because those who founded and built pre-historic civilizations were women, which translated into a matriarchal culture (Engels, 2011; Reed, 2011).

To Nawāl Al-Sa'dāwī, women's humanity is inherently transcendent. This quality is used as the theological assumption and the metaphysical basis that provide guidance for Zīnah's actions, which construct and create a new structure as an expression of her external autonomy. Women's autonomy as a human autonomy contains transcendental awareness in two ways. First, all actions of existence must ultimately acknowledge and comprehend their transcendental existence. The physical, namely the strength and vigor of human being, will eventually dissolve into the metaphysical: earth to earth. Second, the estuary of anything physical, including humans, is an emanation of the metaphysical God.

The two transcendental ideas above become the basis for or the spirit of Zīnah's actions of external autonomy, which constantly move to change the existing structure and to create a new one, to liberate mankind. This idea is seen in the following quoted verses.

أَنَا جِئْتُ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ وَإِلَى الْأَرْضِ أَعُودُ
أَنَا لَمْ أَهْبِطْ مِنَ الْفَضَاءِ أَوْ النُّجُومِ
لَسْتُ ابْنَةَ الْأَلْهَةِ وَلَا الشَّيَاطِينِ
أَنَا زِينَةُ وَأُمِّي هِيَ زِينَاتُ
أُمِّي أَعَزُّ عِنْدِي مِنَ السَّمَاءِ

(Al-Sa'dāwī, 2010: 309)

I came from the earth and will return to the earth

I did not descend from the sky or the stars

I am neither a daughter of God nor a devil's

I am Zīnah and my mother Zīnāt

To me, my mother is higher than the heavens

يَسْقُطُ الظُّلْمُ، تَحْيَا الحَرِيَّةُ
بِلَادِي بِلَادِي، لَكَ حُبِّي وَفُؤَادِي
نُورَتِ يَا قُطْنِ النَّيْلِ، يَا حَلَاوَةَ عَلَيْكَ يَا جَمِيلُ
الْقَمَحِ اللَّيْلَةَ لَيْلَةَ عَيْدِهِ
يا رب تبارك وتزيد

(Al-Sa'dāwī, 2010: 307)

Let darkness fall, and freedom live

My country, my country, for you my love and my heart

Shine, O cottons of Nile, O sweet, O beautiful

Wheat night, feast night

O God, bless and add

The lines "I came from the earth and will return to the earth" and "O God, bless and add", are descriptions of a metaphysical understanding that imply the transcendence of Zīnah's humanity, presented by Al-Sa'dāwī in a distinctively theological manner. The Torah, the Bible, and Al-Qur'an, clearly mention that the first man was fashioned by God from soil; and man returns to the earth when his physical body is dead. The earth as the final form of man is a symbol of human limitations, while the concept of "God" as the highest entity is a symbol of infinity.

These two realizations have become symbols of Al-Sa'dāwī's transcendental-humanism, which is different from the secular and anthropocentric Western humanism paradigm that sees humans as the only entity, the center, and parameter of truth, and the beginning and end of reality. Zīnah also says, "To me, my mother is higher than the heavens". This is an assertion that the magnificence of women as human beings cannot be tainted by a patriarchal interpretation of religion. In Zīnah's belief, God is The Most Exalted, and therefore He exalts all of His creatures.

Zīnah's transcendental view makes her critical in her efforts to seek the various factors that hinder progress. Among these factors is the emergence of a dichotomous perspective in religion in understanding

and perceiving reality. The concept of God is contrasted with Satan; thus we have, virtue versus sin, heaven versus hell, sky versus earth, the world versus the afterlife. Inevitably, men and women are positioned in an oppressively and hierarchically binary opposition.

Zīnah deconstructs this dichotomous view in religion as well (Al-Sa'dāwī, 2010: 211). At the same time, she continuously struggles to bring change, to bring her country toward a more dignified order of values. There is a verse composed and sung by Zīnah on a theater stage. With which she criticizes dichotomous views of herself. Zīnah asserts that both the revered and despised versions of herself are indeed one of duality. Zīnah is the fruit of pure, sincere, and mutually complementary love of a pair of lovers endowed with humanist-transcendental consciousness. However, due to the fall and the inherent conditional transgression, Zīnah's father has to die before he can marry Badūr – Zīnah's biological mother-. Nevertheless, in a conducive, egalitarian and democratic environment, Zīnah finally grows into a shining figure that illuminates the world. For this reason, Zīnah affirms that as she came from the earth, so will return to the earth. She is the child of both the earth and the streets. She is a shining fruit of sin, she is also a child of glory and honor who not only regards humanity highly but also fights for it.

The general philosophical concept explains the existence of three worlds (triangle world), namely: language-subject, subject to object relations, and mediation through language. It is as if there is no objective world, because all that exists is a game between subject and language, which is only the imaginary-illusory effect of signifier's play. In fact, Lacan's view of the whole reality is nihilist that language, subject, object and the Big Other as symbolic rules also do not exist. For Lacan, when everything is non-existent and does not exist, there are only *symptoms*. It appears that Lacan is anti post-structuralist. The basis of post-structuralism is the deconstruction of any substantial identity. Meanwhile, the *symptom* means emphasizing the importance of the accompanying tone to the substance of enjoyment, which is the structured Real kernel (Žižek, 2008b: 77–78).

The absence of dichotomy in religion also means the absence of dichotomy between men and women. The liberation of women from national, colonial, global, sexual, and legal oppressions requires

cooperation from the men as well. The organization founded by Al-Sa'dāwī, the Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA), also expresses such unity, proven by the inclusion of male members (Al-Tamīmī, 2005).

To Al-Sa'dāwī, the figure of Zīnah, with her religious belief that is marked by internal and external autonomies, is the ideal future of feminism in that humanist-transcendental characteristic. Al-Sa'dāwī's fantasy is her belief that it is in the character Zīnah, that new history will be created and it will turn Egypt into a new civilization based on religiosity, humanity and transcendentality. This can be seen in the following quote.

تَدْبُ زَيْنَةُ بِنْتُ زَيْنَاتٍ بِقَدَمِهَا فَوْقَ الْمَسْرَحِ، تَرْفُصُ وَتَغْنِي وَتَنْشُدُ الشَّعْرَ،
تَمْشِي فَوْقَ الْخَطِّ الْفَاصِلِ بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ، تَمْشِي عَلَيْهِ بِقَدَمِهَا لِتُكْسِرَ
الْحُدُودَ، لِتَفْتَحَ لِنَفْسِهَا طَرِيقًا لَمْ يَمْشِ فِيهِ أَحَدٌ مِنْ قَبْلُ

(Al-Sa'dāwī, 2010: 191–192)

Zīnah the daughter of Zīnāt stomped her foot on the stage. She danced, sang and recited poetry. She walked on the dividing line between heaven and earth. Zīnah walked on that line on both feet to break down the boundaries, to make way for herself that no one had previously walked on.

Al-Sa'dāwī expressed in an interview that she had the power to change the position of Middle Eastern women in new ways (Amireh, 2000; Graham-Brown, 1981). To her, feminism is a new civilization, a new science, where women make a revolution in biological, psychological, and religious interpretations. Through her fantasy, she created the character Zīnah with the power to open a new history for the land of Egypt. This is because she believes that religion essentially sets women free. If so far religions have eliminated women's freedom, it is due to their misguided construction which are based on various political and economic interests (Al-Sa'dāwī & Rauf Izzat, 2000: 66).

When placed in Žižek's theory, it will be clear that the fantasy of Al-Sa'dāwī's subjectivity is the desire screen of the Other (Žižek, 2008b: 132). Fantasy also appears as an answer to *Che vuoi*, the irresistible enigma of desire in the Other, to the lacks that exist in the Other. However, at the same time, fantasy itself

provides coordination for our drives, which constructs a frame that enables us to have a drive for something (Žižek, 2008b: 132).

Zīnah views that a revolutionary movement or a war for independence can accelerate the process of women's liberation in the East and West according to the intensity and conditions of each, which differ from one another. The fire of revolution that Zīnah ignites is built on the foundation of humanist-transcendental feminism; a woman who has been liberated must struggle to set other women, the people, and the entire nation free from the shackles of economic, political, social, and cultural oppressions. Zīnah creates and chants the following patriotic-nationalistic poetry in a humanist-transcendental prophetic ideal.

تَحْيَا زَيْنَةَ بِنْتِ زَيْنَاتٍ يَا يَعِيشُ، يَا يَعِيشُ، تَحْيَا زَيْنَةَ بِنْتِ زَيْنَاتٍ، يَا
يَعِيشُ، يَا يَعِيشُ، تَحْيَا الْحُرِّيَّةَ، تَحْيَا الْحُرِّيَّةَ، تَحْيَا الْحُبَّ، تَحْيَا الْحُبَّ، تَحْيَا
الْمُوسِيقِيَّ، تَحْيَا الْمُسِيْقِيَّ، تَحْيَا الْجَمَالَ وَالْعَدْلَ وَالْفَضِيلَةَ، تَحْيَا الْحُبَّ
وَالْفَنَّ وَالْجَمَالَ وَالْعَدْلَ وَالْفَضِيلَةَ، تَحْيَا زَيْنَةَ بِنْتِ زَيْنَاتٍ

(Al-Sa'dāwī, 2010: 310)

Live Zīnah, the daughter of Zīnāt, O life, O life,
live Zīnah the daughter of Zīnāt, O life, O life,
live freedom, live freedom, live love, live love,
live music, live music, live beauty, justice and
goodness, live love, art, beauty, justice and
goodness, live Zīnah the daughter of Zīnāt.

The fantasy that Al-Sa'dāwī's subjectivity has established above is a journey from *symptom* to *sinthome* (Žižek, 2008b: 77). The radical status of the *symptom* ontology as *sinthome* is the only positive essence and support for the subject's being, the only important thing that provides consistency to the subject. In other words, *symptom* is the subject's way or path to "avoid madness", to "choose something, namely *symptom* formation that replaces nothing" (Žižek, 2008b: 81). As a substitute of imaginary identification, the subject has a drive that is supported by fantasy; the function of the fantasy is to fulfill the opening contained in the Other because it contains lacks, to hide the inconsistency of the Other (Žižek, 2008b: 138).

The character Zīnah is a reflection of the rise of developing countries which cannot be separated

from the spirit and character of the revolutionary liberalization of religions. A Semitic religion, Islam carries the universal and cosmopolitan values of civilization which have been actualized in the Middle Ages. Universalism is reflected in Islamic teachings that have concerns regarding the main elements of humanity and teachings that have concerns regarding the main elements of humanity and teachings that are open to progress toward civilization. Toynbee calls it the ruling *oikumene* of the world. The wisdom of Islamic *oikumene* is what is called the cosmopolitanism of Islamic civilization (Wahid, 2007: 3-4).

Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī has established a fantasy of humanist transcendental feminism that allows for Islam and humanity to establish a new civilization based on a liberating transcendental humanism. This humanism is oriented toward an ethical prophetic goal, namely the perfection of monotheism as an expression of human servitude in its endless process to achieve the perfection of being and a humanist-transcendental order of life.

Using Norbert Wiener's metaphor which explains that *symptoms* are the return of the repressed (Žižek, 2008b: 57), Lacan answers the question "Where do the shackles come back from?" From the future. *Symptoms* are meaningless traces, whose meaning is not found, or extracted from the hidden depths of the past, but retroactively constructed (Žižek, 2008b: 58).

From here, fantasies that dream about the future get a chance for interpretation because *symptoms* can be understood as the return from bondage, and the return is obtained from the future. This future cannot be explored except by digging for traces of the past. For this reason, the fantasy that is established by the subjectivity of Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī is always based on the dialectical relationship between the past, the present, and the formulated future.

CONCLUSION

Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī was a divided subject, therefore she continued to seek self-fulfillment dialectically by destructing and destroying the Symbolic, namely the patriarchal discourse of religion that has shackled women for thousands of years. Her movement is her struggle to free women as human beings and to approach the Real that the subject longs for. As part of her subjectification process, Al-Sa'dāwī establishes fantasy as a screen that hides the lacks in the Symbolic

and the estuary of meanings that reinforce the subject's existence. Her fantasy is the manifestation of a transcendental humanist religious discourse that provides a foundation and movement direction for the full autonomy of women which is reflected in the character Zīnah. Zīnah has an internal autonomy in that she has been set free from the shackles of patriarchal religious interpretations, and an external autonomy that is capable of changing and creating new structures in religious discourse. With their internal and external autonomy, women can find full autonomy, high dignity, and can set humanity free from oppressive systems and ideologies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This paper is part of my dissertation entitled *Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī's Critique on Construction of Religious Discourse Concerning Gender Relation in Suqūth al-Imām, Adab Am Qillah Adab, and Zīnah: Subjectivity Approach* [Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University, 2020]. Therefore, I would like to say thanks Professor Dr. Juliasih as promotor and Dr. Wening Udasmoro, M. Hum. DEA as co-promotor who has given me directions in writing.

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