

THE SUBJECTIVITY OF NAWĀL AL-SA'DĀWĪ

Critique on Gender Relations in Religious Construction in *Adab Am Qillab Adab* Work¹

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Abstract

This writing examines three short stories in the short story anthology of Adab Am Qillab Adab by Nawāl Al-Sa'dāwī, namely: "Adab Am Qillab Adab", "al Umm al-Sunvisriyyah al-Qātilab", and "Qiṣṣah Fathīyah al-Miṣriyyah". The analysis focuses on Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī's critique of religious constructions of gender relations. The subjectivity of Slavoj Žižek is the theory used and hermeneutics is the method of analysis. The purpose of the study is to find out the reasoning behind the radical acts of Al-Sa'dāwī over her rejection of patriarchal religious constructions in her three short stories. The result of the analysis shows that the literary work is the explanation of the radicalization of the author's actions, Al-Sa'dāwī, as a subject. Such radicalization is her rejection of the needy Symbolic (patriarchal religion construction) as her attempt to escape the Symbolic. Al-Sa'dāwī continues to move because the subject is split and empty. Therefore, Al-Sa'dāwī makes an effort to seek full self-fulfillment to and approach The Real in order to kill the old tyrannical Symbolic and pick up the new Symbolic, which is the construction of a just religion and liberate women.

¹ This writing is part of dissertation of the first author (Yulia Nasrul Latifi) "Nawāl Al-Sa'dāwī's Critique on Construction of Religious Discourse Concerning Gender Relation in *Suqūf al-Imām*, *Adab Am Qillab Adab*, and *Zīnah: Subjectivity Approach*", Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University, 2019.

[Tulisan ini mengkaji tiga cerpen dalam antologi cerpen *Adab Am Qillah Adab* karya Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī, yaitu: “Adab..Am Qillah Adab”, “al-Umm al-Suwisriyyah al Qātilah”, dan “Qiṣṣah Fathīyyah al-Miṣriyyah”. Analisis difokuskan pada kritik Nawāl Al-Sa'dāwī terhadap konstruksi agama atas relasi gender. Subjektivitas Slavoj Žižek adalah teori yang dipakai dan hermeneutik merupakan metode analisisnya. Tujuan penelitian adalah untuk mengetahui alasan di balik tindakan radikal Al-Sa'dāwī atas penolakannya pada konstruksi agama yang patriarkis dalam tiga cerpennya. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa karya sastra menjelaskan radikalisasi tindakan pengarang, Al-Sa'dāwī, sebagai sebuah subjek. Radikalisasi tersebut adalah penolakannya terhadap Yang Simbolik yang berkekurangan (konstruksi agama patriarkis) sebagai usahanya untuk melepaskan diri dari Yang Simbolik. Al-Sa'dāwī akan terus bergerak dikarenakan subjek itu terbelah dan juga kosong. Oleh sebab itu, Al-Sa'dāwī melakukan upaya untuk mencari pemenuhan dirinya secara terus-menerus dan mendekati The Real agar dapat membunuh The Symbolic lama yang tiranik dan menjemput The Symbolic baru, yaitu konstruksi agama yang adil dan membebaskan perempuan.]

Keywords: subjectivity, Nawāl Al-Sa'dāwī, religious construction, gender.

A. Introduction

Subject is a term used to describe the interior of an interior life or a selfhood, especially in relation to gender, power, language, culture, politics and so on.² It is a concept to understand why selfhood is involved with the other as an object of need, desire, interest and other common experiences.³

Since Descartes until now, the meaning of the subject is different. Within a period of time, the subject's existence can be fully acknowledged, but at other times, the subject's existence can be denied. Subjects then change from independent subjects (such as Descartes' thought) into a dependent subject which is socially constructed.

Nawāl Al-Sa'dāwī is present as a “being” subject and is able to exist in her own way. However, Al-Sa'dāwī is not fully autonomous as

² Nick Mansfield, *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 185.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

conceptualized by Descartes. It is also not fully constructed as defined by post-structuralist. Various traumas have been experienced by Nawāl Al-Sa'dāwī from childhood to adult age due to various oppressive acts in the name of religion. When she was 6 years old, she got circumcised. She felt the traumatic effects for life. The suffering of circumcision is also experienced by most Arab female infants and girls. Young maids commit suicide in the Nile for being pregnant after having been raped; wives burn themselves for their husband betrayal; girls were killed by their father because they were found not virgin anymore in the first night of her honey moon.⁴

Being a doctor, Al-Sa'dāwī witnessed thousands of women suffered from psychiatric illness and other medical conditions caused by various religious constructions. In many of her works, Al-Sa'dāwī criticizes the religious constructions of oppressive gender relations, among them *Adab Am Qillah Adab* (the short story anthology).⁵ Three short stories in her anthology entitled “Adab..Am Qillah Adab”, “al-Umm al-Suwisriyyah al-Qātilah”, and “Qiṣṣah Faṭḥiyyah al-Miṣriyyah” narrated the rejection and resistance of the family and marriage laws that oppress women on the pretext of religion. They commit radical acts as a form of rejection of the symbolic order of religion, to break away and keep moving in order to approach *the Real*⁶ that is longing for a religion that justifies and frees women.

Nawāl Al-Sa'dāwī, known as Simone de Beauvoir of the Arab, was born in Kafr Thahla (Egypt) in 1931. She wrote extensively on the social, historical, political, and liberation of Arab women. She took psychiatric studies at the Faculty of Medicine in Cairo and graduated in 1955. She worked in Cairo, then obtained a masters degree from a Columbia university in 1966.⁷ Al-Sa'dāwī did a lot of research and wrote

⁴ Nawāl Sa'dāwī and Hibah Ra'ūf 'Izzat, *al-Marab wa-al-Din wa-al-Akhlāq* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr i-Dimashq, 2000), pp. 12–3.

⁵ Nawāl Sa'dāwī, *Adab ... am Qillah Adab* (Cairo: Dar wa matabi' al-mustaqbal, 1999).

⁶ Slavoj Žižek said that the Real as a basis and starting point, is a positive fullness without lack; as a product, a leftover of symbolization. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso Books, 2008), pp. 191–2.

⁷ Amal Tamīmī, *al-Sīrah al-Dbātīyah al-Nisā'iyyah fī al-Adab al-'Arabī al-Mu'āṣir* (al-Dār al-Bayḍā: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 2005), p. 47.

many works of fiction and nonfiction. Her works have been translated into more than 12 languages. She was also a visiting lecturer at various universities in Europe and America and had received many international awards in literary and other worlds.⁸ Because of her bold and controversial writings, she was often blocked, subjected to exile, dismissal, fugitive and in and out of jail. Al-Sa'dāwī ever lost her job as Director General of the Ministry of Health.⁹ When she was imprisoned, she continued to write with an eyebrow as a pencil and toilet paper as paper. After leaving the prison, she founded the Arabian Women Solidarity Association (AWSA) in 1981.¹⁰

It is acknowledged that the Arabs with their religion have become a dynamic force for the mobilization and transformation of human history. According to Hitti,¹¹ Arabs with their religion have developed a high culture by inheriting an ancient civilization and then building it. They also absorbed and integrated various elements of Greco-Roman culture; served as a carrier of the intellectual movement to medieval Europe and sparked a revival of the Western world and its modernization process. In the Middle Ages, Arabia was the only nation in the world that contributed greatly to human progress.

Nevertheless, it can not be denied that the study of the subjectivity of Arab women in Semitic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) suggests a patriarchal construct, although Islam shows a softer attitude.¹² The claim to the construction of God's concept and the masculine deity in the monotheistic religions emerged.¹³ The gender construction of most world religions also gets the same criticism (except for some Aboriginal

⁸ Diana Royer, *A Critical Study of the Works of Nawal El Saadawi, Egyptian Writer and Activist* (Lewiston, N.Y. ; Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), p. 9.

⁹ Wardah Hafidz, "Pengantar", in *Catatan dari Penjara Perempuan* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 1997), pp. xii–xiii.

¹⁰ Tamīmī, *al-Sīrah al-Dbātīyah al-Nisā'īyah fī al-Adab al-'Arabī al-Mu'āsir*, pp. 47–8.

¹¹ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs, from the Earliest Times to the Present* (London: Macmillan, 1951), p. 3-6.

¹² Al-Ṣadiq al-Nayhūm, *Al-Ḥadīth 'an al-Mar'ah wa al-Diyānāt* (Beirut: al-Istis'yār al-'Araby, 2002), p. 7-20.

¹³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), p. 47-53.

religions) that have placed women inferior to men.¹⁴

Sanday argues that in outwardly oriented religions (characterized by grazing, migration, warfare, and tension in their history), male dominance are very strong in their gender construction of everyday life.¹⁵ The reconstruction of classical history has revealed both economic dan politic factors that cause women's oppression in the name of morality and religion.¹⁶ Such male dominance happens also in the case of Islam. The unfair construction of gender in Islam is a product of interpretation that reflects the thinking of classical Muslim male scholars at a particular time and space in the history of Islam.¹⁷

The inferior position of Arab women's subjectivity is finally clearly illustrated in the works of Arabic literature. The women's subjectivity is male property in the patriarchal system, whether in agrarian, industrial, socialist or capitalist societies.¹⁸ The study of the works of al-Ma'ārī (952-976), Abbās M. Aqqād (1889-1964), Ṭoha Ḥusayn (1889-1973), Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (1898-1987), and Najīb Maḥfūz (1911-2006), illustrate the negative images of women: passive, derivative, low, and marginalized.¹⁹

In the Arab world, Egypt experienced the most prominent modern literary developments in its powerful emancipatory ideas.²⁰ Ahmed asserts that Egypt is the main container of the process of gender transformation and struggle since the 19th century.²¹ The first consciousness raised by Egyptian female feminists since the nineteenth century was their critique of the issues of family law and oppressive marriage, and women's

¹⁴ Arvind Sharma (ed.), *Perempuan dalam Agama-Agama Dunia* (Yogyakarta: SUKA Press, 2006), pp. 10–1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-2.

¹⁶ Sa'dāwī and Izzat, *al-Marab wa-al-Din wa-al-Akblaq*, p. 24.

¹⁷ Norani Othman, *Muslim Women and the Challenge of Islamic Extremism* (Malaysia: Sisters in Islam, 2005), pp. 8–9.

¹⁸ Nawāl Sa'dāwī, *al-Wajh al-'arī lil-Mar'ab al-'Arabīyah* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 2006), p. 150.

¹⁹ Nawāl Al-Sa'dāwī, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*, ed. by Sherif Hetata, trans. by Sherif Hetata (London: Zed Books, 1980), pp. 157–67.

²⁰ Ali Audah, 'Sastra Arab Mutakhir', *Jurnal Ulumul Qur'an*, vol. 2, no. 7 (1996).

²¹ *Ibid.*

suffering as daughters, wives, and mothers.²²

Arab women arose as pioneers of women's emancipation and liberation from the beginning. Among these pioneers were Aisyah Taymur, Zaynab Fawaz, Malak Hifni Nasif, and May Ziada.²³ Zeidan charted the existence of the forerunners of women's emancipation and liberation in two generations: the generation of pioneering Arab feminists and the generation between World Wars.²⁴ The works of Arab female authors until the end of the 20th century sprang up by voicing feminist protests regarding gender inequality.²⁵ Contemporary works of fiction produced by the Arab writers also illustrate the crisis of patterns of gender relations and the rejection of concepts, the role of traditional identity—the misogynist attached to Arab women.²⁶ The emergence of modern Arab feminists is due to the access the Arab women have in writing the narrative and the emergence of feminism itself.²⁷

Compared to other Arab feminist writers, Al-Sa'dāwī emerged in a different way in liberating Arab women. In her three short stories she has a strategy to dismantle the patriarchal dominance by criticizing religious constructions in Egypt. This is based on her belief that the religion constructed in Egypt no longer reflects the true nature of religion.

Al-Sa'dāwī greatly admired the behavior of the Prophet Muhammad who practiced egalitarian behaviors and worldviews, upholding women's rights and autonomy in the domestic and public sphere.²⁸ In many international forums, Al-Sa'dāwī also expressed her pride in the Islamic

²² Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 124.

²³ Sa'dāwī, *Hidden Face of Eve*, p. 172.

²⁴ Joseph T. Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 64–91.

²⁵ Elizabet Mc Kee, 'Agenda Politik dan Strategi Tekstual Para Penulis Perempuan Afrika Utara', in *Feminisme dan Islam: Perspektif Hukum dan Sastra*, ed. by Mai Yamani, trans. by Purwanto (Bandung: Nuansa, 2000), pp. 155–6.

²⁶ Al-Kabīr al-Dādīsī, *Azmat al-Jins fi al-Riwayah al-Arabiyyah: bi-nun al-niswab* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Rihāb al-Ḥadītat, 2017), pp. 265–82.

²⁷ Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1992), p. 8.

²⁸ Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing*, p. 8.

religion she believed in and the Arab culture she possessed. The research question which is then interesting to answer is: why is Al-Sa'dāwī criticizing the religious construction of gender relations in the anthology of her short story *Adab Am Qillah Adab* in liberating the Arab women's subjectivity?

The data in this research are taken from words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs in the three short stories, namely "Adab...Am Qillah Adab", "al Umm al-Suwisriyyah al-Qātilah", and "Qiṣṣah Fathiyyah al-Miṣriyyah". The data collection methods used is the data reduction technique, namely selecting the data by focusing on what is needed based on determined parameters and criteria.²⁹ The data analysis is done functionally and relationally. Its main character is unitization, namely doing analysis based on each feature, theme, topic, concept or element. As for the analytical methods to understand Nawāl Al-Sa'dāwī's criticism on patriarchal religious construction, this research uses Gadamer's hermeneutics, in which the task of interpretation is to project a historical horizon that is different from contemporary horizon. Interpretation is not a reconstruction or representation of the meaning from the past, but an intersection between tradition and contemporarity of the interpreter so that a new meaning is resulted.³⁰ Gadamer's hermeneutic method is then conducted in the framework of Žižek's theory, referring to the analytical practice done by Žižek himself, who sees "literature" is an author's radicalization of act as a split subject to prove Lacan's triadic concepts: The Real, The Symbolic and The Imaginary.

B. Subject and Subjectivity Construction

This paper studied Nawāl Al-Sa'dāwī's critique of patriarchal religious construction in her three short stories using Slavoj Žižek's subjectivity theory. Žižek holds that the existence of the subject is indeed incomplete or divided. The three Lacanian phases of subjectivity that used by Žižek in the formation of subjectivity are The Real, The Symbolic, and The Imaginary. According to Žižek,³¹ the Real is a pre-symbolic reality

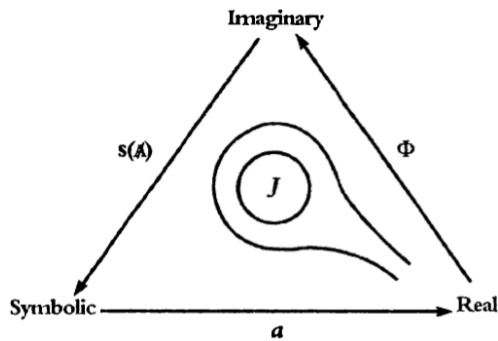
²⁹ Siswanto, *Metode Penelitian Sastra: Analisis Struktur Puisi* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010), p. 74.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), p. 182.

in which the subject always wants to return to its place. The Symbolic is the order that governs our perception of reality. The Imaginary is an illusionary entity which is only a structural effect and has no existence.

According to Žižek,³² Imaginary phase is the stage of formation of subjectivity. It is the stage of mirror, the phase of separation of the subject or *self* with the imagination of himself. This separation or discontinuity is forever, “because the ego does not change its connection once we have become adult”. The peak of the subject’s incompleteness is in Trauma³³ when the subject can not withstand the separation exacerbated by The Big Other³⁴ oppression. This trauma then bridges³⁵ to become the Real in releasing the Symbolic. “Trauma is real – it is a hard core resisting symbolization, but the point is that it does not matter if it has had a place”³⁵. A logical explanation of the consistency of three objects (the Symbolic, the Real, dan the Imaginary) contained in it ‘subject in object’ is described in the following scheme.³⁶



‘Subject in object’ is a subject more than a subject. Not only the

³² Tony Myers, *Slavoj Žižek* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 22.

³³ According to Žižek In the 1950s, the traumatic event in the first Lacan’s seminar, is defined as an imaginary entity which had not yet been fully symbolized. But in the 1970s, trauma is a real, it is a hard core resisting symbolization. See Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 182.

³⁴ According to Žižek, the big Other is the order of the signifier or symbolic order. It is always mutilated, crossed out, and failed. It is penetrated by a pre-symbolic (real) stream of enjoyment.

³⁵ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 182.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

subject is lacking, but the object and the unity that is covering it are also in need. The subject divides itself into the object itself and as the thing that attracts each other.³⁷

Žižek goes further on elaborating Hegel's thought that although the subject is absolute, free and responsible, it is essentially empty. In its absolute fullness, the subject is also an absolute empty. And as an absolute subject as well as empty, the subject also develops dialectically.³⁸ There are two realities surrounding the subject which are both non-contradictory, the subject's fatalistic aspect due to their dialectical journey and the substance of the subject. Subject is an empty gesture; a container that needs content.³⁹

Al-Sa'dāwī continues to fill the void in her with her sharp criticisms on religious constructions. This void will continue to proceed because there is no entity from reality that can fill it. Al-Sa'dāwī does not stand on one hegemonic center and remains devoted to the dialectical process of suing the construction of patriarchal religion by taking action, radical action.

For Žižek, the subject can be a vanishing mediator, one that is capable of disrupting the symbolic and real limits.⁴⁰ The subject's condition as a 'vanishing mediator' makes him a 'psychotic subject', one who is able to keep himself at a distance with the symbolic order, able to avoid paradox, and be able to choose freely.⁴¹ 'Psychotic subject' repeatedly performs radical action. Žižek's places the subject's evil within Kantian notion of ethics. For Kant, choice of evil is an apriori, transcendental act that does not occur in a temporal reality. This evil differs from foolishness, anger, or anything else. Instead, it reflects free choice, a conscious decision that the subject is fully responsible for.⁴²

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

³⁸ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 251; Reza A.A. Wattimena, *Filsafat Politik untuk Indonesia: Dari Pemikiran Plato, Edmund Husserl, Charles Taylor, sampai dengan Slavoj Žižek* (Malang: Pustaka Mas, 2011), p. 105.

³⁹ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 251-2.

⁴⁰ Myers, *Slavoj Žižek*, p. 37.

⁴¹ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 86.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 187.

According to Žižek,⁴³ “*the fear of error is the error itself*”. These radical or false actions indicate an opposition between the subject’s desire and drive. While the subject’s desire is determined by lack, his or her drive is based on surplus.⁴⁴ These radical actions are an emancipation of themselves to change structure. Although Al-Sa’dāwī knew that she failed, she never gave up. As a Marxist, Žižek asserts that the radical action of the subject is an emancipatory act. He believes that there is always a hidden ideology within the symbolic order. Marxists understand that ideology is a ‘false consciousness’. This is what appears in reality as an illusion that deceives the subject, as explained by Marx “*they do not know it but they are doing it*”.⁴⁵

C. The Subjectivity of Al-Sa’dāwī and Her Critique of Patriarchal Religious Construction

1. *Symbolic Dimensions of Patriarchal Religion Construction*

The process of ideologization and religious totalization under the pressure of ‘The Big Other’ has influenced the process of religious formation in Egypt and has made the standard face of religion: the tyrannical ‘Symbolic’. According to the figure of a mysterious friend in “Adab Am Qillah Adab”, this condition is marked by the emergence of ideology and movement of religious fundamentalism that tends to understand the Qur’an textually or scripturally against gender verses that are actually contextual and particular. These ideals and movements have led women back into the home, veiled, serving children and husbands, and women’s role restrictions become domestic.⁴⁶

In “al-Umm al-Suwisriyah al-Qātilah”, ‘Trauma’ that makes the incompleteness of the subject is experienced by the character of the mother who was filled with psychological conflict throughout her life. This trauma happened because when she was a child, she was afraid of her father who accused her of killing social life and morality if she did not

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁴⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 2000), p. 304.

⁴⁵ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 24.

⁴⁶ Sa’dāwī, *Adab ... am Qillah Adab*, p. 121.

want to get married soon. Her father had punished her with the death of her soul and mind by forcing her to leave school. Her father also forced her to marry a man she did not want. The following quotation explains it.

هذا هو التناقض الذي لا تستطيع أن تدركه هذه الأم. فهو تناقض عاش معها في اللاوعى. منذ الطفولة أو المراهقه. حين خشى عليها أبوها الموت الاجتماعى أو الأخلاقى إذا لم تتزوج بسرعة. وحكم عليها بالموت الفكرى والنفسي حين أخرجها من المدرسة . و فرض عليها زوجا لا تريده

It is a conflict that this woman is unaware of—a conflict that exists in the back of her mind. This conflict has been there since her childhood or teenage years, when her father was worried about the death of society or the death of morality in her daughter if she did not get married immediately. Her father disciplined her with the death of mind and soul by getting her out of school and marrying her off to a husband she never wanted.⁴⁷

The construction of religion that has manifested itself as ‘The Symbolic’ that confines and oppresses this woman continues. She is driven by religious fundamentalists who gave rise to ‘Lack’ which resulted in the emergence of ‘Trauma’ that strengthened the subject’s incompleteness. The oppression that exacerbates the subject’s split is legally *shar’i* (Islamic law) law and is applied as an official state law. As a result, there emerged sales practices of girls, forced marriages, marriage of underage girls, unlimited divorces, and polygamy. The following quotation explains it.

أما أنا فقد صنع بي أبي ما هو أبشع من القتل. والمشكلة أن الشرع أو القانون لا يعاقب زوج رابعة ولا يعاقب الآباء ولا الأزواج الذين يبيعون و يشترون فينا باسم عقد الزواج الشرعى. أو الطلاق الشرعى. أو تعدد الزوجات الشرعى

And me, my father treated me worse than a murder. The problem is, the shari‘a law did not punish Rabi’ah’s husband, her father, and any men who sold their women in the name of *shar’i* (legal) marriage, *shar’i* divorce, and *shar’i* polygamy.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Nawāl Sa’dāwī, “al Umm al Suwisriyah al Qatilah”, in *Adab ... am Qillab Adab* (Cairo: Dar wa matabi’ al-mustaqbal, 1999), p. 109. All translation mine, unless otherwise attributed.

⁴⁸ Nawāl Sa’dāwī, “Qiṣṣah Faṭḥiyyah al-Miṣriyyah”, in *Adab ... am Qillab Adab* (Cairo: Dar wa matabi’ al-mustaqbal, 1999), p. 112.

وقد باعني أبي مند ست سنوات. و كنت في العاشرة من عمري لرجل سعودي
عجوز يكبرني بستين عاما

Since six years ago, my father has sold me. I was ten. He sold me to an old Arab man. He was 60.⁴⁹

Both quotes above are the words of Fathīyyah. It was a poor life and suffering she told a Foundation Care Carried by a group of Egyptian women. In the short story, Fathīyyah narrates her life as worse than a murder. She has been sold by her father since she was 6 years old and forced to marry at the age of 10. In the name of a *shar'i* marriage, a *shar'i* divorce, or a *shar'i* polygamy, her whole life was locked in suffering.

The 'Symbolic Religion' that contains the 'Lack' has also led to the oppression of women in the form of physical violence after women experience psychological oppression that paralyzes her soul and mind. Here's the quotation.

سافرت مع زوجي إلى مكة المكرمة. عشت خمس سنوات أشبه بالجحيم.
كان يضربني ضربا مبرحا في الفراش حتى أبكي وأصرح من شدة الألم. لم
أكن أعرف لماذا يضربني ثم يغتصبني. ثم عرفت من زوجاته السابقات أنه
مريض نفسيا. ولا شيء يوقظ شهوته الميتة إلا صراخ طفلة تعذبها آلام
الضرب. وزوجاته الثلاثة يضربن طفلي بلا سبب. وهددت واحدة منهن بقتل
ابني حتى لا يشارك أولادهن الميراث. و طلبت الطلاق من زوجي لأعود إلى
مصر. لكنه رفض أن يطلقني.

I went to Mecca with my husband. I lived in hell for five years. My husband beat me cruelly in bed till I cried and screamed in pain. I didn't know why he hit and raped me. Till I learned from his other wives that he has a psychiatric abnormality. Nothing aroused him except a loud cry of pain of a little girl that he tortured with painful blows. His three wives also beat my child without reasonable cause. One of them threatened to kill my child, so they won't have to share the family inheritance. I asked for a divorce and came back to Egypt, but he refused.⁵⁰

The above quotation explains the suffering of Fathīyyah. For five years she became the wife of her husband who came from Mecca and she felt like living in hell. Every day she was beaten her husband without reasonable cause, so Fathīyyah always screams because of pain. She just

⁴⁹ Sa'dāwī, "Qiṣṣah Fathīyyah al-Miṣriyyah", p. 112.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

finds out from her husband's wives that her husband has a psychiatric abnormality. His sexual desires can not rise unless he hears the screams of a child he painfully tortures. Fathīyyah was the victim of torture. Even Fathīyyah also still receives other suffering because the three wives also beat Fathīyyah's son every day because they are worried that their husband's property fell on Fathīyyah's son.

It is narrated in that short story that the symbolic religion has also eliminated the rights possessed by wives, who can be discharged from their homes and divorced by their husbands whenever the husband wants without the consent of his wife.⁵¹

‘The Symbolic ‘religion is commonly accepted by Egyptian society (the majority of fundamentalists) who make Islamic law as the official law of the country in the form of absolute understanding of the gender verses in the al-Qur’an and the life history of Prophet Muhammad, which is actually contextual but then standardized and believed to be a religious truth. In Egypt, all the gender verses in the al-Qur’an and hadith are no longer necessary to be contextually reconstructed in accordance with *asbab al-nuzul* and *asbab al-wurud* (causes of the decline of verse and hadith). Here is the quotation:

وقال لي أبي: الرجل لا يعيبه إلا جيبه. وقد أحل الله للرجل أربع زوجات. وليس في القرآن نص يحدد فارق السن بين الزوج و الزوجة. وقد تزوج الرسول محمد وهو في الستين من العمر من السيدة عائشة وهي في الثامنة من العمر. أى كانت تصغرنى بعامين اثنين

My father told me: Nothing insults a man but his pocket. Allah has made it halal for him over his four wives. Nothing in the al-Qur’an limits the age gap between a husband and his wife. Prophet Muhammad married Aisha when he was 60 while Aisha was 8, or 2 years younger than me.⁵²

It is also mentioned in the short story that the symbolic is also a form of civil law (family and marriage) in Egypt, which is very patriarchal. Egyptian civil law affirms that men have the absolute rights of divorcing their wives at any time and the rights to polygamy, while women have no rights whatsoever, even against the citizenship of their own children.⁵³

⁵¹ Sa'dāwī, “Qiṣṣah Fathīyyah al-Miṣriyyah”, p. 119.

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ Sa'dāwī, “Qiṣṣah Fathīyyah al-Miṣriyyah”, p. 120.

According to Al-Sa'dāwī,⁵⁴ the construction of patriarchal semitic religions can not be separated from the other patriarchal world religions since the dominant “patriarchal culture” is strongly correlated with the socio-cultural condition of society and economics that became the context of emergence and formation of world religions. The early Brahmanism accentuated men's shrine, and the social organization of early Buddhism was also patriarchal. Taoism was formed in interactions dominated by masculinity in Confucianism, and Han Dynasty emphasized religion as a social order with submission of women to their father, husband, and their mature boys.⁵⁵ The inferior position of women in the Semitic religions is strongly related to the interpretation of Adam and Eve myth which is contained in the Old Testament.

There are four presupposition of theologic-patriarchal construction in the myth, namely: 1) Eve was created from Adam's rib; 2) Eve was a sinner that caused human being's fallout to the earth; 3) God had cursed Eve with pain during child delivery and that she should submit before her husband who leads her; and 4) God had a son who could dominate women.⁵⁶ The New Testament which appeared after the Old Testament then continued this patriarchal construction.⁵⁷

Finally, this patriarchal idea is reflected in some contextual verses of law in al-Qur'an: polygamy, marriage, divorce, the leadership of men, laws of inheritance and testimony. Theologically, the word “Allah” in al-Qur'an is characterized by male gender, and eschatologically, the paradise is described masculinely since it only contains heavenly virgin. The discourse of hell in some Islamic literatures becomes very masculine since they emphasize that the majority of people in hell are women.

According to Al-Sa'dāwī,⁵⁸ masculine interpretation of the myth of Adam and Eve is a patriarchal theology construction which is strongly correlated with the economic factors. Judaism emerged in the context of dominance of exploitative valued philosophy of economics that is

⁵⁴ Sa'dāwī, *al-Wajh al-'arī lil-Mar'ah al-'Arabīyah*, pp. 28–9.

⁵⁵ Katherine K. Young, “Pengantar”, in *Perempuan dalam Agama-Agama Dunia*, ed. by Arvind Sharma, trans. by Ade Alimah (Yogyakarta: SUKA Press, 2006), pp. 9–10.

⁵⁶ Nawāl Sa'dāwī, *Zinah* (Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī, 2009), pp. 164–5.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 163–4.

⁵⁸ Nawāl Sa'dāwī, *al-Unsha Hiya al-Asl* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbulī, 2006), p. 24.

characterized by the feudalism of land ownership and slavery, including women slavery. The context of Judaism emergence which became womb for the myth of Adam and Eve was testamental monotheism (testament with Yahweh, The God) which gave the identity and particular reason for the Jews to survive. This reason then caused Judaism to emphasize the importance of reproduction, family life and strict control on sexuality of women.⁵⁹

The construction of patriarchal religion is also related to the formation phase of old religions (including Judaism). At that time, the society was still on the stage of development of social cohesion which was guaranteed by the kingdom. The development of early kingdoms is a tough phase in history. When the early kingdoms emerged in ancient Israel and China, there were wars and strives to hold the reign at hand. Then transformations in the system of value and patriarchy emerged.⁶⁰

With the emergence of patriarchy before the birth of semitic religions, moral dualism grew since ancient times, since men ruled women economically and sexually. Then the degenerated value of women in religion, society and at home appeared. This degradation reached its peak at the time of Roman emperors.⁶¹ Christianity was born under the shade of Roman empire, an empire with patriarchal system consisting of master and his slave, where a man could have women as he had cattles and had a right of their life and death.⁶² The Church which was under the landlords went away from the original Messianic teachings, since the church leaders were involved in the regime and land ownership. The stronger the patriarchal feudal system, the lower the value of women.⁶³

Islam emerged after the messianic religion. In one of his travels for trade outside Hijaz, Muhammad found a group of people that recited some verses in the Old Testament and New Testament. The Arab society at the moment consisted of master and slave, and Muhammad's revolution against the slavery began. But the patriarchal system at the

⁵⁹ Denise L. Carmody, "Yahudi", in *Perempuan dalam Agama-Agama Dunia*, ed. by Arvind Sharma, trans. by Ade Alimah (Yogyakarta: SUKA Press, 2006), p. 256.

⁶⁰ Young, "Pengantar", p. 12.

⁶¹ Sa'dāwī, *al-Wajh al-'arī lil-Mar'ah al-'Arabīyah*, p. 50.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

moment was preserved by men from all of the clans (except the Umayya clan). Therefore, the patriarchal system in Islam continued since the Arab society needed more people to gain more power for waging wars against their enemies.⁶⁴

Like the Jews that favored to wage wars on their land of barren desert which gave them no fertility, the Arabs into which al-Qur'an was given had the same settings. The Arabs were known as nomadic people who liked to wage wars and grew on the barren desert which gave them no fertility identical to women. This very anthropological context became logical reason that women were not symbolized as superior character and did not grow as a feminist person of God in al-Qur'an.⁶⁵

According to Al-Sa'dāwī, the original Old Testament version explained that Eve was the owner of knowledge, reason and intelligence. Adam was one of her tools to neutralize her capability in the sense of knowledge and creation.⁶⁶ However, the actual myth which positioned women on an elevated and sacred place, reflecting the elevation of women's position was in the pre-historic era and thus before the emergence of semitic religions was then cut off.⁶⁷

The myth of Adam and Eve in the original version of the Old Testament which positioned women on an elevated place is linear with empirical discoveries of facts, namely historical, archaeological or anthropological ones. The facts show that the pattern of early human life was matriarchal and developed to a mathriarchal culture.

In Al-Sa'dāwī's opinion,⁶⁸ before the emergence of patriarchal cultures and semitic religions about 5000 years BC, in the Ancient Egypt a myth of the Goddess Isis written by Homer was found. It is said that Isis was better than Osiris (her husband) since Isis had knowledge, wisdom, and ability to create. Unfortunately, in the next development, the myth of Isis was reverted. Isis was no longer a goddess who gave

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 65-6.

⁶⁵ Abdurrahman Wahid, "Wanita dalam Perspektif Agama-Agama Suatu Pengantar", in *Wanita dalam Percakapan Antar Agama: Aktualisasinya dalam Pembangunan*, ed. by M. Masyhur Amin and Masruchah (Yogyakarta: LKPSM NU DIY, 1992), p. 3.

⁶⁶ Sa'dāwī, *al-Wajb al-'arī lil-Mar'ab al-'Arabīyah*, pp. 17-8.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-5.

birth to the gods because of her knowledge and wisdom, but she was then born by Zeus from his head. Maybe the monumental change from matriarchal system to the patriarchal one in the history of mankind was when the God Osiris became the only ruling god, who was born by himself and not from his mother (Nut).⁶⁹ In the patriarchal setting which is reflected in this myth of Isis, the myth of Adam and Eve in which Eve was created from Adam's rib emerged.

The Symbolic of masculine interpretation of the myth of Adam and Eve emerged along with the patriarchal culture and slavery.⁷⁰ In the prehistoric era that was characterized by the end of matriarchy, men overthrew women with weapon and seized their divinity, reason and capability to create. The symbolic religion emerged in the interpretation of the Old Testament in which a woman's head is cut and she becomes headless, but then her husband is the head. From here, appears the view that women are without reason or lack of reason.⁷¹ In this economical feudalistic system which based its value on servitude, women then lost their position in religion and religious rituals. Religion and God belong only to men. The position of women was degenerated to its lowest position in the same level of slave and animal. Their lives were on men's hands.⁷² With the emergence of patriarchy, moral dualism grew since the primordial era, since men ruled women economically and sexually. The degeneration of women reached its lowest position in the era of Roman emperors where women became property to be traded in the markets.⁷³

According to Al-Sa'dāwī, the story of Adam and Eve is a symbolic story that can be interpreted in some different ways. In the contemporary reflection, the story shows relation between knowledge, gender and women. Adam did not "fall", but Adam indeed became "elevated" and left his animality and became a being with conscience and knowledge for he had eaten the forbidden fruit on Eve's initiation.⁷⁴ A progressive

⁶⁹ Sa'dāwī and 'Izzat, *al-Marāb wa-al-Dīn wa-al-Akḥlaq*, p. 21.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Sa'dāwī, *al-Wajb al-'arī lil-Mar'ab al-'Arabīyah*, pp. 20-21.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁷⁴ Sa'dāwī, *al-Wajb al-'arī lil-Mar'ab al-'Arabīyah*, p. 23; Raimundo Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies* (New York; Ramsey; Toronto: Paulist Press,

interpretation of the myth of Adam and Eve which had been brought out by Al-Sa'dāwī was also brought out by Muslim feminists such as M. Iqbal, Riffat Hassan, Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd. Al-Qur'an also emphasizes that women and men are created in their best form for a high purpose,⁷⁵ not for merely playing around,⁷⁶ for servitudic and chaliphatic mission.⁷⁷

However, in the esoteric aspect, monotheism religions indeed emphasized gender equality. In Judaism, two verses of creation 1: 1-2; 4a and 2: 4b-25 say that men and women were created on God's direct act and were the highest level of creation. In Christianity, The Book of Creation 1: 27 emphasized that men and women were created in God's own image as His partners and helpers of creatures.⁷⁸ In Islam, al-Qur'an said that men and women were created from one soul.⁷⁹

The idea of economic factor as The Big Other which sharpens the tyranni of the Symbolic of the patriarchal religious construction is contained in the short stories.⁸⁰ The strength of feudalism then developed and became capitalism which preserved the servitude in the patriarchal religious construction.⁸¹ Capitalism preserved the oppression on women.⁸² The economic crisis and poverty in Africa made Arab women more subordinate and marginal.⁸³ The political regime made world religions as tools to exploit women through fundamental religious movement.⁸⁴

1979); Maḥmūd Muḥammad. Ṭāhā, *The Second Message of Islam* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1987).

⁷⁵ Qur'an, 15: 85.

⁷⁶ Qur'an, 21: 16.

⁷⁷ Qur'an, 51: 56.

⁷⁸ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Kristen", in *Perempuan dalam Agama-Agama Dunia*, ed. by Arvind Sharma, trans. by Ade Alimah (Yogyakarta: SUKA Press, 2006), p. 294; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983).

⁷⁹ Qur'an, 4: 1; Qur'an, 7: 189; Qur'an, 6: 98; Qur'an, 31: 28.

⁸⁰ Sa'dāwī, *Adab ... am Qillab Adab*, p. 7.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁸² Sa'dāwī, "al Umm al Suwisriyah al Qatilah", p. 104.

⁸³ Sa'dāwī, "Qiṣṣah Fathīyyah al-Miṣriyyah", p. 120.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

2. *The Radical Acts of Nawāl Al-Sa'dāwī*

As stated earlier, that for Žižek, the subject can be a vanishing mediator, i.e. one who disrupts the symbolic boundaries so that the subject can become a psychotic subject, capable of being in a symbolic order and able to choose freely. According to Robertus Robet,⁸⁵ the radical act is called “evil” from the standpoint of the symbolic order, judged negatively beyond the law and morals. Radical actions can also be understood as actions done by the subject spontaneously and without any consideration.

As a form of rejection of all the symbolic order which oppresses women, the subject then performs a radical act of getting out of the Symbolic, disrupting and destroying it. These radical acts are as follows.

أخرجت من جيب جلبابها سكيناً يشبه مطوأة “قرن الغزال” وقالت بصوت مرعب: سأقتل أبي و أدخل السجن. و إنكم دافعتم عن “رابعة” التي قتلت زوجها الذي اراد أن يطردها على الشارع هي و أطفالها الخمسة ليتزوج بقناة صغيرة. رابعة أعلنت أنها لم تقتل زوجها إلا بعد أن قتلها ألف مرة من قبل

She took out her knife which resembles “deer’s horn” from her shirt pocket and uttered something in horrifying sound: I will kill my father and go to jail. You all have defended “Rabi’ah” who killed her husband who had kicked her out on the street with her five kids, so he could marry another young girl. Rabi’ah declared that she did not kill her husband; instead, he had killed her a thousand times.⁸⁶

و هي تطعن ابنها الأول تسع طعنات في ظهره. و تطعن ابنها الثاني سبع طعنات في صدره و تتسرب القوة من يدها حين تطعن نفسها فتفرغ زجاجة الحبوب في جوفها لكن عربة الإسعاف تنقلها إلى المستشفى. لتعيش من جديد تحت رقابة البوليس و الأطباء وقد ترسل إلى المصحة العقلية أو تقدم للمحاكمة كأ م قاتلة

She stabbed her first child on the back nine times and stabbed her second child on the chest seven times. She used all her power of her hands when stabbing herself on the chest using pieces of glasses. But the ambulance got her to the hospital. She came back to life under doctor’s attendance

⁸⁵ Robertus Robet, *Manusia Politik: Subyek Radikal dan Politik Emansipasi di Era Kapitalisme Global menurut Slavoj Žižek* (Tangerang: Marjin Kiri, 2010), p. 120.

⁸⁶ Sa’dāwī, “Qiṣṣah Fathiyyah al-Miṣriyyah”, p. 111.

and police custody. She was sent to either asylum or court as a murderer.⁸⁷

أما زينب فقد عجزت عن قتل طفلتها و ظلت رغبة القتل تراودها وكلما
احتضنت طفلتها الترضعها شعرت كأنها قوة خفية تضغط بيدها هلى ابنتها

But Zaenab had failed to kill her children, and she still had the desire to kill them. Every time she breastfed her babies, she felt as if she had an unknown desire to press her hand on her child.⁸⁸

The quotations above illustrate which kind of radical efforts the subjects can get out of the symbolic order that ensnares and oppresses them. If she were a girl, then the oppression would be done by the father who forced her to stop school, selling herself with high dowries, marry her forcibly which all the financial benefits taken by the father. If she were a wife, she would always be beaten by her husband throughout her marriage life, forced into sexuality, polygamy, and then divorced as she pleases. If she were a mother, she would lose her dignity and rights. In addition to physical suffering, soul and mind, psychological burdens and endless inner conflicts are shared by women throughout their lives.

The subject then performs these radical acts. The subjects radical attempt to escape from the ‘Symbolic’ begins with their own hesitancy for an oppressive dominant religious understanding. The subject then criticizes the construction of religion which has become tyrannical and oppressive.

In Žižek’s view, the notion on negativity stresses on the Real which is located in a positive existence and thus cannot be negated. It is an emptiness, a lack, and a radical negativity. Žižek argues that “it cannot be negated because it is already in itself, in its positivity, nothing but an embodiment of a pure negativity, emptiness.” That is why, in Lacanian view, the Real is the sublime object.⁸⁹

The story character of a mysterious friend criticizes religions by saying that throughout history many religions have oppressed humanity in the name of truth or the God by many names; holy book, sun, moon, star of *zabrah*, star of David, sword, holy war, justice and others.⁹⁰ The

⁸⁷ Sa’dāwī, “al Umm al Suwisriyah al Qatilah”, pp. 99–100.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 192.

⁹⁰ Sa’dāwī, *Adab ... am Qillab Adab*, p. 7.

figure of a mysterious friend then criticizes the religious understanding associated with male leadership over women. According to her, that is the source of the understanding of female inferiority and male superiority in the construction of Islamic marriage law, which results in low, inferior, and marginal positions of women.

تقول صديقتي: إنه البئر المظلم. يسقط فيه المتنافسون و المتنافسات في السوق الحرة. والحرية هنا لمن يملك العملة . الإنفاق مقابل الطاعة في البيت أو المكتب. و تكتب صديقتي تقول: وماذا يشترط الرجل العاجز عن الإنفاق؟ سؤال آخر يرد إلى الذهن. وماذا تشترط المرأة القادرة على الإنفاق؟

My bestfriend said: Verily, he is the dark well, all men and women who compete in a free market will fall in it, and here freedom means having money. Meanwhile, earning is the reward from obedience at home and in office. My bestfriend wrote and said: What is obliged of men who cannot afford? Another question emerges in heart, what is expected of women who can provide?⁹¹

وتبتسم صديقتي في أسى وتقول: منذ اكتشاف العملة والسوق. لم يعد الشرف موجودا في الحب أو الحرب في الشرق أو الغرب⁹²

My bestfriend smiles in my despair and said: Since they found currency and market, dignity is lost in love or war, both in the East and the West.

According to Žižek, the subject's criticism of religion as the 'Symbolic' is the subject's search for 'The Real' as he or she attempts to escape from 'The Symbolic' and even rejects it for the lack of it. Thus, the actions of the subject of the mysterious friend who has criticized religion in the leadership of men over women is an act of radicalization against the symbolic, rejecting and destroying it because it contains 'Lack' in the form of injustice and suffering experienced by women. Religions that turn into oppressive ideologies due to economic and political factors are also a 'Lack', for destroying the humanity of noble humans, that is love and justice.

The rejection of religious construction is also done by a mysterious friend as a subject. She has proclaimed herself that she wants to be "herself" and she does not want to be defined by religion or culture that is equally patriarchal. This mysterious friend figure fully believes that she

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Sa'dāwī, *Adab ... am Qillab Adab*, p. 7.

is the child of her mother and not her father's child. According to her, all humans are children of mothers. In fact, this realm is born from the womb of a sacred woman. Women are not the cause of the fall (as the religions say it), but women are the cause of the rise of humanity.⁹³

Authentic or radical acts as a form of rejection of the characters of the story are an attempt made by a free subject that is empty in its separation. Because the subject is split, it always keeps its longing for 'The Real' to get its wholeness. Radical action and rejection of subjects to religion as 'The Symbolic' is their attempt to be able to search 'The Real' and can approach it. The following quote confirms it.

خديجة المصرية رأيتها في السجن أيضا تمسك في يدها "القرآن" و تخاطب
الله: يا رب أنت العالم أنني لم أقتل ابني إلا حين أمرتني يا رب و أمسكت يدي
الضعيفة و منحنتني القوة من عندك. و هي تقول: هل هناك أم تقتل طفلها؟
أنا لم أقتلها . الله هو الذي قتله. ربنا أخذه ليرحمه من الجوع

I saw Khadijah from Egypt in prison holding the al-Qur'an in her hand and said to Allah: O Lord, You are the most Knowing and know that I didn't kill my child except if it is Your command. You hold my weak hand, and You give me strength. She (Khadijah) said: Is there any mother killing her babies? I didn't kill them. Allah killed them. He took them to protect from hunger.⁹⁴

فكرت في قتل طفلي ثم الإنتحار. لكن امومتي منعتني من قتلهما. و قلت
لنفسي: لماذا أقتلها و هما بريئان بلاذنب. إن المذنب هو أبي. و هو الذي
يستحق القتل. لماذا لا أقتله ليكون عبرة لغيره. ولأدخل السجن و لأموت ثم
أذهب إلى الآخرة و أقابل الله و أحكي له كل شيء. و لا بد أن الله سوف يكون
معي: لأن الله عادل

I was thinking to kill my two children and then kill myself. But my conscience as a mother prevented me from doing that. I told to myself: Why should I kill my innocent children? It is my father who sinned, and he deserved to die. Why would I not kill him instead as a warning for others? Then I went to jail and die. I will be in the Hereafter and meet Allah, and He will surely defend me: because Allah is the fairest Judge.⁹⁵

The two quotations above are the attempts of the subject to be able

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹⁴ Sa'dāwī, "al Umm al Suwisriyah al Qatilah", p. 103.

⁹⁵ Sa'dāwī, "Qiṣṣah Fathiyyah al-Miṣriyyah", p. 118.

to approach 'The Real'. The effort is a form of rejection on 'the Symbolic' and seeks to break the chain. There is hope for the emergence of the new liberating 'Symbolic' order. 'The Imaginary' as a space of ideology and totalization filled with oppression from 'The Big Other' has given rise to a tyrannical 'Symbol', a tyrannical religion believed to be true by Egyptian society. 'The Real' is the subjects' rejection of 'the Symbolic' as the subject's attempt to get closer to 'The Real' that is longed for, a religious construction that liberates women.

The Big Other had worsened the oppression of 'The Symbolic' of the patriarchal religious construction. According to Žižek, 'The Big Other' which appears as the rule of 'The Symbolic' which is then full of improbabilities and contains the lack. Because of the existence of the lack, the structure in 'The Symbolic' becomes open to be criticized by subject because of the alienation of the radical subject from the other.⁹⁶ The radical alienation as a form of subject split causes him to subjectivate which is related to radical act. The radical act is an act that gets out from 'The Symbolic' order by violating the rules and norms which have been established. Robet calls it criminal, destructive, and transcends laws and moral.⁹⁷ The radical act makes the subject as a vanishing mediator, as psychotic subject that is distant from symbolic orders, be able to avoid paradoxes and choose freely.⁹⁸ Depends on Žižek's opinion, evil such as this is a principal and ethical event. It is not a simple event which is driven by pathological motivation (pleasure, benefit, need). Rather, evil constitutes an 'external event-an individual's autonomous personality which is reflected through his or her original actions.'⁹⁹

Al-Sa'dāwī witnessed the Egyptian government's abuse of power by imposing on its citizens religious fanaticism, nationalism, and traditions. Whoever opposed the authorities was either imprisoned or banished.¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile, in the feminism debates which have no end and on behalf of religion and moral, violence on millions of women keeps happening.

⁹⁶ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 137.

⁹⁷ Robet, *Manusia Politik: Subyek Radikal dan Politik Emansipasi di Era Kapitalisme Global menurut Slavoj Žižek*, pp. 120–1.

⁹⁸ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 186.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

¹⁰⁰ Sa'dāwī and 'Izzat, *al-Marab wa-al-Din wa-al-Akblaq*, pp. 62–3.

Feminist activists get accused of infidelity and feminism movement is always being inhibited by political powers on behalf of religion.¹⁰¹ The radical act of subject as a destruction of discourse of patriarchal religion is an act which has an emancipatory mission to destroy the old Symbolic and pick up the new Symbolic as ‘The Real’ that is missed, a freedom for Arabic women from the chain of discourse of patriarchal religious construction.

The subject’s unusual action is not subversion.¹⁰² Subjectivity is a process that begins with inner conflict but then develops into an action to dismantle or replace the existence of socio-symbolic network until the subject is able to determine a space for his or her own existence.¹⁰³ Radicalization of the actions of Nawāl Al-Sa’dāwī rejects the symbolic order of this religion in the form of her actions in writing literary works. Therefore, the characters of short stories become free and autonomous subjects, namely: Fathiyah, a mysterious friend, Zaenab, Rabi’ah, Khadijah, and the mother. All of these subjects with their radical actions are as a process of subjectification of Nawāl al-Sa’dāwī herself, because she is split and empty and have intention to look for self-fulfillment continuously.

The goal of Al-Sa’dāwī in creating radical subjects in stories is to boost the thousands of years of patriarchal religious construction in Egypt. Therefore, according to Al-Sa’dāwī,¹⁰⁴ the study about the existence of women, religion and morals can be scientific in nature by crashing the limits required in academic studies, by dismantling the standard rules inherited by the predecessor.

The works of Al-Sa’dāwī are her response to Gayatri Spivak, *Can Subaltern Speak?*¹⁰⁵ Al-Sa’dāwī is not a silent subaltern woman, but she is able to speak out against the opponents of the patriarchy representing

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-4.

¹⁰² Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, p. 247.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

¹⁰⁴ Sa’dāwī and ‘Izzat, *al-Marab wa-al-Din wa-al-Akblaq*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, in *Marxism and The Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988).

herself and the East.¹⁰⁶ She has full power to change the position of Arab women in new ways. She has critic on the westernization and orthodox religious education system in Egypt.¹⁰⁷

According to Al-Sa'dāwī, religions have been constructed by basing on the system of servitude. In the Qur'an there is a sign that the male sex is higher in degree or degree above the female gender.¹⁰⁸ The Torah painfully places Eve lower than Adam with very sharp discrimination and oppression against women. In the Gospels there is the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit is the god whose name is hidden, as the hidden face of the *hijab* behind the veil. The Holy Spirit loses its natural ability at childbirth, and it is no longer the mother who gave birth to humanity but is born of a male rib.¹⁰⁹

In Christianity, the virginity of the holy virgin Mary is considered a sanctity that must be preserved by all women if she wants to be a mother. But men are freed from the sanctity that must be guarded.¹¹⁰ Therefore, Al-Sa'dāwī deconstructs and becomes a counter hegemony of the phenomenon of a conventional and palogocentric female body.¹¹¹ Many researches on her works illustrate that women's religious opponents are religiously experienced by almost all women with various backgrounds and social status.¹¹² All religious constructions are oppressive to women; all religions are classes, whereas in ancient Egypt men and women were equal. But after the enslavement, the gods of women are replaced by men.¹¹³

However, according to Al-Sa'dāwī, several verses of the Qur'an

¹⁰⁶ Amal Amireh, "Framing Nawal El Saadawi: Arab Feminism in a Transnational World", *Signs*, vol. 26, no. 1 (University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 215–49.

¹⁰⁷ Sarah Graham-Brown, "Feminism in Egypt: A Conversation with Nawal Sadawi", *MERIP Reports*, vol. 95 (1981), pp. 24–7.

¹⁰⁸ Qur'an, 2: 229; Qur'an, 4: 34.

¹⁰⁹ Sa'dāwī and 'Izzat, *al-Marab wa-al-Din wa-al-Akblaq*, pp. 26–7.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹¹¹ Khadidiatou Guèye, "'Tyrannical Femininity' in Nawal El Saadawi's Memoirs of a Woman Doctor", *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 41, no. 2 (2010), pp. 160–72.

¹¹² Ramzi Saiti, "Paradise, Heaven, and Other Oppressive Spaces: a Critical Examination of the Life and Works of Nawal El-Saadawi", *Journal of Arabic Literature*, vol. 25, no. 2 (Brill, 1994), pp. 152–74.

¹¹³ Nawāl Sa'dāwī and Jo Beall, "Nawal El Saadawi", *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, no. 5 (1989), pp. 33–9.

and the hadith of the prophet have explained the fundamental concepts of freedom and equality between men and women. But unfortunately, they do not become a platform that became the backdrop of cultural construction. Al-Qur'an says that The God has created man from one self; then He made it from his partner.¹¹⁴ Allah also affirms that those who believe (both male and female) then some of them become a helper for others.¹¹⁵ The Prophet said, women are brothers and human beings are equal like comb teeth.¹¹⁶ Al-Sa'dāwī also reinforces the existence of "ijtihad" which is upheld in Islam, namely the actualization of the text in real life because the reality changes constantly while the text is static.¹¹⁷

Al-Sa'dāwī has existed in her own unique way. Lack and the traumatic events she experienced from her childhood to her old age have now made her a split subject. Since she is also an empty subject, Al-Sa'dāwī always resists gender inequality through her actions in writing works of fiction.

As an empty subject, Al-Sa'dāwī has the freedom, courage, and authenticity of views. Therefore, in her life, Al-Sa'dāwī has many tragic events: out of prison, dismissal of office, censorship and the arrangement of her works, the juxtaposition of her feminist movement, exile, fugitives, and various criticisms and accusations of infidelity into blacklisting those who should be put to death.

Al-Sa'dāwī continues to move to gain the integrity of herself. She never gave up despite knowing that she failed. As a split and empty subject, she continues to perform radical acts by refusing and breaking the symbolic chain that bombs Arab women. Her refusal was her attempt to break out of the old symbolic order and pick up a new symbolic as her attempt to get close to 'The Real'. In the three short stories, the concept of the God is 'The Real' as a symbolization of women's justice and freedom in religious construction that is longed for, sought and championed. As for the three short stories, radical actions of these female murderers exemplify the subjectivization of the subject within the sublime self-objectivization.

¹¹⁴ Qur'an, 39: 6.

¹¹⁵ Qur'an, 9: 71.

¹¹⁶ Sa'dāwī and Beall, "Nawal El Saadawi", pp. 72-3.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-3.

D. Concluding Remarks

In three short stories in anthology *Adab Am Qillah Adab*, Al-Sa'dāwī has made radical subjects through storytellers rejecting and opposing patriarchal religious constructions. Religious construction has become *The Symbolic* which oppresses women in Egypt. The inferior position of women in the semitic religions is strongly related to the interpretation of Adam and Eve myth in the Old Testament which contained presupposition of theologic-patriarchal construction which strongly correlated with the economic and politic factors.

The literary work is the explanation of the radicalization of the author's actions against 'the Symbolic', because 'the Symbolic' (religious constructs) contains the lack. As an author who performs the process of self-subjectification through her actsof writing fiction, Al-Sa'dāwī has affirmed her 'existence'. The radical subjects in Al-Sa'dāwī's stories are forms of rejection and opposition to 'the Symbolic', to boost the thousands of years of patriarchal religious construction in Egypt, because negotiations of a softer Al-Sa'dāwī never succeeded.

Al-Sa'dāwī is a subject that is split and empty at the same time so that she would continue to move to fulfill herself with her radical actions in rejecting all the symbolic religious orders that marginalize Egyptian women. She is a divided subject because she is filled with 'lack' and 'trauma' that she experienced throughout her life, which is associated with the sufferings and oppression experienced by Egyptian women on the pretext of religion.

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