

**Lebanon Shiite Woman in the Middle of Discrimination
Feminist Literary Criticism Analysis of the Novel
*Hikayah Az-Zahra***

**Perempuan Syiah Libanon di Tengah Arus Diskriminasi
Analisis Kritik Sastra Feminis terhadap Novel
*Hikayah Az-Zahra***

Betty Mauli Rosa Bustam

Magister of Islamic Education, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan

Jl. Pramuka No. 42, Umbulharjo, Yogyakarta 55161, Indonesia

Email: betty.rosa@bsa.uad.ac.id

Submitted: 2019-06-15

Published: 2020-05-05

DOI: 10.24036/humanus.v19i1.104527

Accepted: 2020-04-29

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24036/humanus.v19i1.104527>

Abstract

This article reveals a picture of discrimination against women that occurs in a Shiite Muslims community in Lebanon. As is well known, Shi'a Muslims are second only to Sunnis in Lebanese Muslims as a whole, even though both populations are balanced. Islam itself became the second religion after Christianity in Lebanon and there are still several other religions (sects). Lebanon accommodates the growth of many religions that have a variety rules for their followers, so there is often attraction in making decisions regarding state laws and regulations, especially relating to women. Feminist Literary Criticism is used to explain all literary phenomena relating to women that aesthetically spread in the *Hikayah az-Zahra* novel which is the object of the research, this is due to the peculiarities of women which can only be explained using their own perspective. The results of this study will show a variety of forms of discrimination against women in Shiite circles, which are part of the daily lives of Lebanese people in situations of prolonged conflict. Shiite women, represented by the character of Zahra, cannot even expect protection from anywhere, including family members.

Keywords: *Shiite Muslims, Discrimination against Wamen, Hikayah Az-Zahra*

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengungkap gambaran diskriminasi terhadap perempuan yang terjadi di tengah komunitas penganut Islam Syiah di Libanon. Sebagaimana diketahui bersama bahwa muslim Syiah menempati posisi kedua setelah Sunni di kalangan muslim Libanon secara keseluruhan, meski populasi keduanya seimbang. Islam sendiri menjadi agama kedua setelah Kristen di Libanon dan masih terdapat beberapa agama lainnya. Libanon mengakomodir tumbuhnya banyak agama yang memiliki ragam aturan bagi penganutnya, sehingga seringkali terjadi tarik-menarik dalam membuat keputusan terkait undang-undang dan aturan negara, terutama yang berkaitan dengan perempuan.

Kritik Sastra Feminis digunakan untuk menjelaskan seluruh fenomena literer yang berkaitan dengan perempuan dan tersebar secara estetis di dalam novel *Hikayah az-Zahra* yang dijadikan objek penelitian, hal ini dikarenakan kekhasan perempuan yang hanya bisa dijelaskan menggunakan cara pandang perempuan sendiri. Hasil penelitian ini nantinya akan memperlihatkan ragam bentuk diskriminasi terhadap perempuan di kalangan Syiah, yang menjadi bagian dari keseharian masyarakat Libanon dalam situasi konflik berkepanjangan. Perempuan Syiah, yang diwakilkan oleh tokoh Zahra, bahkan tidak dapat mengharapakan perlindungan dari manapun, termasuk dari anggota keluarga.

Kata kunci: Muslim Syiah, diskriminasi terhadap perempuan, *Hikayah az-Zahra*

Introduction

Lebanon is a country that is often subjected to violence, and there are still many print conflicts seen in its society to this day. As noted, there are many different religions in Lebanon. In total, there are 18 recognized religions and sects, three dominant religions namely Maronite Christianity, Sunni Islam and finally, Shiite Islam. Political and social inequalities as a result of institutionalized sectarianism were exacerbated after the entry of Palestinian refugees into Lebanon in 1948 and next in 1967, which led to increased tensions between Christians and Muslims (Marusek, 2018).

Sectarianism is often used as a 'fig leaf' to normalize the types of violations of everyday law which in turn hinder the emergence of a common and transparent and accountable rule of law and institutions. Sectarian elites expose state finances and natural resources to neopatrimonial predators, protect corrupt clients and institutions, perpetuate regional and sectoral economic gaps in politicizing everything from judicial and state oversight bodies to appointment of the public sector, sports activities and campuses-universities, to imposing sanctions on various forms of violence - especially violence against women and voiceless groups (Salloukh, Barakat, Al-Habbal, Khattab, & Mikaelian, 2015).

Many men and women suffer the technical consequences of a sectarian discipline system, women more suffer and receive crueller treatment than men. The discipline logic of the sectarian system denies Lebanon for they existence as citizens with irrevocable political and social rights, the reduction of their rights applies to members deemed unequal in sectarian communities recognized by the state, and regulated by kinship groups patriarchy. This certainly distorts the structure of incentives that devalue benefits as a prerequisite for personal success and access to public or private institutions, while the absence of rule of law and accountability allows countless forms of criminality to occur. For example, domestic violence especially against women, petty crimes, theft of assets and public land, and vigilantism in sectarian bodies - escape without punishment with impunity (Salloukh et al., 2015).

Shia as one of the 18 recognized religions and sects in Lebanon, must face social discrimination in the country. Shia followers are considered uneducated and have the desire to control Lebanon and replace all the country's leaders with their uneducated adherents. Moreover, Shias are considered immigrants from Iran and are not from the Lebanese community themselves. Shiites are often associated with Hezbollah and they are considered as foreigners who enter Lebanon by invading (when against Israel who

fought Lebanon for accepting Palestinian refugees) (Marusek, 2018). Like other sects, the Shiite community also has its own rules outside the rules set by the state. And as mentioned above, the internal rules of sects, including Shiites, tend to discriminate against women and other voiceless margins.

Many of discrimination that women receive, especially in Shia Muslim societies, is partly re-described by Hanan as-Shaykh in her novel *Hikayah az-Zahra*. A novel that focuses all the events in it around Zahra's life. This novel has a background in Lebanese society in the mid-1970s, when the civil war was at its height. Although the Zahra era has long passed, but the lives of women among Shiite Muslims and Lebanese women in general have not been separated from discriminatory matters. What Zahra experienced is still often experienced by women in real life in Lebanon. This is as reported by Human Rights Watch about the continued discrimination against women in Lebanon, including in state law (Said, 2013).

Zahra's childhood life was filled with turmoil, and in her teenage years she had to deal with domestic violence, abortion, and travel to Africa to visit her uncle who was dumped by the government. She passed adulthood with other difficulties, one of which was failure in fostering the household. In this novel *Hikayah az-Zahra*, conflict is always present everywhere, on the dining table, in the bathroom mirror, even on the bed. This is how Hanan as-Shaykh described the impact of the conflict in the community in her novel. Another interesting portrayal is to reflect political conflict through Zahra's body. Zahra's poor skin condition is a symbol of deepening conflict and inevitable violence. The majority of readers consider the novel *Hikayah az-Zahra* as a novel that is not interesting and confusing. This is because Zahra is described by the author as an absurd figure due to her psychological appearance that seems disturbed. There are not many readers who easily empathize with Zahra figures, especially those who have never felt life in the midst of conflict. However, as a symbol that represents the voices of women in Lebanon, the novel is full of messages and rebellion.

Prolonged conflict certainly leaves many problems in the community, especially in a society that places women as second-class citizens or marginal groups. As a phenomenon, a picture of discrimination that ends in violence and is inflicted on women, is recorded in the memory of many people, including novelists who are part of the community and are directly involved in the phenomenon. As a woman, novelists can certainly feel the discrimination that befell her people in Lebanon. For this reason, the portrayal of the conflict situation in Lebanon, along with all its impacts on the community as outlined by the writer in her novel, seems very real. This is because literary works are a reflection of social conditions, and women are more eloquent about their people than men. The conflict that started from looking sharply at differences, especially religious differences, has left Lebanon devastated and only leaves revenge and sadness, especially for women.

As a literary work, the novel *Hikayah az-Zahra* which is the material object in this study, requires a special analysis knife to dissect it, namely Feminist Literary Criticism. Feminist Literary Criticism is needed to uncover the female voices that emerge from the novel that are not usually captured by other critical theories. Feminist criticism is part of the New Feminism discourse that took place in Europe and America in the late 1960s, which has the agenda to revive political and social issues related to debates about women's suffrage, and to question the actualization of women's participation in Western culture. Feminists and feminist literary critics are indebted to writers before the 20th

century, and writers in years of conflict (war), one of which is Virginia Woolf, who has sparked a new awareness about women and women's writing (Goldman, 2006).

As a theory of critics, in its application feminist literary criticism utilizes the framework of feminist theory to evaluate and interpret a work. Referring to Culler in (Bustam, 2014), feminist literary criticism is the process of reading as a woman (read as a woman). Feminist literary criticism offers all female readers a different perception and assumption about the experience of reading literary works when compared to men. Growing awareness of literature enthusiasts that there are important differences in the meaning of literary works related to gender, namely the assumption of sexual differences in the interpretation of literature and the meaning of literary works. Feminist literary criticism is used to analyze the problem of gender bias and the emancipation of women who are scattered on the aesthetic elements of literary works.

According to Showalter via Bustam (2014), woman as reader pays attention to the exploitation and manipulation of female audiences, especially in popular culture and film, and analyzes 'woman as sign' in the semiotic system. This is intended that women are not just connoisseurs of works, but also critics of works that see the work in the perspective of women and see the female characters in the work as a sign or symbol that is full of interpretation.

The writer hopes that this study can provide significant knowledge on the discrimination of women among Shia followers in Lebanon. This seems contradictory at first glance, because Lebanese women are considered to have a greater role than women in other Middle Eastern countries. Specifically, this study aims to address the issues surrounding how women are treated in a third largest religion in Lebanon, namely Shia, and what forms of discrimination are accepted by women in that group described in the novel *Hikayah az-Zahra*.

Method

This study is a library research. Research that utilizes library resources to obtain research data. Library researches limit their activities to library collection materials without conducting field studies (Zed, 2008). Referring to Zed (2008), penerapan studi pustaka ini bercirikan hal berikut: (1) Researchers deal directly with text or numerical data and not with direct knowledge from the field or eyewitnesses in the form of events, people, or other objects. (2) Library data is 'ready made'. That is, researchers do not go anywhere and only deal directly with source material that is readily available in the library. (3) Library data are generally secondary sources, in the sense that researchers obtain material from the second hand and not the original data from the first hand in the field. And (4) The condition of library data is not limited by space and time. Researchers are dealing with static information, fixed. That is, whenever researchers come and go, the data will never change because it is already 'dead' data stored in written records (in the form of text, numbers, pictures, tape recordings, or films).

In this study, the main text used as research material is the novel *Hikayah az-Zahra* by Hanan al-Shaykh. From the novel, data related to discrimination against women are released which will then be analyzed using the help of literary analysis theory. In conducting the analysis, researchers need other secondary references relating to discrimination against women, the Lebanese conflict, the social conditions of Lebanese society, and other supporting references about theory.

Secondary references are needed because literary works are born from the community and writer often makes one of the events in community as her/his telling idea. The writer as the creator of a literary work is considered as a creature whose existence is bound by her/his social status in society. That is why literary works are often seen as social documents, or as portraits of social reality. It cannot be denied that literary works have the ability to record the characteristics of their times. Literature is able to be a repository of traditions and books on the history of civilization. Recognized or not, literary works give even more historical facts than history books.

Results and Discussions

Discrimination and Sexual Objectification Against Women

Citing ElMorally's analysis (2017), the conflict in Lebanon is the result of a tug-of-war between two interests or views that want one party to be in a marginal area or even be driven out of the national area altogether. And women are at the heart of the dispute between the two groups. The emergence of conflict is regulated by men, but women must share the burden while taking a role in the execution of the conflict. The existence of women in the midst of conflicts that occur without their consent, gives a big influence on social life, not only in interacting with society at large, but also when interacting with family members.

The relationship between stress due to conflict and psychological disorders has been widely documented by the writers. Damage due to conflict is as devastating as damage due to natural disasters, which both cause a decrease in psychological and social level (Farhood, 1999). In the family, the decline in social level can be seen from the relations between family members. In this novel *Hikayah az-Zahra*, one of the relations described is between Zahra and her mother. Many conflicts occur related to the relations between these two women.

Hikayah az-Zahra's novel begins with the silence symbol that most classically known to humans, when the mother covers Zahra's mouth with her hand. This silencing became the initial action of a series of subsequent actions which were described in the novel as a discriminatory symbol against Zahra, who was haunted by fear and insecurity throughout her life.

"We stood behind the door, trembling. I heard my heart beat mixed with the pulse of her hand that placed in my mouth. At that time her hand smelled of soap and onions. I like it when she puts her hand on my mouth forever ..." (As-Shaikh, 1989, p. 7)

The small percentage of women who grow up in patriarchal societies often feel that they are quite motherly. Not only because the mother's very limited power to provide protection to her daughter and provide the support she needs, but through the mother also the patriarchal system can be instilled, according to conventional expectations (Rich, 1995).

The silencing of Zahra by the mother is a form of instilling a patriarchal system, that as a daughter, Zahra must prioritize the interests of other family members over herself, and she cannot speak unless permitted.

"We are standing behind the door. The crying in my head tried to get out, but he lost his way and never knew where and where to go. We both stand up. Her white hand still gripped my hand, instead of my mouth. Especially when a white face appears through a door that is opened by herself, half open, and looks in the dark (whether that person) sees us or not." (As-Shaikh, 1989, p. 8)

Mother's treatment of Zahra made her very scared. Zahra did not know the reason why the two of them had to hide and why she could not say a word. Zahra became a daze, unable to analyze every event that happened to her, even unable to feel anything beyond her fear.

"Even though our two bodies are stuck together, (but) I feel cold and scared. For some time, I could not predict anything, just as I could not accommodate everything that had and was happening other than cold and scared.." (As-Shaikh, 1989, p. 8)

Mother uses Zahra's lacks to hide her secret. Mother has become an agent of discrimination for Zahra that is formed from her patriarchal environment. Mother is no longer a protector for Zahra, but rather the person who plunged her into the abyss of oppression. Mother's attitude has made Zahra mentally unwell.

Anxious pressure from one woman to another, from mother to daughter, to adapt to the role of being low and discouraging, can hardly be called 'nurture', even though a mother believes that this can help her daughter survive (Rich, 1995).

"Mom assured me, she always assured me that this was the right way to go to doctor Syauqi's home. I believe. I have to believe it because that's what was said to me, even though all the evidence says otherwise. However, I believe. Although this man is not a doctor Syauqi. However, I believe..." (As-Shaikh, 1989, p. 9)

In the patriarchal system, women and children are objects of discrimination, even more so in conditions of conflict that change human behavior a lot, as explained earlier. The conflict made the patriarchal system work twice as cruel, due to the increasing dominance of men over women. This can be seen when the (character of) father scolded Zahra who was driven over his suspicion of the mother.

"I tried to think and the slap landed on my face. The tram owner's voice with his khaki pants (also) 'beat' my face. Mother's gazes, her voice, and all of her nerves also 'beat' my face, afraid that if I speak the truth..." (As-Shaikh, 1989, p. 9)

"He (my father) did not listen to my mother's words, even hit my face with his palm of hand and his voice boomed toward my lips, (as if) trying to get it out of my face. The fear of the owner of his khaki-colored pants and his tram, as well as his fat body, haunted me. I began to shiver and sink into tears..." (As-Shaikh, 1989, p. 17)

The picture of violence did not only happen to Zahra, but also to the mother. Father as head of the family has a very dominant position. He has the right to do anything, especially in the name of family honor.

In a patriarchal monotheistic family, the sanctity of women is the most important thing in looking after men. Women only have exclusive rights as a mother or as a daughter of a father. Women are the property of fathers and husbands, and must be accepted in sacred conditions, not as used goods (Rich, 1995).

"See, why she is lamenting again? Mother ran scattering while crying in fear toward the kitchen, I saw her lying on the floor and my father in his khaki-colored uniform and body fat, holding a leather belt and beating it toward her, in front of her was a Quran, he said to mother, "just swear". Then the father shouted, "look, swear!", Mother banged her head on the kitchen floor and father was still as if under the influence of drugs, only able to issue one word, "swear" and sometimes followed by the word, "look", whereas I see blood covering the face of the mother... .." (As-Shaikh, 1989, p. 18)

Apart from her mother and father, Zahra also received discriminatory treatment in the form of sexual objectification from men around her. Sexual objectification is seeing and treating someone as a sexual object (Loughnan et al., 2015). Like her mother, they also take advantage of Zahra's innocence due to her mental weakness. They made Zahra a lust, even on a different level. The necessity of being passive and not having the courage and space to express her feelings, made Zahra fall deeper into the abyss of oppression.

In order to avoid the increasingly uncertain atmosphere of the country due to the conflict and also the conflict that occurred between her parents at home, Zahra was then sent by her mother to Africa to stay there for a month, with her mother's brother, her uncle, who was a political activist of the movement being undergo a period of exile. Even though she didn't get rough treatment from her uncle, what he did to herself and her body made her feel depressed.

"I was silent, with my eyes closed. Uncle had just entered the room and sat on my bed, then touched my face. At the first time, I thought that it was a natural gesture to wake me up along with his hands that kept sticking to my cheeks and did not move unless I put my face away in shame ..." (As-Shaikh, 1989, pp. 23–24)

"In the first days, I really didn't understand why uncle didn't ask me to sleep as I wanted. However, soon I realized that uncle wanted to get my attention. I felt that his actions had disturbed me to the point of being forced, especially (while in) the cinema, when I accompanied him that night. As the light began to dim and the film was played, I felt a movement that was rejected by my mind, without explanation and answer, uncle clasped me with his hand and gripped my shoulders firmly. I was stunned unable to breathe and move, I was sure that his hands continued to harden over my shoulders..." (As-Shaikh, 1989, p. 24)

Uncle's attitude towards Zahra, which makes her a sexual object, does not reflect the attitude of the elder to the child he is supposed to protect. If what uncle does is something normal, then he doesn't do it in a private area or can't be seen by others.

Another abusive treatment was received by Zahra from her cousin, Qasim, the child of her aunt, while she was staying at grandfather's house. A family that should be the safest place for a woman like Zahra, has turned into a scary and anxious place. Zahra's days are filled with feelings of fear in the presence of others, especially men, and there is no room for Zahra to defend herself or just tell her fears and get fair treatment.

“Thus, I slept near my grandfather on a mattress on the floor and at that moment the ambiance was pitch black, I felt a cold hand move quickly and stuck to my pants. I sat up with a startled feeling and immediately the hand disappeared. However, the feeling of fear and cold simultaneously shook me, and even though it was pitch dark, I glanced at Qasim's white glasses's frame, then everything disappeared. That night was difficult. As if the incident did not really happen. I chose to stay seated all night...” (As-Shaikh, 1989, p. 25)

Not only from the closest person who has a kinship, Zahra also received other harassment from one of her brother's friend, Malik, who has been close to their family for a long time. Because of this closeness, Zahra considers Malik to be like his own brother, so Zahra has difficulty rejecting Malik's invitation even though she does not love the man. Moreover, Malik is very good at playing words and launching seduction. However, Zahra is more overcome by fear than other feelings.

“At that time he said that he was impressed with my face with acne and made him always think of me. He was on top of my body and tore my virginity and I felt nothing but fear. I lay down and felt nothing but that I was like other girls, my father was stern. However, I was stung when my father's figure was depicted, and I was very sure that he would slaughter me if he knew this. My father will not refrain from doing so even if he has to spend the rest of his life in prison...”(As-Shaikh, 1989, p. 33)

Zahra gives her virginity to someone she does not love, because of fear. However, at the same time, another fear arises that is the anger of her father if he knew the fact, thing that increasingly made her depressed. She knew very well that her father gave priority to her honor as a woman and Malik's deeds against her committed outside of marriage were a form of violation of her holiness as a woman.

Not just once, Malik harassed Zahra many times, and Zahra was never able to reject his invitation. Every time Malik invited her, Zahra would submit obediently while being haunted by fear. From their first relationship, Zahra was pregnant. However, Malik never talked about marriage, especially since he already had a wife. Malik continues to talk about love, but instead he invites Zahra to have an abortion.

“I escaped from Malik after an abortion because I hated him. When I left the Regie factory, I saw him standing next to his car while moving his head (which means 'come here'). I felt sick, but I approached him. As if in his body and car there is a sophisticated magnetic device. I approached, while the cold air haunted me. It felt cold and shivering even though I was wearing a scarf to hide my hair and ears. The cold spread to my feet as if half wet from the morning rain...”(As-Shaikh, 1989, p. 33)

As a sexual object, it is difficult for Zahra to refuse the figure she considers to have greater social power than her. When dealing with Malik, Zahra feels as if she has no bargaining rights over herself, so she can only be obedient. It has become a common phenomenon, power plays an important role in everyday social life which can be defined as an individual's ability to control all resources and influence others, including the ability to regulate gift giving or punishment (Xiao, Li, Zheng, & Wang, 2019).

Zahra hates herself, in her there is a desire to rebel, but she has never been able to make it happen. She has never been able to express her feelings to anyone, although in

her mind she can compose a sentence that can be understood by anyone, but her mouth never moves to say the words.

"I'm more annoyed with myself, and hate her because she just silent. When will she scream like a woman pushing for childbirth? I stopped motionless. I paused without any meaning on the face. Without expression. As if I'm dead. Even though war is raging inside me. Starting from the brain to my toes. War rages and leaves nothing but pieces..."(As-Shaikh, 1989, p. 37)

Always feeling guilty due to not having the courage to tell the injustice she received, prompting Zahra to choose to stand facing the mirror and begin to peel the pimples on her face, she will not stop until the zits bleed. The longer the behavior becomes a habit and she enjoys it. Her habit is frustrating for those around her, especially father. Father's attitude as a dominant figure in the house, not only tortured Zahra physically, but also verbally, instead of helping her get out of feeling depressed and afraid.

"This bad habit has accompanied me for a long time. My father would go crazy every time he caught me standing in front of a mirror picking up dead zits, then he would slap my face or scream at my mother with painful taunts, "a very happy day is the day of Zahra's wedding... marriage, who will she marry?... her face like toast with a hole!!..." (As-Shaikh, 1989, p. 27)

Zahra once described the fear that always haunted her. The thing that made her never see anything clearly. Feelings of fear have influenced her behavior, all she can do is be quiet.

"The feeling of fear makes me as if seeing something through a glass which surface is flowed by rain water, and through a mirror dewy in a hot shower..."(As-Shaikh, 1989, p. 12)

Although Zahra in her father's eyes is someone who must be guarded her honor and holiness, it does not mean she is seen as special by him. Zahra, like other girls in a patriarchal family, is a burden on the family, especially to the men who are *mahram*, (Islam) degree of consanguinity between a man and woman that renders marriage impossible but gives them the right of association (definition by Kamusku). Because they are required to take care of their family's women until adulthood and try to keep their honor guarded until the day of marriage.

Generally, what happens in patriarchal families is fathers love their sons very much. The mother will support the father's attitude by treating her son very special, far compared to her treatment of girls. Mothers act as patriarchal agents who instill this system in their children, that men must take precedence and boys must be privileged because it is a family asset that will provide for their parents later when they are old. Conversely, a daughter is a bad investment, because it only costs to care for her to adulthood and when she marries she belongs to her husband and his family.

"Along with that, my father's desire to send Ahmad to America became stronger, (suddenly everything is Ahmad's belonging) Ahmad's meat, Ahmad's eggs, Ahmad's best tomatoes, Ahmad's big olives. If Ahmad returns late at night, my mother will pull out his bed and put a pillow in the middle of it, if father asks Ahmad, she will respond shakily, "Ahmad is sleeping..." (As-Shaikh, 1989, p. 28)

The attitude of the mother to her son, Ahmad, is very contrary to her attitude towards Zahra. Supposedly, between mother and daughter have a special relationship. Referring to Abudi (2011: 4) that the lifelong bond between mother and daughter is forged by the birth process, because it is something that is important for every woman regardless of their ethnicity and background. This is central to the relationship between women and is also a major aspect of family life. Mother and daughter exploration is a storehouse of light on key family relationships that are important for shaping self, gender personality, gender roles, and which have a profound effect on the development of a woman's personality and choices.

However, the mother chose to put Zahra aside and let her continue to feel depressed, plus her jealousy towards her brother Ahmad.

"Mom always covered up Ahmad's mistakes, even when Ahmad tried to pull her gold bracelet when she fell asleep and she jumped in surprise, she found one of her bracelets lying in the palm of her hand. Ahmad ran away, and Mother returned the bracelet to her wrist and continued to sleep..." (As-Shaikh, 1989, p. 28)

Mother's behavior towards Zahra in her infancy only left hatred in the heart. There is no longer a close emotional bond between the two. Mother is not only a patriarchal agent, but plays a greater role as the closest person to plunge Zahra into her mental weakness.

"As I get bigger and look back (to the past) with feelings of disappointment and regret, my grudges against my mother are greater because she plunge me into confusion, questions, and blackmagic, while I am still little girl..." (As-Shaikh, 1989, p. 13)

In the novel, it is told that since Zahra was a little girl, Mother assured her that she was exposed to blackmagic, therefore she must often see a doctor and take the medicine given. However, going to the doctor was mother's guise to cover up his affair with another man while his father worked. Zahra has never really known the figure of the doctor that she meant and the medicine she was taking seemed not to be a prescription from a doctor but a sedative that made her more often hallucinating. Therefore, Zahra hates and holds a grudge against her mother.

The discrimination that Zahra experienced throughout her life took many forms. Perpetrators are not only men, but also woman who are closest to her, her own mother. This is because the discriminators feel they have higher social power than Zahra, as mentioned above. The patriarchal system made Zahra's position and condition worse. Its existence is often overlooked, but at the same time it becomes a sexual object by men around it.

Contrary to what Hanan As-Shaikh described in her novel above, Shiite women in Iran are treated very differently than their sisters in Lebanon. This is because Shia is the main religion in Iran. According to Ansari ("The Shiite Interpretation of the Status of Women | Institute for Advanced Study," n.d.) women have an important role in Shia, imitating the figure of Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, from whom was born the next generation of the Prophet. Fatimah passed on the inheritance of the prophet to the Shia priests, their sons, and all future generations. The importance of Fatimah's role

model for Shiite women in Iran was not only due to her position as the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, but also as the wife of the first Shia Imam, Ali ibn Abi Talib. Fatimah was an interpreter of the Quran and was considered to have intelligence that was comparable to that of other Shiite Imams. She was also positioned as a teacher who gave divine guidance to all Muslims.

Ansari ("The Shiite Interpretation of the Status of Women | Institute for Advanced Study," n.d.) also underlines that the position of women in a society is very dependent on the social environment, politics, traditions and local beliefs. Therefore, even if they are the same Shi'ah followers, the difference in treatment received by Shiite women is very dependent on the society in which they live.

However hard Iran claims in treating women in the country, the fact in society there is still a lot of discrimination against women in Iran, even more so for women from minorities, from different religion, language and ethnicity. The idea of gender equality accommodated by Iran refers to the view that women and men are spiritually equal, but are suitable for performing different social functions, based on the conceptions of essentialists and religious understanding about gender roles. This idea actually justifies discrimination against women. Women are treated differentially in many aspects of the Iranian law and judicial system. The lack of legal instruments to protect women has created a climate of impunity for perpetrators of violence against women committed by the state or perpetrators outside the state.

The following are some items that show discrimination against Iranian women as reported by Center for Civilian Rights (Sukic, 2019); (1) Discrimination in the legal and judicial sphere (women and men are treated differently in Iran's Penal Code, especially in areas ranging from criminal responsibility to compensation and the value of testimony), (2) Repression of women human rights defenders (authorities subjected women who involved in human rights activism and defense of women's rights to threats, harassment, arrests and imprisonment), (3) Discrimination in political and public life (exclude women from serving in many political functions and governmental positions, especially Prime Minister position), (4) Discrimination in education (Although in urban areas the right to education for women is increasing, however women in rural areas, especially minority women, continue to attain significantly lower levels of education), (5) Discrimination in employment (Housekeeping is idealized image of a woman promoted by the religious establishment in post-1979 Iran, emphasizes her role in the home as mother and wife), (6) Discrimination in nationality rights (Iranian women do not have the ability to transfer their nationality to their children), (7) Discrimination in marriage and family matters (1. women face rights restrictions and limits on their autonomy across the processes of marriage, divorce and child custody because family law in Iran be in existence a system of male guardianship over women through the institution of marriage and laws to govern the family unit, 2. Legalization of child marriage), (8) Violence against women (domestic violence, Female genital mutilation, Enforced hijab and moral crimes for offenders).

This phenomenon showed that the equal treatment received by Shiite women in Iran which refers to Fatimah's privilege, does not apply to all women. The state also strongly interferes in women's affairs and even how to dress and behave in the domestic sphere. This is getting worse when the Shia become a minority group in a country, as described by Hanan as-Shaykh that happened in Lebanon.

Musa and Tan (2017) conducted research on the Shia community in Malaysia. Shiites are a minority group in Malaysia, although it is a part of Islam which is the main religion there. The Malaysian Statistics Department ("Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal," n.d.) reports that the main religions followed by the Malaysian population are 61.3% Muslim, 19.8% Buddhist, 9.2% Christian, and 6.3% Hindu. Musa and Tan (2017) provided an explanation of how religious conservatism that developed in Malaysia was manifested in discriminatory and restrictive state policies towards Muslim minority groups such as Shiites, which reflected the level of intolerance towards teachings of Islam that the state did not approve.

Shia is a religion that is not recognized by the state in Malaysia, therefore Shia followers often face discriminatory behavior from the public. It is inconceivable what happened to Shiite women there, if diplomats, as an official representing a country, were also discriminated against.

Diplomats from the Iranian embassy in Kuala Lumpur stated that they had experienced insulting anti-Shi'a from Malaysian Sunni Muslims they met (Waikar, Ali, & Osman, 2019). During Najib's administration, various government agencies, including a fatwa assembly, and several state-owned media companies were involved in raids that were predominantly Shia. The company, catching Shia followers and treating it badly. Considering the fatwas that forbid Shi'ism from being in Malaysia for more than two decades, it is clear that the social and religious climate established by the Malaysian state is hostile to Shiites.

If Shia adherents get discrimination in a country because they are a minority group, then Shiite women in the group will get double discrimination, both from outside the group and from within. Because the position of women is considered truly equal only in spiritual matters, while other things, women still stand after men become the second gender, even more so in a patriarchal society.

Conclusion

Lebanon as a country, accommodate the existence of all religions and sects that grow in their society. In total, there are 18 religions and sects which all have their own rules that must be obeyed by their followers or adherents, including Shiite Islam. These various rules are often not touched by the state because they are private. Many of the regulations that are put in place are detrimental to its adherents, especially women, because cases relating to women are almost entirely entered into the realm of religious/sect rules. Cases that often occur related to women are receiving discriminatory treatment. Such is the picture that occurs in the lives of Shiite women in this study represented by the character of Zahra in the novel *Hikayah Az-Zahra*.

Various forms of discrimination were accepted by Zahra, ranging from verbal to physical violence. In fact, Zahra became a sexual object for some of men around her. These forms of discrimination have increasingly crystallized along with the ongoing conflict in Lebanon. Conflicts of interest that seem endless occur between adherents of religion or sect followers whose existence is recognized by the government.

The conflict legitimized the patriarchal system because it was exclusively male's zone. The patriarchal system is applied even harder in the midst of women. Women become increasingly subordinated parties, not at all involved in public affairs. However, on the other hand, women are used for gratification matters. Although there are those who do it voluntarily for reasons of wanting to rebel from pressure and make use of the only

thing of value that is fully owned, namely woman's body, as happened to Zahra's mother, but many do so because they are forced to in a deep fear feeling.

Conflict makes a woman's body as if an object that has no soul. Women are only used for a joy that is outside their interest. Because of that, Zahra's figure became a controversy, representing the voices and feelings of women who were oppressed due to conflict and discrimination.

References

- As-Shaikh, H. (1989). *Hikayah Az-Zahra*. Lebanon: Dar el-Adab.
- Bustam, B. M. R. (2014). *Perempuan Mesir: Potensi SDM Yang Terlupakan*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Ilmu.
- Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal. (n.d.). Retrieved April 26, 2020, from https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemByCat&cat=117&bul_id=MDMxdHZjWtk1SjFzTzNkRXYzcVZjdz09&menu_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZklWdzQ4TihUUT09
- Elmorally, R. (2017). Gender Dynamics During and Post The Lebanese Civil War 1975-1990 Through A Marxist Feminist Perspective. *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research*, 6, 142–147.
- Farhood, L. (1999). War Trauma and Women: Predisposition and Vulnerability to Adverse Psychological Health Outcome. In L. R. Shehadeh (Ed.), *Women and War in Lebanon* (pp. 259–271). Florida: University of Florida Press.
- Goldman, J. (2006). *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Loughnan, S., Campos, S. F., Vaes, J., Anjum, G., Aziz, M., Harada, C., ... Tsuchiya, K. (2015). Exploring the Role of Culture in Sexual Objectification: A Seven Nations Study. *Revue Internationale De Psychologie Sociale*, 28(1), 125–152.
- Marusek, S. (2018). *Faith & Resistance: The Politics of Love and War in Lebanon*. London: Pluto Press.
- Musa, M. F., & Tan, B. H. (2017). State-backed Discrimination Against Shia Muslims in Malaysia. *Critical Asian Studies*, 49(2), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2017.1335848>
- Rich, A. (1995). *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Said, J. (2013). Unequal and Unprotected Women's Rights Under Lebanese Personal Status Law. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/01/19/unequal-and-unprotected/womens-rights-under-lebanese-personal-status-laws>
- Salloukh, B. F., Barakat, R., Al-Habbal, J. S., Khattab, L. W., & Mikaelian, S. (2015). *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*. London: Pluto Press.
- Sukic, S. (2019). Beyond the Veil : Discrimination against women in Iran.

The Shiite Interpretation of the Status of Women | Institute for Advanced Study. (n.d.).
Retrieved April 26, 2020, from <https://www.ias.edu/ideas/2016/ansari-shiite-women>

Waikar, P., Ali, R., & Osman, M. N. M. (2019). Dancing with the Ummah: Islam in Malaysia's Foreign Policy Under Najib Razak. *The Pacific Review*, 32.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2019.1656666>

Xiao, L., Li, B., Zheng, L., & Wang, F. (2019). The Relationship Between Social Power and Sexual Objectification: Behavioral and ERP Data. *Front. Psychol.*
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00057>

Zed, M. (2008). *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan*. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia.