



## DECONSTRUCTION OF PATRIARCHAL CONSTRUCTION: AN ISLAMIC GENDER ANALYSIS OF *LAYSA LAHĀ MAKĀN FĪ AL-JANNAH*

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### Abstract

This study aims to reveal how patriarchal culture manipulates Islamic values to legitimize the subordination of women and to reinterpret those values based on the principle of equality in the Qur'an. The study employs a qualitative descriptive method using library research, observation, and note-taking techniques. The theoretical framework applied is Asma Barlas's Islamic feminism, which is grounded in the Qur'anic principle of equality. The results of the analysis show that patriarchal interpretations of Islamic concepts such as obedience, piety, and paradise function as mechanisms of social control that are internalized by female characters, affecting both their bodies and consciousness. The novelty of this research lies in its deconstructive reading based on Islamic gender theory, which emphasizes that gender inequality in the text does not originate from the Qur'an itself, but rather from patriarchal interpretations that deviate from its ethical vision.

### تجريد

يهدف هذا البحث إلى الكشف عن كيفية توظيف الثقافة الأبوية للقيم الإسلامية من أجل إضفاء الشرعية على إخضاع المرأة، وإعادة تفسير هذه القيم استنادًا إلى مبدأ المساواة في القرآن الكريم. يعتمد هذا البحث على المنهج الوصفي النوعي من خلال الدراسة المكتبية، والملاحظة، وتقنية تدوين الملاحظات. ويستند الإطار النظري المعتمد إلى النسوية الإسلامية لدى أسماء برلاس، القائمة على مبدأ المساواة القرآني. وتُظهر نتائج التحليل أن التفسيرات الأبوية للمفاهيم الإسلامية مثل الطاعة، والتقوى، والجنة، تؤدي وظيفة آليات للضبط الاجتماعي يتم استبطانها من قبل الشخصيات النسائية، مما يؤثر في أجسادهن ووعيهن على حد سواء. وتكمن جدة هذا البحث في قراءته التفكيكية القائمة على نظرية الجندر الإسلامية، التي تؤكد أن عدم المساواة الجندرية في النص لا تنبع من القرآن ذاته، وإنما من التفسيرات الأبوية التي تنحرف عن رؤيته الأخلاقية.

### الكلمات المفتاحية :

*ألتفكيك*

*الأبوية*

*الجندر الإسلامي*

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap bagaimana budaya patriarki memanipulasi nilai-nilai keislaman untuk melegitimasi subordinasi perempuan serta menafsirkan ulang nilai-nilai tersebut berdasarkan prinsip kesetaraan dalam Al-Qur'an. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik pustaka, simak, dan catat. Kerangka teoritis yang digunakan adalah feminisme Islam Asma Barlas yang berangkat dari prinsip kesetaraan dalam Al-Qur'an. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa penafsiran patriarkal atas konsep-konsep keislaman seperti ketaatan, kesalehan, dan surga berfungsi sebagai mekanisme kontrol sosial yang diinternalisasi oleh tokoh perempuan, baik terhadap tubuh maupun kesadarannya. Kebaruan

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penelitian ini terletak pada pembacaan dekonstruktif berbasis gender Islam yang menegaskan bahwa ketimpangan gender dalam teks bukan bersumber dari Al-Qur'an, melainkan dari tafsir patriarkal yang menyimpang dari visi etisnya.

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## A. Introduction

The short story is a form of creative and imaginative literary work that depicts the complexities of human life through various conflicts, while also offering readers new insights and reflections on diverse life experiences (Fariztina et al., 2025). Among contemporary Arab women writers, Nawal El Saadawi stands out as an Egyptian author whose short stories, particularly those compiled in the anthology *Adab am Qillatu Adab*—reflect the cultural and social realities of her homeland. El Saadawi is widely known not only as a literary figure but also as a feminist activist who consistently criticizes and challenges the deeply rooted patriarchal structures within Egyptian society (Wiyatmi, 2013).

Egypt has long been known for its patriarchal social system in which men occupy a central position in the power structure, while women are traditionally viewed as subordinate and expected to comply with norms established by men (Latifi & Udasmoro, 2020). Such inequality has given rise to various forms of discrimination and oppression against women, which in turn has sparked feminist movements as a form of resistance (Prasetyo et al., 2025). In Arab Muslim societies, women's status is often understood through two opposing perspectives. The first views Muslim women as victims of oppression, while the second emphasizes that Islam, when understood comprehensively, actually upholds the dignity and rights of women. When interpreted holistically, the Qur'an clearly rejects patriarchal systems that degrade women, for such interpretations contradict the egalitarian principles and ethical values inherent in Islamic teachings (Hearty, 2015) (Hearty, 2015). Nevertheless, patriarchal readings of the Qur'an are often used to legitimize gender inequality and impose social control over women.

One of El Saadawi's most thought-provoking works is the short story *Laysa Lahā Makān fī al-Jannah* (No Place for Her in Heaven), included in the anthology *Adab Am Qillatu Adab*. The story centers on Zainab, a woman who experiences oppression throughout her life from birth until death, under the authority of her father, brothers, and husband. She is indoctrinated to

believe that obedience to men is a guarantee of entering paradise: before marriage, her heaven is under the authority of her father and brothers, and after marriage, that heaven is transferred to her husband. The doctrine becomes so deeply rooted within Zainab that she believes only the men in her family can lead her to salvation. Upon her death and arrival in heaven, Zainab feels unworthy of being there because she does not find her husband. the only figure she believes capable of granting her salvation. This narrative reflects the profound internalization of patriarchal values that causes women to feel guilty and inferior even in the absence of any moral wrongdoing. Thus, the story serves as a literary mirror of the entrenched patriarchal structure in Egyptian society.

This short story has previously been examined from various academic perspectives. Hafidhatul Absida (2023) analyzed it through the lens of imaginary literary criticism and identified four forms of imagination: entering heaven without judgment, debating with angels, a wife's jealousy in heaven, and the desire to leave heaven(Absida, 2023). In 2024, Rizalman and colleagues studied the story using Robert Stanton's structuralist theory and concluded that the main theme of the story is Zainab's suffering, reinforced by narrative structures such as plot, characters, and conflicts that align with the story's title (Rizalman, 2024).(Rizalman, 2024)

This study aims to deconstruct the construction of Islamic values within patriarchal systems through the perspective of Islamic gender theory. By integrating a deconstructive approach with Asma Barlas's Islamic feminist thought, this research seeks to reveal how religious discourse is manipulated to sustain gender inequality and to reinterpret these values based on the egalitarian spirit embedded in the Qur'an. Accordingly, the research questions are formulated as follows: (1) How does patriarchal Islamic discourse in the short story *Laysa Lahā Makān fī al-Jannah* function as a mechanism of social control over women's bodies, consciousness, and spirituality? (2) How does Asma Barlas's Islamic feminism reinterpret religious values distorted by patriarchy in light of the Qur'anic principles of justice and equality?

## **B. Research Methods**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, an approach that produces data in the form of written or spoken words from observed sources, with the aim of describing and interpreting the meanings contained in literary texts(Moleong, 2019) (Moleong, 2019). This approach is chosen because it aligns with the purpose of the research, namely to reveal the

construction of religious and patriarchal values in Nawal El Saadawi's short story *Laysa Lahā Makān fī al-Jannah* through the perspectives of Islamic gender theory and deconstruction.

The unit of analysis in this study is patriarchal religious discourse as represented in the text of the short story *Laysa Lahā Makān fī al-Jannah*, manifested through narration, dialogue, symbols, and the actions of the main character (Zainab) that demonstrate the internalization of religious values as mechanisms of control over women's bodies, minds, and consciousness. The primary data consist of five key textual excerpts selected purposively because they most strongly represent the manipulation of religious discourse within a patriarchal system. These include: (1) the concept of purity and the imagination of paradise, (2) symbols of female loyalty and mourning, (3) the prohibition of widows' desire for life in the name of honor, (4) doctrines of obedience that silence women's intellectual agency, and (5) the erasure of women's spiritual identity through dependence on male authority.

Data collection methods were carried out using library research techniques along with observation and note-taking (Triadi & Nur, 2024). The library research technique involved intensive reading of the short story text and relevant literature – including books, journals, and articles that support the theoretical analysis. The observation technique was conducted by examining narrative elements, symbols, and dialogues that contain representations of patriarchy and religious values in the text. Meanwhile, the note-taking technique was used to document important data in the form of quotations or story segments related to themes, characters, and conflicts that reveal gender inequality and the manipulation of religious discourse (Arrosyid et al., 2025).

The data analysis process in this study refers to the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, consisting of three main stages. First, data reduction, which involves selecting, simplifying, and focusing on data relevant to the research focus. Second, data presentation, which involves organizing the data systematically in descriptive form to facilitate interpretation. Third, conclusion drawing and verification, which include formulating meanings and messages based on analyzed data to identify patterns and conceptual relationships (Sarosa, 2021).

The research adopts Derrida's deconstruction and Islamic gender theory as its analytical approaches. Derridean deconstruction is used to dismantle patriarchal constructions of meaning embedded in the literary text and to reinterpret the religious values it contains (Rohmatin, 2019). Meanwhile, Islamic gender theory grounded in the thought of

Asma Barlas is employed to reinterpret religious verses or concepts that are often manipulated to perpetuate gender inequality (Subangkit et al., 2024). The combination of these two approaches enables a more critical reading of the relationship between religion, women, and patriarchy in modern Arabic literature.

This study is interdisciplinary, as it integrates two fields of knowledge: literary deconstruction theory and Islamic feminist thought. Procedurally, the research follows several systematic steps, namely collecting data from the intrinsic elements of the text that contain concepts of deconstruction and religious values, categorizing the data based on representations of patriarchy and relevant religious values, analyzing each sign, symbol, and narrative using the framework of deconstruction and Islamic gender theory, and drawing conclusions by comparing analytical findings with insights from literature sources and previous studies. Thus, the research method is designed to trace how Nawal El Saadawi, through the short story *Laysa Lahā Makān fī al-Jannah*, resists patriarchal hegemony by criticizing gender-biased religious interpretations and rearticulating the egalitarian spirit of Islam (Mahsun, 2017).

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### **C. Result and Discussion**

In the results and discussion section, this study analyzes how Islamic values are constructed within a patriarchal cultural framework in Nawal El Saadawi's short story *Laysa Lahā Makān fī al-Jannah*, by categorizing the data into several textual excerpts as the basis of analysis.

#### **The Internalization of Religious Discourse as Social Control over the Body and Consciousness of Female Characters in literary works.**

Religious values do not only function as moral and spiritual teachings, but also as ideological representations of the social system that governs them (Fariztina et al., 2025). The short story *Laysa Lahā Makān fī al-Jannah* by Nawal El Saadawi becomes one of the important works that shows how religious values can be produced and manipulated through the patriarchal system. This story highlights the experiences of Egyptian women in a society that interprets religion with gender bias. Through the story of Zainab, El Saadawi presents the portrait of a woman who lives under the control of her father, brothers, and husband even

after her death. The concept of “paradise” then becomes a tool of control over her body and her mind (Wiyatmi, 2013).

According to Asma Barlas, gender injustice in Islamic societies does not originate from the Qur’anic text, but from patriarchal interpretations carried out by men.(Barlas, 2005). In the context of this short story, religious interpretation becomes an ideological device that subjugates women through illusory concepts of morality and purity. Nawal El Saadawi shows how such interpretations take root in women’s consciousness and transform into a subtle yet effective form of social control over women’s bodies and minds(Latifi, 2016).

### **1. The Control of Women’s Spiritual Imagination through the Concept of Paradise**

Zainab is shaped to understand paradise not as an inclusive spiritual space, but rather as a reward that can only be attained through obedience to men. This is illustrated in the following excerpt:

”ولم يكن خيالها حين تذكر حسنين يتسع لأكثر من إمساك اليد في اليد، والجلوس تحت الظل في الجنة، لكن أمها نهرتها، وقالت لها إن الجنة لن يكون فيها ابن جارهم حسنين.”

*“And her imagination, when she remembered Hassanayn, could not extend beyond holding hands and sitting together under the shade in Paradise. But her mother scolded her and told her that their neighbor’s son, Hassanayn, would not be in Paradise.”*

This quotation shows that from a young age, Zainab was taught that Paradise belongs only to women who completely submit to men as fathers, brothers, or husbands. Zainab’s mother becomes a symbol of the internalization of patriarchy that instills fear and guilt even toward the most human desire: the desire to love. This reading demonstrates how the religious values are narrowed into a moral system that controls women’s bodies and minds (Yanti et al., 2025).

In fact, in Surah An-Nisā’ (4:124), God says:

وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِنَ الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ نَقِيرًا

*“Whoever performs righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer, will enter Paradise and will not be wronged in the least.”*

Through this verse, the patriarchal construction presented in the short story can be deconstructed, as the Qur’an explicitly affirms that spiritual salvation in Islam is egalitarian, without gender-based distinctions in faith, deeds, or eschatological reward. Every individual is evaluated on the basis of piety and moral action, rather than biological

sex. This egalitarian principle should serve as the foundation for understanding gender relations in both spiritual and social domains. However, as depicted in the short story, patriarchal interpretations instead shift the meaning of spirituality from equality toward a gender hierarchy that positions women as spiritually dependent on men (Nuril Fajri, 2019).

## 2. Symbols of Piety as Instruments of Surveillance over the Female Body

Beyond spiritual restraint, patriarchy (Yanti et al., 2025) also operates through symbols of piety that regulate and discipline the female body. This dynamic is illustrated in the following excerpt:

“وأرادت يوماً أن تفك المنديل الأسود من حول رأسها وتربط منديلاً أبيض، لكنها خشيت أن يظن الناس أنها نسيت زوجها...”

*“And one day she wished to remove the black scarf from her head and replace it with a white one, but she feared that people would think she had forgotten her husband.”*

Zainab’s fear of removing the black mourning cloth illustrates how piety and loyalty are measured through outward symbols rather than sincerity of the heart. Women become imprisoned within the image of the “faithful wife,” a role they are expected to display before society even after their husbands have died. From the perspective of Islamic gender theory, this condition reflects a form of moral surveillance imposed upon women, in which the female body becomes a societal barometer of morality (Barlas, 2024).

However, Islam has regulated the waiting period (‘*iddah*) for widows in a humane and dignified manner, as stated in Qur’an Surah Al-Baqarah (2:234):

وَالَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنْكُمْ وَيَذَرُونَ أَزْوَاجًا يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنْفُسِهِنَّ أَرْبَعَةَ أَشْهُرٍ وَعَشْرًا فَإِذَا بَلَغْنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِيمَا فَعَلْنَ فِي أَنْفُسِهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ.

*“Those among you who die and leave wives behind shall wait for four months and ten days. When they have completed their waiting period, then there is no blame upon you (their guardians) regarding what they choose to do with themselves in an appropriate manner.”*

The Qur’an clearly and humanely limits the period of ‘*iddah* (Qur’an 2:234) and does not require women to remain trapped in prolonged grief or emotional restraint. This verse deconstructs the social practice depicted in the short story, where the meaning of ‘*iddah* is expanded into a mechanism of control over women’s freedom and happiness. Consequently, patriarchal interpretations of pious symbols – such as mourning attire and restrictions on moving forward with life – do not reflect Islamic teachings but rather

constitute a distorted interpretation that subjugates the female body within a patriarchal system (Latifi, 2025).

### 3. The Prohibition of Widows' Desire for Life in the Name of Morality and Honor

A more coercive form of social control emerges when Zainab intends to remarry, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

"وجاءها رجل يطلبها للزواج بغير أطفالها، فبصقت أمها في فتحت جلبابها وأسدلت الطرحة فوق وجهها وهي تهمس:  
يا عيب الشوم".

*"And a man came to her asking to marry her without her children, and her mother spat into the fold of her garment and lowered the veil over her face, whispering: 'Oh, what a shame.'"*

The phrase "yā 'ayb al-shūm" ("Oh, what a shame!") reflects the moral pressure institutionalized by society upon women who wish to rebuild their lives. In the mother's view, a woman who has become both a mother and a widow is expected to abandon the pursuit of personal happiness. Thus, remarriage is considered taboo, even though the Qur'an explicitly permits women to remarry after the completion of the *'iddah* period, as stated in Qur'an Surah Al-Baqarah (2:232):

وَإِذَا طَلَّقْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَبَلَغْنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَلَا تَعْضُلُوهُنَّ أَنْ يَنْكِحْنَ أَزْوَاجَهُنَّ إِذَا تَرَاضَوْا بَيْنَهُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ.

*"And when you divorce your wives and they have reached the end of their waiting period, do not prevent them from remarrying their (prospective) husbands if they have mutually agreed in an acceptable manner."*

Interpretations that position women as passive beings subordinated to male authority constitute a deviation from the principle of *tawhīd*, as they implicitly grant men spiritual and moral authority over women, whereas ultimate authority belongs solely to God (Subangkit et al., 2024). This perspective affirms that Islam regards women as moral and spiritual subjects equal to men in rights, responsibilities, and the freedom to determine their own happiness. Therefore, such restrictions represent a form of structural injustice rooted in patriarchal culture rather than in the Qur'anic teachings, which fundamentally uphold principles of equality and human freedom (Hafith et al., 2025).



#### 4. Control over Women's Consciousness

Patriarchal control over women operates not only through the regulation of the body but also through the domination of women's spiritual consciousness (Ningsih & Susanti, 2025), as illustrated in the following quotation:

رأت زينب رجلين يقفان أمامها، أحدهما قال: هذه امرأة صالحة، كانت تُصلي وتُصوم، ولها مكان في الجنة. وقال الآخر: ولكنها كشفت كعبها يوماً، ورأى رجلٌ طرف شعرها، فليس لها مكان في الجنة.

Zainab saw two men standing before her; one of them said, "This is a pious woman. She used to pray and fast, and for her there is a place in Paradise." But the other said, "Yet one day she uncovered her ankle, and a man saw the tip of her hair, so there is no place for her in Paradise."

This quotation represents the clearest illustration of how patriarchal religious interpretations determine a woman's spiritual salvation not by her faith and piety, but by her body and the boundaries of her *aurah*. The first man symbolizes an ethical and spiritual reading of religion, while the second embodies a legalistic-patriarchal interpretation that subjugates women through a morality centered on visual purity.

From the perspective of Asma Barlas's Islamic Gender Theory, this debate reflects a distortion of the principle of *tawhid*, namely when men are positioned as spiritual authorities capable of determining a woman's fate before God. Barlas emphasizes that the Qur'an, textually, does not grant men any form of spiritual superiority, for human dignity is measured by *taqwa*, not by gender.

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ. (QS. Al-Hujurat [49]:13)

This verse functions as a direct deconstruction of the quotation in the short story, as it affirms that human dignity and spiritual salvation are determined by *taqwa* (piety), rather than by the body, symbols of modesty, or male judgment.

### 5. Loss of Identity and Women's Spiritual Dependence

Women's spiritual dependence is clearly illustrated when Zainab believes that her salvation in paradise is only meaningful if it is accompanied by the presence of her husband, as reflected in the following quotation:

"ودخلت زينب الجنة تبحث عن زوجها فلم تجده، فجلست تبكي عند باب الجنة وهي تهمس: لا مكان لي في الجنة بدون زوج".

*"And Zainab entered Paradise searching for her husband, but she could not find him, so she sat crying at the gate of Paradise, whispering: 'There is no place for me in Paradise without my husband.'"*

This passage underscores the spiritual tragedy of a woman who believes that her salvation is valid only when accompanied by a man. Paradise, which should symbolize ultimate freedom, is instead reproduced as a space that reinforces patriarchal values. Zainab has lost her identity as an autonomous spiritual subject. Within the framework of Islamic feminism, this reflects the highest form of the colonization of women's consciousness (Aksin Wijaya, 2025).

Yet Islam affirms that every individual is responsible for their own deeds, as stated in QS. al-An'ām (6):164:

وَلَا تَكْسِبُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ إِلَّا عَلَيْهَا وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ.

*"And no bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another."*

This verse affirms that a woman's spiritual status and ultimate salvation are not dependent upon any man.

This verse serves as a direct deconstruction of Zainab's belief by affirming that each individual is responsible for their own deeds. Consequently, the notion that a woman "has no place in paradise without a husband" does not originate from Islamic teachings but from patriarchal interpretations that replace divine justice with a logic of gendered subordination.

From the overall analysis, it can be concluded that *Laysa Lahā Makān fī al-Jannah* represents how religious discourse is internalized by women as a social mechanism of control over their bodies, minds, and consciousness. The female body is regulated through symbols of piety (the black veil, prohibitions against free clothing); her mind is restrained by moral dogma (prohibitions against imagining, speaking, or thinking freely); and her consciousness

is erased through an ideology of spiritual submission. Through a deconstructive and Islamic gender framework, Nawal El Saadawi reveals that what is referred to as “religious values” in this short story is not a reflection of Qur’anic teachings, but the product of deeply rooted patriarchal interpretations. The narrative thus becomes a sharp critique of systems that interpret religion through a gender-biased lens. El Saadawi not only exposes the suffering of women within patriarchal structures, but also calls for a reinterpretation of religious texts through a more just and egalitarian perspective. In this regard, Islamic feminist thinkers such as Asma Barlas and Riffat Hassan provide the theoretical foundation that the Qur’an’s central message is justice and equality between men and women, an ethical vision that El Saadawi seeks to revive through literature.

#### **D. Conclusion**

The short story *Laysa Lahā Makān fī al-Jannah* by Nawal El Saadawi demonstrates how religious discourse is internalized by women as a mechanism of social control over the body, mind, and consciousness. Through the character of Zainab, this study reveals that gender-biased religious interpretations shape women’s awareness toward submission to male authority, both in worldly life and in constructions of spiritual salvation. Religious values such as piety, purity, obedience, and the concept of paradise are not presented as sources of spiritual liberation but rather function as ideological instruments of patriarchy. The analysis of five primary textual data shows that religious discourse operates systematically: restricting women’s spiritual imagination, surveilling the female body through symbols of piety and loyalty, suppressing widows’ desire for life in the name of honor, silencing women’s intellectual agency under doctrines of obedience, and ultimately erasing women’s spiritual identity by making male presence a prerequisite for salvation.

These findings reinforce Islamic feminist thought particularly Asma Barlas’s argument, that gender injustice in Muslim societies does not originate from the Qur’an itself but from patriarchal interpretations that distort the principles of *tawhīd*, justice, and spiritual equality. Then, this study contributes to Arabic literary studies by affirming literature as a critical space for theological and ideological resistance, and to Islamic gender studies by demonstrating the relevance of deconstructive and Islamic feminist approaches in rereading religious discourse. This study reinforces Islamic feminist hermeneutics by demonstrating that literary texts function as critical spaces for exposing and challenging patriarchal religious interpretations, thereby expanding the scope of Qur’anic reinterpretation beyond formal exegetical discourse.

Future research is recommended to expand the corpus to other works by Arab women writers, conduct comparative studies across cultural and religious contexts, and further develop interdisciplinary dialogues between literature, Qur'anic interpretation, and Islamic feminism in contemporary Muslim societies.

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