



Distortion of Women's Rights in Nawal El-Saadawi's *Suquth Al-Imam*: Naomi Wolf's Perspective

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Abstract. Distortion of women's rights is a difficult problem to eliminate due to the patriarchal culture in society. This study aims to: (1) describe the forms of distortion of women's rights in Nawal El-Saadawi's *Suquth Al-Imam* based on Naomi Wolf's perspective; (2) describe the form of resistance to the distortion of women's rights in Nawal El-Saadawi's *Suquth Al-Imam* based on Naomi Wolf's perspective. This descriptive qualitative research takes the primary data source from the novel "Suquth Al-Imam" by Nawal El-Saadawi. After the data are collected from reading and note-taking techniques, the data are validated by increasing persistence, triangulation, and discussion. Then, the data analysis techniques include data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. The results of this research are: (1) the forms of distortion of women's rights in this novel are the right to take part in government organizations, the rights in education and teaching, the rights in the fields of profession and employment, the rights in carrying out legal actions, and the rights in marital relations; (2) the forms of resistance to the distortion of women's rights in the novel are independence, altruism, persistence, chauvinism, and revolutionaries.

Keywords: Distortion · Women's rights · Power feminism · Equal rights

1 Introduction

Distortion is the twisting of a fact or rule and is a so-called deviation [1]. It often occurs in social life, including in the scope of women's rights, and deviations against women's rights are no longer strange. Since the beginning of the feminist movement, inequality and discrimination against women's rights have been constantly discussed. Because indeed, these problems are difficult to eliminate due to the patriarchal culture in society that continues to take root.

This patriarchal culture often dictates women as weak, emotional, and passive creatures, in contrast to men, who are described as strong, manly, mighty, and rational. This assumption also contains the truth until it develops into a societal stereotype [2]. These stereotypes also have an impact on the gap in rights that occurs between men and women. So women often get unfair treatment in achieving equal rights and success. In general,

women will face more barriers to success regarding career, wages, and position than men [3].

Discrimination against women's rights just because they are women is a phenomenon that is often encountered in social reality. It is in line with research conducted by Aracil in Europe, which states that there are inequalities between women and men in terms of work, company, and position [4]. Also, in Pakistan, women deal with open discrimination in almost every phase of their careers [5]. Therefore, women must be more active against how they are raised and how society views them [3].

Regarding the discrimination against women's rights, Wolf stated that women and men have their values contained in them as human beings. Between women and men, no gender is more special. Both women and men have the right to achievement and power [6]. Wolf also brings up two concepts of feminism that women must go through to achieve success or equal rights. The two concepts of feminism are victim feminism and power feminism. Victim feminism emphasizes that women are seen only as sexual objects, victims of crimes, and acts of violence, which is used as an excuse to petition for their rights [7].

Meanwhile, power feminism is a feminism that views women as human beings or individuals, which is women are neither worse nor better than men and demands equal rights because women have the rights to it. Wolf carries five fundamental ideologies of power feminism, including; 1) Women and men both have essential values in life, 2) Women have the right to determine their life path, 3) Women's experiences are as meaningful as men's experiences, 4) Women have the right to voice their life experiences, 5) Women are entitled to rights that they do not get just because they are women, including respect, self-respect, education, security, health, and material things such as money [7].

The phenomenon of women's rights distortion is represented in literary works, including novels. Novels are imaginative works that tell the whole problem of life in a person or several characters [8]. One of the characteristics of literary works that reflect social life is called mimesis. It reflects a reality that the authors present according to their imagination and creativity. Generally, literature works are born from the personal experience of the author. However, they are also frequently born from a writer's anxiety over the social reality surrounding them. Therefore, even though the literary works are not from the author's personal experience, they could be from others' experiences in the author's social environment.

Suquth Al-Imam is one of the novels born due to the author's anxiety, Nawal El-Saadawi, about the patriarchal system in Middle Eastern society at that time. This novel reflects many social realities, including the government system, social conditions of society, and women's conditions which are discriminated against and deprived of their rights. The phenomena of women whose rights have been distorted have resulted in gender inequality that exists in society. It also results in women being marginalized in several aspects of life.

Distortion or deviation from women's rights is an issue familiar to experts. Therefore, this issue is widely discussed and used as research material, including research on human rights violations against female figures [9], research on discrimination against women [10–14], and research on gender studies [15].

Some previous studies above have similarities and differences with the current research. The similarities lie in the theme of the discussion, namely examining the deviations of women's rights, violations of women's rights caused by gender discrimination, and efforts to equalize women's rights with a feminist perspective. While the difference lies in the object studied and the theoretical perspective used. This current research focuses on the forms of distortion of women's rights and forms of resistance to the distortion of women's rights contained in the novel *Suquth Al-Imam* by Nawaal el-Saadawi based on Naomi Wolf's perspective. Therefore, this current research serves as additional information and reinforcement of some of these previous studies. In other words, some previous research can be used to study feminism theory.

Based on the above phenomena, this study aims to determine the forms of distortion of women's rights and forms of resistance to the distortion of women's rights contained in the novel *Suquth Al-Imam* by Nawal El-Saadawi. This research only focuses on the form of distortion of women's rights and the form of resistance to the distortion of women's rights in the novel. The benefit of this research is to increase knowledge related to literary analysis studies using the perspective of feminist literary theory. This research is also expected to contribute to the application of literary theory, especially the literary theory of feminism by Naomi Wolf.

2 Method

The research method used in this research is the descriptive qualitative method. The descriptive method is a method that examines the status of a human group, an object, a situation, a mindset, or a class of events to describe or systematically describe facts, nature, as well as the relationship between the investigated phenomena [16]. On the other hand, qualitative research examines objects' natural conditions, where researchers act as crucial instruments, and data collection techniques are carried out by triangulation [17]. So descriptive qualitative research is a method used in analyzing data by describing the data in writing, and verbal terms that come from the people and behaviors studied [18]. This method was chosen because it is in accordance with the research objectives to be achieved. This study focuses on the description of data related to the distortion of women's rights in the novel *Suquth Al-Imam* by Nawaal el-Saadawi.

The research approach that is used as a reference for researchers in examining objects is the feminist perspective of Naomi Wolf. Sources of data in this study consisted of primary and secondary data sources. First, primary data comes from the novel *Suquth Al-Imam* by Nawaal el-Saadawi. Then, to support the primary data, the researcher also utilizes secondary data sourced from Naomi Wolf's feminist theory books, journals, and relevant documents related to this research topic. The data collection technique used is the reading technique with the close reading method and the note-taking technique. The basic principle of close reading is that when reading a text, the first reading will not produce a reasonable interpretation [19]. So it is necessary to read repeatedly by looking at every word, sentence, and paragraph to get a reasonable interpretation.

The data validity techniques in this study consisted of increasing persistence, triangulation, peer discussion, and with experts. The research analysis includes data reduction, exposure, and conclusion [20]. First, all data collected will be reduced according to the

theme discussed in the study, then the data will be presented based on that theme, and the last stage is concluding the study's results.

3 Findings and Discussion

3.1 The Form of Distortion of Women's Rights in the Novel *Suquth Al-Imam*

Distortion of women's rights is deviation or discrimination against women's rights. So the distortion of women's rights here is a situation where women's rights are not fulfilled. The distortion of women's rights covers various fields, including the distortion of women's rights in politics, citizenship, education, employment, health, law, and marriage. The description of the forms of distortion of women's rights in the novel *Suquth Al-Imam* by Nawaal el-Saadawi. The forms of distortion of women's rights are in Table 1.

Several forms of distortion of women's rights are in accordance with the research in the novel *Suquth Al-Imam* by Nawaal el-Saadawi based on Naomi Wolf's perspective. The explanation is as follows.

3.1.1 Power Feminism

The distortion of women's rights in the novel *Suquth Al-Imam* by Nawaal el-Saadawi based on the perspective of Naomi Wolf's power feminism are the rights to participate in government organizations, the rights in the field of education and teaching, the rights in the professional field and employment, the rights in carrying out legal actions, and the rights in the bond or termination of the marriage.

3.1.1.1 Distortion of Right to Take Part in Governmental Organizations

The right to participate in government organizations is one of the human rights in the political field. Likewise, as human beings, women are also entitled to these rights. Unfortunately, women are often discriminated against for their rights just because they are women. Society's view of the superiority of men causes deviations in the rights that women should also have the right to. However, nowadays, there is a lot of evidence that women are also worthy of participating in politics, one of which is being a member of government organizations.

*Qalat: "hal yumkin lilrajul 'an yajmae bayn eudwiat hizbayn fi waqt wahidin?"
qala: "laa yujad fi alsharieat nasun yahzir jame alrajul bayn eudwiat hizbayn fi waqt wahidi"*

Can a man be a member of two different parties at the same time? There is no law in the law that prohibits a man from being a member of two different parties (El-Saadawi, 1987).

Here, men are free to become members of any party they want. They are even allowed to join two parties at the same time. Meanwhile, women are not allowed to become members of any party.

3.1.1.2 Distortion of Rights in Education and Teaching

Education is a primary human need to achieve achievement or power. Wolf's view prioritizes women's minds to achieve power is not wrong. Women have the right to get an education and get a proper education. Although Wolf divides the women's sector into the private and public spheres, education is still important to elevate women's dignity.

Qalat laha 'aezam amra' at laysat man katabt 'aezam kitab wa' iinama man wulidat 'aezam rajul.

I once said to her, "the most noble woman is not the woman who writes the best book, but the woman who gives birth to the best man" (El-Saadawi, 1987).

It is said that a noblewoman is not a woman who writes the best books but a woman who gives birth to the best sons. It is as if a woman's life is all about sex, getting pregnant, and giving birth. Women are not supported in developing their writing skills. Women are only seen through their wombs, not their brains.

3.1.1.3 Distortion of Rights in the Field of Profession and Employment

Women and work are two things that are quite controversial. In a patriarchal culture, women are often discriminated against in employment. Women are often considered unworthy because women are often dictated to be weak and sensitive creatures. It is implied in a fragment of a conversation between two male characters in the novel *Suquth Al-Imam*. In the conversation, one of the characters seemed surprised because women can also be astronauts. He considers women's work sector to be limited because he usually meets women who stay at home like his wife.

'Aeindahum rijal safaruu 'iila alqumari? 'ay wallah wamra'at 'aydan safart 'iila alqumri.

Have any of you ever been to the moon? For God's sake, women also go to the moon (El-Saadawi, 1987).

3.1.1.4 Distortion of Rights in Carrying Out Legal Actions

Distortion of rights in the legal field is the injustice or discrimination received by a person in legal actions. Of course, everyone has the right to speak the truth or to defend himself in the realm of law. However, the law also does not always provide justice. Sometimes the law is sharp at the bottom and blunt at the top on social class. Likewise, in gender classes, we often find discrimination in the treatment received by one gender.

Aghtasib kula laylat eadhra' waqabl alfajr 'aqtuluha qabl 'an taqtulani
Every night I raped a virgin girl, and before dawn, I killed her before she killed me.

In the novel *Suquth Al-Imam* the distortion in the field of law is implied in the statement of the Imam's character, which states that he rapes virgin girls and kills them before the girl kills the Imam. The women were not allowed to prosecute the crimes they experienced. Even though the position of women as victims, he was sentenced like the perpetrators.

3.1.1.5 Distortion of Rights in Marital Relations

A marital relationship generally consists of a husband and wife pair, a man and a woman. So to achieve a level of harmony, there must be cooperation between the two parties so neither party feels disadvantaged. However, in married life, men are generally more dominant. Women are often powerless and oppressed in a marital relationship because they fear threats posed by men. Therefore, men often use this fear of women to act arbitrarily.

Waqataeatha wahi latakifean alhikayati. lakina almalik kan yakhun almalikat mae jariat sawda'a. waqalat: wama lah ya bita? khianat alrijal mashrueatan bi'amr allah lakina khianat almar'at min alshaytan.

While talking, a girl cut him off, "But the king has betrayed the empress with his black female neighbor." "Why want? The betrayal of a man is permissible by God's command, but the betrayal of a woman is from the devil." Answered Mrs. Haji (El-Saadawi, 1987).

It is said that a man has the right to commit treason while women do not. However, betrayal is not something to be proud of. However, in the text there is an inequality of rights between men and women. It is as if women are always positioned as victims of their powerlessness. It can also be seen in the following fragment.

Wakunt 'asmae mudaris aldiyn yaqra kalam allah wayaqul aleayn bialeayn walsini bialsini walkhianat bialkhianat walwafa' bialwafa'i. wazalat khianat 'abi mahfurat fi alkawn bila khianat mink tamsahuha.

I once heard a religious teacher read the word of God and say, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, betrayal for betrayal and faithfulness for loyalty." And the betrayal of the father is always hidden without your betrayal to make up for it (El-Saadawi, 1987).

In the text excerpt above, the distortion of women's rights in marital relations is that women are not given the space to voice opinions or fight the poor treatment of men. Men, with their superiority, threaten women to rise from the shackles of their powerlessness. The decision to continue and stop a relationship belongs only to the man. The women can only surrender and submit to the arbitrariness of men. The arbitrariness of men is included in the distortion of women's rights in the bond and the breakup of marriage.

3.2 The Form of Resistance to the Distortion of Women's Rights in the Novel Suquth Al-Imam

Resistance is a protest against the incompatibility of the changes that occur. Resistance can be an attitude to defend, fight, oppose, or act otherwise. So the fight against the distortion of women's rights is an effort to oppose these rights' deviation and defend the existing rights. Based on the feminism of Naomi Wolf's power, the forms of women's resistance or resistance consist of independence, altruism, persistence, chauvinism, revolutionaries, and resilience [21]. The description of the forms of resistance to the distortion of women's rights is shown in Table 2.

Table 1. The form of distortion of women’s rights

Types of feminism	Forms of distortion women’s rights
Power feminism	Distortion of the right to take part in governmental organizations
	Distortion of rights in education and teaching
	Distortion of rights in the field of profession and employment
	Distortion of rights in carrying out legal actions
	Distortion of rights in marital relations

Table 2. Form of resistance to the distortion

Types of feminism	Forms of resistance
Power feminism	Independence
	Altruism
	Persistent
	Chauvinism
	Revolutionary

In Table 2. The form of resistance to the distortion of women’s rights in the novel *Suquth Al-Imam* by Nawaal el-Saadawi, the researcher found several forms of resistance to the distortion of women’s rights that are in accordance with the research in the novel *Suquth Al-Imam* by Nawaal el-Saadawi based on Naomi Wolf’s perspective, the explanation is as follows:

3.2.1 Power Feminism

The forms of resistance to the distortion of women’s rights in the novel “Suquth Al-Imam” by Nawaal el-Saadawi based on the feminist perspective of Naomi Wolf’s power include independence, altruism, persistence, chauvinism, and revolutionaries.

3.2.1.1 Independence

Independence is flexibility or freedom to act and think according to one’s own will. The attitude of independence in women is the attitude to maximize the potential that exists within them. In this case, women are invited to develop their potential and refuse to depend on others.

*Tarakatni mundh waladatni lituharib eadaa’a. matat shahidat alwatani.
In the past, after giving birth to me, he left me to fight the enemies. And he died as kusuma nation (El-Saadawi, 1987).*

The text quoted from the novel “Suquth Al-Imam” above reflects the attitude of independence contained in women. In the text, a woman who has just given birth to

her child decides to go against or fight her enemy. So here reflected the attitude of independence, namely the freedom to act of their own volition.

3.2.1.2 Altruism

Altruism is an attitude of putting the interests of others first. It is not solely because of discrimination, but this is a pure nature that is born in a woman. This trait is also often known as inner beauty or the natural beauty of women. Altruism is a positive character that comes from generosity. The altruism reflected in the novel "Suquth Al-Imam" is when the main female character, Bintullah, is willing to sacrifice himself and even his life for his friend. He was also willing to sacrifice himself a sacrifice for the Imam to save the women in his country.

Sa'ukhatir bihayati li'unjubha, fahi hayati.

I will risk my life to save her because she is my life nation (El-Saadawi, 1987).

3.2.1.3 Persistent

Naomi Wolf's perspective of power feminism says that women also have the right to voice their experiences and opinions. Persistence is the attitude of someone who is not easily influenced by others. So persistence is the determination of what has been said. In other words, persistence can also mean a firm stance.

Wataadhakart qabl 'an tadie aldhaakiratu. qult wa'ana 'aydan zarani allah fi almanami. wataadhakart qabl 'an tudie aldhaakirata. qult wa'ana 'aydan zarani allah fi almanami. qaluu allah layazur aimra'atan wala yazhar laha fi alruwaya. qult zar allah maryam

And I still remember, before the memory was gone, I had time to say, "God also visited me in a dream." But they said, "God does not visit a woman and does not appear in a woman's dream (El-Saadawi, 1987)."

In the novel *Suquth Al-Imam*, the form of persistence is reflected when the main female character Bintullah maintains an opinion about her experience of dreaming of God. It can be seen from the conversation, Bintullah is very firm and intelligent in issuing his arguments. So this is a form of resistance to the distortion of women's rights related to freedom of expression.

3.2.1.4 Chauvinism

Chauvinism is political awareness to create an appropriate and correct state life. Wolf said that this is not the time for women to rely on powerlessness and position themselves as victims to achieve equal rights or success. But it's time for women to realize and maximize their potential in defending their rights.

The chauvinism that is reflected in the novel *Suquth Al-Imam* can be seen in the text excerpt below:

Zawjati aljadidat darasat eilm alsiyasat wara' albahari. walaha nazariat fi fani alhukm watarwid alrajali.

My new wife is studying political science across the ocean. He had a theory about the art of government and how to subdue men (El-Saadawi, 1987).

The text shows where a woman fights her rights by going to study political science. This awareness of the importance of political education enabled her to understand the system of government and subjugate men.

3.2.1.5 Revolutionary

Revolutionary is a courageous attitude to change the wrong mindset or mindset. In line with Wolf's opinion, it is women's courage that can improve women's lives. Women will always be in a slump if she does not dare to get out of the slump.

wa'iidha eajizt ean aldifae ean nafsik fahal tudafiein ean al'ukhrina?

If you cannot defend your rights, how will you defend others? (El-Saadawi, 1987)

The revolutionary attitude reflected in the novel *Suquth Al-Imam* is the attitude of a character who tries to awaken other female characters. The female character is so afraid to defend her rights, so here there is a revolutionary attitude, namely the courage to change the wrong mindset all this time; namely, we must have the courage to defend our rights first, then we can defend the rights of others.

4 Conclusion

Discrimination against women's rights is a phenomenon that is often found in social reality, which is often encountered, especially in terms of work, company, and position. Nawal El-Saadawi describes this phenomenon in the novel *Suquth Al-Imam* which describes the patriarchal system rooted in Middle Eastern society at that time. She describes the distortion of women's rights regarding their participation with government organizations, rights in education and teaching, rights in the professions and employment, irregularities in the rights to take legal action, and rights in marital relations. In contrast, the form of resistance to the distortion of women's rights is illustrated in the form of independence, altruism, persistent, chauvinism, and revolutionary.

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