

THE TENSION OF RELIGION-TRADITION AND THE IDEAS OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION IN "DREAMS OF TRESPASS: TALES OF A HAREM GIRLHOOD", A NOVEL BY FATIMA MERNISSI

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the literary work entitled "Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood," which reflected Fatima Mernissi's critical viewpoint in the struggle for gender equality. Utilizing a literature review and textual analysis, this study attends to how Mernissi told a story of women's liberation discourses in her literary work. Mernissi's work cannot be seen as entirely fictional, as it incorporated Mernissi's own experiences in growing up within a harem-living family. The findings reveal that Mernissi's work is a reflection on reality, as well as, an aspiration for the ideal future in which women and men would have equal responsibilities and rights. This article concludes that Mernissi's critical feminism must be placed in the context of the life in which the work was written and the historical time it tells, namely, the 20th century of Arabic culture and Islamic religiosities in Morocco. At that time, the world had transitioned from the colonization period to the rise of global nationalism in conquered nations, including Morocco. This transition resulted in the clash of religion-tradition and modernity that affects women's thinking and perceptions about gender equality based on universal humanism principles and Qur'anic religious interpretations. Therefore, this article provides an alternative outlook in viewing literary work as a representation of the

experiences and developments of thought of Fatima Mernissi.

Keywords: Fatima Mernissi, Gender equality, Literary work, Muslim feminist, Textual analysis.

ABSTRAK

Tujuan penulisan artikel ini adalah untuk mengkaji novel berjudul "Perempuan-perempuan Haremku" sebagai sebuah karya sastra yang menampilkan pemikiran kritis Fatima Mernissi dalam memperjuangkan kesetaraan gender. Artikel ini menggunakan metode kajian literatur dengan analisis teks untuk melihat bagaimana Mernissi menarasikan wacana pembebasan perempuan melalui karya sastra yang tidak sepenuhnya bersifat fiksi. Hasil temuan kami menunjukkan bahwa karya Mernissi juga berangkat dari pengalaman sang penulis yang berasal dan besar dari kehidupan keluarga di dalam harem. Karya tersebut merupakan sebuah refleksi atas realitas, sekaligus aspirasi masa depan yang ideal untuk kesetaraan peran dan hak antara perempuan dan laki-laki. Para penulis artikel ini berkesimpulan, pemikiran kritis feminisme Mernissi harus ditempatkan pada konteks kehidupan di mana karya tersebut ditulis dan waktu sejarah yang dikisahkan di dalamnya, yakni terkait dengan kultur Arab dan keberagamaan Islam di Maroko pada abad 20. Dalam konteks periode tersebut, dunia sedang mengalami peralihan dari masa kolonialisme ke gerakan nasionalisme global di negara-negara terjajah termasuk Maroko. Sehingga ada perbenturan tradisi dan modernitas yang mewarnai gagasan-gagasan perempuan dan tentang perempuan terkait kesetaraan gender berdasarkan nilai humanisme universal serta tafsir keagamaan dalam kitab suci Islam. Dengan demikian, artikel ini menawarkan pemikiran alternatif dalam melihat karya sastra sebagai representasi pengalaman dan perkembangan pemikiran seorang tokoh Fatima Mernissi.

Kata kunci: Analisis Teks, Fatima Mernissi, Feminis Muslim, Karya Sastra, Kesetaraan Gender.

INTRODUCTION

Fatima Mernissi's critical thinking in her fight for women's rights, equal position, and better life conditions has served as an inspiration to many academics and activists. Mernissi's intellectual spirit was shaped by her sympathetic views towards women. This is evident in her works, such as the novel "Perempuan Perempuan Haremku," which was first published in 1994 under

the title "Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood." This classic work is frequently cited in popular scientific writings and essays with varying perspectives, methodologies, and disciplinary foundations for critical analyses. Many scholars with critical attention to Mernissi's have focused on her aspiration of women's emancipation and the pursuit of gender equality in her works. Ana Bilqis Fajarwati¹, Lub Liyna Nabilata², and Ratna Wijayanti and colleagues³ have written about Fatima Mernissi's writing as a literary critic towards women's liberation. Each of the three articles examines a different aspect of the conversation surrounding Islam and democracy, feminism and Islamic hermeneutics. When discussing the women's liberation movement and gender equality, these studies do not consider the author's personal experience to be important.

Mernissi's writing has sparked a debate over her feminist ideas. Nabilata viewed that Mernissi's interpretation of the Al-Qur'an and Hadith was influenced by her subjective beliefs.⁴ Nabilata argued that the feminism-oriented interpretations of these verses and hadiths are problematic. Meanwhile, Wijayanti et al. argued that Mernissi was making an effort to dispel gender misconceptions of religion by addressing the inequality of women and men within the context of the conflict between tradition and modernity.⁵ In Fajarwati's research, Mernissi condemned the ease with which religious doctrines could be

¹ Ana Bilqis Fajarwati, "Islam Dan Demokrasi Dalam Perspektif Fatima Mernissi Ana," *Religió: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 1, no. 1 (2011): 1–22, <http://religio.uinsby.ac.id/index.php/religio/article/view/3>.

² Lub Liyna Nabilata, "Al-Adabiya Hermeneutika Feminis," *Al Adabiya: Jurnal Keislaman Dan Kebudayaan* 13, no. 02 (2018): 201–22, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37680/adabiya.v13i02.23>.

³ Ratna Wijayanti et al., "Pemikiran Gender Fatima Mernissi Terhadap Peran Perempuan," *Jurnal Muwazah IAIN Pekalongan* 10, no. 1 (2018): 58–68, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.28918/muwazah.v10i1.1131>.

⁴ Lub Liyna Nabilata, "Hermeneutika Feminis: Kritik atas Kesetaraan Fatima Mernissi," *Al-Adabiya: Jurnal Keislaman dan Kebudayaan*. 13, no. 02 (Desember 2018): 204, <https://doi.org/10.37680/adabiya.v13i02.23>.

⁵ Ratna Wijayanti et al., "Pemikiran Gender Fatima Mernissi terhadap Peran Perempuan," *Muwazah: Jurnal Kajian Gender*. 10, no. 1 (June 2018): 62, <https://doi.org/10.28918/muwazah.v10i1.1131>.

twisted to serve the interests of the power. Therefore, in Mernissi's view, the subjugation of women was a cultural construction that was invented, but not a part of the teachings of the Islamic religion.⁶ In the present study, authors' analysis is comparable to that of Wijayanti and colleagues⁷ and Fajarwati⁸, and authors will explain the reasons for this similarity in greater details.

Mernissi's novels criticized Quranic interpretations that legitimize power over women. She contends that the interpretations of the holy Quran and Hadith that denigrate women were unfounded and that there were numerous ways in which the science of interpretation could be inaccurate.⁹ Mernissi, on the other hand, employed a woman's perspective to interpret Hadith or verses from the Qur'an in order to understand women's position within the tradition of Islamic religious interpretation. This reading was therefore referred to as a feminist reading. Mernissi's writings essentially challenged the common ways of reducing women's roles to domestic works, which was and is used to uphold patriarchal discourse when interpreting the Qur'an. Mernissi's work has become interesting for advocates of gender equality and scholars of religious interpretation because it talked in depth about the limits of religious traditions and women's freedom. When scholars wrote about Mernissi's works, many of them focused on the works itself and did not connect it to historical events or Mernissi's own thoughts and experiences. When comparing feminist Moslems' thoughts (e.g., Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, and Riffat Hassan), Roohi Khan Stack, for example, remained focused solely on the texts these feminists

⁶ Ana Bilqis Fajarwati, "Islam dan Demokrasi dalam Perspektif Fatima Mernissi," *Religio: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama*. 1, no. 1 (March 2011): 5.

⁷ Wijayanti et al., "Pemikiran Gender Fatima Mernissi Terhadap Peran Perempuan."

⁸ Fajarwati, "Islam Dan Demokrasi Dalam Perspektif Fatima Mernissi Ana."

⁹ Muhammad Fathur Rozaq, "Hermeneutika Terjemah Al-Qur'an Era Kolonial: Telaah Kitab Terjemah Al-Qur'an Hidayah al-Rahmān," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 16, no. 2 (Desember 2018): 442–63, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlk.v16i2.549>.

produced.¹⁰ The authors of this present article argued that the struggles against female's oppression in Mernissi's novel was a reflection of Mernissi's own experience. In doing so, she consistently evoked the ideas and spirit of women's liberation. In fact, the female characters in Mernissi's novels were closely related to the original life of the author. The concept of Mernissi feminism was shaped by the interwoven history, culture and life experiences, where there was friction between religious traditions and the progression of modernity. Therefore, the authors contend that the novel "*Perempuan-perempuanku Haremku*" studied in this article suggested a linkage between the experience of the author and the works she had written.

The fact that Mernissi was born and raised in the era of Moroccan independence helps to provide context for the stories she wrote about the impact of colonialism on the women's liberation movement at that time. The 1960s marked the beginning of feminist studies and movements, which came at a time when concerns for the subordination of women had reached its highest point. Historically, feminist studies and movements have been traced back to this time. This period coincided with the process of nationalism that was actively flourishing in colonial countries at the time, including Morocco where Mernissi was born. The novel "*Perempuan-perempuanku Haremku*" discussed how changing times have caused cultural tensions brought by modernization processes in the context of Morocco's Muslim community's religious traditions. These contradictions have also gradually formed a new perspective on the position of women and their new roles in a changing world.

Mernissi's novel developed and emphasized gender equality as its central theme. Women were treated differently than were men in society due to socially and culturally constructed gender differences. Issues arose when discrimination based on gender

¹⁰ Roohi Khan Stack, "An Analysis of Muslim Women's Rights Based on the Works of Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, and Riffat Hassan," ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, *ALM, United States - Massachusetts, Harvard University* (blog), 2020, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2480796213/abstract/7D71EE3D87814577PQ/1>.

was practiced, especially against women.¹¹ The term "gender injustice" refers to situations where men and women have an unequal, harmful, or even sacrificial relationship with one another. Some examples of gender injustice are: being forced to work harder and longer hours, being subjected to violence, having one's views on one's gender negated by society, being socialized into believing that one's gender is less important in political decision-making, and so on.¹²

Instead of reading Mernissi's works through the lens of Islamic feminism as did many other scholars, authors of this article focused on the discourse of women's resistance and liberation in "Perempuan-perempuan Haremku" by delving into the author's cultural background and personal experiences to better understand the circumstances under which her works were written. Using this context as a foundation, this article seeks to answer two interrelated research questions: *Under what conditions or circumstances do Mernissi's sensitivity and critical thought emerge? How and by whom did the feminist ideology of Mernissi originate and develop?* The authors are by no means denying Mernissi's contributions to the field of Islamic feminism. Nonetheless, by situating the history of colonization and modernization in Morocco, authors hope to provide a more nuanced understanding on the foundation of Mernissi's religious interpretation for gender equality and women's empowerment.

The novel "Perempuan-perempuan Haremku" is a representation of a fictionalized reality that bears striking resemblance to real life. Reading this book can be seen as an exercise in trying to make sense of the world. A literary writer, like an artist, not only interprets his or her life through the lens of a particular perspective, but also takes that interpretation into the depths of the mind, where it is processed and eventually given expression in a new way. Ernst Cassirer called this process an

¹¹ Siti Yumnah Syaukani, "Pemikiran Fatima Mernissi Tentang Pendidikan Islam Perspektif Gender," *Ta'limuna*. 10, no. 01 (March 2021): 26, <http://dx.doi.org/10.32478/talimuna.v10i1.489>.

¹² Mansoer Fakhri, *Analisis Gender Dan Transformasi Sosial* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2000), 14.

aesthetic experience—a full of unlimited possibilities that are not captured by everyday sensory experience.¹³ Authors contend that such a process is what allowed Fatima Mernissi to create the works that she made. The novel is a critical and aesthetic reflection of Mernissi's everyday life.

In this particular piece of study, a semiotic method was utilized in order to carry out textual analysis. The idea behind this approach is that the written word is a product of how language is used.¹⁴ Text, in its broadest sense, refers to any product of discourse, including the use and exchange of signs and language. Text is defined as "a combination of signs" in its most fundamental form.¹⁵ Text analysis refers to the examination of signs in groups or combinations. Literary works such as poetry, short stories, and novels can be used as a source for text analysis in order to determine the relationship between story ideas or story content and the author's experience, or how the story idea describes the experience. Feminist discourse is concerned with what women's experiences reveal about their struggle, resistance, or oppression. For example, Fitri Solihat and colleagues found the complex experiences of women as a study of gender discourse in short story literature in Helvy Tiana Rosa's work.¹⁶ In this present study, the foundation for gender equality and justice in the novel *Perempuan Perempuan Haremku* was traced by analyzing the relationships between language signs that give rise to meaning and their relationship to the position and background of the author.

In addition to textual analysis, the authors analyzed several verses from the holy Qur'an to demonstrate that the purpose of

¹³ Ernst Cassirer, *Manusia dan Kebudayaan: Sebuah Esei tentang Manusia*. Jakarta: PT. Gramedia, 1990, p.219.

¹⁴ Yasraf Amir Piliang, "Semiotika Teks: Sebuah Pendekatan Analisis Teks," *MediaTor*. 5, no. 2 (2004): 190.

¹⁵ Tony Thwaites, *Tools for Cultural Studies, an Introduction*. London: MacMillan, 1994, p. 67.

¹⁶ Fitri Solihat, Teti Sobari, and Woro Wuryani, "Potret Pengalaman Perempuan dalam Cerpen 'Selamanya Cinta' Karya Helvy Tiana Rosa: Studi Ekofeminisme Transformatif," *Parole: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia*. 3, no. 4 (July 2020): 532.

textual interpretation in Islam was not to demean women, but to exalt them. We follow Mernissi's strategies in her writings by interpreting religious texts in favor of women. In carrying out this work, Mernissi sought to counter the interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith that tend to legitimize patriarchal culture in Islam. Similar to Mernissi's, for us, the Quranic interpretation that promotes discrimination against women, is contrary to the Islamic principle of '*rahmatan lil alamin*' where religion must be a mercy for all creatures and genders in the universe. Meanwhile, the gender injustice have dominantly befallen towards women. Through her novel, Mernissi fought for a more equal world in which everyone, regardless of gender, is treated with respect and given equal opportunities.

FINDING DAN DISCUSSION

Fatima Mernissi's Harem World

The Mernissi family was originally from the Moroccan city of Fez. In 1940, when she was born and grew up, her family resided in a harem, a traditional form of Arab settlement dating back to the ninth century. The Mernissis was one of the aristocratic families who inherited a large amount of land; they were known as *fellah* or landowners. The harem in which they lived was not a royal harem, as was typical of Muslim royal dynasties from the Umayyad to the Ottoman Empires, but rather a domestic harem. Behind the harem's walls, women were fully protected. This harem was more akin to a residential area that accommodated extended families. Without the permission of the male household head, women had zero access to the outside world.

The term 'harem' is derived from the Arabic word 'haram', which means 'prohibited'. However, unlike harems in the Western orientalist fantasy, the domestic *harems* that existed in the Muslim world were not particularly erotic. The bourgeois, rather than erotic, dimension was more pronounced where a man, his sons, and his wife lived in the same house, shared resources and prohibited women from leaving the house.¹⁷ The spark of

¹⁷ Fatima Mernissi, *Perempuan-Perempuan Haremku* (Bandung: Qanita Mizan, 2003), 393.

women's liberation that was started by Mernissi needs to follow the course of history all the way back to the beginning, which is the *harem*.

The *harem* adhered to very stringent rules which mainly based on the concept of boundaries. It is possible to say that the *harem* itself was the boundary that divided the private world of women from their public world, which was dominated by the privileges of men. *Harem* life was based on the logic of *hudud*, or sacred boundaries. According to her account in the novel "Perempuan-perempuan Haremku," Mernissi was born during a chaotic time when neither Christians nor women respected these sacred boundaries.¹⁸ According to Mernissi's father, peace could only exist if each side respected the other's boundaries; exceeding these boundaries would only result in regret and suffering.¹⁹ Life in the *harem* inspired women who wanted to fly across the horizon outside the *harem*. For women who had been forced to serve in *harems* their entire lives, the freedom to enjoy life as it was lived by men was not just a dream, but also a passion.

According to Mernissi's novel, *harem* life which limited women's freedom with physical boundaries such as walls, gates, and the separation of men's and women's spaces, represented cultural boundaries in the form of communal life norms and rules, the embodiment of tradition rather than the manifestation of religious values. As a result, the life of a *harem* culture that isolated women from the outside world did not accurately reflect Islam's egalitarian spirit. Mernissi implied in her novel that there was no basis in the Qur'an or Hadith for the prohibition of women from leaving the house or for the separation of the men's and women's rooms. In other words, neither the concept of *hudud* nor the sacred boundaries upon which *harem* rules were based had any religious legitimacy.²⁰

The *harem* is a tradition that dated back to the Islamic dynasties that ruled the Arab Caliphate during the Umayyad,

¹⁸ Fatima Mernissi, *Perempuan-Perempuan Haremku* (Bandung: Qanita Mizan, 2003), 393, 12.

¹⁹ Mernissi, 13.

²⁰ Mernissi, 15–16.

Abbasid, Fatimid, and Ottoman Empires.²¹ *Harem* was served to assemble royal wives, concubines, slaves, including eunuchs, and other members of the royal family, separating them from ordinary society groups. The harem concept was closely related to the sultan's cultural values and religious beliefs, as well as his household, which included the extended family.²² However, with the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the royal *harems* were transformed into domestic harems, which functioned as a large family living area.

The interweaving of Mernissi's personal life and Global History

Mernissi's first education came from her mother's grandmother, Lalla Yasmina, who taught her the beautiful meaning of the Qur'an as a gateway to understanding Islam as a poetic religion. Furthermore, she received basic education, specifically on the Qur'an, with a focus on reading accuracy and textual translation. Mernissi attended the Women's School as a National School at the advanced study level, which was funded by the French government.²³ Mernissi continued her education at Muhammad V University in Rabat, where she studied Sociology and Political Science. Both were completed in 1965. She then moved to Paris to continue her doctoral studies and worked as a journalist. Her long journey to study eventually brought her back to Morocco, where she taught at the Muhammad V University and worked at The Institute of Scientific Research from 1974 to 1981.²⁴

²¹ Nationalgeographic.grid.id, "Harem Kesultanan Utsmaniyah Melayani Dengan Lebih Dari Satu Cara," Article, *National Geographic* (blog), Agustus 2022, <https://nationalgeographic.grid.id/read/133430107/harem-kesultanan-utsmaniyah-melayani-dengan-lebih-dari-satu-cara?page=all>.

²² Idntimes.com, "Terisolasi Dari Dunia Luar, 12 Fakta Harem Di Kekaisaran Ottoman," News, *IDN Times* (blog), September 21, 2021, <https://www.idntimes.com/science/discovery/amelia-solekha/fakta-harem-kekaisaran-ottoman-c1c2?page=all>.

²³ Fatima Mernissi, *Ratu-Ratu Islam Yang Terlupakan* (Bandung: Mizan, 1994), 95.

²⁴ Syaukani, "Pemikiran Fatima Mernissi Tentang Pendidikan Islam Perspektif Gender," 28.

Mernissi's characters and feminist ideas evolved over the course of her childhood in a *harem* family and her education in France. Mernissi spent much of her time teaching as a visiting professor at Harvard University and Berkeley University in California, as well as working for women's movement organizations and institutions. She was working as a consultant for United Nations agencies and as a member of the Pan Arab Woman Solidarity Association.²⁵ Mernissi lived at the end of the colonial era, when Morocco was divided into two colonial territories shared by France and Spain. Her family's *harem* was located in Medina's old city, next to the new city of Ville Nouvelle, which was populated by French colonial people.²⁶ The proximity of the two regions resulted in a meeting of two cultures: West and East, Islam and Christianity, French and Arabs. These two ends allowed for a variety of clashes due to cultural differences.

In the 1940s when Fatima Mernissi was still a very young woman, the nationalism movement driven by modernization spread throughout various colonial countries around the world, including Morocco. Moroccan nationalists were well-educated people who had studied Arabic and French. When the majority of Moroccans, particularly women, were illiterate, the Nationalist movement began to echo the idea of equality between nations as a form of equality in human rights. The abolition of colonialist practices was on the struggle agenda because it was contrary to universal humanist values. Along with this struggle, the Nationalist group gradually introduced a new culture by replacing traditional Moroccan Arab clothing with a French dress style. Aside from that, women could wear men's clothing, such as the *jellaba*, once they become accustomed to it.²⁷

Fatima Mernissi's feminism cannot be generalized with Western feminist ideology and movements that arose as a result of different historical circumstances. Mernissi's concept of gender equality must be seen in the Eastern world where she

²⁵ Syaukani, 28.

²⁶ Mernissi, *Perempuan-Perempuan Haremku*, 44.

²⁷ Mernissi, 193–95.

grew up and lived. As a result, Fatima Mernissi's critique of the practice of oppressing women, based on interpretations of verses in the Islamic religion, employed a similar model of resistance by incorporating interpretations of the scriptures that support the idea of gender equality for women. The only thing that varies a narration to another narration and a hadith to another hadith is the interpretation.

Several critics of Fatima Mernissi's feminism pointed to a counter-interpretation that drew on the same source of legitimacy and patterns. Among these criticisms was the belief that Fatima Mernissi's ideas were still mired in a crisis of interpretation and counter-interpretation.²⁸ This crisis arose because the methods or strategies used by opponents and supporters of gender equality in constructing and legitimizing their respective positions were essentially the same, namely by explaining specific parts of the Qur'an or Hadith text that are appropriate and support their interests and views.²⁹ However, Fatima Mernissi's counter-interpretation must be seen as an effort to fight for the values of gender equality that were actually contained in the breath of Islam as a religion of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (grace to the universe).

An interpretation of the text i.e., the holy book of Quran, must be understood contextually by taking into account the cultural background of Arab society at the time of Quran verse revelation. However, in the opinion of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, a text is a historical and cultural product in which the text is present. The text is then a representation of the people's thoughts or culture that gave birth to it. In this context, culture act as a text producer, so the realities depicted in the text partially reflect the socio-cultural reality of the society that forms it. Alternatively, the text also functions as a cultural producer. In other words, the text has the power to affect and transform culture, which is then reconstructed in a new form.³⁰

²⁸ Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Reformation Historical Analysis* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), <http://islamlib.com/id/index.php?page=article&id=793>.

²⁹ Nabilata, "Hermeneutika Feminis: Kritik Atas Kesetaraan Fatima Mernissi," 218.

³⁰ Zayd, *Reformation Historical Analysis*, 24.

Therefore, Mernissi's views on gender justice must be understood in the cultural and historical contexts of her lifetime. Mernissi's critical awareness was honed by her varied experiences and events as an Arab Muslim living in a French colony in Morocco. Arab Muslims are eastern people who live in Morocco, a former French colony. As Edward W. Said stated in his book "Orientalism," the majority of his personal investment in the study stemmed from his awareness as an "Eastern", as a child who grew up in two English colonies, Palestine and Egypt, and received a Western education in the continental United States of America. These circumstances did not cause him to forget the fact that he was an "Eastern." This awareness endured within him.³¹ Mernissi, who fought for the ideology of women's liberation in the name of gender justice, could be separated from her awareness and values, much less deny that she was an "Eastern" feminist.

Confinement and the Spirit for the Liberation of Women

In the novel "Perempuan-perempuan Haremku," Mernissi described her childhood as a young girl who lived with her extended family in a domestic *harem*. Everyday, she was surrounded by women with personalities, worldviews, and attitudes that contrasted with her own. In simple terms, there were two main groups living in the *harem*: the reformist group who supported Morocco's transformation, and the conservative group who adhered to tradition. While the first group wanted Morocco's face to change with the times, the second believed that Moroccan life would be better if it continued to adhere to the inherited values of the glorious Islamic dynasties in Arab lands. However, the differences in perspectives and value foundations of the two groups focused on the realm of ideas surrounding women, specifically their position and role in a constantly changing world.

Little Mernissi had a male cousin of the same age in the *harem* named Samir. Mernissi and Samir were born one hour apart on the same day of Ramadan. They always played together

³¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalisme* (Bandung: Penerbit Pustaka, 2001), 33.

because they were so close and compact, not realizing their respective sexual and gender differences. Friction due to these differences was only felt after the two reached their adolescent years. On Samir's birth, the Mernissi family held a party in accordance with Moroccan Arab Islamic tradition to commemorate the birth of a son. Despite her exhaustion, Mernissi's mother³² insisted on holding a thanksgiving, as she had done for Samir. She rejected male superiority as nonsense and incompatible with Islam. "God created us equal," Mernissi's mother said.³³

In Islam, men and women share the same status as Allah's creatures. This is what Mernissi's mother meant when she said that men and women are equal. When one gender is compared to another in the Qur'an, it is due to biological differences rather than hierarchical differences. Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13 explained why the noblest are not men or women, nor Western or Eastern nations, but those who fear Allah SWT the most:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ
لِتَعَارَفُوا ۗ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

"O humanity! Indeed, we created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may 'get to' know one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware," (QS. Al-Hujurat:13).

Similar verses can be found in Surah Az-Zariyat verse 56 which reads:

³² It is interesting to observe Mernissi's storytelling style in that she did not mention the name of her mother. In contrast to other women such as her grandmother, Lalla Yasmina, Lalla Thor, Lalla Mani, or Lalla Radia as well as Aunt Habiba and cousin Chama. As such, the mentions and quotes related to the mother of Mernissi in this article followed Mernissi's expressions in the novel.

³³ Mernissi, *Perempuan-Perempuan Haremku*, 25.

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

“I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me,” (QS. Adh-Dhariyat:56).

When tracing Mernissi's mother's characters, it is necessary to look at her family background, as she was the daughter of Lalla Yasmina (Grandma Yasmina), who was very egalitarian-minded despite living in a patriarchal culture. Mernissi described her mother and grandmother in her novel as women who harbored a fire of resistance within themselves. Lalla Yasmina would occasionally tell Mernissi that being confined to a *harem* meant a woman's freedom of movement had been taken away. Another time, she said that a *harem* meant misfortune because a wife had to share her husband with his eight mistresses, which meant she had to sleep alone for eight nights before making love to her husband. According to Lalla Yasmina, her grandchildren's generation and subsequent generations should be happy because they no longer had to share a husband.

Lalla Yasmina, despite being a polygamous wife, was a lady who was not afraid to express her thoughts and feelings to anyone. She named her pet duck Lalla Thor after her husband's first wife. This was done to criticize the first wife's privilege of having no household obligations. "I don't care how rich that woman is, she has to work together just like us. Are we Muslim or not? If so, everyone is the same. God said so, and the Prophet also said so," Lalla Yasmina said.³⁴

Mernissi's mother instilled in her a spirit of resistance, teaching her to always protest anything that was unjust to her. Mernissi's mother frequently shared her hopes and dreams for women's liberation, which she inherited from her mother (Mernissi's grandmother).

“I want to get up early,” Mom kept saying.

“Oh, that I could take a walk at dawn when the streets are quiet. The skylight may appear blue, or it may be orange, like a sunset.

³⁴ Mernissi, *Perempuan-Perempuan Haremku*, 51.

What is the color of the morning sky when the streets are quiet?" No one answered the question. In the harem, we ask questions not only for answers. We ask ourselves simply to find out what is happening to us."³⁵

Mernissi's mother frequently disagreed with her mother-in-law, Lalla Mani, about what it meant to be a woman. She once attacked Lalla Mani's views by claiming that the French did not confine their wives behind walls. They were free to go to the market, had access to entertainment, and the real work continued. This argument contradicted Lalla Mani's belief that *harems* prevented men and women from seeing each other, allowing everyone to do their own thing. The disparity in perspectives between Mernissi's mother and her in-laws reflected the general way of thinking of society at the time. Gender equality activists began to oppose this cultural practice. When viewed through the lens of religious text interpretation, the interpretation of the Qur'an on verses such as Surah Al-Isra verse 70 can provide support for the spirit of liberation of women imprisoned behind *harem* walls. Allah glorifies all of Adam's children and grandchildren in this text, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or skin color:

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِّنَ
الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَىٰ كَثِيرٍ مِّمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا

“Indeed, we have dignified the children of Adam, carried them on land and sea, granted them good and lawful provisions, and privileged them far above many of Our creatures,” (QS. Al-Isra:70).

Mernissi learned from her mother to be defiant in the face of injustice. Mernissi recognized that being rebellious was not in her nature. In contrast to Samir, who was able to express his displeasure with adults by screaming and jumping up and down, rolling on the floor, or kicking people who were nearby. Mother frequently encouraged Mernissi to rebel and repeatedly reminded

³⁵ Mernissi, 43.

her that relying on Samir to be aggressive was not a good idea. She told Mernissi not to rebel in an idiotic way, but to carefully observe and analyze the situation. "It's okay to rebel when you know you have a chance to win," she said.³⁶

Apart from Lalla Yasmina and Mernissi's mother, there were other figures who helped to shape and strengthened Mernissi's feminist ideas. In the midst of the *harem's* routine and silence, the women were entertained by art performances staged by Aunt Habiba and Chama. After finishing their housework, the women usually went to Aunt Habiba's place where she was telling stories or where Chama was performing. Aunt Habiba used to say that every human being possessed magic, which was hidden in dreams.

"If you feel helplessly slumped behind a wall and confined in a stifling harem," said Aunt Habiba, "you'll want to find a way out. And the magic will come when you manifest the dream and destroy the boundaries. Liberation begins with the imagination dancing in your little head, and you can translate that imagination into words. And it's all free of charge!"³⁷

The stories told by Aunt Habiba, as well as the theater staged by Chama, depicted the desires of women who wanted to live life outside the *harem*. Adventures in foreign lands, romance, intellectual passion through education, and other forms of entertainment were transformed into fairy tales and dramas that enchanted the *harem* women. They were transported to an imaginary dimension where the depression and boredom of everyday life were banished.

Asmahan, an Egyptian and Lebanese actress, singer, and feminist; Shahrazad and the princesses in the story "One Thousand and One Nights" and important religious figure are among the most frequently appearing female characters in Chama's theater. Chama's favorites among feminists (pioneers of women's rights defenders) were Aisyah Taymour, Zainab Fawwaz, and Huda Sya'rawi. Among the most popular religious figures were

³⁶ Mernissi, *Perempuan-Perempuan Haremku*, 192.

³⁷ Mernissi, 185.

the Prophet's wives Khadija and Aisha, as well as the Sufi Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah.³⁸ Fatima Mernissi's awareness that a woman must fight for her voting rights over men was sparked by her cousin Chama.

Women's solidarity was a sensitive issue on the terrace of the *harem*, the stage for the Chama theatre, because the women there found it difficult to unite against the men. Some who agreed with the *harem*, such as Granny Lalla Mani and Lalla Radia, always supported the men's decisions. Meanwhile, others, such as Mernissi's mother and Chama, took the opposite stance. Mernissi's mother even thought that the woman who sided with the men were the most responsible for other women's suffering. However, Chama's performance was essentially a space for women to participate, to speak up rather than to remain silent. In this way, women could assert their subjectivity in public in relation to the dominant power.³⁹ Both Chama with her theater and Bibi Habiba with her fairy tales could be seen as individual agents who were triggers for the power of mobilization of collective actions. These collective actions had their own context, namely the progressive women's resistance to the *harem* tradition.

Women's Resistance and Agency in the *Harem*

Mernissi witnessed and lived in a traditional family that was unable to quell women's dreams of liberation. She was inspired by women whose perspectives on themselves and the world went beyond the boundaries of tradition and the walls of the *harem*. They were Mernissi's mother, cousin Chama, and Aunt Habiba, who were widows upon their husband's divorce. Mernissi learned to question things that had never been questioned except from these three people. For example, why were only men allowed to enter and exit the *harem* gates and go to the movies, but not women?

³⁸ Mernissi, *Perempuan-Perempuan Harem*, 206–7.

³⁹ Dewi Candraningrum, "Perempuan Buruh Dalam Pasar Internasional: Cinta Ibu, Agensi, Dan Keragaman Politik Aktivisme," *Jurnal Perempuan*. 20, no. 2 (2015): 146, <https://doi.org/10.34309/jp.v20i2.38>.

Apart from the three women who dared to protest against women's limited rights and access in comparison to men, the majority of the others continued to be women bound by tradition. Lalla Mani (Grandma Mani) and Lalla Radia (Chama's mother) were the group's leaders. They followed traditional and religious rules that governed what women could and could not do. Basically, even though the women in the harem were divided into two groups based on their position and role as women, they would still help each other and keep the household warm. Unknowingly, they were linked in a network of sister-women bonds and formed the "matrifocal" family bonding organization. This matrifocal term referred to a broader family role structure, particularly in terms of position, stratification, and even politics and religion.⁴⁰ When men were present, they were the highest authority in the household. But when the men go out to work, the ultimate authority fell on Lalla Mani. She was the decision maker in managing the household which was run by all women in the *harem*.

According to the novel "Perempuan-Permpuanku Haremu," a group of progressive women with opposing views to Lalla Mani frequently defied the *harem* household rules that restrained them. Mernissi's mother, Chama, and Aunt Habiba were among the figures in the group. Mernissi gained the spirit of resistance and women's liberation within herself through them and through Lalla Yasmina. Mernissi's maternal grandmother, Lalla Yasmina, was a polygamous woman with seven other women who frequently rebelled against the confines imposed on the *harem*. Grandpa Tazi was the supreme leader of the household, but his eldest sons, Haji Salem and Haji Jalil, also made decisions. When grandfather was not at home, they acted as his representatives, according to Mernissi. Lalla Yasmina, on the other hand, was always able to get around the no-go rule by claiming

⁴⁰ Riska Dwi Agustin, "Agensi Kepemimpinan Perempuan: Entrepreneurship Umi Waheeda Di Pesantren Al Ashriyyah Nurul Iman, Parung, Bogor," *Musawa: Jurnal Studi Gender Dan Islam*. 19, no. 2 (July 2020): 237, <https://doi.org/10.14421/musawa.2020.192-235-247>.

that her husband had given her permission to go fishing before he left the house early in the morning.⁴¹

The story of Lalla Yasmina's life became one of the novel's highlights because it was an important issue in the feminism struggle regarding polygamy cases. In Islam, the verses of the Qur'an that served as the foundation for men's legitimacy to practice polygamy are still being debated among Muslim scholars. Indeed, Allah had decreed the existence of a polygamous text, but the law was unclear as to whether it is obligatory, sunnah, haram, makruh, or mubah (permissible). As stated in Surah An-Nisa verse 3 and its translation:

وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تُقْسِطُوا فِي الْيَتَامَىٰ فَانكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِنَ
النِّسَاءِ مَثْنَىٰ وَثُلَّةً وَرُبْعًا ۚ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً أَوْ مَا
مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ ذَٰلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَلَّا تَعُولُوا

"If you fear you might fail to give orphan women their 'due' rights 'if you were to marry them', then marry other women of your choice—two, three, or four. But if you are afraid you will fail to maintain justice, then 'content yourselves with' one or those 'bondwomen' in your possession. This way you are less likely to commit injustice," (QS An-Nisa:3).

The revelation of this verse could not be separated from the previous Arab culture, which permitted the marriage of up to dozens of wives; this culture was deeply ingrained in society. As a result, the spirit of the verse was to limit the provision of polygamy to only four wives, with very strict requirements, i.e. the husband should be able to treat all of his wives justly. Mernissi felt the need of a new interpretation of this verse because otherwise, the verse will continue to be used by men to legitimize their sexuality.

Lalla Yasmina, Mernissi's mother, cousin Chama, and Aunt Habiba were women who fought for rights and opposed

⁴¹ Mernissi, *Perempuan-Perempuan Haremku*, 244.

gender injustice. According to Judith Butler, the act of resistance was a way to overcome vulnerability. A vulnerable person must, at least temporarily, confront his own vulnerability through acts of resistance.⁴² In daily life in the *harem*, these women expressed their resistance to traditions that discredited women, whether through clothing or the hijab, artistic entertainment such as fairy tales and theater, eating habits that violated communal traditions, the making of certain decisions, and so on.

Mernissi described the act of violating harem rules related to the separation of men's and women's rooms in her novel. On the right side of the *harem* field on the public arena, there was the largest and nicest room of all the existing rooms, namely the men's dining room. It was where they ate their meals, watched the news, conducted business and played cards. The large radio in the cupboard to the far right of the room was only accessible to the family's male members. When the radio was turned off, this cabinet was locked. Father was certain that only he and Uncle had access to the radio. When the men were not in the harem, the women secretly listened to Radio Cairo on a regular basis.⁴³

The women, led by Mernissi's mother and Chama, duplicated the radio cabinet keys so they could listen to world news and songs performed by Middle Eastern actresses such as Asmahan from Lebanon and Ummi Khultsum from Egypt. *Harem* women were considered unimportant and did not require access to technology or information sources, demonstrating their subordinated position. Inasmuch as women had the right to be respected, upheld, and treated in accordance with their rights, they also had the freedom to develop in the same manner as men.⁴⁴ Mernissi's mother and Chama's act of stealing and duplicating the radio cabinet's keys was a form of resistance to women's rights to self-development.

⁴² Judith Butler, "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance," in *Vulnerability in Resistance* (USA: Duke University Press, 2016), 12.

⁴³ Mernissi, *Perempuan-Perempuan Haremku*, 23.

⁴⁴ Annemarie Schimmel, *Jiwaku Adalah Wanita: Aspek Feminin Dalam Spiritualitas Islam*, Terj. Rahmani Astuti (Bandung: Mizan, 1998), 146.

Another form of resistance practiced by some harem women was an attempt to escape via an alternate route at the terrace. However, this attempt came with consequences. Those who were desperate to escape must be able to climb, jump, and land well. So far, this action had always resulted in injuries. No one had ever been successful. Meanwhile, women like Chama and Mom refused to use the terrace as an alternative to the front gate.⁴⁵ Going out through the terraces, according to them, must be done in secret, and this type of action was despised by those who fought for women's freedom of movement. Arguing with Ahmed at the gate was far more heroic. Fleeing through the terraces was not only unheroic, but also not reflecting the spirit of liberation.

Referring to Butler's ideas, what Mernissi's mother and Chama did with the courage to organize and confront those considered subordinate embodied the principle of feminism resistance. Building a network of solidarity and resistance, according to Butler, was a critical component of the feminist movement.

“Feminisme adalah bagian penting dari jaringan solidaritas dan perlawanan ini justru karena kritik feminis mendestabilisasi lembaga-lembaga yang bergantung pada reproduksi ketidaksetaraan dan ketidakadilan. Serta mengkritik lembaga-lembaga dan praktik-praktik yang menimbulkan kekerasan pada perempuan dan minoritas gender. Dan pada kenyataannya, semua minoritas tunduk pada kekuasaan polisi untuk muncul dan berbicara seperti yang mereka lakukan.”

[Feminism is a crucial part of these networks of solidarity and resistance precisely because feminist critique destabilizes those institutions that depend on the reproduction of inequality and injustice, and it criticizes those institutions and practices that inflict violence on women and gender minorities, and in fact, all minorities subject to police power for showing up and speaking out as they do”]⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Mernissi, *Perempuan-Perempuan Haremku*, 102.

⁴⁶ Butler, “Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance,” 20.

The Tension Between Tradition and Modernity

*“Zaman adalah luka Bangsa Arab
Mereka merasa berjaya pada masa lalu
Masa lalu adalah pesona keranda nenek moyang
Taqlidi adalah negeri kematian
Masa depan mengerikan dan penuh dosa
Inovasi adalah bid'ah, kejahatan!”⁴⁷*

“Age is the wound of the Arab Nation
They feel triumphant in the past
The past is the charm of ancestral coffins
Taqlidi is the land of the dead
The future is terrible and full of sin
Innovation is heresy, evil!”

The above poem was composed by Chama and performed in a play on the *harem's* terrace. Substantial criticism was leveled at conservative groups that extolled Islam's past triumphs in Arab countries to the point where they shut themselves off from changing times because they saw any newness or innovation as a retreat from past glories. Chama, a supporter of reformist movements, envisioned a new face for the Arab world in which women were no longer imprisoned in *harems* or be covered for their beauty with the hijab.

The emergence of reformist and conservative groups, as well as the conflict between the two were as a result of a changing world. Mernissi wrote the novel "Perempuan Perempuan Haremku" with a historical backdrop at the end of the colonial era. In Morocco, the concept of nationalism spread quickly, resulting in massive anti-colonial movements demanding Moroccan independence from the French state. Fighting French colonialism, nationalists vowed to build a new Morocco with equal opportunities for all. Every woman had the same rights as men, including the right to monogamy - an exclusive and special relationship with her husband. Leaders and members

⁴⁷ Mernissi, *Perempuan-Perempuan Haremku*, 344.

of nationalist groups had demonstrated their integrity by marrying only one wife. Mernissi's father and uncle were among those in the group.⁴⁸

In the streets in front of the Mernissi family's harem, French people, both men and women, freely moved through Medina on their way to their own city, Ville Nouvelle. Meanwhile, only men had the right to move freely in public spaces in Morocco. The pulse of modernization, which energized the spirit of nationalism, clashed with religious values and traditions that served as the foundation of Arab society in Morocco. Arab Muslim women were required by religious law to cover their body with clothing to prevent men from seeing them. As a result, traditional Moroccan women's clothing known as *haik* was worn in layers from head to toe. On the one hand, these clothes adhered to religious values, but on the other hand, they were extremely impractical because they restricted women's movements. In other words, *hudud*, or sacred boundaries that women faced extend to the realm of their body and skin, as manifested by dress and appearance rules.⁴⁹

Mernissi's mother, as an adult woman, recognized how difficult it was for her to fight religious traditions that dictated how these women dressed. Finally, she switched strategies, instilling resistance in Mernissi by dressing little Mernissi in French women's clothes that were not layered and had short cuts, and not allowing Mernissi to wear the hijab. Mernissi's father, despite being a nationalist, would be furious if he caught his wife imitating this style of dress. He was worried to be seen as a nationalist who allowed their wives and sisters to wear *jellaba* (men's clothing) instead of *haik* (women's clothing). However, Mernissi's father chose to do as Simone de Beauvoir once said, "when you love someone, you should give the person you love the trust to choose and determine the values he or she adheres to."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Mernissi, *Perempuan-Perempuan Haremku*, 256.

⁴⁹ Mernissi, *Perempuan-Perempuan Haremku*, 194.

⁵⁰ Simone de Beauvoir, *Perempuan Yang Dihancurkan* (Yogyakarta: Narasi, 2017), 32–33.

In contrast to the issue of clothing, Mernissi's father ordered her to use French beauty products that were practical and provided quick results instead of traditional beauty makeup. Only beauty products could persuade Dad to prefer modern over traditional.⁵¹ Mernissi's mother, on the other hand, preferred traditional products because they were made by women's hands. She believed that women's control and beauty did not require male roles or legitimacy. This kind of viewpoint divergence was common in married life. The most important thing was to allow the wife to be equal to her husband and to trust her to balance her husband's logic. As a result, a wife felt respected and valued, as well as free to express herself.⁵²

The differences in perspectives between the husband (Mernissi's father) and wife (Mernissi's mother) within the *harem* household indirectly reflected the tension between groups supporting tradition and modernity. This issue also arose in craft activities such as embroidery. She was either a reformer or a conservative according to her choice of motive. Mernissi stated that when women were engrossed in embroidery projects, anyone looking closely would notice that a secret war was taking place. The eternal feud was caused by the *taqlidi* (traditional) and *'asri* (modern) groups. Chama and Mom represented the modern camp by embroidering unusual objects like birds flying with their wings spread wide. The flying bird motif represented the desire for freedom. Meanwhile, Lalla Mani and Lalla Radia who belonged to the traditional stronghold, continued to embroider old, repetitive and boring Fez designs.⁵³

The conflict between tradition and other modernities was exemplified by communal life. *Harem* households combined several families into one large family that lived together. The pattern of eating together with other families at certain times had

⁵¹ Mernissi, *Perempuan-Perempuan Haremku*, 370.

⁵² Eka Francisca Fitri Agustin and Endrika Widdia Putri, "Perempuan Dalam Novel Khadijah: Ketika Rahasia Mim Tersingkap Karya Sibel Eraslan (Analisis Gender Dan Agensi Perempuan)," *EGALITA: Jurnal Kesenjangan Dan Keadilan Gender*. 14, no. 1 (2019): 12, <https://doi.org/10.18860/egalita.v14i1.8363>.

⁵³ Mernissi, *Perempuan-Perempuan Haremku*, 326.

become a tradition. Mernissi described how her mother frequently persuaded her father to leave the *harem* and raised their family separately. Nationalists advocated for the abolition of sexual segregation but did not mention of married couples' right to separate from the larger family. In reality, the majority of nationalists continued to live with their families.⁵⁴ The male nationalist movement supported women's liberation, but had yet to propose the concept of a married couple living independently and apart from extended families. Such ideas were regarded as inappropriate or impolite.

Morocco is changing in every way as it struggles to break free from the clutches of French colonialism. In relation to the women's movement during the colonial period, both individuals and organizations demonstrated the agenda of the resistance movement against the system of injustice and oppression, which was a global issue at the time.⁵⁵ This includes opposition to traditional religious values that are no longer considered relevant to apply in a modernizing world. It is equivalent to confining women within *harem* walls. On the other hand, it is important to recognize that the formation of traditions in the Arab-Islamic world is inextricably linked to the manifestation of a particular interpretation of Qur'an. It can be seen in matters of polygamy and the hijab, among others. Due to the awareness of the continuity of values and actions, this tradition is passed down from generation to generation. A tradition is "eternal" in the sense that it transcends both the past and the present. The significance is both human and divine. Traditions, in other words, have spiritual significance because they are more than just inherited behaviors.⁵⁶

CONCLUSION

⁵⁴ Mernissi, 123.

⁵⁵ Asnawan, "Local Women's Agency in Peace Building: A Study on the Conflict of Iron Sand Mining in East Java," *Ulumuna: Journal of Islamic Studies*. 22, no. 1 (2018): 140, <http://dx.doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v22i1.297>.

⁵⁶ Simon J Bronner, "The Meaning of Tradition: An Introduction," *Spring: Western Folklore*. 59, no. 2 (2000): 87–104.

Mernissi's concept of women's liberation is semantically represented by the novel "Perempuan-perempuanku Haremku" and its style of expression. Mernissi's feminist thinking, which becomes the novel's spirit, is not simply the result of reading theories or teachings in classrooms, but stems from events she witnessed and experienced firsthand from very young age. Her personal life in the *harem* was inextricably linked to the global historical situation at the time, which was rife with anti-colonialist sentiment. This resistance was the biological offspring of modernity, which seeks to establish an equal life system among the world's nations. This process then helped to raise women's awareness of their rights to equality, justice, and prosperity in a world that previously provided more opportunities and privileges to men.

Mernissi's novel's resistance ideas are a form of crystallization of various life experiences and education that have been absorbed. The novel as a text is the product of historical and cultural struggles. Mernissi, as an Eastern feminist, echoes the hopes and struggles of twentieth-century Moroccan women seeking freedom and change. Mernissi's critical power and spirit of liberation have been instilled and growing within her, despite the physical boundaries of the *harem* and the imaginary sacred boundaries created by religious traditions.

From this study, the authors viewed the boundaries that were born from the influence of Arab patriarchal culture in the twentieth century through the characters in Mernissi's literary works, aspirations and imagination for self-independence grow and compete with the reality that restrains women in the *harem*. This study suggests that by emphasizing Mernissi's personal and historical experience, the novel "Perempuan-perempuanku Haremku" represents the value of feminism, which arose from a conflict between two opposing values: tradition-religion and modernity. Textual analysis of this novel is yet sufficient without considering the global historical context and Mernissi's personal background, which is undergoing value fluctuations, and these are suggestions for further studies.

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