

# Patriarchy and Gender Discrimination as seen in the Novels of Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) and Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *The Girl from the Coast* (2002)

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**Abstract**—Women for centuries have undergone gender discrimination under the pretext of patriarchy which is engraved in the culture and tradition of some societies. It is important to highlight that this condition has been encoded by the male gender to dominate and manipulate women. It is therefore necessary to draw attention to this important obstacle that stands in the way of women's achievement of their full potential and humanity in the face of these cultural traditions. The appropriate style that was chosen for this literary analysis is a qualitative research method that relies on the feminist technique using Freud's psychological theories. This article explores patriarchy and gender discrimination as portrayed in Ahdaf Soueif's *In The Eye of the Sun* (1992) and Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *The Girl from the Coast* (2002). It could be argued that those two novels describe a society that is feminist, patriarchal, and gender discriminatory. Moreover, it is important to assert that patriarchy and gender discrimination are part of the system's social order which compels the female characters to adjust to society's norms and conventions. This social order is supported by traditional and cultural masculine attitudes and results in sustaining gender inequality, female stereo typing and patriarchy which suppress women's beliefs and dreams.

**Keywords**—Gender discrimination, Patriarchy, Feminism, Stereotype.

## I. INTRODUCTION

FOR a long time women have been subjected to being stereotyped, marginalized and subordinated. The stereotype woman is expected to remain at home and rely on a man to support her. A woman's home should not be the prison in which man places her which results in stifling her abilities and humanity. Sugianti asserted that women should have the freedom to choose the role that they want to play in society and their husbands should not use their "power to not allow this, due to the fact that men are considered to provide money for the family" [1]. Similarly, Dar et al. affirmed that "Women are generally suppressed, humiliated and often subjected to an inhumane treatment being totally dependent on men [2]. On a similar note, Bashin and Khan argued that women should be allowed to have a career outside the house because raising children could be shared between the mother and father [3]. In addition, household chores could be done by hired domestic servants. Bashin and Khan asserted that "Every girl [should

have the] ... freedom and opportunity to do and to be what she wants and also encouraged to be able to do that" [3]. Moreover, when some women are able to work, they are not given high managerial positions and thus they are subordinated in hierarchy to men. In other words, women socially differ in terms of the social role in the society; women do not pose high position in the work as men do. Sundberg stated that these differences create great differences between men and women [4]. Thus, the importance of researching this problem becomes evident and of first priority.

It is noteworthy to highlight the significant role that gender plays in the lives of human beings, and how this becomes evident from the moment of a person's birth, when the baby boy is dressed in blue clothes and the girl is made to wear pink dresses. Moreover, when the boys' toys include cars and guns, the girls play with dolls and houses, and this becomes accepted as the natural appropriate gender division in the society. In other words, each gender is directed on a path that will transform them into what their culture regards as proper men or women. Lange stated the following:

From the very first breaths, humans are taught to follow a strict code of behavior that differs depending on their sex. In a patriarchal society, this often means that a male will lead a privileged life in which he is thought to be the standard for human experience and the female will lead a subjugated, subservient life in which she is defined only in relation to males. Forcing men and women to fit into gender roles is damaging as it leads to the belief that these roles represent truth, causing gender stereotypes to endure. It also forces men and women to experience life only from their point of view as men or women, not as human beings. If art is a reflection of life, then one would expect that literature would present worlds in which these gender roles exist, and women experience life far differently from men and suffer because of it [5].

Patriarchy and gender discrimination are terms that have been used in society to illuminate a drastic problem that most women face across the globe. The Indonesian feminist, Ratna gives a clear definition of feminism stating that it is "women's struggles to fight for their rights as a social class" [6]. Men in society consider themselves superior to women treating them as second-class citizens with limited mental abilities. Moreover, gender discrimination is closely related to

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feminism, which is defined by Sugianti as referring to “the practice of granting or denying rights or privilege to a person based on his/her gender that is longstanding and acceptable to both genders” [1]. On a similar vein Sundberg added that “Feminist theories, feminist writing and feminist criticism are opposed to the traditional attitudes in society that deny women as a group the same right as men have as a group” [4]. With regards to patriarchy, it is considered a result of the feminist ideology since without the emergence of feminism, patriarchy would not have been identified in society. Hooks defines patriarchy as “a political-social system dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence” [7].

## II. OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this article is to explore patriarchy and gender discrimination as portrayed in Ahdaf Soueif's *In The Eye of the Sun* (1992) and Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *The Girl from the Coast* (2002) [8]-[9].

## III. METHOD

The suitable method for the literary analysis approach adopted in this article is the qualitative research method. The research design used for this study is based on the feminist approach using Freud's psychological theories because it analyses stereotyping and gender discrimination. Mulvey mentioned that the feminist approach is most appropriate for understanding women's lives and women's issues [10]. Feminism is concerned with issues of broader social change and social justice and committed to change the condition of women. On a similar note, Tyson adds that therefore, the ultimate goal is to increase the understanding of women's experience, both in the past and present, and promote appreciation of women's value in the world [11]. This study also uses comparative literature because those two novels are written by different authors from different countries.

The data sources are the novels Ahdaf Soueif's *In The Eye of the Sun* (1992) and Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *The Girl from the Coast* (2002) [8], [9]. Data are collected through two sources: primary sources (the two novels) and secondary sources (academic articles and books). Primary sources include data extracts of quoted material from the two novels analyzed from a feminist viewpoint. Moreover, instances of secondary data are used as reference to support the arguments made by the researcher in the analysis. The logical framework is in Fig. 1.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to understand gender identities, there is a need first to refer to Freud's explanation of the two different psyches of human beings which in spite of their differences are complementary. The first is called the instrumental/active and this type is goal oriented and as Steinberg stated that it “is characterized by rationality, emotional insensitiveness,

resolution and repression of spontaneous impulses and feelings” [12]. This type of psyche is mainly socially associated with the male gender role. Steinberg added that the second is called expressive/passive which is “oriented toward fostering the harmony of the group through the expression and management of feelings and emotions” [12]. Furthermore, this type is socially associated with the female gender role. Both Freud and Steinberg argue that these two human psychological identities “are independent of a person's biological sex” [12], [13]. In other words, it is the society that indoctrinates these identities towards males and females not the fact that these types belong to certain genders.

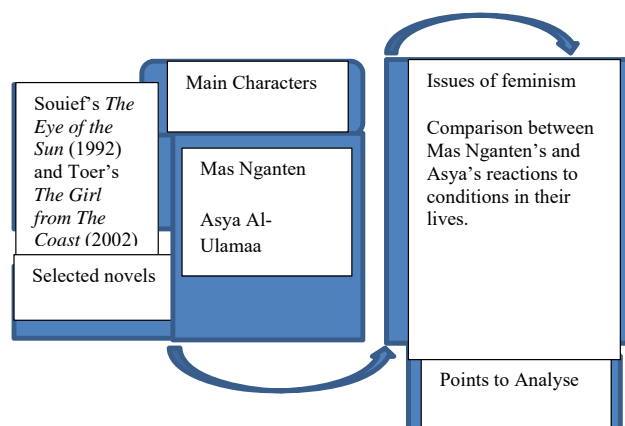


Fig. 1 Two selected novels, the main characters and the points that are analysed

Despite the fact that the setting of Soueif's *In The Eye of the Sun* (1992) is in Cairo, Egypt and Toer's *The Girl from the Coast* (2002) is in Indonesia, yet there are similarities between what both protagonists (Asya and Nganten) face namely, patriarchy and gender discrimination. In order to analyse and compare both novels, it is important to highlight certain similarities with regards to the fact that both novels include female marginalization, subordination and stereotyping.

Women in Soueif's *In The Eye of the Sun* (1992), as Mami argued, are “put to lead a marginal life; they are on the periphery of both public and domestic life and they are reduced to situations where they look incapable of deciding their own fate” [13]. Wherever Asya looks, there are examples of ‘phallocracy’ which are “a set of conditions that are rife with patriarchal mode of perception and production” [13]. These modes, as Soueif perceives them, favours men over women, not due to merit, but because of a social code and gender discrimination that sees men as more competent and thus provides them with privileges that are denied to women. An example of marginalization is in Asya's friend Nora who finds no other means to marry her Palestinian lover Bassam other than eloping with him after her father refused his marriage proposal, as he saw that Bassam would not be able to afford to get married to his daughter. When she decided to disobey her father, she was marginalized from her status as being a daughter who has living parents. Her father who had patriarchal powers decided to disown her saying “She would

not be my daughter. I would have nothing to do with her” (Soueif, 1992).

Marginalization is also found in Toer's *The Girl from the Coast* (2002), as its protagonist is a fourteen year old girl named Naganten who was originally from a poor family and was forced to marry a noble prince named Bendoro and was forced to be exiled from her previous life, family, friends and duties. She had to accept to live totally by herself with only some servants to keep her company. “She felt like a hen torn away from her brood. Living alone, yet surrounded by so many people. Not allowed to have friends. Simply giving and receiving orders, at the appropriate time. She felt so lonely. So cold” [9]. Her mother told her that she was on her own and she had to learn to think of only pleasing her husband which clearly indicates the patriarchal mind-set of the Indonesian society that regarded women's role in life as to mainly serve and please men. This society also believes that the girl's separation from her family and friends and being marginalized is normal since it is the expected cycle of a female's life. This of course does not apply to men who can go out to work and also enjoy the company of their friends and their family. In other words, they do not undergo marginalization like women which clearly indicates stark gender discrimination.

Subordination is clearly discerned in Soueif's *In The Eye of the Sun*, as Asya has to be subordinate as a daughter to her father. She is expected to obey his orders even if they stifle her liberty. He imposed certain curfews that Asya had to abide by and not break with regards to going back home early. This drove her to lie and invent excuses to go out with her fiancé Seif. Her father is thus conforming with the social code of patriarchy of backward, ignorant and Feudal Egyptian elites who are disabled because of patriarchy from “conducting what Foucault calls ‘an epistemological break or that leap in the collective thinking of society that would put ordinary Egyptians in favorable positions to bypass the archaic attitudes and habits’” (as cited in [13]). In other words, Soueif wanted to expose to the reader that patriarchy prevented the elite from becoming catalytic agents for development and change. Subordination is also expected from Asya when she becomes a wife, as she has to be obedient and obey her husband. Asya realises that in her subordinated position she has been under the influence of “lousy circumlocutory forms of thinking that she has been obliged to adopt by her society's cultural norms” [13] which makes her constantly concerned about what other people may say about her words and actions.

Subordination is also clearly apparent in *The Girl from the Coast* (2002) and is portrayed in the fact that Naganten is a subordinate to her husband the noble prince. She is told by her mother that she has to obey him and do everything he tells her. So, the girl learns that being the wife of a noble did not free her from subordination. Even if she is not rich, lives in an old scruffy hut, and is not happy, a woman's sole duty is to make her husband pleased, content and satisfied. This piece of motherly advice shows how patriarchal societies – be it commoners or nobles – all share a common view towards women. A wife exists not as an equal partner of life to her husband, but merely as a man's accessory. In the eyes of

patriarchal societies, women are born into this world to complete men's lives. “You belong to me. I decide what you can and cannot, will and will not do” [9]. The previous sentence signifies the subordinate state that the wife is in especially when she cannot do anything without the permission of her husband.

Stereotyping women is also apparent in Soueif's *In The Eye of the Sun* (1992) as Soueif portrays in this novel the idea that “the modern Egyptian society is a highly gendered society, and that social roles are rigidly fixed and defined to the extent that they set and prescribe the norm of almost any life situation” [13]. For example the stereotype of a wife is that she should be happy with her married life and accept her husband even if he does not treat her like a normal human being who has feelings, emotions and a need to communicate with others especially the spouse in a marriage setting. Asya's husband refused to talk to her as a person who has a mind and is equally capable of conducting a conversation. She complains to her mother that Saif did not enjoy talking with her and that “he'd rather talk to Karim or daddy anytime and it is been like this since we got engaged” [8]. She also complains to her friend Chrissi “He won't listen. He won't permit a conversation about anything that matters” [8]. Asya also stated that they get along well when she behaves as he wants her to. In other words, her husband has a stereotyped wife character and behaviour that Asya has to conform to, and that is enshrined in Saif's subconscious having been spoon-fed the patriarchal superiority ideas that have prevailed for centuries in the society. In other words, Asya did not follow the stereotyped image of a wife who should be always tame and satisfied with her married life and believe that having a baby “will put everything right” as her friend Chrissi mentions.

Stereotyping women is also clearly evident in Toer's *The Girl from the Coast* as the Javanese society was comprised of wealthy nobles and hardworking commoners. Moreover, these conventional branded ideas about women were engraved in society for a long period of time, as “the socially-accepted truths about life, coming from this centuries-old patriarchal culture” [14]. For example when Naganten's mother is recommending the prince who is proposing to her daughter, she tells her “You'll be the wife of a pious man. He has made the pilgrimage to Mecca. Who knows how many portions of the Koran he can recite by heart? When a woman marries, child, she becomes bad if her man is bad, and good if he is good” [9]. The mother's second assumption that a woman is considered good only if her husband is good is based on the stereotyped idea that a woman is not free to decide whether she wants to be good or bad, as it is related to what her husband is. In other words, she automatically follows her husband's status.

If we use Freud's two types of psyche division to analyse Naganten and Asya's psychological identities we find that Naganten at the beginning of the novel till near the end has a completely expressive/passive character, as she obeys her parents being subordinated to them and marries the prince. Then she suffers marginalization, gender discrimination as she is not on equal footing with her husband and as soon as she

gives birth, her baby is taken away from her and she finds herself divorced at a very young age. However, near the end of the novel she somewhat changes towards the instrumental/ active identity who is emotionally insensitive and goal oriented as she insists on attaining her freedom from the status of being once again subordinated to her father's patriarchal domination of her. She has a clear goal of surviving on her own away from her parents' house even if it is at the expense of terminating her emotional familial ties forever. On the other hand, Asya in *The Eye of the Sun* has an instrumental/ active identity from the beginning till the end of the novel, as she has a goal which was to complete her PhD and teach at the university which she managed to achieve. However, her adoption of this type of psychological identity put her in constant conflict with her husband and her parents who refuse to remove the stereotyped image of the tame always satisfied wife who should have no other aim in life but to please her husband. Soueif in Asya's husband who later became her divorcee made the readers "witness the ways in which patriarchy ... [and gender discrimination are] able to carry on ...[their] crippling dynamics, confuse straight thinking and render it completely irrational" [13].

#### V.CONCLUSION

In Soueif's *The Eye of the Sun* (1992) and Toer's *The Girl from the Coast* (2002) both protagonists Asya and Naganten uncover the illogical premises of gender discrimination and the 'patriarchal machine' [13], showing how "patriarchy has shown an unparalleled ability to infiltrate and infest intimate social relationships, rendering them corrupt and destructive instead of enhancing and constructive" [13]. These negative consequences of patriarchy and gender discrimination is what inspired feminists to call for equality between genders. Johannsdottir blames "the patriarchy and its detrimental effects, for women's position in the world today" [15]. Analyzing the concepts of marginalization, subordination, stereotyping, patriarchy and gender discrimination is an eye opener that might enable people to become more censorious of society. The demise of patriarchy and gender discrimination might eventually occur if society is willing to become enlightened and look at truth wearing women's lenses.

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