

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of five sub-chapters. Those are the background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, significance of the study, and scope and limitation of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Women as victims of sexist oppression are a global issue and need to have attention from women around the world. This study covers three issues that relate to women as victims of sexist oppression. Those three issues are required to investigate the female protagonist's power in the novel *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* by Nadia Hashimi. In other words, the issues of sexist oppression experienced by the female protagonist, the solidarity obtained by the female protagonist, and the basic personal power exercised by the female protagonist are examined in this study. This study will reveal how the female protagonist transforms herself from margin to center. The female protagonist who exercises her basic personal power shows a redefinition of power that a woman is powerful to perform her resistance towards sexist oppression. Thus, this study must elaborate on the female protagonist's struggle to resist the sexist oppression she experiences.

In this study, the writer uses bell hooks' feminism theory. bell hooks is the pseudonym of Gloria Jean Watkins. She was born in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, U.S., on September 25, 1952, and died in Berea, Kentucky, on December 15, 2021. bell hooks assumed her pseudonym, the name of her great-grandmother, to honor female legacies; she preferred to spell it in all lowercase letters to focus on her message rather than herself (Britannica, 2022).

The issue of gender will never be separated from the issue of violence and discrimination against women. Until now, violence against women is a big

problem that is still common worldwide. The National Commission for Women stated that the root of the problem of violence experienced by women is the unequal relationship between men and women, where women have a position below men. This inequality occurs because the patriarchal system is still developing in society. Patriarchy is described as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women (Walby 1990: 20). In a patriarchal system, women and men have different positions. Women are positioned as the second society and men as the first society. The difference in position indicates that men have more significant opportunities and power than women. It means the privileges possessed by men make the position of women automatically marginalized. The impacts of their marginalized status make them challenging to achieve equality in society. In addition, women who live in patriarchal systems are more likely to become victims of sexism.

Sexism is prejudice or discrimination based on sex or gender, especially perpetrating against women and girls. According to bell hooks (1984: 47), *"between women and men, sexism is most often expressed in the form of male domination which leads to discrimination, exploitation, or oppression."* Natasha Walter reinforces this opinion about sexism in her book *Living Dolls: The Return Of Sexism*. Natasha defines *sexism* as "discrimination perpetrated against others" based on their gender, primarily women" (Walter, 2013: 4). Sexism contains assumptions and actions that men use to dominate women. In addition, the forms of sexist oppression experienced by women can be physical and verbal oppression shared between husband and wife.

In marital relations, women are more often assigned to take care of household chores. At the same time, men are in charge of making money and providing a living for family members. These rights often make men feel they have the power to control their children and wives. Men think that women will depend on them because women cannot fulfill their own needs. This thinking is what triggers inequality between men and women in domestic relations. A husband who feels power over his wife will not hesitate to do physical and verbal bullying.

"Therefore, male domination over women happens not only in the domestic field but also in the public field or general society" (Kulsum, 2017: 4). In the world of work, women do not get the same opportunities as men. There are many fields of work that women cannot enter because of certain stereotypes. In this case, women are considered weak physically, mentally, and intellectually. As a result of these harmful stereotypes, many women are required to stay at home and do household chores. They are restricted to work, study, and develop skills. In contrast, men are considered more intelligent and competent, so they often become leaders and dominate in many fields. If this continues, a woman is vulnerable to sexist oppression, especially women from the lower classes; they are considered powerless to fight back.

The pressures experienced by women as victims of sexist oppression encourage feminists to build a bond. They propose that women do not just accept their fate as victims. Instead, their similarities as victims can form a supportive bond. This bond is called women's solidarity. Women's solidarity can be built by sharing potency, empathy, and passion (hooks, 1984). Even though they are in a state of oppression, this bond will give them power to face their reality. Women's solidarity is not only obtained through fellow victims, but women who have normal lives can also be a source of strength. Men who give space to women are also considered to have supported women's solidarity. Ultimately, the solidarity that has been built can produce the power to stop sexist oppression.

Society identifies power as the power to regulate, dominate, and control others. In this case, men are powerful, and women are powerless. In line with this situation, bell hooks created a new definition of power. *Power* here is the ability to live a creative and assertive life. Women can explore their potency and have the opportunity to determine their own lives without being controlled by other parties. The changing perspective of power proposed by bell hooks (1984) strongly supports women's power to be powerful as they can stop sexist oppression and make their lives creative.

The issue of women's oppression is not only found in real life but also literary works. The oppression of women in real life is often used as an inspiration by authors to write a literary works. One of them is a novel entitled *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell* by Nadia Hashimi. This novel tells about the suffering of a girl who lives in a patriarchal system; as a result, she often becomes a victim of sexist oppression by her father, husband, and mother-in-law. The writer is interested in examining the novel because it has a theme similar to this research: women who successfully use their power to be free from sexist oppression.

The Pearl That Broke Its Shell is a successful novel that became an international bestseller. In addition, in 2014, this novel became a Good Reads finalist for the Debut and Fiction Writer categories. This novel has also been translated into various languages, including French, Italian, Norwegian, German, Turkish, and Hungarian. Meanwhile, the author is named Nadia Hashimi. She is a woman of Afghan descent who was born and settled in America. At first, she worked as a pediatrician until she wrote a book about Afghanistan's life and culture. During her time as an author, she has written three novels that became international bestsellers. The three most famous novels by Nadia Hashimi are *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell* released in 2014, *When the Moon Is Low* released in 2015, and *A House without Windows* released in 2016.

The Pearl That Broke Its Shell has a setting in Afghanistan, precisely in the capital city of Kabul. In 1992 an Islamic government was proclaimed in Kabul by the mujahideen. In public, women are required to wear a head cover because women are attractive targets. Women in Kabul were kidnapped, raped, tortured, and forced into marriage by rival factions in mid-1992 and 1996. In 1996, when the Taliban took control of Kabul, women completely lost the rights they had been defending. On the orders of Mullah Mohammed Omar, the Taliban announced that women were not allowed to leave their homes. Girls are expelled from school. Female government employees lost their jobs. Women can leave their homes only if accompanied by a male relative. A woman who has lost their close male relative cannot get out. *Chadri* became mandatory for all women in public.

Women are not allowed to wear white clothes, socks, or shoes to insult the white flag of the Taliban. Women, even war widows without other means of support, are forbidden to work outside their homes (Wahab and Youngerman, 2007: 237).

Rahima is an Afghan girl who lives in a patriarchal system. Since childhood, Rahima had to live under the rule of her father. Her father determined every major decision in Rahima's life. When Rahima was 13 years old, her father accepted a warlord named Abdul Khaliq as Rahima's husband. Abdul Khaliq wanted to make Rahima his fourth wife. Rahima's father accepted Abdul Khaliq because he would benefit from his daughter's marriage. Unfortunately, this decision was taken without asking for Rahima's approval. As a result, Rahima was forced to marry a man she did not love. Since becoming Abdul Khaliq's wife, Rahima's life has been increasingly miserable. As a wife, she must complete all household chores daily. Tragically, her husband and mother-in-law would punish her if she disobeyed their orders. The only thing that keeps Rahima going is the support from her aunt, Shaima. Since Rahima is unmarried and still lives with her parents, Shaima has always tried to fight for Rahima's rights. Several times Shaima opposes Rahima's father's decision which she considers unfair to Rahima. In addition, Shaima is diligent in motivating Rahima through the story of Rahima's great-grandmother, who had the same fate as her. Through this, Rahima's self-confidence and courage began to grow. Gradually, Rahima began thinking of ways to free herself from her husband.

Based on the description above, the writer is interested in examining three things; the sexist oppression experienced by female characters, women's solidarity gained by female characters, and power exercised by female characters. These three things are interrelated, where the power of the female character emerges from the bond of solidarity built up due to the sexist oppression experienced by the female protagonist in the novel. This study bases the analysis on the perspective of bell hooks (1984). Through the lens of bell hooks (1984), the writer wants to redefine power as a tool to end sexist oppression. Therefore, this research has the title *Redefinition of Power by Rahima in Nadia Hashimi's "The*

Pearl That Broke Its Shell." What is meant by the redefinition of power is changing the perspective of power. Here, the female protagonist is the character who redefines the definition of power as resistance to end sexist oppression.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background above, this study has three research questions:

1. What sexist oppression are experienced by Rahima described in *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*?
2. How is women's solidarity for Rahima built-in *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*?
3. How does Rahima use her power to stop the sexist oppression she experienced in *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

From the research question above, this study has three research objectives:

1. To find out sexist oppression experienced by Rahima in *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*.
2. To reveal the women's solidarity for Rahima built-in *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*.
3. To analyze how Rahima used her power to stop the sexist oppression she experienced in *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*.

1.4 Significances of the Study

The significance of this study is divided into two points. Those are theoretical and practical. The theoretical significance is that this study broadens the perspective of a novel by using different theories. By using the feminism theory of bell hooks (1984) from margin to center, it is hoped that the results of this study can present something different from previous studies. Meanwhile, this

study's practical significance may help the following writers apply bell hook's theory to other literary works.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study focuses on three issues: sexist oppression, women's solidarity, and women's power to stop sexist oppression. The limitations of this study are narrator's narrations and character's utterances that indicate sexist oppression, women's solidarity, and women's power.