

Egypt in The Perspective of Najib Mahfouz

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Abstract—The article aimed to find out Najib Mahfouz perspective on Egypt in his novel *Bidayah wa Nihayah*. This study uses sociological approach to literature with Lucian Goldman's genetic structuralism theory as theoretical framework and dialectic method as its analysis. After dissecting the structure of relationships between characters and social communities in the novel the result reveals the worldview and social background of Najib Mahfouz. This novel talked about the reality of Egyptian society with all the economic, political and social problems in the Egyptian revolution which was captured through the conflict of Samira's family, they were the problem of poverty and education, gender inequality and the existence of political recession of colonialism. In this case, poverty became the main theme promoted by Najib Mahfouz through the intrigue within the Samira's family. In addition, the colonialism background and the political recession existence were the other things that Najib Mahfouz wanted to express.

Keywords— *Egypt, Genetic Structuralism, Najib Mahfouz*

L INTRODUCTION

Najib Mahfouz was one of the writers who portrayed much about life in each of his literary works. Egypt which was a fusion of two world civilizations, Europe and Asia, formed the personality of Najib Mahfouz. In addition, Egypt was a great civilization fragment of the era of Pharaoh which had been recognized as one of the great civilizations in the world. Najib Mahfouz then retold the long historical material since Pharaoh times until modern times in the form of novels. The high civilization of Egypt was distinctly visible in his early works. It was the period of historical romance novels that originated in ancient Egyptian history, including allegory and symbolism of prophet stories. Egyptian historical background or folklore that flourished in Egyptian society at that time captivated Najib Mahfouz's attention. Using ancient Egypt as the background, Najib Mahfouz produced several novels, such as *Bidayah wa Nihayah* [1].

The novel "*Bidayah wa Nihayah*" that was a portrait of Egyptian social life captured by Najib Mahfouz was published in 1949. The condition of Egyptian poverty at the beginning of World War I and the Egypt revolution became the crucial thing displayed by the author through some figures like *Bahiyah*, *Nafisah*, *Samirah*, and *Chasanain* [2]. The period is known as the Realistic or Naturalistic Period which means changing

interest in current issues or also called as a Realism Period. Najib Mahfouz was one of the writers who accurately portrayed the social life of Egyptian society, one of which was in the novel *Bidayah wa Nihayah*. The Realism described by Najib Mahfouz was extremely interesting to be analyzed with the literary sociology approach, especially using Lucian Goldman's genetic structuralism theory [3].

According to Ratna, structuralism is a structural analysis that focuses its attention to the origin of the work. The origin or genetics mentioned before was related to the social, economic, political and cultural conditions in which the literary work was born [4]. The research on the novel *Bidayah wa Nihayah* with the literary Sociology approach of Goldman's genetic structuralism theory was properly conducted to identify the reality that occurred when the novel was created [4]. Moreover, the research was also carried out to see the worldview of the author contained in the novel.

II. METHOD

The preferred method used in this study was dialectics. The dialectical method represented the typical method used in the study of Genetic structuralism. Goldman provided the following procedure for implementing dialectical methods, including building up a model which provides a certain level of probability on the basis parts; checking the model by comparing one part with the whole parts and determining how far each analyzed unit is combined with a comprehensive hypothesis [4]. Therefore, the steps of this study were to determine the material object, decide the main problem of the research related to the theory of genetic structuralism, conduct literature study accurately, analyze the novel and draw conclusions based on the proposed problem.

The specialty of genetic structuralism is understanding and studying literary works based on genetic aspects of their origin, its relationship with the author and his worldview as well as the historical social conditions underlying the creation of literary works. Through this relationship, Goldman underlined his theoretical concept from Marx's key concept. However, Goldman also criticized Marxist literary sociology, which traditionally connected literary work as a tendency to awareness obtained by writers from their social groups. Goldman

considered literary works as a reflection of the reality that indicated the rise in a collective awareness [4]. Several basic concepts must be understood in the genetic structuralism theory. It includes the subject of a trans-individual or collective subject, worldview, human facts and the structure of literary works. The idea of worldview is the core concept of this research used to identify the author's worldview in the novel "*Bidayah wa Nihayah*"

III. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

A. *The Structure of Hidayah wa Nihayah and Its Reflection on the Social Environment*

From the structural analysis of relationships between characters and their environment, it can be seen clearly the problems faced by the figures. The figures representing respectively each problem were Samirah, Hasan, Nafisah, Husain, Hasaunin, Farid Affandi, Bahia, Salman Jabir, Ahmed Bey Yousry, and Mahrous. In addition, there were some figures who were not directly mentioned, including Salman Jaber's father, Nafisah's friends, the men who accompanied Nafisah, prostitutes, and police. The main characters in this story were Hasanain, Husain, and Nafisah. The three figures were the characters who frequently appeared and became the core story of the novel. Each of the character was interconnected and produced a structure. The portrait of the characters and their socio-political problems can be presented in the table 1.

TABLE 1. PICTURE OF CHARACTERS' PROBLEMS AND THEME OF REALITY OF EGYPTIAN SOCIETY

No	Characters	Problems in the Text	Social Reality
1	Samirah	A widow that relied on her children in a difficult situation.	Egypt in the reign of King Faruq ended in 1952 and was in a social and political recession
2	Hasan	The oldest brother in the Samirah's family, lived less orderly and in a bad environment and a drug trafficker.	The political recession had an impact on criminal cases and the high number of unemployed people for it was difficult to get jobs.
3	Naisa	She was a daughter in the Samira's, trapped in Salman Jabir's love and became a prostitute	Women occupied domestic sector due to the lack of educational opportunities.
4	Husain	The Samira's 2 nd child lived better than his brother and sister.	His life was more stable in terms of emotion, and was not affected by social life
5	Hasanain	He was the main character, graduated from military academy, arrogant but ashamed of his family's condition.	He was very smart, unstable because of the poverty. After graduating from the military academy, his social class changed
6	Farid Affandi	A middle-class family, Bahia's father, matched up Bahia with Hasana	Farid Afandi's family was a portrait of a middle-class family.
7	Salman Jaber	He left Nafisah and married another woman.	Middle-class had better education than lower class
8	Ahmed Bey Yousry	The boss of Samira's husband, representing a high social class.	A high-ranking Police Inspector and representing a high social class.
9	Mahrous	He was a gangster at Coffee & killed	The social and economic conditions triggered the emergence of thuggery, crime, and drug trafficking.

The relationships among these characters also caused problems. This problem was caused by the relation between the characters and the surrounding social-political environment. The problems of the characters in the novel *Hidayah wa Nihayah* could be explained by the relationship between political and social conflicts that occurred in Egypt. In addition, it could be explained by the transition process from King Faruk's reign to a democratic republic. Moreover, British and French colonialism lighting over the Middle East region was the background raised by Najib Mahfouz. Certainly, Britain and France were fighting over Egyptian territory [5].

The problems of the characters emerged from the reality that occurred in Egyptian society. The dominant themes raised by Najib Mahfouz in the novel were poverty and social problems. Najib Mahfouz did not explain these problems as scientific facts but gently wrapped them in stories originated from family problems. In that case, they influenced the social problems that had emerged as a result of the poverty.

B. *The Background of Najib Mahfouz and Novel Bidayah wa Nihayah.*

It has been mentioned earlier that there was a relationship between the author's background and the novel he created. Similarly, Najib Mahfouz could not be separated from the social background surrounding him. His personality was also formed from the environment he lived in, and the education he got.

The setting in *Bidayah wa Nihayah* novel was also inseparable from the cafes he visited, such as Cafe Qasi Nil, cafe Qastamar, Cafe Araby, Cafe al-Fishawy and Cafe Opera. Even at the Opera, Najib Mahfouz formed a literary forum in 1940 which was mostly attended by countless senior and junior writers. The cafes that were remarkably related to Najib Mahfouz were described in the novel *Bidayah wa Nihayah* through Hasan, one of the eldest children of Samirah. With his experience visiting the cafes. Najib Mahfouz really understood the realities of the Egyptian society that he was able to differentiate the image of the middle to lower social class.

The setting described by Najib Mahfouz in the novel *Bidayah wa Nihayah* derived from his life experience. Seemingly, Najib Mahfouz was eager to describe the real realism of the Egyptian society. For example, Nile bridge, Zaqtij Street, Subro Street, Nasr-allah and other places were described in realist terms. Najib Mahfouz was born in 1911 in a middle-class family living in an old village in Cairo. The life experience in the midst of such community and places became an interesting setting for Mahfouz.

C. *Najib Mahfouz's view on Egyptian society*

According to Goldman, the worldview is a term that is suitable for the overall complex ideas and aspirations that connect members of a particular social group who oppose it and other social groups as well [6]. In this study, there were several authors' worldviews about Egyptian society as follows.

1) Poverty and Education

Poverty and education were the main themes in the novel *Bidayah wa Nihayah*. The story began with a middle-class family in Cairo who was left dead by his father, Farid Efendi, the family was very shocked by the death of his father because he was the only one who backed up the family financial condition [7].

Poverty is always correlated with education because it is related to the quality of individuals and society. In fact, poverty can arise because of the unqualified human resources to be taken into consideration in terms of social, economic and political condition [8]. Nafisah is a character portrayed by Najib Mahfouz in the novel *Bidayah wa Nihayah* to represent the Egyptian who faced poverty problems. It correlates with the political recession of Egypt in 1949-1952. The political recession relates to the attempt of overthrowing King Faruq by a movement called the Free Officers led by Muhammad Naguib, Gamal Abdul Nasser, and Anwar Sadat [9]. Therefore, it produced a political, socioeconomic impact on the Egyptian people.

2) Gender Inequality

Najib Mahfouz also concerned the issue of gender inequality. In the novel *Bidayah wa Nihayah*, there were many problems with gender inequality. According to Eisenstein, gender inequality experienced by women as not due to biological differences between men and women, but because of judgments and assumptions [10].

In this novel, the figures who often experienced gender inequality were Nafisa and Bahia, Nafisa was a figure who did not get an education in Farid Efendi's family. Meanwhile, his brother had a chance to get a good education. Another consequence was the violence she experienced from Soliman Jabir Soliman. Nafisa and Hassanein were the key figures who became the ending in this novel [1].

Another figure who experienced gender inequality was Bahia, who was a fiancé of Hassanein. Similar to Nafisa, Bahia also did not get a proper education while his younger brother, Salim, received math lessons and English. Due to the lack of education, Bahia got physical and sexual violence from Hassanein,

According to feminism, patriarchal ideologies that existed and developed in society were the main causes of gender inequality. The entry of the patriarchal tradition began with a reduced gender understanding. The Gender relations were understood to be the same as sexual relations. The thought about sex differences that as applied the same as gender differences that eventually lead to discrimination toward women [11].

3) Political Recession and Colonialism

Political recession and colonialism were also important concerns for Najib Mahfouz. Around the 1940s and 1960s, it was the culmination of Najib Mahfouz's authorship. Najib Mahfouz explored historical trends experienced by people, exposed them and confronted them with tradition and modernity. Furthermore, around 1940-1960 Najib Mahfouz's novels' objects were the atmosphere of Egypt's social

conditions in colonialism era which was unorderly and extremely poor [1]. The social and political situation at that time was also the concern of school children such as Husain, Hassanain, and his friends. It was the atmosphere of a revolution that opposed British domination in the reign of King Faruk,

During the writing time of the *Bidayah wa Nihayah*, Egypt experienced a revolution that occurred on July 13, 1952 generated by the dominance of British power and the decadence of the reign of King Faruk. The deterioration in the economic field also revealed through Samira family.

The economic deterioration in Egypt became worst because of the difficulty to get jobs, especially in Cairo. The limited field work and a great number of immigrants from the countryside that moved to Cairo in hopes of succeeding in a more decent life did not happen. The limited field work and immigrants were not the only factors of deterioration in Egypt, but also the effort of England to establish its colonialism.

Indeed, the political, social and economic condition intrigued Najib Mahfouz, as a writer who lived in that social situation. Therefore, his works in that year were remarkably heartwarming as they described the reality of the surrounding community. Moreover, the cafes where he pondered the social and economic issues were rarely overlooked in his writing. Hence, the enormous works emerged from his hands, including the *Bidayah wa Nihayah*.

IV. CONCLUSION

Discussing about Najib Mahfouz is akin to discussing about the reality itself. The most important thing that Najib Mahfouz wanted to express in the novel *Bidayah wa Nihayah* was the poverty problem in the midst of a political and social recession. The strong influence of Britain and its dominance in the King Faruq kingdom were the factors that caused poverty for Egyptians. As a result, numerous rebellions occurred at that time. In addition, another vital problem was about the gender inequality which originated from the discrimination of women in education. Due to the lack of education, female figures such as Nafisa and Bahia often experienced violence. Finally, this research provides an answer about the relationship between the birth of a novel, the structure, the author, and his social environment and worldview which become the main subjects in this study.

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