

Feminism According to Fatima Mernissi's Thinking

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Abstract

This study aims to find out the extent of the Islamic field in responding to issues about feminism. The method used in this study is library research with a qualitative descriptive approach. To deepen the results of this research, we take the thoughts and works of one of the women scholars known worldwide, Fatima Mernissi. In her view, Fatima Mernissi felt the need to criticize the old dogmas that discredited women's roles. Although the source or evidence comes from a legitimate source. In the end, it is necessary to re-interpret the thinking on the pieces of evidence that distinguish the role of women and men in general.

Keywords: *Fatima Mernissi, Feminism*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui sejauh mana pandangan Islam dalam menanggapi isu-isu tentang feminisme. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah studi Pustaka dengan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif. Untuk memperdalam hasil penelitian ini maka kita mengambil pemikiran dan karya-karya salah satu ulama perempuan yang dikenal mendunia yaitu Fatima Mernissi. Dalam pandangannya Fatima Mernissi merasa perlu melakukan kritik terhadap dogma-dogma lama yang mendiskreditkan peran perempuan. Meskipun sumber atau dalil tersebut berasal dari sumber yang sah. Pada akhirnya diperlukan re-interpretasi pemikiran mengenai dalil-dalil yang membedakan peranan perempuan dan laki-laki pada umumnya.

Kata Kunci: *Fatima Mernissi, Feminisme*

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1. Introduction

Historical-sociological religious studies are increasingly in demand. This understanding is very logical, considering that revelation (the Qur'an) itself comes down has historical-sociological reasons for giving answers to the revelation. Islam which is sourced from revelation as an ideal value, should be distinguished from Islam as a result of understanding, which is historical.

Historical Islam, which is the result of this understanding, raises problems related to the relationship between men and women or commonly called gender issues. Feminism is one of the keywords to understand the complexity of the problem. Charles Kurzman writes that the issue of women's rights is one of the main issues of liberal Islamic thought in the Islamic world today, in addition to resistance to theocracy, democratic issues, non-Muslim rights, freedom of thought, and the understanding of progress (Rachman, 2001).

The term feminism comes from latin (*femina ; woman*), which means "having female traits." The word refers to a theory of male and female gender equality and the movement for women's rights, born in 1890 AD. The term feminism was first used in 1890 AD, and since then, the term feminism has become widely known (Tuttle, 1986). But long before this term appeared, in essence, the women's movement, especially in the West, had grown considerably (Bhasin dan Khan, 1994).

According to Kamla Bhasin and Nighat Said Khan, feminism means "awareness of oppression and extortion against women in society, in the workplace and the family, as well as a conscious act by both women

and men to change the condition." They further suggest that a person who recognizes sexism, i.e., ionization based on gender, male dominance over women, the implementation of the patriarchal system, and he or she acts against, then this can be categorized as a feminist (Bhasin dan Khan, 1994).

It can be seen that the feminism movement is egalitarianism, which inevitably faces a patriarchal religion. According to feminism, this patriarchal understanding of religion challenged women to fight back because the religious understanding was not the price of death and finality, which should not be contested. According to him, the pattern of religious patriarchy is not the essential nature of religion but the product of patriarchal social and cultural structures. The feminism movement that promotes the spirit of egalitarianism wants a new spirit of understanding in terms of relationships between men and women, including in understanding religious texts.

From here came Muslim feminists, such as Aisha Taymuriyah, Egyptian writer and singer; Zainab Fawwaz, Lebanese Essayist; Rokaya Sakhawat Hosain and Nazar Sajjad Haider of India, through her short stories, novels and articles; R.A. Kartini of Java, Emil Ruete of Zanzibar; Taj al-Salthanah of Iran; Huda Sya'rawi and Nabawiyah Musa from Egypt and others, who later in recent years came the name Fatima Mernissi from Morocco.

2. Research Methods

This research is library research where the sources used come from books and scientific works related to the topics and problems in this study. The approach used is the qualitative approach, which is a research approach that allows for data that is descriptive-analytical (Suryabrata, 1998).

3. Historical-Sociological Settings and Intellectual Careers

Fatima Mernissi was born in a harem in the northern Moroccan city of Fez in 1940 to a middle-class family. As a teenager, he actively followed the movement against the French imperialism. Mernissi was born in a Harem and faced two different family cultures: his father's family environment in Fez, the harem symbolized by high walls. While from her mother's family, the house of her grandmother Lalla Yasmina, which is far from urban, the harem is manifested in the form of a house surrounded by a large garden. At her grandmother's house, Mernissi gained valuable experience of equality among human beings, the meaning of kinship in the harem, and the causal relationship between the political defeats experienced by Muslims and the deterioration experienced by women.

His intellectual anxiety began as a child with his cousin Chama, who always asked about the meaning of the harem. His family in the city of Fez is divided into two groups; the first group consisted of Lalla Mani and Chama's grandmother, Lalla Radia, who were pro harem and considered it a good thing. At the same time, the second group, namely Mernissi's mother, Chama, and Habiba's aunt, is an anti-harem group. Her mother often protested against the separation of the room between her family and her uncle's family, which directly or indirectly taught her the idea of liberation and rebellion of women. A valuable lesson was learned from her grandmother Lalla Yasmina, about the boundaries of the harem, which she thought were more in one's mind, more than just the boundaries of the walls that physically restrict women's wiggle room.

As a child, Mernissi had an ambivalent relationship with the Qur'an. Traditional schools, founded by nationalists, teach the Qur'an with a challenging learning system. The learning system is in stark contrast to the learning received from Lalla Yasmina, who has opened the door to a poetic religion. In the school of the Qur'an, if misreading will be punished and snapped by the teacher, Lalla Faqiha, said: "The Qur'an must-read the same as when this book was sent down from Heaven." Every Wednesday is held memorization, and if the student makes mistakes in spelling, it will be punished, not even infrequently, accompanied by blows performed by mahdriyah, older students.

According to Mernissi, this dual attitude towards the sacred text, attached to him for many years. Depending on how to deal with them the scriptures can be a gateway to escape or hinder the insurmountable. He can also lead us into a dream or even a mere weakener. It all depends on who calls it.

As a teenager, she recounted that the Qur'an seemed to dim. His introduction to Sunnah in high school opened his heart. The teacher taught the book of al-Bukhari, stating that "Dogs, Donkeys, and Women will

cancel the prayer of a person when passing in front of them, interrupting between the one who prays and qibla." Her feelings were shaken and wondered, and she rarely repeated them, hoping that silence would make this hadith erased from his memory. She said: "How could Rasulullah say the hadith, which thus hurt my heart? Especially since his statement does not correspond to their story about the life of the Prophet Muhammad". How could the beloved Muhammad have hurt the feelings of the little girl, who as she grew up trying to make her a pillar of her romantic dreams.

As an adult, his anxiety begins with a question to a vegetable trader subscription: "Can a woman be the leader of the Muslims?" He was a vegetable merchant then exclaimed: "Nauzu billah min zalik with great shock". Then a teacher I did not know attacked by saying "a people who give up their business to a woman will not have prosperity". Mernissi can't say anything. For him in Islamic history, hadith is not something indiscriminate. Mernissi left the store silent, defeated and angry. Finally, he suddenly felt an urgent need to gather information about the hadith and look for the mentioned nashs to be able to understand well.

Then he continued his intellectual slang at Muhammad V University in Rabat, taking a political science program completed in 1965. He then went on to Paris, where he worked as a journalist, in 1973. He completed his doctoral program in sociology from Brandeis University. He returned to Morocco from 1974 to 1981, and he taught in the sociology department at Muhammad V University, as well as a lecturer at The Institute of Scientific Research, at the same university. In addition, she also acted as a consultant at United Nations Agencies, and was actively involved in the women's movement, as well as a member of the pan Arab Woman Solidarity Association.

Based on the above brief biography and intellectual career, Mernissi has a solid willingness to know religious doctrines regarding the relationship between men and women. His intellectual anxiety began as a child, both in the family and in the school education of the Qur'an, to his doctoral-level education. His great concern the pattern of male-female relationships, as well as the dominance of men in the patriarchal system of society, can be seen from the works he has written (Hassan, 2001).

Among his works, namely *Beyond the Veil Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (1975), *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1987), *Equal before Allah* (1987), *Doing Daily Battle* (1989), *Woman in Islam : In Historical and Theological Enquiry* (1991), *Islam and Democracy : Fear of the Modern World* (1992), *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (1993), *Dreams of Trespass Toles of a Harem Gildhood* (1994). Based on these works, it seems that Mernissi is trying to pour his inner anxiety regarding the pattern of relationships between men and women.

4. Fatima Mernissi's Thoughts

In fighting for his idea of equality of men and women, Mernissi criticized the hadiths of misogyny and some verses of the Qur'an, which he said in his commentary deviated from the spirit of revelation. Among his ideas is:

4.1. Misogynist Hadith Criticism of Women's Leadership

In his hadith mentions, Al-Bukhari mentions the hadith narrated by Abu Bakrah, which means: "*Whoever gives up business to women, then they will not get prosperity.*" Abu Bakrah said that the hadith was put forward by the Prophet (s) when he learned that the Persians had appointed a woman to be their leader. Then the Prophet asked: "*Who has replaced him as leaders.*" Abu Bakrah replied, "*They ceded power to his daughter.*" Then the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: Based on this hadith, according to Mernissi, the fundamental problem that needs to be questioned is "*why was the hadith expressed by Abu Bakrah, when Aisha suffered defeat in the Jamal War?*" (Mernissi, 1997)

According to Mernissi, Abu Bakrah expressed the hadith when refusing to engage in civil war. In this case, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani recounted, when Aisha contacted Abu Bakrah, he publicly expressed an attitude against slander. Abu Bakrah replied: It is true you are our Umi, it is true you have over us, but I heard the Messenger of Allah say (as above).

Mernissi made his criticism of Abu Bakrah in relation to narrating the hadith, namely:

- a. Abu Bakrah was initially a slave who was later freed when he joined the Muslims. Therefore, it is difficult to trace his lineage. In the Arab tribal and aristocracy tradition, if a person does not have a clear pedigree,

- then socially, it is not recognized its status. Imam Ahmad, who conducted biographical research of the companions, admitted to having just skipped Abu Bakrah and did not investigate it in detail.
- b. Abu Bakrah was once sentenced to qazaf, for not being able to prove his alleged adultery committed by al-Mugirah ibn Syu'bah and other witnesses, during the time of caliph Umar Ibn Khatab. According to Mernissi, by using the standard of acceptance of hadiths stated by Imam Malik, including not including liars, safih and have done heresy, then the narration of Abu Bakrah is not acceptable. This is because of the act of lies he has committed.
 - c. Based on the historical context, Abu Bakrah remembers the hadith when Aisha experienced a fracture in the Jamal War, when fighting Ali ibn Abi Talib. In fact, the initial attitude taken by Abu Bakrah was to be neutral. Then why then he revealed the hadith, which seemed to corner Aisha.

Based on the above reasons, Mernissi concluded that although the hadith is contained in Sahih al-Bukhari, it is still disputed by the fuqaha. According to him, the hadith is used as an argument to displace women in the decision-making process. However, al-Tabari doubted it, saying there were not enough reasons to deprive women of their ability to make decisions. There was no reason to think women were inferior to men.

4.2. Hadith Narrated by Abu Hurayrah

Al-Bukhari narrated a hadith from Abu Hurayrah, which says that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: *"Dogs, donkeys, and women will cancel one's prayers when he crosses in front of them and interrupts himself between those who pray with qibla"*. Mernissi criticized the sanad and Matan hadith by basing himself on the correction of Aisha to Abu Hurairah (Father of the Little Cat). The name given by the Prophet was not favored by him, saying: *"Do not call me Abu Hurayrah. The Prophet called me Abu Hirr (the father of the male cat), because males are better than females"*. Abu Hurairah has a kind of excessive jealousy associated with female cats and women. This prompted the Messenger of Allah, said Abu Hurayrah, to say that makes the female cat much better than the woman. However, this was opposed by Aisha (Mernissi, 1997).

In another narration, Aisha was asked about three things that brought disaster: houses, women, and horses, as narrated by Abu Hurayrah. Aisha stated that Abu Hurayrah studied this hadith badly. Abu Hurayrah entered our house when Rasulullah was in the middle of his sentence. He only had time to hear the last part of the sentence. The Apostle said: "may Allah prove the guilt of the Jews; They say, "The house, the woman, and the horse." Abu Hurairah's actions also annoyed Umar when he was offered a job by saying that he was the best person. It is based on this argument that Mernisi cannot accept this hadith of misogyny. He tried to cast doubt on the acts of discrimination committed by Abu Hurairah. Abu Hurayrah does narrate a lot of hadiths, but many hadiths that he characterized nuanced misogyny. Mernissi tried to dismantle it, although the hadith was contained in Sahih al-Bukhari (Mernissi, 1997).

4.3. Verses About Hijab

Fatima Mernissi's other thoughts are about interpreting hijab verses as found in sura al-Ahzab:53. By examining the reasons for the descent (asbab an-nuzul), this verse is not for the justification of the separation of roles of men and women. Because the revelation of this verse related to the event when the Prophet married Zainab ibn Jahs, the Prophet was troubled by some friends who did not return home immediately after attending his wedding. The anxiety of the Prophet was finally answered by the revelation of verse 53 of sura al-Ahzab (Mernissi, 1997).

According to al-Tabari, this hijab verse contains an understanding of the division of space into two areas: separating each of the two men who existed at Rasulullah and Anas. From this moment, a justified source in the narration that states that "The Prophet (s) lowered or pulled a curtain (satrun) between himself and Anas, and the verse on this hijab was finally revealed. It is understood that the act of the Messenger of Allah who pulled a curtain was to cover it between himself and Anas. According to Mernissi, if this verse is read carefully, it will be understood that God's emphasis in this verse is a matter of wisdom. He wants to teach friends some aspects of manners that do not seem to be cultivated. For example, when entering the house, they must ask permission.

Based on the phenomenon of hijab, according to Mernissi, it can be taken to understand that the friends seem very accustomed to visiting the Prophet's house without any formalities. Similarly, it can be understood

and his house is easy to visit by his people without the separation between private life (the residence of the Wives of the Prophet) and public spaces (mosques). With this understanding, there is no separation between men and women in playing domestic and public roles.

5. Conclusion

As a sociologist, in conducting his studies, Mernissi not only approaches religious texts in terms of textuality. However, religious texts must be examined from a historical-sociological approach. This is to discover the significance of meaning if associated with the conditions of times and places. Text as a representation is the result of social construction, not to be sacred, let alone enshrined. However, it is necessary to continue to be reviewed and reinterpreted to be dynamic so that the product of thought is not final, let alone perfect. Because perfection is just a limit that cannot be achieved but can only be approached, departing from this awareness, the thinking developed by Mernissi is undoubtedly not an established product of thought. His passionate attitude in examining the hadiths of misogyny is appreciated. This is to enrich Islamic science concerning the discourse of feminism.

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