

# Arab Women and War in the Short Story "*Falnaltaqi*" by Radwa Ahmed Eid

1st Rizqi Handayani<sup>1</sup>, 2nd Dewi Tsalatsatin Nauroh Azizah<sup>2</sup>, 3rd Mutiara Amanda<sup>3</sup>, 4th  
Widya Octaviani<sup>4</sup>

{rizqi.handayani@uinjkt.ac.id<sup>1</sup>, dewi.tsalasatin@mhs.uinjkt.ac.id<sup>2</sup>,  
mutiara.amanda18@mhs.uinjkt.ac.id<sup>3</sup>, octowidy@gmail.com<sup>4</sup>}

Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University Jakarta, Indonesia<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>

**Abstract.** This article aims to analyze the female author's ideology regarding the tragedy of war based on the author's personal experience as a female writer in the Arab world in the short story "*Falnaltaqi*" by Radwa Ahmed Eid. In addition, this article will also describe the intrinsic elements of the short story to understand the author's ideology in the short story. For this reason, the paper uses the gynocritic approach to see the author's ideology, because women as producers of texts as well as the role of conveying the meaning of texts. The primary source of data is the text of the short story "*Falnaltaqi*" written by Radwa Ahmed Eid, whereas supporting data such as literature and articles related to the topic of the paper are used to complete the data and interpretation of the short story. According to this, the article shows that the author through this short story wants to say that suicide bombing behavior is included in jihad on the battlefield and its death is martyrdom. However, female authors are still often trapped in the male writing style (androcentrism), which places women as weak, passive, sweet, obedient, must be protected, and neglected. Even when women decide to contribute to the war. The female character's decision to commit suicide bombing is motivated by her frustration over her husband's death.

**Keywords:** Arab Women, Literature, War

## 1 Introduction

The discussion of women and warfare in contemporary Arabic literature has received considerable attention from writers, both in the Arab world and around the world. Several Arab women writers, such as Nawāl El-Sa'dāwī, Laylā 'Usayrān, Emily Naṣrallāh, Ṣaḥar Khalīfeh, Ghādah al-Sammān, Hanān al-Shāykh, Liyānah Badr, Hudā Barakāt, and 'Ulwiyyah Ṣubḥ have contributed to immortalizing their memories and experiences of the tragedy of war in poetry, novels, short stories, memoirs, and essays. They attempted to take part in formulating and redefining the idea of Arab feminism in a broader political and cultural realm. In their literary works, they write about how wars, revolutions, and national crises affect women as individuals and citizens[1]. According to Cooke, the war and all the tragedy behind it encouraged women writers to describe their most important, most dramatic and traumatic stories. Through these writings, the authors would write their awareness of their feminist experiences and consciousness[2]. Hanan Al Shaykh in her novel *Hikayah Zahra* (1980), presents the setting of the Lebanese civil war. The novel tells the tragedy of a woman named Zahra who tries to survive in the midst of war and the pressures of patriarchal culture. Zahra undergoes sexual experiences

and abuse that lead her to suffering and death. In Palestine, there is Sahar Khalifeh for example. In her novels, such as *Passage to the Plaza*, *The End of Spring*, *The Inheritance*, and *Wild Thorns*, she speaks about the experiences of Palestinians during the Israeli occupation. What is interesting about her novels is that she presents new female characters who try to narrate the spirit of her people's struggle as well as a project of women's liberation from patriarchal norms in her society[3].

Literary works produced by female authors in the Arab world try to articulate women's issues and war as a symbol of resistance to the chaos created by patriarchal culture. According to Cooke, literature becomes an arena for women authors to articulate their experiences, beliefs, and choices, as well as an attempt to break the hegemony of knowledge created by men through production, publication, distribution and information[4]. Meanwhile, according to Aragonès, the female body plays a symbolic role in war. The violence done to the body symbolizes the suffering of the nation and its genocide, women and their struggle are the resilience of a nation. In this sense, women who enter the battlefield have created their own organizational structure and enabled them to participate in the decision-making of combat strategy on equal terms with men as fellow human beings. As such, women are political subjects[5].

In cultural practice, war is synonymous with the patriarchal world. Symbolically, war is associated with masculinity, violence, might, courage, destruction, aggression, adrenaline and various gender attributes associated with the patriarchal world. Meanwhile, women are associated with gentleness, peace, commitment, and other actions associated with femininity. This classification raises fundamental issues regarding the position and role of women in warfare, especially when women participate directly in warfare. For some antifeminist groups, women's participation in warfare is considered unnatural and tends to be considered a mistake because it neglects the family and other domestic functions. However, for feminists, the image of a female warrior is a representation of the potential power of women. Women's involvement in making important decisions at a crucial time shows the equality and emancipation of women. This is confirmed by Aragonès in his writing, "Women, Body, and War: Kurdish Female Fighter Through Commander Arian and Girls' War", that women and war have a historical relationship mediated by their bodies as a symbolic expression of one nation's occupation, extermination, and subjugation of another[5]. Regardless, the real warfare is women's fight against patriarchal culture itself.

The presence of literary works written by women, thus, becomes an effort for women to reconstruct literary works that have been produced and reconstructed by male authors. As a cultural product, literature comes as a process of imagination that involves the author's experience as an individual and social being. Each author has different experiences, so male and female authors will have different perspectives and ideologies in presenting the reality of life they face. Based on this, male authors and female authors are distinguished based on the gender identity attached to their bodies[6]. The presence of women authors is important to reconstruct ideas about women in literary works, as well as to release women from the gender construction created by male authors through language[7].

Like other women authors, the presence of Radwa Ahmed Eid, an Egyptian short story writer born in 1986, caught the attention of the public through her writings on her Facebook platform page. One of her short stories entitled *Falnaltaqi* (2016) won a short story writing competition organized by Daar bint Al Zayyat. This story tells about the condition of a husband and wife in

the Palestinian-Israeli war around the early 2000s. Through this short story, this paper will look at the female author's ideology about war and how women are portrayed in it. In this case, women's writing is considered as a manifestation of the author's ideology that is stored in language..

## **2 Methods**

This paper uses a qualitative method, which produces descriptive data in the form of written words from linguistic and literary phenomena in the form of short story texts that are used as the main corpus. In this case the writer functions as a key instrument to collect and analyze data. In collecting data, the author uses literature and interview methods. The literature method is used to search, collect, and analyze data sources to be processed and presented in descriptive form. While the interview method is used to obtain data in the form of the author's biography. The main data source used by the author is the text of the short story "Falnaltaqi" written by Radwa Ahmed Eid, while supporting data such as literature in the form of books, articles related to the topic of writing, and the results of interviews are used to complete the data and meaning of the short story.

Data analysis is done descriptively, with a gynocritical approach as proposed by Showalter (1941). Gynocritics is an effort to create literary works by women to reconstruct ideas about women in literary works. For this reason, this paper will emphasize the disclosure of intrinsic elements in short stories as an application of the understanding of literary works as structures, which in turn will see the ideology stored in the text as the author's worldview.

## **3 Findings and Discussion**

### **3.1 Overview of Falnaltaqi's Short Story**

Falnaltaqi is a short story about the struggle and escape of a couple, Kindah and Adam, during the Palestinian-Israeli war in the early 2000s. Falnaltaqi's short story takes place around the Gaza region, Palestine, where Israeli soldiers attacked and massacred Palestinian civilians. In addition, at the end of the story Radwa also describes the setting of the Erez border, which is the entrance for tourists as well as a border area, where Israeli soldiers carry out strict security. As is known, the Erez border is one of the border barriers built by Israel in 1994 which was built between the Gaza Strip and Israel, located in the northern part to Israel.

Falnaltaqi's short story does not involve many characters. The main character in this story is Kindah, a brave Muslim woman, the wife of a husband who became a fighter in the Palestinian-Israeli war. In addition, there are five supporting characters, namely Adam, Ammar, Yusuf, Kindah's mother-in-law, and Hussein. Adam is Kindah's husband. He is described as a brave, tough, and unyielding Palestinian Muslim. He became one of the fighters in the Palestinian-Israeli war. The other supporting characters are Ammar, a fighter who helps and takes Kindah to the refugee camp. Yusuf, Ammar's friend who was assigned to take Kindah to her in-laws' house in Beit Hanoun. Kindah's mother-in-law (Adam's mother), a middle-aged woman with greying hair. She is described as a warm and loving mother-in-law. In addition, there is also

Hussein who is Kindah's brother-in-law. Hussein is the one who takes Kindah to the Erez crossing.

In the storytelling, Radwa Ahmed Eid uses a forward flow that describes events directly related to the main character, Kindah. Functional events begin when Adam and Kindah leave their house, after being told by a friend that Zionist soldiers are heading to their house. Conflict occurs when during the escape Adam is killed by a bomb detonated by Zionist soldiers. The next event occurred when Kindah met Adam's mother, at that time he came alone without Adam, his mother already knew that her son died in his escape. Furthermore, the climax occurs when he decides to go and carry out a suicide bombing among Israeli soldiers at the Erez crossing.

In describing this story, the author uses a third-person omniscient point of view, using the *diain* technique (third person omniscient). This is shown by the author's effort to be in the third person and tell every detail of the events in detail. For example, at the beginning of the story, the author begins with the story of Kindah and Amar's flight from their home because they were attacked by Israeli soldiers by air. The author is present as an author observer, while trying to let the characters in the story appear so as to make the atmosphere more alive.

### **3.2 Biography of Radwa Ahmed Eid**

Radwa Ahmed Eid is an Egyptian female writer who was born on July 24, 1986. She grew up in a Muslim family. Radwa started her education at Ibn Khaldoun school in Egypt (1991-2000), then continued her education at Al Hadad Giza High School, Cairo, Egypt (2001-2003). In 2004 she studied Oriental languages at the Faculty of Arts at Cairo University and obtained her BA (Bachelor of Arts) degree in 2007 and continued her General Education Diploma studies at Sadat City University, Faculty of Tarbiyah in 2014 in Egypt[8].

Radwa Ahmed Eid discovered her writing talent around 2009 to 2010. She wrote her ideas and thoughts on various platforms, one of which was her Facebook page called Rody Eid. Her literary debut began when she won a poetry competition organized by a group of poets on Facebook in 2016 and she received an award for it. She also participated in a short story writing competition organized by Daar bint Al Zayyat in 2016. Her short story Falnaltaqi won the hearts of the judges and won the competition. Falnaltaqi tells the story of the escape of a couple, Kindah and Adam, from the attacks and threats of the Israeli army in Palestine. The story ends tragically as Adam is killed in a bomb attack during his escape. Kindah, his wife, had to struggle alone to find shelter. Then she decided to commit jihad by carrying out a suicide bombing in the West Bank, where Israeli soldiers were standing guard[9].

In addition to Falnaltaqi's short stories, she also published a book in Arabic *خواطر فراشة* (Thoughts of The Butterfly) in 2017 electronically. The book is a prose that contains a collection of her writings and thoughts since she started writing. In 2020, both her short story Falnaltaqi, Thoughts of The Butterfly, and her recently published book To You, Letters haven't Arrived, were published on many literary sites on the Internet such as Books Juice, Noor Library, and others[10].

### **3.3 Women Writers and the Construction of Patriarchy**

Falnaltaqi's short story was written in response to the ongoing war between Palestine and Israel. In the world of war, women and children are placed in homes and refugee camps, while men

are present at the forefront in the ranks of fighters. Homes and refugee camps represent the domestic world attached to women's bodies. War is a patriarchal world filled with violence. Men's presence is to protect their country, women, children and families. This is how male writing constructs readers to place women in the innermost spaces in the corner of the house.

According to Herrmann and Palmieri (2010), the relationship between women and war can be seen from two different perspectives, namely as amazon (victim) or sabine (active participant)[11]. This view comes from the patriarchal construction that places women as weak, passive, sweet, obedient, must be protected, and neglected[12]. Thus, patriarchal culture has marginalized women from the hustle and bustle of knowledge and politics, and ultimately isolated them from the public sphere. Whereas women's absence in war has considerable political implications, because women are not present in the political reconciliation process[5].

At the beginning of the narrative, this short story presents a female character named Kindah. Like most literary works, women are already portrayed as weak, passive, and in need of protection. So Kindah is presented as a victim of war who takes refuge under the protection of her husband, Adam. Kindah's weakness and fragility are also shown when her husband is killed, she becomes a desperate figure and looks so heartbroken. This is depicted in several scenes of the story, such as when she screams until her voice is hoarse, is restless and cries in her in-laws' house for days, and suddenly decides to carry out a suicide bombing. Readers have come to expect that the writing by women authors presents a sabine female character, characterized as a tough and strong female warrior. Instead of presenting female warriors who have the same qualities as male warriors, the author reinforces the patriarchal construction of war as masculine. War as a masculine figure is reinforced by the presence of male warriors, namely Adam and the soldiers of Israel.

The narrative in the short story clearly mentions Adam, as a responsible fighter, while Kindah is shown as the wife of a Palestinian fighter whose safety is very dependent on her husband, Adam, timid, slow, weak and various femininity attached to his body. We can see this from the following narration:

كانت ترتجف من شدة الخوف وقد بدأ التعب يدب في أوصالها..حاولت تخفيف سرعتها ولكنها  
اكتشفت أنها لا تتحرك بإرادتها بل هو من يجذبها..حين شعر بثقلها توقف والتفت لها فقالت  
وهي تحاول التقاط أنفاسها:  
-آدم..لقد تعبت..لا أستطيع.

كان الجنود الإسرائيليون في طريقهم إلى منزله بصفته أحد المقاتلين الشرسين لهم حين وصلته  
رسالة من أحد أصدقائه تعلمه بضرورة الهرب فأخذ زوجته وهربا تاركان ورائهما كل شيء..

War is synonymous with masculinity, destruction, death, oppression and coercion. It presents everything associated with masculinity, such as brave soldiers, bullets, gunshots, grenades, fire and red smoke, helicopters, and everything that is active and aggressive. Meanwhile, women and their femininity are associated with weakness, gentleness, peace, home, refuge, and life[5]. We can see this in the portrayal of Kindah above, as a weak, helpless and passive woman. Although the text is only in the form of words, it has a very important function to create knowledge and construct culture, because language is used to build reality[6]. Words that stereotype a certain gender represent the author's ideology. In other words, female authors are

often trapped in patriarchal culture and unconsciously they are reinforcing patriarchal culture through the language and cultural codes they create through literary texts, regarding what should be attached to male and female bodies.

In fact, the state of war in recent decades has opened the boundaries of taboos created by patriarchal culture. War forces the involvement of men and women, they complement each other. Men become military officers or fighters, while women can serve as volunteers such as medical teams, cooks, fearless ambulance drivers, and even workers in munitions or weapons factories. According to Cooke, some male writers such as Glenn Gray and Erich Maria Remarque depict men who become nurses for war victims. Meanwhile, Helen Zenna Smith presents tough female characters who are actively involved as volunteers such as medical teams, cooks, and fearless ambulance drivers[4]. The state of war allows the exchange and violation of gender roles for men and women, where women can act like men without having to lose their femininity and men can perform domestic roles without worrying about losing their masculinity.

### 3.4 War Means Jihad in Islam

The concept of Jihad can be seen from various perspectives, both linguistically/etymologically and theologically. Etymologically, jihad comes from the Arabic "jaahada-yujaahidu-mujaahadatan-jihaadan," which means "work wholeheartedly"[13], sincerity and greatness of effort[14]. In Munawwir Dictionary, jihad is defined as struggle[15]. While in Lisan al-Arab, jihad is to fight the enemy, to devote all the ability and energy in the form of words, deeds or anything, someone could[16]. In theological terms, jihad is defined variously. Ramlan, et al., compiled the understanding of jihad theologically. According to Sabiq, jihad is to make every effort and endure all difficulties in fighting the enemy to fight aggression, which by definition is now known as al-harb (war), which means armed combat between two or more countries. Specifically, the Shafi'iyah scholars define jihad as fighting the infidels with the aim of glorifying Islam. This is in line with Ismail's view, that jihad is an effort to mobilize all abilities to fight in the way of Allah, either by directly involving or directly by helping in the field of finance, expressing opinions (jihad), or raising enthusiasm[13]. Yusuf Qardhawi divides jihad into three levels. First, jihad against visible enemies. Second, jihad against satanic temptations and third, jihad against worldly desires[17]. For the Palestinian people, of course, jihad is understood as an effort to fight against colonialism or militarism in fighting for their homeland. Yet, this political conflict that is full of group interests becomes complex and enters the realm of religion. The war not only destroyed the buildings and economy of the Palestinian people, but also made civilians, especially children and women, the victims.

The Falnaltaqi short story also shows the author's views on the conditions of war, which are narrated through the beginning of the story:

كانا يركضان سويًا بين الشوارع والأرصفة.. يتقدمها هو ممسكًا يدها بقوة حتى لا تفلت منه.. وسط  
قصف مروحيات بني صهيون الذي يدوي بقوة فوق رؤوسهم.. يدك بيوت المسالمين من أبناء غزة  
المحاصرة.

In the narrative above, the author uses the oppositional diction غزة المحاصرة أبناء and بني صهيون, the Jewish soldiers and the people of Gaza to indicate the Palestinian-Israeli war. In this context, the author shows the resistance efforts in fighting for the homeland that is being seized through the act of jihad. In this short story, jihad is shown by the involvement of the character Adam as

a Palestinian fighter who becomes one of the important figures in the movement of Palestinian civil society against the atrocities of the Israeli army. The purpose of jihad is in line with the views of the Syafii'iyah scholars, namely in order to fight the infidels with the aim of glorifying Islam[13]. The death of mujahids or fighters is considered a sacrifice called martyrdom/shahid:

ارتمت كندة بين ذراعيها وهي تبكي بحرقه فأدركت الأم استشهاد ابنها.. جعلت تطلق الزغاريد وهي تكفكف دمعها فقد أصبح شهيداً تفخر به.

For women, jihad is understood in three domains, namely jihad in the context of worship, women's jihad in the domestic sphere (household), and women's jihad in the battlefield. First, what is meant by women's jihad in the context of worship is the Hajj. Qardhawi explained this by quoting one of the traditions narrated by Nasaī from Abu Hurairah which reads: "The jihad of old people and women is Hajj and Umrah"[17] This Hadith shows that jihad on the battlefield is not mandatory for women, although it does not rule out the possibility that women can perform jihad by plunging into the battlefield with their various roles. Second, women's jihad in the domestic sphere (household) is related to the role of women with their social functions, both as children, wives, and mothers. This is based on the hadith by Thabrani, one of which reads "The Prophet SAW replied, "Obeying your husbands and knowing their rights (can equal jihad in the way of Allah), but few of you do it." (HR Thabrani)[17]. Third, in relation to jihad on the battlefield, women are often associated with jihad on the battlefield and the practice of terrorism. The word 'jihad' itself is ambiguous, which can be interpreted with positive or negative behavior, this is seen from the impact that can be caused by the jihad behavior itself. Through the character of Kindah, the author wants to say that the effort to fight the Israeli Zionists with suicide bombings is the third type of jihad, namely jihad on the battlefield and his death is martyrdom/shahid. As can be seen in the following narration

بعد وقت طويل من الانتظار لم يفتر فيه حماسها قام أحد الجنود ببناء اسمها.. سلمته التصريح فجعل يفحصه ويفحصها بنظرات ثاقبة.. نظرت حولها فيترقب.. إنها اللحظة المناسبة.. تحسست الحزام الناسف الملتف حول جسدها وتمتمت بالشهادة قبل أن تقوم بالضغط على الزر وهي تبسم قائلة: " فلنلتقي "

This death tragedy shows that the author justifies suicide bombing behavior in the name of jihad and that such behavior is allowed by religion. This view is certainly a polemic that is quite complicated among religionists and scholars. Several studies such as Lydia Khalil (2019), Udji Asiyah, et al. (2020), concluded that women's involvement in extreme jihad is due to misunderstanding of jihad verses and patriarchal domination so that women tend to commit violence such as suicide bombing practices that harm themselves and others[18]. The saddest thing is the involvement of women in terrorist acts in the name of jihad as in the case of ISIS. Women often act as jihadists, supporters, financiers, and even influencers of extreme jihad that tends to be counterproductive[19].

On the other hand, women can be actively involved in ongoing wars by carrying out various activities according to their expertise. Islamic history records a number of names of women involved in various wars, such as Umm Umarah or Nasibah bint Ka'ab al-Anshariyah, Syafiyyah bint Abdul Muttalib, Hammah bint Jahsy, Aisyah bint Abu Bakr, Umm Aiman, Umm Sulaim, Ummu, Salith, Rufaidah al-Anshariyah, Al-Rubayyi' bint Mu'awwidz ra..., Umm Haram bint Milhan, Fatimah bint Rasulullah, Asma' bint Yazid Al-Anshariyyah[17]. In addition, there is also the involvement of women in war both as soldiers and as leaders, as in the case of Queen

Ahhotep I of Egypt, who led her troops in battle against the Hyksos invaders, Fu Hao, a Chinese military woman leader with the rank of General, Empress of the Shang Dynasty, Celtic warrior Queen Boudica or Boadicea, and Zenobia, Queen of Palmira[20]. The presence of women as warriors on the battlefield becomes a gender issue, where gender boundaries between men and women become absurd and even more flexible, considering the situation of war is considered an extraordinary thing. However, the problem that arises then is the stereotypical view of women and the use of weapons and tools of war, because war is taboo for women.

## Conclusion

Based on the results of the discussion above, it can be concluded that several things related to the ideology of women authors can be seen from their writings, namely that jihad is understood as an effort to struggle against colonialism or militarism in fighting for the homeland. The author's ideology regarding jihad is influenced by the views of the Syafii'iyah ulama who say that jihad is carried out in order to fight the infidels with the aim of glorifying Islam. The death of mujahids or fighters is considered a sacrifice called martyrdom, including the behavior of suicide bombers whose death is considered a shahid. However, female authors are still often trapped in the male writing style (androcentrism), which places women as weak, passive, sweet, obedient, must be protected, and neglected. Even when women decide to contribute to the war. The female character's decision to commit suicide bombing is motivated by her frustration over her husband's death.

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