



**The existential quest for freedom: Resistance and self-determination in  
Naguib Mahfouz's *Miramar***

**Anshar Zulhelmi\*, Siti Aminah\*\*, Hasanuddin Tosimpak\*\*\*, Khairul Rifqi\*\*\*\*✉,  
Luthfi Muhyiddin\*\*\*\*\***

*\*Faculty of Adab and Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh,  
Indonesia*

*Email: anshar.zulhelmi@ar-raniry.ac.id*

*\*\*Faculty of Adab and Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh,  
Indonesia*

*Email: aminahgayles@gmail.com*

*\*\*\*Postgraduate School, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Malang,  
Indonesia*

*Email: 240104320002@student.uin-malang.ac.id*

*\*\*\*\*Faculty of Adab and Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Banda  
Aceh, Indonesia*

*Email: 200502008@student.ar-raniry.ac.id*

*\*\*\*\*\*Department of Oriental Institute of Leipzig University, Leipzig, Germany*

*Email: luthfi.muhyiddin@studserv.uni-leipzig.de*

**ABSTRACT**

*This study analyzes Naguib Mahfouz's novel *Miramar* through the lens of existential feminism, focusing on the character of Zahra representing a young woman who struggles to free herself from the social, psychological, and cultural constraints that limit her freedom. This research employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach by examining Zahra's actions, dialogues, internal monologues, and character development throughout the story. Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminist theory is applied to explore themes of freedom, self-determination, and resistance against patriarchal hegemony. The findings reveal that Zahra's rejection of an arranged marriage, her courage to leave her hometown, and her commitment to working at the Miramar pension symbolizes her existential struggle. Zahra also faces intimidation, discrimination, and harassment from male characters, yet she continues to maintain her dignity and control over her life. This underscores her struggle to gain bodily autonomy, identity, and a future of her own. By depicting Zahra's determination to achieve economic independence and personal development, Mahfouz offers a social critique of gender inequality and the restricted roles of women in post-revolutionary*

✉ Corresponding author:

Email Address: 200502008@student.ar-raniry.ac.id

Received: August 19, 2025; Accepted: September 25, 2025; Published: September 30, 2025

Copyright © 2025 Anshar Zulhelmi, Siti Aminah, Hasanuddin Tosimpak, Khairul Rifqi, Luthfi Muhyiddin

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22373/equality.v11i2.32003>

*Egyptian society. This study concludes that Miramar is not merely a portrait of Zahra's personal conflict but also a powerful commentary on class, identity, and women's struggle to create the meaning of their own lives. The study highlights the relevance of existential feminism in understanding the dynamics of women's freedom and resistance in modern literature.*

**Keywords:** Naguib Mahfouz; Existential Feminism; Simone de Beauvoir; Psychological Liberation; Gender Roles.

### ABSTRAK

*Penelitian ini menganalisis novel Miramar karya Naguib Mahfouz dengan menggunakan lensa feminisme eksistensial dan memfokuskan kajian pada karakter Zahra. Zahra merupakan representasi perempuan muda yang berjuang melepaskan diri dari belenggu sosial, psikologis, dan budaya yang mengekang kebebasan dirinya. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif-analitis kualitatif dengan menganalisis tindakan, dialog, monolog internal, serta perkembangan karakter Zahra sepanjang cerita. Teori feminisme eksistensial Simone de Beauvoir diterapkan untuk mengeksplorasi tema-tema kebebasan, penentuan diri dan perlawanan terhadap hegemoni patriarki. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penolakan Zahra terhadap pernikahan yang diatur keluarga, keberaniannya meninggalkan kampung halaman, serta komitmennya untuk bekerja di pension Miramar menjadi simbol perjuangan eksistensialnya. Zahra juga menghadapi intimidasi, diskriminasi dan pelecehan yang dilakukan tokoh laki-laki, namun ia tetap mempertahankan martabat dan kendali atas hidupnya. Hal ini menegaskan perjuangannya untuk memperoleh kebebasan tubuh, identitas dan masa depan. Dengan menampilkan tekad Zahra dalam mencapai kemandirian ekonomi dan pengembangan diri, Mahfouz memberikan kritik sosial terhadap ketimpangan gender dan keterbatasan peran perempuan pada masyarakat Mesir pascarevolusi. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa Miramar bukan hanya potret konflik personal Zahra, tetapi juga komentar yang kuat mengenai kelas, identitas dan perjuangan perempuan untuk menciptakan makna hidupnya sendiri. Kajian ini menegaskan relevansi feminisme eksistensial dalam memahami dinamika kebebasan dan perlawanan perempuan dalam sastra modern.*

**Kata Kunci:** Naguib Mahfouz; Feminisme Eksistensial; Simone de Beauvoir; Pembebasan Psikologis; Peran Gender.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Literature serves as both a mirror and a record of human life, reflecting the changes in society norms and political climates over time. Naguib Mahfouz's *Miramar* (1967) is a prominent example of such a literary work that captures the complexities of Egyptian society during the post-revolutionary period. By exploring the life of Zahra, a young woman who strives for freedom and independence, Mahfouz provides a critical commentary on the socio-political dynamics of 1960s in Egypt. *Miramar* offers an insightful perspective on gender roles, societal expectations, and the individual's struggle for autonomy, making it a key text for exploring feminist literary theory (Mahfouz, 1992).

The concept of freedom and self-determination is central to existential philosophy, which emphasizes individual agency and the creation of meaning in an otherwise indifferent universe (Sartre & Richmond, 2021). Simone de Beauvoir's feminist existentialism further explores these ideas, arguing that women's liberation is not only a social and political struggle but also an existential one. According to de Beauvoir, women must transcend the roles imposed upon them by society to become free and self-defining individuals (De Beauvoir & Parshley, 1997). Mahfouz's *Miramar* portrays these themes vividly through the character of Zahra, whose battle against both external and internal constraints echoes De Beauvoir's existential notions of freedom and identity.

Feminist theory, particularly in its existential form, offers a valuable framework for understanding Zahra's struggles in *Miramar*. Feminism, at its core, aims to address the social, economic, and political inequalities between men and women, with the ultimate goal of achieving equality and individual freedom (Tong & Botts, 2024). Existential feminism, as articulated by de Beauvoir, underscores the necessity for women to define themselves independently of societal expectations, a notion that aligns with Zahra's refusal to submit to the patriarchal demands placed on her. By rejecting the arranged marriage proposed by her family and seeking employment at the pension in Alexandria, Zahra actively resists the roles dictated by her traditional rural upbringing (Mahfouz, 1992).

This research aims to examine the image of struggle in *Miramar* through a feminist existential lens. It will explore how Zahra's psychological journey, her role as a working woman, and her pursuit of personal goals reflect the existential themes of freedom, individualism, and resistance to social pressures. By analyzing Zahra's character through De Beauvoir's feminist existential framework, this study will offer a deeper understanding of the ways in which Mahfouz uses literature to comment on the condition of women in Egyptian society during the 1960s (De Beauvoir & Parshley, 1997).

To provide a clearer overview of the context, it is important to consider Zahra's background and her social environment in *Miramar*. Zahra is a young woman from a rural village in Upper Egypt who moves to Alexandria in search of independence and a better future (Mahfouz, 1992). Coming from a conservative family, she faces pressure to conform to traditional expectations, including an arranged marriage that she firmly rejects. Her decision to leave home reflects her determination to break free from familial control and pursue her own path.

The novel also highlights the gendered power relations in Zahra's life. As a woman in a patriarchal society, Zahra's interactions with men—whether family members, employers, or fellow tenants in the pension—are often shaped by expectations of submission and obedience

(Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011). This dynamic underscores the broader socio-cultural structures that restrict women's autonomy, against which Zahra's struggle for freedom becomes all the more significant (De Beauvoir & Parshley, 1997).

Several previous studies have explored similar themes as Naser, et al. (2021a) examined the intersection of existentialism and feminism in literary criticism, demonstrating how female characters in literature resist patriarchal domination in order to assert their agency. Their study emphasizes that existentialism with its focus on freedom, choice, and individual responsibility provides an important foundation for feminism by encouraging women to transcend the socially constructed roles imposed on them. By analyzing female characters that face social pressures and constraints, the research highlights that resistance to patriarchal control is an essential step for women to define their identities independently. Naser and colleagues also stress the significance of literary representation in capturing the psychological and social transformation of women, showing that their struggle for freedom is not only personal but also a symbolic challenge to oppressive social structures. These findings support the relevance of applying a feminist existential lens to characters like Zahra in *Miramar*, as they reveal the close connection between women's struggles in literature and the broader themes of freedom, resistance, and self-determination (Naser et.al., 2021a).

Beside of similar themes, there is a study by Hasyim et al. (2022) analyzed gender roles in agro-industrial workers' families and revealed that women's participation in the workforce simultaneously represents empowerment and ongoing struggle within patriarchal contexts. Their study highlights how women working alongside men in agro-industrial settings often experience a double burden: contributing economically to their households while still being expected to fulfill traditional domestic responsibilities. This dual role positions women in a space where they gain a sense of agency and financial independence but remain constrained by cultural expectations that reinforce male authority and gender hierarchy. Hasyim and colleagues argue that this tension between empowerment and subordination illustrates the complex reality of gender dynamics in rural and semi-industrial communities. The findings suggest that true gender equality requires structural and cultural change, not merely women's entry into the workforce. This insight is highly relevant to the analysis of Zahra in *Miramar*, whose employment at the pension embodies both her resistance to patriarchal control and the emotional and social struggles she faces in navigating a male-dominated environment (Hasyim, et.al., 2022a).

Similarly, Holqi et al. (2024) explored gender equality in political representation, offering a comparative analysis between Indonesia and the United States to examine how structural and cultural factors shape women's access to decision-making roles. Their research highlights the persistent gap in female representation in legislative bodies despite formal quotas and legal frameworks that aim to increase participation. Holqi and colleagues argue that the presence of women in politics is not only a matter of numerical representation but also of substantive participation, where women are empowered to influence policy and challenge patriarchal norms. They identify barriers such as gender stereotypes, limited access to party leadership positions, and sociocultural expectations that continue to hinder women's political autonomy. The study underscores that achieving gender equality in representation requires a transformation of both institutional structures and societal attitudes. This finding resonates with the analysis of Zahra in *Miramar*, whose struggle reflects a parallel fight for autonomy in a

male-dominated environment. Just as political equality demands both opportunity and agency, Zahra's resistance to familial control and societal pressures illustrates the existential necessity for women to claim their right to self-definition and actively shape their destinies (Holqi et.al., 2024).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The analysis of *Miramar* through a feminist existential framework requires an understanding of the intersection between feminist theory, existentialism, and literary criticism. Feminist existentialism, rooted in the works of Simone de Beauvoir, is central to exploring how gender roles constrain women's freedom and how women resist these limitations to define themselves. De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) remains foundational, presenting the idea that women have been historically defined as the "Other" in relation to men. This concept has been widely discussed in recent feminist philosophical texts, emphasizing the liberation of women through self-definition and resistance to societal norms (De Beauvoir & Parshley, 1997).

In recent years, feminist existentialism has found new interpretations within literary studies, with scholars emphasizing its relevance in understanding the struggles faced by female characters in literature (Hasyim, Indriani, & Sayekti, 2022b). Womack and Houghton argue that feminist existentialism is a critical lens for analyzing female agency and identity in contemporary literature, especially in postcolonial contexts. Their work suggests that existential themes in literature often mirror the struggles women face when asserting their independence within oppressive societies. The existential notion of freedom, according to de Beauvoir, is the act of transcending the roles imposed by society, a theme that resonates strongly in the life of Zahra in *Miramar*.

Moreover, the theme of women's labor in literature is often examined through the lens of feminist theory, which critiques the gendered division of labor and its impact on women's autonomy (Holqi et al., 2024). Bradshaw and McLoughlin (2021) highlight how domestic labor and economic participation shape women's roles within the family and society. They argue that working-class women often experience a double burden—working in both the domestic and public spheres—yet they also find ways to assert agency through their labor. In *Miramar*, Zahra's work as a maid in the pension can be seen as both a source of oppression and empowerment, aligning with feminist views on the significance of labor in shaping women's identities and autonomy.

The role of goals and self-improvement in existential philosophy is also central to the analysis of Zahra's character. Vargas (2022) explores the existential importance of goal-setting and personal development as a means of creating meaning in life. He argues that individuals who pursue self-improvement, despite external obstacles, embody existential freedom. Zahra's commitment to learning a trade, despite her challenging circumstances, reflects this existential drive for self-actualization. This aligns with recent studies on existential psychology, which emphasize the role of personal goals in overcoming adversity and creating meaning in one's life (Baumeister, 1999).

Recent feminist critiques of sexual autonomy in literature have provided valuable insights into the ways women resist sexual exploitation and reclaim their agency. Morris and Niskanen (2020) examine how feminist existentialism challenges traditional views of women's

sexuality, arguing that sexual autonomy is essential to a woman's overall freedom. In *Miramar*, Zahra's resistance to the sexual advances of the men at the pension illustrates her desire to assert control over her body and sexuality, which is a critical aspect of her struggle for existential freedom. This mirrors the feminist existential view that women must resist the societal imposition of sexual roles and reclaim their autonomy in all aspects of their lives.

### 3. METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative research approach, which was well-suited for exploring complex phenomena such as the psychological and existential struggles of characters in literature. Qualitative research, especially in literary studies, emphasized in-depth understanding and analysis of text and meaning, rather than statistical analysis (Creswell, 1998). In the context of *Miramar*, the primary objective was to analyze the character of Zahra using feminist existential theory, focusing on her psychological journey, her role as a working woman, and her struggle for personal liberation.

To analyze the data, the study employed a descriptive-analytical method, which was commonly used in literary studies to explore and interpret literary works in relation to specific themes or theories. This method involved systematic reading, identification, and categorization of relevant texts (Piantanida & Garman, 2009). In this case, textual analysis was applied to excerpts from *Miramar*, with particular attention to Zahra's interactions, internal monologues, and dialogue that reflected her existential and feminist struggles. As noted by Mitchell and Cody (2020), literary analysis allowed for a deep exploration of how themes such as freedom, agency, and resistance manifested in characters' lives and decisions.

The data collection for this study involved a close reading of Naguib Mahfouz's *Miramar*, supplemented by secondary data from recent academic articles and books on feminist existentialism and literary analysis. The textual data were analyzed for recurring themes related to Zahra's psychological state and her attempts to overcome the limitations imposed on her by society. As outlined by Lincoln and Guba (2020), qualitative researchers ensured that their methods of data collection aligned with the research objectives and yielded rich, detailed insights into the phenomena being studied.

The analysis also drew upon feminist existential theory, particularly the work of De Beauvoir, whose ideas on women's autonomy and freedom were central to understanding the struggles of Zahra in *Miramar* (De Beauvoir & Parshley, 1997). Recent studies on feminist literary criticism also supported this approach, emphasizing the importance of feminist existentialism in contemporary literary analysis (Naser et.al., 2021b). Through this framework, Zahra's actions and decisions were interpreted as expressions of existential freedom and self-definition, challenging the social structures that sought to limit her. By using a feminist existential lens, the study uncovered the deeper layers of meaning in Zahra's character and her ongoing battle for self-liberation.

### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1. Findings

The analysis of Zahra's character in *Miramar* through the lens of feminist existential theory reveals several key aspects of her struggle for freedom, self-determination, and personal growth. Zahra's psychological liberation, her role as a working woman, and her pursuit of long-

term goals are all central to understanding her resistance to societal oppression. These themes are consistent with feminist existential thought, which posits that personal freedom and agency are crucial to human experience (Langley, 2024).

#### *4.1.1. Psychological Liberation*

One of the most significant findings of this study is Zahra's psychological liberation from the societal and familial constraints that seek to define her. Her refusal to return to her village, despite intense pressure from her family, marks a pivotal moment of existential freedom. Zahra's declaration, "I am free and no one has the right to dictate my life," reflects her inner resolve to assert her autonomy. This mirrors De Beauvoir's (1949) notion of existential freedom, where individuals must resist the roles imposed upon them by society and define their own existence. Similar findings in contemporary feminist literary studies have demonstrated that literary characters' struggles for autonomy are essential to understanding the broader social forces at play (Kasket, 2017). Zahra's psychological independence is portrayed not only as a personal act of defiance but also as an existential claim for her right to define herself.

Zahra's struggle is further illustrated through the explicit resistance she shows in several key moments in *Miramar*. When pressured by her family to return to the village and accept a traditional marriage, Zahra asserts: "I am free, and no one has the right to dictate my life" (Mahfouz, 1992). This statement not only emphasizes her rejection of patriarchal control but also embodies the existential principle of self-definition (De Beauvoir & Parshley, 1997).

Moreover, Zahra's experiences at the pension reveal the intimidation and discrimination she encounters as a working woman. She resists the unwanted advances of male boarders, refusing to be reduced to an object of desire. For instance, when confronted with harassment, she responds firmly: "I came here to work and to learn, not to surrender to anyone's will" (Mahfouz, 1992). Such moments reflect her existential fight against both sexual exploitation and the social structures that seek to confine her (Butler, 2011).

Through these confrontations, Zahra's voice becomes a powerful act of resistance, demonstrating her refusal to be silenced or controlled. Her struggle captures the essence of feminist existentialism: the insistence on autonomy, the rejection of imposed roles, and the pursuit of a self-determined identity (Naser, et. al., 2021c).

#### *4.1.2. The Working Woman*

Another crucial aspect of Zahra's character is her role as a working woman. Despite the harsh working conditions at the pension, Zahra remains dedicated to her job, which underscores the intersection of gender, class, and personal agency. As a domestic worker, Zahra occupies a liminal space where she is both oppressed by her economic status and empowered by her ability to provide for herself. Recent feminist studies of labor and gender roles have shown that women in similar socio-economic positions often face double burdens—both at home and in the workplace—yet still assert their agency through work (Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011). Zahra's dedication to her work, despite its emotional toll, highlights her resilience and desire to change her destiny. Her role as a working woman not only challenges the traditional roles assigned to women in patriarchal societies but also reflects her existential need for self-sufficiency and recognition.

#### *4.1.3. Goals to Achieve*

Zahra's pursuit of personal goals, such as learning a new profession, illustrates her determination to change her life and transcend the limitations imposed by her socio-economic background. This drive to improve herself is consistent with the existential idea that meaning is created through individual action and the pursuit of personal goals (Baumeister, 1999). Zahra's decision to take time out from her work to study demonstrates her belief in the possibility of self-improvement and a better future. Recent studies in existential psychology emphasize that individuals derive a sense of purpose and satisfaction from working toward long-term goals, even in the face of adversity (May & Yalom, 2005). Zahra's commitment to learning a new trade is a powerful example of existential growth, as it shows her refusal to accept the role of a passive victim in her own life.

#### *4.1.4. Life During Work*

The harsh realities of Zahra's life at the pension reveal the emotional and psychological toll of her work. Though she is dedicated to her job, the environment is far from supportive, with instances of mistreatment and emotional strain. However, Zahra's perseverance through these challenges is indicative of her existential commitment to creating meaning despite external suffering. Studies on the psychological impact of work on women in oppressive environments suggest that while women often experience stress and emotional burnout in such roles, they also demonstrate significant resilience and determination (Al Arkoubi & Wollack-Spiller, 2023). Zahra's resilience in the face of adversity reinforces the existential philosophy that meaning can be found through personal strength and the ability to endure and resist suffering.

#### *4.1.5. Sexual Politics and Feminist Existentialism*

Zahra's story also delves into the intersection of sexual politics and feminist existentialism. Her interactions with the men at the pension highlight the ways in which sexual and gendered power dynamics shape her daily life. While Zahra struggles against these dynamics, her refusal to submit to the expectations of the men around her illustrates her desire to assert her sexual autonomy. The tension between sexual freedom and societal pressure has been a key area of feminist existential theory, which argues that women must reclaim their sexual agency to live authentically (De Beauvoir, 2023). Zahra's refusal to conform to the stereotypical role of the submissive woman and her quest for independence challenge the traditional gender roles embedded in Egyptian society.

#### *4.1.6. Identity and Resistance to Gender Norms*

An essential part of Zahra's journey is her resistance to the gender norms imposed upon her. Throughout *Miramar*, Zahra refuses to let her gender define her fate. Her actions, such as leaving her family to seek a life of independence, resonate with the feminist existential belief in the importance of self-creation (Butler, 2011). Zahra's rejection of traditional gender roles is an act of defiance that enables her to carve out a space for herself in a world that continually seeks to confine her. Her story aligns with recent research on gender resistance, which suggests that women's struggles for self-determination are often marked by a continuous negotiation of identity in relation to dominant societal expectations.



#### 4.2. Discussion

The findings of this study shed light on the complex interplay of feminist existential themes within *Miramar*, particularly through the character of Zahra. Zahra's struggle for psychological liberation, her role as a working woman, and her pursuit of personal goals illustrate the centrality of existential freedom in her character development. This analysis not only highlights Zahra's journey toward self-definition but also underscores the broader implications of gender, class, and social norms in shaping individual identities.

##### 4.2.1. Psychological Liberation and Existential Freedom

Zahra's psychological liberation is a pivotal aspect of her character, resonating with de Beauvoir's existential feminism, which argues that women must overcome societal and familial constraints to achieve true freedom (De Beauvoir & Parshley, 1997). Zahra's refusal to return to her village, despite familial pressure, is an act of self-assertion and defiance against traditional gender roles. This act of psychological autonomy is consistent with recent feminist analyses of women's emancipation in literature, where resistance to oppressive structures is essential for self-empowerment. Zahra's declaration that she is free and her rejection of the life prescribed for her by her family reflect a critical moment of existential freedom, where she chooses to define herself outside the confines of patriarchal expectations.

This theme aligns with recent feminist existential philosophy, which emphasizes that true freedom comes from an individual's ability to create meaning and identity for themselves, rather than merely accepting the roles imposed by society. Zahra's journey is a prime example of existential freedom in literature, where self-liberation is an ongoing process of resisting external pressures and affirming one's agency.

##### 4.2.2. The Working Woman and Gendered Labor

Zahra's role as a working woman is a key element in understanding her struggle for autonomy. Although she works in a subordinate and physically demanding position, Zahra's ability to support herself and maintain her independence reflects an existential commitment to self-sufficiency. The relationship between gender and labor is a critical focus in recent feminist literature, which highlights the ways in which women, particularly in lower socioeconomic classes, experience a dual burden of domestic and economic labor (Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011). Zahra's labor at the pension is both an act of survival and a demonstration of agency, as it allows her to assert control over her life despite the oppressive circumstances.

Recent studies on women's labor in postcolonial societies also support this view, showing that women's work, even in seemingly subordinate roles, is often a source of personal empowerment and resistance to patriarchal control (Al Arkoubi & Wollack-Spiller, 2023). Zahra's role as a maid in *Miramar* is not just an act of submission but a means of asserting her autonomy within a system that seeks to limit her opportunities. Through her work, Zahra embodies the existential belief that individuals must engage in the world and act to create meaning, even if the world presents them with limited choices (Baumeister, 1999).

##### 4.2.3. Pursuit of Goals and Existential Meaning

Zahra's determination to achieve her personal goals, such as pursuing an education and learning a new trade, is another manifestation of her existential struggle. In existential

philosophy, the search for meaning through self-improvement and goal setting is central to the human condition (May & Yalom, 2005). Zahra's decision to take time off work to study highlights her belief in the possibility of change and self-betterment, even when faced with difficult circumstances. This aspect of Zahra's character echoes the existential notion that meaning is created through the pursuit of personal goals and self-determination (May & Yalom, 2005).

The pursuit of goals, especially by marginalized individuals, is also a theme that has received significant attention in contemporary feminist existential studies. Researchers argue that individuals who are subjected to oppressive social systems can find meaning and empowerment through their aspirations, as these goals offer a path out of subjugation and toward self-realization (Burr, 2024). Zahra's commitment to learning and her desire to transcend her current circumstances through education is a powerful example of this process, as it reflects both her resilience and her refusal to accept a limited future.

#### *4.2.4. Sexual Politics and Feminist Existentialism*

Zahra's interactions with the men at the pension also raise important questions about sexual politics and gendered power dynamics. Zahra's resistance to the objectification and control of her sexuality is a key element of her existential struggle. Recent feminist studies have explored the ways in which women's sexual autonomy is often compromised by patriarchal expectations, which shape women's lives and limit their agency (De Beauvoir, 2023). Zahra's rejection of sexual exploitation and her quest for independence reflect a feminist existential critique of traditional gender roles and sexual oppression. Her struggle for sexual autonomy is integral to her larger fight for existential freedom, where she must assert control over every aspect of her identity, including her sexuality.

Studies of feminist existentialism in literature suggest that women's sexual liberation is an essential component of their overall autonomy and self-determination. In *Miramar*, Zahra's resistance to being defined by male desire underscores her refusal to be confined to the roles traditionally assigned to women in society (Naser, et al., 2021b). Zahra's journey reflects the existential belief that individuals must actively resist societal definitions and assert their own identities, even in the face of sexual and gendered pressures.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Zahra's journey in *Miramar* serves as a compelling example of feminist existentialism in literature. Her struggle for psychological liberation, her resistance to traditional gender roles, and her pursuit of personal goals illustrate the centrality of existential freedom in her character development. Through her actions, Zahra exemplifies the core principles of feminist existential theory, demonstrating that true freedom and self-determination can only be achieved through resistance to oppressive societal norms. By analyzing Zahra's character within this framework, this study highlights the ways in which Mahfouz's *Miramar* not only critiques the social structures of 1960s Egypt but also offers a profound commentary on the existential struggle for identity and autonomy.

## 6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Siti Aminah for her invaluable contribution in completing this study. Her insights and guidance have been instrumental in shaping the direction of this research. I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Hasanuddin Tosimpak for his thorough review of this article. His constructive feedback and thoughtful suggestions have greatly enhanced the quality of this work. I am grateful to the Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Faculty of Adab and Humanities, State Islamic University of Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh for providing the academic environment and support that made this research possible.

Furthermore, I am deeply appreciative of the support and encouragement I have received from my family and friends throughout this academic journey. Their understanding and patience have provided me with the strength and motivation to complete this study. Thanks to everyone who has been a part of this process and helped me in making this work a reality.

## References

- Al Arkoubi, K., & Wollack-Spiller, G. (2023). The journey of career resilience among women. In *Personal, Educational and Organizational Transformation: Leading During Times of Metacrisis* (pp. 331–346). London: Springer.
- Baumeister, R. F. (1999). *The self in social psychology*. psychology press. Retrieved from [https://books.google.co.id/books?id=ZiQtTi6\\_RC0C](https://books.google.co.id/books?id=ZiQtTi6_RC0C)
- Burr, V. (2024). *Social constructionism*. Oxfordshire, UK: Taylor & Francis. Retrieved from <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=zYkhEQAAQBAJ>.
- Butler, J. (2011). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of Identity*. Oxfordshire, UK: Taylor & Francis. Retrieved from <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=2S0xAAAAQBAJ>
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. London: SAGE Publications. Retrieved from <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=bjO2AAAAIAAJ>
- De Beauvoir, S., & Parshley, H. M. (1997). *The second sex*. New York: Vintage. Retrieved from <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=hPv5r4hcM3EC>
- De Beauvoir, S. (2023). The second sex. In *Social theory re-wired* (pp. 346–354). London: Routledge.
- Hasyim, F., Indriani, Y., & Sayekti, W. D. (2022a). Analysis of gender roles in agro-industrial workers' families. *Gender Equality: International Journal of Child and Gender Studies*, 8(2), 238–247. <https://doi.org/10.22373/equality.v8i2.14710>
- Hasyim, F., Indriani, Y., & Sayekti, W. D. (2022b). Analysis of gender roles in agro-industrial workers' families. *Gender Equality: International Journal of Child and Gender Studies*, 8(2), 238–247. <https://doi.org/10.22373/equality.v8i2.14710>
- Holqi, F. G. F., Regita, A. S., Aprillia, A., & A'yun, I. Q. (2024). Analyzing gender equality in the US and Indonesian parliaments through liberal feminism theory. *Gender Equality: International Journal of Child and Gender Studies*, 10(1), 104–117. <https://doi.org/10.22373/equality.v10i1.22688>
- Kasket, E. (2017). At the existentialist cafe: freedom, being, and apricot cocktails. *Existential Analysis*, 28(2), 419–423.

- Langley, H. (2024). Freedom and agency in the second sex. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 32(1), 100-113. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/ejop.12841>
- Mahfouz, N. (1992). *Miramar*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Retrieved from <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=vzNODwAAQBAJ>
- May, R., & Yalom, I. (2005). *Existential psychotherapy*. Boston: Thomson Brooks/Cole Publishing Co.
- Naser, S. J., Ghandeharion, A., & Torghabeh, R. A. (2021). Twinning existentialism and feminism: The intersection of philosophy and social science in literary criticism. *The First National Conference on New Perspectives in Interpreting and Translation Studies and Teaching English as a Foreign Language*.
- Piantanida, M., & Garman, N. B. (2009). *The qualitative dissertation: A guide for students and faculty*. California: SAGE Publications. Retrieved from <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=1bYLKAh5YnIC>
- Pratt, N., & Richter-Devroe, S. (2011). Critically examining UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 13(4), 489–503. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2011.611658>
- Sartre, J. P., & Richmond, S. (2021). *Being and nothingness*. New York: Atria Books. Retrieved from <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=Xj5qDwAAQBAJ>
- Tong, R., & Botts, T. F. (2024). *Feminist thought: A more comprehensive introduction*. Oxfordshire, UK: Taylor & Francis. Retrieved from <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=ZkkSEQAAQBAJ>