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DECONSTRUCTING 'POVERTY' IN *ALWĀN MIN AL-FAQR* BY ISLĀM ṢĀDIQ: JACQUES DERRIDA'S PERSPECTIVE

Muhammad Husain Rifa'i[1]*, Ummi Hasanah[2], Alif Zakaria[3], Maulana Nurul Izza[4], Muhammad Fahmi[5]

[134]Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia
[2]Universitas PTIQ Jakarta, Indonesia
[5]Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: muhamadhusainrifai@mail.ugm.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the construction and deconstruction of the meaning of poverty in the short story collection *Alwān min al-Faqr* by Islām Ṣādiq through hierarchical binary oppositions and how these structures can be destabilized through Jacques Derrida's deconstruction. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach using close reading and textual note-taking techniques. The main textual source of this study is the short story collection *Alwān min al-Faqr*, which serves as the corpus of analysis, while secondary sources include scholarly works on deconstruction theory and studies on the representation of poverty in literary discourse. The findings reveal four patterns of binary opposition: physical versus economic poverty, social versus economic poverty, poverty without shelter versus poverty with shelter, and health versus economic poverty. A deconstructive reading shows that these hierarchies are unstable because the text contains internal contradictions that undermine the assumed superiority of one meaning over another. Consequently, poverty in the text emerges as a relational discursive construct open to multiple interpretations and contributes to expanding the application of deconstruction in contemporary Arabic literary studies.

الكلمات المفتاحية:
ألوان من الفقر؛ التفكيك؛ معنى الفقر؛ إسلام صادق؛ جاك دريدا

الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة بناء وتفكيك معنى الفقر في مجموعة القصص القصيرة «ألوان من الفقر» لإسلام صادق، من خلال التناقضات الثنائية الهرمية، وكيف يمكن زعزعة استقرار هذه البنى من خلال نظرية التفكيك التي طرحها جاك دريدا. وتستخدم هذه الدراسة نهجًا وصفيًا نوعيًا يعتمد على القراءة المتأنية وتقنيات تدوين الملاحظات النصية. المصدر النصي الرئيسي لهذه الدراسة هو مجموعة القصص القصيرة «ألوان من الفقر»، التي تشكل مادة التحليل، بينما تشمل المصادر الثانوية الأعمال الأكاديمية حول نظرية التفكيك والدراسات حول تمثيل الفقر في الخطاب الأدبي. تكشف النتائج عن أربعة أنماط من التناقضات الثنائية: الفقر المادي مقابل الفقر الاقتصادي، والفقر الاجتماعي مقابل الفقر الاقتصادي، والفقر بدون مأوى مقابل الفقر مع مأوى، والفقر الصحي مقابل الفقر الاقتصادي. وتظهر القراءة التفكيكية أن هذه التسلسلات الهرمية غير مستقرة لأن النص يحتوي على تناقضات داخلية تقوض التفوق المفترض لمعنى ما على آخر. وبالتالي، يظهر الفقر في النص كبناء خطابي علائقي مفتوح لتفسيرات متعددة، ويساهم في توسيع نطاق تطبيق التفكيك في الدراسات الأدبية العربية المعاصرة.

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INTRODUCTION

The meaning in a literary work is always determined by the author to ensure that the text aligns with what has been intended (Derrida, 2017a). This makes the text structured and undeveloped, trapped within the boundaries set by the author's intentions (Pertiwi et al., 2020). This condition makes the meaning of a literary work controlled by the reader, who merely represents the text according to the author's intention. Although this approach may provide certainty in interpretation, it often renders the literary work rigid and lacking freedom (Cahyanti & Dermawan, 2021). According to Faidah, meaning is not something final; rather, it is a process of interpretation that continually changes depending on the reader's perspective and understanding of the literary work (Faidah, 2018). In a literary work, especially in short stories, meaning and interpretation may vary, and differences in interpretation are inevitable. This also occurs in the collection of stories analyzed in this study (Madi, 2020). Contemporary studies in Middle Eastern scholarship also emphasize that discourse itself often shapes and stabilizes meaning through particular structures of representation, which may later be challenged through critical interpretation (Sangidu et al., 2025).

Deconstruction is an approach to reading texts deeply, highlighting the inconsistencies and contradictions in the use of concepts constructed by the author within the text (Agis, 2022). Deconstruction is not only a theory but also a unique way of reading. The theory of deconstruction challenges the view that a text has a fixed foundation in language, structure, and predetermined meaning. Within deconstruction, there is the concept of binary oppositions that divides two concepts into opposing categories, and this theory seeks to overturn the hierarchy embedded in those oppositions (Rosa, 2023).

Jacques Derrida, as the leading figure in deconstruction theory, emphasizes the importance of binary oppositions in textual analysis, which often reveal inconsistencies between the meaning that emerges and the structure inherent within the text itself (Derrida, 2017b). A deconstructive reading requires identifying the binary oppositions that emerge in the text and then dismantling them to reveal the inconsistencies and uncertainties of meaning (Derrida, 2017b). From this perspective, deconstruction challenges the assumption that the first term in a binary opposition is inherently superior to the second. In this study, the researcher analyzes the deconstruction of the meaning of "poverty" in the short story collection *Alwān min al-Faqr* by Islām Ṣādiq through the perspective of Jacques Derrida. *Alwān min al-Faqr* is a short story collection written by Islām Ṣādiq, an Egyptian writer and literary figure. The collection presents various narratives that address social, psychological, and philosophical themes, portraying society through reflective and critical perspectives. The stories explore diverse aspects of human thought, emotion, and the complexities of life. Through these narratives, Islām Ṣādiq not only depicts everyday realities but also raises deeper existential questions concerning life, values, and human relationships (Ṣādiq, 2023).

Derrida's theory of deconstruction is an approach that highlights the instability of meaning in texts and language. Derrida critiques logocentrism, the view that there is a fixed center of meaning and replaces it with the idea that meaning always depends on the ever-changing relationships between words. Through deconstruction, he reveals contradictions and ambiguities within texts, showing how structures of meaning are often unstable and interdependent. Derrida also challenges the binary oppositions in Western philosophy and seeks to liberate thought from restrictive systems, opening possibilities for more diverse and complex meanings (Derrida,

2001; Rottenberg, 2023).

The main analytical focus of deconstruction in this study lies in the examination of binary oppositions and the instability of meaning within the text. Derrida's concept of difference suggests that meaning is never fixed but continually shifts depending on textual relations and context. In addition, deconstruction seeks to reveal internal contradictions within a text, demonstrating that meanings which appear stable often contain tensions that undermine their own hierarchy. Through this perspective, the analysis identifies the binary oppositions constructed in the short stories and examines how these oppositions privilege one term over another. The study then applies a deconstructive reading to show that these hierarchies are unstable and that the supposedly dominant meanings can be challenged or reversed. In this way, deconstruction becomes a method for uncovering the multiplicity of meanings embedded in the narrative structure (Dadlez, 2022; Derrida, 2001; Rorty, 2003).

Several studies have applied Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction to examine hierarchical meaning structures in literary texts and broader discourses. These studies demonstrate that representations in literary works are often constructed through hierarchical binary oppositions that can be destabilized through deconstructive reading (Hasanah & Adawiyah, 2021). Other research emphasizes that deconstruction is capable of challenging mythological authority through intertextual reinterpretation (Nuramalia et al., 2023) and revealing that intertextual relations can generate competing meanings that are never final (Alfianti & Taqwiem, 2020). In addition, deconstructive analysis has shown how hierarchical constructions of identity can collapse when the internal contradictions of the text are exposed (Devi & Zahro', 2022). Beyond literary studies, deconstruction has also been applied in broader fields such as public policy analysis, uncovering binary oppositional structures that centralize authority while marginalizing other social actors (Yuwono, 2025). Recent developments further indicate an expansion of deconstructive approaches into various contemporary issues, including digital narratives and environmental discourse (Abdullah, 2025; Al-Razi et al., 2025; Angelyca et al., 2020; Esposito et al., 2025; Heinrich & Cheruiyot, 2025; Dhungana, 2025; Kuby et al., 2025; Liao, 2025; Muhammad Ashraf Kaloi et al., 2025; Poole & Clark, 2026; Rahmatullah et al., 2025; Taherkhani, 2025; Uche et al., 2025; Wagiati et al., 2025; Wegner, 2025). These studies demonstrate the flexibility of deconstruction as an analytical framework; however, research that specifically examines the construction and deconstruction of poverty in contemporary Arabic literature remains limited.

Based on the expanded review of previous studies, several patterns can be identified in the application of Derridean deconstruction. Most studies employ deconstruction to interrogate hierarchical meaning structures and binary oppositions embedded in literary texts and broader discourses. In literary analysis, deconstruction has been widely used to expose hierarchical constructions of gender, identity, and intertextual meaning by revealing the internal contradictions that destabilize dominant interpretations. Through this approach, texts that appear to convey stable meanings are shown to contain competing and shifting interpretations.

Beyond literary criticism, deconstruction has also been applied to broader discursive fields such as public policy, media representation, and socio-cultural discourse, where it functions as a critical tool for uncovering binary oppositional structures that privilege certain forms of authority while marginalizing alternative perspectives. More recent studies further demonstrate the expansion of deconstruction into contemporary issues, including digital narratives, ecological discourse, migration, popular culture, and global identity politics.

These developments indicate that Derrida's deconstruction has become a flexible analytical framework for examining how meaning is constructed, stabilized, and subsequently destabilized within various discursive contexts. However, despite this wide range of applications, relatively little attention has been given to the deconstruction of poverty as a discursively constructed phenomenon in contemporary Arabic literature. This limitation highlights the need for further research that examines how literary narratives construct and challenge the meaning of poverty through deconstructive analysis.

Despite these similarities, the present study differs significantly from previous research in both its analytical focus and its object of analysis. Earlier studies have primarily examined issues such as gender representation, identity construction, intertextuality, authority, and broader socio-political discourses through deconstructive approaches. In contrast, this study focuses specifically on the deconstruction of the meaning of poverty in the short story collection *Alwān min al-Faqr* by Islām Ṣādiq. Rather than treating poverty solely as an economic or material condition, this research interprets it as a relational construct shaped by social, cultural, and psychological dimensions within the narrative structure. The research gap lies in the limited attention given to poverty as a discursively constructed phenomenon in deconstructive studies of contemporary Arabic literature.

Accordingly, this study aims to address the following research questions: how does the text construct the meaning of poverty through hierarchical binary oppositions and how can these hierarchical structures be destabilized through a Derridean deconstructive reading? By addressing these questions, the study seeks to extend Derrida's deconstruction toward a socio-economic interpretation of contemporary Arabic fiction and thereby broaden the scope of deconstructive literary criticism in examining social themes.

This study employs a qualitative approach grounded in interpretative literary research methodology to analyze the meaning of "poverty" in the short story collection *Alwān min al-Faqr* by Islām Ṣādiq. Qualitative research emphasizes the exploration of meaning, context, and interpretation within texts. (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This research adopts a descriptive-analytical design aimed at examining how poverty is constructed through narrative structures and hierarchical binary oppositions, and how these structures are destabilized using Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory (Derrida, 1976). The main textual source of this study is the short story collection *Alwān min al-Faqr* by Islām Ṣādiq, which is analyzed through close reading techniques commonly employed in literary criticism (Culler, 1982) to identify internal tensions and contradictions within the text. Secondary data consist of scholarly books and journal articles discussing deconstruction theory and literary representations of poverty, which provide theoretical grounding and socio-cultural context for the analysis. Through this methodological framework, the study systematically interprets textual elements to reveal the instability and relational nature of meaning within the narrative.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the data analysis, this study reveals two interrelated dimensions within the framework of deconstruction. First, it identifies how the meaning of poverty is constructed in Islām Ṣādiq's short story collection *Alwān min al-Faqr*, showing that poverty is articulated through hierarchical binary oppositions embedded in the narrative structure. Second, it demonstrates how these constructed meanings are subsequently destabilized through a deconstructive reading, which

exposes internal contradictions and reveals the instability of the hierarchies that initially appear dominant. Through this process, poverty emerges not as a fixed or singular concept, but as a relational and fluid meaning shaped by textual interplay and socio-cultural context.

The meaning of poverty in deconstruction studies

This section presents the findings of the study regarding the hierarchical binary oppositions constructed in the short stories of *Alwān min al-Faqr* by Islām Ṣādiq. Through close reading, several patterns of binary opposition are identified as central to the construction of the meaning of poverty in the narratives. These oppositions organize the narrative structure by positioning certain conditions as more dominant or meaningful than others.

However, a deconstructive reading reveals that these hierarchical structures are not stable. The narrative context often exposes tensions and contradictions that challenge the assumed superiority of one term over its binary counterpart. As a result, the hierarchy constructed in the text becomes open to reinterpretation. The following section presents the data and analysis of the binary oppositions found in the short stories. The following are the data and their analysis:

The first short story: "Faqada rijlahu... al-ḥamdu lillāh"

The hierarchical binary opposition concerning the meaning of poverty emerges in the short story entitled *Faqada Rijlahu... Al-Ḥamdu Lillāh (He Has Lost His Leg, Al-Ḥamdu lillāh).* In this story, there are two meanings of poverty that fall into the category of binary opposition.

> "خرج الرجل البائس من بيته الصغير ومشى إلى عمله حافيا وهو خزل من منظر رجليه الحافيتين، سيسخر منه زملاء عمله وسيطرده مديره، لا يملك مالا ليطعم أولاده فكيف له أن يشتري حذاء؟ فكر ألا يذهب إلى العمل، لكن لن يأخذ راتبا هذا الشهر، تضاربت الأفكار في رأسه، ندب حظه لتارة، وغبط صديقه صاحب أزواج الأحذية تارة أخرى. مرّ رجل بجانبه يتكئ على عكازه، رجل فقد ساقيه."
>
> "The unfortunate man stepped out of his small house and walked to work without shoes. He felt ashamed of the sight of his bare feet; he would be mocked by his colleagues and dismissed by his employer. He had no money to feed his children how could he possibly afford shoes? He considered not going to work, but then he would not receive his salary for the month. These conflicting thoughts wrestled in his mind. At times, he lamented his fate, and at other times, he envied his friends who had shoes" (Ṣādiq, 2023, p. 8).

The first meaning of poverty is that a man is depicted as being extremely poor simply because he leaves his small house to go to work without shoes. He feels deeply ashamed for not having shoes and is also unable to feed his children. Although food is a basic necessity of life, and shoes are items that almost everyone whether rich or poor possesses, shoes are in fact inexpensive and easily obtainable. Yet, in this story, the first meaning of poverty illustrates that even shoes are beyond his reach when going to work.

The second meaning of poverty, which serves as the binary opposition to the first, is that of a man who has no leg. He can only move with the help of a stick. The story does not explain this man's economic condition, whether he is rich or poor. However,

in this second meaning, poverty is portrayed in a physical form namely, the lack of a body part.

In the short story *He Has Lost His Leg, Al-Ḥamdu Lillāh,* these two meanings of poverty are resolved by the author through the statement that, although the first man has no shoes, he still possesses a healthy body, expressed in the words: *"Al-ḥamdu lillāh, I do not have shoes, but I have strong legs. Al-ḥamdu lillāh."* Here, it is implied that the man with legs is considered poorer than the one lacking food or shoes. From the perspective of poverty, the second meaning is therefore depicted as poorer than the first. This causes the text to come to a pause for the reader, as it opens possibilities that lie beyond the context predetermined by the author.

Therefore, the representation of poverty in the short story *He Has Lost His Leg, Al-Ḥamdu Lillāh* can be understood within the framework of deconstructive analysis. At the surface level, the narrative constructs a hierarchical binary opposition that positions physical disability as a more severe form of poverty compared to economic deprivation. However, a deconstructive reading reveals that this hierarchy is not stable. The narrative context exposes tensions in which economic hardship also appears as a significant and unavoidable form of suffering, thereby challenging the assumption that physical poverty is inherently more dominant. Through this process, the binary opposition between physical and economic poverty becomes destabilized, allowing both meanings to reflect and reinterpret one another rather than remaining fixed within a rigid hierarchy.

The second short story: "Laysa ladayhā aṣdiqā'... al-ḥamdu lillāh"

The second short story that contains a hierarchical pattern of binary opposition is entitled *Laysa Ladayhā Aṣdiqā'... Al-ḥamdu Lillāh (He Has No Friends... Al-Ḥamdu Lillāh).* Similar to the previous short story, this narrative presents two meanings of poverty that possess different characteristics, yet remain interconnected and form a linking line between them. A binary opposition is established between the two. These meanings hold different levels and positions within the story, where one meaning of poverty appears to be considered more significant than the other. The second meaning is not regarded as stronger than the first. The hierarchy within this binary opposition or the levels that shape it renders the two meanings of poverty static and constrained according to the order predetermined by the author. In the short story *"He Has No Friends... Al-Ḥamdu Lillāh,"* the two meanings of poverty are clearly portrayed.

"قرّبت وجهها من زجاج نافذة محل الألعاب وهي تتأمل الدمية الجميلة، كم تمنّت الطفلة الصغيرة أن تشتري هذه الدمية، لكنّها غالية الثمن، هذه الدمية حلمها. تلاشت الدمية من أمامهاكما تلاشى حلمها. لقد اشتراها أحد. خرجت فتاة تقاربها سنّا من المتجر وهي تحملالدمية، نظرتإليها الفتاة وقالت: -هل دميتي جميلة؟ -نعم جدا- هذه الدمية هي صديقتي الوحيدة أنا ليس لدي أصدقاء، وأنت؟ -نعم لدي أصدقاء"

"The little girl pressed her face against the toy shop window while gazing at a beautiful doll. How much she longed to buy it, yet the price was too high. The doll was her dream. But the doll disappeared, just like her dream. Another girl of the same age walked out of the shop carrying the doll. She looked at her and asked, 'Isn't my doll beautiful?' 'Yes, it's very beautiful.' 'This doll is my only friend. I don't have any friends. What about you?' 'Yes, I have many friends'" (Ṣādiq, 2023, p. 10).

The first meaning of poverty depicts a little girl who is very poor economically, so much so that she can only look at the doll displayed in the toy shop window. She wishes to have it, but since she has no money, she cannot afford it. The second meaning portrays another girl who is able to buy the expensive doll in the toy shop, the very doll desired by the poor girl. This second girl may come from a well-off or even wealthy family, as she can easily purchase the doll. However, she has no friends at all. Although she possesses many things, she feels lonely. In contrast, although the first girl is poor economically, she has friends who make her life more meaningful.

These two meanings of poverty form a hierarchical binary opposition in the short story *"He Has No Friends... Al-Ḥamdu Lillāh,"* reflected in the line: "*Al-ḥamdu lillāh*, I have many friends, while that girl is lonely. *Al-ḥamdu lillāh*." At the narrative level, the story positions social poverty (the absence of friendship) as more severe than economic poverty, suggesting that companionship is more valuable than material wealth. However, a deconstructive reading reveals that this hierarchy is not stable. While the text privileges social relationships over financial security, the narrative context simultaneously implies that economic resources remain an important condition for stability and well-being. This tension destabilizes the binary opposition between social and economic poverty, as neither dimension can fully replace the other. Consequently, the meaning of poverty in the story becomes relational rather than hierarchical, allowing both forms of deprivation to reflect and reinterpret one another within the narrative structure.

The third short story "Miẓallah, Lakinnahā Taḥmīnī"

The short story *Miẓallah, Lakinnahā Taḥmīnī (An Umbrella That Shelters Me*) reveals two different yet interconnected meanings of poverty within a single situation. Each meaning of poverty is placed within a binary opposition that establishes a hierarchical pattern or level by comparing the two.

"في هذه الليلة الممطرة المسكين الصغير يتجول بمظلته الصّغيرة، ليس لديه مأوى ولا مكان يحتمي به سوا هذه المظلة التي تحمي رأسه. جميعهم داخل منازلهم وأمام مواقدهم وهو يتمنّى سقفا صغيرا يحتمي به. تبللت المظلة ولم يتبلل رأسه. لكن وللحظة تغيّر كل شيء."

"On this rainy night, the little child walked with his small umbrella, having no home or shelter other than that umbrella which protected his head. Everyone else was in their houses, in front of the fireplace, while he wished he had even a small roof to shelter under. The umbrella was wet, yet his head remained dry. However, for a moment, everything changed" (Ṣādiq, 2023, p. 9).

The first meaning of poverty that emerges in this story depicts a small child who has only a little umbrella to protect him from the rain. Nothing else shelters him except the umbrella, which can only cover his head from the heavy downpour. The second meaning, on the other hand, portrays a child walking under the rain without any protection at all for his body. In this case, there is a distinction between the child who has an umbrella and the one who does not.

The author intertwines these two meanings in such a way that the child with the umbrella appears more fortunate and less poor than the one who has nothing. This difference suggests that the one who possesses an umbrella is "richer" than the one without. The binary opposition of poverty in this story thus forms a hierarchical pattern, in which one meaning is considered poorer than the other.

The fourth short story "Malaka Kathīran min al-Māl, walākin…"

The short story *Malaka Kathīran min al-Māl, walākin… (He Has a Lot of Money, but…)* presents two different yet interconnected meanings of poverty at a certain level, determined by the author and compelling the reader to interpret the story in accordance with what the text intends.

"يدفع ماله مقابل ملك كثيرًا من المال وعندما مرض لم يسعفه ماله. فقد صحّته، أي فقد كل شيء. أن يعود أنت لا تملك قطعة نقدية واحدة، لكنك تملك عقلا تملك عينا، تملك جسما صحيحا."

"He had a great deal of money, but when he became ill, his wealth could not help him. He lost his health, which meant he lost everything. He spent his money trying to buy back his health. You may not have a single penny, but you have a mind, you have eyes, you have a healthy body" (Ṣādiq, 2023, p. 17).

The first meaning of poverty in this story portrays a man who is very wealthy and possesses everything materially, yet he falls ill and loses his health. He can buy anything, but his money cannot grant him health. Even so, he continues to spend his fortune in pursuit of it. In the end, he realizes that health is the true form of wealth. Although he has money, he remains poor because he has lost his health.

The second meaning presents a person who does not have a penny, yet has a healthy body. This person possesses a most valuable wealth despite lacking material possessions. The story illustrates that the person who has money but is ill is actually poorer, despite his material wealth, whereas the one who has no money but enjoys good health is considered richer. This pattern forms a hierarchy between physical poverty and economic poverty.

The deconstruction of the meaning of poverty in the novel *"Alwān min al-Faqr"* by Islām Ṣādiq

Figure 1. The meaning of poverty after deconstruction

No.	The Title	Patterns of Deconstruction	The Meaning of Poverty before Deconstruction	The Meaning of Poverty after Deconstruction
1	He Has Lost His Leg… *Al-ḥamdu Lillāh*	Hierarchical Opposition	Physical poverty is considered more severe than economic poverty.	Economic poverty can also be interpreted as equally or even more significant than physical poverty.
2	He Has No Friends… *Al-ḥamdu Lillāh*	Hierarchical Opposition	Social poverty (lack of friends) is considered worse than economic poverty.	The hierarchy becomes unstable, as both social and economic poverty reveal different but equally meaningful forms of deprivation.
3	An Umbrella That Shelters Me	Hierarchical Opposition	Poverty with an umbrella is portrayed as worse than poverty without one.	The distinction collapses, showing that poverty remains significant regardless of whether protection (umbrella) exists or not.

4	He Has a Lot of Money, But…	Hierarchical Opposition	Poverty in health is considered worse than economic poverty.	The opposition becomes destabilized, as health and economic conditions both shape the experience of poverty.

After describing all the research data categorized within the scope of deconstructive studies, as shown in Figure 1, the data being explained and reorganized based on the framework of deconstruction in the form of hierarchical binary oppositions. Therefore, all the data found serve as ideal material for deconstruction. This demonstrates that there are elements which need to be dismantled and then reconstructed according to what has been gathered by the short story's author. All the collected data represent constructs that the author has explicitly built through the textual structure of his work.

Upon examining all the data in each short story, it was found that there is a necessity to deconstruct this data. Following the process of deconstruction, the data are expected to provide new perspectives and patterns of thought in the interpretation of the findings. This is due to the structural problems inherent in the concept of poverty constructed by the author in the meanings of poverty throughout the short story collection *"Alwān min al-Faqr"*.

This deconstruction offers a new perspective on what already exists within the short story (Nuramalia et al., 2023). The results of this deconstruction are being compared with existing facts to identify the differences. In the process of deconstruction, the researcher provided new insights and also introduce external perspectives that are not present within the short stories of *"Alwān min al-Faqr"* These may include findings from previous studies, expert opinions, and other relevant sources.

The hierarchical binary opposition of the meaning of poverty in the Novel *Alwān min al-Faqr* by Islām Ṣādiq

Hierarchical binary opposition first refers to the scope of study of the hierarchy within binary opposition, in which there is an order or sequence of two meanings of poverty that form a binary pattern. The process of deconstruction takes the form of rearranging this order to reflect the position of poverty, or possibly the equality between the two within the existing system (Margareth, 2012). The process of deconstruction positioned the hierarchical pattern of binary opposition within the concepts in the short story alongside different perspectives, as well as include several pieces of data beyond the short story itself.

In the first short story, a hierarchical binary opposition emerges between economic poverty and bodily poverty, symbolized by the loss of a leg. Bodily poverty is portrayed as more severe than economic poverty, although the character also struggles to provide food for his family and lacks proper shoes for work. While the text appears to arrange these two meanings in a particular order, a broader perspective shows that economic poverty still allows for the possibility of change, whereas losing a leg is not necessarily dependent on financial condition and may occur even in economic stability. Economic poverty is further depicted through the risk of dismissal due to the inability to meet work requirements, illustrating how material deprivation can lead to unemployment and the collapse of socio-economic life. Overall, the story constructs a tension between poverty as material lack and poverty as physical loss within a hierarchical framework.

Therefore, the hierarchy constructed in the narrative cannot be accepted as a fixed interpretation of poverty. In its ordinary sense, the term "poverty" commonly refers to economic or financial deprivation. However, the narrative in *"He Has Lost His Leg, Al-ḥamdu Lillāh"* introduces another dimension of poverty by associating it with physical loss. From a deconstructive perspective, this shift opens the possibility of interpreting poverty beyond its conventional economic meaning. The opposition between physical poverty (losing a leg) and economic poverty initially appears hierarchical, as the narrative suggests that bodily loss represents a deeper form of deprivation. Yet, a closer reading reveals that this hierarchy is unstable, since the experience of poverty cannot be confined to a single dimension. Instead, the text exposes the relational nature of deprivation, where physical, economic, and social conditions interact in shaping human suffering. Consequently, deconstruction dismantles the rigid hierarchy between these two meanings and reveals that poverty in the story operates as a broader and multidimensional concept rather than merely a matter of financial scarcity.

In the second short story, the next hierarchical binary opposition appears in the short story entitled *"He Has No Friends, Al-ḥamdu Lillāh."* In this story, the meaning of poverty is constructed within a binary opposition pattern: a boy who is financially poor and wants to sell dolls in a toy store, yet he has friends. The second meaning of poverty is represented by a boy who has no friends but can easily buy dolls, which indicates that he comes from a wealthy family. These two meanings of poverty form a hierarchical pattern of binary opposition, in which a person who has friends despite being poor is considered better than a person who has no friends despite being rich.

If we look at it only from the perspective of a person's need for social interaction, then perhaps this meaning is appropriate. However, if we examine it from another point of view, we will certainly realize that this hierarchy is not always valid. Friends are not a measure to determine whether a person is rich or poor. Moreover, friends do not always have a positive influence on an individual, especially during childhood. Friendship is indeed something very important for many people. Nevertheless, it does not guarantee that a person who has friends is not poor. In this story, friends are portrayed as something very important and to be grateful for by those who have them. However, many studies have shown that friendship also has numerous negative impacts on a person. One such study was conducted by Khoiri (2018), which states that friendship can have a significant impact on a person's materialistic attitudes and hedonism.

This research finding is very much in line with sthe depiction of children who have friends. They may fall into materialistic groups that only think about possessing the items they desire without considering the needs or benefits of those items. This is reflected in the behavior of the little boy who wanted an expensive doll without paying attention to his own or his family's financial capability. On the other hand, it turns out that there are also many positive aspects even when someone does not have friends. According to research (Trisnasari & Wicaksono, 2021), people who do not have friends may develop greater creativity compared to those who do. This is because when someone is alone, they are able to think more quickly than those who are constantly surrounded by others every day. Many of us are more focused when studying alone than when gathering with others. This suggests that individuals without friends may, in fact, be more creative than those who have friends.

Many children engage in misbehavior due to peer influence, such as trying cigarettes after seeing friends smoke, since during childhood they often cannot distinguish between good and bad influences. This shows that friendship is not always positive and may bring negative consequences. Therefore, the hierarchical binary

opposition in the short story, which implies that having friends is inherently better than having none, is inaccurate. Friendship is a personal choice that carries both positive and negative possibilities, and a person without friends is not necessarily in a worse condition, as each situation depends on individual judgment and choice.

In the third short story, the meaning of poverty in the form of binary opposition that creates a hierarchical pattern is found in the short story entitled *"An Umbrella That Protects Me."* In this short story, there is a binary opposition concerning the meaning of poverty that forms a hierarchical structure. The first meaning of poverty is depicted through a little boy who shelters himself from the rain with his small umbrella. He has nothing but the umbrella to protect his head from the rain. We can understand that this little boy is a street child who does not have a comfortable home. The second meaning of poverty is represented by another child who is also caught in the rain. He is described as having nothing, similar to the first boy. One of the differences between these two meanings of poverty is that the umbrella can protect the first child's head from the rain. However, the author establishes a hierarchy between them: the first child is considered better because he has an umbrella to shield him from the rain.

Perhaps the author's intention was to distinguish between the two with the aim of giving readers an understanding that, in certain situations, something may be considered highly valuable because it fulfills an urgent need. In the narrative of this short story, the umbrella is able to differentiate the two street children caught in the rain, with one of them being sheltered by it. The author seeks to show that the child who has an umbrella is far better off than the one who does not, even though economically both have nothing. However, the author errs in placing the meaning of poverty within the hierarchy presented in this short story. There is a sentence that undermines the hierarchy constructed by the author. The sentence reads: *"Everyone was inside their houses and in front of their fireplaces, while he wished to have a small roof that could protect him,"* which means that the umbrella is not the only thing that can protect someone from the rain. When this short story is described, everyone is depicted as taking shelter inside their homes from the rain. Thus, there must be other forms of shelter besides an umbrella, even if not within a house. Almost every building certainly has some form of roof outside the house, whether on the porch, beside the house, or elsewhere.

This means that the construction of the hierarchical pattern within the binary opposition in this short story fails. It is undermined by a sentence within the story itself, namely that everyone was taking shelter inside their homes. Therefore, the setting of the story is not in a desert or an open space where nothing but an umbrella could protect one from the rain. In reality, the events take place in the middle of a residential area, where every building or house almost certainly has a roof outside, whether on the porch or beside the building. Such places are commonly used as shelter from the rain. This renders the hierarchical opposition constructed by the author collapsed from within the text itself. The presence of a sentence that contradicts the importance of the umbrella during the rain through the existence of surrounding buildings in the short story's narrative causes the binary opposition to fall apart. Therefore, in the short story entitled *"An Umbrella That Protects Me,"* the hierarchical binary opposition regarding the meaning of poverty fails, due to the sentence that describes the presence of buildings around the character in the storyline.

In the fourth short story, the next hierarchical pattern of binary opposition in the short story collection *Alwān min al-Faqr* appears in the story entitled *"He Has a Lot of Money, But..."* In this short story, there are two meanings of poverty that form a

hierarchical binary opposition. The first meaning of poverty is depicted through a man who is extremely wealthy, yet ill, and his money cannot buy him health. The second meaning of poverty is represented by a man who has no money at all, yet possesses reason, sight, and a healthy body. These two meanings create a hierarchical binary opposition in which a person without health, even if rich, is considered poorer than one with a healthy body, even if very poor.

By establishing this hierarchy, the author seeks to persuade readers that health is absolute, it cannot be compared to the amount of wealth one possesses. The author aims to convey that health is more important than anything else. At the end of the story, the author writes, *"He died and did not take his money with him,"* which implies that no matter how much wealth we have, we cannot take it with us in death.

However, focusing solely on health while ignoring economic sufficiency is a flawed perspective. Health is indeed important, but economic sufficiency is equally significant. Economic sufficiency can be measured in various ways. However, according to research (Dewi et al., 2021), the standard of a person's economic sufficiency is when he is able to fulfill his basic needs for himself and for those under his responsibility. However, in this short story, it is portrayed that a person who has no money is considered better than someone who is ill. This is not accurate, because the ability to maintain health and meet life's necessities requires money, especially when one does not possess a single penny. Health is indeed important, but economic needs are equally significant, since a person requires basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. This serves as evidence that focusing on health while underestimating the role of the economy is not an appropriate perspective.

On the other hand, according to one study presented by Zainur (2020), Physical health is included in the category of physical needs, along with food and clothing. In this short story, the author illustrates economic sufficiency with the sentence, *"You do not have a single coin, but you have intelligence, sight, and a healthy body,"* as if a person without money is not poor, as long as they possess health. This is inaccurate because economic sufficiency is crucial, regardless of the importance of health for human beings. Therefore, in the construction of the binary hierarchical opposition in this short story, there is a fundamental flaw. Focusing on health while neglecting economic sufficiency is a mistake. Considering the facts and the explanations previously outlined, it can be concluded that health and economic sufficiency are equally essential in human life. Neither should be neglected, as both share the same level of importance for human existence.

After deconstructing each meaning of poverty in all the data that emerges from the four short stories in the collection *Alwān min al-Faqr* by Islām Ṣādiq, the researcher compared the meanings of poverty before and after the deconstruction. The differences will become evident once deconstruction is applied to each meaning of poverty in the short stories within Islām Ṣādiq's *Alwān min al-Faqr*.

Poverty as a relational construct in deconstructive analysis

The findings of this study indicate that the construction of the meaning of poverty in *Alwān min al-Faqr* by Islām Ṣādiq is structured through hierarchical binary oppositions that position one dimension of poverty as more dominant than another, such as physical over economic poverty, social over material poverty, or health over wealth. However, through a deconstructive reading, these hierarchies prove to be unstable, as the text itself contains internal contradictions that open possibilities for the reversal or equalization of meaning. In line with Derrida's concept of deconstruction, meaning within a text is never fixed but constantly produced through

differences and relational structures within language (Derrida, 1976; Yerli, 2017). Therefore, poverty in this short story collection cannot be understood as a singular or stable concept but rather as a relational construct shaped by narrative context and the interplay of signs within the text.

When compared with previous studies, this research shares a similar theoretical foundation in applying Derrida's deconstruction to dismantle hierarchical meaning structures embedded in texts and discourses. Earlier studies have demonstrated that deconstructive analysis is effective in exposing hierarchical binaries in themes such as gender representation, identity construction, and intertextual relations, where dominant meanings often marginalize alternative interpretations (Alfianti & Taqwiem, 2020; Devi & Zahro', 2022; Hasanah & Adawiyah, 2021; Nuramalia et al., 2023). In broader discursive contexts, deconstruction has also been employed to analyze power relations in public policy and social discourse, revealing binary oppositions that privilege institutional authority over other social actors (Yuwono, 2025). More recent studies further demonstrate the expansion of deconstructive approaches into contemporary issues such as digital narratives, ecological discourse, and socio-cultural representation (Al-Razi et al., 2025; Kaloi et al., 2025). These studies collectively confirm the relevance of deconstruction as an analytical framework for destabilizing dominant meanings and exposing hierarchical structures within various forms of discourse.

Nevertheless, the present study differs from these earlier works in its thematic focus. While previous research primarily examines identity, gender, or intertextual relations, this study foregrounds poverty as a socio-economic construct within contemporary Arabic literature. By analyzing how poverty is narratively constructed and subsequently destabilized through deconstructive reading, this research expands the scope of deconstructive literary criticism toward socio-economic themes that have received relatively limited attention in previous studies.

The academic contribution of this research therefore lies in two main aspects. Theoretically, it strengthens the application of deconstruction in literary studies by demonstrating that the meaning of poverty in literary narratives is not fixed but continuously open to reinterpretation and alternative readings. Thematically, it offers a more comprehensive understanding of poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing material, physical, social, and psychological dimensions that cannot be reduced to a single hierarchical framework. Through this perspective, the study contributes to broadening the analytical scope of deconstructive criticism and highlights the potential of Derrida's framework for examining socio-economic issues in contemporary Arabic fiction.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion in previous chapter regarding the deconstruction of the meaning of "poverty" in the short story collection Alwān min al-Faqr by Islām Ṣādiq, the researcher identified four meanings of poverty that contain elements of hierarchical binary opposition: first, physical poverty is poorer than economic poverty; second, social poverty is poorer than economic poverty; third, poverty with an umbrella is poorer than poverty without an umbrella; fourth, poverty in health is poorer than poverty in economy. Deconstruction was carried out on each meaning of poverty that contained elements within the scope of deconstructive study. The researcher explained the patterns and positions of new and different meanings of poverty in the four short stories. The first deconstruction was conducted within the scope of hierarchical binary opposition. The first indicates that economic poverty is

poorer than physical poverty. The second indicates that social poverty is not poorer than economic poverty. The third indicates that both meanings of poverty are equal, whether with or without an umbrella. The fourth indicates that both meanings of poverty are important without neglecting one or the other.

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher suggests that deconstructive research on meanings in literary works requires a deep understanding before beginning the process of deconstruction. The researcher must also have a strategy in carrying out the deconstruction so that the meaning produced does not develop too far. This is because the freedom in deconstructing meaning carries the risk of distorting the meaning itself. In addition, selecting an appropriate topic for deconstruction and adhering to Derrida's theory of deconstruction are crucial to ensure that the process runs properly. To acquire broader knowledge, researchers should conduct studies using this theory on literary works that contain meanings with multiple possibilities within dialectical elements, in order to obtain more diverse research outcomes.

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