

Gender Performativity of Male Characters in the Novel *Yaum Qutila Az-Za'im* by Najib Mahfouz: A Judith Butler Perspective

Siti Nurhidayati^{1*}, Muhammad Hasyim², M. Imam Multazami³

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia

³Al-Aydrus Institute of Hadramaut, Yemen

¹stnurhidayatiida@gmail.com, ²muhammadhasyim@bsa.uin-malang.ac.id, ³Imammultazami19@gmail.com

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*Corresponding Author:

Name : Siti Nurhidayati

Phone/WA : +6282252938594

ABSTRACT

Gender identity is not merely an inherent personal attribute but is also shaped through social practices, cultural expectations, and repeated performances. In literary works, the representation of masculinity can therefore reveal how gender norms are constructed, reinforced, and negotiated within particular social contexts. This study aims to analyze the forms and mechanisms of gender performativity of male characters in Najib Mahfouz's novel *Yaum Qutila Az-Za'im* using Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. This research employs a qualitative descriptive method, with data collected through intensive reading and note-taking techniques focusing on excerpts related to the gender performativity of the main character, Alwan Fawaz Muhtasyimi. The findings reveal that Alwan's gender performativity is manifested through four principal forms: social roles, language and discourse, emotional expression, and the body and physical actions. Furthermore, the study identifies two primary mechanisms underlying this performativity, namely repetition and social norms and surveillance. The findings indicate that Alwan's masculinity is not a natural or essential identity but rather a social construction that is formed, maintained, and negotiated through social practices that are continuously repeated in everyday life.

Keyword

gender performativity; Judith Butler; masculinity

Introduction

Human beings live within a social order governed by norms, values, and power relations that shape how individuals understand and express their identities. One of the most strongly regulated social identities in society is gender. In patriarchal societies, discussions of gender, particularly masculinity, often regard it as an identity that appears fixed and natural. Men are

expected to display certain characteristics and behaviors, such as being strong, rational, independent, capable of controlling their emotions, and serving as leaders and economic providers (Lusiana, 2023). These expectations function not only as social standards but also as a normative framework that regulates how men are supposed to behave in everyday life.

In contemporary gender studies, masculinity is no longer understood as an innate characteristic but rather as a social construction formed through the repetition of actions and particular social practices. Changes in social norms, work practices, digital media, and gender equality movements have challenged traditional expectations of men as dominant figures, economic providers, or emotionally resilient individuals. Studies on masculinity in popular media continue to demonstrate the presence of hegemonic ideals, such as physical dominance, violence, and emotional endurance (Bramantyo & Husen, 2025).

Hegemonic masculinity refers to the form of masculinity considered the most dominant and ideal within a particular society. It is not merely the most common form of masculinity, but rather the form that legitimizes and maintains men's dominance over women as well as over other forms of masculinity (Harahap et al., 2024). This dominance not only shapes social standards regarding how men should behave and conduct themselves but also creates pressure for men to continuously perform masculinity in ways that conform to societal expectations. When these standards cannot be consistently fulfilled due to social circumstances, personal conditions, or unequal power relations, men may experience identity tensions and internal conflicts.

This process of formation occurs through complex social mechanisms such as discipline, normalization, and the regulation of behavior. Gender norms operate by directing individuals to perform behaviors considered appropriate while simultaneously imposing social sanctions on conduct deemed deviant. Thus, gender functions not merely as an identity category but also as a mechanism of social control that regulates bodies, behaviors, and interpersonal relations within society. Men, in this context, are placed in a position where they must continuously negotiate their masculine performances in order to remain aligned with prevailing social norms (Rizal et al., 2024).

Previous studies have demonstrated that Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity can be applied across various cultural, social, digital, and literary contexts. Fitria et al. (2023) examined gender performativity in *wayang kulit* performances and found that gender stereotypes were constructed through linguistic performances and could be commodified for popularity and economic interests. Julianto and Seran (2025) analyzed non-binary identity on Instagram and revealed that gender performativity was negotiated through visual, narrative, and digital-symbolic practices, positioning social media as a space for the negotiation and contestation of gender identity. Parebong and Orindevisa (2024) applied Butler's theory to

gender decolonization and LGBTQ issues, emphasizing that gender is performative and continuously produced through social and cultural practices. Opier et al. (2025) investigated women's linguistic and behavioral performativity in the film *God, Allow Me to Sin* and found that such performances could function as forms of agency, norm deconstruction, and resistance to social structures. Meanwhile, Sirait et al. (2025) examined gender performativity in *Clueless* (1995) and demonstrated how repeated gender performances through femininity, fashion, and masculinity can conform to, challenge, and reinterpret conventional gender norms. Collectively, these studies demonstrate the broad applicability of Butler's theory in examining gender construction and performativity across different contexts, while also indicating a research gap concerning the analysis of male characters' gender performativity in Arabic literary works, particularly in Najib Mahfuz's *Yaum Qutila Az-Za'im*.

Masculinity is disseminated through discourses of masculinity that operate through systems of social discipline, processes of normalization, and the regulation of gendered behavior (Rizal et al., 2024). Through these mechanisms, men are directed to display particular behaviors considered consistent with prevailing standards of masculinity. In this context, a crisis of masculinity can be understood as a condition in which masculine identity loses its stability due to the subject's inability to reproduce masculine norms repeatedly and consistently. Similarly, in Najib Mahfouz's novel *Yaum Qutila az-Za'im*, masculinity is represented as a construction that is vulnerable to social, political, and power-related pressures.

This understanding is consistent with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. Butler argues that gender is not an identity inherently or essentially attached to the subject; rather, it is produced through the repetition of actions that conform to particular social norms. Gender appears natural and stable because it is continuously reproduced through repeated performances. However, because it depends upon such repetition, gender identity is inherently unstable and remains in a constant process of becoming (Harahap et al., 2024). Every gendered act is the result of normative regulation operating through language, social institutions, and power relations within society.

As a social construction, gender is created and reproduced through various social institutions and levels, such as the family, education, religion, media, and the state. From an early age, individuals are directed to understand and perform particular gender roles. Men, for instance, are often encouraged to be strong, rational, independent, and dominant, whereas women are expected to be gentle, emotional, and dependent (Wahyuni, 2024). These patterns are repeatedly taught and normalized, making them appear as if they were natural traits, when in fact they are the result of a long social process. Gender constructions are also performative and regulatory in nature, meaning that they not only explain differences between men and women but also establish standards regarding what is considered correct, normal, and

appropriate. Gender norms operate through mechanisms of social rewards and sanctions. Individuals who conform to gender norms tend to gain social acceptance, whereas those who deviate from them often experience stigma, marginalization, or rejection. Thus, gender functions as a mechanism of social control that regulates both individual behavior and social life.

The concept of gender performativity is one of the central ideas in contemporary gender studies, emphasizing that gender is neither fixed nor essential. From this perspective, gender is not understood as an identity naturally attached to individuals from birth but rather as something that is constructed through social and cultural practices. In other words, gender is not something that a person possesses, but something that is performed through specific actions and behaviors in everyday life. This perspective emerged as a critique of traditional understandings that regard gender as a direct consequence of biological differences between men and women (Butler, 1990a).

Gender performativity also suggests that these actions do not occur freely or independently; rather, they take place within a framework of social norms and regulations established by society. These norms govern how individuals are expected to behave according to particular gender categories. When individuals conform to patterns of behavior that align with prevailing norms, their gender identities are more readily accepted by society. Conversely, when such actions deviate from established norms, individuals often face stigma or social rejection (Butler, 1993).

Performativity is a contemporary concept in gender studies and linguistics which asserts that actions, expressions, and utterances do not merely function as representations of reality but actively create, shape, or transform reality itself (Opier et al., 2025). Meanwhile, gender is understood as a social construction shaped by norms, values, and power relations within society. The concept of gender refers to the characteristics attributed to men and women that are formed through social and cultural factors, giving rise to assumptions regarding the social and cultural roles of men and women (Handayani & Sugiarti, 2017).

Contrary to essentialist understandings of gender, Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990b) developed the theory of gender performativity to challenge the assumption that gender is an inherent, natural, and stable identity. Butler argues that gender is not something possessed by the subject but rather something produced through the repetition of actions that conform to particular social norms (Latifah & Moerdisuroso, 2024). Through this repetition, gender identity appears natural and stable; however, it is in fact fragile and dependent upon the consistency of its performance.

The aim of this study is to analyze and describe the gender performativity of male

characters in Najib Mahfouz's novel *Yaum Qutila Az-Za'im* from the perspective of Judith Butler. More specifically, this study seeks to: (1) describe the forms of gender performativity experienced by male characters in *Yaum Qutila Az-Za'im* based on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, and (2) analyze the mechanisms of gender performativity operating within *Yaum Qutila Az-Za'im* from Judith Butler's perspective.

Literature Review

Gender is a social and cultural construction that differs from sex, which is biological in nature. Gender encompasses roles, attributes, values, behaviors, and expectations constructed by society through social, cultural, and historical processes. Gender norms regulate how individuals are expected to act and present their identities according to particular gender categories. These constructions are reproduced through various social institutions, such as the family, education, religion, media, and the state, so that characteristics such as being strong, rational, independent, and dominant are often regarded as natural qualities of men, although they are in fact products of social construction (Wahyuni, 2024). In patriarchal societies, masculinity tends to be positioned as an ideal standard associated with power, authority, and rationality, while femininity is often placed in a subordinate position. The demands to fulfill masculine standards may lead to identity conflicts when individuals are unable to perform the norms expected of them.

The concept of gender performativity rejects the view that gender is a fixed, natural identity inherent from birth. From this perspective, gender is something that is performed through actions, behaviors, expressions, and social practices in everyday life. Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble* (1990b), explains that gender is produced through the repetition of acts that conform to particular social norms (Butler, 1990a). Thus, gender identity appears stable and natural because it is continuously reproduced through repeated practices, whereas in reality, it is constructed, unstable, and dependent on the consistency of performance. Performativity also does not occur freely because individual actions operate within a framework of social norms and rules that determine which forms of gendered behavior are socially acceptable and which are regarded as deviant (Butler, 1993).

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity positions actions, expressions, and utterances as practices that not only represent reality but also play a role in constructing gender identity. Gender is produced through practices that are continuously performed and reproduced in accordance with social norms (Latifah & Moerdisuroso, 2024). This process may create a discrepancy between an individual's perceived identity and the gender roles expected by society (Inayah & Fauzi, 2024). Therefore, gender identity is not absolute but rather the result

of an ongoing process of performativity. In the context of research on male characters, this theory is used to examine how masculinity is constructed through actions and behaviors that repeatedly conform to prevailing gender norms.

Forms of gender performativity can be observed through various social practices that display gender identity. In male characters, these forms include social roles, language and utterances, emotional expressions, and the body and physical actions. Social roles are manifested through the construction of men as heads of households, breadwinners, decision-makers, and socially responsible figures (Wibawa, 2014). Language and utterances demonstrate how a character performs masculinity through ways of speaking, giving commands, and expressing views concerning gender roles (Butler, 1997). Emotional expressions are reflected in the expectation that men should control their emotions, behave rationally, and demonstrate assertiveness (Maharani & Ningsih, 2025). Meanwhile, the body and physical actions function as a medium through which gender identity is displayed through ways of moving, working, and acting in accordance with masculine norms (Butler, 1993).

Gender performativity operates through regulatory social mechanisms, particularly norms, repetition, normalization, and social surveillance. Gender norms direct individuals to display particular behaviors consistently through social expectations, cultural practices, and symbolic pressures (Putra et al., 2025). Repetition serves as a primary mechanism because gender identity is continuously produced through the repetition of bodily gestures, ways of speaking, emotional expressions, and social roles. However, repetition does not always produce stability, as each repetition also creates the possibility of shifts, failures, or deviations from existing norms. Thus, repetition not only functions to maintain gender norms but may also become a space for resistance and transformation of gender identity (Wibawa, 2014).

In addition to repetition, normalization and social surveillance play an important role in maintaining gender constructions. Normalization makes certain gendered behaviors appear acceptable, natural, and appropriate, while behaviors that do not conform to established norms may be positioned as deviant (Harumi, 2019). Social surveillance operates through judgment, collective expectations, correction, and social sanctions that may become internalized by individuals (Suharni, 2021). As a result, conformity to gender norms often appears to be a personal choice, even though it is influenced by power relations and ongoing social processes. Nevertheless, because gender performativity is never completely stable, failure to conform to gender norms may also create space for tension, negotiation, and transformation of gender identity. This framework provides the theoretical foundation for analyzing how the masculinity of the male character in *Yaum Qutila az-Za'im* is constructed, maintained, and negotiated through social practices and prevailing gender norms.

Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method using Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity as its analytical approach. The research data are analyzed descriptively through the examination of narrative excerpts, dialogues, and character descriptions in Najib Mahfouz's novel *Yaum Qutila az-Za'im* that are related to the gender performativity of male characters.

The data sources consist of primary and secondary data. The primary data source is Najib Mahfouz's novel *Yaum Qutila az-Za'im*, while the secondary data are obtained from books, journals, scholarly articles, and previous studies relevant to Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity.

Data were collected through reading and note-taking techniques. The researcher read the novel carefully and thoroughly, then recorded excerpts that demonstrate the forms and mechanisms of the gender performativity of male characters. Data analysis was conducted following the model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The selected and classified data were analyzed using Judith Butler's perspective of gender performativity to reveal the forms and mechanisms of the gender performativity of male characters in *Yaum Qutila az-Za'im*.

Result and Discussion

Consistent with the focus of this study on gender performativity, this research examines the forms and mechanisms of gender performativity depicted in Najib Mahfouz's *Yaum Qutila Az-Za'im*, an 88-page novel published by Hindawi in 2022. Particular attention is given to the character Alwan Fawaz Muhtasyimi, whose representations of masculinity are analyzed in detail through the lens of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity.

Forms of Gender Performativity of the Male Character in Najib Mahfuz's Novel Yaum Qutila az-Za'im Based on Judith Butler's Theory of Gender Performativity

Within the framework of gender performativity theory, forms of gender performativity refer to the concrete ways in which individuals enact gender identity through actions and social practices. Gender performativity does not exist as a single or fixed form; rather, it emerges through various practices that are repeatedly performed and normalized in everyday life (Kiswanto, 2017). According to Judith Butler, gender is not an essential identity possessed by the subject but is instead produced through the repetition of actions that conform to particular social norms. Therefore, forms of gender performativity can be observed through concrete manifestations in the lives of characters, including the social roles they perform, the language

they use, the emotional expressions they display, and the bodily and physical actions they enact in social interactions.

Based on this framework, the present study focuses on the character Alwan Fawaz Muhtasyimi as a representation of a young man experiencing the pressures of masculinity in the novel *Yaum Qutila az-Za'im*. This character was selected because he clearly demonstrates the tension between social expectations of men as rational, independent, and economically responsible providers and the realities of his life, which instead place him in a vulnerable and pressured position. Accordingly, the forms of Alwan's gender performativity in this study are classified into four main categories: social roles, language and discourse, emotional expression, and the body and physical actions. These four forms are subsequently analyzed based on textual evidence found in the novel in order to illustrate how Alwan's masculine identity is constructed and performed.

Based on the analysis, it was revealed that the gender performativity of the character Alwan Fawaz Muhtasyimi is represented through four main forms: social roles, language and discourse, emotional expression, and the body and physical actions. These four forms were selected because each demonstrates a concrete manifestation of how Alwan performs, displays, and responds to norms of masculinity in his everyday life. Accordingly, the following discussion focuses on elaborating each form of gender performativity based on textual evidence from the novel, thereby illustrating clearly that Alwan's masculine identity is not natural or inherent but rather the result of social practices that are continuously performed and negotiated.

Social Roles

Social roles constitute one of the most significant forms of gender performativity because it is through these roles that gender identity becomes concretely manifested in social life. Within Judith Butler's theoretical framework, gender is not possessed as a fixed essence but is instead realized through repeated actions that conform to particular social norms. Accordingly, social roles can be understood as forms of gender performance through which individuals carry out functions, responsibilities, and positions that are culturally associated with their gender identities. For men, these social roles often involve expectations to become leaders, breadwinners, protectors, and decision-makers.

In the case of Alwan Fawaz Muhtasyimi, his social role as a man is frequently associated with demands to act as a leader, provider, protector, and decision-maker. Based on this perspective, the following several data are analyzed to demonstrate how Alwan's gender performativity in relation to social roles is represented in the novel.

Data 1:

"قلت لجدي: أريد أن أخطب رندة سليمان جارتنا". (Mahfouz, 2022, p. 12)

"I said to my grandfather, "I want to propose to Randa Suleiman, our neighbor."

This excerpt appears when Alwan recalls the early stage of his relationship with Randa after both of them had graduated from secondary school. At this point, he no longer positioned himself merely as Randa's childhood friend but rather as a man seeking to enter a socially legitimate stage of relationship, namely *khitbah* (engagement).

This data demonstrates Alwan's gender performativity in the form of his social role as a prospective husband. From Judith Butler's perspective, gender is not an essential identity but something enacted through socially recognized roles. By expressing his desire to propose, Alwan begins to perform masculinity as an adult man whose social trajectory is directed toward the institution of marriage (Putra & Putra, 2023).

Data 2:

(Mahfouz, 2022, p. 12). "لم يكن يباح الكلام في الخطبة قبل أن يستقل الشاب بحياته."
"Talking about marriage proposals was not allowed before a young man became independent in his life."

This statement is made by Alwan's grandfather in response to Alwan's intention to propose to Randa. The situation emphasizes that Alwan's personal desire must conform to the social norms already established within the family and society.

This data belongs to the category of social roles because it illustrates the position that a man must fulfill before being recognized as a prospective husband, namely independence, particularly economic independence. In Butler's theory, gender identity is shaped by norms that precede the subject. Therefore, Alwan can only appear as a socially legitimate man if he is able to perform the social role of economic independence (Wibawa, 2014).

Language and Discourse

For male characters, language and discourse are often associated with particular images of masculinity, such as rationality, assertiveness, independence, self-control, and the ability to confront problems logically. In practice, however, language can also reveal tensions, failures, and even fractures within masculine identity when the subject is unable to fully conform to these norms. Therefore, the analysis of language and discourse in this study aims to examine how Alwan Fawaz Muhtasyimi performs his masculine identity through speech, inner monologues, word choices, and the ways in which he responds to the social pressures surrounding him. Through the following data, it becomes evident that Alwan's language not only reflects his inner condition but also demonstrates how his gender performativity is constructed and negotiated within the social relations he encounters.

Data 3:

"إني عبد العقل الراجح، والخلق الكريم." (Mahfouz, 2022, p. 11).
"Indeed, I am devoted to sound reason and noble morals."

This excerpt appears at the beginning of Alwan's narrative segment as he walks to his workplace while constructing a self-image through his inner monologue. He perceives himself through two highly valued qualities: reason and morality.

This data demonstrates a form of gender performativity through the discourse of rationality. In Butler's theory, language does not merely represent identity but actively participates in its construction. By describing himself as a servant of reason and moral virtue, Alwan is discursively constructing his masculinity as rational, respectable, and honorable (Rohmah & Indarti, 2018).

Data 4:

"لا وقت للفلسفة من فضلك." (Mahfouz, 2022, p. 11).
"Please, this is not the time for philosophy."

Alwan utters this statement while lamenting the harsh rhythm of life: work, family obligations, and social problems have made life feel narrow and rushed. The expression emerges from circumstances that leave him with little room to breathe.

This data demonstrates gender performativity in the form of pragmatic discourse. Alwan presents himself as a man who must deal with reality rather than engage in prolonged reflection. Within Butler's framework, such language constitutes a performative practice that aligns the subject with masculine norms emphasizing swift action, efficiency, and practical orientation (Saputro et al., 2025).

Emotional Expression

From the perspective of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, expression is not understood as something that naturally emerges from within the individual but rather as the result of social practices repeatedly performed and shaped by cultural norms. Gender expression constitutes the presentation of identity such as emotions, language, gestures, and bodily actions—which does not originate from a fixed inner essence but is instead produced through the repetition of social norms that shape how individuals appear as men or women. Therefore, this section examines the forms of emotional expression displayed by the character Alwan Fawaz Muhtasyimi in *Yaum Qutila az-Za'im* based on the collected textual data.

Data 5:

"إني مسئول مطارد." (Mahfouz, 2022, p. 12).
"I am a responsible man, constantly pursued."

This excerpt appears in Alwan's inner monologue during the early phase of the narrative, specifically after he reflects on the consequences of his engagement to Randa. At this point, Alwan is experiencing a transition from youth to adulthood, where he no longer functions merely as a lover but is increasingly expected to become a prospective husband capable of fulfilling economic and social responsibilities. Under these circumstances, he faces pressures from multiple directions simultaneously, including the expectations of Randa's family, the hopes of his grandfather, and the reality of a job that offers little financial stability. The phrase "مسئول مطارد" (*a hunted man burdened with responsibilities*) indicates that Alwan does not merely recognize his responsibilities but experiences them as forces that pursue, pressure, and psychologically threaten him.

From Judith Butler's perspective of gender performativity, this emotional expression demonstrates that masculinity is not the stable and rational identity envisioned by patriarchal norms but rather something fragile and marked by pressure and vulnerability. The sense of emotional distress experienced by Alwan reveals a failure to sustain the ideal masculine performance that requires men to remain strong, composed, and in control of situations at all times. Thus, Alwan's emotions are not merely reflections of his inner state but also evidence that the gender performativity he attempts to enact cannot be fully stabilized (Wibawa, 2014).

Data 6:

"أنا قائم مثل السد في طريق حظها". (Mahfouz, 2022, p. 12)
"I am like a barrier standing in the way of her happiness."

This excerpt appears when Alwan begins to recognize the consequences of his economic inability for his relationship with Randa. At this stage, their relationship is no longer merely romantic but has entered a more serious social domain, namely marriage. However, due to his financial limitations, Alwan is unable to meet the material requirements necessary to advance the relationship into a formal union. In this situation, he not only feels that he has failed as an individual but also begins to perceive himself as an obstacle to Randa's future. His statement that he is "like a dam in the path of her destiny" demonstrates that Alwan internalizes his failure as a moral shortcoming with consequences for others.

Analytically, this expression reveals a complex emotional state characterized by a combination of guilt, inferiority, and the loss of masculine self-worth. Within dominant norms of masculinity, men are expected to open pathways, provide protection, and secure the future rather than hinder it. Consequently, when Alwan perceives himself as an obstacle, it signifies the collapse of the masculine performance that society expects him to maintain. Within Butler's framework, this failure illustrates that gender identity depends heavily upon the successful

repetition of normative performances. When this repetition is disrupted, gender identity becomes unstable and enters into crisis (Pinasthika et al., 2022).

Body and Physical Actions

The body and physical actions constitute the most visible forms of gender performativity because they can be directly observed. From the perspective of performativity, the body is not merely a biological entity but the primary medium through which gender is performed through various actions, such as working, moving, and interacting with others. These actions are repeatedly enacted, thereby creating patterns that eventually become recognized as particular gender identities.

Accordingly, the body becomes the site where gender norms are produced and reproduced through continuously repeated actions. In this context, the physical actions performed by the character Alwan should not be understood as ordinary activities but rather as performances that reflect the demands of masculinity within the social structure. To examine this issue more closely, the following data illustrate how Alwan's body and physical actions contribute to the construction of his gender identity.

Data 7:

(Mahfouz, 2022, p. 11) . "لا نجد وقتاً للنوم"
"We don't have time to sleep."

This excerpt appears in the early part of the narrative in the form of Alwan's inner monologue as he describes his routine as a worker. At this stage, Alwan is experiencing the initial phase of the conflict, as he begins to feel the pressure between occupational demands and his personal life. He is required to maintain an intensive work schedule every day, leaving him with almost no time to rest. This condition not only reflects the reality of his life as a lower-middle-class worker but also marks the beginning of the pressures that continue to intensify throughout the narrative.

Analytically, this statement demonstrates that Alwan's body has become an object of social and economic demands that compel him to work continuously. From the perspective of gender performativity, the body is not merely a biological entity but the primary medium through which gender identity is enacted. When Alwan repeatedly sacrifices his rest for work, he is performing masculinity as an economically responsible man. At the same time, however, this bodily exhaustion reveals a vulnerability that contradicts the idealized image of masculinity as strong, resilient, and tireless. Thus, this physical action illustrates that gender performativity does not always produce stability but may also generate contradictions within identity (Suharni, 2021).

Data 8:

(Mahfouz, 2022, p. 13). "وقفت أمام المدير صامتاً."
"I stood in front of the director, silent."

This excerpt appears when Alwan is summoned by the director at his workplace and is required to confront a formal and highly pressurized situation. Under these circumstances, Alwan stands silently before his superior without speaking much. This situation reflects an unequal power relation between himself as an employee and the director as the holder of authority.

Analytically, the physical act of standing silently demonstrates a form of gender performativity shaped by structures of power. Alwan's body not only performs obedience but also reveals the limitations placed upon his ability to express himself. Within Butler's framework, gender performativity is constituted not only by norms of masculinity but also by power relations that regulate how bodies are expected to act. In this situation, Alwan is unable to perform a dominant form of masculinity and instead must adjust himself to his subordinate position within the institutional hierarchy (Suharni, 2021).

Mechanisms of Gender Performativity of the Male Character in Najib Mahfuz's Novel Yaum Qutila az-Za'im from Judith Butler's Perspective

From the perspective of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, gender is not only constituted through visible actions but also through the mechanisms that continuously reproduce those actions and make them appear "natural." Butler emphasizes that gender identity is formed through two primary mechanisms: repetition and social norms and regulation. These two mechanisms operate simultaneously in shaping and sustaining individuals' gender identities within social life.

The gender performativity of Alwan Fawaz Muhtasyimi is manifested not only through its concrete forms but also through the underlying mechanisms that shape it, namely repetition and social norms and regulation. These two mechanisms play a crucial role in explaining how Alwan's actions, language, emotional expressions, and social practices contribute to the continuous construction of his masculine identity. Repetition causes these practices to appear stable and seemingly natural, while social norms and regulation function as a framework that both governs and constrains how gender should be performed. Accordingly, the following discussion focuses on elaborating each of these mechanisms based on textual evidence from the novel in order to provide a deeper understanding of how Alwan's masculine identity is constructed, maintained, and negotiated within his social life.

Repetition

According to the concept of gender performativity, repetition constitutes the primary mechanism through which gender identity is formed and maintained. Actions, language, and social practices that are continuously repeated create the impression that such identities are natural and stable. In this context, the character Alwan Fawaz Muhtasyimi demonstrates various forms of repetition related to the masculine roles he performs. Therefore, the following data illustrate the mechanism of repetition in shaping Alwan's gender performativity in the novel *Yaum Qutila az-Za'im*.

Data 9:

(Mahfouz, 2022, p. 11). "لا نجد وقتاً للنوم."
"We don't have time to sleep."

This excerpt appears in the early part of the story when Alwan describes his daily routine as being so consumed by work that he has no time to rest. This condition does not occur only once but instead becomes a recurring pattern in his everyday life. From the beginning of the narrative, Alwan is trapped in an intense cycle of labor that continues through the middle and even the end of the story with little significant change.

Analytically, this statement demonstrates that Alwan's body is engaged in repetitive practices that construct his masculine identity as a hardworking man. From Judith Butler's perspective of gender performativity, gender identity is produced through actions that are repeatedly enacted. This relentless work routine creates the illusion that men are "naturally" strong individuals capable of working without limits. However, the exhaustion implied in the quotation reveals that such a performance is in fact imposed rather than innate. Thus, repetition not only constructs identity but also exposes the tension between normative expectations and the individual's lived reality (Sirait et al., 2025).

Data 10:

(Mahfouz, 2022, p. 32). "أعمل في الصباح حتى منتصف الليل."
"I work from morning until midnight."

In the middle section of the story, Alwan once again emphasizes his work pattern, which extends from morning until midnight. This statement demonstrates that the routine introduced at the beginning of the narrative continues without significant change. Indeed, at a time when he is under pressure to marry, this pattern of labor becomes even more deeply reinforced as an attempt to fulfill social expectations.

Analytically, this repeated act of working illustrates how gender performativity is produced through the consistency of action. Within Butler's framework, repetition generates an effect of naturalization, making what is actually socially constructed appear natural and self-

evident. In this case, the continuous repetition of hard work renders Alwan's identity as a male breadwinner normal and unquestioned. However, because the results of this labor fail to transform his living conditions, repetition instead reveals his inability to achieve the expected standards of masculinity. Consequently, repetition does not always produce stability; it may also intensify experiences of identity crisis (Fitria et al., 2023).

Data 11:

(Mahfouz, 2022, p. 13). "مشكلتنا حتى الآن لا حل لها....."
"Our problem still has no solution..."

This quotation appears during Alwan's conversation concerning his relationship with Randa, yet its meaning extends beyond that immediate context because the problem in question recurs throughout the entire narrative. His inability to marry due to financial limitations becomes the central conflict that remains unresolved from the beginning to the end of the story.

Analytically, this repeated problem demonstrates that gender performativity is not only constituted through actions but also through experiences that recur over time. In Butler's perspective, repetition is not always associated with success; it can also involve failures that are continually reproduced. In Alwan's case, his inability to meet economic expectations becomes a recurring pattern that shapes his identity as a man who has "not yet succeeded." This illustrates that gender identity is dynamic and may be constructed through repeatedly experienced failures as much as through successful performances (Fitria et al., 2023).

Social Norms and Social Surveillance

From Judith Butler's perspective of gender performativity, social norms and regulation constitute mechanisms that govern how individuals are expected to act in order to be recognized as particular gendered subjects within society. Gender norms operate as a set of unwritten rules that determine how men and women should think, behave, and conduct themselves. These norms are not merely external constraints but are also internalized by individuals through repeated social processes.

Based on this understanding, social norms and surveillance play a crucial role in shaping individual gender performativity. In this context, Alwan Fawaz Muhtasyimi constructs his masculine identity not only through repeated actions but also through various social pressures and regulations that bind him. These norms emerge through family relations, the workplace, and the broader community, all of which continuously monitor and direct his behavior. Therefore, the following data illustrate the mechanisms of social norms and surveillance in shaping Alwan's gender performativity in *Yaum Qutila az-Za'im*.

Data 12:

"لم يكن يُباح الكلام في الخطبة قبل أن يستقل الشاب بحياته.." (Mahfouz, 2022, p. 12)
"Talking about marriage proposals was not permitted before a young man became independent in life."

This excerpt appears in the early part of the narrative when the social norms governing marriage are explained. In this context, a man is not permitted to discuss or proceed with an engagement before achieving economic independence. Although this rule is not formally codified, it functions as a powerful social convention upheld by the surrounding community.

Analytically, this quotation demonstrates that social norms function as mechanisms of control that restrict individual actions. Alwan does not possess the freedom to determine the future of his relationship with Randa because he must first satisfy standards established by society. From Butler's perspective, such norms precede the individual and shape the range of actions available to him. Consequently, Alwan's masculine identity is not formed freely but is conditioned by social expectations requiring men to achieve independence before marriage (Harumi, 2019).

Data 13:

"وأنت فتى عاقل، بيدك إنقاذها.." (Mahfouz, 2022, p. 32)
"You are a sensible young man, and you have the power to save her."

This statement is spoken by Alwan's grandfather during a family discussion concerning the future of Alwan's relationship with Randa. Within this conversation, Alwan is encouraged to take actions considered appropriate for a man, namely to resolve the situation and determine the direction of their relationship.

Analytically, this statement demonstrates a form of social surveillance operating through family relations. The grandfather is not merely offering advice but is also instilling the expectation that Alwan must act rationally and responsibly. In Butler's theory, gender norms operate through social interactions that continually direct individuals to behave according to expected roles. This pressure illustrates that masculinity is not constructed solely by the individual but also by the demands of a social environment that constantly observes and evaluates his behavior (Ristantika & Sudikan, 2023).

Data 14:

"رندة ليست قاصراً.." (Mahfouz, 2022, p. 32)
"Randa is not a minor."

This statement appears during a discussion involving Alwan and his family regarding Randa's position within their relationship. The statement emphasizes that Randa is sufficiently

mature to make her own decisions; however, it simultaneously and implicitly places responsibility upon Alwan as the male partner.

Analytically, this statement demonstrates how gender norms operate within male-female relations. Although Randa is recognized as possessing autonomy, the ultimate responsibility for decision-making is still directed toward Alwan as a man. From Butler's perspective, gender norms produce hierarchies of roles that regulate how individuals are expected to act. This indicates that Alwan's masculine identity is constructed through expectations that he assume the role of decision-maker within the relationship (Kiswanto, 2017).

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the gender performativity of Alwan Fawaz Muhtasyimi in the novel *Yaum Qutila Az-Za'im* is manifested through four principal forms: social roles, language and discourse, emotional expression, and the body and physical actions. These four forms demonstrate that Alwan's masculinity does not exist as a natural or innate identity but is instead constructed through social practices that are continuously repeated in everyday life. Alwan's roles as a prospective husband, breadwinner, protector, and decision-maker illustrate how social expectations imposed upon men shape the ways in which he thinks, speaks, feels, and acts. At the same time, the emotional pressures, feelings of guilt, and physical exhaustion that he experiences reveal that the masculine identity he seeks to maintain is fragile and constantly subject to negotiation.

This study also finds that the construction of Alwan's masculinity occurs through the mechanisms of repetition and social norms and surveillance, as explained in Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. The repeated practices of working, fulfilling economic responsibilities, and continuously confronting social expectations create the impression that such roles are naturally inherent to men, whereas they are in fact social constructions reproduced through various social institutions, including the family, society, and the workplace. Thus, *Yaum Qutila Az-Za'im* demonstrates that masculinity is not a fixed or essential identity but rather one that is constructed, maintained, and negotiated through the relationship between individuals and the social norms that govern them.

This study has several limitations that should be considered as opportunities for further research. First, this study focuses exclusively on the construction and performativity of gender from a masculine perspective, particularly in relation to the main male character in Najib Mahfuz's novel *Yaum Qutila Az-Za'im*. Therefore, it does not comprehensively examine the dynamics of gender relations between masculinity and femininity presented in the text. Second, this study focuses only on a single character, leaving the gender representations embodied by other characters in the novel insufficiently explored. However, Judith Butler's perspective on

gender as a performative construction provides an opportunity to examine how gender identities are constructed, negotiated, reproduced, and contested through social relations and prevailing norms. Therefore, future research could broaden the scope of analysis by examining other characters and comparing the constructions of masculinity and femininity within the novel. Further studies could also investigate the tensions, intersections, and differences between feminist and masculinity studies perspectives in understanding gender relations, thereby providing a more comprehensive interpretation of power practices, gender norms, and identity formation in literary works. Thus, future research is expected to contribute to the development of gender studies in Arabic literature, particularly by demonstrating that gender identity is neither fixed nor essential but is continuously constructed through social practices, discourse, power relations, and the repetition of norms within particular contexts.

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