**DEMOCRATIC AND POPULAR REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA**

**MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH**

**UNIVERSITY OF DJILLALI LIABES SIDI BEL ABBES**

**FACULTY OF LETTERS, LANGUAGES AND ARTS**

**Department of English**

# Woman Self-Assertion vs. Patriarchal Regulations in Nawal El Saadawi's "*Woman at Point Zero*"

Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfillment of the Degree of Magister in Post Colonial Woman Literature Written in English.

Presented by: Miss Samira LAOUFI

Supervised by: Prof. Fewzia BEDJAOUI

BOARD OF EXAMINERS:

President: Dr. Belabbes OUERRAD (MC- A) University of Sidi Bel Abbes

Supervisor: Prof. Fewzia BEDJAOUI University of Sidi Bel Abbes

Examiner: Dr. Nourredine GUERROUDJ (MC- A) University of Sidi Bel Abbes

Examiner: Dr. Mohamed Yamin BOULENOUAR (MC- A) University of Sidi Bel Abbes

Academic Year: 2014-2015

# DEDICATIONS

This Magister dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather BOUZOUINA MUSTAPHA. I miss him every day,

…to my family, through good bad and times, their kindness and extensive support have been ever-present in this important time of my life, to them l remain eternally grateful,

…to my parents, sister; *Nina* and brothers; *Samir*, *Nadjib*, *Mohammed*; my sweet hearted nephews; *Mustapha*, *Rayan*, *Lilia*, and all my aunts and uncles,

…to my Friends, for putting me up (and putting up with me) when l needed a break from this work.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMNTS

All the praises and thanks are due first and foremost to Allah and may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon his noble messenger; our Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

I would like to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor, *Pr.Fewzia Bedjaoui* who encouraged me through all the writing, her appreciation, knowledge and kindness were unvaluable.

My gratitude goes also to *Dr.M.Y Boulanouar* who supported my colleagues and me in our study and for his distinguished teaching.

I wish to thank all the members of the board, who accepted to examine my dissertation, and whom I respect deeply, *Dr. A.Ouerad* and *Dr.N.Guerroudj* .

I also appreciate the knowledge of *Dr. B.Benseddik* who inspired me in my work and who will keep inspiring me in the future, for sure. beside his support and encouragement .

# ABSTRACT

Women are subjected to male oppression and exploitation at various stages of life. Unfortunately, female oppression is deeply ingrained in the culture of the societies which ensures the continuation of patriarchal control. Having a voice in society is often something that women in the Western world take for granted. However in African countries, especially the Islamic ones as Egypt and Sudan, the majority of women remain silent, because of patriarchal authority.

The aim of this study is to discover why the protagonist of *Woman at Point Zero* chooses to prostitute to fight against patriarchy and how society and men respond to her opposition. Patriarchy shows men's power and domination to keep women in an inferior status. This research found how patriarchy made Firdaus the woman protagonist, an "object" instead of a human being and how her suffering ultimately led her to choose prostitution as her means of fighting against male dominance. Patriarchy ensures that women remain in perpetual dominance. Thus this study examines the type of oppression women face from infancy to adulthood as portrayed in Nawal El Saadawi's Woman *at Point Zero* and the measures taken by women to free themselves from the shackles of male domination and oppression. Her struggle for taking control over men carries her to death, because the patriarchal society considered her a dangerous figure that can inspire other women to resist men's authority. It concludes that female oppression is at the detriment of women and counteracts the principles of a male dominated society. Therefore, such behaviors would be discouraged and completely eradicated.



**Keywords:** patriarchy, prostitution, feminism

# TABLE OF CONTENT

# TABLE OF CONTENT

# TABLE OF CONTENT

# TABLE OF CONTENT

# GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Arabic novel made its first appearance in Egypt which was and still is the cultural centre of all Arabs. Beginning with the translation of Western novels, then imitation, experimentation and domestication, the Arabic novel has now gained worldwide recognition. Currently, there are lots of Arabic works that have been translated into many European and other languages from all over the world.

Despite this recognition, the Arabic novel still suffers from the lack of a well-defined position in the international literary and cultural landscape. The novels from the West and East are transitional, according to Walid Hamraneh, (an Arab critic), yet the Western ones have "a status", while the Arabic novels are "in search of a status", both within their own cultural and literary context, history, and within world literature. This lack of status becomes sufficiently evident, when we examine some relatively recent postcolonial publications such as *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (1989), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (1995), and *Postcolonialism: Critical Concepts* (2000). Whereas many other "national" literatures such as the Caribbean, Indian, Australian, Irish as well as the African (even the African-American) have been established and recognized as postcolonial, the case is not the same when it comes to Arabic literature.

In the Western literary tradition, the Arabic novel is synonymous with Naguib Mahfouz, the Nobel laureate for literature in 1988. The Arabic novel owes much of its development and recognition to Mahfouz, who has become an established literary and artistic institution not only in Egypt, but also in the rest of the Arabic World. Nonetheless, there are still many new and powerful voices whose writings can be seen as significant contributions to human heritage. Such writers as Mohammed Abdul Wali (Yemen), Ghassan Kanafani (Palestine), Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (Palestine/Iraq) and Tayeb Salih (Sudan) have produced significant works, but these works are neglected in terms of critical and academic investigation. Writing from and about such peripheral places as Yemen, Sudan and Palestine, these intellectuals have tackled many issues related to identity de-construction, cultural hybridization and national identity and they have appropriated various narrative techniques. Based on my readings, the work of

these writers has not been approached from a simultaneous postcolonial and structural perspective. Accordingly, this study seeks to some extent to achieve this task by adopting an eclectic approach.

Having a voice in society is often something that women in the Western world take for granted. On the other hand, in many Arabic countries, the majority of women remain silent because traditional Arabic societies have cultural and patriarchal practices that hold them together and act as their codes of conduct. This cultural behavior has been compounded by social, economic, political, traditional and cultural structures built on assumptions that are deeply rooted in our societies.

Women have to accept the mis-conception that to "be a woman is a natural infirmity and every woman gets used to it. To be a man is an illusion, an act of violence that requires no justification." (*Women at Point Zero* translated by Sherif Hetata, 1975:43-44). She has become the passive sacrificial lamb, always ready to be sacrificed by men. Consequently, post-colonial feminists have had to contend with two obvious realities: women's respect for and the obedience to their communities.

Suffering from male patriarchy, Arab women writers have learned to use writing to make their voices heard on their own terms. They have used writings as a tool of communication to bring the attention of their own people and, by extension to the wider readership aspects of culture. Their writings provide the literary spaces where questions on women are discussed and in some cases answered. Nothing could be more feminist than the forceful articulation in women's writing of deep preoccupations with, and attempts at explaining the experiences and fate of women in patriarchal societies.

Female oppression is a problem that still exists in present day society. The fact that we live in a modern world with monumental technological advancement has not changed the grim reality that some women remain discriminated against and oppressed because of the patriarchal molded structures. The cultural beliefs, traditions and religions of most societies give more attention to patriarchy, thereby ensuring the continuation of the domination over and repression of women. Any attempt by women to protest against such injustices and meted by the male traditional folk is tantamount

to challenging long age tradition and culture which is perceived as a sacrilege, if not a sin. Therefore she is made to accept her subordinate and second class position.

It is no gainsaying that women have proved their mettle in social, economic, and political spheres of the society by making meaningful contribution to its development. In spite of these, a woman, especially in Arab countries as Egypt is only respected and regarded as fulfilled when she performs her traditional duties as a housewife, mother, homemaker and caregiver who is meant to be seen not heard. Any other role contrary to these stereotypical roles is regarded as an affront to male authority and ego which results in violence and oppression.

Nawal El Saadawi the Arab world's most famous feminist is one of the writers whose writings attempt at explaining the experiences and fate of women in patriarchal Arab societies. Her works reflect cultural context where rape and female sacrifice embody the violence of a social structure that has established virility as its norm for manhood. Nawal El Saadawi as an Egyptian writer believes that women occupy an inferior position in traditional Islamic societies as: Yemen, Palestine, Sudan which manipulate the percepts of Islam in order to oppress and restrict women. Further she seeks to highlight the deeply rooted teaching of equality in the Quran and encourages a questioning of the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic teaching based on the Quran, Hadith and Charia. She does this with the aim of creating a more equal and just society. The study found that even though women occupy an inferior position in traditional society .Those Islamic societies manipulate to some extent the percepts of Islam in order to oppress and restrict women. Besides, the study concluded that patriarchy, a cultural constraint in *Woman at Point Zero* emerges as a system with political, economic, social, cultural and psychological manifestations bound to get her by underlying class dynamic.

El Saadawi's novels can present a hard challenge as they depart from the norms by incorporating multiple narrators, utilizing a circular plot structure and often slipping between memories and events in the present. Her narrators are almost exclusively Egyptian females who live in Cairo. The narrators are presented with difficulties that come from simply being female in a predominately Islamic society. In return they fight

against their fates; they are angry against themselves for being female, at their families for enforcing society's patriarchal norms upon them, and at society itself for basing this oppression on religious ideology.

Nawal El Saadawi is an Egyptian novelist, a doctor and a militant writer on Arab women's life conditions. She was born in 1931 in the village of Kafr Tahla in the Egyptian Delta, and attended college at the Faculty of Medicine in Cairo, "one approximately fifty women among hundreds of men (Malti Douglas, 1995:11). She is known for controversial writings, often an invitation to question patriarchal authority and power. She was dismissed from The Ministry of Health, Chief Editor of an important health journal, Assistant General Secretary in the Medical Association in Egypt, and imprisoned in 1981 for the courageous political activity. Nawal El Saadawi has often been silenced for advocating women's liberation. Her *Arab Women's Solidarity Association,* an international organization dedicated to "lifting the veil from the mind" of the Arab Women (Malti Douglas, 1995:11), and her controversial books, reflect partly her tremendous activism.

*Women at Point Zero* is one of Nawal El Saadawi's most controversial writing. The book is an allegory for women's struggle against patriarchy and colonial power in Egypt, an allegory narrated through the life-history of Firdaous, an Egyptian woman convicted for murder and awaiting for execution. Nawal El Saadawi met Firdaous "*in Qanatir Prison, a few years ago*" (El Saadawi, 1983:3), the woman was doing a research on the personalities of women prisoners and detainees convicted for various offenses. The present doctor asked Nawal El Saadawi to interview Firdaous several times, but Firdaous always refused. Firdaous did not want to meet anybody, especially "*one of them*", an individual related to the repressive authorities implicated in her conviction. Nawal El Saadawi had "*given up all hope to meet her*" (El Saadawi, 1983:4), when one day, as she was leaving the prison, the warder warned her that Firdaous wanted to see her. Firdaous has been "*sentenced to death for killing a man*" he said. But she is "not like the other murderesses held in the prison". "*You will never meet anyone like her in or out of the prison"* (El Saadawi, 1983:6).

# GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Throughout the dissertation, I will endeavor to answer key questions facing Western readers of Nawal El Saadawi or other Arab authors, as well as professionals involved in the field of translation. The questions that arise could be as follows:

1- Does Nawal El Saadawi address Arab readers or Western readers in her books and does she write to be translated?

2- Are Arabs allowed to expose the "negative" sides of their societies including culture, traditions, customs, to "other" cultures and societies, and thus being culturally and religiously sensitive books be translated for a foreign audience?

3- Does translation serve as an attempt to change stereotypes, or foster them and thus affecting the topics writers write about?

The answers to these research questions and problematic are based on the following hypotheses:

1- Nawal El Saadawi wrote with the purpose of revealing the causes of such violence and oppression in an Arab/ Islamic male dominated society.
2- The "different" interpretations deriving from the reading of the sacred book sutures the questioning and at the same time narrows the critical mind.
3- Translation is a cultural and linguistic process which has to be loyal to the original writing.

Probably Personal opinions of writers, translators and audience regarding cross-cultural translation, are more or less felt on ways of looking at such matters, i.e. educational, social, religious and cultural background of the audience and on translation strategies adapted by the translator depending on the objective of the translation, nature of the text, target audience and time of translation.

This dissertation is divided into three chapters including theoretical and practical considerations, beginning with general issues and finally reaching detailed aspects and analysis, to some extent.

In the first chapter, I use some key concepts from postcolonial and narrative theories to examine and investigate the thematic and technical aspects of the novel selected for this study. My intention, here, is to go beyond the encounter between the colonizer and the colonized, to focus on narratives that construe a postcolonial stance within and after this immediate encounter. Inspired by the critical theories of such

scholars as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak and Fredric Jameson, Thematic issues related to identity formation, nationalism, body-politics, centre/periphery opposition, and subaltern are to be examined. Hybridity and its attendant issues of ambivalence, assimilation and mimicry form the corner stone of this study.

The second chapter includes the theoretical as well as practical considerations, beginning with general issues surrounding cross-cultural translation and finally reaching more concentrated and detailed aspects of analysis. I will present a general translation theory, considering the definition of translation, along with different translation techniques with a look at the term “equivalence” and its connection to translation. I intended for this chapter to be general in order to lead the reader to a more specific topic which is cross-cultural translation and how it is reflected in Saadawi’s translations. I will clarify various translation theories using practical examples to arrive at the central issue of cross-cultural translation, paying special attention to the role of the translator in the matter. Here the spotlight is on Arabic to English translation as a real world example of cross-cultural translation, highlighting a number of problems facing translators.

The third chapter is an analysis of the chosen novel. It unveils the writer preoccupations of what is a woman in an Arab Muslim society. The characters are constructed to vehicle true to life events, which confirm the authenticity of woman’s oppression as a result of man’s violence and authority. It examines the different subjugating conditions that women are confronted with daily. These include domestic violence, sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, child-brides, bride-burning, discrimination in religious institutions and work place and other harmful cultural practices that inhibit the personal development of women in the society. Nawel El Saadawi’s portrayal of this grim reality in *Women at Point Zero* brings to fore the various phases of injustices and abuse that women grapple with in phallocentric societies. Set in Egypt, the novelist reveals the deep rooted cultural and religious beliefs which are actually barriers to the self actualization of the female.

The conclusion opens also paths of research related to women writings.

# Chapter One: Conceptual and Cultural Background

## 1.1 Introduction

Postcolonial studies, which have mainly developed in the United States, Canada, Australia and Britain, primarily discuss writers from English-speaking countries. They rarely include the contributions of writers, novelists and intellectuals from the Arab world-most parts of which were under British colonial influence and hegemony up to the second half of the twentieth-century-and especially from peripheral countries such as Yemen, Palestine and Sudan.

This study argues that writers from such places have addressed issues such as the quest for identity, nationalism, modernization, hybridity, mimicry, resistance, the clash between tradition and modernity and the encounter between the colonizer and the colonized. Unfortunately, such writings have been mostly neglected if not totally ignored in contemporary postcolonial studies. This sense of marginality, nonetheless, is not only confined to postcolonial studies, but also extends to the whole Arab world. Meanwhile, the Arab world itself has largely focused interest in the novels produced in the Arabic literary centers such as Cairo and Beirut.

Many critical studies have been conducted on the novel genre in contemporary Arabic literature; however, the majority of these studies concentrate on the Egyptian novel in general and on the Mahfouzian style in particular. This sense of "Egyptiocentricism" has marginalized the status of the Arabic novel outside the Egyptian literary and cultural sites. Furthermore, the Arabic novel in Western literary circles has become synonymous with Naguib Mahfouz. There is some truth in this claim for no one can deny how much the Arabic novel owes to Mahfouz for its domestication and indigenization into the Arabic literary tradition. Nevertheless, there are many other "new" novelistic voices in the Arab world that suffer serious marginalization in literary and critical studies.

Recent years have shown a serious concern with translating Arabic novels into English. More than 100 Arabic novels have been translated into English, according to

Halim Barakat, a renowned Arab critic, novelist and sociologist. However, these novels are either marginalized or ignored in terms of criticism. At a conference entitled "The Arab Novel: Visions of Social Reality" conducted at Georgetown's University Center for Arab Studies, Barakat told a distinguished group of Arab and Arab-American writers, academics, critics and students that Arab novels remain unknown, overlooked and undiscovered in the West (Shalal-Essa). I would like to argue that Arab novels remain unknown and undiscovered even in many parts of Arab world today especially in the peripheries. The literary and cultural hegemony of the Western novel has overridden any interest in the national novel genre.

The novel is not an indigenous form in contemporary Arabic literature, but an imported and borrowed form that arrived with the European colonialism in the 19th and early twentieth century of the Arabic world, which stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the (Persian) Gulf and from the Northern Mediterranean to the heart of Africa. This is certainly not to say that story telling or narrative in any sense is exclusively European. Yet it is clearly one result of colonization- when societies and cultures intermingle- that the literary forms, like the languages, of the colonizers have been adopted. The novel is connected with reality. It imitates reality whereas the traditional Arabic narrative forms were just of the romantic type that aimed at entertaining and edifying the public.

## 1.2 Defining Literature

The quest to discover a definition for « literature » is a road that is much travelled, though the point of arrival, if ever reached, is seldom satisfactory. Most attempted definitions are broad and vague, and they inevitably change over time; in fact, in fact the only thing that is certain about defining literature is that the definition will change. Concepts of what is literature change over time as well. What may be considered ordinary and not worthy of comment in one time period may be considered literary genius to another.

## Chapter One: Conceptual and Cultural Background

Generally, most people have their own ideas of what literature is. When enrolling in a literary course at university, you expect that everything on the reading list will be “literature”. Similarly, you might expect everything by a known author to be literature, even though the quality of that author’s work may vary from publication to publication. Perhaps you get an idea just from looking at the cover design on a book whether it is “literary” or “pulp”. Literature then, is a form of demarcation, however fuzzy, based on the premise that all texts are not created equal. Some have or are given more value than other.

Etymologically, literature has to do with letters, the written as opposed to the spoken word, though not everything that is written down is literature. There is also a general agreement that literature foregrounds language, and uses it in artistic ways. Terry Eagleton goes some way towards a definition of literature and its relationship to literature to language: “literature transforms and intensifies ordinary language, deviates systematically from everyday speech”. Just as architecture is the art form that arises out of the human ability to create buildings, literature is the art form that arises out of the human ability to create language.

The common definition of literature for university courses is that it covers the major genres of poetry, drama, and novel/fiction. The term also implies literary quality and distinction. This is a fairly basic view of literature, because as mentioned in the introduction, the meaning of the term has undergone changes, and will no doubt continue to do so. Most contemporary literary histories show a shift from the belles-lettres tradition, which was concerned with finding beauty, an elevated use of language, emotional effects and moral sentiments before something could be called literature.

Definitions of literature change because they describe and clarify a reality, they do not create the reality they describe. Or it may be that definitions tell us what we ought to think literature should be.

Does it really matter what “literature” is? Does everyone have to agree? Because there is no hard and fast definition of literature, perhaps it is more beneficial

to seek an analysis instead. What purposes does literature serve? What distinguishes literature from non literary works? What make us treat something as literature? How do we know when something is literature? Would it be easier to ask “what isn’t literature”?

Literature is as literature does. In exploring ideas about what literature is, it is useful to look at some of the things that literature does. Literature is something that reflects society, makes us think about ourselves and our society, allows us to enjoy language and beauty, it can be didactic, and it reflects on “the human conditions”. It both reflects ideology and changes ideology, just like it follows generic conventions as well as changing them. It has social and political effects: just ask Selman Rushdie or Vladimir Nabokov. Literature is the creation of another world, a world that we can only see through reading literature.

Literature didn’t take itself to a single definition because the achieving of it over century has been as complex and natural as the life itself. Literature is more interesting for me than other scientific field, in the way we feel ourselves free to do or to write what we want without fear or doing a mistake or fear for failure.

As literature is a means of expression, it just reflects human’s feelings, desires, emotions, fears, anger. Literature is always related with time and social conditions. Literature itself is correlated with human’s expression. It could be seen that literature was a true picture or replication of human’s life.

Long in his book “English literature” writes that “literature is the expression of in the world troughs and beauty; it is the written record of men’s thoughts, emotions, aspiration, and it is the story and the only and the only history, of the human soul”. (Long, 1994:8)

Literature needs a heavy sense of appreciation to be understood. Literature is like a dish if we don’t appreciate it, it becomes tasteless. To get willingness to find out what the author wanted to express to the readers. Therefore, the readers needed to look into not only outer surface of its component but also what was more important in the essence of it. It also implies things in the works literature had to be dug out to find the

vulnerable lesson hidden. The appreciation of literary work was always stand by special attitudes such as how to interpret, characterized and evaluate. Literature could not be separated from language because literature was language used at the best.

Classical Arabic literature is rich in many narrative artistic forms which include oral and written stories. There are works which, like *The Book of Songs* by Al-Asfahani, narrate stories about famous poets and tales of love, and yet others give accounts of wars and battles. There are also religious narratives such as *The Stories of Prophets*. All these have certain narrative elements which influence the existing contemporary narrative fiction, but none of them can be called a novel or even slightly resemble it.

## 1.3 Post colonialism

Post-colonialism in literature includes the study of theory and literature as it relates to the colonizer-colonized experience. Edward Said is the leading theorist in this field, with Chinua Achebe being one of the leading authors.

### 1.3.1 Defining Post colonialism

Post colonialism is an intellectual direction. This « era » exists since around the middle of the 20$^{th}$ century. It mainly refers to the time after colonization. The postcolonial direction was created as colonial countries become independent.

Nowadays, aspects of post colonialism can be found not only in sciences concerning history, literature and politics but also in approach to culture and identity of both countries that were colonized and the former colonial power. However, post colonialism can take the colonial time as well as the time after colonialism into consideration.

One might say that post colonialism is a vivid discussion about what happened with the colonial thinking at the end of the colonial era.

What social, cultural and economical sequences could be seen and are visible today?

## Chapter One: Conceptual and Cultural Background

As a contemporary history term, post colonialism occasionally is applied temporally to denote the immediate time after colonialism, which is problematic application of the term, because the immediate, historical, political time is not included to the categories of critical identity discourse. The terms post colonial and post colonialism denotes aspects of the subject matter, which indicate that the decolonized world is an intellectual space of contradiction, of half finished processes and hybridism.

The term “decolonization” seems to be of a particular importance while talking about post colonialism. In this case it means an intellectual process that persistently transfers the independence of former colonial countries into people’s minds. The basic idea of this process is the deconstruction of old fashioned perceptions and attitudes of power and oppression that were adopted during the time of colonialism.

A major aspect of post colonialism is the clash of cultures as an inevitable result of former colonial times; the relation of the colonial power to the colonized country, its population and culture and vice versa seems extremely ambiguous and contradictory. This contradiction of two clashing cultures must be regarded as a major theme in post colonialism; for centuries the colonial suppressor often had been forcing his civilized values on the natives. But when native population finally gained independence, the colonial relicts were still omnipresent, deeply integrated in the native minds.

A decolonized people develop a post colonial identity from the cultural interaction among the types of identity (cultural, national, and ethnic) and the social relations of sex, class and caste.

Post colonial also deals with conflicts of identity and cultural belonging. Colonial powers came to foreign states and destroyed main parts of native traditions and culture. This often leads to conflicts when countries became independent and suddenly faced challenge of developing a new nationwide identity and self-confidence. As generation has lived under the power of colonial rulers, they had more or less adopted their western tradition and culture. The challenge for these countries was to

find an individual way of proceeding to call their own. They could not get rid of the western way of life from one day to other; they could not manage to create a completely new one either.

So, how is this process of decolonization being done?

By the power of language which is the intellectual means by which post colonial communication and reflection takes place. This is particularly important as most colonial powers tried to integrate their language. A lot of Indian books that can be attacked to the era of post colonialism, for instance are written in English. Concerning the integration of western values in the Indian population and culture, one can say that the British influence is still omnipresent in the Asian subcontinent. The reason for this can be also found in the persistence of the English language. The British colonialists intended to export their values and culture by teaching the Indian population their language.

What about the relation between India and the United Kingdom today?

It is a special one and of course without tension. India has managed to become an independent country with its own political system and is still working to find its own identity.

The literature written in the colonial period is called colonial literature; and when the country got the independence it is called post colonial literature. Post colonial literature reflects a way of life and talks about customs, attitudes, religion and legends. That is an affirmation of their identity.

Post colonial literary study presents two analytic categories of literature: That of the post colonial nations and that of the nations which continue forging a post colonial national identity.

### 1.3.2 Postcolonial Theory

Post colonial theory in general is largely informed by the post modern call for the acknowledgment, both scientifically and politically, of marginalized groups whose

voices have been silenced by dominant actors( e.g.: western, middle class, men) perceiving and studying the “other” through their own (sub) cultural lenses.

Postcolonial deals with the reading and writing of literature written in previously or currently colonized countries. It focuses particularly on:

1. The way in which literature by the colonizing culture distorts the realities and inscribes the inferiority the inferiority, of the colonized people.

2. on literature by colonized people which attempts to articulate their identity.

Postcolonial theory focuses on the reading and writing of literature written in previously or currently colonized countries. The literature is composed of colonizing countries that deals with colonization or colonized people.

The postcolonial theory is a term that refers the theoretical and critical observations of former colonies of the western powers and how they relate to and interact with the rest of the world.

Greatly interested in the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized, postcolonial theory seeks to critically investigate what happens when two cultures clash and one of them ideologically fashions itself as superior and assumes dominance and control over the other.

Postcolonial literature often focuses on race relations and the effects of racism and usually indicts while and/or colonial societies. Works of literature that are defined as postcolonial often record racism or a history of genocide including slavery, apartheid, and the mass extinction of people, such as the Aborigines in Australia.

Post colonialism includes a vast array of writers and subjects. In fact, the very different geographical, historical, social, religious and economic concerns of the different ex-colonies dictate a wide variety in the nature and the subject of most postcolonial writings.

Postcolonial theory is built in large part around the concept of otherness. There are however problems with the concept of otherness. Colonized people are highly

diverse in their nature and in their traditions, and as being in cultures they are both constructed and changing, so that while they may be ‘other’ from the colonizers, they are also different one from another and from their own pasts. Through such concepts as a black consciousness, Indian soul, aboriginal culture and so forth.

The concept of producing a national or cultural literature is in most cases a concept foreign to the traditions of the colonized people, who had no literature as it is conceived in the western traditions or in fact no literature or writing at all. For instance, People in West Indies, transported into a wholly different geographical, political, economic and cultural world. The very concepts of nationality and identity may be difficult to conceive or convey in the cultural traditions of colonized people.

There are complexities around the difficulty of conceiving how a colonized country can reclaim or reconstitute its identity in a language that is now but was not its own language. One result is that the literature may be written in the style of speech of the inhabitants of a particular colonized people or era.

Hybridity is another important concept in postcolonial theory, referring to the integration of cultural signs and practices from the colonizing and the colonized cultures. The assimilation and adaptation of cultural practices, the cross-fertilization of cultures, can be seen as positive, enriching, and dynamic as well as oppressive. ‘Hybridity’ is also useful a useful concept for helping to break down the false sense that colonized cultures have unchanging features.

Culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational. It is transnational because contemporary discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement. Culture is translational because such spatial histories of displacement, now accompanied by the territorial ambitions of global media technologies. The transnational dimension of cultural transformation: migration, diaspora, displacement, relocation, makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of signification.

### 1.3.3 Reflections of Egyptian Literature in the West

For most Arab countries, as well as for most third world countries, the post-independence era did not mark the end of the struggle against the west. After the departure of colonial powers, the pervasive influence of western cultural models remained untouched.

Cairo in the 19th century witnessed a great expansion of literary activity under internal pressures of embryonic nationalism and the impact of Western cultural and scientific influences in the so-called modernist movement. Poetry, biography and history became the staple element in Arabic literature of the 20th century. There was also an explosion of interest in political affairs as literacy spread and anti-colonial attitudes deepened. New literary forms were adopted such as the novel, the most influential of which was zeynab by Hussein haykal published in 1914 dealing with human relation and the pastoral theme.

In the 21th century the book stands and book shops in Egypt carry a growing weight of publications. Much is ephemeral, a great number of school and university text books are translated from Western languages but there is also good proportion writing by Arab authors. The international success of Naguib Mahfouz's novels is an indicator of the strength of contemporary Egyptian literature. Among the most influential women writers is Nawal El Saadawi, revered among leading female writers as a feminist and political radical. Her book *Woman at Point Zero* is available in English and many other languages. She operates under constraint of the censor in Egypt.

Of course, the number of non-Arabic readers is limited and most educated people outside the Muslim world come into contact Egyptian literature in translation; the novels of Naguib Mahfouz are a case in point. Mahfouz ran foul of the conservative religious establishment in Egypt and was very badly hurt in 1994 by an Islamist assassin responding to a judgment issued against him by a fundamentalist cleric. He wrote less from that time until his death in 2006, but much of his work remains to be published in translation.

## Chapter One: Conceptual and Cultural Background

Some women colonial writers draw a relationship between post colonialism and feminism. For many of these writers, who live in strong patriarchal cultures, language and the ability to write and communicate represent power. Some of these writers for example, have noted that since the language of British ruled colonies is English, literature written in English has often been used to marginalized and constrain female points of view. In the postcolonial period, however, language and the ability to speak, write, and publish has become an enabling tool for postcolonial authors.

This dissertation analyzes the fictional works of Nawal El Saadawi *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) using the postcolonial, feminist theory of the subaltern. For consistency, Sherif Hetata is the translator for this novel. Using the theory of the subaltern as explained by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (Leitch, 2001), the primary narrator in El Saadawi's work is seen as silenced through her oppression by (Egyptian) society and by the way in which that society exerts power through religion ( Islam ).

El Saadawi's narrators are almost exclusively Egyptian females who live in Cairo. The narrators are presented with difficulties that come from simply being female in a predominately Islamic society. In return, they fight against their fates; they are angry at themselves for being female, at their families for enforcing society's patriarchal norms upon them, and at society itself for basing this oppression in religious ideology.

Because El Saadawi is not Western, it is important to use a theory, such as the theory of the subaltern that does not employ Western ideals. The origin of the term "subaltern" derives from the works of Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist, and refers to the "non-elite or subordinate social groups" within a society (Landry 203). One of the foremost writers on the theory of the subaltern is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Vincent Leitch summarizes the term's definition in the introduction to excerpts from Spivak's essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?": " the subaltern always stands in an ambiguous relation to power – subordinate to it but never fully consenting to its rule, never adopting the dominant point of view or vocabulary as expressive of its own identity" (Leitch,2001).

Spivak believes that despite the best intentions of "postcolonial intellectuals" to give a voice to the subaltern, they simply continue the silencing (Leitch, 2001:2193). While Spivak is hesitant about postcolonial attempts to give a voice to the subaltern, she does believe that it is important to listen as much as possible to the subaltern.

Are El Saadawi's narrators subaltern? Three of El Saadawi's novels provide the best opportunity to answer this question: *Woman at Point Zero* (1975), *The Fall of the Imam* (1989), and *The Innocence of the Devil* (1994). In the case of *Woman at Point Zero,* the doctor to whom the primary narrator is speaking is a secondary narrator who only appears at the beginning and end of the novel. This approach provides a frame for the main narrative, which the primary narrator's life story. This distinction is necessary in order to focus solely on the primary narrator, who is the possible subaltern in each work: Firdaous in *Woman at Point Zero*, Bint Allah in *The Fall of the Imam*, and Ganat in *The Innocence of the Devil.*

### 1.3.3 Egypt a Postcolonial Country

Cairo is Africa's largest city and is a renowned learning center. The country has the highest number of Nobel laureates in the Middle East and Africa. Contemporary Arab culture is influenced by Egyptian music, films, television, and literature.

Egyptian novelists were some of the first to experiment with modern Arabic styles. Their forms have been imitated throughout the Middle East. In 1913, Mohamed Hussein Haykal wrote the first modern Egyptian novel, "*Zaynab*". The first Arabic writer to win the Nobel Prize for literature was Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz. There are also well-known Egyptian women writers like Alifa Rifaat, and Nawal el Saadawi.

In the Western literary tradition, the Arabic novel is synonymous with Naguib Mahfouz, the Nobel laureate for literature in 1988. The Arabic novel owes much of its development and recognition to Mahfouz, who has become an "established literary and artistic institution" (Al Musawi 22), not only in Egypt, but also in the rest of the Arab World. Nonetheless, there are still many new and powerful voices whose writings can

be seen as significant contributions to human heritage. Such writers as Mohammed Abdul Wali (Yemen), Ghassan Kanafani (Palestine), Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (Palestine/Iraq) and Tayeb Salih (Sudan) have produced significant works, but these works are neglected in terms of critical and academic investigation. Writing from and about such peripheral places as Yemen, Sudan and Palestine, these intellectuals have tackled many issues related to identity formation, cultural hybridization and national formation and they have appropriated various narrative techniques.

The term "Arabic" refers to the culture and society in which these novels were written. The literary genre involved in this study is the novel. Defined as an extended, fictional narrative prose which may relate to realistic characters, settings and events, the Arabic novel has been the subject of numerous studies, particularly in Egypt which served as the centre of enlightenment during the *Nahda* period (rebirth or renaissance), and even today. First and foremost, the multiple meanings and the ways they are communicated by the narrative strategies is the main area in which this study will operate. The historical period covered in this study is from the 1960s to the 1980s, a period referred to by literary historians as the "Age of Conflicting Ideologies" (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* 16). This is the period in which the novels considered in this study were written.

Compared with the earlier periods of contemporary Arabic literature, these three decades were very significant in shaping the Arab literary scene with the changes that swept the socio-political atmosphere of the Arab world. Many radical changes happened which directly affected the Arab lands. The disintegration of the direct colonial powers is but one example. The rise of '*Nassrism*, the '*Bathesim*, two forms of a Marxist inspired Arab socialism, and Islamic fundamentalism were key features of this period. Along with the horrific wars with Israel, the removal of old regimes and the ascendancy of new ones, these historical changes had a great impact on the literary scene. This impact is reflected in the themes addressed by the Arab novelists of the time. Thus, narratives of alienation, exile, war, and displacement and power relations characterize the content of many novels of that period.

## 1.4 Egyptian Women Writers

The first women writers as Huda Eshaarawi, participated to a great degree in literary debates, which broadened the discussion on women's roles in Egyptian society in the 19th and early 20th centuries. They respond to the challenge of the west and by the early 20th century, a great awakening was happening in Egypt with regards to women's writing. Among the genres that motivated women's writing in pre and post-1919 Egypt were those biographies which focused on conduct literature. Ironically, Egyptian female writers often used women's biographies as the example for Egyptian women's success.

Beth Baron's *the women's awakening in Egypt* documents women's contributions to Egyptian public discourse at the turn of the 20th century. The fact that some belonged to a new middle class was feature of these writers subject areas. As a result their writings reveal the disparity between male and female intellectuals. Males travelled abroad for further education, whereas women had fewer opportunities to take up professionals careers. There were contradictions felt by women intellectuals. Often they used pseudonyms to hide their family ties-Another irony, in that they veiled to keep anonymity too. New topics were being born as women began to address a national identity under colonial rule.

Alifa Rifaat (1930-1996) a controversial author who originated from rural Egypt shocked much of reading public not only in Egypt, but also worldwide after her works were translated into English, Dutch, Swedish, and German. Her beautiful stories mixed critical response. In *Distant View of Minaret,* Rifaat explores the sexual and human needs of a woman, calling her husband to understand the sexual appetite of their wives. She brought a different lens to Egyptian feminist writing. Some western feminists have called Rifaat's female characters passive, while in Egypt he books were controversial enough to be kept off shelves.

Rifaat was self-educated and firmly grounded in Islamic values, believing that women would be served best by a proper application of Islam. Her work doesn't wave

a flag of women's rights. She was surprised to be called a feminist, but it does deal frankly with women's desires, as in the collection's title story.

Alifa Rifaat wasn't the only Egyptian woman writer whose books were banned in Egypt. Nawel El Saadawi. Post colonial Women writings are viewed as an antidote, a resistant to colonial authority and the superiority of Western patriarchal civilization.

## 1.5 **The Status of Woman in Islam**

We need to provide a fair evaluation of what Islam contributed or failed to contribute toward the restoration of the woman's dignity and rights. In order to achieve this objective, it is useful to review briefly how women were treated in general in previous civilizations and religions, especially those which preceded Islam. A survey of the status of women in pre-Islamic Egypt may shed more light on the subject, thus providing a better basis for an impartial evaluation. The chapter starts with a brief survey of the status of women in pre-Islamic Egypt and other countries. It then focuses on the position of Islam regarding the status of women. A conclusion would then be drawn on what Islam contributed or failed to contribute toward the restoration of woman's dignity and rights. Part of the information provided here, however, describes the status of the woman as late as the nineteenth century, more than twelve centuries after the advent of Islam.

Before the advent of Islam, conditions for women in Egypt were very bad. Women were treated like slaves or property. They were not regarded as human beings but as a kind of a sub-species between humans and animals. Allen, E. A., History of Civilization, (1989) states that a wife was described by historians as: "a babe, a minor, a ward, a person incapable of doing or acting anything according to her own individual taste, a person continually under the tutelage and guardianship of her husband." Again, in his submission to the Commission on the Law of Marriage and Divorce and Matrimonial.

Status of Women," Seyyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi, Chief Missionary of the Bilal Muslim Mission of Tanzania, wrote: "the Babylonians and the ancient Egyptians punished the woman for her husband's mistakes. Therefore, the birth of a daughter in a family was not an occasion for rejoicing, but was regarded with humiliation."

Additionally, women were never even treated as a party to a marriage contract because by their culture, they were nonentities. For example, in the Mosaic Law, the wife was betrothed and in explaining this concept, Rev. T.K. Cheyene, and J.S. Black in Encyclopedia Biblica, (1902) state: "To betroth a wife to oneself meant simply to acquire possession of her by payment of the purchase money; the betrothed is a girl for whom the purchase money has been paid." From the legal point of view, the consent of the girl was not necessary for the validation of her marriage. This meant that women had no independence, could own no property and were not allowed to inherit the husband. As a result, a husband could treat her as one of his property making physical abuse permissible. As to the right of divorce, Rev. Cheyene and Black in Encyclopedia Biblica, (1902:2445) state: “The woman being man's property, his right to divorce her follows as a matter of course. The right to divorce was held only by man. In the Mosaic Law, divorce was a privilege of the husband only.”

The situation in India and most parts of Europe was no better. It was due to this unthinkable state of woman that James Hasting in Dictionary of the Bible, (1963) states that according to the English Common Law:

> ...all real property which a wife held at the time of a marriage became a possession of her husband. He was entitled to the rent from the land and to any profit which might be made from operating the estate during the joint life of the spouses. As time passed, the English courts devised means to forbid a husband's transferring real property without the consent of his wife, but he still retained the right to manage it and to receive the money which it produced. As to a wife's personal property, the husband's power was complete. He had the right to spend it as he saw fit.

Again, according to Rev. T.K. Cheyene, and J.S. Black in Encyclopedia Britannica, (1902) we find a summary of the legal status of women in the Roman civilization which was similar to that of Egyptian women:

> In Roman law a woman was even in historic times completely dependent. If married she and her property passed into the power of her husband . . . the wife was the purchased property of her husband, and like a slave acquired only for his benefit. A woman could not exercise any civil or public office, could

> not be a witness, surety, tutor, or curator; she could not adopt
> or be adopted, or make will or contract.

Describing the status of the Indian woman who shared the same sentiment with the Egyptian woman, the Encyclopedia Britannica, states:

> In India, subjection was a cardinal principle. Day and night must women be held by their protectors in a state of dependence says Manu. The rule of inheritance was agnatic, that is, descent traced through males to the exclusion of females. In Hindu scriptures, the description of a good wife is as follows: "a woman whose mind, speech and body are kept in subjection, acquires high renown in this world, and, in the next, the same abode with her husband. (1992:2946)

Moreover, in Athens, according to Rev. T.K. Cheyene, and J.S. Black in the same book state that women were not better off than the Indian, the Roman or the Egyptian women.

Athenian women were always minors, subject to some male – to their father, to their brother, or to some of their male kin. Her consent in marriage was not generally thought to be necessary and she was obliged to submit to the wishes of her parents, and receive from them her husband and her lord, even though he were stranger to her. Furthermore, in their book, *Marriage East and West*, (1960:2946) David and Vera Mace wrote:

> Let no one suppose, either, that our Christian heritage is free of such slighting judgments. It would be hard to find anywhere a collection of more degrading references to the female sex than the early Church Fathers provide. Lecky, the famous historian, speaks of these fierce incentives which form so conspicuous and so grotesque a portion of the writing of the Fathers….
> woman was represented as the door of hell, as the mother of all human ills. She should be ashamed at the very thought that she is a woman. She should live in continual penance on account of the curses she has brought upon the world. She should be ashamed of her dress, for it is the memorial of her fall. She should be especially ashamed of her beauty, for it is the most potent instrument of the devil.(1960:100)

## 1.5.1 Genital Mutilation Practice :( Female-Circumcision) and Polygamy in Islamic Countries

A crude cultural practice, genital mutilation, was prevalent in Egypt. Alison T. Slack in Female Circumcision: A Critical Appraisal, (1980: 480) states that «female circumcision has been practiced from as early as 2500 years ago and continues in practice today in over forty countries." Fran Hosken notes in her (1994:45) Hosken Report that Egypt is one of the countries which have a circumcised female population of 60 to 75% and female children were circumcised at the age of six. Added to Slack's assertion is Dr. Marie Assad's Female Circumcision in Egypt: Social Implications, Current Research and Prospects for Change, (1980:4) that proposes that the origins of female circumcision are Egyptian, since evidence has been found that infibulations were practiced on ancient mummies. Thus, infibulations are also called *Pharonic circumcision* in the Sudan and in Egypt.The primary job of the clitoris is for sexual stimulation. When some or all of the genitals are removed, the ability for full sexual development is hindered in the process. The woman's body thus joins others in a language which is muted because there is the instant separation of her sexuality from her biological function -- reproduction. Marriage, after becoming 'purified' through circumcision ultimately leads to childbearing.

Female Genital Mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) refers to all procedures involving partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. FGM/C is a violation of girls' and women's human rights. Yet where it is still practiced, FGM/C is performed in line with tradition and social norms and is strongly associated with ethnicity. More than 125 million girls and women alive today have been cut in the 29 countries in Africa and the Middle East where FGM/C is concentrated. If current trends continue, as many as 30 million girls are at risk of being cut before their 15th birthday. However, the data also show that the majority of girls and women in most practicing countries think FGM/C should end. The practice is less prevalent among adolescent girls than among their middle-aged counterparts in most of the 29 countries.

## Chapter One: Conceptual and Cultural Background

The World Health Organization (WHO) classified FGM/C into four broad categories in 1995 and again in 2007:

Type I: Partial or total removal of the clitoris and/or the prepuce.

Type II: Partial or total removal of the clitoris and labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora.

Type III: Narrowing of the vaginal orifice by cutting and bringing together the labia minora and/or the labia majora to create a type of seal, with or without excision of the clitoris. In most instances, the cut edges of the labia are stitched together, which is referred to as 'infibulations'.

Type IV: All other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, for example: pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterization. (UNICEF, 2007)

FGM/C is condemned by a number of international treaties and conventions, as well as by national legislation in many countries. Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being," and this statement has been used to argue that FGM/C violates the right to health and bodily integrity. With FGM/C considered as a form of violence against women, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women can be invoked. Similarly, defining it as a form of torture brings it under the rubric of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Moreover, since FGM/C is regarded as a traditional practice prejudicial to the health of children and is, in most cases, performed on minors, it violates the Convention on the Rights of the Child. An interagency statement on FGM/C, issued by 10 UN organizations, was issued in 2008.

FGM/C is concentrated in a swathe of 29 countries from the Atlantic coast to the Horn of Africa, with wide variations in prevalence. The practice is almost universal in Somalia, Guinea, Djibouti and Egypt, with levels above 90 per cent, while it affects only 1 per cent of girls and women in Cameroon and Uganda.

## Chapter One: Conceptual and Cultural Background

Saadawi's most important novels, *A Woman at Point Zero* (1973) and *God Dies By the Nile* (1976) have recently been reprinted in new editions by Zed in London, along with her influential study on Arab women, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, originally published in 1977. The English translation of *The Hidden Face of Eve* first appeared in 1980; it is undoubtedly the most recognized of her works, and one which has had the greatest impact on a Western readership. The chapters on female genital mutilation are unforgettable, and drew attention for obvious reasons; a 1982 New York Times review by Vivian Gornick was entitled 'About the Mutilated Half and focused almost exclusively on this aspect of the book. The images of brutalized girls, damaged by fingernails and razors, are overwhelming, as are El Saadawi's reports of the physical and psychological trauma suffered in consequence. That genital mutilation is not a specifically Islamic tradition but an African one, with a history long predating the Islamic conversions of nations where it is still practiced.

Apart from female circumcision, in Marriage in Islamic Law: The Modernist Viewpoint, *(*1978) Khadduri Maji observes that in pre-Islamic Egypt, the culture of the people permitted unrestricted polygamy. Additionally Cory H. Sukuma in Law and Customs, (1953: 52) admits that anthropologists tell us that among various tribes and societies, polygamy is a social and economic necessity because children are a source of additional labour for the earning capacity of the family and to have more children under such situations would require the practice of polygamy. David Murray, an anthropologist, defends the practice and insists in (*The Washington Times,* 2000), that historically, polygamy is more common than monogamy. Leonard J. Swidler in Women in Judaism: the Status of Women in Formative Judaism, (1976: 144-148) argues that the *Talmud* (collection of Jewish law) advises a maximum of four wives and European Jews continued to practice polygamy until the sixteenth century while Oriental Jews regularly practiced polygamy until they arrived in Israel where it was forbidden under civil law. However, he adds, under religious law which overrides civil law in such cases, it is permissible.(ibid.44-45)

Besides, polygamy was, reportedly, practiced by Hebrew patriarchs such as David, Moses, Abraham, and Jacob in the Old Testament. In Judaism it is notable that

most of the Old Testament Prophets were polygamous. Hasting, in his book The Dictionary of the Bible, (1963) states that in the Old Testament, Abraham, "the friend of God" had more than one wife, David had one hundred wives, and Solomon is even said to have had 700 wives and 300 concubines. (1907) God had allowed such marriages to certain men of the Old Testament only in particular circumstances, and if a Christian wanted to follow their example he had to show that the circumstances were similar in his case; but polygamy was undoubtedly preferable to divorce. It is against this background that, Yusuf Ali in The Glorious Qur'an: Text Translation, and Commentary, (1979) defends polygamy when he writes:

> Polygamy was prevalent among all the nations of antiquity, not excluding the Hindus and Buddhists. The world in general and Arabia in particular before the ministry of the Holy Prophet was lying deeply buried under gross licentiousness and depravity which historic fact no educated one among us can ever contradict, particularly about the private life of the rulers of the states. The great king Dasarata, the father of Sri Rama, was polygamous. The Christian monarchs of Europe could not help themselves against having wives more than one. Henry the VIII of England had as many as eight wives. Even the great Apostles of God like Abraham, Solomon and the others had wives more than one.(1974:14)

But the Philosophy behind the legalization of polygamy in ancient Egypt defeats the essence of its practice. The Philosophy is explained in the Encyclopedia Biblica as: “The man who owns his wife as a chattel can on the same principle own as many as he pleases, that is to say, as many as he can afford to buy and keep.”(P: 2946) Though some of the early Christian Fathers in Egypt accused the Jewish Rabbis of sensuality, no Council of the Church in the earliest centuries opposed polygamy, and no obstacle was put in the way of its practice by kings in Egypt and other countries where it had occurred in the times of paganism. It was only at the beginning of the eleventh century that polygamy was expressly prohibited in Judaism.

Apart from polygamy, the traditional dress code for the married woman in Egypt was very simple. Outside her home, an Egyptian married woman traditionally wears a black outer dress over her brightly colored housedress and covers her hair with a long veil, which often sweeps the ground behind her. She wears black dress and head

cover embroidered in tiny cross-stitch designs: blue for unmarried women and red for married women. She covers her face with a veil highlighted in the same stitches and often decorated with shells and coins. She wears her dowry of gold necklaces and silver bracelets and anklets which are an insurance against poverty if her husband divorces her or she becomes widowed.

The points discussed were the state of women in Egypt before Islam was introduced. During the initial Islamic invasion in 639 AD, Egypt was ruled at first by governors acting in the name of the Righteous Caliphs, and then the Umayyad Caliphs in Damascus. From that time till date, Islam has been practiced by the majority of Egyptians and it governs their personal, political, economic and legal lives. Islam originated from what is today Saudi Arabia and the Prophet Muhammad is seen as the last of God's emissaries to bring revelation to mankind. He was distinguished with bringing a message for the whole of mankind, rather than just to a certain people. As Moses brought the Torah and Jesus the Bible, Muhammad brought the last book, the Qur'an. According toYusuf Ali in The Glorious Qur'an: Text Translation, and Commentary, (1979) the Qur'an (literally "the recitation") is the central religious text of Islam. The Qur'an and the *Hadith*, (sayings of Mohammed) properly and understood unbaised, he adds, provide the basic source of authentication for any position or view which is attributed to Islam, and Muslims believe the Qur'an to be the book of divine guidance and direction for mankind and they consider the text in its original Arabic to be the literal word of God. (the Qur'an, 2:23–24)

The Qur'an also ordains that the followers of Islam need to obey Allah and obey the Messenger (Prophet Muhammad), stressing the importance of keeping the commandments mentioned in the Qur'an by Allah, and following all the teachings of Muhammad, (4:59) labeling everyone who concurs as a 'Muslim'(22:78) and as a part of the "best of communities brought forth from mankind."(3:110) According to the Islamic religion, God, the Most Gracious, Most Merciful, insists on making His religion easy, practical and enjoyable for His true believers. He reminds Muslims in the Quran that He has placed no hardship on His followers in practicing the religion "You shall strive for the cause of God as you should strive for His cause. He has chosen you and has placed no hardship on you in practicing your religion - the religion

of your father Abraham." (22:78) For this reason, no one can place any hardship or rule on any Muslim, male or female.

In terms of women's rights women generally had fewer legal restrictions under Islamic Law. For example, Badr Gamal M. in "Islamic Criminal Justice," The American Journal of Comparative Law (1984:78), says under traditional interpretations of sharia, women had the right to keep their surnames upon marriage, inherit and bestow inheritance, independently manage their financial affairs and contract marriages and divorce. Indeed, the Qur'an provides clear-cut evidence that woman is completely equated with man in the sight of God in terms of her rights and responsibilities. The Qur'an states: "Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds." (74:38) It also states:

> ..So their Lord accepted their prayers, (saying): I will not suffer to be lost the work of any of you whether male or female. You precede one from another... Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has faith, verily to him will we give a new life that is good and pure, and we will bestow on such their reward according to their actions.(ibid.3: 195)

Moreover, before Islam, having a female baby was such a disgrace that it was acceptable if their fathers buried them alive, and there were no consequences for this heinous crime. John L. Esposito in The Oxford Dictionary of Islam, (2003:76) states that the general improvement of the status of Arab women included prohibition of female infaticide and recognizing women's full personhood. Criticizing the attitudes of such parents who reject their female children, the Qur'an states:

> When news is brought to one of them, of (the Birth of) a female (child), his face darkens and he is filled with inward grief! With shame does he hide himself from his people because of the bad news he has had! Shall he retain her on (sufferance) and contempt, or bury her in the dust? Ah! What an evil (choice) they decide on? (ibid.16: 58-59).

Far from saving the girl's life so that she may later suffer injustice and inequality, Islam requires kind and just treatment for her. Among the sayings of Prophet Muhammad in this regard are the following: "Whosoever has a daughter and he does not bury her alive, does not insult her, and does not favor his son over her, God will enter him into Paradise." A similar *Hadith* (sayings of Prophet Mohammed)

deals in like manner with one who supports two sisters. “Whosoever supports two daughters till they mature, he and I will come in the Day of Judgment as this (and he pointed with his two fingers held together.) (Ibn-Hanbal, 2104) Again, the right of females to seek knowledge is not different from that of males. Prophet Muhammed said: "Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim." (ibid.3:6) The word “Muslim” as used here includes both males and females.

Besides all other provisions for her protection at the time of marriage, Islam specifically decreed that a woman has the full right to her marriage gift, (Mahr) which is presented to her by her husband and is included in the nuptial contract, and that such ownership is not transferable to her father or husband. According to John L. Esposito in The Oxford Dictionary of Islam, (2003) under Islamic law, marriage was no longer viewed as a "status" but rather as a contract in which the woman's consent was imperative. (p.79) the concept of *Mahr* in Islam is neither an actual or symbolic price for the woman, as was the case in Hebrew culture, but rather it is a gift symbolizing love and affection.

As regards polygamy, Islam did not outlaw polygamy; it regulated and restricted it. In Islam, polygamy is neither required nor encouraged, but simply permitted. Before the advent of Islam, some men had many wives, but Islam came with a limit of four and there is the condition of dealing justly, otherwise men are not allowed to marry more than one wife. However, some Muslims misunderstand their religion and think that polygamy is allowed without a good reason. Examples of situations when polygamy solves problems are when women outnumber men such as in wars, which result in a large number of widows and orphans or if the first wife is chronically sick or disabled, or unable to have children. In such a situation Islam states that polygamy is a moral, practical and humane solution. (The Qur’an) Abd Al-Ati Hammuda in *Islam in Focus*, (1963) argues that the verse which allows polygamy was revealed after the battle of *Uhud* in which many Muslims were killed, leaving widows and orphans for whom due care was incumbent upon the Muslim survivors. The verse in the Qur’an that allows polygamy is: “If you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four; but if you

fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then(marry) only one…" (The Qur'an.4:3)

From this verse, a number of facts are evident: that polygamy is neither mandatory, nor encouraged, but rather merely permitted; that the permission to practice polygamy is not associated with mere satisfaction of passion. It is rather associated with compassion toward widows and orphans, a matter that is confirmed by the atmosphere in which the verse was revealed, that even in such a situation, the permission is far more restricted than the normal practice which existed among the Arabs and other peoples at that time when men married as many as ten or more wives; and that dealing justly with one's wives is an obligation. This applies to housing, food, clothing, and kind treatment, among others, for which the man is fully responsible. If one is not sure of being able to deal justly with them, the Qur'an says: "then (marry) only one." This verse, when combined with another verse in the same chapter, shows some discouragement of such plural marriages. The other verse plainly states: "You are never able to be fair and just as between women even if it is your ardent desire…" (Qur'an 4:129) The requirement of justice rules out the concept of the man can "own as many as he pleases."

## 1.6 Definition of Feminism

"Feminism refers to the body of thought on the cause and nature of women's disadvantaged and subordinate position in society, and efforts to minimize and eliminate the subordination."(Hughes, 2002:160)

Since the beginning of time women have been considered inferior to men, which seem to proceed to affect everyday lives of all social beings in this world. Feminism, a word used first in France in 1872 as (les feminists). The Oxford English Dictionary lists 1894 for the first appearance of "feminists" to the English language importing from France "women's right" was probably the term used most commonly.

## Chapter One: Conceptual and Cultural Background

The history of feminism involves the story of feminist movements and of feminist thinkers. Depending on time, culture, and country, feminist around the world have sometimes had different causes and goals.

Women have a disease, a disease that will prevent them for ever having the political drive to achieve political, social or economic opportunities men have. This "disease" is the need for independency and self respect or the lack there of. This is what we have come to know as feminism. Understanding that the need for independency and self-respect is not a real disease, it is just a metaphor for how women go about trying to achieve them. "For nearly hundred and fifty years, women have fought for equality and been oppressed by men, and no matter what they do, they will never be considered equals" (Hughes, 2002:161)

Feminism is theory that men and women should be equal politically, economically, and socially. Notice that this theory does not subscribe to differences between men and women, nor does it refer to excluding men or only furthering women's causes. Most of other branches of feminism do. Feminism is about equality of the sexes and activism to achieve such equality for women. Feminism refers to a diverse variety of beliefs, ideas, movements, and agendas for actions. Here is what Rosemary Radford Ruether finds to be the core similarities among those using the term for their own beliefs, ideas, movements, and agendas for action:

> Feminism consists of ideas and beliefs of what culture is like for women just because they are women, compared to what the world is like for men just because they are men.

B-Feminism also includes ideas and beliefs about how culture can be and should be different ---goals, ideals, visions. In ethical terms, this form or aspect of feminism is perspective.

C-Feminism includes ideas and beliefs about the importance and value of moving from A to B ---a statement of commitment to behavior and action to produce that change.

## Chapter One: Conceptual and Cultural Background

D-Feminism also refers to a movement—a collection of loosely connected groups and individuals committed to organized action, including changes in behavior of members of the movement and persuasion of others outside the movement to make change.

Feminism assumes that such treatment is cultural and thus possible to change and not simply "the way the world is and must be"; feminism looks to a different culture as possible. It consists of activism, individually and in groups, to make personal and social change towards that more desirable culture.

What is feminism and why should we do it? Is it relevant to cross culturally? Feminism basically means the affirmation of the full humanity of women. This means that all the ways women have been defined as inferior, secondary and dependent on men since the rise of patriarchy roughly. It means that women are affirmed as fully human, not partly human or complementary to the male, but with all human attributes and capacities.

Feminism is relevant cross culturally because all known cultures presently existing have been shaped in one way or another by patriarchy, although in different ways. Thus feminism must take a vast plurality of cultural context and forms.

Feminism has accomplished a lot in the last hundred years since it began to reform law, culture and social relations in the late nineteenth century. Patriarchy is very deeply entrenched and has endless ways of reasserting its patterns of male domination, covertly and overtly in some areas it asserts itself aggressively and violently.

The main character of "woman at point zero" chooses to be a prostitute to fight against patriarchy and how the society, especially men, respond to her opposition, patriarchy shows men's power to keep women in a secondary status. Patriarchy is divided into two categories: private patriarchy which is related to the rule of husband and father in the family, and public patriarchy which occurs outside the family in Firdaous's life. This research found how both private and public patriarchy make Firdaous an object instead of a human being and how her suffering ultimately led her

to choose prostitution as her means of fighting against male dominance. Her struggle for taking control over men carries her to death women to resist men's authority.

## 1.6 .1 History of Feminism

For many centuries women had been traditionally regarded as inferior to men physically and intellectually. Throughout most of western history, women were confined to the domestic sphere, while public life was reserved for men. In medieval Europe, women were denied the right to own property, to study, or to participate in public life. Law and theology both had ordered their subjection. Women couldn't possess property in their own names, or control the disposal of their children or even for their own persons. Moreover, women had little access to education and were barred from most professions. The first organized women's movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries found that the absence of women was largely obvious from standard history

The principle theme of feminism was equality. Thus women have been fighting for equality for more than 100 years. The steps of this struggle are called "waves". The following is describing the important elements in these waves of activism.

### 1.6 .1.1 First Wave Feminist

The writing of feminist history has been closely linked with contemporary feminist politics as well as with changes in the discipline of history itself. When women sought to question inequalities in their own lives they turned to history to understand the roots of their oppression and to see what they could learn from challenges that had been made the past. If a woman's role could shown to be socially constructed within a specific historical context, rather than natural and universal, then feminist could argue that it is was open to change.

Women struggled primarily on gaining legal rights for instance (women's suffrage) the right to vote and property rights. The first known publications by women was a demand for equality between men and women were published in the 15th

century, but the first wave feminist really began in earnest in the late 1800's and early 1900's led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B Anthony who both struggled to secure the vote for women in the united states. Little by little, women's demands for higher education, entrance into trades and professions, married women's rights to property, and the right to vote was conceded. In the United States after woman suffrage was won in 1920.women were divided on the question of equal standing with men (advocated by the National Woman's party) versus some protective legislation. This wave of feminism ended when women made some legal gains in North America like (right to have a say with regards to their children, the right to own property) and when some women won the right to vote between 1917 and 1920. In Canada, Aboriginal women living in reserves would not win the right to vote until 1960.

### 1.6 .1.2 Second Wave Feminism

Second wave feminism is a period of feminist activity that first began in the early 1960's in the United States, and eventually spread throughout the western world and beyond. In the United States this movement lasted through the early 1980's. Whereas, first wave feminism focused mainly on suffrage and overturning legal obstacles to gender equality, Second wave focused on a broad range of issues in the 1960's, 70's and early 80's including discrimination in work place and in border society. It also drew attention to domestic violence and marital rape issues, establishment of rape crisis and battered women's shelters, and changes in custody and divorce law. It later became a worldwide movement that was strong in Europe and parts of Asia. With the leadership of women such as Bella Abzug, Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem, the Equal Right Amendments was pushed through Congress in 1972, but by 1982 it felt short ratification. The National Action Committee on the status of women was set up following the Canadian Royal Commission on the status of women to advocate for women's equality and became an important focal point for feminist action in Canada during the 1970's and 80's.

By the end of the 20$^{th}$ century, European and American feminists had begun to interact with the new feminist movements of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Women in developed countries were terrified to discover that women in some countries were

required to wear veils or to endure forced marriage, female infanticide, widow burning, or female genital cutting (FGC).

After the 1980 World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: equality development and peace, in Copenhagen, women from less developed complained that the veil and FCG had been chosen as conference priorities without consulting the women most concerned. In Cairo women from the third world protested outside because they believed the agenda has been hijacked by Europeans and Americans.

Still, the close of the 20th century saw women around the world advancing their interests, although often in fits and starts. However, feminism achieved significant gains for women, as seen in the eradication of FCG in many African countries or government efforts to end widow burning in India.

### 1.6 .1.3 Third Wave Feminism

The third wave feminism is a term identified with several diverse strains of feminist activity and study. This wave emerged in the mid-1990's in part as a response to the backlash from the gains second wave feminists had made in the 1970's and 80's. This wave of feminism is not concerned around one or two key struggles, such as the right to vote or reproductive choice, as it was the case in the first and second wave. It was led by the so-called generation X scholars and activists. Some early adherents of the new approach were literally daughters of the second wave. Third wave supported groups and individuals working towards gender, racial, economic, and social justice. It was founded by Rebecca Walker, the daughter of the novelist and second waver Alice Walker. This woman and others worked hard to achieve female success. They choose to struggle such obstacles by inverting sexist, racist, and classist symbols, fighting patriarchy with irony and answering violence with stories of survival.

For third wave feminists, therefore, "sexual liberation", a major goal of second-wave feminism, was expanded to mean a process of first becoming conscious of the way one's gender identity and sexuality have been shaped by society and the

intentionally constructing ( and becoming free express) one's authentic gender identity.

## 1.6 .2 Arab Feminism

For centuries, women had low status in Arab culture. Starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, Western influence and processes of modernization led to a change in the status of women, and feminist ideas began to germinate. Women started going out of their homes to study and became increasingly aware of their liberation, both their own and that of others around them. Thus the nineteenth century saw the birth of a feminist discourse among Arab women on such topics as education, work, marriage, suffrage, and breaking out of their isolation. The feminist discourse continued to develop—at first, theoretically and literarily. Women met and talked about their situation and their status and wrote philosophy and literature about them. Then the discourse developed in practical terms: Women became national and feminist activists and founded associations that promoted women's rights. Women may have won the struggle for education in the Arab world, but in other areas their progress is still impeded by conservative elements, and the process of achieving equal rights between the sexes is still incomplete.

In recent years, the study of Arab feminism has developed. The studies examine the ways in which women cope with power structures that dictate the frameworks of their lives, how they behave in light of these structures, and how they reshape the limits of their liberty. Scholars like Layla Ahmed, Miriam Kook, Denise Candiotti, Beth Baron, Iman Alkachi, Butheina Shaaban, Fatima Mernissi, Layla Abu Lughod, Valentine Moghdem, Margot Badran, and Nawal El Saadawi started delving into the issues and theories concerning women's writing in general and women's writing in Arabic in particular.

Arab women's rights occupy a good space in Arab and Western feminist thought. In both the East and the West, Arab Muslim women often share contrasting and identical stereotypical representations and discourses which are welcomed by

some Arab feminists and rejected by others and accordingly Muslim Arab feminists are divided between pro-western feminism and Islamic feminism. The focus is on the difficult situation of Arab feminism in the twenty-first Century after the 9/11 terrorist attacks as a defining moment for Arab women whose rights become a part of the American war on terrorism as the then First Lady Laura Bush states: "The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women" (Smith. Par. 4). These words have an insightful resonance for a reader who has knowledge of colonial discourse that uses women's right to justify imperial domination as Gayatri Spivak clearly puts it "White men are saving brown women from brown men" (296). Therefore, September 11, 2001 is playing a catalytic agent for westernizing the feminist content that gradually replaces Islamic feminism in the twenty first century especially among the Arab intelligentsia. Simultaneously, it is also noteworthy to know that Islamic feminism is still effective even among Arab women who live in the United States and Europe today. Nouha al-Hegelan, an Arab feminist in the US, argues that one can never ignore the rights of woman given with the advent of Islam when the Arabs used to bury their newly-born daughters alive and the Christian church was still debating the existence of a woman's soul:

> Before Islam, women in the Arabian Peninsula followed the cultural bonds of the tribe...In some instances, women were chattels and men often buried their newly-born daughters alive… Islam liberated these women from such cruel prejudice and gave them the dignity of humanity and the pride of being a woman. Islam projected a woman as being parallel to a man and embodied the philosophy of being both equal and different. Fourteen hundred years ago, Islamic women were given the right to run their own businesses, to keep their financial autonomy after marriage and, more importantly, the right to learn-the key to emancipation (ibid.7-8).

As far as Arab feminism is concerned, Islam is seen by the West as a political ideology and an obstacle for woman and her struggle for freedom. Here, a comparison between the terms Islamist and Islamic will make things clear. Islamist government refers to a radical orthodox Muslims who oppose all the western traditions including the notion of women's rights. Caroline Cox and John Marks (2003) define Islamism as an ideology: "Islamism' and 'Islamist' are the terms now widely used to refer to

radical, militantly ideological versions of Islam, as interpreted by the practitioners and in which violent actions such as terrorism, suicide bombings or revolutions are explicitly advocated, practiced and justified using religious terminology".So, feminist voice for promoting women's rights is seen as a challenge to male patriarchy. And rejection of these laws would be looked at as a rejection of their heritage, religion and identity.

Contrary to Islamist code of governance, the term "Islamic" refers to the moderate Muslim thought who adopts a reinterpretation of the Quran to modify the Sharia'a law and make it more flexible and compatible with modernity. Hence, the Islamic feminism emanated from this thought does not totally oppose secular feminism rather it tries to become more compatible with it. This movement can be looked at as a Quran-centered reform movement by Muslim Arab women with the linguistic and theological knowledge to challenge the male interpretations of the Quran and offer alternative readings in pursuit of women's advancement and in refutation of both Western stereotypes and Islamist orthodoxy alike. As a general rule, the majority of twentieth century Muslim feminists argue that Islam elevated women's position in society and was successful in ending many traditional practices that undermined women. Further, these Islamic Arab feminists try to transcend and destroy old binaries that have been constructed by a mono-interpretation of religious texts that favors the male. So pioneers of the Islamic feminist movement in Arabia have always had space for secular feminist ideas to make their movement go hand in hand with modernity. Nawal Al Saadawi, a prominent Egyptian Islamic feminist, argues:

> The idea that you can have feminism within a religion is incoherent, should it be Christianity, Judaism or Islam. In the States and in Europe, many Christian women tried to be feminist within Christianity and reinterpret the bible. They said that Christ was a black woman. So as such some Islamic women are reinterpreting the Koran and they can say Mohamed was a black woman or whatever they want. To reinterpret religion is a good; it's positive and in the favor of women, because all the books, the Old Testament, the Bible and the Koran are biased in that they portray women as inferior to men" (Saleck, 2010).

Though those feminists were fighting on a daily basis to achieve positive and concrete changes in the lives of women from education, employment, driving to issues of divorce, much of the theoretical debate has focused on opposing certain concepts in western feminism. This old generation is represented by the most known women like Hind Nawfal and Bouthaina Shaban from Syria and Hoda El Sharawi and Nawal El-Saadawi from Egypt. Their effort has been a two-fold one aimed at fighting both male dominancy in Arabia and the western charges against Islam as a religion that denigrates women and treats them as second-class citizens. In pre-Islamic Arab tradition, women were perceived as a disgrace to the family. So in order to avoid having females in the family, burying new born females was common in the Arab society before Islam. From an Islamic feminist point of view, Islam librated the female from the brutality of Arab tradition. The Quran reveals the brutality of this action and links it with horrible signs of the Day of Judgment:

When the sun is wound round and its light is lost and is overthrown, when the stars fall, when the mountains are made to pass away, when the pregnant she-camels shall be neglected, when the wild beasts are be gathered together, when the seas become as blazing Fire or overflow, when the souls are joined with their bodies, when the female (infant) buried alive (as the Arabs used to do) is questioned: For what sin, was she killed? (ibid.81:1-9).

When we look at feminism in the Arab world today, the first idea comes to mind is that women rebel against male dominancy without any adherence to the religious code. Based on the response to westernization, Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilization* theory foresees the new encounter between the West and the Islamic world will take the form of a "Clash of Civilizations": "This centuries-old military interaction between the West and Islam is unlikely to decline. It could become more virulent..... On both sides the interaction between Islam and the West is seen as a clash of civilizations" (1993). This clash begins to manifest more in the twenty first century as Arab feminism comes very close to its Western counterpart and becomes more critical of Islamic code of life. Bernard Lewis observes that Arab women's response to western ideas is the most appreciated influence of western feminism in the Arab world:

> It is clear that irreversible changes have taken place. Even those claiming to restore the Holy Law in its entirety are unlikely to reintroduce legal concubinage, nor is there much probability of a return to polygamy among the educated classes in Middle Eastern cities. Fundamentalist influences and rulers have in many ways changed the content and manner of education for women, but they have not returned them -- nor are they likely to return them -- to their previous condition of ignorance. And while, in Islamic lands as in Europe and America at an earlier age, there are women who speak and work against their own emancipation, the long-term trend is clearly for greater freedom. There are now significant numbers of educated, often Western-educated, women in Islamic lands. They are already having a significant impact, and Islamic public life will be enriched by the contributions of the previously excluded half of the population (ibid.31).

These feminists look at secular feminism as a savior from gender dilemmas in the Arab world due to excessive application of religious dos and don'ts in ordinary life. Wafa Sultan is an Arab Syrian psychiatrist and critic of the Arab patriarchal society who lately moved to America. Sultan feels that both tradition and religion have been oppressors of Arab women for fourteen centuries and distort the concept of honor. The *New York Time* called her an "International Sensation" and after her book *A God Who Hates* was published, she was labeled by *Time Magazine* as one of the 100 most influential people in the world. According to her Arab Muslim society is a savage one when compared to western society:

> As an Arab woman who suffered for three decades living under Islamic Sharia, it is clear to me that Islam's political ideology and Sharia must be fought relentlessly by Western civilization to prevent its application in a free society…When I first immigrated to the US, I learned to my dismay that Islam has been labeled by many as "a religion of peace." But for me, as a Syrian who grew up in an Islamic country, a set of beliefs that insists that women are wicked is an evil set of beliefs (ibi.1-6).

Judging Arab woman in the light of her beliefs to find out how civilized she is a common western view on Arab woman. Accordingly "If a Muslim woman holds certain beliefs that are uncommon in Western culture, she is described as backward, no matter how highly assertive, educated or independent she is; in other words, women are not judged on how they fit within their culture as much as they would fit in a

Western culture" (Eltantawy:144). This western standard of how a Muslim woman looks like, what relationships she makes what clothes she wears and how western her thoughts are may not be logical since many liberal Muslim still hold conservative religious opinions that fit their cultural affiliation and lifestyle. In *Orientalism*, Said draws a distinction between "unconscious positivity" which he properly names "latent Orientalism," and "the various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology," he calls "manifest Orientalism." Said explains that: "Whatever change occurs in knowledge of the Orient is found almost exclusively in manifest Orientalism; the unanimity, stability, and durability of latent Orientalism are more or less constant" (206). Said further notes that it does not matter how Orientalists differ in their treatment of the Orient because such differences are found only on the "manifest" side of Orientalism while the only thing that unifies the Orientalist effort is the "latent" side which is the deeper level of Orientalism that introduces the Orient as inferior.

### 1.6.3 Feminism in Egypt

Feminism had already been born in Egypt when the twentieth century dawned, but it was still an unnamed infant. Its mothers were women whose lives spanned the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, women of the middle- and upper-classes who realised that the benefits of modernity and the possibilities for new lives that it held were not the same for them as for men of similar circumstances. As the twentieth century unfolded, a new awareness about what it meant to be "female" took root.

#### 1.6.3.1 The Effect of State, System and Islam on Egyptian Women

Feminism in Egypt has involved a number of social and political groups throughout its history. Its development of fighting against imperialism, patriarchy, men's oppression has not been easy. Do not forget Islam which is the predominant religion in Egypt and its restrictions. Though it didn't stop women's dreams and needs to be free and to be equal to men.

In the Islamic world, feminism is a difficult and controversial subject to address. In some cases, it is viewed as a construct of the western world, imposed upon the

Middle East and North Africa by imperialism. Others believe that women's rights should be accommodated only in so far as they can be justified within an Islamic framework. In Egypt fighting for equality for women's rights has not been easy. Egyptian feminism is unique in the Islamic world, partly because of its early exposure to western and capitalistic forces (Keddie90).

First phase of feminism has taken place between (1923-1939). The Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) was founded by the former leader of the women's committee in the Wafd party, Hoda Shaarawi who faced Egyptian authorities by an offensive gesture she made by throwing her veil into the sea. An act that caused a scandal to Shaarawi. However, she was able to inspire other women to cast off their veils.

The women working for this organization did three things, which were revolutionary for women at that period.

1. They removed their veils as a sign of protest against the invisibility.

2. They referred to themselves openly as feminists and not only as women.

3. They built a link to international feminist networks.

According to some writers the feminism began to decline in the period following the Second World War. This new phase in the Egyptian women's movement was characterized by a more radical approach. Younger Egyptian women's voices influenced by the rise of student and labor movements began to be heard and they ask to update the EFU statics.

The Egyptian feminist party was founded in 1942. Headed by Fatma Neamat Rashed, the party called for the complete equality between women and men in education, employment, political representations and rights. It also called for the right to paid leave for working women. In 1952 the army seized power in Egypt. As a result all independent women's movements were banned. However, significant equal rights were granted to women during this period not only in education and work but also by the 1956 Constitution that gave women the right to vote and run for election for the first time, as well as gender equality in jobs and payment.

The reforms of Jamal Abdel Nasser, who controlled Egypt from 1952 to 1970, made great leaps in encouraging women to become educated and to work outside the home, but also banned independent feminist organizations and left the patriarchal structure of both law and cultures mostly intact (Keddie 122). Jamal Abdel Nasser was associated with a term "state feminism", which became synonymous with his reign and his attempt to integrate women into labor force and increase female education levels. Nasser also instituted mandatory education for six years, and he guaranteed jobs in the bureaucracy and free health care to college and high school graduates. In addition, progressive labor laws were introduced and birth control was approved (Keddie 123). Despite the progressive idea of the system, conservative views about women's position in the family and politics were left unchallenged by the regime (Hatem 231-233).despite this fact, Nasser certainly did more to further the feminist cause than his successor.

The decline of the Nasserist regime means another period in the feminist movement in Egypt. The publication of the book of Nawal El Saadawi *women and sex* in 1972 was symbolic of the re-emergence and radicalization of the movement. The book demanded "unified criteria for honor for both women and men, and denounced social practices which used religion to justify women's oppression". The book caused backlash within Egyptian society especially due to the rising religious fundamentalism within the state.

Today, it seems that what gains Egypt over the years are being abandoned and invalidated by large number returning to the veil, and to traditional Islamic views about work.

## 1.7 Clashing Paradigms on Conceptions of Modernity, Tradition, and Selfhood

Some feminist narratives in Arab-Muslim societies by dealing with a related problem: the author's setting up of convenient conceptual dichotomies, which account for the female experience, that reduce-female relationships in the given social context to a fundamentally antagonist one.

## Chapter One: Conceptual and Cultural Background

The question of Muslim identity in the face of shifting cultural paradigms has long been at the heart of the debate on modernity and tradition in the Arab-Muslim world. In Nawal El Saadawi's Woman at Point Zero, the question of the "female body" which is seen as a locus of identity acquires more specifity and complexity, as well as more urgency, insofar as it is tied to the definition of female space and selfhood as understood and experienced by the female protagonist. Such a selfhood appears, until recently, to have long been relegated to non-discursive positions within a given Arab-Muslim social and cultural context, with a few remarkable exceptions in every society and historical period.

Case studies of feminism and female writers in Arab-Muslim societies typically reveal two main tendencies. The first one is to define Arab-Muslim feminisms mainly from the perspective of Middle Eastern feminists from Egypt, while giving comparatively little academic attention to North African female writers, as Elizabeth Fernea rightly notes3. The second one is to categorize them uncritically in terms of movments that replicate certain western models of liberalism, many of which are exclusively secular in the general direction of the political aspirations and social goals. The main shortcoming of such approaches is to sum up feminism in Arab-Muslim societies in terms of privileging the materiality of existence as the primary anchor for female formation in those societies. Consequently, the crucial role of the spiritual heritage is overshadowed. Although it goes into the very construction of individual and collective centers of consciousness in Arab-Muslim societies. The work of Fatima Mernissi (1992), a Moroccan sociologist, offers some good insights on the diverse and complex sociocultural and political realities of various manifestations of feminism in the Arab-Muslim world.

Nawal El Saadawi is a professional middle-class woman who has held leading role in her government. She uses fiction to explore and represents patterns of relationships that situate her as an individual in relation to "authority", "tradition", and "modernity". Her texts feature female protagonist who, although seemingly caught in the same kinds of personal crisis and social dilemmas, are given notably different ways of expressing and rationalizing them. The ideological paradigms informing the novel's

worldviews (varying between an exclusively secular and dissident view and a nationalist and conforming one) seem to represent different determinants of female identity in its two dimensions: the way it is as well as the way it ought to be.

The central issue here is the overarching viewpoint framing the woman's story: the one that describes the causes of their misery and the effects of their marginalization, and that articulates viable alternative means and modes of self-expression and self-affirmation.

In his analysis of Arab novels, Halim Barakat identifies three main trends: novels of reconciliation, novels of exposure, and novels of revolutionary change5. The first category describes novels in which "visions depicting social reality in a state of harmony are combined with concern about threatening changes", the second category consists of novels that "expose the weakness of society and its institutions without exhibiting real commitment to the restructuring of the existing order", and the third category refers to novels committees to "radical change". Such novels engender an encompassing vision of society as a whole, in a state of conflict rather than harmony. Society is depicted as a complex and vital whole in which individual or psychological issues cannot be isolated from social issues.

Barakat's definitions apply to certain features of the novel under discussion; they are limited in that they fail to account for moments in which the individual-society relationship portrayed is complex. On the one, El Saadawi's novel only partially lends itself to being seen as a novel of exposure, since the protagonist sees her individuality and not so much society as the center. She reveals society's flaws and weaknesses only insofar as this contributes to helping define her selfhood.

Firdaous, the female protagonist in Woman at Point Zero, seems to be engaged in a subversive process of the total feminization of various discourses of authority, tradition, and modernity. The narrative of Firdaous reflects a key feature of "novel of exposure": her voice serves to criticize society's excesses. The character sets out to foreground her "self" and "femininity" as the main object of her narrative.

## Chapter One: Conceptual and Cultural Background

El Saadawi problematizes the politics of gender role and institutional truth to account for her marginal social existence and the human indignities associated with it. She exposes the material effects of this politics on the body and attempts to think of an alternative route out of the body's view point.

In her prefatory remarks, El Saadawi establishes the biographical character of her novel based on what she describes as the story of Firdaous, a "real woman". Firdaous who was imprisoned and sentenced to death after being convicted of murdering a pimp and who comes to be associated with the image of a prostitute later on tells the story of her abuse childhood and adulthood from a prison cell. The female narrator points out that she came to be a witness to Firdaous' story in her capacity as a psychiatrist conducting research on women prisoners "who suffered degrees of neurosis". The matter-of-factness and precision of these remarks have, at first glance, a distancing effect. They suggest that the fictional first-person narrator, who listens to Firdaous' story, is bracketing it as a clinical case study of a woman prisoner whose psychological poise is beset by male oppression, and whose asocial behavior manifests itself in obsessional thoughts, compulsive acts, and excessive anxiety. Indeed such are the main characteristics of Firdaous' behavior pattern as a victimized and lower-class female peasant figure. While these descriptions point to the troubling psychological effects and emotional damage inflicted by the different forms of male oppression represented in the text, they raise questions about the narrators's reliability as an important narrative voice because of her supremely egocentric language. Her closing worlds on men ring with a dim pessimism: "my life means their death. My death means their life".

However, the preface complicates this view of the first narrator's relationship to Firadous and undercuts the former's authority in a way that projects Firadous as the only valid source of "truth" and point of reference: "this woman, despite her misery and despair, evoked in all those who, like me, witnessed the final moments of life, a need to challenge and to over-come those forces that deprive human beings of their rights to live, to love and to real freedom". The apparent identification between the first-person narrator and Firdaous results in the assimilation of the two voices, instead

of having Firdaous voice relativized and embedded in the female doctor's. This, in turn, seals off the world of *Woman at Point Zero* within the confines of Firdaous' cynical worldview, which plays out the same dynamics of violence existing at the story level and complicates any possibility of redeeming her identity in positive terms. Narrative truth does not seem to be questionable in the text, and yet several issues (e.g. knowledge, individuality, desire, freedom, religious values, time, and space) are at stake because of the text's framing devices.

The text's mainframe is the first-person narrator (the psychiatrist who is, one might argue, a fictional El Saadawi figure). The narrator's voice ushers in Frirdaous' voice and is soon drowned and outweighed by it. The power that she yields as a doctor diagnosing and listening to a woman prisoner is visibly taken over by Firdaous when the latter decides to initiates the telling of her story on her own terms, and finally agrees, after much reticence, to receive the doctor in her cell. The first-person narrator's self-effaced character and the power of Firdaous' voice are seen when the latter forcefully opens her narrative in a commanding tone: "let me speak. Do not interrupt me." (ibid.11) They are conveyed symbolically even earlier by the doctor's words upon her first encounter with Firdaous:

> Suddenly we were face to face. I stood rooted to the ground, silent, and motionless. I did not hear the bear of my heart, nor the key as it turned in the lock, closing the heavy door behind me. It was as though l died the moment her eyes looked into mine. They were eyes that killed, like a knife, probing, cutting deep down inside, their look steady, unwavering. (ibid. 6)

The idea of the first-person narrator is "silent" or "dead" emphasized in the above-quoted passage id highly ironical in this context. The image of the knife that kills foreshadows the crime of which Fidaous is to be accused and marks the climax of the story and of the protagonist's psychological drama. From the very early pages of the text, we see that Firdaous' relating her story as a powerless, poor peasant girl reflects a consciousness that has been, up to the point of her imprisonment, disturbed, distraught, and very upset. The intensity and persisting nature of her pain conveyed through her words and permeating the entire narrative, gives emotional validity to her

account. Her story starts at the peak of her personal struggle and search for identity, and in the middle of total spiritual desolation. It is interesting to note that at this point, Firdaous introduces herself by playing on conceptual dichotomies that cement the text's fictional universe in absolutist and univocal terms.

She begins by reminiscing about early childhood experiences closely tied to the image of an abusive father. Her memory of her father soon becomes an epitome of the male image as an analytical category in the text. Firdaous' words establish this category's homogeneity and universality when she expresses her feelings as a child watching throng of men walking out of Friday congregational prayer: "sometimes l could not distinguish which one of them was my father. He resembled them so closely that it was difficult to tell". (ibid. 13)

This undifferentiated perception of the male given by Firdaous the child is also the one that determines the vision of Firdaous the adult. Examples of negative male figures proliferate in the text and punctuate key moments in her journey and growth into adulthood. From a child-abusing father to a child-molesting uncle, from an avaricious and a cruel older husband to complacent and domineering male coworkers, and from numerous male figures involved in sexual aggression and exploitation who force her into the humiliating world of prostitution, all these male characters come out of the same mold: namely, one that emphasizes their bestiality, selfishness, and non-human qualities.

Firdaous' language expresses unequivocally the kinship between all of the males in her life, the words she addresses to the police upon her arrest indicate: "l am saying that you are all criminals, all of you: the fathers, the uncles, the husbands, the pimps, the lawyers, the doctors, the journalists, and all men of all profession."(ibid. 100)The demonization of male figures is also affected by the representation of disembodied male images in the fictional world of *woman at point zero.* A recurring technique is to reduce men to two menacing and sinister eyes that are emblematic of physical violation. The malevolent male gaze that objectifies the female body and destroys female interiority and subjectivity is transferred to all males in the story. Its

mechanism is described by Firdaous when she is roaming aimlessly in the streets, trying to escape her uncle's oppressive household:

> In the dark l suddenly perceived two eyes, or rather felt them, moving towards me slowly, closer and closer. They dropped their gaze with slow intent down to my shoes, rested there for a moment, then gradually started to climb up my legs, to my thighs, my belly, my breast, my neck and finally came to a stop, fastening themselves steadily in my eyes, with the same cold intent. (ibid. 41-42)

As a consequence of this elaborate system of imageries, Firdaous' universe excludes entirely any individualized or qualified male images. In her assessment of El Saadawi's text, Fedwa Malti-Douglas argues that:

> "Tempting as it might be to agree (…) that all males in the novel are evil, that conclusion is unfortunately not true. A slight glimmer of the light exists with the male prison doctor in the prologue of the novel. He does not believe Firdaous is guilty". (1995: 52)

It is true that this male doctor who arranges the first-person narrator's visit to Firdaous is the only male that does not appear to be conniving, yet Malti-Douglas' positive interpretation does not take into account his structural insignificance in the text. For instead of representing a different male viewpoint, he rather seems to be a *papier-maché* institutional male voice that does not represent or have any direct jurisdiction that can positively influence Firdaous' fate or relativize her narrative. The consequence of such representation is to attribute categorical unity and sameness to male identity in a manner that underscores the impossibility of envisioning a social order in which male and female identities are not antagonistic, and in which difference and multiplicity within each identity category is not conceded.

Firdaous' voice has a great deal of force when she exposes the corruption, hypocrisy, and mendacity underlying the power wielded by government authority figures, symbols of religious and educational institutions, the elite, and the general state of decadence associated with the rise of a selfish middle-class obsessed with its lust for power, control, and prestige. The representation of male figures in *Woman at Point Zero*, however, is symptomatic of Firdaous' unidimensional perception of

reality, which affects her self-perception and that of others. Indeed all characters seem to operate on only one level of reality: one that is expressed at the level of the *body and* is peopled by *automated* and *hollow* individuals, as discussed below. Firdaous' words as she in the streets once again, this time on the run from her brutal husband, reveal a world that features people (including Firdaous) as automatons and stresses their anonymity, loneliness, and estrangement:

> I walked through the streets with swollen eyes, and a bruised face, but no one paid any attention to me. People were rushing around in buses and in cars, or on foot. It was as though they were blind, unable to see anything. The street was an endless expanse stretched out before my eyes like a sea. I was just a pebble thrown into it, battered by the waves, tossed here and there, rolling over and over to be abandoned somewhere on the shore. (ibid.45)

In addition to its indifference, hostility, morbidity, and impersonality, the characters' experiences in the world of *Woman at Point Zero* are flagrantly corporeal, as Firdaous' physical confinement in the prison from which she is telling her story symbolically emphasizes. Little emphasis is placed on the other spheres of experience associated with the mind and the spirit. From the standpoint, Firdaous' world is identified with physical deprivation and is plagued with moral inertia. It is world from which it is impossible to escape and, much less, to change the human existential condition. The fact that the ultimate stop of her journey is physical confinement in prison is therefore highly significant. The flux of her experience shows an obsessive preoccupation with the *body* as the space within which the dynamics of male-female power relations unfold. There are many recurring patterns of physical violence that serve as organizing motifs, such as the repeated images of physical violation of Firdaous' body by uncouth male figures.

The representation of the body in relation to power recalls Foucault's account on prison as instruments of power in the nineteenth and twentieth century's:

> That punishment in general and the prison in particular belong to political technology of the *body* is a lesson that l have learned not so much from history as from the present. In recent years, prison revolts have occurred throughout the world. There was

> certainly something paradoxical about their aims, their slogans, and the way they took place. They were revolts against an entire state of physical misery that is over a century old (…). All these movements and the innumerable discourses that the prison has given rise to since the early nineteenth century have been about the *body* and material things (…). They were revolts, at the level of the body, against the very body of the prison (…). It is this whole materiality as an instrument and vector of power over the body that the technology of the "soul" that of the educationalists, psychologists, and psychiatrists fails to conceal or to compensate, for the simple reason that it is one of its tools. (Foucault, 1984:178)

Foucault's account here is part of his complex theory on human subjectivity and its determinants that emphasize the materiality of identity. Indeed, it is difficult to miss the total physicality of experience delineated in Firdaous' world. In the context of this world, her consciousness seems to mourn the permanent loss or lack of an unexpressed or perhaps an illusory ideal that is defined in physical terms. This lost ideal resonates throughout the novel with nostalgic evocations of the time prior to her circumcision, when Firdaous mournfully broods on her loss of physical pleasure:

> It belonged to a distant past, had been with me somehow right from the beginning. I had experienced it at the time. Yet it seemed to go back further than my life, to some day before l was born, like a thing arising out of an ancient wound, in an organ which had ceased to be mine, on the body of a woman who was longer me. (ibid.56)

Firdaous defines the markers of her liberated self and inner change in terms of a celebration of physical pleasure and comfort tied to her economic independence, which her profession as a prostitute offers her:

> Can the Nile, and the sky, and the trees change? I had changed, so why not the Nile and the color of the trees? When l opened the window every morning l could see the Nile flow by, contemplate the green of the water, and the trees, the vivid green light in which everything seemed to bathe, feel the power of life, of my body, of the hot blood in my veins (…). I let myself sink in this feeling of warmth and softness, drown in the perfume of gentle roses, and savor the comfort of the silken sheets as l stretched my legs (…).I drank in the liquid softness through my nose, my mouth, my ears, through every pore in my body with a thirst which knew no end. (ibid.55)

In El Saadawi's text, physical pleasure also is associated with the sexual ambivalence evoked in description of Firdaous' relationship with a few female characters with whom she forges some kind of solidarity and bonding, including the first-person female narrator herself. Malti-Douglas credits this sexual ambivalence in El Saadawi's fictional universe by suggesting that it is a manifestation of a "female force" that can "effectively battle the University of Patriarchy" (ibid.207-8). Besides being somewhat ambiguous, especially since Malti Douglas adds that El Saadawi's heroines are ultimately doomed to failure in their battle with patriarchy, (ibid.208) this reading betrays violence because it redeploys the same dichotomous view of male-female warring relationship to contrast the image of an autonomous female. In addition, it evokes a female experience that is far from being a socially viable alternative for reconfiguring male-female relationships in the given sociocultural context.

## 1.8 Self-Construction

Although Firdaous' voice as a lower-class female forcefully indicts the trappings of male authority and power, it remains deeply caught in the same patterns of violence it seems to condemn. Consequently, the movement towards self-reconstruction is negative because it results in her dividedness and alienation not only in relation to others (the human world) and to the social world of institutions, but also in relation to herself. Furthermore, this movement is negative because it operates by conceptually redefining and setting the female identity against the male identity through a relationship of antagonism and violence. It never gets beyond this dialectic situation. Through Firdaous's view, the female identity can be vindicated only by reproducing the same structures of power she denounces with the sole difference of reversing the male-female positions in the hierarchy.

As a result, the reader of *Woman at Point Zero*, just like the first-person narrator, witnesses a slow deconstruction of the autonomous, responsible, and positive thinking subject. Divested of moral agency, all characters, whether male or female, wallow in the mire of moral inertia and bestial existence, whose primitive and repulsive character is reminiscent of the logic governing George Bataille's critique of

western idealist philosophies as well as utilitarian capitalism. In (Bataille's, 1994: 199) view, these philosophies try to conceal the reality of the *body*, which he counters with the myth of the "a cephalic man" (a headless mythological figure) who represents a body untrammeled in its behavior by the dictates of the head, as a symbol of "conscious authority" and that stands for "one of the servile functions that gives itself as, and takes itself to be, an end." furthermore, it is a body that no dignity or glory.

## 1.9 Conclusion

The reader is served well by the translation by El Saadawi's husband, Sherif Hetata, which reflects the simplicity of the original language but still manages to convey deftness in description. Although El Saadawi writes in Arabic, her books are more widely read and disseminated in the West, creating a worldwide debate around her. The question is whether the translation of Nawal El Saadawi helps shed light on Arab society for people of the West, or does it foster stereotypes about Arabs? Other pertinent questions arise while examining the matter. The dissertation aims at reaching an answer for this question and for many other relevant questions related to woman status and rights. In the final analysis, however, the answer depends on the perspective of the reader; it is purely a matter of personal opinion backed up by one's educational, cultural, religious and social background.

The Arabic novel is a direct result of cultural and political contact between the East and the West. The novel is a travelling genre, as suggested by the American critic Mary Layoun in her comparative study, *Travels of a Genre*: *The Modern Novel and Ideology* (1990). It originated in West-Europe but moved out with the European ambitions for extension and expansion. Moreover, the novel is now an international form and includes far more than just British or American fiction. The novel is a novel just like 'East is East and West is West', no more and no less, whether written in Arabic or English, the language may differ but the basic structure remains the same. This is which will be further discussed in the second chapter.

# Chapter Two: Cultural Translation Intricacies

## 2.1 **Introduction**

Literature is undoubtedly one of the most fascinating forms of human expression; written words having excellence of form or essence or both, expressing timeless ideas of universal interest. Literature is a profound representation of the culture of origin. If the ideas expressed in literature are indeed timeless and universal, there arises a significant question of how to transfer meaning across the ages and across the earth. In this dissertation, I will endeavor to respond to the latter of these questions, considering the cross-cultural journey of literature by means of translation. Perhaps the most important link between literature and translation is the "intercultural exchange" that occurs, since literature is a representation of a certain culture and translation is an attempt to transfer this culture to a different culture. The potential marriage of literature and translation; the mixture of science and art, theory and practice, beg a deeper inquiry into this matter, as well as an effort to try to find ways to bring them closer together. In order to delve into cross-cultural translation, we need to clarify its definition, importance, related problematic issues and the role of the translator in dealing with it.

The books of Nawal El Saadawi, the popular Egyptian author, provide an excellent case of practical examples to help clarify the theory while illuminating the various arguments and opinions about the issue of cross-cultural translation and about writing in general.

-Does Nawal El Saadawi address Arab reader or Western readers in her books? In other words, does she write to be translated?

-how should culturally and religiously sensitive books be translated for a foreign audience?

The answers to these questions are based on the personal opinions of writers, translators and audience regarding cross-cultural translation, on ways of looking at such matters, i.e. educational, social, religious and cultural background of the audience and on translation strategies adapted by the translator depending on the objective of the translation, nature of the text, target audience and time of translation.

# Chapter Two: Cultural Translation Intricacies

Some writers have had their works translated from English to other languages though these languages are mostly European, very few of their works are translated into indigenous languages. Among the women writers, only Nawal el Saadawi writes in her native Egyptian Arabic language through which means she is able to reach the generality of women. The advantage of Arabic here is that as a universal language of the Islamic religion, both men and women are schooled in it. Her novels are then later translated into English. Language therefore is an area that writers who want to reach the majority of women could look into.

## 2.2 **A Postcolonial Reading of Selected Arabic Novels into English**

Postcolonial studies, which have mainly developed in the United States, Canada, Australia and Britain, primarily discuss writers from English-speaking countries. They rarely include the contributions of writers, novelists and intellectuals from the Arab world-most parts of which were under British colonial influence and hegemony up to the second half of the twentieth-century-and especially from peripheral countries such as Yemen, Palestine and Sudan.

This chapter argues that writers from such places have addressed issues such as the quest for identity, nationalism, modernization, hybridity, mimicry, resistance, the clash between tradition and modernity and the encounter between the colonizer and the colonized. Unfortunately, such writings have been mostly neglected if not totally ignored in contemporary postcolonial studies. This sense of marginality, nonetheless, is not only confined to postcolonial studies, but also extends to the whole Arab world. Meanwhile, the Arab world itself has largely focused interest in the novels produced in the Arabic literary centers such as Cairo and Beirut.

Many critical studies have been conducted on the novel genre in contemporary Arabic literature; however, the majority of these studies concentrate on the Egyptian novel in general and on the Mahfouzian style in particular. This sense of "Egyptiocentricism" has marginalized the status of the Arabic novel outside the

Egyptian literary and cultural sites. Furthermore, the Arabic novel in Western literary circles has become synonymous with Naguib Mahfouz. There is some truth in this claim for no one can deny how much the Arabic novel owes to Mahfouz for its domestication and indigenization into the Arabic literary tradition. Nevertheless, there are many other "new" novelistic voices in the Arab world that suffer serious marginalization in literary and critical studies.

Recent years have shown a serious concern with translating Arabic novels into English. More than 100 Arabic novels have been translated into English, according to Halim Barakat, a renowned Arab critic, novelist and sociologist. However, these novels are either marginalized or ignored in terms of criticism. At a conference entitled "The Arab Novel: Visions of Social Reality" conducted at Georgetown's University Center for Arab Studies, Barakat told a distinguished group of Arab and Arab-American writers, academics, critics and students that Arab novels remain unknown, overlooked and undiscovered in the West (Shalal-Essa). I would like to argue that Arab novels remain unknown and undiscovered even in many parts of Arab world today especially in the peripheries. The literary and cultural hegemony of the Western novel has overridden any interest in the national novel genre.

The novel is not an indigenous form in contemporary Arabic literature, but an imported and borrowed form that arrived with the European colonialism in the 19th and early twentieth century of the Arabic world, which stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the (Persian) Gulf and from the Northern Mediterranean to the heart of Africa. This is certainly not to say that story telling or narrative in any sense is exclusively European. Yet it is clearly "one result of colonization- when societies and cultures intermingle- that the literary forms, like the languages, of the colonizers have been adopted" (Walder 12).

Classical Arabic literature is rich in many narrative artistic forms which include oral and written stories. There are works which, like *The Book of Songs* by Al-Asfahani, narrate stories about famous poets and tales of love, and yet others give

accounts of wars and battles. There are also religious narratives such as *The Stories of Prophets*. All these have certain narrative elements which influence the existing contemporary narrative fiction, but none of them can be called a novel or even slightly resemble it.

The novel is connected with reality. It imitates reality whereas the traditional Arabic narrative forms were just of the romantic type that aimed at entertaining and edifying the public.

The Arabic novel has its roots in the *nahda2* (literary and cultural renaissance), a period which was marked by the French expedition, perhaps bettered called an invasion to Egypt which took place in 1798 and lasted for three years. Prior to the *nahda*, the prominent Arabic literary form was poetry, and there was no remarkable narrative prose that might be considered as significant as the novel or the short story, both of which are representative as well as creative. Narrative fiction was seen by Arab intellectuals as a more appropriate medium for depicting and reflecting the new transitional movement being made by society so as to cope with what was called the spirit of the age and the rising of classes in Arabic society.

Summoning the authority of the rising classes as well as the spirit of the age, Naguib Mahfouz, Nobel Laureate and father of the contemporary Arabic novel, argues that it is "the spirit of the age" which lies behind the need for narrative. The Iraqi scholar and literary critic, Muhsin Al-Musawi comments on Mahfouz's opinion saying that:

> This age is different from ancient times, for formerly poetry was dominant as an expression of the "legendary" and "spontaneous." But in an age of science, industry, and facts, there ought to be some other art that could manage as much as possible between the human taste for facts and the old longing for the fanciful. The age came upon the novel as its own poetry. (87)

# Chapter Two: Cultural Translation Intricacies

My involvement with the Arabic novel in translation can be explained in the need to fill a gap that is still vacant in many critical studies about this type of novel. Many critical books have been published regarding the Arabic novel; however, almost all of them fall short of discussing postcoloniality and its presence in Arabic narrative fiction.

## 2.3 **Defining Translation**

A lot of translations of many novels are resulting in books different from the original. We see a plot begins to go in a different direction, and the main character is developing into a whole different person. When we say translating, some people thought it is a word for word, others say it is a creative work done without following the original text; and this work gives the target text a life of its own. But to describe the same thought in a different language seems to give it a whole different life that is richer and more creative. How can we translate novels correctly? Word for word or meaning to meaning? How far can the translator go before we can call this translation an original? And can we And is the foreignisation a solution in translation?

The definition of “translation” will guide us through how to apply it to transfer different cultures to different parts of the world. Many people who are not really aware of the principles of translation consider it to be some form of paraphrasing. By this reasoning, if a person is bilingual, then he/she, would inevitably be capable of translating any written or spoken material from and into either of the two languages. In fact, among translators, this method of word for word transfer is called literal translation, and can only be used in a limited number of texts without risking interference from the translator such as translating technical texts like manuals.

Translation, however, extends far beyond mere paraphrasing, although it does use paraphrasing to some extent. More than just the transfer of words only, translation includes the transfer of ideas, culture, atmosphere, hidden meaning, etc. It is the most powerful tool that permits the exchange of unlimited knowledge between different cultures. Translation began with the beginning of culture in the world; with the beginning of memory. Before any kind of media was established, translation was the

first and only method to transfer science, literature, religion and more between the furthest point in the east and the furthest point in the west. Beyond mere paraphrasing, however, what exactly is translation?

In one of his lectures in the American University of Sharjah, Faiq (2003) has presented a number of definitions of translation given by a number of scholars who define translation as: the transference of the content of a text from one language into another bearing in mind that we cannot dissociate the content from the form. : (Foster L, 1958). For Foster, content is of vital importance, as translators must focus on the meaning rather than on the form. (Robin C, 1958) looks at translation as:The process by which a spoken or written utterance takes place in one language which is intended and presumed to convey the same meaning as a previously existing utterance in another language. This definition unites the spoken and written utterances as parts of language. Catford, I (1965) defines translation as: The process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another or the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent material in another.

In his first definition, he makes no mention of transferring the content of the source text during the process of translation; rather he simply presents translation as a matter of transferring words only. In his second definition, Catford mentions the word “equivalent” which implies that the source text and the target text both have the same form and informative value. (Nida, E and Taber, C, 1969) explain translation as:
Consisting in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and second in terms of style.

Producing a “natural equivalent” means that the translation should not feel foreign to the target reader, therefore what is considered the natural equivalent of any given text changes according to the culture and environment of the target readers.
Brislin (1976) offers a simple definition of translation: The transfer of thoughts and ideas from a source language into a target language.

# Chapter Two: Cultural Translation Intricacies

Moreover than being a matter of mere words; translation involves ideas and thoughts which make it a complex profession that cannot be performed by any bilingual. Although ideas are essential in the process of translation, other aspects are also transferred. Suzan Bassnett (1991) provides a broader explanation:

> What is generally understood as translation involves the rendering of a source text into the target language so as to ensure that the surface meaning of the two will be approximately similar and the structure of the source language will be preserved as closely as possible but not that the target language structure will be seriously distorted.

The translator is responsible for preserving the identity of each language. He/she can modify the source text without causing it to lose its spirit, thereby preventing the impact of the source text from being delivered to the target reader.

Vermeer (1986) defines translation as:

> Information offered in a language (z) and culture (Z) which imitates information in language (a) and culture (A) so as to fulfill the desired function. That means that a translation is not the transcoding of words and sentences from one language into another, but a complex action in which the translator provides information about a text under functional, cultural and linguistic conditions and in a new situation, whereby formal characteristics are limited as far as possible.

The key words in the process of translation according to Vermeer are “culture”, “function” and “language” as they pertain to the meaning of the source text. For him, grammar is less important. What is important is to deliver the same function that the source text provides to the source readers by keeping culture in mind as Cary E. (1999) says that translation should respect the source and target languages, the source and target readers, the relationships between the source and target audience, their psychological and emotional background and the circumstances regarding time and place.

Finally, Newmark (1988) looks at translation as:

> A craft consisting in an attempt to replace a written message and/or a statement in one language by the same message in another language. By using the word “craft,”

> Newmark ensures that translation is an art that not every bilingual person is capable of performing perfectly.

If we look up the word “translation” in a dictionary we find definitions similar to “To give the sense or equivalent of in another language; change into another language″(F&W, 1422) or “carry over into one's own or another language”. These shallow definitions present translation as a mechanical task requiring limited talent, education and experience. Thrasher, (1998) quotes Francis Steels as he defines translation:

> The liberty taken by many so-called translators is seen in their violation of the limits of true translation in distinction from paraphrase. Any technical definition of `translation' must emphasize the meticulous accuracy with which such limits must be observed, especially by scholars who profess to believe in scriptural revelation. A translation should convey as much of the original text in as few words as possible, yet preserve the original atmosphere and emphasis. The translator should strive for the nearest approximation in words, concepts, and cadence. He should scrupulously avoid adding words or ideas not demanded by the text. His job is not to expand or to explain, but to translate and preserve the spirit and force of the original... Not just ideas, but words are important; so also is the emphasis indicated by word order in the sentence.

## 2.4 **Translation: Theory or Practice?**

Some might ask whether translation is a theoretical or a practical act; whether translators need to study translation as a science or they can depend on their experience and skills. Until recent times, translation was a mere practical action performed in the absence of theory. Yet, translation was a successful method of interaction between cultures, facilitating the benefits of making use of the knowledge of “the other”. Not all translations were successful; some lacked validity because translators did not possess the underlying theory and the talent to practice translation. Different theorists have different attitudes regarding the use or non-use of theory in translation practice. . Eugene Nida suggests that most successful and creative translators of the past have had little or no use for translation theories. In fact, some

insist that only those who cannot translate become theorists, and then insist upon the necessity of using theories in the process of translation. In reality, outstanding translators are born, not made, since without an innate potential for the creative use of language the study of procedures and principles of translating is unlikely to produce outstanding results. As different theories appeared, presenting translation from different perspectives and having different methods in dealing with translation, Nida states that none of the theories has gained wide acceptance, since there is no consensus regarding related disciplines and methods.

Lefevre (1998) offers another way of looking at the differences between theorists and practicing translators, considering the present era of translation as well as the past when there were no theorists at all. Lefevre disagrees with theorists who claim that translation is impossible, pointing out that translation has been going on for at least the last four thousand years, leaving the theorists not only bewildered, but also looking more than a little out of touch, thereby supporting Nida's point of view.

Theorists are convinced that they are clarifying and ordering matters through offering principles and rules in a field that is considered more than a little chaotic. Practicing translators, on the other hand, are interested in quick solutions to the problems they are facing while translating. These problems are typically measured in relation to the next deadline imposed on them by the patrons who often provide their own rules and principles according to their goals, location, attitudes towards certain matters and line of approach. Practicing translators, in general, therefore have little time for applying theories. They do not have the luxury of being able to make changes according to the way they believe or to the schools of theories they belong to. Even free lance translators are obligated by deadlines and by the client who has the right to demand a certain change or refuse another. In an article published by the SIL International, it was mentioned that Larson (1991) looks at the relationship between theory and practice from a special perspective; he states that good theory is based on information gained from practice. Good practice is based on carefully worked-out theory.

Practicing translators, on the other hand, are interested in quick solutions to the problems they are facing while translating. These problems are typically measured in relation to the next deadline imposed on them by the patrons who often provide their own rules and principles according to their goals, location, attitudes towards certain matters and line of approach. Practicing translators, in general, therefore have little time for applying theories. They do not have the luxury of being able to make changes according to the way they believe or to the schools of theories they belong to. Even free lance translators are obligated by deadlines and by the client who has the right to demand a certain change or refuse another.

Amin-Zaki. A (1995) studied the different translations of Shakespeare's works and compared the early translators such as Muhammad al-Sibai, Muhammad Iffat al-Qadi, Ali Imam Atiyah, Khalil Mutran and Sami al-Juraydini and the contemporary translators. She noticed that early translators ignored Shakespeare's plots to such an extent that their efforts sometimes had only a passing resemblance to his works. Most of their translations were not successful as they did not respect the source text or the target readers. They were not aware that readers are now more familiar with foreign cultures. They did not follow theories or rules, but created their own improvised rules. Early translators of Shakespeare tended to be quite cautious in their translations, trying to avoid religious or cultural offense, often deleting or softening ribald allusions. They were less likely to render obscene meanings than their more modern counterparts. The use of vows and bawdiness in Shakespeare's works created was problematic for the early translators.

From the various translations of Shakespeare we notice that in the past translation was more a practical process with no existence of theory which produced successful as well as unsuccessful translations. We can also apply this principle to the present era, as some translators translate literally rather than take the risk of applying certain theories.

# Chapter Two: Cultural Translation Intricacies

Theories can serve translation and can help create an outstanding work in the sense of defining the contextual and extra-contextual factors that play role in the translation process. However, successful translators who do not abide to theories can exist if they are talented enough to set and follow their own rules, and those rules are accepted by others.

## 2.5 **Role of the Translator**

Since translation transfers one text in one language to another text in another language, some might consider it as betrayal to the source text. There is a certain degree of loss in each translated text, decreasing its power and making it less effective than the source text. According to Maier (1995), this loss may occur in two cases: either the translator is not competent enough to transfer the source text without any loss, or the source text depends on shared knowledge that is only completely understood by the readers of its own language because they already have preexisting ideas about the content or topic. The latter problem can be solved by a skillful translator who can make target readers aware of the topic either by footnotes, through explanation within the text itself, through the introduction, or through any other way he/she finds suitable. The translation may seem to suffer a loss or breakdown in the "inner space;" in reality this inner space can also provide an opportunity to discover the differences in cultures.

Translators face numerous kinds of difficulties during translation. One such difficulty is whether to interpret what they translate or not; i.e. whether to be objective to the source text or not. Objectivity or loyalty to the source text does imply that the translator act as a static being; he/she will necessarily interpret the meaning of the source text in the performance of the translation.

There has been a turn in the translation theory in modern times as the unit of translation has expanded from words and sentences to whole texts and cultures. This turn has created a new opportunity for the translator to practice his/her interaction with

the text and his awareness not only of the source language and culture, but also of the target language and culture.

In order to achieve the best target texts, the translator has to understand the value of the source text within the source-language discourse. To develop this understanding, the translator must be aware of the differences in the cultures and discourses of the source and target languages. The translator must discover the hidden structure and meaning of the source text through the use of various strategies related to discourse. The translator must be familiar with the culture, customs, traditions, religion and social settings of the source and target language speakers. He/she should also be familiar with different registers, styles of speaking, idioms, accents and social elements of both languages. This socio-cultural awareness, can improve the quality of translations to a great extent. According to Hatim and Mason (1990), the social context in translating a text is probably a more important variable than its genre. The act of translating takes place in a socio-cultural context. Consequently, it is important to view translating activity only within a given socio-cultural context.

## 2.6 **Cultural Problems in Translation**

In the beginning of the third millennium where the echoes of globalization resounds through the world, the needs to the translated matter have increased intensely. For example, in the Arab world, the translation of literary or non literary works from Arabic language to the French and English languages has not ceased to augment more intense. This phenomenon can be explained by two facts: firstly, that the French and English languages appeared as official languages in the world. Secondly, the production of the pragmatic, scientific, and literary texts in English and French languages augmented significantly. In Egypt and in the Arab world in general, millions of literary works need to be translated from Arabic to the French and English languages.

# Chapter Two: Cultural Translation Intricacies

In this context, we are questioning the cultural problems in translation and how can the translators solve these problems especially when we have two languages extremely different such as Arabic and English.

The problem is what happens when cross-culture contacts and interaction take place, i.e., when the message producer and the message receiver are from different cultures. The contact among culture increased and makes the intercultural communication imperative for people to make a concerted effort to get along with and understand those whose believes and backgrounds may be vastly different from their own.

Language can mark the cultural identity, it is also used to refer to other phenomena and refer beyond itself especially when a particular speaker used it for his intentions. A particular language points to the culture of a particular social group. We can conclude that language is a culture consequently translating a language is translating a culture. Therefore, to translate you should know the both language and culture.

Language also refers to object peculiar to a given culture and that is so evident in proper names which embodied those objects. The linguist Byran(1989) said that "a loaf of bread" evokes a specific culture objects in British usage unless a conscious effort is made to empty it of that reference and introduce a new one. Therefore we can draw on that language is a part of culture and through it we can express the cultural beliefs and values, that the specific collocations of a given word are peculiar to a language and its relationship with culture.

## 2.7 **Types of Inter-Cultural Problems Facing the Translator**

Translators face many challenges when they have to translate a document from one language to another. This seemingly simple job, takes up a lot of time and effort. Only a translator knows how difficult and painstaking it is to translate a document without obfuscating the meaning of the sentences. A wrong substitute word used by a

translator can distort the whole sentence, which can botch the whole document as a result.

### 2.7.1 A Problem of Semiotics

One prickly issue in relations between the Arab world and the West is on the one hand the ignorance which many westerners have about the degree of development that has gone on in the Arab world, and on the other hand the sensitivity that many Arabs feel towards any representation of their culture which confirms the stereotype which Europeans hold. This can lead to problems when one is seeking to represent this culture abroad.

### 2.7.2 **Translating Arabic Direct Speech in Novels**

In translating Arabic novels into English, one of the challenges that the translator frequently faces is how to translate the many greetings, exclamations and idiomatic expressions that occur. Does one totally domesticate them and reduce the religious aspect to that expected by the English-speaking audience, or does one translate them literally, running the risk of so exoticizing the text that it is ridiculed or rejected by the target audience. The third possibility is to hew out a new language expressive of the worldview of Muslims and the comprehensive situation of Arabs, but at the same time accessible to the target audience. In seeking to do this, the translator is fulfilling the role of intercultural communicator and facilitator par excellence. He is developing the capacities of the target language, while at the same time gently stretching the target audience's tolerance for otherness.

### 2.7.3 **The Translation of the Word *"Allah"***

# Chapter Two: Cultural Translation Intricacies

One of the most vexed issues is the translation of Islamic religious vocabulary, and in particular the question of whether the word Allah should be translated into the English term God, or whether it should simplified be transliterated. Many members of the Muslim community in Britain insist that it should not be translated. All other things being equal, to translate it implies that the Muslim God and the Christian God are essentially the same, whereas to refuse to translate it implies that the two are essentially different.

However, does this mean that it is appropriate to follow one's theological nose in all texts? It would appear not, for when students try not to translate the term even in legal and administrative texts, the effect is distinctly odd. It distorts the purpose of the texts, for legal texts are not intended to further a particular theological position, but rather to stipulate a law.

What are the criteria for making the choice then? When the writer of the text appears to be making a theological point, then the choice is significant, and the term to be used should be the one most accurately expressing the viewpoint of the writer, although it is a mute point if the translation is free to choose according to his own preference when the position of the writer is not manifest. When the theological point is not at issue, however, the choice to be made should be the unmarked one, the one that most conforms to the norms of the target culture and genre.

The translator is having to decide what the position of the author is, what his intention in that particular text is, and then to make a translation decision depending on whether the word is central to the conventional or personal goals of the author. Considerations of the effect of the word on the audience only come into play when the word is peripheral to conventional and personal goals.

## 2.8 **Cross Cultural Translation**

Much more than a matter of transferring words and sentences from one language to another, the process of translation reaches beyond to the underlying cultures when

those words and sentences originate. In the case of translating between Arabic and English, the translator faces the challenge of drawing together totally different cultures in the East and West. The translator has to be not only bilingual in order to produce a successful translation; he/she must be bicultural as well. For Pym, "the ultimate aim of translation is to improve intercultural relations" (1992) as Lindfors mentions in her article “Respect or Ridicule: Translation Strategies and the Images of a Foreign Culture”.

In most cases target readers are not familiar with the source culture including their numerous traditions, colloquial language, idioms and religion. The translator’s job is to create an impact on the target text reader that resembles the impact on the source text reader. That impact can be measured by comparing the reaction of the target language reader with the reaction of the source language reader. The translator faces challenge every step of the way in an effort to maintain loyalty to the author and his work bearing in mind the background of the target audience, the relationships between the target and the source audience, the place and the time the translation occurs, according to Cary, as Raddawi mentions in her article “The Concept of Translation Today” (1999).

In one of his lectures at the American University of Sharjah, Faiq discussed Lefevre’s explanation of his point of view regarding translation and culture (1998) saying:

> Different cultures have tended to take translation for granted, or rather, different cultures have taken the technique of translating that was current at a given time in their evolution for granted and equated it with the phenomenon of translating as such. Histories of translation in the West have shown increasingly that the technique of translating in western cultures has changed repeatedly over the centuries, and that was accepted as “obvious” at one particular time was, in fact little more than a passing phase. The important point is that shifts and changes in the techniques of translating did not occur at random. Rather, they were intimately linked with the way, in which different cultures, at different times, came to terms with the phenomenon of translation, with the challenge posed by

> the existence of the Other and the need to elect from a number of possible strategies for dealing with the Other. We, are, therefore, finally beginning to see different methods of translating as well as different approaches to translational practice as contingent, not eternal, as changeable, not fixed, because we are beginning to recognize that they have, indeed, changed over the centuries. (1998:12-13).

Lefevre thinks that each culture sees translation as its own and that people take it as a fashion. However, he believes, that each culture needs translation to develop. From Lefevre's explanation of the connection between translation and culture, we can notice that the issue of the Other and the cultural beliefs and traditions are not limited to Arabs only, rather it is considered an issue also among the Westerns who are not afraid to show their culture, with all its defects, to the Other as long as this will enrich their own culture and participate in developing it through sharing it with the other cultures.

In addition to that explanation, Lefevre also says that:

> Translators (..) are active negotiators between cultures, whose negotiations may, if not change the face of cultures all on their own, at least heavily contribute to doing so.

From this quote about the role of translators in changing the cultures, we can come out with a definition of cross-cultural translation in the point of view of Lefevre. Translation itself, he thinks, is a negotiation between cultures so cross cultural translation is a negotiation between different cultures through translation.

Nawal El Saadawi's books provide an excellent case study of cross-cultural translation from Arabic to English because of the complexities facing the translators of her works as well as the questions and arguments she raises in both the Arab world and the Western world. Nawal El Saadawi's books are representative of the difficulties of cross-cultural translation because of the themes she writes about.

## Chapter Two: Cultural Translation Intricacies

El Saadawi raises important issues between Arabs with polarized points of view regarding various topics. One party criticizes her for distorting the image of Muslims and Arabs as they are viewed in the West and for emphasizing the stereotype Westerners have about Arab countries instead of trying to improve and polish that image. They disapprove of the fact that she writes about the Islamic rules and principles which seem negative to the non-Muslim reader. Furthermore, they accuse her of directly addressing the West in her writings, focusing on what Western readers want to hear about the Islamic and Arab world, choosing the topics in which they are interested. On the other hand, the other party encourages her to expose Arab traditions and beliefs they find defective, like the circumcision of girls, the mistreatment of women, and the reduction of women's social status. Supporters approve of El Saadawi's attempts to change and improve these antiquated traditions.

I believe that Nawal El Saadawi addresses the Arab readers not the Western readers, as her opponents claim. The topics she writes about and the words and terms she uses is an obvious proof for that. She uses certain words and phrases that are known only among Muslims and Arabs without explaining them within the text itself. If she was addressing the Western readers, she would have explained them within the text so that when the translators translate her work, they would not face any problems delivering the same meaning to the English language reader. She would have tackled the same issues or topics but without using Islamic words, terms and phrases that are not known among the Westerns such as using verses from the Quran and the other religious and cultural elements.

Nawal's critics should have an active role in transferring the image of Islam and the Arab world to the West by showing the existing gap between Islamic teachings and current "malpractice" resulting from misinterpretation of these teachings by some religious scholars who look nothing but into their own interests as males instead of those critics just having a passive attitude towards Nawal and other writers. They can write or translate books that talk about the beautiful side of Islam and how it is a

merciful religion instead of attacking writers who are against some inherited obsolete rules and traditions. Those critics are being passive by only attacking feminists and writers who criticize some Islamic and Arab behaviors instead of being active and defend Islam in a better way.

Nawal's most famous book ; *Woman at Point Zero* which is an excellent example to study because of its plot deals with discrimination against women and questionable behaviors and beliefs of Arabs towards different areas of their lives and they are packed of dialectical, cultural and religious problems. *Woman at point Zero* is based on a true story of a prostitute named Firdaus who faces execution for killing her pimp. Firdaus relates her life story to Nawal El Saadawi from early childhood until she became a prostitute and killed her pimp.

Condemned by society for choosing such a disgraceful job, Firdaus was actually forced into that line of work by the very same society that condemns her. Firdaus' trauma begins with her uncle who first sexually abuses her, then forces her to marry an older man who beats her. She finds herself defenseless and runs away from her husband. With nowhere to turn, she finds herself on the streets of Egypt where she is repeatedly raped, and finally ends up working as a prostitute.

*Woman at point Zero* provoked a sharp reaction from many Arab readers who disapproved of the fact that Nawal El Saadawi defends a prostitute, justifying her line of work, her killing a man, and her leaving her family in the first place. Many Arabs also reacted to certain details mentioned in the book, causing them to oppose not only the book's translation and publication in the West, but also the mere fact that it was written at all. An example of such controversial details is when Firdaus goes to her uncle to complain to him about how her husband beats her. Her uncle replies, "All husbands beat their wives." To this her uncle's wife adds, "It was precisely men well versed in their religion who beat their wives. The percepts of religion permitted such punishment. A virtuous woman was not supposed to complain about her husband. "Her duty was perfect obedience" (p. 44). Nawal's attackers maintain that passages

such as the one quoted above can perpetuate a negative image of Islam. In another instance, Firdaus' uncle is shown to be a very religious man, respected in his village, despite the fact that he sexually abuses his niece and beats his wife.

Another example of controversial Arab behavior mentioned in *Woman at point Zero* is female circumcision, which exists in some villages in Egypt and certain other Arab countries. The way Nawal presents this custom might be shocking to the foreign reader who is unaware of this practice and its reason for being. She mentions it without offering any cultural background: "one day I asked my mother about my father. How was it that she had given birth to me without a father? First she beat me. Then she brought a woman who was carrying a small knife or maybe a razor blade. "They cut off a piece of flesh from between my thighs" (p.13). Nawal made this act sound like a punishment, as if Arabs condemn girls when they ask questions of a sexual nature or when they behave in a certain way.

### 2.8.1 **Translation Requirements**

The translator of the twenty-first century needs to work with a model of the translation process that takes into account the historical, cultural, and social context of what he is doing. The focus of the translator's work has to do with genres (novels, scientific and economic reports, poems etc.), which are realized by combinations of text types (narrative, descriptive, expository, argumentative, exhortatory etc.), which in turn are realized by lexicographical forms or words bearing ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings. The genre needs to be seen not in terms of its literary meaning, but in its social context, as a product of certain social circumstances, the defining feature of each genre being its communicative purposes (as argued by Bhatia 1993 p.100). Each genre takes place in the context of a certain institutional communicative transaction, as a result of which it fulfills a certain number of generalized conventional communicative purposes. However, in addition to these conventional purposes, writers and speakers often have certain specific conventional purposes and personal communicative purposes that together constitute the pragmatic action of the text. This pragmatic action takes place within a world of pre-existent

micro- and macro-signs (words, phrases, textual patterns, pictures, clothes etc.), where the writer/speaker uses these pre-existent signs for purposes of his own.

However, all this is taking place within a context of patterns of words, or discourses, which are characteristic of particular institutions, and reflect certain worldviews, which determine legitimate objects of knowledge, attribute qualities to these objects of knowledge, and specify legitimate relationships between these objects (Kress 1988:3). Given that no two worldviews are totally different, it is most helpful for the translator to think of worldview as being the totality of an individual's or a society's view of reality, which is in turn made up of "a large number of distinguishable perspectives or paradigms" (Kraft 1989:82). For example, when we compare capitalism and communism as ideologies, we find that they are not totally different, but rather they contain a number of contrasting perspectives within a framework of similar perspectives; while capitalism is conventionally seen as giving pride of place to individual initiative and individual reward, and communism as giving pride of place to the state, both operate largely within a materialist framework (Hatim & Williams 1998:128).

This model takes into account the fact that the translator encounters problems at a number of different levels, not just the linguistic level of finding the correct meaning of a word or finding the appropriate turn of phrase in the language into which he is translating. Here are some Examples of this type of problem.

### 2.8.2 **Translation and cultural problems**

The problem is what happens when cross-culture contacts and interaction take place, i.e. when the message producer and the message receiver are from different cultures. The contact among culture increased and makes the intercultural communication imperative for people to make a concerted effort to get along with and understand those whose believes and backgrounds may be vastly different from their own.

Language can mark the cultural identity, it is also used to refer to other phenomena and refer beyond itself especially when a particular speaker used it for his

intentions. A particular language points to the culture of a particular social group. We can conclude that language is a culture consequently translating a language is translating a culture. Therefore, to translate you should know the both language and culture.

Culture is a fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioral convent ions, and basic assumptions and values that are shared by a group of people and that influence each member's behavior and each member's interpretations of the meanings of other people's behavior. Language is the medium for expressing and embodying other phenomena. It expresses the values, beliefs and meanings which members of a given society share by virtue of their socialization into it. Language also refers to object peculiar to a given culture and that is so evident in proper names which embodied those objects. The linguist Byran(1989) said that "a loaf of bread" evokes a specific culture objects in British usage unless a conscious effort is made to empty it of that reference and introduce a new one.

Therefore we can draw on that language is a part of culture and through it we can express the cultural beliefs and values, that the specific collocations of a given word are peculiar to a language and its relationship with culture. In fact, translation means to produce an equivalent message in the target language. In this context, Nida notes that the production of equivalent message is a process of matching different parts of speech, but also reproducing the total dynamic character of the communication. In other words, the text and the context have to be considered. Language and context are based on the culture and its sign systems in which the language is created. Language, as a sign system, is a cultural vehicle that reflects the society and its values in which communications take place. Non-linguistic signs which form part of the context determine the cultural framework in which linguistic signs function. The task of the translator is to find a translation theory to deal with cultural aspects in the transference of sign meaning into a target
language.

# Chapter Two: Cultural Translation Intricacies

Nida (1975) suggests five important phases of communication that have to be considered when translating. They are:

1. The subject matter, i.e., the referents that are talked about.
2. The participants who take part in the communication.
3. The process of writing
4. The code used that is language, including all its symbols and arrangements.
5. The message that is the particular way in which the subject matter is encoded into specific symbols and arrangements.

According to Nida(1975) the translator may have problems in decoding the message in the case of translating texts between different cultures which are not closely related. The translator in this case will find rare form of words, unusual syntax, strange combinations of words and unfamiliar themes. As a result, he will face problems in decoding the original message. He added that certain aspects of culture are universal and are not culturally bound. He said that human experience is so much alike throughout the world. Everyone eats, sleeps, works, is related to families experiences, love, hates, is/has jealousy, is capable of altruism, loyalty, and friendship, and employs many facial gestures which are almost universal. In fact, what people of various cultures have in common is far greater than what separates them from one another.

Language is embedded in a cultural context and has to be transferred to the target language to solve the cultural challenges and problems in translation (Nida, 1975). Nida (1975) proposed cultural dynamic equivalence. The dynamic equivalent translation is the closest natural equivalent to the source language message. This definition contains three essential terms: equivalent, which refers to the source language message, natural which refers to the receptor language, and closest which binds the two orientations together on the basis of the highest degree of approximation. The translation should bear no obvious trace of a foreign origin; it should fit the whole receptor language and culture. However, when source and receptor languages

represent very different cultures there should be many basic themes and accounts which cannot be naturalized by the process of translating.

In this case, Nida(1975) said that no translation that attempts to bridge a wide cultural gap can hope to eliminate all traces of the foreign setting. Thus, the translator could not always domesticate the Target text but sometimes he will foreignise certain terms or words. Domestication means changing the SL values and making them readable for the TL audience. However Foreignisation is keeping the values of the SL and exposing audience to them.

### 2.8.3 **Translation from Arabic to English**

Arabic is one of the most controversial languages in the world as it involves many elements that the other languages lack. Arabic language is not considered only a mere language; it combines with its words, phrases and grammar a religion, certain traditions and beliefs and a certain background. Like other languages, it involves a certain culture but there is also an important element involved in translating from Arabic: stereotype. The image of the Arabian nights, the slaves, the oppression against women and the domination of men do not disappear from the eye of the English language reader. A certain image about Islam and about Arab society is spread throughout the West because most of the books that are being translated foster that image. The Western expectations encouraged the publishing houses and the translators to focus on the books that talk about those topics.

To get a better idea of this image of Arab culture in the West, we consider the kind of books written by Arab authors that are being translated most, those that are becoming more popular in the West than in their land of origin. Such books typically include those written by feminist writers about how women in the Arab world are oppressed; books that talk about the backwardness of the Arab and Islamic world; books defaming or criticizing Islam; and books that criticize Arab culture in general.

## Chapter Two: Cultural Translation Intricacies

Hanan Al-Shaykh and Nawal El Saadawi are good examples of the authors who are popular in the West for their works aiming at reforming Arab society by pointing out its defects. According to Faiq. (2004), the stereotypes the Westerns have about the Arabs are caused by the numerous translations of the *One Thousand and One Nights* which has been the main source of Western representations of Arab culture, and by extension Islam.

Some claim that El Saadawi is popular in America and Europe because she says and writes what people there expect to hear and read. These critics argue that she does not write to realistically portray Arab society as she claims; not because she is a true defendant of women's rights; but because her focus is on the West; she writes to be translated into English or French. Such critics oppose authors like El Saadawi because they confirm the stereotype of Arabs in the West and distort the image of Arabs and Muslims. Critics insist that what is inside Arab society should remain inside it.
In an interview with Two Eyes Magazine (1999), Nawal El Saadawi defends her cross-cultural publications. Asked whether she finds it difficult to locate a balance to criticize Islam without pandering to Western prejudices about it, El Saadawi replies:

> I am critical of all religions. When you criticize your own culture, there are those in your culture who are against you, who say, "Oh, don't show our dirty linen outside," you know? But I don't believe in this theory, the dirty linen, et cetera. I speak one language, whether inside the country or outside. I don't change my language, because I believe in what I'm saying. I'm critical of Islam, Christianity(…)" No, I have to criticize everything. I must be honest with myself. So I have one language, which I speak. And we shouldn't be afraid of being blamed of being westernized. Some people say, "Oh, you are westernized, that's why you criticize Islam." Taslima Nasrin was a victim of that; people said, "She shouldn't criticize her culture in the West."

Reality should not be hidden. The author has the right to uncover the reality and to voice it with all its defects in a hope to change it. Western authors expose the reality

of their culture without fear of being judged by Arabs, so why should Arab authors hide their views? Oppression towards women still exists, men retain the upper hand in society, taking as excuse or argument some distorted Islamic teachings, people prefer to have a baby boy instead of a girl and Arab society is a male-oriented society. In an enlightened Arab society, people are transformed from their "backwardness" and women enjoy a full range of human rights just as men do. El Saadawi tries to take us to that enlightened society through her books, reaching beyond the purported stereotypes of one culture or another, and even helping English language readers as well, since every society suffers from a variable degree of mistreating certain groups of its members.

In the same interview, El Saadawi was asked whether she writes differently for different audiences or not, after being criticized for writing to the West, not to Arab readers as she claims. Many writers who are famous in the West like Hanan Al Shaikh are accused of the same: writing for the West even though they write in Arabic. These writers tackle such controversial issues as criticizing the situation of women in the Arab society such as oppression, inequality of rights, double standards, various aspects of Islam, like wearing the veil but being corrupt double-faced; and other customs that may be considered to be social defects. Nawal's answer regarding this matter was:

> No! I write in Arabic. All my books are in Arabic. And then they are translated. Because my role is to change my people. That's my role. I can
> not change people here in America and leave my country. So that's why I
> write in Arabic. I never write in English. And then my books are translated.

Nawal El Saadawi was taken as a case study to examine the advantages and disadvantages of cross-cultural translation. The translations of El Saadawi's books were used as examples to comment on the validity of translating into another culture to a totally different audience.

## Chapter Two: Cultural Translation Intricacies

The study was an attempt to answer a question that is raised among Arab readers and critics: “does the translation of Nawal El Saadawi’s works help in shedding the light on the strange “other” and make its culture more familiar to the West, or does it foster the stereotypes Western readers have about Arabs?”.

People have different views regarding writing about sensitive issues in their culture, and Arab culture is no exception. Those who oppose cross-cultural translation, have stronger objections when it comes to translation of written texts. They are against writing about those issues in an attempt to protect the reputation of Arab culture in the West.

The solution to the dilemma of stereotypes lies not in hiding Arab social problems from Western readers, pretending to be a perfect society; the solution is to realize change and reform in that society, eventually overcoming the antiquated image of Arabs.

At the same time, writers take care to avoid offending source language readers of their work. In Nawal El Saadawi’s case, she criticizes negative behaviors and ideas in Arab society in an attempt to reform it. Her aggressive way of presenting her ideas and of condemning society is offensive to the very people she endeavors to communicate with. A talented writer such as El Saadawi is capable of conveying her message without creating negative reactions from her fellow Arabs by attacking their traditions and for giving Western readers a dreadful image about Muslims and Arabs. Translators are integrally involved in this matter. When translating this kind of text, they must strive to clarify its foreignness by any means they find suitable. Some target language readers do not have pre-existing notions about the topics Nawal and others write about; other target language readers are aware of those topics but have little or no idea about them; this kind of books can make them believe all Arabs and Muslims behave and think in a negative way. The author of such books needs to clarify that while certain thoughts and behaviors do exist in Arab society, they do not

pervade all people and all areas of the Arab world. By creating a better overall representation, misunderstanding and erroneous generalizations of target language readers are avoided, while source language readers will not be so inclined to attack the author and avoid reading his/her books.

Many people refuse to read Nawal El Saadawi's books simply because she attacks Arab beliefs and way of living, although they read other books that address the same topics in more accepted ways. Losing Arab readers is not Nawal's aim. She purports to restructure Arab society, and therefore should inspire all Arabs to read her books with an open mind. Arabs are not used to free voice. That's why Nawal was shocking. Maybe a whole restructuring of the interpretation of religious teachings is needed and taboos should be sometimes eliminated so as to speak freely about different social issues and try to find a possible remedy to them.

Cross-cultural translation is a successful method of shedding the light on "the other," bringing different societies closer together. Arabs learn about Western society, largely by way of American movies. American cinematographers tackle the various negative aspects of their society, including drug abuse, crime and other social defects, rather than try to present a skewed, idealized image. They have the courage to shamelessly show their reality to people around the world. Nawal El Saadawi has the same courage; yet there is a difference between the two. The West presents their defects as exceptional; not all Westerners behave in the same way and when they choose a questionable or mistaken path in life, society tries to modify them as it refuses this kind of behaviors. El Saadawi presents all Arabs as behaving and thinking in only one way; consequently she has lost many Arab readers and been accused of exclusively addressing the West in her books.

Cross-cultural translation is one of the most effective methods to make all people around the world familiar with each and every culture no matter how far and how different it may be. It should be perpetuated through exchanging information and

sharing experience between one culture and “the other” culture. The method may vary from one person to the next, whether in the role of author or that of translator; in the final analysis, everyone has the same goal: to make his/her own culture reach the whole world, and to profoundly comprehend the culture of “the other.”

Yet, a translation must be faithful to the original work. We have different versions in the target language of the same work, and each translator creates something quite original. So, is translation possible, or is it an impossible exercise? As an illustration of this ongoing controversial debate, the following quotation provides ample evidence: "Translation is of course an impossible task. No version of any sentence in one language can possibly capture the semantic richness, phonic structure, syntactic, form and connotative allusiveness of a sentence in another language. ('Petrey in Rose, 1984:87). Certainly, "translation is not the transcoding of words or sentences from one language to another, but a complex form of action, whereby someone provides information on a text (source language material) in a new situation and under changed functional, cultural and linguistic conditions, preserving formal aspects as closely as possible"( Snell-Hornby in Bassnett and Lefèvre, 1990:82). Indeed, the act of translation involves both linguistic transcoding and interlingual communication. But, although it is true that considerable literature exists on the theoretical aspects of the subject and manuals and course books abound, little research has been done with the aim of revealing the strategies selected by translators in resolving interlingual difficulties.

### 2.8.4 The Linguistic Differences between English and Arabic

Because English and Arabic belong to different language families the possibilities of loss can be occur on all language levels morphology, syntax and phonology ,or textual levels stylistic/rhetoric, texture and semantic. Firstly, the difference between Arabic and English internal structure and forming rules enhances the rate of the morphological loss. Unlike English, Arabic morphology is rich with

various functional morphemes like the duality and feminine suffixes and infix morphemes which does not exist in English (Reima Al-Jurf: 2).Accordingly, the absence of the feminine form and duality in English can be confusing to translators, and the failure of extracting the intentional meaning can create a serious morphological loss leading to producing a wrong or an inadequate translation.

Similarly, Arabic and English syntax are separated from one another because each one of them combines and arranges the words within sentences according to its way, and the failing in overcoming these differences will cause an inevitable syntactical loss. Probably tenses are one of the most difficult syntactical dilemmas confronting the translator either in translating from English into Arabic or vice versa since English has twelve tenses and moods of time reference; while, Arabic has only three (McCarus, Mory, & Snider, 1969). For example, translator had no choice but to render present progressive into simple present in Arabic. (Target Text)

Additionally, the asymmetrical in part of speech, especially the case of Arabic cognate object which does not exist in English, can be tough to deal with without resorting to some alternatives like using different noun or adding adverb of manner.(As-Safi, 2011) By contrast, phonological loss do not affect the intended message both writer or translator wants to convey because each language has its own way of articulating and producing phonemes, even if they belong to the same language family. Still, the possibility of loss on this level is high and can affect the impact of the original; especially, if the message is part of rhythmic, prosodic features or rhetorical features of texts like poetry, jokes or songs. The failing in meeting the prosodic and the phonemic features of the original will produce a text with weak auditory appealing effect on the reader and hearers. (James, Sandor, & Ian, 2002) Additionally, losing the aesthetic values of (Source Text) can be due to the stylistic/rhetorical loss where translator fails in rendering either rhetorical or stylistics devices of the original into (Target Text). Arabic stylistics is by all means different from English because some

Arabic stylistic devices like repetition, redundancy and successive use of nominalization are considered as flaws in English texts.

Eventually, any loss on the previous levels leads to what so called semantic loss which can be categorized lexical semantic loss on textual semantic loss .to begin with, textual semantic results from the loss of the previous loss levels because any loss on any level will cause loss the meaning of the original. Still, any translation entails loss of semantic content particularly when dealing with idioms, figurative meaning, generative and specific meaning, and special formulas (Nida &Taber, 1982).

## 2.9 **Conclusion**

*Woman at Point Zero* is a powerful Egyptian novel relaying the life story of a woman awaiting death row in a Cairo prison for murdering a pimp. Her crime is one she confesses with no shame.

The book opens with a confident, concerned woman psychologist and author trying to learn the story behind quiet, patient Firdaus. She is a mysterious, ex-prostitute who refuses to speak with anyone in or out of the prison. Firdaus at last agrees to speak to the woman psychologist/author, and slowly unravels her tragic life history before the woman. It is a lifetime rife with abuse, oppression, abandonment, being taken advantage of on all levels, and of consistent rejection- by nearly every human she encountered from child to adulthood.

Firdaus graphically and unabashedly reveals the movement toward a frenzied dance with fear and anger, one slowly picking up tempo with each man or woman who walked in and away from her life carrying a small piece of her soul. Older, secondary education and college students would be the best audiences for whom the book might be adopted as a course text. Its contents are powerful, though would be best examined in terms of the political, social, personal, and economic contexts under which her story took place.

## Chapter Two: Cultural Translation Intricacies

Firdaus takes readers through her turbulent childhood, from being abused and witnessing the abuse of her mother by her father, to her mysterious female circumcision as a young woman, to the twisted molestation by her uncle, betrayal by lovers, and on to bitter exploitation by pimps, and last and possibly most ruthless- the persistent taunting of men, women, and law enforcement- as she struggles to live an adult life she has been given no tools to live.

# Chapter Three: Analyzing *Woman At Point Zero*

## 3.1 **Introduction**

*Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi is an engrossing, dramatized non-fiction work about the life of Firdaous, an Egyptian woman sentenced to death for killing a man, after suffering greatly at the hands of men through her entire life. Firdaous becomes a prostitute, but she is imprisoned for killing a pimp who beats and rapes her. *Woman at point zero* is a heart wrenching tale that any readers will find hard to put down.

The story takes place in early 1970's. The author, Dr Saadawi is a psychiatrist and consultant for the women's prison. A young woman named Firdaous is scheduled to be executed for fatally stabbing her pimp. Thus far Firdaous has refused to speak to anyone, but Dr.Saadawi breaks through and thus a novel is born.

The plot is clear, simple and melodic and the voice is haunting. As Firdaous tells her story l particularly was moved by the sadness of her tale. She was poor and unwanted, suffering from hunger and parental cruelty as a child. Every man she ever met, from her father to her uncle to her many clients and lovers all treated her badly. It seems part of the culture to abuse, mistreat and abandon women, and there is a sadness and acceptance of this situation throughout the book. And yet Firdaous has courage. She uses her body to escape poverty and a terrible arranged marriage. She is able to get money from money but they all despise her even when she gives up her life as a prostitute and goes to work in an office. She experiences the same kind of negative treatment from men. The only difference is that she makes less money.

This women's life is awful. l could well understand her desperate act. However, l find it hard to believe that all men could be such beasts. Surely, even in Egypt, there is at least one man with a feeling of compassion or tenderness. But l cannot really believe that every woman is always a victim in every situation. Certainly the book reinforces my thankfulness in a social culture where women do not lead a life of a constant abuse. But l have to wonder if the author went a little far in making her point.

# Chapter Three: Analyzing *Woman At Point Zero*

The book is certainly worth reading. It does shed some light on the plight of women. The main character is sympathetic; but l was aware that its political perspective overshadows the characterization.

## 3.2 **Text Analysis**

*Woman at Point Zero* is based on a true story about a woman whose struggles to survive poverty ending with her facing execution–at the same prison where the author herself was held for political activism.

### 3.2.1 **The Context**

Nawal El Saadawi was born in the Egyptian village of Kafr Tahla in 1931. Her father was a civil servant, and her mother came from an upper-class Egyptian family. At the age of six, and at the insistence of her mother, El Saadawi underwent a clitoridectomy (also known as female genital mutilation), a procedure in which a young girl's clitoris is removed. El Saadawi was one of nine children, and her parents made the unusual decision to send all of their children—boys and girls—to school. El Saadawi excelled in school, and in 1949 she entered medical school at the University of Cairo. There, El Saadawi met and eventually married Ahmed Helmi, a fellow medical student and an Egyptian freedom fighter who opposed Britain's presence in Egypt. They were soon divorced. Despite the limitations placed on women by governmental and religious rule at the time, El Saadawi became a doctor in 1955.

After her divorce from her first husband, El Saadawi was pressured by her family into marrying Dr. Rashad Bey, who disapproved of El Saadawi's writing and her feminist viewpoints. El Saadawi in turn disliked Bey, and they, too, divorced. She then moved to New York to attend Columbia University, where she obtained her master's degree in public health in 1966. By this time, El Saadawi had married her third husband, Sherif Hetata. Like El Saadawi, Hetata is both a doctor and a novelist, and so was supportive of both of El Saadawi's passions. Hetata has since translated several of El Saadawi's works into English. Upon their return to Egypt, El Saadawi rose to become Egypt's Director of Public Health. She also worked as the editor-in-

chief of Health magazine and assistant general secretary for Egypt's Medical Association.

In 1972, El Saadawi published her first nonfiction work, *Women and Sex*, which dealt with religion, sex, and clitoridectomy. Infuriated, the Egyptian government and religious establishment pressured the Ministry of Health into dismissing El Saadawi. She simultaneously lost her jobs as editor-in-chief of Health and as assistant general secretary in the Medical Association in Egypt.

From 1973 to 1976, El Saadawi researched women and neuroses at the Medical School of Ain Shams University. During this time, she did extensive research on women in prisons, traveling often to Qanatir Women's Prison. It was there that she met the woman who inspired the character of Firdaus in *Woman at Point Zero*—a prostitute condemned to death for killing the man who would have been her pimp.

From 1979 to 1980, El Saadawi worked for the United Nations as the advisor for the Women's Program in Africa and the Middle East. By this time, she had established a formidable bibliography and had published numerous works of fiction and non-fiction, including *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* (1958), *Two Women in One* (1968), *She Has No Place in Paradise* (1972), *God Dies by the Nile* (1976), *The Circling Song* (1977), and *The Hidden Face of Eve*: *Women in the Arab World* (1977). All of her works have a feminist point of view, and El Saadawi was threatened by various Islamic fundamentalist groups throughout her life.

In 1981, El Saadawi was imprisoned by the regime of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat for criticizing his one-party rule. She spent two months in Qanatir Women's Prison—the same prison in which she visited Firdaus, the protagonist of *Woman at Point Zero*—under the Egyptian "Law for the Protection of Values from Shame." She was released one month after President Sadat's assassination in 1981. In 1982, El Saadawi founded the Arab Women's Solidarity Association, a feminist organization that was subsequently banned in 1991. Not long after, El Saadawi's name began to appear on "death lists" issued by Islamic fundamentalist groups who objected

to her outspoken feminism and her unapologetic criticism of some aspects of Islam. El Saadawi and Hetata fled to the United States, where she taught at Duke University in North Carolina and Washington State University in Seattle. Finally, in 1996, she returned to Egypt.

But her troubles weren't over. In 2001, the seventy-three-year-old El Saadawi suggested in an interview that the pilgrimage that Muslims make to Mecca has its roots in a pagan tradition. In the same interview, she suggested that Islamic laws of inheritance were discriminatory toward women. Consequently, El Saadawi was accused of "straying from the circle of Islam." A famous Egyptian lawyer invoked an old and out-of-use law that allows one Muslim to accuse another of "apostasy," or renunciation of the Islamic faith. Because under Sharia, or Islamic law, a non-Muslim is not allowed to be married to a Muslim, the lawyer, Nabih al-Wahsh, tried to force El Saadawi to divorce Hetata, her husband of 40 years. The case was overturned in July of 2001, and El Saadawi and Hetata remain married. El Saadawi continues to be a provocateur.

### 3.2.2 **Plot Overview**

In *Woman at Point Zero*, Nawal El Saadawi describes her experiences as a psychiatrist in Egypt, studying the psychological effects of prison on female prisoners. She states in her introduction that when she was conducting these studies, she had no idea that one day she would be imprisoned by the government. On one visit to Qanatir prison, Nawal meets a doctor who tells her that there is a prisoner there who is truly remarkable. She is awaiting the death penalty for killing a man, but the doctor cannot believe that this woman is capable of killing anyone. He wrote out a request for a pardon, but the condemned woman refused to sign it. Nawal desperately wants to meet with this woman, named Firdaus, but Firdaus keeps refusing to meet with her. Finally, the day before she is to be put to death, Firdaus agrees to meet with Nawal.

Nawal goes to Firdaus's cell, and Firdaus commands her to sit on the ground. Firdaus begins to tell her life story. She was born into an extremely poor family in the

countryside. Her father often beat her mother; sometimes he beat her as well. Firdaus used to play in the fields with other children. A boy named Mohammadain was her special playmate, and when they were young, they used to play "bride and bridegroom." Firdaus got pleasure from her sexual experiments with Mohammadain. One day, her mother performed a clitoridectomy on her, and after that, Firdaus is no longer allowed to play with Mohammadain, nor does she ever feel sexual pleasure in the same way. Soon, Firdaus's mother and father die, and Firdaus is sent to live with her uncle, a sometime scholar, who lives in Cairo.

At first, everything goes well for Firdaus in Cairo. She and her uncle get along well, and she is allowed to go to school, which she loves. She and her uncle share a bed and are close. Her uncle gets married and the new wife does not like Firdaus, so Firdaus is sent to a boarding school. Firdaus is an excellent student and works hard. Unlike the other girls, she does not fantasize about boys and marriage. She spends most of her time at the library and in the courtyard, where she encounters a teacher named Miss Iqbal, with whom she forms a friendship. When Firdaus graduates, she is given an award, but she and her family are not at the ceremony, so Miss Iqbal accepts it for Firdaus. When school is over, Firdaus's uncle comes to get her.

Back at her uncle's house, Firdaus is miserable. One night, she overhears her aunt and uncle discussing whether they will marry Firdaus to her aunt's old uncle, Sheikh Mahmoud. He is sixty and has a facial deformity. Firdaus runs away, but while she is on the streets, she is terrified by the strange men who approach her, so she returns home. They marry her to Sheikh Mahmoud. He is selfish and stingy and beats Firdaus. His facial deformity is a large swelling on his chin with a hole in the middle that leaks pus. After one bad beating, Firdaus runs away. She ends up in a coffee shop, where she meets Bayoumi, the coffee shop owner. She goes with him to his apartment. At first Bayoumi is kind to Firdaus. Then Firdaus announces that she wants to get a job, and Bayoumi is enraged. He beats her and begins to lock her in the apartment when he leaves. He brings his friends home and allows them to have sex with her.

Firdaus escapes with the help of a neighbor and flees Bayoumi's apartment for the city.

Resting by the Nile, Firdaus feels hopeless until an wealthy-looking woman approaches her. Her name is Sharifa, and she is a prostitute. She takes Firdaus in and teaches her to become a high-class prostitute. Sharifa makes money from Firdaus's body until one night when her friend Fawzy comes over. Firdaus overhears Sharifa and Fawzy fighting over who will get to keep her, so she runs away again. Still a prostitute, Firdaus becomes her own boss and eventually has a beautiful home and expensive things. One night, a client named Di'aa tells her that she is not a respectable woman, and Firdaus is devastated. She gives up her nice apartment and beautiful things, moves into a shack, and begins working as an office assistant. There, she realizes that the life of an assistant is in many ways worse than the life of a prostitute. She meets a man named Ibrahim, and falls in love with him. They have a relationship, and Firdaus begins to feel that the world is not so horrible, until she discovers that Ibrahim has become engaged to the boss's daughter.

Firdaus leaves the company and becomes a prostitute again. She is very expensive and very popular. Many powerful men come to her, and she turns some of them away to prove that she has power over her own body, and because she despises them. Ibrahim comes to her, and she realizes he never loved her; rather, he just wanted free sex. A pimp tries to take over Firdaus's life, and for a little while, she lets him. Then they fight and she kills him. Shortly after that, Firdaus meets an Arab prince who takes her home and offers her $3,000. She sleeps with him, rips up the money, and slaps him. Terrified, the man calls the police. They come and arrest Firdaus. Firdaus is tried and sentenced to death.

She is, she tells Nawal, just waiting to die, because she is excited to go somewhere new. She knows that the men who sentenced her want to kill her because they're afraid of the truth she has to tell, not because they're afraid she'll kill again. After she finishes her story, police come to her cell and take her away to be executed. Nawal leaves the cell and is ashamed of the world. Everywhere she looks, she sees lies

and unhappiness. As Nawal drives away from the prison, she thinks about running people over with her car, but she doesn't. She realizes that Firdaus is braver than she is.

## 3.3 **From Cradle to Grave**

*Woman at point zero* set in a patriarchal society, where rights of women are strictly limited by men. Women have no freedom, no economic power, and are always forced to accomplish in domestic tasks. According to dictionary a patriarchal society is a system whereby men are the ones who have control over women; they are the ones who hold positions of power and prestige. However in both of these texts women disobey these norms. Medea and Firdaus rebel aggressively against male dominance, both of them kill men and fight against what society is expecting from them.

This is paralleled by Saadawi's battle against male dominance, as she was also born in the same patriarchal society as Firdaus. It is true that Saadawi was born in a superior class than Firdaus, but during her existence she realizes how deplorable the situation of women in society is. She consequently decides that as she was in a favorable position she should fight for women's rights. Her family was as traditional as any other family at the time. Saadawi's genitals were mutilated at the age of six. Since she was small her family taught her that as a woman she would have to be docile and to obey all men in her life. This is reflected in her novel, when Firdaus is narrating her story, she says: "A woman who was carrying a knife...They cut off a piece of flesh...between my thighs" (2006:13). Her father decided that all his children should have a proper education. Despite the social coercion Saadawi manages to study psychiatry at the University of Cairo. These are similarities between Saadawi's life and Firdaus's that show how Saadawi's experiences are reflected on her writing.

### 3.3.1 **Infancy**

The female child faces the problem of discrimination as soon as she is born. This stems from the fact that a male child is usually the preferred sex. Technology has made it possible for the prejudice and abuse to start right from the womb through the

use of sex selective abortions. This procedure has made female feticide to be on the increase. Firdaus siblings „are stricken with diarrhea, waste away quickly and one by one, creep into a corner and die because „her father never went to bed without supper, no matter what happened (ibid-17). Whenever a male child dies, Firdaus father beats her mother mercilessly as if she caused it. But „when one of his female children dies,my father would eat his supper, my mother would wash his legs, and then he would go to sleep, just as he did every night.... Sometimes when there is no food at home, we would all go to bed with empty stomachs. But he would never fail to have a meal. (ibid-18). Her father s self-centeredness results in the starvation, malnutrition and eventual death of these children.

### 3.3.1 **Childhood**

Clitoridectomy, also known as Female Genital Mutilation, is a common practice in many traditional African societies.

> It is a traditional practice in which a person, sometimes unskilled or a health worker, cuts off parts or whole organs of the female genitalia usually using the knife or razor blade, which for the most part is unsterilized…It is considered, variously, a cleansing ritual from evil spirits, a female rite of passage, a guarantor of a woman s chastity and her marriageability, and a boost to fertility or to a man s sexual pleasure (Salami :37).

It is worrisome to know that this practice is carried out by elderly women who have gone through the same painful exercise that is enforced by traditional customs and they know the devastating effect of this mutilation. The woman is mutilated both physically and psychologically. Okpara (ibid-193) asserts that „while the woman s body is mutilated for the benefit of the man, the male organ in the course of circumcision gets manicured for the reification of woman.. This reveals that Female Genital Mutilation is at the detriment of women and concerned only with the satisfaction of man s pleasure. Firdaus undergoes clitoridectomy at a tender age. She recalls that her mother „brought a woman who was carrying a small knife or maybe a razor blade. They cut off a piece of flesh from between my thighs. I cried all night

(ibid-13). This single act leaves a devastating effect in her life. Later in her life, she is unable to experience sexual pleasure because according to her, „a part of me, of my being, was gone and would never return (ibid-15).

As a child, Firdaus uncle uses any opportunity he has to exploit her sexually. While she is kneading dough to bake for family use, her uncle, under the guise of reading a book, rubs her thighs and gradually moves upwards to her private part. He only stops when he hears a sound or movement and „would continue to press against my thighs with a grasping almost brutal insistence (ibid-13) when silence is restored to the environment. Child marriages are common place in Africa. This practice enables the girl s family to get rid of her because she is regarded as an unnecessary liability. At the tender age of eighteen, Firdausis forcefully married off to Sheik Mahmoud, a sixty-year old rich widower, by her uncle. This arrangement is masterminded by her uncle s wife who complains that „the house is too small and life is expensive. She eats twice as much as any of our children (ibid-35*).* This is in spite of Firdaus obvious importance to the house in assisting with the daily domestic chores. Although she runs from the house when she overhears this plan, she returns home to be married to Sheik Mahmoud when she discovers that the society she belongs to does not have a safe haven for children who lack parental love, care, and security, and whose human rights are violated. She later suffers physical, emotional and verbal abuse in her marriage.

### 3.3.2 **Adulthood**

Women are subjected to various degrees of physical and sexual abuse from their spouses.Firdaus father always beats her mother. She observes that this is one of the „very few things he knows in life, that is, „how to beat his wife and make her bite the dust each night (ibid-12*).* Research has shown that children that grow up in abusive environments most times end up in an abusive relationship. Firdaus grows up in a family where the father dictates to his family members and maltreats his wife daily. It is therefore no wonder that Firdaus ends up in a violent relationship with

Sheik Mahmoud, her husband. Firdaus sexual relationship with her husband is rather one of torment. At a very tender age, she is forced to marry an old man and goes through humiliating experiences. After Firdaus suffers a brutal beating in the hands of Shiekh Mahmoud, her husband, she runs to her uncle for solace.

> But my uncle told me that all husbands beat their wives, and my uncle's wife added that her husband often beat her (ibid-46) and brings her back immediately. The next day, her husband stops her from eating and says he is the only one that can put up with her and feed her – since her family has rejected her and sees her as a burden-yet she avoids him for obvious reasons. He later leapt on me like a mad dog. The hole on his swelling oozing drops if foul smelling pus. I did not turn my face or my nose away this time. I surrendered my face to his face and my body to his body, passively, without any resistance, without a movement, as though life had been drained out of it (ibid-45).

Firdaus endures this marital rape called sex instead of enjoying it because these men see sexual pleasure as their sole right. She says, He got into the habit of beating me whether he had a reason for it or not. On one occasion he hit all over me with his shoe. My face and body became swollen and bruised... One day, he hit me with a heavy stick until the blood ran from my nose and ears. So I left, but this time I did not go to my uncle s house, I walked through the streets with swollen eyes and a bruised face (ibid-47). After Firdaus escapes to the streets from her husband s violence, she meets Bayoumi, a coffee shop owner. He initially offers to help Firdaus and shows her kindness and care. He accommodates her in his apartment and provides her basic needs. When Firdaus expresses the wish to get a job instead of sitting at home all day, this is how she expresses her agonizing experience in the hands of Bayoumi: He jumped up and slapped me on my face… His hand was big and strong and it was the heaviest slap I had ever received on my face… The next moment he hit me with his fist in the belly until I lost consciousness immediately (ibid-51). Despite the fact that Firdaus is raped and sexually exploited by Bayoumi, he also allows his friends to molest her sexually. In order to ensure that Firdaus does not escape from the house, Bayoumi locks her in the room until he returns from his coffee shop. A neighbour helps her to escape by calling a carpenter to break the door. While on the streets, she meets Sharifa Salah el Dine, an old professional prostitute, and is introduced to

prostitution. In spite of being a prostitute, Firdaus is sexually abused by men from all walks of life. Indeed. Her experience is such that she never used to leave the house.

> In fact I never even left the bedroom. Day and night I lay on the bed, crucified, and every hour a man would come in. There were so many of them. I could not understand where they could possibly have come from. For they were all married, all educated, all carrying swollen leather bags, swollen leather wallets in their pockets. They dug their long nails into my flesh and I would close my lips tightly trying to stifle any expression of pain, to hold back a scream (ibid57*).*

She endures this torture daily until she decides to run away. Although Firdaus resorts to prostitution in order to free herself from man□s control and sexual exploitation, Chukwuma agrees that „in both institutions, marriage and prostitution, man is still dominant, the difference being that in the latter only, the female calls the tune.□ Even as a prostitute, Marzouk, a pimp, threatens Firdaus. He tells her that „every prostitute has a pimp to protect her from other pimps, and from the police….You cannot do without protection, otherwise the profession exercised by husbands and pimps would die out… I may be obliged to threaten□ (ibid-92) Firdaus

> thought I had escaped from men but the man who came this time practiced a well known male profession. He was a pimp. I thought I could buy him off with a sum of money, the way I did with the police. But he refused the money and insisted on sharing my earnings. I went to the police only to discover that he had more connections than I. Then I had recourse to legal proceedings, I found out that the law punishes women like me, but turns a blind eye to what men do (ibid-92).

After Firdaus tries to protect herself without success, she agrees to share her earnings with Marzouk and he takes the larger share. Firdaus discovers further that:

> he was a dangerous pimp who controlled a number of prostitutes, and I was one of them. He had friends everywhere, and in all professions, on whom he spent his money generously. He had a doctor friend to whom he had recourse if one of the prostitutes became pregnant and needed an abortion, a friend in the police

> who protected him from raids, a friend in the courts who used his knowledge and position to keep him out of trouble and release any of the prostitutes who found herself in goal, so that she was not held up from earning money for too long. I realized that I was not nearly as free as I had hitherto imagined myself to be. I was nothing but a body machine working day and night so that a number of men belonging to different professions could become immensely rich at my expense. I was no longer even mistress of the house for which I had paid with my sweat (ibid-92).

When Firdaus, first leaves prostitution and starts working in a company, some of the men in the company desire to sleep with her. The other female workers succumb to the pressures from the men in order to gain favours. Firdaus refuses to give in to their demands because of her determination to protect her self-esteem and to live a decent and honorable life. Because of her commitment to keeping her honor and integrity,

> word went round that I was a honorable woman, a highly respected official, in fact the most honorable, and the most highly considered of all the female officials in the company. It was also said that none of the men had succeeded in breaking my pride and that not a single high-ranking official had been able to make me bow my head, or lower my head to the ground (ibid-76).

On several occasions, Firdaus, despite being a prostitute, yearns for a decent source of livelihood. She tries to get a job with her secondary school certificate without success because of the bias towards women in gaining employment in her society.

## 3.4 **Analysis of Major Characters**

To analyze the characters of the chosen novel l have selected the major characters in *Woman at Point Zero* starting by Nawal El Saadawi who is the writer and an important character at the same time.

# Chapter Three: Analyzing *Woman At Point Zero*

### 3.4.1 **Nawal El Sadaawi**

Nawal El Sadaawi is both the author and the narrator of Woman at Point Zero. As the author, she presents a fictionalized version of two real people: Firdaus and herself. Though the fictional characters closely resemble the two real people, they are distinct. The fictional El Sadaawi struggles with feelings of insignificance, and by the end of the book she is consumed with helpless rage over the condition of women, including herself, in her country. Undoubtedly, the author El Sadaawi also has these feelings, but by the time she wrote Woman at Point Zero, she had long been a significant figure in her country's consciousness, as well as a crusader for women's rights.

The fictional El Sadaawi is first introduced when she visits the prison in which Firdaus is awaiting her execution. El Sadaawi approaches her meetings with Firdaus with desperation. Firdaus is an imprisoned prostitute, and El Sadaawi, an educated and wealthy doctor, occupies a much higher social position. Still, El Sadaawi is devastated by Firdaus's initial refusal to be interviewed; it makes her feel insignificant. When Firdaus finally agrees to meet El Sadaawi, El Sadaawi approaches her like a petitioner. This is because El Sadaawi, despite her education and status, is still subject to discrimination and feels insignificant most of the time. Because the imprisoned Firdaus refuses to be "put in her place," El Sadaawi suspects that Firdaus might have some sort of strength or knowledge for which El Sadaawi is desperate. The doctor therefore approaches the prisoner for wisdom and guidance.

El Sadaawi's reaction to the end of Firdaus's tale—the helpless fury and sorrow she feels after Firdaus goes to her execution—further demonstrates her feelings of insignificance. The truth of Firdaus's story, which shows so starkly the position of women in El Sadaawi's society, is such that El Sadaawi feels her own lack of power all the more keenly. She has spoken to someone who had been oppressed for much of her life before finally seizing power. Yet El Sadaawi does not act on violent impulses to destroy the oppressive forces in her society after Firdaus is killed, and she is disappointed in herself. The book ends with character El Sadaawi's realization that

Firdaus has more courage than she, El Sadaawi, has. Here, again, it is important to separate the fictional character from the figure of the revolutionary author. The real El Sadaawi was galvanized by her encounters with the woman who inspired the character of Firdaus. Among other things, the encounter inspired her to write the book, Woman at Point Zero, to illuminate the sufferings of Egyptian women for a larger audience.

### 3.4.1 **Firdaus**

Firdaus is a woman struggling to live a dignified life in a society in which women have limited options. Throughout the book, Firdaus fights not just to be in control of her own destiny but also to figure out who she is. But she has little time to devote to self-exploration. The scene in Bayoumi's coffee shop is an example of this. Bayoumi asks Firdaus whether she wants oranges or tangerines, and Firdaus is unable to answer him, having never considered whether she might like one thing more than another. For most of her life, it has never been important what she wanted. What was important was what the men around her wanted. And as Firdaus tells it, all of the men around her are brutes who exult in the power that they have over women. To some extent, Firdaus's life becomes about living in opposition to the men in her life. Taking pleasure from a relationship with men is never really an option for her. This is partially because she needs to be treated like an equal, which never happens, but also because of her clitoridectomy. This procedure robs her of pleasure during sex.

By the time Firdaus becomes a prostitute, she has discovered that she can exploit the desire that many men have for her by getting money for it. She learns that people with money can also command respect. But having money and commanding respect do not make Firdaus feel respectable. To someone who dreamed of studying and becoming a scholar, the life of a prostitute is disappointing and demeaning, yet Firdaus also suggests that the life of a prostitute might be a surer path to dignity and self-determination than the "respectable" life of an office assistant. At least as a prostitute Firdaus need not show deference toward even the most powerful of men.

### 3.4.3 **Uncle**

Firdaus's uncle is a complicated figure in her life, and in many ways her relationship with him forms a template for her relationships with the other men in the story. When Firdaus is a young girl living with her mother and father, her uncle represents a kind of freedom. He is a scholar, and he lives in Cairo, far away from the rural world of Firdaus's immediate family. Yet he also sexualizes young Firdaus, as shown in the way he caresses her thighs. Though Firdaus is uncomfortable with the way in which he touches her, she does not object because it doesn't occur to her to do so. As a result of this and her father's behavior toward her mother, Firdaus learns to think that men own women's bodies. Despite this, her uncle is still her savior. After Firdaus's parents die, her uncle brings her to Cairo, where they sleep in the same bed and live like a married couple, though it isn't clear whether they have a sexual relationship. Firdaus's uncle sends her to school and consequently provides her with a much better life than the one she lived with her parents.

However, her uncle soon abandons the life of a scholar to become a civil servant. At this point, Firdaus learns that men value power above all else. She also learns how insignificant she is to her uncle when compared to his thirst for power. In order to advance, Firdaus's uncle marries above his station. Because his new wife does not care for Firdaus, Firdaus is sent to boarding school. Firdaus's uncle turns out to be just as selfish as all of the other men in her life. When he eventually marries Firdaus off to his wife's old and disfigured uncle for a large sum of money, he confirms Firdaus's belief that she is alone in the world, and that men are horrible hypocrites who will do anything for money and power.

### 3.4.4 **Sharifa**

Sharifa is the high-class prostitute who finds Firdaus sitting by the Nile after her escape from Bayoumi's house. Sharifa takes Firdaus to her luxurious home, and it occurs to Firdaus for the first time that she could one day have a home of her own and be surrounded by nice things. Sharifa, through her confidence and the skillful

application of makeup, helps Firdaus see that she has beauty and strength. Unfortunately, Sharifa shows her these things in order to make her more appealing to the men to whom Sharifa hopes to sell Firdaus's body. Though she takes Firdaus under her wing in order to earn more money, Sharifa does act as a mother figure to Firdaus, and it is under Sharifa's care that it first occurs to Firdaus that she might be able to live without the protection of a man. Like Firdaus's own mother, Sharifa both supports and undermines Firdaus. Under Sharifa, Firdaus is reborn as an attractive woman aware of the power that she has over men. But like Firdaus's mother, Sharifa is jealous of the attention men give to Firdaus, and seeks to control her.

Eventually, Firdaus realizes that she has to leave Sharifa. This realization comes because she needs to make her own money and determine the course of her own destiny. In addition, Sharifa's imagination is constrained by a patriarchal society in a way in which Firdaus's is not. Sharifa only wants money and a comfortable life, and is willing to play the game that powerful men have set up in order to attain these things. Sharifa is more charming with the men who come to visit, and more eager to please. This is because she still believes herself to be, in some respect, a supplicant, lucky to get whatever money men throw her way. Firdaus wants to be comfortable, but she also wants power of her own. Firdaus begins by emulating Sharifa, but it is only after Firdaus leaves Sharifa that she realizes that as a prostitute, she commands power over men, not the other way around.

## 3.5 **Prostitution and Other Nervous Conditions**

In much of the literature of the Arab world, the relevant figure of the female prostitute signifies the nation prostituted to the colonizer for superficial gains, bands of gold, and the false beauties of Western "modernization". In post-World War I Egypt, many Egyptian peasant and middle class expressed a growing opposition to British colonial presence and the corruption it wrought on traditional religious and family structures. As prostitution "mushroomed" in the streets of Cairo and around British bases, the corruption of various political leaders and groups who "prostituted" themselves to colonial interests was further reflected in the bourgeoning sexual

corruption of lower-class woman whose “dishonor” became emblematic of the condition of the Egyptian state. In Midalq Alley, Nobel Prize novelist Naguib Mhfouz portrays a Cairo neighborhood in almost complete isolation from all surrounding activity" as its inhabitants come in contact with the influences of British occupation, which draws the young men into the army and the women into prostitution. Although many Egyptian men collaborated with and benefited from the British occupation, Egyptian women were expected to bear the burden of cultural tradition by keeping their "honor" intact.

El Saadawi faults Mahfouz for his objectification of women in his symbolic equating of sexual aggression against women with colonial aggression against a nation, and asserts that at the individual level the honor and integrity of women remains for Mahfouz a totally different thing to that of men. The honor of women is preserved or lost depending upon the type of sexual relations which they have with men, rather than on the other aspects of their life. (Hidden Face of Eve: 166)

In resistance to the dominant male ideology reflected in Mahfouz's work, El Saadawi directly incorporates elements of his system of relations and further sharpens her criticism of that system by focusing on prostitution. Woman at Point Zero, a feminist (2) reading of prostitution and the social, economic, and political factors that define women's oppression within Egyptian society, challenges male understanding of the conditions of women's lives and subverts her own position of privilege within the existing relations of power.

In this novel, Firdaus, who is imprisoned for murdering a pimp, recounts her life story as she awaits her death. As a prostitute from the peasant class, she must tell her story to the psychiatrist, Dr. El Saadawi, who operates as "translator," much like Spivak's postcolonial intellectual who must represent the silenced subaltern woman. In giving voice to Firdaus, Woman at Point Zero may be viewed as a response to a tradition of Arab literature that has failed to give women a voice other than that which is dislocated in patriarchal discourse; but it should also be read with an understanding of its political/historical context. According to Barbara Harlow, Firdaus's story is the

history of an Egyptian peasant girl victimized by the conservative indigenous traditions of her country and exploited by the post-colonial corruption which characterized Egyptian society and government, particularly under Anwar Sadat. (Ibid-137)

In the 1983 English translation of the novel, Firdaus's story is framed by El Saadawi's explanation of her role as psychiatrist within the prison, her research on women prisoners, her husband's thirteen-year imprisonment as a political detainee, and her own subsequent arrest under Sadat, who imprisoned 1500 intellectuals, writers, and journalists for voicing opposition to his policies in 1981.(3) Although the terms of Firdaus's and El Saadawi's imprisonment are very different, they both signify ways in which corrupt postcolonial governments attempt to silence and contain resistance. Throughout the novel, Firdaus expresses contempt for these "kings, princes, and rulers" (ibid-11) by spitting on their pictures in the newspaper, and exposes the criminal corruptions of a system that leads a woman to murder. El Saadawi's research of women political prisoners, published as Women and Neurosis in Egypt in 1976, aptly describes the "nervous conditions" of Egyptian women's lives. Her writing of Woman at Point Zero, on the other hand, recounts a woman's individual story, described by El Saadawi herself as "half way between fiction and fact . . . Imagination is only twenty per cent, maybe ten per cent" ("Reflections": 402). According to El Saadawi, Firdaus's story asserts the "need to challenge and to overcome those forces that deprive human beings of their right to live, to love, and to real freedom". Her writing, however, fails to redeem Firdaus from death, except in a symbolic sense.

Firdaus's story arises from silence, from her initial refusal to speak. She recognizes, like Frantz Fanon's native intellectual, that "To speak is to exist absolutely for the other" (Fanon: 17), and she believes that the doctor is one of "them," one of the repressive authority figures implicated in her hanging. In some sense, Firdaus's assessment of the doctor's authority is correct: the doctor (like the Western reader) is implicated in this collective "they" who hold authority over the prisoner, and the

doctor must relinquish her position of authority before Firdaus will address her. Firdaus's silence, therefore, resonates with strength and dignity and nags at the doctor:

> ".her refusal to see me, the feeling that I was helpless, and of no significance grew on me . . .Since she had rejected me, did that mean she was a better person than me?" (Ibid-3).

The power of Firdaus's silence reverses the hierarchical relationship between the doctor and the prisoner, placing the doctor in a position of dis-ease, and compelling her to relinquish her authority in order to approach Firdaus's story. When Firdaus finally does agree to speak, perhaps because she believes that the doctor is not entirely other, her voice is authoritative and urgent. "Let me speak. Do not interrupt me," she commands. The doctor grants Firdaus her uninterrupted say in the session, but Firdaus too allows the doctor a hearing of the story of her life. In so doing, she struggles for a position of subjectivity that does not exist entirely through and for the other.

This zero point of subjectivity from which Firdaus speaks is a space emptied of desire, a final, total vanishing point (4) from which the subject refuses to be subjected by those in authority. In exposing the methods of patriarchal dominance - including social, religious, economic, and political control - and returning to a zero point where all has been revealed and discarded, Firdaus constantly subverts this space into which she is forced. Her position at point zero is simultaneously one of lack and of subversion, because the "nature of [her] subalternity leads [her] to struggle against the process of hierarchization as a whole" (see Hammami and Rieker: 101).(5) Firdaus has turned the complete negation of women to the zero degree into a self-claimed space where she can no longer be subjected. Yet because she cannot exist as a subject within the existing patriarchal class system, she must be hanged.

Firdaus's ability to manipulate the roles she is cast in by those more powerful than she is evident in her embracing of prostitution as a method of liberation. She insists on a high price for her body, rejects men who are dirty, and resists by making her body "passive, inert, unfeeling" in these sexual encounters (ibid-85). After her own experiences as wife, prostitute, and office worker, she characterizes all women as

"prostitutes who sold themselves at varying prices" (ibid-76). In her outcry against male dominance, she exposes the multiple forms of hypocrisy and control used to gain authority over women. For example, she states, "The men I hated most of all were those who tried to give me advice, or told me that they wanted to rescue me from the life I was leading . . . they thought they were better than I was . . . they saw themselves in some kind of chivalrous role" (ibid-88). Indeed, all those who supposedly rescue Firdaus, men and women alike, end up using her for their own purposes. When she is propositioned by a policeman for a visiting Head of State and rebuked as "unpatriotic" at her refusal, she responds, "I told the man from the police that I knew nothing about patriotism, that my country had not only given me nothing, but had also taken away anything I might have had, including my honour and my dignity" (ibid-90). Firdaus's refusal to serve "her country" and those government officials who attempt to master her through manipulation empowers her and poses a threat to the state she exposes as corrupt. She also counters here the nationalist ideology that encouraged collaboration with corrupt leaders and positioned lower class women as "patriotic prostitutes" who must bear the burdens of nation without benefiting from the nation in any way. By refusing to prostitute herself to state "interests," Firdaus, in effect, extends the control of her body to an act of rebellion against the state.

Some Arab male critics have demonstrated their limited understanding of feminist politics by characterizing Arab women's writing as individualistic and autobiographical rather than as fictional accounts representative of a collective social reality.(6) Women's individual lack of freedom is, however, part of the collective social reality. Yet this fact seems to escape Georges Tarabishi who, in Woman against Her Sex: A Critique of Nawal El-Saadawi, gives more credence to woman's lack of the phallus than to her lack of freedom within patriarchal society. Tarabishi describes Firdaus as "only interested in liberating herself, not her female sister" (ibid-32), and further faults El Saadawi for "her individualistic philosophy, combined with her elitist attitude" (ibid-33). Yet he misses two key points of the text: the individual woman struggling against social and economic dominance represents her sisters' struggle and lends courage to that struggle; and the doctor interrogates her position of privilege and

relinquishes her authority in order to hear Firdaus. The doctor takes Firdaus in - "she vibrated within me" - even as she realizes that "Firdaus had more courage than I" (ibid-110). Firdaus's story, therefore, operates as a "way in" to the subaltern woman's experience, for Firdaus's courage has infused those stony parts of the doctor, of the listener, of the reader. Thus the story functions as a collective cure for the many female listeners who might hear it.

Tarabishi's reading of El Saadawi's novel places the author herself on the metaphorical psychoanalytic couch while subjecting her to the methods of Freudian analysis El Saadawi so brutally and insightfully critiques in Woman at Point Zero. As

a medical doctor, a doctor of the body, El Saadawi finds herself in the prison serving as a psychiatrist, literally in Arabic, "a doctor of the spirit" or "self." She engages Firdaus in a kind of talking cure, for "in her role as healer, the woman physician is transformed into a mediator of discourse" (Malti-Douglas: 131). The roles of doctor and patient are confounded, however, for the doctor experiences Firdaus's initial rejection as that of unrequited love, comparing her to a man with whom she had fallen in love:

> "I felt rejected, not only by him, not only by one person amongst the millions that peopled the vast world, but by every living being or thing on earth, by the vast world itself" (ibid-4).

The doctor, in effect, becomes the patient, or at least shares this role with Firdaus by exposing her own need for Firdaus's recognition. This act of intersubjectivity subverts the psychoanalytic model, particularly in its Freudian form, which relies on male models that enforce the Law of the Father and ignore the economic and social conditions that bind women within a system of male dominance.

Tarabishi believes that feminists should reject power and "tame the penis" rather than transform existing power structures and concepts of power. El Saadawi, in contrast, exposes the lies of patriarchal dominance and asserts the "truth," thereby unsettling hegemonic structures. Firdaus, like the author who is subsequently

imprisoned for her writing, is condemned not for murder but for telling the truth. With each revelation, Firdaus repeats "the veil was torn from my eyes" (ibid-72), exposing one of the many and varied tools of dominance that bind her, discontinuous yet connected forms of repression that cannot be understood by any simple formula. Her stow emphasizes her sexual and economic exploitation as means by which patriarchal tactics of domination have oppressed Arab women. Firdaus's position at point zero suggests a ground of intersubjectivity from which we may move beyond such volatile power relations. But her male oppressors refuse to join her there, and her refusal to accept her position within their enslaving structure condemns her to death.

Firdaus, whose name means "paradise" in Arabic, is both martyr and mystic, both prostitute and holy woman, both heaven and hell, as the language of the novel suggests. (7) Though Tarabishi cannot get beyond the "flesh and blood" level of the story, and characterizes the doctor's respect for this woman as neurotic, clearly El Saadawi accords the "dishonorable" prostitute a most honorable spiritual position within the symbolism of the text. In applying traditionally male religious images to Firdaus, El Saadawi alludes to the oppositional mystic tradition of Islam found in Sufism to reclaim woman's spirituality as well as her body. (8) The blatantly mystical imagery that surrounds Firdaus comes to represent her empowerment within an otherwise male discourse that casts her only in negative terms. In the opening scene, Firdaus is seated on the cold floor of her cell, staring fixedly into the void for long hours, like a prophet receiving a revelation. When Firdaus finally agrees to speak with the doctor, the doctor approaches Firdaus's cell door (literally in Arabic, "the gate of Paradise") and hears no other sound but her voice. Firdaus's narrative carries the authority of divine voice even as it is constrained within her imprisoning cell, signifying that while patriarchy assumes control over women's bodies, it cannot exercise dominance over her mind and spirit, nor, most significantly, over her voice.

Though Firdaus's body is imprisoned as she awaits her execution, her voice recounts her story of the multiple violations of her body, and reflects "the common embodiment of the female condition" that she shares with the doctor (Malti-Douglas:

139). Firdaus's voice, which speaks with urgency and strength, is the voice of testimonio: This presence of the voice, which we are meant to experience as the voice of a real rather than a fictional person, is the mark of a desire not to be silenced or defeated, a desire to impose oneself on an institution of power, from the position of the excluded or the marginal. (Beverley :96)

Firdaus's voice, "Defined first and foremost through her body" (Malti-Douglas: 136), connects the authorship of the body to the authorship of language. Firdaus, however, can only speak and be heard through the doctor, who is simultaneously a member of the institutions of power and marginalized, as a woman, within that institution. El Saadawi has been criticized not only for writing "against her sex" but also for catering to the prurient interests of Westerners who fixate on Arab women's sexuality and practices such as clitoridectomy or veiling as examples of Arab barbarism. The question of El Saadawi's complicity in hegemonic discourses is further complicated by the ways gender issues are invoked in a Western context to justify imperialist interventions, or, in Spivak's terms, to "save brown women from brown men."

This critique of El Saadawi has been leveled by a number of Arab women, including Leila Ahmed, who describes El Saadawi's denunciation of Arab cultural attitudes toward women's bodies as "grounded in 'modern' or 'Western' medical and feminist thought" ("Arab Culture" :41). (9) Ahmed's claim that "El Saadawi's text is informed by a Western consciousness" tends to delimit El Saadawi's critique of the patriarchal class system to one of assimilation to Western ways of thinking. The cultural "hybridization" often representative of the bourgeois postcolonial intellectual, whose class privilege allows her access to Westernized institutions, has also exacerbated class divisions in postcolonial countries. Colonization encouraged the "Westernization" of the bourgeoisie by providing economic and political rewards for their assimilation. Yet given the hybridization of contemporary culture, Ahmed's critique begs the question whether consciousness can be exclusively Western or more authentically Arab. (ibid-10)

But Ahmed, aware of El Saadawi's popularity in the West, voices a valid concern that El Saadawi's novels and her essays in The Hidden Face of Eve may provide Western audiences with a monolithic approach to how Arab women conceptualize the body and their position within Arab societies. Within the novel the doctor confronts her position of privilege in relation to Firdaus, but she casts this in terms of her social privilege, rather than in terms of Westernization. After hearing Firdaus's story, she is both empowered and ashamed. "I felt ashamed of myself, of my life, of my fears, and my lies" (ibid-108). In attempting to negotiate "with the structure of enabling violence" that produced her (although El Saadawi has roots in the peasant class herself), the doctor implicates herself in the system that condemns the prisoner to death, although she may not be aware of the multiple ways in which she participates in the system even as she resists it.

Ahmed's concern about El Saadawi's appropriation by Western audiences addresses the larger issue of the way third world women's texts are received in the first world (Mukherjee :27). Perhaps because it was initially written for an Arab audience who would have knowledge of the postcolonial corruption under Sadat, Woman at Point Zero focuses its attack against patriarchy and says little about the legacy of colonialism in Egypt. However, in her articles and interviews, El Saadawi espouses a "revolutionary feminism" that is highly critical of the West and its continuing neocolonialist influence on the lives of Arab women ("*Arab Women and Western Feminism*":177). She finds fault for women's oppression in economic and political forces, "namely those of foreign imperialism operating mainly from the outside and reactionary classes operating from the inside" (*Hidden Face of Eve*: 212). While the novel focuses on the internal corruptions of Egyptian society, it also points to a larger imperialist system of corruption that extends beyond Arab society. To reduce El Saadawi's work to an exercise of Western consciousness or to a "collective castration" (Tarabishi :30) is to ignore her explicit critique of the patriarchal class system as an outgrowth of Western imperialism, which oppresses women socially, politically, and economically worldwide. Firdaus may be read as the attempt to assert a positive women's history, an empowering subjectivity, in the face of imperial and patriarchal

dominance. Ironically, it is the prostitute herself who ultimately refuses to prostitute herself to imperialist interests and power.

### 3.6 **The Roles of Money, Power, and Sexuality**

Nawal el Saadawi does an exceptional job applying various symbols and motifs into her novel Woman at Point Zero. These elements are essential to the novel's structure as well its plot. Not only do these symbols and motifs provide historically accurate information about the treatment of women in Egyptian society, they also provide insight into the mind of the novel's protagonist Firdaus. Throughout the course of the novel, the ideas generated in Firdaus' head fluctuate due to experiences concerning the symbols and motifs presented by Nawal el Saadawi. The reader's interpretation of Firdaus' thoughts and actions are crucial to understanding the concepts that Nawal el Saadawi meant to portray throughout the novel. The inner mechanisms of Firdaus' mind are presented to the reader through the author's use of symbols, such as money and power, and motifs, such as sexual pleasure, in Woman at Point Zero.

During her childhood, Firdaus' family was the source for her initial views on money and power. Firdaus was born into a poor family and lived in a community stricken with poverty. As a child, Firdaus relied on her parents and other family members for any amount of money; Firdaus never had any real money of her own. Her father was considered the "master" of the household and many of his actions gave Firdaus a simple, black and white view on power: men possess power, women do not. Firdaus grew up in a society where virtually any man has power over any woman; this concept is demonstrated to Firdaus when her uncle forces her to marry Sheikh Mahmoud. The abusive relationship Firdaus formed with her husband, created by the unbalance of power, encourages her to run away from her home and escape her past life. Soon after this event, Firdaus finds Sharifa, who will play the role of Firdaus' mentor. After Firdaus meets Sharifa, her opinions and views on...

# Chapter Three: Analyzing *Woman At Point Zero*

## 3.7 **Themes, Motifs and Symbols**

The Connection between Surveillance and Ownership: Throughout the telling of her story, Firdaus describes the act of seeing as akin to an act of possession. One of Firdaus's earliest memories as a child is the memory of her mother's eyes watching her, holding her up when she struggled to learn how to walk and negotiate the world. For the young Firdaus, this sense of belonging to her mother and being watched over by her is very comforting. She feels that being a possession of her mother is what protects her. Later, though, the act of being surveyed takes on a very different meaning. When Firdaus grows older, she no longer feels her mother's eyes supporting her. From then on, whenever Firdaus senses someone's eyes watching her, she feels threatened. When Firdaus first runs away from her uncle's house, she encounters a terrifying man who runs his eyes up and down her body, making Firdaus feel invaded, and as if her body were not her own.

Firdaus's life-long struggle is to claim her body as her own. When Firdaus marries Sheikh Mahmoud, his eyes never leave her dish at mealtimes, and he watches every morsel of food she eats with jealous intensity. Firdaus becomes self-conscious about eating. Firdaus describes almost all of the men she encounters in the same way—they rake their eyes over her body and, in doing so, act as though her body exists only for them. It is not until she is in prison that Firdaus learns to feel at ease during other people's examinations of her. This is because Firdaus has proven to herself that she owns herself and that she is in control of her own destiny.

### 3.7.1 **The Nature of Power**

For the young Firdaus, the nature of power seems at first to be very simple: men have it and women do not. Her father has power over her mother. Her uncle has power over her. When she is married, Sheikh Mahmoud has power over her. Even men on the street have power over the women they pass, merely by turning them into objects with their eyes. Bayoumi, who locks Firdaus in his apartment and lets his friends have sex with her, has power over her. It isn't until Firdaus meets Sharifa that her ideas of

power begin to change. Sharifa is a wealthy, independent woman. Rather than allowing men free use of her body, as married women do, Sharifa uses the power of the desires that men have for her to her advantage. She teaches Firdaus how to command the power of her physical appearance. Still, Firdaus doesn't know what it means to possess power of her own. She learns that women can have power, too, but she cannot fully wield her own power while living under Sharifa's control.

When she sets out on her own as a prostitute, Firdaus finally learns what it means to have something that other people desire. This is power. She learns that she can command higher and higher prices simply by denying people what they want, or exercising the power that she has over them. Because of this, she feels that money is power. When she possesses money of her own, she has power over the people who slander her, and she can give herself a respectable name by hiring a lawyer and suing. Her brief stint as an office worker only serves to reinforce this idea, and when she goes back to prostitution, she charges more money than ever and uses her money to mingle with more powerful people. Firdaus comes to believe that she has attained real power. But the pimp who claims her proves that this is not the case. He threatens to defame her or kill her, proving that no matter how much money she has, Firdaus is still vulnerable to men because she has something to lose. When she kills the pimp and later tears up the prince's money, Firdaus finally proves that she has control over herself.

### 3.7.2 **The Importance of Attaining Respect**

Attaining respect does not become one of Firdaus's goals until Di'aa, who has engaged her services as a prostitute, points out to her that in spite of her financial security, she is not respectable. Until Firdaus has money of her own, the way that the world views her never really enters into her consideration. This is in part because the world has never paid her much attention before. She was just an invisible person occupying the role of daughter or wife. When she finally accumulates some wealth and power, the world takes notice. Men take notice because, in Firdaus's world, men don't want women to have power over them. By condemning her work as a prostitute as

shameful, they try to minimize her power, though they are also involved in the exchange of sex and money. For the men in Firdaus's story, respectable women are women who are submissive and live under the protection of a powerful man.

When Di'aa tells Firdaus that she is not respectable because the work she does is shameful, she is deeply hurt. In an effort to become a more respectable woman, she gives up her nice apartment and prostitution in order to work in an office. Indeed, she becomes a "respectable" woman by placing herself under the power of men again. Firdaus's relationship with Ibrahim is a part of this quest for respectability. She's playing by the rules and, for the first time, she feels as though she's met a man she can trust. The sacrifices she's made to become respectable seem worthwhile. However, when Firdaus discovers that Ibrahim was using her for sex, she once again realizes that "respectability" is a trap that is designed to put women at the mercy of men. By quitting her job and taking up prostitution again, Firdaus rejects the pursuit of a "respectable" life in favor of a life of power and self-determination. Firdaus has come to see that respectability in her world means playing by someone else's rules.

## 3.8 **Motifs**

Body pleasure, choice and captivity are three important motifs in the novel.

### 3.8.1 **Body Pleasure**

During her childhood, Firdaus experiments sexually with a local boy named Mohammadain. They play "bride and bridegroom," meaning that they take off their clothes and rub against one another. Firdaus describes the sensation of pleasure she gets from her encounters with Mohammadain, which end when her mother forces her to undergo a strange surgery. It is not fully explained in the book, but Firdaus undergoes a clitoridectomy (the removal of her clitoris). After this procedure, Firdaus never again experiences sexual pleasure the way she once did. Though her mother forces her to undergo the procedure as a matter of tradition and doesn't seem to think about it politically, Firdaus considers the tradition another attempt to suppress women. By removing the clitoris, sex has become an act in which only men take pleasure.

Firdaus believes that if women were equal to men, then both would find pleasure in sex.

Pleasure is out of the question in her sexual encounters with her old, deformed husband. To Firdaus, these encounters are horrific, and she describes the stench of his open wound and the lack of joy she feels during sex. She also describes with contempt the way men who come to her as clients will demand, during sex, to know whether or not she is taking pleasure in the act. For these men, the act is not about two people enjoying each other, but instead about proving their physical prowess. They are determined to wring pleasure from Firdaus, whether she wants it or not. Firdaus tells the men that she enjoys sex (though she does not), which stops them from asking. When Firdaus overhears her uncle and his wife having sex, the idea of it warms her, but she is unable to take pleasure in it herself.

### 3.8.2 **Life's Choice**

As a woman from a poor family, Firdaus has never had to make many choices. Her clitoris is removed and she is married to a tyrannical older husband without anyone ever asking her opinion. The first real choice she has ever had to make comes when she flees her husband's home. When Bayoumi asks her whether she prefers oranges or tangerines, Firdaus is struck by the fact that nobody has ever asked her to make a decision like that before. She realizes she does not even know which fruit she prefers, because she has never had to think about what she wanted. Other people always told her what would happen. After this, choice becomes an obsession for Firdaus.

As a prostitute, Firdaus has the money and the power to make choices for herself. She chooses her own apartment and clothing and also begins to choose which men she will and will not sleep with. Because of this, she begins to believe in her own independence. The power to choose for herself is intoxicating. And soon, the fact that she has rejected powerful men makes her even more alluring to them. By exercising choice, Firdaus commands more and more money and gets an increasingly prestigious

clientele. However, the pimp who moves in and demands control over her shatters the illusion of choice for Firdaus. Firdaus realizes that no matter how powerful she might seem, she is still a woman, and men will still attempt to exercise control over her. In Firdaus's world, there is no way for her to make real choices. Though it seems to some that a female prisoner has less power than even the lowliest wife, Firdaus feels that waiting on death row is the most liberating thing that has ever happened to her. She chooses not to appeal her sentence; she would prefer to die in order to escape the control that other people have over her. Only when dead will Firdaus be free.

### 3.8.3 **Captivity**

Firdaus explains that all of her life until the time she spends in prison has been spent in captivity. Though as a child, a wife, and a prostitute, she had some degree of physical freedom, she did not attain mental freedom until she got to prison. Captivity, for Firdaus, means living under someone else's power. It means not making choices for oneself and agreeing to be deceived by those in power (whether those in power are presidents or fathers or husbands). Though Firdaus is waiting to die in prison, she considers herself freer than anyone else in the world. She certainly feels freer than Nawal El Saadawi, who hopes to interview her. Nawal senses this, and it is for this reason that she is so devastated when Firdaus refuses, time and time again, to be interviewed.

Firdaus looks forward to death because it means that she will have a chance to start over. Though she is enclosed in a cell, she feels free. She refuses to work with the system, sign an appeal, or visit with the doctor because she does not want to feel like a captive. Signing appeals would only serve to entrap her again, as she would have to appeal to, and thereby recognize, the power of men. When she finally agrees to meet with Nawal, it is only in order to spread a message of truth and to do further damage to the world that abused her before she dies.

## 3.9 **Symbols**

Here are the three most important symbols of *woman at point zero*.

### 3.9.1 **Money**

Firdaus grows up in a poor family in a community of poor families, and she further recognizes the power of money when she moves to Cairo. As Firdaus tells it, she never really had money of her own until she started prostituting herself. Before this, she was at the mercy of her stingy father, uncle, husband, and Sharifa—because they had money and she did not. All of them recognized this fact, and they were careful not to give her any money of her own, lest she escape their grasp. When Firdaus first ventures out on her own—after leaving Sharifa's house—and learns that her body has a monetary value to men, she also learns that she can command more money from them because she has something they want. To men, her body is a commodity, just as food and clothing are a commodity: the more difficult it is for them to obtain, the more money they will pay. In this way, Firdaus begins to amass money of her own. She despises her work, and she loathes the men who come to see her, but she greatly values her newfound power. She is not at the mercy of men anymore.

When she is slandered in public, Firdaus uses her "shameful" money to pay a lawyer to clear her name. At this point, money is everything to Firdaus. It even has the ssability to cleanse her public image. But by the time Firdaus kills the pimp and demands $2,000 from the prince, money has come to mean something very different. It becomes just another symbol of the hypocrisy of her society. It gives power to the unworthy and makes the despicable seem respectable. It allows men to rule over women, and makes the prince think that he can buy Firdaus. When Firdaus tears up the $2,000, she demonstrates to the prince that his money has no power over her. Because of this demonstration, the prince declares that she must really be a princess—i.e., one outside the reach of money's power. Because of Firdaus's newfound understanding of the treachery of money, the prince is right. Firdaus is truly outside the reach of money's power.

### 3.9.2 **Books**

Firdaus's uncle gives Firdaus her first taste of the power of books when he secretly teaches her how to read. Books become a symbol of the kindness of her uncle, who takes an interest in young Firdaus and tries to teach her. Through reading, Firdaus comes to realize that there is more in the world than her poor village and humble family. Even before her uncle teaches her to read, she views the books he brings with him from Cairo as a kind of passport to a life in which she, too, could be a scholar. When she moves to Cairo and goes to school, Firdaus spends the few happy years of her life immersed in books and learning. The time that they spend reading together is a time of bonding between Firdaus and her uncle.

When her uncle gives up the life of a scholar and marries his boss's daughter, he sends Firdaus to boarding school. Essentially, her uncle gives up books in exchange for wealth and status. This feels like a betrayal to Firdaus, but boarding school proves more advantageous for her than living with her uncle and aunt. She soon develops a reputation as a bookworm, and often spends long evenings in the library. She becomes an excellent student and wins many academic prizes. Books become more important to Firdaus than people. Yet when Firdaus is married off to Sheikh Mahmoud, books virtually disappear from her life. Firdaus has to fit herself into the role of submissive wife, and there is no room for her to be a prize pupil or a reader. Books, which represented her uncle's kindness and the potential for a better life, disappear.

## 3.10 **Woman's Burden**

For Nawal El Sa'dawi feminism is deeply politicised, the ideals of her resistance in line with the Western feminist movement. El Sa'dawi's Woman at Point Zero is both a piece of fiction and nonfiction, as El Sa'dawi's character, Firdaus, is very much based on a real person El Sa'dawi met in Egypt. The novel tells the story of Firdaus, an imprisoned prostitute awaiting her death sentence. The plot follows the story of Firdaus from her childhood in rural Egypt, when she experiences female circumcision and sexual harassment by her uncle, to the time she ends up in prison.

# Chapter Three: Analyzing *Woman At Point Zero*

Firdaus experiences homelessness and poverty, as well as sexual assault and exploitation during her life. There is a point, however, where she breaks free of her pimp and starts a prosperous life as an independent prostitute.

What is so interesting to me about this novel is that it successfully combines witness and empowerment. There is a successful balance, which I think is especially necessary when writing about the Middle East, between exposing violence against women, but also allowing these women to escape the stereotype of the victimized Arab woman. El Sa'dawi allows Firdaus' character to resist her circumstances both intellectually and actively. The growth that the reader perceives in Firdaus' character allows it to move between the spaces of oppression and empowerment, thus leaving the borders of a stereotype to become an example of resistance.

Firdaus' sexual awakening occurs during childhood, when a young friend and her old uncle fondle her. This awakening is complicated by her circumcision, which leaves her awareness of her sexuality ambiguous. The 'figurative' exploitation of Firdaus' body occurs within the patriarchal family, when her uncle marries her off to an old rich man in order to get her dowry. Her 'literal' prostitution is linked to her leaving this patriarchal family into the streets where she meets Bayoumi who he locks her up in his flat. The fact that El Sa'dawi chooses to push this character into prostitution under the supervision of a male figure speaks to the oppression and exploitation women suffer under the rule of men in the Middle East. The fact that El Sa'dawi chooses to empower this character, however, speaks to her project of showing that women are not totally helpless.

The first act of resistance in the narrative takes shape in Firdaus' escape into the streets. This escape, both figurative and literal, signifies the escape from the injustice of the patriarchal family towards the unknown. Even the language that El Sa'dawi uses to describe these streets is more lyrical:

> It was clean, paved thoroughfare, which ran along one bank of the Nile with tall

> trees on either side. The houses were surrounded by fences and gardens. The air which entered my lungs was pure and free of dust. I saw a stone bench facing the river. I sat down on it, and lifted my face to the refreshing breeze. (El Saadawi 54)

Firdaus' independence commences with her realisation that money and the objectification and exploitation of a woman's body co-exist. Her revelation that this knowledge is not new, but suppressed in the memory of her father, which stands for patriarchal hierarchy, resonates with women's financial independence as a means of owning their bodies. It might seem ironic that prostitution can give her financial independence, but that financial independence might also give her full ownership of her body. This reverse objectification is not limited to the context of prostitution, but goes beyond it to speak to the independence of all women.

Furthermore, objectification of the female body within the context of prostitution is challenged by a self-objectification that Firdaus' character exercises, not to mention an objectification of the male body. For Firdaus' independence is accompanied by allowing herself the luxury of choosing the men she would sleep with. Her understanding of the male gaze towards the female develops her resistance towards that objectification, as she controls it with her own gaze towards herself, her gaze towards men, and her control over her body's sensory involvement during sex. Her understanding of the transgression over her body allows her to set limits, as well as identify her selfhood and identity:

> How many were the years of my life that went by before my body, and myself became really mine, to do with them as I wished? How many were the years of my life that were lost before I tore my body and myself away from these people who held me in their grasp since the very first day? (El Sa'dawi 74)

Therefore, it is through this separation of body and self that Firdaus can claim both elements as her own and defy the will of others to wipe her identity and reduce her to an object. This realization, this self-awareness and exercise of control that

develops in Firdaus' character is one of the ways in which she resists the situation she is in and the gender role society imposes on her.

This book was one of the first feminist novels. I admire it so much not only for exposing the horrible truth that many women in the Middle East still live in, but for allowing women the strength to resist and reclaim their bodies and their authorities over themselves.

### 3.11 **Revenge as a Tumor**

Sexual slavery was not the only form of slavery that Firdaus had known. Slavery involved every part of Firdaus' personality. "Who owns it? Who controls it? Does Firdaus have a right to it?" (Malti Douglas 1995, p.53). As Malti Douglas argues, every action was problematic for Firdaus, even the mere act of eating. Eating was always associated with male power. Her mother hid food from Firdaus to feed her father. Her aunt hid food from Firdaus to give it to her uncle. Firdaus used to watch her father's "big, camel's mouth" chewing the food, but she herself could not eat. Only after her father, her brothers, and her husband had eaten insatiably she could finally have some food, while all the men in her family watched her: they watched what she ate, how she ate and how much she ate. Throughout her life, men had controlled Firdaus' being restlessly. Only the killing of the pimp gives Firdaus liberation. Fanon considered the armed insurrection to be a necessary phase in the liberation of the colonized people. Similarly, Firdaus turned to violence to find her freedom. Just like de-alienation for Fanon is a violent process that requires the deconstruction of the colonizer's identity and the simultaneous affirmation of the colonized national identity, Firdaus' liberation came with the violent killing of her oppressor. Firdaus' violent act was her first action as a free subject, an action that filled her with pride. But in a patriarchal society, liberation is prohibited, and just like the slaves that used to resist slavery in the colonial time were sent to prison, Firdaus' liberation is punished with execution.

# Chapter Three: Analyzing *Woman At Point Zero*

> When I killed I did it with truth not with a knife. That is why they are afraid of me and they want to execute me. They don't fear my knife. It's my truth that frightens them. This fearful truth gives me great strength. It protects me from fearing death, or life, or hunger, or nakedness, or destruction. It is this fearful truth which prevents me from fearing the brutality of rulers and policemen. I spit with ease on their lying faces and words, on their lying newspapers (El Saadawi, 1983: 102).

Firdaus is the extreme representation of a woman's struggle for emancipation. In this novel, literature is thus transformed into a tool for the 'subjugated' woman to become a conscious political subject. Nawal El Saadawi uses the evocative power of literature to inspire women to action. She uses literature to take the struggle from the street to the homes of the oppressed women, using the written word as a revolutionary tool. The vivid symbolism that emerges throughout the novel is nothing but a means to that end: an instrument to show the sources of oppression in society. Foucault argued that power becomes dominant by means of its invisibility. The main principle for power to be effective is to be "absolutely indiscreet, since it is everywhere and always alert" but "absolutely discreet, for it functions permanently and largely in silence" (Foucault, 1963: 177). Invisibility allows power to reproduce political oppression: when the source of power is unidentified, oppression is hard to resist. Visibility is thus a preliminary condition for power to be opposed. A visible and concentrated source of power is easy to defeat. In this context, clirodectomy, arranged marriages, sexual exploitation and the strong visual images that El Saadawi uses, such as the representation of her husband as a "dog", or the description of the tumor on his lip, are tools to make power visible and recognizable to her readers. Nawal El Saadawi's symbolic narrative is an instrument to help the reader identify the oppressive nature of patriarchy in Egypt. In the author's intent, literature has thus a precise political function: to make power visible to isolated women and "uplift" the veil from their minds. Like the postcolonial intellectual gives voice to the silent ones and makes visible the invisible, Nawal El Saadawi uses literature as an instrument to liberate women, and inspire them to resist oppression. Woman at Point Zero is thus not merely

a novel: it is a message of resistance for all women: a message that compels women to see that they are not alone, for in such solidarity they may find the courage to "end oppression and to achieve justice and freedom for themselves and then for the whole society".

> "The challenge before women is to break this isolation and to reach women everywhere. […] A social consciousness based on awareness of other women, and a desire to unite with them to acquire the capability and power necessary in the fight to end oppression, and to achieve justice and freedom for themselves and then for the whole society" (El Saadawi, quoted in Tarabishi, 1988: 21-22).

## 3.12 **Violence on Women and Children**

Abused women are more likely than others to suffer from depression, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, eating problems, sexual dysfunction and many reproductive health problems, including miscarriage and stillbirth, premature delivery, Sexually Transmitted Infections, unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions. Sexually abused children tend to end up in abusive relationships and have a higher than normal risk of becoming involved in prostitution and drugs.

Firdaus feels rejected in the patriarchal society because no one cares to show her a little love and care. From childhood, her father neglects her and fails to show her fatherly love and care. Her mother who is absorbed in her father□s tyrannical control has little or no time to give her children the care and love that a child yearns for in a mother. During her teenage years, she is exploited for selfish reasons by her uncle and his wife. As an adult she is exploited and molested by Sheik Mahmoud, her husband, Bayoumi and even Sharifa, a fellow woman. The only man she falls in love with ─ Ibrahim ─ deceives her and gets engaged to his boss□s daughter. She discovers that she is vulnerable in a society where everyone exploits her because she is a woman. She feels lonely and rejected in the patriarchal society.

Children that are abused sexually or undergo female circumcision end up having a phobia for sex and rarely enjoy it. Due to the clitoridectomy experience, Firdaus only

endures sex. In her sexual relationship with Sheik Mahmoud, Bayoumi and his friends, and the men she meets when she becomes a prostitute, she regards sex as time for enduring pain. She always talks of a pleasure that:

> I could feel it somewhere, like a part of my being which had been born with me when I was born, but had not grown with me when I had grown, like a part of my being that I had once known, but I left behind when I was born. A cloudy awareness of something that could have been, and yet was never lived (ibid-30).

Teenage brides with much older husbands often have limited capacity to negotiate sexual relations, contraception, child-bearing, as well as other aspects of domestic life. They often have limited autonomy, freedom of movement and face higher risks in their pregnancies, including obstructed labor leading to Obstetric Fistula or Vesico-Vaginal Fistula. They are more likely to be beaten and threatened due to their young age and inexperience. Firdaus movement is closely monitored by her husband. She is also physically molested and sexually abused by him. She recounts her experience in this way:

> All day long he remained by my side in the house, or in the kitchen, watching me as I cooked or washed. If I dropped the packet of soap or spilled a few grains on the floor, he would jump up from his chair and complain at me for being careless. And if I pressed a little more firmly than usual on the spoon as I took ghee out of the tin for cooking, he would scream out in anger, and draw my attention to the fact that the contents were diminishing more rapidly than they should. When the dustman came to empty the refuse from the bin, he would go through it carefully before putting it out on the landing. One day he discovered some leftover scraps of food, and started yelling at me so loudly, that all the neighbours could hear. After this incident, he got into the habit of beating me whether he had a reason for it or not (ibid-44).

This vulnerability is increased by the inadequate exposure to society and the denial of educational opportunities. Although Firdaus loves education, she is denied access to it because it is regarded as the sole preserve of the men. Moreover, „the university is a place where she will be sitting side by side with men (ibid-36) and

she will have a weapon to fight back when molested. She knows that education empowers women and paves the way to financial independence. On several occasions, she yearns for a decent source of livelihood and has an insatiable quest for knowledge. She is unable to achieve these aims because of her low educational qualification and the patriarchal bias towards the education of the girl-child. This contributes to her choosing prostitution as an alternative. The educational power which leads to economic independence and the awareness of individual human rights are taken away from her. This denial of educational opportunities makes women prone to their spouses attacks and abuse. The fear of poverty and feeling of insecurity make them choose to remain in wedlocks that are clearly unworkable.

## 3.13 **Patriarchal Institutions**

*Woman at Point Zero* portrays the life of one particular woman who falls into the category of the subaltern, in that she was forced to face oppression at the hands of men and society as a whole, often in the name of religion. Through this oppression, she finds herself silenced in multiple ways. Just as her aunt and uncle would not listen to her complaints about her abusive husband, neither would the court system and newspapers. It is only the doctor/author who even attempts to give her a voice.

Women in *woman at point zero* and *God Dies by the Nile* are victims of the patriarchal class system consolidated by politics, religion, and social customs. El Saadawi deconstructs the patriarchal class system by showing us its dark side where women are raped and destroyed for being women and even men are eliminated for failing to support fully the patriarchal class system .Saadawi uses metaphor in all the titles of her novels for both patriarchal class and religion. The title may also reflect El Saadawi's intention to reveal the interplay between the political power of the ruling class, the oppression of women in rural Egypt and the misuse of religion. "In any society, it is not possible to separate religion from the political system, nor to keep sex separate from politics. The trilogy composed of politics, religion and sex, is the most sensitive of all issues in any society.

Here, one may notice that women are victims of patriarchy fortified by religion, traditions and politics. Within this context, Adrienne Rich argues that "Patriarchy is the power of ideological, political system in which men--by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male." (1976: 57-8).

Within this context, Nabila Jaber argues "that there are two modes of patriarchy: private patriarchy that is enacted in the authority of men over women in family and public patriarchy as manifested through the state and increasingly the religious establishment, particularly Islam." (2001:101).The patriarchal class oppression of women rooted in the sexual division of labor within the family is protected by government, which sees the family as private rather than public (Gordon, 1996). And that reflects how state plays a crucial role in fortifying the patriarchal class system through enacting laws which consolidate the authority of men. Deconstruction of patriarchy continues through exposing these patriarchal double moral standards concerning female and male sexuality. For El Saadawi , the whole society is permeated by a dichotomy of moral standards for females and others for males."At the root of this anomalous situation lies the fact that sexual experience in the life of a man is a source of pride and a symbol of virility, whereas sexual experience in the life of women is a source of shame and a symbol of degradation."(1980:31). since men rule over and dominate women, they, in turn, permit for themselves what they forbid for women.

## 3.14 **Conclusion**

It is true that Allah created females and males with some physical differences between them. However, this does not mean that one is superior and the other is inferior. Many non-Muslims believe that Islam oppresses women, and makes them inferior to men. Some Muslims actually consider women inferior to men by their misunderstanding of Islam or because of their culture's influence although they would

not admit that. Muslims in general believe that Islam gave women many rights, but at the same time, they feel that women are not equal to men in rights and obligations. It is therefore prudent to “correct” the image non-Muslims have about Muslim women, and to “correct” the wrong understanding of some Muslims about women in Islam. To speak of a religion or interpret a religious text remains a sensitive and thorny issue. Interpretation(s) varies (vary) on grounds of age, socio-educational and family background.

The illustration of Firdaus's killing of her pimp, indicates the severely limited nature of the power women can wrest from the oppressive systems operating in their lives. It also alludes to the fact that the path to liberation is thick with thorns in a society accustomed to class hierarchy and gender inequality.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1- al-Sayyid Marsot explains the impact of British colonization on traditional Arab life in A Short History of Modern Egypt. She argues that the increase in prostitution, particularly among poor women, angered the Muslim Brotherhood, who challenged the Wafd party's [a secular nationalist group] collaboration with British occupation (100).

2- I use the term "feminist" here, although it is important to clarify that this term is not commonly used in the Arab world. As El Saadawi herself says, "Feminism to us is a very English word. We call it women's liberation [tahrir al-ma'rah] because we don't have feminism in Arabic. Women's liberation means the liberation from class and patriarchal oppression." See "The Progressive Interview."

3- See also al-Sayyid Marsot 138. Sadat was championed by the U. S. as a great leader and his government highly subsidized and supported by U. S. government funds and policies. Marsot writes that Sadat's assassination in 1981 "moved the United States government and its people as though it had lost one of its own, [but] it barely moved the Egyptians" (140).

4- In El Saadawi's Two Women in One, the protagonist expresses the desire to escape her body, "to reach a final, total vanishing-point" (11). Peter Hitchcock refers to Firdaus's subjectivity as "the position of the asocial," a rejection of the Law of the Father, and a challenge to the rationality of phallogocentrism (44).

5- Hammami and Rieker here are referring to "the subaltern woman," a definition that aptly fits Firdaus.

6 Halim Barakat, for example, has described the defiant female protagonist of Layla Ba'albakki's Ana Ahya [I live] as "deeply rooted in her egotistic assertion of individual freedom . . . almost to the exclusion of social reality" (see Allen 86).

7- Thanks to Terri De Young for pointing out these details in the original Arabic.

8- As Leila Ahmed points out (Women and Gender 95-98), Sufism was the one branch of Islam that offered women equality with men, and sometimes stressed women's superior attributes.

9- It is interesting to note that in her more recent text, Women and Gender in Islam, Ahmed praises El Saadawi, saying that "no writer has played a more important and eloquent role than [she]" in exposing the hidden abuses of women and in challenging the misogynist and andocentric practices of Arab culture (215). Yet, she still critiques El Saadawi for her adherence to Western notions of individualism.

10- When I asked Nawal El Saadawi about these charges of "Westernization," she commented that ironically they are most often leveled by those Arabs who have lived in the West for some time, whereas she has chosen to live most of her life in Egypt (personal conversation, January 1994).

## GENERAL CONCLUSION:

An analysis of this novel leads to the conclusion that the primary narrator is silenced, within a traditional society and interpretations of Islam playing a significant role in her oppression. Firdaus, fought against the power that kept her silent. Therefore, she belongs to the category of the subaltern. To return to Spivak's question, "Can the subaltern speak?" it seems that at least in this case, the answer is yes. The narrator is given a chance to tell her story through El Saadawi's writing.

In order to understand El Saadawi's works in their cultural context, l must take a brief look at the events that occurred in Egypt during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. The decades of the 1960s and 1970s saw a period of increased feminism, which could be attributed to Egypt's postcolonial efforts to modernize as well as Westernize. However, during the 1980s a decline in the importance of feminism began (Braziel). Veiling became more popular, possibly in reaction to attempts to Westernize the country. Anwar Sadat served as President of Egypt from 1970 until his assassination in 1981. Sadat imprisoned nearly 1600 intellectuals in 1981 in an attempt to control political thought. El Saadawi was among those arrested. Merely a month after the arrests, members of a Muslim fundamentalist group assassinated Sadat. El Saadawi's novels are replete with historical and political allusions and commentary on these events.

El Saadawi suggests that all women have important stories to tell and that their plight should be given a voice. *Woman at Point Zero* portrays the life of one particular woman who falls into the category of the subaltern, in that she was forced to face oppression at the hands of men and society as a whole, often in the name of religion. Through this oppression, she finds herself silenced in multiple ways. Just as her aunt and uncle would not listen to her complaints about her abusive husband, neither would the court system and newspapers. It is only the doctor/author who even attempts to give her a voice.

The main character, Firdaus, a victim of male subordination is a symbol of a harassed and defenseless woman in a society in which women have limited options. Throughout the book, Firdaus fights not just to be in control of her own destiny but

also to figure out who she is. The scene in Bayoumi's coffee shop is an example of this. Bayoumi asks Firdaus whether she wants oranges or tangerines, and Firdaus is unable to answer him, having never considered whether she might like one thing more than another. Apart from this, growing up, Firdaus is treated as inferior to her brother and is not allowed to attend school simply because she is a girl. She is forced into marriage and when she thinks she has found an outlet by leaving her abusive husband, she is surprised that there is really no outlet.

In *Woman at Point Zero*, El Saadawi strives hard to deconstruct the patriarchal attitude towards marriage. In Saadawi's portrayal of marriage in this novel, certain issues clearly emerge: women are seen as commodities to be traded off when need to be: fathers remain the only authority to determine who their daughter should marry and the effects of such marriages on women. Firdaus, the main character is portrayed as a silent woman who, by this very fact, becomes a victim under her uncle's authority and violence, her husband and her society.

As the marginalized third person, Firdaus becomes the passive agent in a study about her in which she is rendered irrelevant and therefore her voice is silenced. Voiceless and passive, she is rendered an object, hence allowing her uncle and his wife to make decisions for her. By deciding what Firdaus needs, even in a most personal way, her uncle, a respected sheik and his wife do not only humiliate her but also are opposed to the natural rights of individuals to be free of any form of subjugation.

By the arbitrary power vested in Firdaus' uncle as the male head, he marries her off to her aunt's uncle, Sheikh Mahmoud, an old, deformed, tyrannical husband for a hundred pound dowry without anyone ever asking Firdaus' opinion. As her society has created the ideal self-sacrificing, passive and nurturing woman, the female who disobeys a member of her family has not only broken the law but has also violated gender expectations. To do otherwise is a violation which puts the violator in a cultural and religious space of otherness. So Firdaus has no other alternative than to marry the old Sheik against her will.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION:

Since Firdaus cannot buy love, freedom nor happiness, she has to destroy the very symbol that reminds her of her misery, men. The ultimate way to free oneself from this hypocritical society is to kill. She kills Marzouk, the man who claims his "capital is women's bodies."

By being tough, to the point of being abusive, Firdaus is not seen by society as the woman in the male role, but rather as a woman\wife who does not know how to be one. For that reason alone society is prepared to forgive her and ask her to go for a lawyer who will defend her. To show her dissatisfaction with society, she chooses not to appeal her sentence; she would prefer to die in order to escape the control that other people have over her. She refuses to work with the system, sign an appeal, or accept a visit from the doctor because she does not want to feel like a captive. When she finally agrees to meet with Nawal El Saadawi, the doctor, it is only in order to spread a message of truth and to do further damage to the world that abused her before she dies.

A broader reading of Firdaus' action shows that her first and only obligation is to keep herself and her society free of any cultural ambivalence represented by Marzouk. As the cultural "other," one message can be heard loud and clear over this silence: oppressed women are capable of crossing the traditional line; one does not usurp the role that corresponds to the patriarch no matter how misguided such a decision is or how strongly one rejects the issue at hand**.**

The significance of Firdaus' final acts of desperation needs to be emphasized. Murdering is an act of condemnation of patriarchy. In a patriarchal society, by murdering the pimp, she has in a way killed patriarchy which would have lived on through the ages to come.

One comes finally to conclude that patriarchy in *Woman at Point Zero* emerges as a system with political, economic, social, cultural, and psychological manifestations bound together by underlying class dynamics. Such oppressive systems, represented by the abusive and exploitative figures of male authority, are the real cause behind the

suffering of Firdaous. For oppressive patriarchal class ideologies to survive, brutal force implements and instills such ideology in society. The impact of such ideology on women has been manifested through double moral standards, rape, sexual exploitation, psychological instability, and violence. With the murder of the pimp, Firdaous finally restores her sense of freedom and self-respect by resisting. Within this context, Frantz Fanon confirms that “this violence represents the absolute line of action.” (1963:67).

Fanon considered the armed insurrection to be a necessary phase in the liberation of the colonized people. Similarly, Firdaus turned to violence to find her freedom. Just like de-alienation for Fanon is a violent process that requires the deconstruction of the colonizer’s identity and the simultaneous affirmation of the colonized national identity, Firdaus’ liberation came with the violent killing of her oppressor. Firdaus’ violent act was her first action as a free subject, an action that filled her with pride. But in a patriarchal society, liberation is prohibited, and just like the slaves that used to resist slavery in the colonial time were sent to prison, Firdaus’ liberation is punished with execution.

Firdaus is the extreme representation of a woman’s struggle for emancipation. In this novel, literature is thus transformed into a tool for the ‘subjugated’ woman to become a conscious political subject. Nawal El Saadawi uses the evocative power of literature to inspire women to action. She uses literature to take the struggle from the street to the homes of the oppressed women, using the written word as a revolutionary tool. The vivid symbolism that emerges throughout the novel is nothing but a means to that end: an instrument to show the sources of oppression in society. Foucault argued that power becomes dominant by means of its invisibility. The main principle for power to be effective is to be “absolutely indiscreet, since it is everywhere and always alert” but “absolutely discreet, for it functions permanently and largely in silence” (Foucault, 1963:177). Invisibility allows power to reproduce political oppression: when the source of power is unidentified, oppression is hard to resist. Visibility is thus a preliminary condition for power to be opposed. A visible and concentrated source of power is easy to defeat. In this context, clirodectomy, arranged marriages, sexual

exploitation and the strong visual images that El Saadawi uses, such as the representation of her husband as a “dog”, or the description of the tumor on his lip, are tools to make power visible and recognizable to her readers.

Nawal El Saadawi’s symbolic narrative is an instrument to help the reader identify the oppressive nature of patriarchy in Egypt. In the author’s intent, literature has thus a precise political function: to make power visible to isolated women and “uplift” the veil from their minds. Like the postcolonial intellectual gives voice to the silent ones and makes visible the invisible, Nawal El Saadawi uses literature as an instrument to liberate women, and inspire them to resist oppression. *Woman at Point Zero* is thus not merely a novel: it is a message of resistance for all women: a message that compels women to see that they are not alone, for in such solidarity they may find the courage to end oppression and to achieve justice and freedom for themselves and then for the whole society.

One also comes to find out that women pay dearly their freedom and dignity to obey the laws of the patriarchal class system that dominates society. They also pay a heavy price in order to become free. El Saadawi, through her character Firdaous, conveys a message to all women that resistance is the only option left to eradicate oppression and deconstruct the patriarchal class structures that enslave them. Furthermore, one can see the importance of collective action taken by women to resist the patriarchal class oppression meted against them. And that may reflect El Saadawi’s vision which it is only through political organization and a patient, long-enduring struggle, women can become an effective political power which will force society to change and abolish the patriarchal class structures that keep women victims.

Revolution was the code of Nawal El Saadawi's books: Revolution against men, against the chains of traditions and against everything that can imprison women. Freedom for women is the search of most of El Saadawi’s more than 30 books which have been translated into more than 30 languages as: English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Italian, Dutch, Finnish,

## GENERAL CONCLUSION:

Indonesian, Japanese, Persian, Turkish, Urdu, and are taught in a number of universities round the world as: Duke University's Asian and African Languages Department in North Carolina as well as the University of Washington in Seattle. She has since held positions at a number of prestigious colleges and universities including Cairo University, Harvard, Yale, Columbia, the Sorbonne, Georgetown, Florida State University, and the University of California, Berkeley.

The best method available to Arabs to present their society is writing, since Arab media is not yet popular in the West. Arabs must use this means of expression effectively. The three parties sharing responsibility for effective writing are Arab authors, Arab readers and translators. The Arab readers should support authors' efforts to write about Arab society fearlessly; Arab authors should write endlessly about their society, its positive and negative sides, but without offending their own people; and translators should strive to transfer the source text to the target readers achieving the intended understanding and reaction.

It could be concluded that, women in patriarchal societies find themselves in prostitution through no fault of theirs, but because of the demands from society. Prostitutes have at least the freedom to live in a situation "better" than that of other women: charging for service rendered and being patronized by high profile officials. By this, Saadawi is saying that revolting against patriarchy exacts a severe penalty which may include paying with one's life or body. Even though prostitution is not a better choice, Firdaus has succeeded in exposing the ills of society through her choice of such a profession.

In the Islamic society, the setting of *Woman at Point Zero*, where Firdaus finds herself, it is observed that male oppression is backed by religious authority and not frowned at by law enforcement agents. A pimp is not punished for his indecent activities but raids and arrests are carried out on prostitutes. Although these men are religious and observe their daily religious obligations, they still regard oppression and subjugation of women as a "normal" way of life. The subjugation of women is a

plague that cuts across African societies. This social evil of marginalization that cuts across an entire continent calls for a concerted effort from women around the world to join hands together and fight for their liberation. Since suffering is a common denominator that they share together, they need to unite and see to its stoppage.

In spite of these efforts aimed at improving the social status of women, a definite attitudinal change from men with oppressive tendencies, gender mainstreaming and ensuring equal access to opportunities for both men and women will go a long way in improving the lot of women. In other words, gender issues should play a central role in all social restructuring. Women should be included in the contemporary social and political transformations and regarded as co-partners in the developmental process of the society.

Indeed the novel selected of this Magister dissertation is thought provoking as it deals with men authority and power supposedly granted to them thanks to male interpretation(s) of the sacred book. Yet, it remains that this dissertation is a scientific piece of writing. Nevertheless, women suffering, exploitation and oppression are key themes in post-colonial and feminist writings. Women writers belonging to East/West or Christian/Muslim cultures denounce the inferior status of women in male patriarchal societies, families. Women writer's rights are perceived as requests and thus less attention is paid. Though translated novels cannot translate the cultural specificities, they at least reveal the ills of particular societies which condemn women who want to live a decent life: the right to be free and respected with their minds and bodies. Consequently, Paths of further research can include the analysis of women writings belonging to different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and investigate original and translated versions.

# Bibliography


- Ahmed, Leila. "*Arab Culture and the Writing of Women's Bodies*." Feminist Issues (Spring 1989).
- Ahmed, Leila. "Early Feminist Movements in Turkey and Egypt." In*Muslim Women*, Freda Hussain: 111–123. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984.
- Al-Ali, Nadje Sadig. *Gender Writing/Writing Gender: The Representation of Women in a Selection of Modern Egyptian Literature*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1993.
- Allen, Roger. *The Arabic Novel*: "An Historical and Critical Introduction. Syracuse": Syracuse UP, 1982.
- Amireh, Amal. "*Framing Nawal El Saadawi: Arab Feminism in a Transnational World." Signs* 26.1 (Autumn 2000: 215).
- Badran, Margot and Cooke, Miriam *Nawal al-Saadawi"Reflections of a Feminist: Conversation with*." In*Opening* the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing": 394–404. London: Virago; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- Bassnett, S. *Translation Studies.* London and NewYork: Routledge (2002)
- Beard, Michael and Adnan Haydar "*Men Constructed in the Mirror of Prostitution*." In Naguib Mahfouz*: From Regional Fame to Global Recognition*: 106–125. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993.
- Bedjaoui, Fewzia: "*Feminist Trends towards Permissiveness*" in the Journal of the Odisha Association for English Studies , edited by Santwana Haldar, vol 2, Issue 1, India,2012.
- Bedjaoui, Fewzia: *Recreating Literature Texts through Translations* in "Muse India", Issue 51, Sept-Oct 2013.
- Braziel, Jana Evans. "*Background in 20th Century Egyptian History since 1952 Revolution.*" University of Massachusetts Amherst. 08 Dec. 2005.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble:* "Feminism and the Subversion of Identity". New York: Routledge, 1990.

# Bibliography


- Cooke, Miriam. *Arab Women Writers*. In “The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature”: Modern Arabic Court to hear Egypt apostasy case, July 9, 2001.
- Delisle, Jean (1988). *Translation: An Interpretive Approach. (Traduit par Patricia Logan et Monica Creery)*. Ottawa: Presses de l□Universite d□Ottawa. El Saadawi, N. (1983).
- Douglas, Fedwa Malti- and Douglas, Allen Interview. "*Reflections of a Feminist*". Opening the Gates: “A Century of Arab Feminist Writing” 1986.Ed. Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990. 395-404.
- Edward, Said, W. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.
- El Saadawi Nawal and Hetata Sherif *Memories from the Women’s Prison*. London and New York: El Saadawi N. “Exile and Resistance”. (2002).
- El Saadawi Nawal *Men, Women, and God(s):* and “Arab Feminist Poetics”. Berkely: University of California Press, 1995.
- El Saadawi, Nawal. "*Arab Women and Western Feminism*: An Interview with Nawal El Sadaawi." Race and Class (Autumn 1980): 175-82.
- El Saadawi, Nawal. *The Bitter Lot of Women*, “Freedom Review”, Vol. 25, n. 3, 1994.
- El Saadawi, Nawal. *The Fall of the Imam*. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Mandarin Paperbacks, 1989.
- El Saadawi, Nawal. *Woman at Point Zero*. Dr. Sherif Hetata Translation. London: Zed Books, 1975.
- El Saadawi, Nawal. *Women’s Resistance in the Arab World and in Egypt*. “Women in the Middle East”: “Perceptions, Realities and Struggles for Liberation”
- Elam, Diane – W. Robyn, *Feminism beside Itself*, Routledge, New York 1995.
- Elam, Diane and Wiegman, Robyn *Writing Nawal El Saadawi*. In “*Feminism Beside Itself*”: 283–296. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- EL-Kasimi, Ali *Translation and its theory tools theory and practic*e. librairie du Liban publishers. Edition *1*. *Encounters in Translation from Arabic.* Clevedon, U.K; Buffalo: Multilingual (2009).

# Bibliography


- Erman, Adolf. *A Handbook of Egyptian Religion*. Translated by A. S. Griffith. Boston: Longwood Press, 1977. Esposito, John L. *Islam: The Straight Path*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Faiq, S. The *Cultural Encounter in Translating from Arabic*. (2004).
- Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove, New York 1978.
- Fanon, Frantz. *A Dying Colonialism*. Translated by Haakon Chevalier. New York: Grove Press, 1967.
- Fawcett, P. (1997). *Translation and Language: Linguistic Theories Explained*.
- Gandhi, L, Postcolonial *Theory*, Columbia University Press, New York 1998.
- Gershoni, Israel, and James P. Jankowski. *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs:* "The Search for Egyptian Nationhood", *1900–1930*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Hafez, Sabry. "*Intentions and Realisation in the Narratives of Nawal El-Saadawi*. "Third World Quarterly" 11, no. 3 (July 1989): 188–198. al-Hakîm, Tawfîq. *Izîs*. Cairo: Maktabat al-Adâb, 1985.
- Haleh, Afshar *Women's Resistance in the Arab World*. In"*Women in the Middle East":* "Perceptions, Realities, and Struggles for Liberation": 139–145. London: Macmillan, 1993.
- Hammami, Reza, and Rieker, Martina. "*Feminist Orientalism and Orientalist Marxism.*" New Left Review 170 (1988): 93-106.
- Hatim B. & Williams M.P. "*Course Profile -- Diploma in Translation*", The Translator. Vol.4 No.1, St Jerome Publishing. (1998)
- Hatim B. *Communication across Cultures*: "Translation Theory and Contrastive Text Linguistics". University of Exeter Press. (1997)
- Hatim, B. and Mason, I *Discourse and the Translator*. London and New York: (1990).
- Hatim, Basil and Orsini, Elisabeth *Woman against Her Sex:* "A Critique of Nawal el-Saadawi". London: Saqi Books, 1988.
- Head and Myriam Warner-Veiyra *The Politics of (M) Othering*.Ed. ObiomaNnaemeka. London and New York: Routeledge, 1997. 205-227.

# Bibliography


- Heise, L. *Violence against Women:* "The Hidden Health Burden". World Bank Discussion Paper. Washington. D.C.: The World Bank. 1994.
- Heong-Dug, Park. "Nawâl al-Sa'adâwî [sic] and *Modern Egyptian Feminist Writings.*". Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1988.
- Hetata, Sherif. *The Hidden Face of Eve:* "Women in the Arab World". Trans. Boston: Beacon Press, 1982.
- Hetata, Sherif. *The Innocence of the Devil*. Trans. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. Translation Journal, 4, (4), October 2000. Retrieved November 16, 2004
- Hodge R. & Kress G. *Social Semiotics*. Polity, Cambridge, UK. (1988)
- Ingersoll, Earl G. "*Nawal El Saadawi□s The Fall of the Imam* and *the Possibility of a Feminine Writing.* "International Fiction Review" 28.1-2 (2001): 23-31.
- Kaplan, Caren. "*Resisting Autobiography: Out-Law Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects*." Smith and Watson 115-38.
- Keddie, Nikki R. *Women in the Middle East: Past and Present*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 2007.
- L. Horn, Pierre and Pringle, Mary Beth *The Prostitute in Arab and North African Fiction*. In "The Image of the Prostitute in Modern Literature": 63–75. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1984.
- Landry, Donna & Gerald MacLean, eds. *The Spivak Reader:* Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Lefevere, A. *Translation* : "Who is Doing What For/Against Whom" (1998).
- Leitch, Vincent B, ed. "Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2001. 2193-2197.
- Leonardi, V. (2000). *Equivalence in Translation: Between Myth and Reality. Life,* Africa World Press, Trenton, NJ 1999: 207-216.
- Lightfoot-Klein, Hanny. *Prisoners of Ritual:* "An Odyssey into Female Genital Circumcision in Africa". New York: Haworth Press, 1989.

# Bibliography


- M. Cooke, *Women in the Middle East*, "NWSA Journal", Vol. 11, n. 1, 1999.
- M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, Vintage Books, New York 1963.
- Mahfouz, Naguib. Midaq Alley. Trans. *Trevor Le Gassick*. New York: Doubleday, 1966.
- Malti-Douglas, F. *Men, Women and Gods*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1995.
- Malti-Douglas, Fedwa Preferred Citation: *Men, Women, and God(s):* "Nawal El Saadawi and Arab Feminist Poetics". Berkeley: University of California Press, c1995 1995. http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft8c6009n4/
- Malti-Douglass, Fedwa. *Woman's Body, Woman's Words*: "Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing. Manchester", UK: St Jerome Publishing Matters Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991
- Marsot, Al-Sayyid, Lutfi, Afaf. *A Short History of Modern Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985.
- Mernissi, Fatima. *The Veil and the Male Elite:* "A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam". Trans. Mary Jo Lakeland. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1991.
- Mernissi, Fatima. *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory*. Zed Books: London, 1996.
- Mitra – M. Mitra, *The Discourse of Liberal Feminism and the Third World Women's Text:* "Some Issues of Pedagogy", "College Literature", Vol. 18, n. 3, 1993.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Ed. Mohanty, Ann Russo, Lourdes Torres. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991. 51-80.
- Mukherjee, Arun P. "*The Exclusions of Postcolonial Theory and Mulk Raj Amand's 'Untouchable*': "A Case Study." Ariel 22.3 (July 1991): 27-48.
- Munday, J. "Introducing Translation Studies"*: Theories and Applications*. London and New York: Routledge(2001).

# Bibliography


- Nida, E. Translation: Possible and Impossible. In *Translation Perspectives*. (1996).
- Nida, Eugene (1975).*Toward a science of translation*. London. Oxford University Press (2013). Oxford dictionary online, available at http*//www.oxford online.com* November 16, 2004
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford. "Womanguides"*: Readings toward a Feminist Theology*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985.
- Saiti, Ramzi. *Paradise, Heaven, and Other Oppressive Spaces*: *A Critical Examination of the Life and Works* of Nawal El-Saadawi. "Journal of Arabic Literature" 25.2 (July 1994: 152-74).
- Salami-Agunloye, Irene. *Cultural Practices and the African Woman* as Portrayed in Some Selected Dramatic Texts Site. Retrieved November 16, 2004.
- Schatteman, R. *Fanon and Beyond:* Tsitsi Dangarembga and "the Nervous Condition of the Colonized Woman", in K. Anyidoho – A. P. A. Busia – A. V.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* "The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism". Vincent B Leitch, Ed. New York: W. W. Norton, 2001. 2197-2208.
- Stowasser, Barbara. *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Strong-Leek, Linda. Reading as a Woman: Chinua Achebe□s *Things Fall Apart and Feminist Criticism*. African Studies Quarterly 5.2. 2000 WaThiong□O, Ngugi". Homecoming. London: Heinemann, 1982.
- T. Nahid, *Women of the Arab World,* Zed Press, London 1988.
- T. Saliba, *On the Bodies of Third World Women:* "Cultural Impurity, Prostitution, and Other Nervous Conditions", "College Literature", Vol. 22, n. 1, 1995.
- Tarabishi, Georges [Tarâbîshî, Jûrj].*Unthâ Didd al-Unûtha*. Beirut: Dâr al-Talî'a, 1984.

# Bibliography


- Tarabishi, Georges. *Woman against Her Sex*: "A Critique of Nawal El-Saadawi". Trans. Basil Hatim and Elisabeth Orsini. London: Saqi, 1988.
- Tarabishi, J, *Woman against Her Sex:* "A Critique of Nawal el-Saadawi with a reply" by Nawal el-Sadaawi, Saqi Books, New York 1988.
- Thomas, Philipp. *Feminism and Nationalist Politics in Egypt*. In "Women in the Muslim World",Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie, pp. 277–294. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978.
- Trinh, Min-ha T. *Woman, Native, Other:* "Writing Post-coloniality and Feminism. Bloomington": Indiana University Press, 1989.
- Tucker, Judith E. "*Rebellion, Maturity, and the Social Context:* Arab Women's Special Contribution to Literature." In Arab Women: Old Boundaries, *New Frontiers*: 224–253. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.


**Webiorgraphy :**


- http://www.accurapid.com/journal/14equiv.htm.
- http://www.eng.helsinki.fi/hes/Translation/respect_or_ridicule1.htm.
- http://www.minimumsecurity.net/aboutme/writing/isis.htm
- http://www.nawalsaadawi.net/articlesnawal/bornexile.htm

# Glossary

- **Women's writings**

The academic discipline of women's writing as a discrete area of literary studies is based on the notion that the experience of women, historically, has been shaped by their gender, and so women writers by definition are a group worthy of separate study: "Their texts emerge from and intervene in conditions usually very different from those which produced most writing by men." It is not a question of the subject matter or political stance of a particular author, but of her gender: her position as a woman within the literary world. The study of women's writing developed in the 1970s and since. The majority of English literature programmes offer courses on specific aspects of literature by women, and women's writing is generally considered an area of specialization in its own right.

- **Hegemony**

Is the political, economic, or military predominance or control of one state over others.

- **Polygamy**

  Marriage to more than one person at the same time. The most common polygam y is

  polygyny, where a man has several wives. A less common form is polyandry, w here a woman has several husbands.

- **Indigenization**

Is a term that is used in a variety of ways depending on the context. It is the fact of making something more native; transformation of some service and idea. To suit a local culture, especially through the use of more indigenous people in administration, employment, etc.

In world politics, indigenization is the process in which non-Western cultures redefine their native land for better use in agriculture and mass marketing. Due to imperialism and the impetus to modernize, many countries and cultures invoked Western values and ideals of liberalism, democracy and independence in the past. But now, along with

experiencing their own share of cultural confidence, they desire to revert to their traditional cultures and values.

- **Paganism**

Is a broad group of religions including modern pagan religions, indigenous religions and historical polytheistic religions. It is often taken to exclude monotheism, and to express a worldview that is pantheistic, polytheistic, or animistic. In a wider sense, paganism has also been understood to include any non-Abrahamic, folk, or ethnic religion. However, not all pagans were strictly polytheist.

- **Orientalism**

Unlike the Americans, the French and British less so the Germans, Russians, Spanish, Portuguese, Italians, and Swiss--have had a long tradition of what I shall be calling Orientalism, a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western Experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles. . . .

- **Imperialism**

Is a type of advocacy of empire. Its name originated from the Latin word "imperium", meaning to rule over large territories. Imperialism is "a policy of extending a country's power and influence through colonization, use of military force, or other means". Imperialism has greatly shaped the contemporary world.

# Glossary

- **Domestication and Foreignization**

Are strategies in translation, regarding the degree to which translators make a text conform to the target culture. Domestication is the strategy of making text closely conform to the culture of the language being translated to, which may involve the loss of information from the source text. Foreignization is the strategy of retaining information from the source text, and involves deliberately breaking the conventions of the target language to preserve its meaning. These strategies have been debated for hundreds of years, but the first person to formulate them in their modern sense was Lawrence Venuti, who introduced them to the field oftranslation studies in 1995 with his book *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. Venuti's innovation to the field was his view that the dichotomy between domestication and foreignization was an ideological one; he views foreignization as the ethical choice for translators to make.

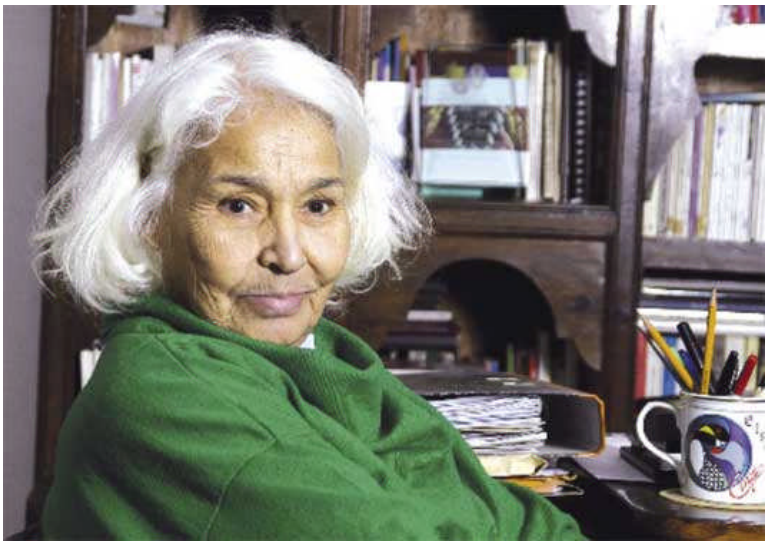
- **Sheikh**

A leader of a Muslim organization or group.

# APPENDICES

**Appendix one:** biography of Nawal El Saadawi.

A Voice That Cannot Be Silenced



# APPENDICES

Dr. Nawal El Saadawi is an internationally revered and respected Egyptian feminist and political writer. She has had to pay steep costs for her controversial writings. However, Saadawi insists, "*There is no power in the world that can strip my writings from me.*"

Her works have been translated into over 30 languages so that her strength, vision, and courage can inspire feminists around the world. Saadawi is a woman who accepts that change must come at a cost. In her own words, "*Danger has been a part of my life ever since I picked up a pen and wrote. Nothing is more perilous than truth in a world that lies.*" But despite copious obstacles, Saadawi has continued to tell the truth. And with the truth that streams from her pen, she has realized reform.
Nawal el-Saadawi is perhaps the best loved, most hated and best known feminist in the Arab world.

El-Saadawi stands out among feminists in Egypt and in the region because she is a woman as strong as she is controversial, in a class all her own.

But that fighting spirit has earned her many enemies.
*"I've been attacked for over 40 years. Either I can look back and attack back or look forward and write more books.*," she says, and goes on, refusing to be interrupted.
*"I'm ready to die if someone tries to stop me from expressing myself."*

Her words are strong because she is fighting to encourage strength among those around her. With shining eyes, a quick mind, and white hair flying in all directions, she's become more outspoken and controversial all the time.

Born to a family of little means in the Delta village of Kafr Tahla in 1931, el-Saadawi says she became a feminist at age seven. "*It started unconsciously when I was a child. I felt the discrimination,*" she wrote in Opening the Gates (Indiana University Press, 1991). "*My parents and my family were relatively quite liberal. But I felt that my brother was privileged. And then when I grew up I became a physician, and I worked in rural areas, and so on, where I started to become aware of the fact that what I had felt years earlier was the truth.*"

In 1955, el-Saadawi became Egypt's director of public health. She began writing novels and short stories over 30 years ago and in 1972 published her first study on Arab women, Women and Sex. This cost the author her position in the Ministry of

Health, her post as chief editor of the medical journal Health and her job as assistant secretary general of Egypt's Medical Association.

She reacted by focusing her energies on the plight of Arab women. From 1973 to 1976, she researched neurosis and women at Ain Shams University and from 1979 to 1980 she served as the UN advisor for the Women's Program in Africa and the Middle East.

Although she was denied pen and paper, El Saadawi continued to write in prison, using a "*stubby black eyebrow pencil*" and "*a small roll of old and tattered toilet paper.*" She was released in 1982, and in 1983 she published *Memoirs from the Women's Prison,* in which she continued her bold attacks on the repressive Egyptian government. In the afterword to her memoirs, she notes the corrupt nature of her country's government, the dangers of publishing under such authoritarian conditions and her determination to continue to write the truth.

Even after her release from prison, El Saadawi's life was threatened by those who opposed her work, mainly Islamic fundamentalists, and armed guards were stationed outside her house in Giza for several years until she left the country to be a visiting professor at North American universities. El Saadawi was the writer in residence at Duke University's Asian and African Languages Department from 1993-1996. She also taught at Washington State University in Seattle.

El Saadawi continues to devote her time to being a writer, journalist and worldwide speaker on women's issues. Her current project is writing her autobiography, laboring over it for 10 hours a day.

Her writing presents the full range of her extraordinary work. She explores a host of topics from women's oppression at the hands of recent interpretations of Islam to the role of women in African literature, from sexual politics of development initiatives to tourism in a 'post-colonial' age. She looks at the nature of cultural identity to the subversive potential of creativity, from the fight against female genital mutilation to problems facing the internationalization of the women's movement. Throughout her writing she sheds new light on the power of women in resistance –

against poverty, racism, fundamentalism, and inequality of all kinds. Nawal El Saadawi has received three literary awards.

**Work cited:**

El Saadawi, N (1999) *A Daughter of Isis: The Autobiography of Nawal El Saadawi*, London: Zed Books. 320 pages.

Nawal El Saadawi by Jennifer McBride, and www.cc.emory.edu/ENGLISH/Bahri/Saadawi.html

APPENDICES

## **Appendix two:**

Synopsis

Woman at Point Zero by Nawal El Saadawi is an engrossing, dramatized non-fiction work about the life of Firdaus, an Egyptian woman sentenced to death for killing a man. After suffering greatly at the hands of men through her entire life, Firdaus becomes a prostitute, but she is imprisoned for killing a pimp who beats and rapes her. "Woman at Point Zero" is a heart wrenching tale that readers will find hard to put down.

In 1973, Nawal El Saadawi hears about Firdaus, a woman who has been sentenced to death for killing a man, from her doctor friend at Qanatire Prison. At first, Firdaus refuses to meet Saadawi, but she eventually agrees to tell the story of her life.

As a child, Firdaus lives with her parents. She receives pleasure from Mohammadain but stops feeling pleasure after her mother cuts off her clitoris, though Firdaus' uncle still touches her. Firdaus does not understand who she, her mother or father is. She often goes hungry while her father eats. After her father dies, her uncle puts her in elementary school, and he takes her to live with him in Cairo after her mother dies. Firdaus likes school, and after she receives her primary school certificate, a strange thing happens to her as pleasure reawakens in her body. When her uncle marries, she is sent to the boarding section of the school, and she likes school and dreams about her hopes for the future. In her despair one night, she is comforted by and falls in love with Miss Iqbal, but she never sees her after receiving her secondary school certificate and returning to live with her uncle.

Firdaus' uncle's wife convinces him to marry Firdaus off to Sheikh Mahmoud, an old man who beats Firdaus. When Firdaus runs away from Sheikh Mahmoud, she lives peacefully and happily with Bayoumi until he begins to beat her and locks her up in his flat so that he and his friends can use her sexually. After escaping from Bayoumi, Firdaus is taken in by Sharifa Salah el Dine who acts as her pimp until Fawzy, a client, wants to marry Firdaus and beats and rapes Sharifa when she refuses. Seeing this, Firdaus runs away yet again, but now, she gets her own apartment and

prospers financially as a prostitute until Di'aa tells her that she is not a respectable woman. She gets a job at a big industrial operation where she has an affair and falls in love with Ibrahim, but she returns to prostitution when she learns that Ibrahim is engaged to the chairman's daughter.

Firdaus learns the truth: that all women are victims of deception, but prostitutes are less deceived than other women. She chooses the men she will bed and becomes very successful, being paid the highest price. This changes when Marzouk, a pimp, forces Firdaus to pay him most of her earnings in exchange for protection, though he beats and rapes her. When he tries to prevent Firdaus from leaving, Firdaus stabs Marzouk. After bedding an Arab prince, Firdaus confesses to killing a man, and she is imprisoned and sentenced to death because she knows the truth and is free because she no longer wants, hopes or fears anything. The journey to a place unknown to the world fills Firdaus with pride. After she finishes her story about her life, she is taken to her execution. As Nawal El Saadawi returns to her car, she sees the lies and hypocrisy of the world. Although she wants to stamp it all out, she is too frightened, and she realizes that Firdaus has more courage than she does.

## Appendix three:

Huda Sha'rawi, right, with Saiza Nabarawi at a women's conference in Rome after they had removed their veils *(Keystone Photographs)*

http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/1999/462/women.htm

## **Appendix four:**

Huda Shaàrawi meeting with women from various Arab countries. The Egyptian Feminist Union also promoted the cause of Arab women.

http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/1999/462/women.htm

## **Appendix five:**

The state granted women the right to vote and run for parliament in 1956. Here, Rawya Attiya, in military garb, canvassing the support that would make her Egypt's first female parliamentarian (1957)

http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/1999/462/women.htm

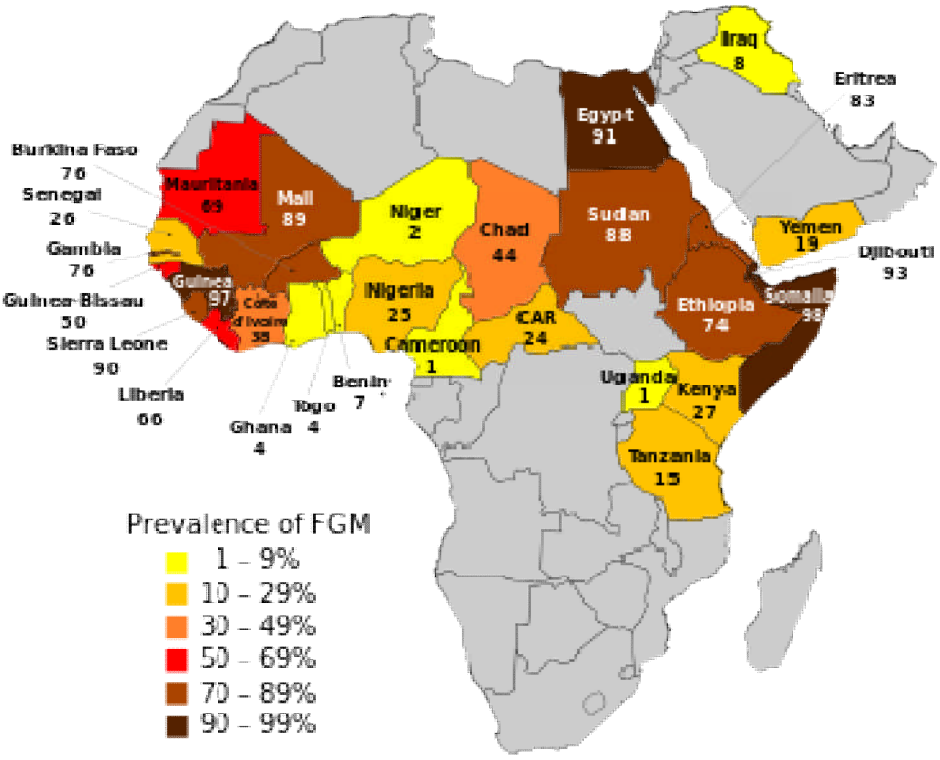
**Appendix six:** Egypt was the birthplace of the first Feminist Movement in the Arab world.

The Egyptian Feminist Union, established in 1923, was the first nationwide feminist movement in the Arab world. In 1988, feminist activist Hoda Badran founded the Alliance for Arab Women (AAW), which acts today as an umbrella organization to about 350 NGOs nationwide.

http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/1999/462/women.htm

APPENDICES

## **Appendix seven:**




Percentage of women aged 15–49 with FGM in the 29 countries in which it is concentrated (UNICEF, November 2014).

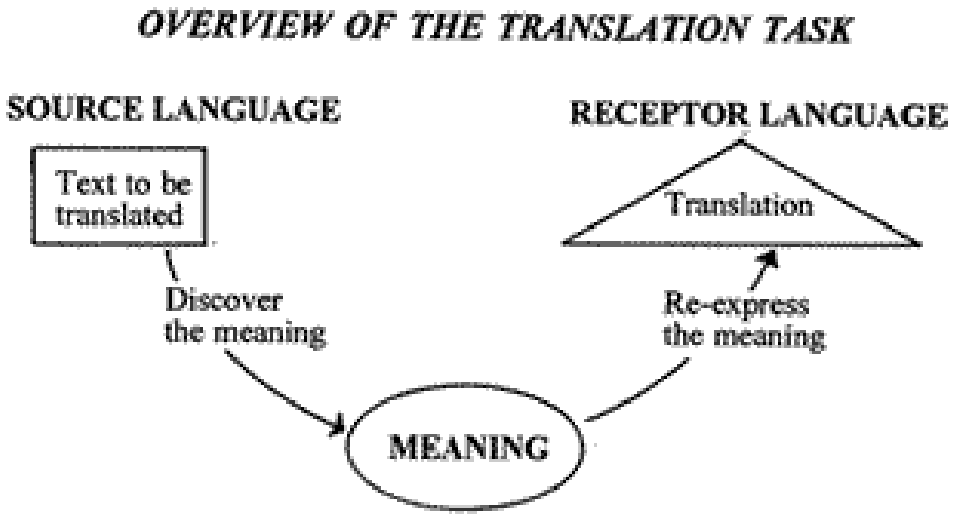
The State of the World's Children 2015: Executive Summary, New York: UNICEF, November 2014, Table 9: 84–89.

**Appendix eight:** Gender Violence throughout a Woman's Life

| **Phase** | **Type of Violence** |
|---|---|
| Infancy | Female infanticide, emotional and physical abuse, differential access to food and medical care |
| Childhood | Genital mutilation; incest and sexual abuse; differential access to food, medical care, and education; child prostitution |
| Adolescence | Dating and courtship violence, economically coerced sex, sexual abuse in the workplace, rape, sexual harassment, forced prostitution |
| Reproductive | Abuse of women by intimate partners, marital rape, dowry abuse and murders, partner homicide, psychological abuse, sexual abuse in the workplace, sexual harassment, rape, abuse of women with disabilities |
| Old Age | Abuse of widows, elder abuse (which affects mostly women) |

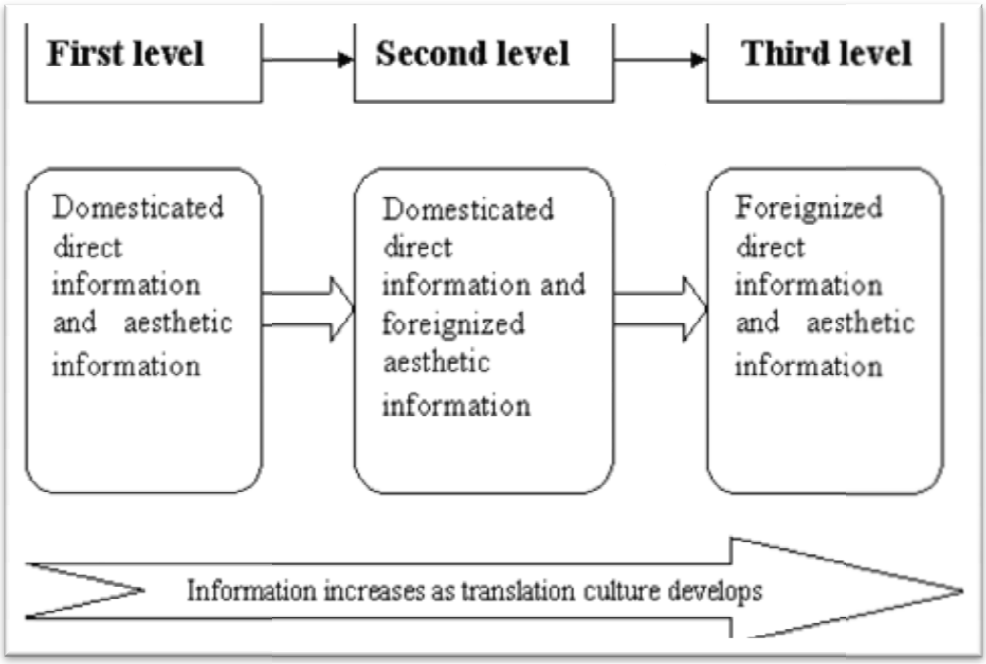
Source: Heise, L. 1994. Violence Against Women: The Hidden Health Burden. World Bank Discussion Paper. Washington. D.C.: The World Bank**.**

**Appendix nine:**




The process of translation SIL International (Larson, 1991)

## Appendix ten:




Xiaosong's table which explains the differences between domestication and foreignization. Why Foreignizing Translation Is Seldom Used in Anglo-American World in Information Age. Translation Directory.com. Retrieved November 16, 2004

From http://www.translationdirectory.com/article50.htm