

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF MOHAMED BOUDIAF - M'SILA

FACULTY OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

N°.....



DOMAIN: FOREIGN LANGUAGES

STREAM: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

OPTION : LITERATURE & CIVILIZATION

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN NAWAL SAADAWI'S
WOMAN AT POINT ZERO (1975)

**Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial fulfilment of
the Requirements for the Master's Degree**

Candidate:

Ms. Chaima BENOUMHANI

Ms. Ahlam YALLAOUI

Supervisor:

Dr. Mohammed Senoussi

2021

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Dr. Mohammed Gouffi	University of M'sila	Chairperson
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In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FGM: Female genital mutilation

AWSA: Arab Women's Solidarity Association

NCW: National Council for Women

NGO: Non-governmental organization

WHO: World Health Organization

WHD: Women's Health and Development

WPZ: Woman at Point Zero

DEDICATION

To who I have no words to describe how grateful I'm: My Mother and My Father...

To My Precious Friends Ahlam, Amal, Bouchra, Iman, Dalal, and Ikram

To All the Oppressed Women Around the World

Chaima

Dedication

To my father for being my first inspiration

To my mother the symbol of love and giving

To my soul mates Meriem and Ines

To my dear brother zahir

To my dearest friends: Chaima, Amel, Naima, Zineb, Imane, Nadjima and Bouchra.

Thank you for your support and endless love.

Ahlam

ABSTRACT

Woman at Point Zero, by Nawal El Saadawi, is a remarkable portrayal of Egyptian women's struggle against patriarchy and colonialism. Firdaus is the protagonist of the novella, a woman attempting to make a life in a culture where women have little options. Throughout the narrative, Firdaus fights not just to be in charge of her own destiny, but also to discover who she is and how to reach liberation. Thus, this dissertation aims to show how women are oppressed and subjugated in Egyptian's male-dominated society, as well as it highlights every possible road a woman can take to reach power, freedom, and self-reliance from the perspective of Nawal El-Saadawi. There are two chapters in this dissertation; the first chapter provides a theoretical framework and socio-historical context. While, the second chapter, includes an analysis of the theme of empowering women, through the lens of postcolonial feminism, starting with a part one that examines an Egyptian woman struggles, to the second part analyzing the possible factors that may empower the Egyptian woman.

Keywords: oppression, male-domination, empowering women, liberation.

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General Introduction

The postcolonial era, with the third phase of feminism produced a strong woman comparing to that of the old days, a woman who achieved an astounding milestone in her quest for equal rights with that of the man. But in the other side the woman of the third world is still fighting for what her sisters in the West already achieved. The Arab woman is still subjected to all forms of oppression, inequalities, and discrimination; under the cover of cultural and traditional norms, male authority practices various cruel behaviors against women, as an example the husband beats his wife, regards her inferior, and she is asked to be obedient regardless of what he does. The deeply rooted patriarchal view in the Arab societies entangled the Arab women from achieving liberty and obtaining power, the hardships that females encounter to get education is one way in which the patriarchy system tries to keep females under their control as education will allow women to be aware of their rights thus they will ask for it.

Since the early twentieth century, Arab fiction in general, and the novel in particular, has become a more essential platform for debating social, political, and national ideas such as national identity, poverty, discrimination, gender, and sexuality, among other topics. Arab female writers use this new and developing literary style to offer counter-narratives that derive from a desire to equalize the playing field for women in modern Arab culture. These voices have evolved over time in response to cultural, social, political, and economic shifts in the Arab world and elsewhere, particularly in the West. Women speak just as loudly as males here, influencing both collective and individual experiences.

The hardships Arab women encounter since birth, do not stop them from fighting against male domination; Arab women writers are no exception, as their burden is bigger because they try to make Arab women's voices loud through their writings but it is a challenging quest regarding that literature and writing are also dominated by male authority. Mambrol¹ says that gender opposition shapes writing, in a way that the man is more valued, and writing is restricted to his rules.

Despite the banning, threats, and all kind of obstacles Arab women writers face, they do keep the war waged, so that they pave the way to their oppressed sisters, and ensure them enough freedom, and enough power, because who can guide women to their liberation and power if it is not women themselves. Writing is a strong way to empower, especially if it is directed to a weak category of people, and this is exactly what the writer Nawal El-Saadawi wants to do, with her novel *Woman at Point Zero*, in which she writes about both, the struggles Egyptian women go through, and at the same time she captures, step by step how can these weak women reach liberation, and power.

El Saadawi's novels have attracted a large number of experts, particularly *Women at Point Zero*. This novel is notable for delving into the most challenging themes in postcolonial feminism, such as gender stereotyping, patriarchy, female bodily exile, and capitalism.

One of the researchers that have sought to explore El Saadawi's issues is Saddik Goharin in his work "Empowering the Subaltern in *Woman at Point Zero*" (2016). The study discusses how women are marginalized by males. Additionally, *Woman at Point Zero*, according to Saddik, is not simply Firdaus' narrative, but the story of every girl, particularly in Egyptian

¹"Helene Cixous and Poststructuralist Feminist Theory."
<https://literariness.org/2016/12/20/helene-cixous-and-poststructuralist-feminist-theory/>

society. And According to the study's researcher, Firdaus is exploited physically and psychologically throughout her life.

Eka Wilany, on the other hand, devotes her work “Feminism Analysis in the Novel *Woman at Point Zero*” (2017). To investigate the portrayal of the female protagonist from a feminist perspective in order to highlight Firdausi’s acts of resistance. The study shows how difficult it is for a woman to fight for her rights, not only as a woman but also as a human. According to Wilany, a lot of unfairness can make us worry ceaselessly about what we need to do to prevent it. Even the rights of passive persons like Firdaus are disregarded. The author concludes that Firdaus had to end her life without any just and reasonable retribution for herself.

On the contrary, in her article "On the Condition of the Colonized Woman: Firdaus' Nervous Condition in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*” (2001). Firenze Giunti describes the novel as an "allegory" of the life of an Egyptian woman and her struggles against colonialism's larger oppression as well as patriarchal power's smaller oppression.

El Saadawi’s novel *Woman at Point Zero* is a satire on Egyptian culture. In actuality, it is a classic case of a book being excluded from both the feminist and postcolonial literary canons due to the fact that it is written by a non-white, non-western woman.

As well, Assia Djebar's book "*Fantasia an Algerian Cavalcade*" is about women's experiences in Algeria. It is an exploration of current Algerian women's fight to define them without being bound by males, as well as a search to comprehend women's roles in Algerian history. Djebar condemns women's silence and attempts to give it a voice through her works. Algerian women's subjugation is examined through the lenses of French colonialism and

Algerian nationalism in Djébar's work. It also features a female colonized tribe who has been oppressed in various ways.

In *from a Crooked Rib* (1970), Nurridin Farrah explores the condition of women in a culture that balances traditions and Islamic principles. Farrah tells the story of Ebla, who has been informed by her grandfather that she would marry a guy she has never met. She flees to live with her cousin, who sells her as well. She flees once more in search of equality, but she soon discovers that in her society, being a woman means less in comparison to being a man. She has doubts about her faith and the world around her. Farrah concludes that the world would be a better place if we all treated each other equally, something he believes religion does not do.

Furthermore, Mahfouz's best work, *the Cairo Trilogy*, is a series of interconnected human dramas. In terms of scope, it offers a thorough assessment of Egypt's socio-political development during a period of transition. Different categories of women may be found in Mahfouz's *The Cairo Trilogy*, in which he exposes the suffering of women in a patriarchal society while chronicling the Egyptian political forces' struggle for independence. Throughout the novels, he also depicts the many forms of husband-wife interactions through the marital lives of a number of couples. The majority of them are traditional marriages, in which the husband or wife is the master and the relationship is not based on love. What is remarkable about Mahfouz's concern in female oppression is that he views it through the lens of political oppression in his own country, both before and after independence. Almost all of his realistic writings incorporate a graphic portrayal of women's exploitation and sorrow in an attempt to expose the entire political system.

All of the works listed and examined above are carefully chosen because they are relevant to this study in some way, and the issue that will be addressed in the study has already been addressed in each of these works, albeit in limited and diverse ways.

Nawal El Saadawi successfully portrays the painful experiences that Egyptian women go through, reflected in the life of Firdaus, an experience all Arab women relate to. But, does not stop there, she wants to give the marginalized women a way to escape the male dominance, highlighting what can possibly empower them. This is basically what pushed our curiosity and interest to undertake the research. Applying a postcolonial feminism, this study aims to understand the different forms of oppression the Arab-Muslim women encounter under the cover of cultural, and traditional norms, adding to that this study aims to unveil the different factors that can possibly make the marginalized women escape the male dominance, and possess power.

In order to reach our aims, the following questions are asked:

- 1/ What are the different forms of oppression that the Egyptian women encounter in their lives under the cover of traditional and cultural norms?
- 2/ What are the different factors that may empower the woman?

This research is divided into two chapters, the first chapter is for the theoretical framework and socio-historical background, in which the first part is about postcolonial feminism, while the second part discusses the status of Egyptian women under the patriarchal hegemony during the postcolonial era. The second chapter is devoted to the thematic analyses of the novel using postcolonial feminism, this chapter is divided into two sections, the first section includes the forms of oppression Firdaus encountered, mainly violence, mutilation, sexual harassment, and forced marriage. The second section devoted to the factors that empowered Firdaus mainly: education, prostitution, employment, and sisterhood.

CHAPTER ONE:
SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT
AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Introduction

“This world has always belonged to males, and none of the reasons given for this have ever seemed sufficient”.

(Simone de Beauvoir, *The second Sex*, p 96 (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

The never ending injustice and, inhuman treatment that women encountered all long the history, encouraged them to gather in order to restore their rightful rights as an equal human being to men. This marked the beginning of what is called today Feminism. Feminism is a movement in which feminists call for a change in women’s social, political, and economical position. It is through this movement that women started to battle, to speak out, and to express their hopes for a better life, a life in which they are regarded equal to men.

Postcolonial feminist writers are no less than the white feminists in the west, when it comes to standing against inequality towards women, in which they use their access to literature that is also dominated by men to show the world that Third World Women are important and matter as much as all human beings. In the case of Arab women, Egyptian women particularly are suffering mainly because of patriarchy that is why the Arab feminist writers try to highlight in their writings the life of women in Egypt, suffering with classical patriarchy, and at the same time guide these women towards freedom through calling them to resist and never surrender.

1.2. Socio-historical Context

1.2.1. Arab Women and Patriarchy

“Man is defined as a human being and a woman as a female - whenever she behaves as a human being she is said to imitate the male.”

(Simone de Beauvoir, *The second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

In the last two decades, the term "patriarchy" has been reintroduced to understand the origins and conditions of men's dominance over women. It was coined to represent the father's power as the family's head, but has now come to refer to the post-feminist system of male supremacy and female subjugation. In other words, patriarchy is a male-dominated society in which women are oppressed through social, political, and economic systems. Feminist theorists claim that a sex gender system and a system of economic inequality exist in any historical form of patriarchal society, whether feudal, capitalist, or socialist. As a result, they define it as an inequitable social system that oppresses women.

The term's meaning has evolved since Weber's time, particularly in the writings of radical feminists, who developed the element of male dominance over women while paying less attention to how they dominated each other, and dual systems theorists, who sought to develop a concept and theory of patriarchy as a system that exists alongside capitalism and sometimes racism.

Actually, before feminist usage, patriarchy was most commonly used to describe a father's power over his family. According to Dia³leti, pre-feminist use "focused on hierarchical links among males in legal, political, and economic contexts, whilst male power over women

²Marianne Weber is a sociologist, a feminist, and the wife of sociologist Max Weber. Weber is best known for her book "Wife and Mother in the Development of Law," in which she collected information on women's legal, economic, and social standing from antiquity to the present.

³ Androniki Dialeti is an Assistant Professor of Early Modern European History at the University of Thessaly's Department of History, Archaeology, and Social Anthropology. Early modern Italian social and cultural history, gender history, and historiography are the subjects of her research and writings.

maintained a second position", until feminist analysis brought the structural dominance of women in such institutions to the fore. One reason for this could be because many authors considered the male-female relationship in their period as a given, an ahistorical and unchangeable state of being in some ways.

Apart from classical patriarchy, which focuses on familial authority, patriarchy as a feminism analytical tool is used to describe a comprehensive system of male domination and female subjugation that goes beyond the house and displays itself in all sectors of social life. In its most basic form, it can be summed up as male dominance dialectics, in which males as collective exploit women as a group.

Further, patriarchy is frequently used to describe a system in which men exert some power over women with whom they do not have a family relationship. This patriarchy as institutional male dominance is related to conventional patriarchy of familial authority, but they are distinct and follow separate paths. It is defined by Lener as: "the manifestation of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general." (Pierik 08). As a result, the sort of "patriarchy" that institutionalizes men's supremacy differs from the one that concentrates on a kinship family's father's leadership.

Men have enjoyed the right to make decisions about all aspects of life, both public and private, throughout history. Women's participation in decision-making has been limited within the framework of a patriarchal culture that pervades all levels of society. Patriarchy,

according to Pam Morris, is defined as “self-sustaining structures of power by means of which women’s interests are always ultimately subordinated to male interests”, meaning that in patriarchal society, wealth is concentrated in the hands of men, and women's needs are thus seen as secondary. Women are oppressed by patriarchy in a variety of ways, including the law, education, employment, religion, family, and cultural customs (Nkealah 221).

Under this model, men have complete power over their decisions. They do so on all levels because of what society perceives to be right, religious, and lawful, as well as the current social structure's security. Men, on the other hand, employ a number of strategies to co-opt women at times and to enslave them at other times by overt and social force.

Since the early twentieth century, feminist authors have used the term patriarchy to refer to the societal framework of male supremacy over women. Patriarchy has long been a key issue in gender studies. Feminist scholars have proposed a number of hypotheses in order to better understand the causes for women's subordination to men.

Furthermore, in patriarchal societies, women are ranked lower in status than men, and they are ignored by men. Religion is one of the major determinants of women's status in the Arab culture, therefore it is not unexpected that disputes surrounding women and the veil have largely focused on Quranic interpretations rather than secularist interpretations. Any attempt by Muslim women to address this issue in a secular or autonomous way will be seen as rebellious, resulting in anarchy and disruption in society. This is because tackling women's issues from a secular perspective necessitates questioning both men's and religion's authority. Any discussion that does not take place in an Islamic context is considered blasphemous (Khimish 134). Richard W. Bulliet claims that The term "Islamic culture" refers to a diverse

⁴ Pam Morris is an independent scholar who previously served as a Professor of Critical Studies and Head of the Research Centre for Literature and Cultural History at Liverpool John Moores University. His present interests include literary, cultural, and political philosophy, as well as Thomas Hardy's writings and modern fiction.

group of peoples and societies distributed over numerous countries, all of whom are members of the Umma.

In fact, like many other cultures, Muslim culture is explicitly patriarchal. Despite the fact that Islam supports equality for all believers, this ideal is not always reflected. As a result, Muslim culture must be understood as multifaceted; the form and shape it takes in one civilization may differ from that of another. In many parts of Africa and the Middle East, indigenous practices and rituals have influenced Muslim culture, and because many of these customs are considered barbaric by non-indigenous observers, Islam has come under fire from international human rights organizations, non-governmental organizations, and other civil rights organizations. Despite legal injunctions forbidding practices such as clitoridectomy and infibulation, which have come to be included under the umbrella term "female genital mutilation" (FGM), clitoridectomy and infibulation have continued in Egypt (Nkealah 222). Researchers revealed that 64.1 percent of the 244 respondents claimed cultural views as their motive for circumcision, while 35.9% mentioned religious reasons in a survey done in 2010 to investigate the frequency of FGM in Cairo and Giza (Zayed and Ali 197).

North African and Middle Eastern women writers have publicly mocked patriarchy, whether traditional or religious, as a fundamental role in the inequitable structures that exist in Muslim communities. These women are now using writing as a platform to tackle important topics affecting women, such as culture, gender, and religion. While some draw on their own personal experiences as well as the experiences of women in Arabo-Islamic communities, others rely on statistics (Alifa Rifaat, Marguerite Amrouche, Nawal el-Saadawi, Assia Djebar). None of them, however, claims that the women they depict are representative of Muslim women in North Africa and the Middle East.

Arab feminists are concerned about cultural constraints, gender inequality, class stratification, economic injustice, religious intolerance, and political oppression in their societies. Two fundamental subjects, marriage and sexuality, occupy center stage in the Arabo-Islamic feminist discussion. Early marriage for teenage girls, polygamy, the practice of a man having up to four wives; marriage between paternal cousins, which ensures that property remains in the patrilineal line; and the rules favoring men over women in divorce are among the topics discussed by Muslim women authors (Keddie 19).

The contractual presence of marriage, which maintains a patriarchal legacy of male authority and female obedience, is a subject of significant concern for Arab feminist writers like El-Saadawi and Djébar. Both El Saadawi's *Two Women in One* (1972) and Djébar's *Les impatientes* (1958) include female characters that reject established marriages. Sexual behavior standards and male-female contact not just reject their families' choice of partner, but also forging their own path, putting personal needs ahead of family responsibilities and society expectations. As a result, both novels appear to imply that women's fight for self-preservation necessitates an end to patriarchy.

Moreover, El-Saadawi provides a solid case against clitoridectomy in *Woman at Point Zero* (1975). Firdaus, the protagonist, laments the loss of her right to sexual enjoyment later in life as a result of her clitoris being removed forcibly when she was young (Nkealah 23).

Female genital mutilation, as demonstrated, is not a practice that will alter with new regulations. It is profoundly rooted in these societies' traditions, but it derives its actual force from patriarchal interpretations of religions' varied beliefs and attitudes about women's sexuality and worth.

besides, In the culture of Islam the virginity of women is inextricably linked to their identities. Because their sexuality is considered threatening, they are kept asexual until they

marry while Non-virgin, unmarried women have little social value because they are unable to find a husband.

Men can achieve respect (sharaf) through good deeds or family position, but women can only gain honor through chastity and sexual purity. Female sexuality belongs to their fathers and husbands, not to the women themselves. As a result, their sexuality is perilous and a perpetual threat to the honor of their family. In brief, the cultural weight put on female purity, virginity, and family honor increases female vulnerability and facilitates patriarchal oppression (Stepp 11).

In many Islamic societies, the practice of veiling is also a more widespread form of oppression. The veil is worn to enforce feminine modesty while also reducing male sexual ardour. Today, however, there are many diverse forms of Islamic clothing that reflect local customs and differing interpretations of Islamic and Qur'anic requirements all throughout the world. Many Muslim women do not wear anything to identify themselves as Muslims; others wear light head scarves, some pin dark veils securely around their faces, and those in the most fundamentalist countries wear coverings that completely protect them from male gaze save for their hands and eyes.

This excessive veiling is the outcome of fundamentalist Islamic purity culture, which fears women's sexuality and places the responsibility for "proper" gender interactions on women. Another way that women are sexually oppressed is through objectification. While it may appear less extreme than other forms of oppression, such as female genital mutilation or rape, they are all on the same scale.

Sexual objectification, which is widespread, serves as the foundation for these more severe outlets. According to John Stuart Mill, boys and men are taught that they are superior to women because they are males, and "they are corrupted by this awareness". Males are taught

that they have complete control over women and sexuality. In patriarchal society and the religions that support it, there are many double standards around female sexuality. Before marrying, men, on the other hand, are not needed to be virgins. Women are dangerous seductresses, but males are not accountable for their virility. The sexuality of women is not their own; it is the property of their fathers and spouses. In patriarchal societies, male aggression and objectification of women are taught as "boys being boys." Male aggression towards women is eroticized by society, which denounces female sexual autonomy while glorifying male sexual autonomy, resulting in rape culture.

After all, many women and men believe that these assumptions are part of the natural order things, that they are a natural aspect of the landscape rather than a man-made edifice based on gender discrimination. The woman has come to embrace the myth that "being a woman is a natural ailment that every woman gets used to" as a result of decades of male chauvinism. As a consequence, she has taken on the role of the passive sacrificial lamb, ready to be sacrificed on the altar of man's bloated ego at any moment. Religious extremism and cultural nationalism have exacerbated the problem. therefore, postcolonial feminists have had to deal with two stark realities: women's respect for and obedience to their societies traditional norms, as well as their subordination to them.

1.2.2 Arab Woman against Patriarchy

Muslim women are sidelined and oppressed by men and their faith, according to popular thinking in the West; as a result, they lack political and personal power, as well as few of the rights and freedoms enjoyed by women in the West. Such broad generalizations have proven useless in grasping the dynamic realities of Arab societies. Explicitly, the manner in which women's experiences, as well as the techniques they use to advocate for themselves, varies with time and place. Where there is power, says Michel Foucault There will be resistance, and

because we are focusing on resistance, we need to define power, specifically women's empowerment. We look into how women might feel powerful in patriarchal environments, as well as how they subvert patriarchy to engage in both public and private struggles (Holt and Jawad 03)

Some Arab women are building a power debate from the periphery, devising new ways to respond to age-old silencing practices. As such, to act as a "Islamic feminist" is to construct a new, contingent subject position rather than to perform a fixed identity. Without the crippling fear that pro-women behavior or writing will mark them as traitors to their culture who have sold out to the west, these women declare their double commitment to the religious community and to themselves as powerful women working on behalf of and alongside other women from this vantage point (Cooke 152).

Furthermore, many have seen Tawakkul Karman's Nobel Peace Prize candidacy as a reference to both the "Arab Spring" in general and the role played by Arab women in particular. She has acted as a symbol for hundreds of Arab women who have risked their lives and exposed themselves to danger in the cause of integrity, independence, liberty, and democracy. Observers can not help but notice that women are playing a visible and extraordinary role in this massive wave of political upheaval. They include women who are young and old, Muslim and Christian, religiously conservative and liberal, veiled and uncovered, wealthy and impoverished. This heterogeneous group of women represents a new period of solidarity, cohesiveness, and togetherness, matching the grassroots feminist movement. This golden era of Arab solidarity in struggle, which led to actual political change in some Arab nations like Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, and is still unfolding in others such as Syria, Yemen, and Bahrein, is, however, coming to an end (Khamis 692).

Following the Ottoman Empire⁵'s defeat in the First World War, France, Britain, and Italy invaded the Arab world. The French colonized and "protected" Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Lebanon, and Syria. The British occupied Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, and Iraq, while the Italians occupied Libya. When Algeria was a settler colony, Morocco and Tunisia were protectorates. The impact of colonialism on women's status varied, as did national reactions. A better understanding of women's situation in Arab Muslim-majority countries before, during, and after colonization, however, needs a study of the different cultural and ideological variables that have greatly influenced the ongoing debate on women's rights and gender equality (Megahed and Lack p 401).

Beginning in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Egypt's government endeavored to incorporate women in economic and technological reforms. As a result, it began to dislodge women from the family's more exclusive control, jeopardizing men's authority and dominance over their wives. After liberating Egypt from direct Ottoman domination earlier in the century, the new emperor, Muhammad 'Ali, cemented his position by imposing state control over the Islamic establishment at Al Azhar. When it came to promoting new social positions for women, the state could not afford to alienate patriarchal interests too much, so it made various concessions and alliances. The state and religious powers have maintained patriarchal systems of dominance over women, despite their competing interests. Both state authorities and Islamists have attacked, contained, or silenced feminists for recognizing and challenging this patriarchal character. In Egypt, however, there has been sufficient space inside the state and culture for women to speak up as feminists and activists - albeit this is more often than not taken for granted. The authorities also have a variety of tools at their disposal.

⁵ the former Turkish empire that ruled Europe, Asia, and Africa from the late 13th century to the end of World War I.

Feminist, conservative, and Islamist perspectives on the 'woman question' are rarely explored together in the literature. Moreover, despite the fact that women's perspectives are internal, their voices have been swallowed inside 'bigger' (male) discourses, whether as feminists or as Islamists. we have to focus on the agendas of feminist women from various walks of life, as well as feminist women from various walks of life (Badran 202).

In her book "In Search of Islamic Feminism: One Woman's GlobalJourney" (1998), Elizabeth Fernea addresses Egypt as the birthplace of the first Arab women's movement. And that Egypt produces more female engineers than Europe . Furthermore, compared to the bulk of Arab countries, Egypt has traditionally provided substantially more open options for women. In Saudi Arabia, for example, women are prohibited from driving or appearing in public unless totally dressed from head to toe, and they are mostly invisible in society.

As a result of the fast developments that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Egyptian women publicly demanded freedom from patriarchal society's restraints. During the 1919 Revolution, women made a spectacular appearance in the public domain, signaling the start of Egypt's organized and vocal feminist movement. Women in the middle and upper classes no longer lived in isolation. Instead, they publicly opposed patriarchal traditions that oppressed women, first by opposing isolation, then by articulating and fighting for an agenda that would better women's status. Pioneering feminists' work was genuinely groundbreaking, as they took control of their life in an effort to remove the patriarchal label of inferiority that had been placed on them.

Despite the dissolution of the British Protectorate in 1922, the British remained to dominate and occupy Egypt until the 1952 revolution. Following that incident, Gamal 'Abdel-Nasser rose to become Egypt's first prime minister and subsequently president, a position he held from 1956 to 1970. Nasser's reign is seen by some researchers and activists as a "golden era"

for the progress of women's rights. Women were granted the ability to vote and run for public office under Nasser's 1956 Constitution and new electoral law.

Indeed, Nasser, like a number of other modernizing nationalists, such as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Turkey, pushed women to work outside the home for pay and provided more educational options for women. The number of girls enrolled in elementary and secondary schools climbed dramatically, as did women's literacy rates. Nasser's regime also passed new progressive labor laws, strengthened women's rights, and provided further legal protections for working women.

Despite making significant public advancements for women, the Egyptian state did not confront the patriarchal structure of society established by the Personal Status Laws of the 1920s and 1930s. At home, gender relations remained unaffected. Overall, throughout the Nasser administration, state-sponsored feminism improved educational and employment possibilities, but, as academic Selma Botman points out, “gender-specific aims remained outside the core of the revolutionary ideology.” Women had earned more public presence and intellectual, social, and professional experience by the time Anwar Sadat came to power in 1970, allowing them to continue their activity under Sadat's government and under Mubarak's. as well as, The UN Decade of Women (1975-1985) and Jihan Sadat's support for women's rights prompted the dictatorship to emphasize gender issues. The Egyptian Women's Organization and the National Commission for Women were founded by Sadat. Despite the progressive rules of 1979, Sadat's government did not support autonomous female activism, Dr. Nawal El-Saadawi was detained and imprisoned for months by the government in September 1981.

During the early 1980s, there was a resurgence of autonomous feminism's visibility and organization, which was masked by competing discourses. During this time, El-Saadawi

founded the Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA). In 1986, AWSA held its first conference, with the theme "unveiling the mind," and hosted a number of women's cultural seminars. The AWSA was vociferous in its criticism of Islamists. During the Nasser and Mubarak governments in Egypt, women's issues were politicized. In 2000, Mubarak established the National Council of Women (NCW), and an NGO law was approved providing the Ministry of Social Affairs the authority to disband NGOs. The NCW is a federal agency dedicated to improving women's status.

It is also worth noting that Egypt's civil code from 1956 gives women the same constitutional rights as men. According to Mervat Hatem the constitution provides equality to all Egyptians, male and female, without discrimination (Sabbagh 172). The government also guarantees jobs to women with the necessary skills.

Egyptian women, in contrast to most Arab countries, particularly those in the Gulf, stand out for their active and unaffected public participation in economic operations. Unlike many traditional Muslim countries, Egyptian women work in public roles such as government employees, street sellers, saleswomen, and tour guides (Yamin 244).

1.2.3 Islam and patriarchy

In fact, Islam developed in a patriarchal society, much like Judaism and Christianity before it. In Muslim countries, patriarchy continues to manage gender interactions due to the maintenance of tribal structures and kindred ⁶networks. To be clear, Tribes are the most traditional form of patriarchal organization, and they still exist in the Arab world such as Iran and Afghanistan.

⁶ According to Merriam Webster kindred is a group of related individuals

According to Keddie⁷, even though most nomadic women are not veiled and hidden, they are regulated. She argues that continued limitations on women are tied to the pervasiveness of tribal systems in the Middle East, or what Tillion⁸ refers to as "the republic of cousins and those most nomadic women are regulated even if they are not veiled and hidden.

besides, Caldwell refers to North Africa, the Muslim Middle East, and South and East Asia as the "patriarchal belt". Indeed, the region is known for having exceptionally high standards for women's behavior, such as enforced gender segregation and a strong mindset that links family dignity to female purity.

Furthermore, Men are entrusted with preserving family honor through their control over female members, and they are supported by sophisticated societal institutions that secure women's safety and reliance. Thus, in today's Muslim patriarchal societies, women are considered as a potential source of fitna, or moral or social instability, and control over them is necessary. as well as, Male domination over women has been defined as rejection or permission to work outside the home or travel; family honor and good reputation, along with the negative consequences of shame, rely greatly on women's actions. In the patriarchal belt, women's life options are severely limited; patriarchal structures that favor men have a disastrous influence on women's life prospects in various countries, particularly in South Asia. In the formal sector, unequal gender ratios, poor female literacy and educational achievement, high fertility rates, high maternal death rates, and low female labor force participation are all common. to sum up, patriarchy should not be confused with Islam, but rather understood in terms of social structure and growth (Moghdam 10).

⁷ Nikki Keddie is a well-known social scientist and historian who is Professor Emerita of Middle Eastern History at the University of California, Los Angeles.

⁸ Germaine Tillion is a French ethnologist, writer, and resistance fighter.

1.2.4 Status of Women in Islam

One of Islam's contributions to humanity is to elevate women's position and bring it into line with men's. Prior to the advent of Islam, Jahilliyah Arabs had a tradition of burying their daughter's alive (female infanticide) because they were considered a burden or a disgrace to the family thus, this fundamental injustice was elevated to Islam's highest court, where on the Day of Judgment, "the infant female who was buried alive would be interrogated for what offense she was killed" (The Qur'an, 81:8-9). so When Islam arrived, this tradition was abandoned, and women were recognized as individuals with rights, including property rights and the right to vote.

Prior to the coming of Islam, a woman in traditional Arabia was considered as a sex product that could be bought, sold, and inherited. Despite their legal incapacity, Islam encouraged women to positions of authority and respect in the home and society.

also, Women's rights in Egypt were extremely poor before the arrival of Islam. Women were viewed as property or as slaves. They were not considered human beings, but rather a sub-species of people and animals. According to E. A. In Allen's History of Civilization (1989), historians defined a wife 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."

Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi⁹ stated that the wife was punished by the Babylonians and ancient Egyptians for her husband's faults. As a result, the birth of a daughter in a household was not greeted with joy, but rather with embarrassment.

Indeed, Islam granted men and women equal rights based on the premise that they are both members of the same family and hence have comparable rights and responsibilities

⁹ Sayyid Sa'eed Akhtar Rizvi, an Indian scholar of the Twelver Sh'ah sect, propagated Islam in East Africa.

“O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female.” (The Qur'an 49: 13). Men and women are equal in their humanity because they both came from the same core. In Islamic law, a woman's marriage cannot take place without her permission, and she has the legal right to divorce her spouse in certain conditions. According to Islamic traditions, a Muslim marriage guarantees a woman the unconditional right to financial support from her husband, regardless of her own financial circumstances. She also retains possession of her belongings, including her home. On the other side, a man's traditional responsibility is viewed as the "breadwinner." This has remained not only a core component of Egyptian faiths, but also a key influence on modern Egyptian family law. Islam, on the other hand, allows women to work in public under certain conditions. For example, Aishah, the wife of the prophet Mohammed, went beyond the confines of her home to do public services in order to help the Islamic community move in the correct direction. Aishah holds a unique place in Islamic history as one of the best instructors the religion has ever produced.

Furthermore, during the time of Prophet Mohammed, women were quite active. He emphasized the importance of women becoming educated, knowledgeable, and aware of their own rights. Women were allowed to fight in battles at the time, and they also had the right to express their own beliefs (Ahmed 25). In fact, it is necessary to distinguish between Islam as a religion and how Islam is viewed and practiced in different cultures before discussing women in Islamic countries. Some Islamic countries' cultures, for example, can force women into arranged marriages that they do not want.

Many Islamic scholars have stated that when Islam and local culture are merged, one must be cautious not to mistake the culture for the religion. Perhaps this explains why women's treatment varies greatly from country to country and is not always a consequence of religion. Leila Ahmed, a Harvard University professor who specializes in women's studies in religion, came to the conclusion that “practicing Islam is hugely different from country to country”.

It is True that Allah created males and females with different physical characteristics; however, this does not mean that one is superior to the other. According to many non-Muslims, Islam oppresses women and treats them as second-class citizens. Although they would not acknowledge it, some Muslims believe women are inferior to males due to a misunderstanding of Islam or the impact of their society. Muslims in general think that Islam has given women numerous rights, but they also believe that women do not have the same rights and obligations as males.

It is consequently prudent to address non-muslims' perceptions of Muslim women, as well as certain Muslims' misconceptions regarding women in Islam (Issaka Ba 33).

1.2.5 Women's Prison Literature

Prison literature, according to Bramina Braet, is a genre defined by works created while the author is incarcerated. It is likely that the literature will be set in, influenced by, or written in a prison. Famous works of jail literature include Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Henry David Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience*, Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*, and Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*. To be honest, the controversial nature of such publications just adds to the literature's appeal and wants to be read.

Early contemporary jail literature can be traced all the way back to the Middle Ages and the ancient world. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was revitalized and reinvented, and it became one of England's most distinctive cultural forms at the time. In fact, early contemporary jail literature can be traced all the way back to the Middle Ages and the ancient world. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was revitalized and reinvented, and it became one of England's most distinctive cultural forms at the time.

Initially the birth of prison literature has been attributed to a number of factors. One apparent example is the existence of a large number of prominent early modern writers, such as Thomas More, Thomas Wyatt, and others. When they wrote about jail, however, they wrote about what intrigued their readers and audiences, not only what they knew and had experienced (Freeman 133).

In the meantime, one of the fascinating aspects that draw fans of this genre is how unique authors' experiences in prison impact their writing. We are captivated by stories of redemption, recidivism, or fortitude in the face of adversity. In truth, writers are imprisoned not because their writings are manifestly destructive to the public good; rather, they are imprisoned so that others would not make the same mistakes they did. A writer does not always have to write to be imprisoned, which serves as an example of the danger inherent in the very premise of writing. Something that has already been written can be rewritten. Such a person has established a persona that, in and of itself, jeopardizes the public's welfare. (Freeman 135).

We must also analyze the circumstances of women's incarceration. Women were rarely imprisoned until recently, and when they were, it was usually for murder (sometimes of an abusive husband). Although religious martyrs and wives who joined their husbands in revolt were traitors, they were rarely held accountable for debt. They were not taught to be aggressive or violent in any way. In the past, there were likely fewer women in state prisons, and the number of women incarcerated has only recently risen considerably.

Their husbands imprisoned them as disobedient or escaped wives seized, while their family imprisoned them as nuns. Marie Mancini Colonna, for example, avoided her husband's wrath after her third difficult and dangerous childbirth by refusing to have sexual relations with him.

Despite the fact that she was Mazarin's niece at the time, her husband imprisoned her in the Pyrenean fortress.

Moreover, many inmates want to share their stories with a larger audience, and autobiography or prison memoirs are more effective at this than letters. Madame Roland, who was imprisoned and subsequently executed during the French Revolution, penned her memoirs to vindicate herself, according to Gelfand, and assert that she was not an abnormal woman. Other writers are less concerned about their personal lives, but they all have a strong desire to communicate their jail stories in order to support a cause or a belief.

Vera Figner and Eugenia Ginzburg's works also demonstrate a direct effect of one imprisoned writer on another, as well as a lucky writer/audience relation. These women, who were imprisoned in Russian prisons at various times throughout history, demonstrate the continuity of women's jail writing as well as the jail writer's personal sense of a women's jail literature heritage.

For revolutionary terrorism, Figner was imprisoned in the Schlüsselburg Fortress in 1881. Her ability to engage with other convicts, even if only through the prison system's coded wall tappings, kept her life acceptable during her twenty years in imprisonment, much of which she spent in solitary confinement. Her memoirs, which outline the code and how she employed it, were first published in 1927 and quickly became a best-seller.

Another distinct feature of women's prison writing is the writer's creation of a persona through which she presents herself. The tendency to treat female inmates like children and to eliminate any pride they may have in having some control over their lives is regularly noticed in studies of women's prisons. Writing, on the other hand, gives the female prisoner a way to exert some control over her surroundings. Because writing entails accepting responsibility for structuring reality according to one's own perceptions and a guiding principle, A writer of

letters, memoirs, or autobiography, for example, can develop a persona or lineage of herself to portray to her audience (Scheffler 57-59).

Prison writings by third-world women provide a dual challenge to Western literary critique and feminist theoretical achievements. In general, these texts defy accepted classifications and outcomes by blending fictional forms with documentary records.

In Third World countries, political and economic pressures are radically transforming the structure of women's lives, redefining not only their relationship with males in the household, but also their role in society as a whole and in the larger social order. Other women's political commitments will be restructured if they participate in national liberation campaigns or resistance operations. Similarly, following the death of her husband, brother, and son, the Baluch lady will bear an additional social weight. They joined them in arms either because they had to fill in for the absent males or because they had to fill in for the absent males. Palestinian women - mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters - took over the monitoring and maintenance of many of the resistance organization's social services during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, as they had done previously.

Despite the fact that Third World women's prison writing does not always adhere to generic criteria and specifications as envisioned by a Western critical or literary tradition, ranging from short story to autobiographical testimony or political documentary, and thus confounding even the categorical distinction between fiction and nonfiction, despite this, it provides many boundaries for defining and describing literary traditions.

Formal requirements must therefore yield to ideological and political imperatives in defining the victory of form and the alliances among texts and writers. These literary or textualized formal categories, however, are not without a set of distinctions placed on inmates by the correctional system itself. One of the most important disparities affecting prison

classification is that between common law inmates and political detainees, which is maintained by state judicial machinery and managed by prison authorities. That is, the contrast between individuals serving prison sentences for criminal actions and those serving political prison sentences. The act of writing is one of these activities.

In Egypt's al Qanatir women's jail, where Nawal el Saadawi was imprisoned during the Sadat government in 1981, it was forbidden to speak with political individuals. *Woman at Point Zero* balances the requirements of fiction and narrative form with those of historical and sociological biography. The protagonist of *Woman at Point Zero* is Firdaus, a former prostitute and female prisoner awaiting execution at al Qantir jail for the murder of a wealthy and powerful pimp. The story is framed by the writer's firsthand recollection of her encounter with the prison. Firdaus' story is about an Egyptian peasant girl who was victimized by her country's traditional indigenous traditions and exploded by Egypt's post-colonial corruption, especially under Anwar Sadat. Despite sympathetic encouragement from wardresses and the jail doctor, Firdaus remained stubborn in prison, refusing to receive visits or even to appeal to the Egyptian Presidency's higher authority to have her death order postponed. Her willingness to meet with Nawal El Saadawi to tell her story, in contrast to her previous refusals, represents permission for her individual act of civil disobedience to become part of the public record of social opposition to authoritarian governmental structures and patriarchal hierarchies in Egyptian society.

Even El Saadawi was held as a political inmate at the Qanatir jail for alleged offenses against Sadat's Egypt. *Memoirs from the Women's Prison*(1972) is El Saadawi's firsthand account of her imprisonment. In al-Qanatir, the political feminist shares a cell with other convicts of diverse political persuasions, some of whom are old friends or acquaintances with similar ideas, while others, still veiled, represent Islamic conservatism (Harlow 503-512).

Women's prison literature has received little attention from academics and scholars. There may be a lot more written about this tradition, which differs from the more well-known practice of male convicts writing in many ways.

The works are not academic or cerebral in nature; rather, they are practical, empirical records of events, attitudes, people, and physical environments that inspire the writers and which they feel compelled to express to a specific audience. Because of their accurate portrayal of the jail experience in various locations and eras. For researchers in the various disciplines currently engaged in the study of women and society, works in the tradition of women's prison literature constitute a vast bank of untapped primary source material (Scheffler 65).

1.2.6 Nawal El-Saadawi's Formative Years

Nawal El-Saadawi, a writer, a psychiatrist, a doctor, and also a feminist, born in 1931, in Kafr Tahla a village in the Nile delta. She began to write by the age of thirteen, and since then she published more than fifty works in the Arabic language. Part from her writing, she also formed what is called the Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA). In 1982, guided by Dr. El Saadawi, 120 women from Egypt, started the AWSA. This organization aims to connect Arabs' struggle for liberty and emancipation from the domination of the three fields: media, economy, and culture with Arab women's independence (Rita Stephan, 88).

EL-Saadawi devoted her writings to the women's liberation from all kinds of imprisonment, she was courageous in the face of the harsh rejection she received because of her outspoken views, and she fought for what is right no matter what that could take from her. It is true that she is positively celebrated in the west, and the *Time* magazine's title for her as one of the "100 Women of The Year" in 2020 is one of the examples of this celebration, but it

is the total opposite in the Arab world generally, and in Egypt specifically, because she received and still receiving waves of hate and criticism.

The writings of Nawal EL-Saadawi made her be in the state of controversy in the Arab world generally and in her country Egypt specifically, but she had an unwavering determination to struggle for justice and for equality, and for oppression she had an unrelenting condemnation, even if that meant for her to risk her job or to threaten her personal life (Mekerta29). When El Saadawi wrote *Women and Sex* (1972), the work was banned, and she lost her job in the Egyptian Government as a Director General for Public Health Education in the Ministry of Health.

The writer once said that if having a society that differs of the one we have now means that she might lose her freedom, she is ready for it, and this is what happened when she criticized the president Anwar Sadat, which led to her imprisonment in 1981 under the accusation of crimes against the state. The accusations against her did not stop there, she was also accused of apostasy, as Adele-Newson mentioned in the book edited by her *The Essential Nawal El Saadawi A Reader* (2010) El Saadawi had to fight many allegations and accusations against her and her family members, including her daughter Mona Helmy; in 2001 she received a court allegation charging her with “apostasy” and tried to compel her to end her marriage, and after she released her play *GodResignat The Summit Meeting* 2007, they called for the revoke of her Egyptian nationality.

In spite of all the obstacles, El Saadawi kept writing to give the marginalized and oppressed women a space to be heard. Her novel *Woman at Point Zero* is the best portrait of the oppressed woman in a patriarchal society; Firdaus the protagonist in the novel lives a life full of despair and misery, mainly because of the cruelty of men in her society. She suffers sexual harassment, abuse, violence, and many other forms of oppression, not only as an adult woman

but the suffering started when she was a child; Firdaus' story is not only about a woman that is oppressed, but also a story of a woman that fights this oppression and try to free herself from male domination, this is what El-Saadawi wanted to deliver to her female readers, that they have to fight.

Woman at Point Zero is a story of Firdaus, a prostitute who is waiting for her execution because she killed her pimp, it is a real story of a woman El Saadawi met in Qanatir prison. the story starts with a female psychiatrist visiting the prisoners, and hears of this unique and fearless woman which makes the Doctor curios to meet her, after many failed attempts the psychiatrist succeeds and meets Firdaus. She gets the chance to hear the story of this fearless woman directly from her as Firdaus tells her story in details from childhood to adulthood, a story that is highlighted with the subjugation she endures as a woman in all aspects of life.

El Saadawi described Firdaus as an inspiration to all women around the world, especially those in the Arab world, including her, to question, and to resist the system, or authorities, or whoever holds power and tries to deny human beings from their rights to be free, to live and to love, she could be an inspiration despite the anguish she experienced and despite all the hardships and pain.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

1.3.1 Postcolonial Feminism

Defining postcolonialism is important, before moving to talk about postcolonial feminism. Postcolonialism is a new term used to describe a somewhat unusual moment in the world, a confluence of perceptions and observations, goals and desires coming from an unheard part of the globe, investing in new circumstances, seeking to make changes and establishing a new perspective upon which to examine the past and future (Mishra and Hodge, p 378).

Postcolonial Feminism or as it is also known as Third World Feminism started as a reaction against western feminism, but in its core principles and basis is the same as Feminism in the rest of the world, that is defending women's rights against injustice, and standing against the domination of men at the expense of women. it seeks to change the domination of men in a society with equal and fair environment, its intent is also to rebuild "inequitable gender-based" social structures for the betterment of women and men living in the third world communities. (Waylen, 1996, qtd in Ipshita Chanda, p 1)

Women of the postcolonial countries- feminists particularly- felt the need to rely on themselves and not to wait for postcolonial theorists to represent them or to fight for them; with feminist critics claiming that postcolonial theory is a male-dominated field that has not only ignored but even manipulated women's concerns, Postcolonialism and feminism have developed a fraught relationship. Postcolonial feminist theorists have accused postcolonial theorists not only of neglecting the position of women in the fight for liberation, but also of turning a blind eye on the role of women in the struggle for independence, and in the international discourses they kept viewing them in a wrong way. (Tyagi 45).

1.3.2 Postcolonial Feminism Vs Western Feminism

Feminism has been attacked for being a Western ideology, as Raj Kumar Mishra argues that the European women and North American women's life conditions and experiences largely shaped Western Feminism. Western Feminists focus only on aspects that the western women struggle with, and generalize it on the rest, without considering that women's experiences differ. The best example for that, is the postcolonial women's different life experience of that of the western women; as Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and You-me Park puts it, the western women's movement's focus on "individualism, equality, and identity politics" started to be less important, considering women's more complicated status (66).

Postcolonial woman suffers twice; as a colonized woman against colonialism, and suffers as a woman against patriarchy; it is as Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford call it “double colonization”. The colonized man oppresses the woman as a way to save the cultural, and traditional values that were threatened by the colonizer, adding to that, as Ritu Tyagi argues in his article, the colonized man is oppressing the colonized woman by misrepresenting her in his discourses. Not only the postcolonial woman is oppressed by her brother, the colonized man, but the western feminists are another burden, as the ethnic, cultural, and historical differences that characterize colonized women's situation are ignored by the white feminists, as a result, they forced White feminist ideologies on colonized women, and hence acted as oppressors. (Tyagi47). Their lack of awareness, and the centralization on women’s oppression from their perspective as white western feminists does not work in the favor of the non-western women, rather, it adds to their burden.

White women who dominate feminist discourse today rarely question whether or not their perspective on women's reality is true to the lived experiences of women as a collective group. Nor are they aware of the extent to which their perspectives reflect race and class biases, although there has been a greater awareness of biases in recent years (Hooks 3).

1.3.3 Arab Feminism

Like the rest of women around the world, the Arab women suffered inferiority and low status in their societies, but after the appearance of women consciousness and awareness that started in the west and then spread to reach the Arab world, Arab women began to develop a sense of resistance, and wanted to reach for liberation, through Women’s Movements, and Women’s Organization, to the Arab Feminist movement that began in the late nineteenth century.

Badran explains the term feminist in Arabic saying

The first term for feminist to be used in Arabic was nisa'i; the same was used in referring to women's movements, harakat nisa'iya. Nisa'i is derived from the word nisa' (women). The word niswi, derived from the word niswa (also women), is also used to mean feminist. Both niswi and nisa'i are equally short of the meaning of feminism as they are both directly derived from the Arabic words for women (nisa' or niswa)" (Badran, 2009, 218, qtd. in Arenfeldt and Golley 2012, p. 10).

Arab feminists started asking for a freedom from the imprisonment, and focused on topics such as marriage, education, and work. With the second wave of feminism their focus developed to challenge the political systems that define, limit, and alter their lives. Arab women writers such as Layla Ahmed, Miriam Kook, Layla Abu Lughod, and Nawal El Saadawi also joined the battle for the issues related to women writing, as Donya Tag-El-Din further explains that Women's writing has been fundamental to the discourse in all feminist groups in the Middle East. Women authors battled with their male colleagues, not just in terms of expressing their ideas and views on political and social issues. Women's writers expressed their opinions on "marriage, divorce laws, veiling, and segregation" (17)

1.3.4 Conclusion

In the struggles women go through, there lay ways to empowerment, the first chapter provide a basis in the analysis in the second chapter, in which we will use *Woman at Point Zero* to highlight the empowering notions that can change women's life from the perspective of El Saadawi.

**CHAPTER TWO:
EMPOWERING WOMEN:
FROM THE VICTIM TO THE
VICTOR**

2.1. Introduction

Gender discrimination affects women all around the world, leaving not only a physical scar on their bodies but also a mental scar that is difficult to heal. Women have long acknowledged their worth and fought for their rights, but they have yet to achieve their objectives. Discrimination against women is a long-standing issue that varies by country.

The novel, which is based on the life of a woman El Saadawi met soon before her execution, depicts what can happen to a woman without a family to protect her while also serving as a metaphor for all women in their relationships with men. Firdaus notices the disparities in her father's treatment of his daughters and sons as a youngster, and knows, albeit unintentionally at first, that her father and brothers are treated better than she and her mother.

Her uncle's wife, on the other hand, refuses to let her stay at the house once she graduates, and she is married off to a much older man. Firdaus ultimately believes that she is most free as a prostitute after that marriage and a series of short and long term relationships. At the very least, she has control over her body and sexuality, and she gets compensated for services that all of the males in her life have seemed to provide.

This chapter describes and investigates how Firdaus, who had struggled since childhood and had been enslaved in practically every aspect of her life, was able to achieve emancipation.

2.2. Struggles of an Egyptian Woman

The society in Egypt is a patriarchal one, in which the man has the power over the woman. Firdaus is the perfect example of what a woman in Egypt has to endure because of the patriarchal system, females open their eyes to life on a cruel treatment that grows with them, cruelty such as Female Mutilation, Domestic violence, sexual harassment, and forced marriage, those are only few struggles the Egyptian woman, like Firdaus, has to go through.

2.2.1. Women are an Enemy of their own: Genital Mutilation Cutting

Nawal EL Saadawi goes further to portray a cruel, and inhuman form of oppression Firdaus endures as a child which is circumcision or as it is also named Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), that is defined by WHO as a practice that requires a removal of “the female external genitalia”, the removal can be a total one or just a part, they define it also as a harm to the girls “genital organs” (6). The FGM is widely spread in Egypt specially the rural areas, and is wrongly blamed on Islam, but in fact is a purely cultural practice, because many Islamic countries do not embrace such action. females have to go through this drastic experience just because their families believe that it is a way to protect the purity of their daughters as the term means in Arabic purification process. As Madiha El-Safty puts it in her article *Women in Egypt: Islamic Rights Versus Cultural Practice*(2004), circumcision is believed to protect the girl’s virginity and purity, which is traditionally highly treasured, the protection is from any probable threat to the standard ethics connected to her purity, so the goal of the FMG is to decrease a woman's sexual desire by removing the genitals. The procedure must be done before she reaches the age of risk that is puberty, when –they believe- her sexual desire can cause her problems. (279)

Firdaus one day asks her mother a question like all children do in her age, ask about everything, and love to discover new things

Sometimes I could not distinguish which one of them was my father. He resembled them so closely that it was difficult to tell. So one day I asked my mother about him. 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 (13).

A girl is not supposed to talk about sexual matters in the Arab society; for Firdaus’ mother, this was a sign of danger that she has to deal with immediately, for her, her daughter now is

no longer a child, she is now a woman, so she ends her childhood. She no longer let her play, and gives her a plenty of tasks that is hard for a girl child. Firdaus before asking this question lived like any girl in her age, she says “I could play with the goats, climb over the water-wheel, and swim with the boys in the stream” (13). Firdaus’ mother perfectly portrays how women can be the enemies of their own, instead of considering her daughter’s curiosity as an immaturity, she instead chooses to act in a savage way by making her child live an awful experience, and to deprave her from her freedom.

This savagery is not supposed to come from a woman that went through the same pain, but since the practice is for many has to do with religion, and is deeply rooted in their culture it is difficult for them to not keep it practiced. Especially if the parents, mainly if the mother is not educated because according to UNICEF 2013 girls with educated mothers are in a less risk of being mutilated.

El Saadawi wants also to highlight the connection between FGM and the women’s sexual pleasure, that even women’s sexual desires are controlled by men, for the interest of men. The woman is mutilated not only physically, but also psychologically for the rest of her life, just for the sake of men’s satisfaction. In a data collected by Amel Fahmy, Mawaheb T El-Mouelhy, and Ahmed R Ragab. On a group of men, they show a growing fear concerning their wives, for them non circumcised wives’ intensity of their sexual urges, in the marriage, may be in danger because their sexual needs would go “beyond their capacity” so they seek or involve in love affairs (184).

Firdaus after the genital cutting, stops feeling any sexual pleasure, as she describes it after meeting Mohammadain, the boy she used to play with the bride and bridegroom

but I no longer felt the strong sensation of pleasure that radiated from an unknown and yet familiar part of my body. I closed my eyes and tried to reach the pleasure I had

known before but in vain. It was as if I could no longer recall the exact spot from which it used to arise, or as though a part of me, of my being, was gone and would never return. (15)

Firdaus is referring to an organ in her body that no longer exist, that is cut away to deprive her another right as a female in the cruel world of men's interests, the practice perfectly picture how the male oppression can be savage, cruel, and barbaric.

2.2.2. Beating a Woman is a Sin: Domestic Violence

Violence against women is a great danger on women's lives globally, that they have been subjected to it for centuries; domestic violence is even greater in the rate of danger because, women in their homes, with their families, and the people close to them supposed to feel safe, and supposed to feel comfortable, but instead they face horror and became the victims of the people around them, physically, and psychologically. According to the World Health Organization 1997 violence against women is "any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to the women". The Middle East is no exception, as the domestic violence against women, which is a patriarchal crime, afflicted the area for a long time.

The novel *Woman at Point Zero* adequately tackles the issue of domestic violence that threaten Egyptian women, through the protagonist Firdaus' experience with the issue. Firdaus since childhood grew watching her father beats her mother, that is, as she says, one of the very few things he knew in life (12). When her uncle and his wife forced Firdaus to marry a sixty years old man, he gets the habit of beating her, for a reason or no reason. "A Survey of the Egyptian Demographic and Health, conducted in 1995, among a national random sample of 14, 779 women, indicated that one out of three Egyptian women ever married has been beaten at least once since marriage and one third of those were abused during pregnancy" (El

Zanaty et al., 1996, qtd. In S. Douki et al). Once Firdaus' husband beat her in a cruel way that could end her life, "One day he hit me with his heavy stick until the blood ran from my nose and ears." (45). What makes the women who are victims to such disgusting behavior more in a misery that in Muslim Arab countries, such behavior is not yet considered a major concern, and the normalization of the cruel act as if it is a normal thing the wife must endure it silently, not only that but to be obedient to her abusive husband because it is his right, the wife must be invisible, and must satisfy her husband. the society, the norms, the cultural believes, wrong Islamic interpretations, ensure it to him without taking the wife's life or condition into consideration, Firdaus was about to die yet she was asked to go back to her husband because this happens with all wives. "A virtuous woman was not supposed to complain about her husband. Her duty was perfect obedience. » (44). Fwagil Ada elaborates that females are raised in a society that teaches them to be accommodating to their husbands, and are taught to never criticize men's repressive and enslaving behavior. To the Egyptian society, wife beating has long been acceptable so the women is not permitted to protest, as Firdaus is compelled to understand the fact that her social status must not exceed or match the male's status, she is there to assist him to efficiently live his life. (22)

S. Douki, F. Nacef, A. Belhadj, A. Bouasker, and R. Ghachem further explain that unlike violence outside the family which is acknowledged, and has a public denouncement, domestic violence is seen as a private matter that must remain inside the family borders, and is mostly accepted by many, and justified with some unreasonable justifications, like the wife's failure to do her duties as a wife or for not behaving the way she should behave according to the traditions. Due to the sociocultural context in which the importance is placed on "family privacy, repetition, and solidarity", makes the ignoring and denial of making the beating of the wife a crime is necessary. (166)

The poor Firdaus' experience with violence does not stop there, when she realized that she must run from the monster called her husband she lived with, this time she chooses the street as an escape. Her bad luck makes her meet with a man named Bayoumi, who helped her at first but he shows another side of him, the first time he beats her because she raised her voice in his face, as he claims, and asked for a job, "I was speaking in low tones, and my eyes were fixed on the ground, but he jumped up and slapped me on the face, saying, 'How dare you raise your voice when you're speaking to me, you street walker, you low woman?'"(49). Bayoumi gets the habit of beating her, and rapping her. A woman is not supposed to speak out her thoughts only the man can, a woman is not supposed to ask for her rights, only the man has ones, says the society. Her pimp after she starts working as a prostitute is another man used violence with her, when she tells him that she wants to stop working as a prostitute.

Violence consequences in a less disastrous forms of physical injuries, like not serious cuts and wounds, "to chronic disability or mental health", or seriously dangerous results like a willful kill. The mentally traumatic women may end their lives as for them it is the only way they can end the violence. (WHD, *Violence Against Women a Priority Health Issue*). Where the women facing violence can go? They are not only victimized by men but also their societies, cultural believes that is forbidden to be changed or challenged, and those man of religion misinterpreting Quran and Sunnah to suit them.

2.2.3. Sexual harassment

According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, sexual harassment includes unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature in the workplace or learning environment. Sexual harassment does not necessarily have to be about sexual behaviour or directed at a specific person.

Discriminatory remarks regarding women as a group, for example, could be considered sexual harassment.

In fact, Arab women are oppressed from the Atlantic to the Arabian Gulf. Sexual harassment appears to be an expression of Arab men's servitude at the hands of their governments, as well as their suppressed sexual appetites. For instance, The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights hosted a regional conference titled "Sexual Harassment as a Form of Social Violence and Its Impact on Women in the Arab Region". Female activists and leaders traveled to Egypt to share their personal experiences with sexual harassment. They demanded a single law on sexual harassment, which they think is the most common crime in the Arab world. Approximately 80 percent of Arab women admitted they have been subjected to some form of harassment. Besides, over 99.3% of Egyptian girls and women surveyed reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment in their lifetime.

Certainly, Sexual harassment is a widespread and serious problem in Egypt, as the country ranks second in the world after Afghanistan. as well as, it is caused by a variety of circumstances. Economic pressure, poverty, and unemployment, as well as social oppression and westernization, are all causes that contribute to sexual harassment among Egyptian women.

The novel *Woman at Point Zero* is about a woman who was frequently abused and tormented by men. Naturally, Firdaus has been sexually abused by the men in her life on numerous occasions. From the time she was a youngster until she was put to death on the gallows, she was involved in several instances. The grief and sorrow of common Arab women who become victims of patriarchal culture have been beautifully expressed by Nawal el Saadawi who has been dubbed the "Mother of Arab Feminism" several times

Firdaus is subjected to sexual molestation by one of her playmates. For the first time, Mohammadain and Firdaus, with whom she used to play "bride and bridegroom," are having sexual pleasure. Mohammadain is already content with it because he had the chance to do so wherever Firdaus is currently free of strange ideas after playing with a friend. Firdaus is an innocent young lady who has no sense of rape or sexual harassment. Those are private matters that have never spoken in the family. Nobody ever tells her that a man should not touch her inappropriately, and no one ever explains what sexual harassment is.

A little boy called Mohammadain used to pinch me under water and follow me into the small shelter made of maize stalks. He would make me lie down beneath a pile of straw, and lift up my galabaya. We played "bride and bride groom" (12). According to the quotation, Mohammadain sexually harassed Firdaus after inviting her to a game. Yet, She doesn't even intervene when her playmate mistreats her. Her naivety causes her to remain mute about the mistreatment she receives from a man who only wants to profit from her.

Firdaus's playmate, Mohammadain, does indeed teach her about sexuality at a young age. His tugging at her clothes around her waist demonstrates a developing masculine trait imprinted in him as a result of society's demands to view women as sexual objects. Therefore, El Saadawi emphasizes the macho characteristics that society inculcates in a young boy.

Firdaus' uncle, too, is doing to her what Mohammadain has done before; moving his hand slowly and then touching her leg. He wants to use Firdaus for sexual pleasure, despite the fact that he is Firdaus' uncle. Thus, indicates that her Uncle is unconcerned about it. On his own, he continues to carry it out.

My galabeya often slipped up my thighs, but I paid no attention until the moment when I would glimpse my uncle's hand moving slowly from behind the book he

was reading to touch my leg. The next moment I could feel it travelling up my thigh (13).

Furthermore, her uncle takes her to the movies to view a film about a couple hugging, which Firdaus is not allowed to see because it is unnatural and perverted for her.

When I was awarded my primary school certificate he bought me a little Wrist watch, and that night took me to the cinema. I saw a woman dancing, her thighs were naked. And I saw a man hugging a woman (21).

According to the passage above, Firdaus' uncle attemptsto persuade Firdaus to view something she is not supposed to see in order for Firdaus to feel better when her uncle harasses her shortly after they return home after watching the movie.

Firdaus has been a victim of the savagery of men's desire since she was a child. Once, when she was trying to get away from her abusive spouse, she met someone named Bayoumi. who provides her with a place to stay till she finds a job. Initially, Bayoumi appears to be a good guy and a gentleman until Firdaus recognizes that Bayoumi has done nothing to assist in the job search. When she decides to leave him, he slaps her and harasses her, even locking her in a room until his friends arrive and harass her as well. That is to say, it makes Firdaus realize that Bayoumi openly allowed males to sexualize her body in order to gain him money.

He took to locking me in the flat before going out. I now slept on the floor in the other room. He would come back in the middle of the night, pull the cover away from me with all his weight. I kept my eyes closed and abandoned my body. it lay there under him without movement, emptied of all desire, all pleasure, or even pain, feeling nothing, a dead body with no life in it at all, like a piece of wood, or an empty sock, or a shoe. Then one night his body seemed heavier than

before, and his breath smelt different, so I opened my eyes. the face above me was not Bayoumi (53).

To some up, Firdaus is not only harassed by Bayoumi, but he has also exploited her body by having males sexulate her in order to make money.

2.2.4. Forced and Child Marriage

A number of UN treaties and other international instruments specifically identify forced marriage as a violation of human rights. as well as, The United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan classified forced marriage as one that “lacks the free and lawful agreement of at least one of the parties” in his 2006 study on all types of violence against women. He continues:

In its most extreme form, forced marriage can involve threatening behaviour, abduction, imprisonment, physical violence, rape and, in some cases, murder. There has been little research on this form of violence. Indeed, this is consistent with the most prevalent, albeit ambiguous, definition of forced marriage used by campaigners, advocates, and practitioners. Forced marriage is also described as a kind of gender-based violence that takes advantage of women's vulnerabilities, as well as a significant human rights violation.

However, the most prevalent definition of early/child marriage is marriage that happens before the age of 18—the upper age restriction for protection under the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. Marriages may or may not be recognized by law, and such relationships may or may not be deemed informal unions.

Because children are judged incapable of giving informed consent, forced marriage is commonly understood to include child and early marriage. As a result, early/child marriage can be seen of as a subset of forced marriage, which also includes adult couplings.

In the Middle East and North Africa, roughly one in every five young women is married before their 18th birthday, and one in every 25 is married before their 15th birthday, which is close to the global average. As a result, the region now has over 40 million child brides, including married girls and women who married as children. According to UNICEF's global databases, 17 percent of women aged 20 to 24 in Egypt, 13 percent in Morocco, 28 percent in Iraq, 8% in Jordan, 6% in Lebanon, and 3% in Algeria were married or in union before they were 18.

Forced marriage was one of the issues that Firdaus faced. Forced marriages are most common among girls under the age of 15 or even younger. They were forced to marry by their parents for a variety of reasons, including the fact that they do not have to worry about their children's salaries, and they do not care about their feelings and do not allow them to complete their studies.

Child marriages are common in the Middle East and Africa. This strategy helps the girl's family to get rid of her because she is considered as an unnecessary liability. At the age of eighteen, Firdausis was forcibly married off to Sheik Mahmoud, a wealthy widower in his sixties. My uncle, Sheikh Mahmoud, is a virtuous man. He has a big pension and no children, and he's been on his own since his wife died last year. if he marries Firdaus she will have a good life with him (37). This marriage is arranged by her uncle's wife, who complains that the house is too small and life is too expensive and that she consumes twice as much as each of her children. She eats twice as much as any of our children (36). Firdaus is unable to express her feelings about something. She is unable to defend herself since she is unable to complain. Even her uncle and aunt are unconcerned about her feelings about marriage.

supposing Firdaus refuses him?

Why should she refuse him? This is her best chance to get married. do not forget what a nose she has, it's big and ugly like a tin mug. Besides she inherited nothing, and has no income of her own we will never find a better husband than sheikh mahmoud (38).

Firdaus becomes a passive participant in a study about her as a marginalized third person, in which she is rendered irrelevant and hence silenced. Because she is silent and passive, she is reduced to an object, allowing her uncle and his wife to make decisions for her. Additionally, when she overhears their plans, she flees the house, but later returns to marry Sheik Mahmoud after learning that the culture she belongs to lacks a safe haven for children who lack parental love, care, and security, and whose human rights are abused. Later in her marriage, she is subjected to physical, emotional, and verbal abuse.

Firdaus' uncle, as the male head, uses his arbitrary power to marry her off to her aunt's uncle, Sheikh Mahmoud, an old, disfigured, dictatorial spouse, for a hundred-pound dowry, without ever seeking Firdaus' opinion. The female who disobeys a member of her family not only breaks the law, but also violates gender standards, as her culture has established the ideal self-sacrificing, docile, and nurturing lady. To do otherwise is a violation that places the offender in a cultural and religious area where he or she is an outsider. As a result, Firdaus has little choice but to marry the old Sheik against her will.

2.2 Firdaus vs male domination

Woman at Point Zero is about a woman who is unable to realize her potential and rights as a human being in a male-dominated society distinguished by class hierarchy. Firdaus is subjected to constant abuse from the males in her life, including her father, her childhood

boyfriend, her uncle, her husband, her pimps, a cop, a journalist, and her revolutionary lover. Firdaus explains her hatred of males, which stems from her lifelong experience of male oppression. Firdaus believed that she would only be able to discover happiness and freedom after death, and that she would never be able to do so while alive in a patriarchal culture that used Islam to oppress women. indeed, Firdaus is a feminist who challenges patriarchy.

Firdaus' father is also a significant character, He illustrates the severity of men's unfettered authority in patriarchal society. He is depicted as a harsh, abused man who will go to any length to keep his dominance at home.

Sometimes when there is no food at home we would all go to bed with empty stomach. But my father would never fail to have a meal. My mother would hide his food from us at the bottom of one of the holes in the oven. He would sit eating alone while we watch him. One evening I dared to stretch out my hand to his plate but he struck at me a sharp blow over the back of my finger. I was so hungry that I could not cry. I sat in front of him watching as he ate. My eyes following his hand from the moment his fingers plunged into the bowl until it rose into the air and carried the food into his mouth... At the end of the meal; my mother would bring him a glass of water. He drank it and belched loudly expelling the air from the mouth or belly with a prolonged noise (17-18).

When one of his female children died, 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. When the child that died was a boy, he would beat my mother, then have his supper and lie down to sleep (23). As demonstrated in these passages, Women are worthless toys in the hands of males, according to Firdaus' father, and they can be treated worse than slave-girls, as. His wife feels compelled to go to extremes to satisfy him, even if it means endangering their children. Firdaus knew

from a young age that men's lives were valued differently than women's, and she swiftly learnt not to question this after inquiring of her mother about it.

“No light seemed ever to touch the eyes of this woman, even when the day was radiant and the sun at its very brightest. One day I took her head between my hands and turned it so that the sun fell directly on her face, but her eyes remained dull, impervious to its light, like two extinguished lamps (17)

It would only take Firdaus a few years to comprehend that her mother had become like this as a result of her constant tyranny and torture at the hands of men, and that Firdaus would soon feel the same way. Besides, When she meets Marzouk, a pimp who tries to protect her, she witnesses the pinnacle of injustice, demonstrating that patriarchal ideas have no regard for women, no matter how wealthy they are. The conversation between Marzouk and Firdaus exemplifies this.

You can't do without protection, otherwise the profession exercised by husbands and pimps would die out.

‘I refuse your threat.’

‘But I'm not threatening you. I'm just giving you a little advice.’

‘And if I don't accept your advice?’

‘Then I may be obliged to threaten you.’

‘How do you propose to threaten me?’

‘I have my own ways of doing things.’

Every craft has its tools.’ (.100).

After this meeting, Firdaus decides to submit a police report, but she is astonished to learn that "he had better contacts 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" (101).

Firdaus understands that, no matter how powerful she appears to be, she is still a woman, and men will attempt to control her. There is no way for Firdaus to make actual decisions in her reality. Though it may appear to some that waiting on death row is the most liberating experience she has ever had. She has decided not to appeal her sentence because she would rather die than be subjected to the tyranny of others. Firdaus will only be free after he is dead.

Firdaus is viewed as a subordinate to her brother and is not permitted to attend school merely because she is a female. She feels compelled to marry, and when she believes she has found an outlet by leaving her abusive spouse, she is surprised to discover that there is none. Firdaus learns about this from historical writings and then from her personal experiences:

"I read about a ruler whose female servants and concubines were as numerous as his army and another whose only interests in life were wine, women, and whipping his slaves. A third cared little for women, but enjoyed wars, killing, and torturing men" (26). Firdaus recognizes that her own era's rulers (men), as well as the average men she encounters throughout her life, are no better. To put it another way, both ancient and modern males feel that women must be subdued in all situations. In such settings, the choice of prostitution seems inescapably sad in the absence of alternative options for women. Firdaus' magnificent expression of anguish when Diaa informs her she is not respected (76) is a clear indication that there are no better possibilities for women like her.

It is clear that in patriarchal society, women do not have a choice because the power to select is reserved for men. Wherever a woman finds herself in society, whether as a wife, a

prostitute, or an office worker, she is denied dignity and respect. Despite the fact that she resists patriarchy, she loses the war.

El Saadawi exposes the terrible side of the patriarchal class system, in which women are raped and killed simply for being women, while males are expelled for failing to fully accept the patriarchal class system. Saadawi used metaphor in all of her novel titles to represent patriarchal class and religion. The title may also indicate El Saadawi's desire to expose the relationship between the ruling class's political power, women's persecution in rural Egypt, and the misuse of religion.

2.3. Woman's Way to Power

Firdaus, like most of Egyptian women, her society teach her that the man is superior and she is born to satisfy him, but she resists to stay in the shadow of an oppressive man, and goes in a journey to prove that as a woman she can do what the man can do and better, if she is given the opportunity. Through Firdaus, El-Saadawi draws possible ways the woman can take to reach her freedom and independence, like education, and work.

2.3.1. Freeing the Mind: Education

Education is the nurturing of learning and change in a thoughtful, hopeful, and respectful manner, with the notion that we should all have the opportunity to share in life. Mark K Smith considers what education is and proposes that it is a practice of being with people and encouraging truth and possibilities.

Actually Women's economic freedom hinges on their ability to obtain an education. Despite the fact that women have the right to an education in the majority of countries, equitable access to education for women remains a challenge. Millions of women in developing and rich countries equally do not complete their education because they are compelled (by culture,

circumstance, or the fear of violence) to prioritize home, care giving, and child-rearing responsibilities.

In her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women: With Structures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792), Mary Wollstone Craft, a prominent feminist, discusses how crucial education is for women's survival and freedom. She believes that education is critical for both women and the nation's empowerment.

Feminists all across the world are debating the importance of education. The irony of being a woman is that males believe they do not need to have an education because they simply live in their own homes. If they simply allow them to receive an education, they will be able to stand on their own as independent women who are aware of their rights. Men, on the other hand, believe women are just inferior to their male counterparts.

The heroine's emancipatory attempts can be witnessed in her actions and reactions as she faces her captors throughout the story. In her drive to better and emancipate her limited feminine character, El Saadawi depicts a resilient and educationally ambitious heroine whose primary interest has been university education since infancy.

Firdaus was subjected to educational limitations. Firdaus' uncle would frequently leave for the city where he was a student at El-Azhar University during his school breaks. She also announces her wish to study at El-Azhar University while walking alongside him on one of his return journeys. He bursts out laughing at her ignorance and informs her that “El-Azhar was only for men” (16).

Education is one of the most essential problems highlighted by feminists around the world because when women receive an education, they will be aware of their rights and would be able to stand on their own as self-sufficient women. However, the irony is that most girls are denied an education and are taught that women and education are incompatible.

Firdaus was also denied an education at first, and the most astonishing part is that she only received an education after her parents died. She had requested that her uncle take her to Cairo with him. He inquired as to what she intends to do there, and when she stated that she intends to attend university, her uncle chuckled and remarked, "University is for for males."

Males make women feel inferior by doing things like this to them. And this causes a lasting mental scar in the shape of inferiority complex in the minds of the girls. Firdaus received her education after her parents died, when her uncle took her to Cairo with him, and she completed secondary school. In her secondary school exams, she placed second in the school and seventh in the state.

Firdaus wanted education in order to be able to financially extricate herself from her oppressors, but in this patriarchal society, women's access to school was limited, thus they needed permission to pursue knowledge, thus, if women have knowledge they would recognize that they are oppressed and abused, and they will desire to change it.

After Firdaus' uncle sent her to boarding school, where she developed a passion for learning. She immediately learned that every book was about men's accomplishments, and she felt compelled to read about women's strength, which she was never given the opportunity to do. Then, she quickly earns a reputation as a bookworm, spending many evenings in the library. She excels at school and receives numerous academic awards. Firdaus begins to value books more than people.

Indeed, she understands that education empowers women and leads to economic independence. She has expressed a desire for a respectable source of income and an insatiable need for education on multiple occasions. She is unable to fulfill these goals due to her lack of educational qualifications and patriarchal attitudes toward female education. As a result, she chooses prostitution as an alternative.

2.3.2. Prostitution

Firdaus the strong, and fearless woman we met at the beginning of the story, is a woman took every possible chance to free herself from her one and only nightmare which is male oppression. Prostitution is one of the ways Firdaus uses to reach self-reliance, and financial independency, even though it is not the right path to take, but considering the miserable, and cruel life she has, that made her realize that the street is more safe than many other places she lived in, because no single person she knew do good to her, not even her father, so she has no choice. Firdaus enters the world of prostitution, after she runs away from an abusive man, and met a prostitute named Sharifa. Sharifa as Firdause says “opened my eyes to life” (54), and gave her a clean, and comfortable place to stay in, later she used her to earn money so she run away again, and continued her work alone. The way prostitution empowered Firdaus is in the fact that she is now financially independent, earns her own money, and relays on no one. The first amount of money she made was ten pound by which she bought lunch, and was amused by the food’s taste, not because she never had it before, but as she says because it is “the first one bought with my own piaster” (66). The woman is always dependent on her father, or her husband financially, makes her constantly in a need to ask for money, therefore feels inferior, but with being able to support herself, and make money, Firdaus guarantees freedom to herself.

Working as a prostitute makes Firdaus have a comfortable life, she has her own apartment, eats what she wants, andwears clothes of high class ladies. Before, her father made her sleep in the cold, and she had never been asked about the food she likes. Now that she knows her worth, and the importance of money, she is a confident prostitute that her wishes are orders to who wants her body. (68)

How many were the years of my life that were lost before I tore my body and myself away from the people who held me in their grasp since the very first day? Now I could decide on the food I wanted to eat, the house I preferred to live in, refuse the man for whom I felt an aversion no matter what the reason, and choose the man I wished to have, even if it was only because he was clean and well-manicured. (68).

The most successful prostitute is the title Firdaus earns after years of working in the field, even powerful men, and princes, fought for her favors, and because she demands the highest fee, she makes a lot of money as a prostitute. Prostitution makes Firdaus a powerful woman that can stand in the face of people of power without fear, even if they threaten her, “On another occasion he threatened me with prison” (90). She sees prostitution as a freedom, and thinks that wives are prostitutes as well, but has nothing but a misery “All women are prostitutes of one kind or another. Because I was intelligent I preferred to be a free prostitute, rather than an enslaved wife” (91). With her husband she had nothing but swollen face that gets worst every time her husband wants, but now she is not only free, but independent, confident, and powerful.

2.3.3. Self-Reliance: Work

Working is another way Firdaus takes, to prove her worth and capability, to herself, and to the people around her. She starts working in a company after a hard, and longtime searching for a job which it might not be in the same rate of hardness if it was a man. She worked as a prostitute, had money, and all what she wanted, except for respect, which is a fact that a friend of her called D'iaa opened her eyes to, when he said “You are not respectable”, her body, and soul were in a choke hearing this fact, “seeing my life in a new way. I was not a respected woman. It was something I had not known before. It was as well that I had

remained ignorant of the fact” (72). Because she was forced to be prostitute “I am not a prostitute. But right from my early days my father, my uncle, my husband, all of them, taught me to grow up as a prostitute.” (99). She wanted to be respected, so she quite prostitution, and choose a decent job, in which she earns little, and lives in “a small room without a toilet” (73). In three years she succeeded to be the most valuable, most respected, and the most honorable employee in the entire company, with her smartness, braveness, and experience with men that helped her to keep their traps away from her.

As de-Beauvoir demonstrates that a woman is enslaved by her circumstances. She has been able to reduce the distance between her and men to a significant part through employment; work alone can secure her genuine freedom (813). Adding to the freedom a decent job can give the to the woman, self-respect that leads to self-value, and the financial independence, results in a free powerful woman with a high self-esteem.

2.3.4. Sisters in the Struggle

Nujhat Jahan Khan, defines sisterhood as woman's emotion of affection, concern, and compassion for another woman, women feel as if they have a hidden tie that makes them feel like sisters, despite of whether they are related by blood or not. Women who share a common interest are more likely to form this bond (23).

Sharifa and Firdaus does not share an interest, rather, they share a struggle as Egyptian women. When Sharifa saw Firdaus for the first time she knew that this woman is like her, and went through what she went through, she could easily know that it was a man by asking her who is he which made Firdaus amused that she knew her problem without telling her, Sharifa said “Any one of them, it doesn't make any difference. They're all the same, all sons of dogs, running around under various names. Mahmoud, Hassanein, Fawzy, Sabri, Ibrahim, Awadain, Bayoumi.” (52).

Sharifa is just like Firdaus, lived what she experienced, and felt the same, they talked and opened their hearts to each other. Sharifa gave Firdaus place to stay in, but most importantly, she changed her view of life “She opened my eyes to life” (54), and changed her view of herself, the self that she hated to even see in the mirror, after meeting Sharifa started to disappear

“I discovered I had black eyes, with a sparkle that attracted other eyes like a magnet, and that my nose was neither big, nor rounded, but full and smooth with the fullness of strong passion which could turn to lust. My body was slender, my thighs tense, alive with muscle, ready at any moment to grow even more taut” (54).

Sharifa giving Firdaus place to stay in, deciding to be her sister, and her mother, definitely makes her feel warm, and loved, the two things she did not feel with her own parents. Sharifa like a real sister, like a real mother advices Firdaus and enlighten her about her value

Sharifa said to me one day, 'Neither Bayoumi, nor any of his cronies realized your worth, because you failed to value yourself highly enough. A man does not know a woman's value, Firdaus. She is the one who determines her value. The higher you price yourself, the more he will realize what you are really worth, and be prepared to pay with the means at his disposal. And if he has no means, he will steal from someone else to give you what you demand.' I was seized with wonder and asked her, 'And am I really of any value, Sharifa?' 'You are beautiful and have culture.' 'Culture?' I said. 'All I have is a secondary school certificate.' 'You belittle yourself, Firdaus. (55).

Sharifa gave power to Firdaus through opening her eyes to her worth, leading her to be confident, that is the strongest power a human can hold, with self-confidence, and value, the individual is able to achieve what once seemed far, and impossible.

2.4. Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter balances between the mournful reality of the oppressed women in Egypt, reflected in the character of Firdaus, and the bright side that the woman can reach through resisting and following every possible road toward power, and this is the message of WPZ, it says that a woman should accept oppression, instead she should stand on her feet.

General Conclusion

Women after struggling for generations, and with the rise of a feminist consciousness, they reached a tremendous point in their war for equality, but unfortunately women in the Arab countries are few steps behind, still struggling domestic violence, discrimination, and many other cruel forms of oppression, being convinced that it is traditions, and even blame it on religious ethics. The Arab woman is a fighter that can turn every struggle that hinder her way, into a stone to build a stair to reach her freedom, and liberation, and this is exactly what El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* is about, enlighten Arab girls of ways to escape patriarchal imprisonment, and reach power. WPZ is a story of a woman went through what no normal human can handle, but survived, a woman reached the point zero, a point of the end, because of the savagery of patriarchy, but refused to bend the knee when she is right, even if that means her death.

The novel portrays the reality of the Egyptian women, those women who are taught, since childhood, that they are born to satisfy the needs of the man, this believe is deeply rooted, to the point that women themselves consider who resists this believe as a corrupted woman. They endure beating, enslavement, from their husbands, and other inhuman treatments but keep silent. In the same time, the novel depicts a journey of a woman towards empowerment, and shows every possible way a woman can take to unlace herself, hence to move to liberation; the perfect balance between the struggle and the way to escape it. A perfect balance between highlighting the struggles, and drawing a map, leading to ways to freedom.

Diving in the historical, and theoretical background of the novel, chapter one, in its first part, we investigated the struggles of the Egyptian women under patriarchy, and the second part with the theoretical framework scrutinized the postcolonial feminism, its different from the western one, and Islamic feminism. Chapter two was mainly analytic, it highlighted in the

first section the different forms of oppression women encounter, starting with, Female Genital Mutilation, Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage, to Sexual Harassment. the second section, discussed ways in which the woman can reach powerful self, and liberation, with, education, work, prostitution in which the protagonist used as an escape from dependency, and sisterhood, showing how can a woman who went through the same misery help another woman stand on her feet.

We hope that we succeeded in making the voices of women suffering oppression louder, and succeeded in spotlighting every possible way into empowerment. We highly encourage others to carry researches on Nawal El-Saadawi's novel, and researches on Women Empowerment. At last, we hope that our analysis would be helpful source to those interested in women struggles, and empowering women.

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المخلص

تعد رواية امرأة " عند نقطة الصفر " للكاتبة نوال السعداوي تصويرا مهما لمعاناة المرأة المصرية ضد سلطة الرجال وكذا الاستعمار. فردوس الشخصية الرئيسية تجاهد لبناء حياة في مجتمع وثقافة لا تعطيها ابسط الحقوق. لا تحارب فردوس فقط لتضع مصير حياتها بين يديها بل تبحث عن نفسها وطريقة لتحريرها. يهدف هذا البحث لإظهار كيف ان المرأة مضطهدة في مجتمع يهيمن عليه الرجل كما انه يسلط الضوء على كل الطرق التي من الممكن ان تسلكها المرأة المصرية لتصل الى القوة والحريية والاعتماد على النفس من منظور الكاتبة. تنقسم هذه الدراسة الى فصلين الأول بعنوان السياق التاريخي والإطار النظري بينما يتناول الفصل الثاني موضوع تقوية المرأة حيث يناقش معاناة امرأة مصرية ويناقش كذلك الطرق التي تساعد على تقويتها.

الكلمات المفتاحية اضطهاد المرأة، سلطة الرجل، تقوية المرأة، التحرر.