

Representation of the Victimized Woman in Selected Works of Nawal Saadawi

Keywords: patriarchy, gender roles, undoing gender

Dr. Azhar Jasim Ali Al-Zubeidi

**English Department
College of Basic Education
Al-Mustansiriyah University**

Dr. Maysam Bahaa Saleh

**English Department
College of Arts
Al-Mustansiriyah University**

تجسيدُ المرأةِ كضحيةٍ في أعمالٍ مختارةٍ لنوال سعداوي

كلماتُ مفتاحيةٌ: السلطة الذكورية- أدوار الاجناس- تدمير الجنس

د. أزهار جاسم علي الزبيدي

الجامعة المستنصرية / كلية التربية الأساسية / قسم اللغة الانكليزية

د. ميسم بهاء صالح

الجامعة المستنصرية / كلية الآداب / قسم اللغة الانكليزية

Abstract

There may be a limited number of Arab women writers but they managed to expose the painful reality Arab women live in. Among the renowned Arab women writers stands the distinguished Nawal El-Saadawi, a prolific feminist writer whose literary product passed genre limitations while keeping to her main theme of exposing the unfair patriarchal power in the Arab society. Nevertheless, El-Saadawi may have reached extremes in her victimization of women characters in her writings. Her abhorrence of the male dominance in the Arab society is so obvious in works such as the play of *El Elah Yuqaddim Estiqaletih fi Egtema' El-Qimmah* (God Resigns at the Summit Meeting), the novel of *Imra'a Endeh Noqtat El-Sifr* (Woman at Point Zero), and *Al Ruwaya* (The Novel). The critical analysis of the selected texts focuses on El-Saadawi's representation of gender and gender role from the perspective of Judith Butler's theory of gender. The Female protagonists in El-Saadawi's works seem to undergo a prolonged suffering due to their surrender to the gender roles imposed on them as women while avoiding living in an abject world. Yet, El-Saadawi seems to suggest a solution to the women dilemma under the patriarchal dominance which is through undoing gender by resisting the gender roles imposed and maintained by the patriarchal dominance.

الخلاصة

هناك عدد محدود من الكاتبات العربيات استطعن أن يظهرن الحقيقة المؤلمة التي يعيشها النساء العربيات. من ضمن هؤلاء الكاتبات تتميز نوال سعداوي والتي تعد من أبرز المناصرين لحقوق المرأة إذ تناولت في كتاباتها موضوع اساس هو السلطة الذكورية غير العادلة في المجتمع العربي. وقد وصلت نوال سعداوي إلى أقصى حدود الطرح في كتاباتها عن اضطهاد المرأة وهيمنة سلطة الرجل في المجتمع العربي متمثلة في مسرحية "الإله يقدم استقالته عند اجتماع القمة" ورواية "امرأة عند نقطة الصفر" ورواية "الرواية". إن التحليل النقدي للنصوص المختارة يركز على تصوير نوال سعداوي للجنس البشري ودور كل جنس من خلال استخدام نظرية جوديث بتلر عن الجنس. وإن الشخصية النسائية الرئيسة في روايات نوال سعداوي تخوض معاناة كبيرة بسبب استسلامها لدور الجنس المفروض عليها ومحاولتها تجنب العيش في عالمها التعتيس. ومع هذا يبدو أن سعداوي تقدم حلاً لمشكلة المرأة تحت الهيمنة الذكورية وذلك بطمس وتدمير فكرة الجنس ومقاومة أدوار الاجناس المفروضة من قبل السيطرة أو الهيمنة الذكورية.

Representation of the Victimized Woman in Selected Works of Nawal Saadawi

Dr. Azhar Jasim Ali Al-Zubeidi

**English Department / College of Basic Education / Al-Mustansiriyah
University**

Dr. Maysam Bahaa Saleh

English Department / College of Arts / Al-Mustansiriyah University

Introduction

Nawal El-Saadawi is an Egyptian feminist, who is originally a physician and psychiatrist. She prefers the apprenticeship of writing over the medical career. She finds writing an effective tool for expressing her feminist opinions. She also finds herself a creative author, whose creativity, in her opinion, is threatened because of the Egyptian patriarchal society which neither gives women their rights nor believes in their creative ability.

Though El-Saadawi's writings vary in genre, they still carry the most controversial themes against the Arabic/Islamic society. In this regard, Fedwa Malti-Douglas indicates that "[n]o Arab woman inspires as much emotion as Nawal El Saadawi. No woman in the Middle East has been the subject of more polemic" (Malti-Douglas' 1995, 1). This kind of response seems to be obtainable only by the kind of writings that break the norms, where El- Saadawi's texts make a case in point.

The texts chosen for this research represent two of the different genres ventured by El Saadawi. These genres embed drama, as in *El Elah*

Yuqaddim Estiqaletih fi Egtema' El-Qimmah (God Resigns at the Summit Meeting), and novel, as in *Imra'a Endeh Noqtat El-Sifr* (Woman at Point Zero), and *Al Ruwaya* (The Novel). Nawal El Saadawi has also written closet drama, as is the case with *Ruler by the Order of God* (*El Hakim Biamr Allah*), which will be referred to throughout this research.

Main Themes In El-Saadawi's Writings

Nawal El Saadawi, as aforementioned, has chosen some value judgement themes that break the norms of the Arab society in general and the Islamic society in particular.

El-Saadawi has made her radical feminist orientation clear in her writings by harping on sensitive aspects of man-woman relation and on the status of Arab Muslim women. She has declared her antagonism to all aspects of patriarchy. Nevertheless, what really makes her writings in this respect subjective is the way she defines patriarchy and the way she tackles the earlier mentioned aspects.

The main themes in El-Saadawi's writings, specifically, in the currently selected texts, can be summarized as shown below:

1. Patriarchy and patriarchal dominance;
2. Gender discrimination and gender role;
3. Social injustice and oppression;
4. Sexual harassment, abuse and rape;
5. Prostitution;
6. Extramarital relations; and
7. Intellectual freedom.

Moreover, El-Saadawi always associates patriarchy with politics and considers the oppression of women's rights as part of the patriarchal political scheme. Another essential point reflected in El-Saadawi's

writings is that she is a secular feminist, whose writings do not reflect any specific religious beliefs. This is clear in her combination of different beliefs from different religions in her texts whenever required.

Materials And Methods

This research hypothesizes that El-Saadawi's feminism is most suitably located within the western feminist context. Although this research focuses on the presentation of gender role and its performance within the scope of the theory of gender by Judith Butler, it attempts, as well, to discuss the abovementioned themes in El-Saadawi's writings in the light of Kate Millett's 'Theory of Patriarchy', Jean Paul Sartre and Simone De Beauvoir's theory of 'Existentialism', among others. Such an analysis requires a thematic inductive reading, which avoids the linguistic analysis due to the fact that not all El-Saadawi's texts are translated into English. Accordingly, it would be safer and more accurate if the linguistic aspect is eliminated in this research.

Analysis Of El-Saadawi's Selected Texts

Each of the following texts, *Woman at point Zero*, *God Resigns at the Summit Meeting*, and *Al Ruwaya* is discussed separately. The results obtained by discussing each text are to be highlighted and compared with that of the other texts. Furthermore, it is to be noted that there is no chronicle presentation for the texts in this research.

Woman at Point Zero

This novel is centered on the oppressed female character of Firdaus. It traces the stages of her life, which are represented by a renewed exploitation, abuse, and humiliation. In *Woman at Point Zero*, El-Saadawi presents five of the themes covered in this research. The first theme of patriarchy and patriarchal dominance can easily be traced in her

father's preference of himself to his children. Firdaus recalls: "in winter my father used to shift my straw mat and my pillow to the small room facing north, and occupy my corner in the oven room." (p.17) Her father's preference of himself to her is repeated in another incident, recalled by Firdaus. In this incident Firdous states that when there is very little food in the house, the father eats and the rest of the family keeps watching. Firdaus's father uses his patriarchal power to exploit his family members in doing unpaid work. Being the father of the family entitles him to have all the advantages of patriarchy. He dominates all the other members, who fear his power.

The above mentioned extract presents also social injustice and oppression. The latter is shown when the male of a certain family uses the power entitled to him by patriarchy to be unjust and an oppressor.

The patriarchal dominance and power is manifested in the novel throughout the other male characters. After the father comes the power of the uncle whose relation to Firdaus is of different phases and nature. He first uses her childhood innocence to satisfy his sexual desires as in the harassment she describes in the novel stating: "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 with a cautious, stealthy, trembling movement".(p. 14) Yet, her uncle also empowers her via the reading skills that help her get an insight into the world. He also uses her instead of guarding her against any type of exploitation. Finally, he forces her to marry an old ugly miserly widower. His behaviors and acts with Firdaus reflect his patriarchal power, which is represented by dominating her, deciding on her behalf and finally getting rid of her by selling her for about 100 pounds to an old worthless widower who can

only offer her an unbalanced marriage. Firdaus, in her uncle's opinion, is a tool whereby he can pay all his debts. Firdaus's husband is no better than her uncle in manifesting patriarchal dominance over the poor wife. He does not only watch over her like an eagle on a prey but also beats her. Her husband was ugly and brute that she fled the marriage after an incident about which she details as "On one occasion he hit me all over with his shoe. my face and body became swollen and bruised." (44) Marzuk, the pimp, is another figure who practices the power of patriarchy, entitled to him as he is a man. He forces Firdaus to pay him the greatest share of her income as a prostitute, under the pretext that he is protecting her.

Gender discrimination and gender role is another theme that can be traced in the same novel. Firdaus and her mother work for free. Being women obliges them to do a heavy load of work and prevents them from experiencing the sense of freedom offered only to the patriarchal power. They are enslaved in their gender. Even when Firdaus works as a prostitute, she is forced to give up a big share of her earnings to Marzuke just because she is a woman, who has no right to be free in the patriarchal society. Whether a decent girl or a prostitute, a woman has to surrender to the patriarchal power of man due to gender discrimination.

Firdaus faced all kinds of social injustice and oppression throughout her life; a matter which pushes her to revolt against the bitter life and be sentenced to death. Her father usually makes her work hard for nothing in return to the extent that she sometimes sleeps without having any food even when she was still a child. Her uncle uses her for the sexual pleasure, serving and for doing all the household work with no reward. He also forces her to a bad marriage match to gain money for

himself; a matter that destroys her physically and psychologically. She is used to escape from the abuse of her old ugly miser husband, who severely beats her, leaving marks of humiliation and shame on her face.

Firdaus' experience with Bayoumi is no better. He also starts using her as an unpaid house maid, enslaves her for his sexual pleasure and finally allows his friends to use her, too. In one incident, she finds a friend of him on top of her. When she insisted that he was not Bayoumi, he replied: "What difference does it make? Bayoumi and I are one." (p. 50) That man's reply is true; for whether being Bayoumi or whoever, he is a man who loses no chance to exploit women in the patriarchal society that offers him full power, absolute freedom and an unquestioned dominance. Even the man, she falls in love with, has invested his claimed true love to make her work hard for him and to use her for free sexual pleasure.

Even after selling her body, injustice is mercilessly imposed on her; finding Marzuk in her way is a case in point. From what has been mentioned so far, sexual harassment, abuse, and rape are present all the time in her life. It started by her uncle and continued through her bad husband, who forces her to do sex. Outside the family, the sexual abuse has been done through Bayoumi, Marzuk, Ibrahim, and every man she encounters in the streets, including the policeman.

Prostitution for Firdaus is neither a choice nor an unavoidable destiny. She finds herself working as a prostitute to earn her living. Then, when she realizes that such an action devalues her, she quits it and accepts a tough life, in which she is respected. However, she decides to go back to prostitution as a free choice when she realizes that women are used for men's pleasure unpaid when getting married or paid when

working as prostitutes. Thus, for Firdaus who evaluated her situation from a materialistic perspective that she was unable to feel any value of her soul, she thought for women to be paid in prostitution is a better choice since money will give them some sort of value though may be a purely materialistic value of a soulless body.

Firdaus' journey of life is an example of Kate Millett's theory of patriarchy where woman is reduced to her body. Being thought of as a mere body, men start practicing their patriarchal power through the act of sex to dominate, humiliate and subject that body to their sexual desires. From the existentialist's feminism perspective, Firdaus is an example of a woman who searches for value for herself as a woman in the male-dominated patriarchal society. She realizes at some stage that she has lost her body to every man she has encountered in her life and thus has decided at times to detach her soul from that body when men are around. She believes that she is being 'herself' in her soul while her body is the 'other' and an 'object' through which men prove their masculinity. She even realizes that by saying 'no' to the desires of men will help her gain value because that means she owns herself while men do not. Nevertheless, she could not at the end maintain the ownership of her 'soul'. Ibrahim, one of the other men, has made her give up her body and soul in one package to him in the name of love. She accepts to be the 'woman' he needs as a man. With him, she completely loses her value. The belief that she can make herself of value via money, which she earns by selling her body as a prostitute, does not last long. As a piece of evidence to that is when Marzuk at the end tells her that men can even control and own her soul. His attempt to killing her is a clear piece of evidence. Firdaus ends up believing that the best solution is to surrender

to death through accepting the prosecution. She believes that by setting her soul free, she can get rid of the body that all men she has known have cruelly used and humiliated.

God Resigns at the Summit Meeting

The author of *God Resigns at the Summit Meeting* (السعداوي الإله) (يقدم إستقالته في إجتماع القمة) attests in this drama her feminism in a religious context. The themes she tackles in this play are patriarchy and patriarchal dominance, gender and gender role, social injustice and oppression.

Right from the beginning of the play; specifically, when reading the list of characters, it is clear that by personifying God, a number of prophets, the devil, and other characters, El-Saadawi attempts to defy all aspects of patriarchy. In fact, it is clear that El-Saadawi considers all that is masculine and male-related patriarchal; she reaches the extreme when she positions God at the top of patriarchy. El-Saadawi seems to embrace Millett's 'theory of patriarchy', where Millett attempts to "formulate a systematic overview of patriarchy as a political institution." (Millett¹⁹⁷⁰.

^{xi)} El-Saadawi rejects in *God Resigns at the Summit Meeting* all aspects of patriarchal power and dominance. The solution, in her opinion, is to get rid of the power of patriarchy and its dominance by demolishing its head representation in the play; that is God. In this aspect, El-Saadawi comes close to the beliefs of existentialism where humans can only live when they have a full responsibility of their existence. The latter cannot take place unless God dies. This kind of existentialism is greatly reflected in writings of Jean Paul Sartre; especially in his play *No Exit* (Sartre). In *God Resigns at the Summit Meeting*, El-Saadawi sets herself in conversation with a patriarchal character, represented by God. In sarcasm, which may seem a reality to a non-established reader, she holds

God responsible for all sins, massacres and genocides, and for whatever misdemeanors and felonies.

In what she calls the 'summit meeting', El-Saadawi reverses the 'Judgment Day'. In this meeting, everyone seems to accuse God indirectly for the sins committed. El-Saadawi, from an existentialist perspective, argues the idea of Allah as being the ultimate God. She maintains that instead of only questioning and judging people and the devil (Iblis), God also should be questioned and judged. She further states that if God has decided that Iblis tempts people into doing evil things, then Iblis and people are both innocent since evil is created by God. She makes Iblis resign from his post as a seducer to prove the claim that he is not evil by nature; he is assigned to be so by God. Existentially speaking, El-Saadawi argues in this play that humans are either free to decide for themselves; that is, the existence of God is denied, or that they have no free will; that is, free choices are all predetermined by God. Such ideas reflect the absurdity of life, existentially speaking. Another important point in this play is that El-Saadawi claims that God has limited the existence of woman to be an 'object' to be used by men, specifically for their sexual pleasure. That means God has deprived women from having a complete existence experience when He created her only for the sake of man.

Reading *God Resigns at the Summit Meeting* through Millets' 'theory of patriarchy' makes it clear that El-Saadawi's claim, in this play is that patriarchal means unjust. That is, God, who is held at the top of patriarchy, is unjust. She argues that his injustice is manifested in creating a masculine world that is unfair to all women, who are considered second class citizens. She supports her idea by referring to the

fact that God selects his prophets only from the masculine class, leaving by that no chance for women to hold the post.

Finally, a reference is to be made to the character of Daughter of God (Bint Allah), which El-Saadawi creates in different fictional works to perform the role specified to her by the writer. This character is the author herself whenever she appears in any text of El-Saadawi. Nevertheless, in *God Resigns at the Summit Meeting*, the author delivers through this character the message that she can impose on God to have a daughter to get rid of God's patriarchal aspect represented by choosing only a son, the Christ. She also delivers through this character the message that women are as capable as men to be prophets of God though they are not allowed to be so by the patriarchal society. That is why, such a character always ends up imprisoned. El-Saadawi finalizes the play with a song by Bint Allah, in which she says:

This land was hers, and hers was this house
As well the Sycamore tree and its door open to the entrance
And the oven, the canon, the comb and the ax
And her jelbab (dress) hanged on a nail
And the straw mat on which she gave birth to her son
She nursed him, taught him to read and write, gave him up her brain.

I saw him grab the ax and beat her while I scream grandma
He buried her underground hid her body
Then came out to people saying that he was not given birth to any nor
was born to any and he has no mother
This is my father the mighty worshiped
Wanted to kill me too I his daughter
Admits having no children but male sons

And erases my memory from existence (Saa'dawi. 1996.112-113)

In fact, this song is of essential importance when tracing El-Saadawi's themes in this play. El-Saadawi speaks metaphorically about patriarchy in all its myriad forms; including the personification of patriarchy by God. She indicates in this song that patriarchy/God has exploited woman, the main source of life, to establish a patriarchal world that plays a role in killing that woman physically and psychologically through abusing and raping her body and through the fanatic cultural beliefs that cancel her excellence. The theme of intellectual freedom is so obvious in the last line. She declares that in the patriarchal world, women are denied the right of intellectual freedom. She finally suggests that women can only regain their life and existence when patriarchy is demolished. So, the play ends with the demand that all humans should enter her cell to free her from imprisonment. There is an indirect indication in this concluding scene that when God dies, not physically, but the reference is when there is no existence to the authority of God all can attain freedom.

Al Ruwaya

Al Ruwaya (السعداوي الرواية) is one of the most feministic works of El-Saadawi in terms of writing style involved, language used and the content reflected. This makes it a thorny task to trace the beginning and the end of events as well as to define their place and the characters involved. In this novel, El-Saadawi approaches the absurdity of life, one of the main themes of existentialism. Nevertheless, intellectual freedom remains the most dominant theme among all. The whole novel revolves around the character of a fatherless young woman; -- The main character in this novel is referred to as the girl all the time. At some other times,

the girl is called by her mother's name, Noria -- who connects the lives of many other characters. The girl's life seems to be absurd; she comes of no past; has no family as she was born through an extramarital relation and has no idea about the future. She is nobody with the least feminine features and has no writing experiences or talents; yet, she is urged by some inner desires and by the surrounding people to be a writer. She sways in an extramarital relation between two men; Rostum and Sameeh. She carries the baby of someone who might be Sameeh. But since the latter is not the only man in her life, the father could also be Rostum or Francisak. She gives her name and her mother's name to the fatherless baby. She does not know if she is defining herself through herself or that she is defining herself through Rostum or Sameeh. By the end of the novel, it is still unclear whether she has managed defining herself through herself or through Rostum's wife; Carmin.

The only family bondage that seems to be authentic throughout the novel is the maternal one. Such an authenticity can sometimes be sensed through the mother-child relationships, where naming the child after the mother is so much celebrated by the author. At other times, authentic relations can be crystallized via inheriting the mother – even though a virtual mother. The girl inherits the novel of Carmin (as well as her characteristic features) and the house of Gamalat. In this novel, the author makes clear the idea that when women are free from marriage bondage and family restrictions, she can escape the gender discrimination and play the role decided by her rather than by her gender. Carmin, for example, has extramarital relations; she refuses to be imprisoned in her feminine body functions of reproduction. Accordingly, she managed to live the experience she wants and be a great novelist, whose novel lived

even after her death and triumphed over the patriarchal authority. Her intellectual legacy has also survived as it continued by the girl, her virtual daughter.

Findings And Discussion

The writings of Nawal El-Saadawi beat on the most sensitive issues suffered by the Arab Muslim women without bringing forward any solution for any of the displayed dilemmas to whom they were claimed to have been written. The points below help to define the feminist stand of El-Saadawi.

1. No way out

It is so clear from *Woman at point Zero* that El-Saadawi intends to raise the awareness of women not of their situation but of the fact that there is no way out. It will be enough to make women furious and resentful at men when realize the message that fathers are bad, uncles and relatives are worse, strangers are monsters and husbands are hell. Just like the existentialist feminism of Beauvoir, a woman who abides by the laws of men has no value because such rules reduce her to her female body and make her a tool or a field of men's self-fulfillment. There is no way out because even when woman buys value through prostitution, she may still fall a victim again and ends up owned by a man, the pimp.

2. Contradictions

Nawal El-Saadawi's radical and angry feminism makes her a victim of some contradictions. In *Woman at point Zero*, all men are evil. Like Kate Millett, who sees that all men consider women a body or an object whereby they can practice sex or celebrate their masculinity. Nevertheless, in the closet drama, that is entitled *Ruler by the Order of God*, she concludes her drama with the protagonist surrendering herself

in an extramarital relation to a 'man', her mother spent the night wandering in the streets and looking for him calling: "I am looking for one man to save my daughter." (Saadawi. 2012. 28) The other contradictory element here is that the protagonist in that drama gives birth to a baby boy who is celebrated on as the savior of the city. Comparing the aforementioned to *Al Ruwaya*, there is yet another contradictory element that is represented by El-Saadawi's conclusion of the novel insisting that life continues through woman not man.

3. Attacking religion not its interpretation

Nawal El-Saadawi is a radical feminist. To her, all sorts of power; especially, the one practiced on woman, are patriarchy. In her opinion, patriarchy is unfair just like any power that imposes dos and don'ts. Thus, God, religion and all those who apply their rules are unfair. She directly attacks God in *God Resigns at the Summit Meeting*. Apart from the play she declares in an interview that "[t]o reinterpret religion is [sic] good, positive and in favor of women because all the books, the Old Testament, the Bible and the Koran are biased in that they portray women as an [sic] inferior to men." (Saleck 2007)

4. Exchanging the eastern Islamic gown by a western secular one

Nawal El-Saadawi's writings are so representative of feminism, but not the Arab Islamic one. As Susan Muaddi Darraj says, "the Arab feminists see that El-Saadawi's writings do not fit into Arab feminism. Darraj further adds that "they believe her work reinforces the stereotype of the universally battered and silenced Arab woman." (Darraj. 2002) El-Saadawi's heroines with fatherless children, free extramarital relations, optional prostitution, and any other similar cases do not fit into the Arab

Islamic context. The solution her works carry for women can only fit into the western feminist scope.

Conclusion

Nawal El-Saadawi demonstrates a western feminist tradition in the writings selected for thematic analysis in the current study. She reveals secular existentialist beliefs blended with deeply radical feminist abhorrence of patriarchy. Her writings reflect anti-social ideas that call upon individual women to have free life led by free choice that should not adhere to the rules of society. It is because she believes that society is a patriarchal institution in marriage and family life. El-Saadawi does not call for any social reform. Her interest is in liberating woman from all constraints including marriage, family bondage, social traditions, and religious rules and teachings. She makes it clear in her writings that when women stop performing the female gender; their chances to free themselves from patriarchy become greater. This happens with Firdaus when she stops acting the female gender and uses the knife to stab the pimp. She presumed the role of the male gender by performing the masculine gender performance.

The method El-Saadawi conducts in her urge to empower woman is cutting woman loose from all that ties her to body functions, motherhood tasks, wife commitments, and daughter's obligations. Her feminist statement not only helps stereotype Arab Muslim woman as a passive powerless creature, but also introduces her to western concepts that cannot be practical in her case. Nevertheless, El-Saadawi may be so much appreciated by young women and feminists who "look at secular feminism as savior from gender dilemmas in the Arab world due to excessive application of religious dos and don'ts in ordinary life"

(Altwaiji 2011. 3) In Al-Riwayah, the protagonist is acting as a person who has managed to get rid of the shackles of gender roles. She does not adhere to the norms of the female gender. However, she does not totally perform the masculine gender role.

The conclusion shows that El-Saadawi writings are distinguished feminist texts by themselves but they fit to situate her in the western feminist scope. To be addressed to the Arab Islamic society, El-Saadawi's writings can only work as means of westernizing its thought and secularizing its beliefs. Unlike some Islamic feminists who believe that "Islam liberated the female from the brutality of Arab tradition" (Ibid. 2), she rather generalizes that all religions degrade women to an inferior status. Thus, this research finds it inaccurate to situate El Saadawi in the Islamic feminist context in opposition to Altwaiji's opinion who declares that "Nawal Al Saadawi [is] a prominent Egyptian Islamic feminist" (Ibid).

El-Saadawi seems to offer a model of characters who suffer only when they try to avoid living in the abject world as it imposes on them the performance of the female gender role which in turn subjugates them to the abusive masculine patriarchy. On the other hand, these women change the women/female destiny and escape both the abject and the patriarchal dominance when they set themselves free from performing the female gender role. Bint Allah, is the decision maker, Firdause uses a knife to kill, and the girl leads a free life where she drinks alcohol, lays on the beach, travels, gives birth to fatherless child, writes novels, ...etc. with a freedom denied to women yet allowed only to men. The key words here to the model presented by El-Saadawi is undoing gender. As Judith Butler indicates, "Sometimes a normative conception of gender

can undo one's personhood, undermining the capacity to persevere in a livable life." (Butler, 2004, 1) Thus, The characters presented by El-Saadawi could not go on performing normative conceptions of the female gender, as detailed in the analysis above. And, as Butler adds, "Other times, the experience of a normative restriction becoming undone can undo a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one that has greater livability as its aim." (Ibid). This is then the exact condition of the character of Firdaus in particular. The characters created by El-Saadawi find themselves changing into stronger humans when they no longer continue the performance of the weak gender as constituted by the society. Butler confirms in this regard that gender "is an identity tenuously constituted in time-an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*." (Butler. 1988. 519). Thus, The female characters in the selected works of this research have undone their female gender and have acquired new identity.

References:

- Altwaiji, Mubarak. (2011). *Twenty-First Century Arab Feminism: A Movement from Islamic to the Secular. The Criterion: An International Journal in English* II IV: 1-9. Print.
- Butler, Judith. (Dec., 1988) *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Research in phenomenology and Feminist Theory. Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4., pp. 519-531.
- . (2004) *Undoing Gender*. Routledge, New York.
- Darraj, Susan Muaddi. (March, 2002) *Understanding the Other Sister: The Case of Arab Feminism. Monthly Review* 53.10. <http://monthlyreview.org/2002/03/01/understanding-the-other-sister-the-case-of-arab-feminism>.

- Malti-Douglas, Fedwa. (1995) *Men, Women, and God(S): Nawal El Saadawi and Arab Feminist Poetics*. California: University of California Press.
- Millett, Kate. (1970) *Sexual Politics*. London: Rupert Hart-Davis Ltd.
- Saleck, Karine Ancellin. (March, 2007) *Interview with Nawal Al Saadawi*.: www.thewip.net
<http://www.thewip.net/contributors/2007/03/interview_with_nawal_al_sadawi.html>.
- Sartre, Jean Paul. (1989) *No Exit and Three Other Plays* New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.
- Tamimi, Jinan. (2009) *Mafhoum El-mara' bain Nas El-tanzeel wa Ta'weel El-mofasireen* التميمي، جنان. مفهوم المرأة بين نص التنزيل وتأويل المفسرين. <<http://www.arabiclinguistics.net/>>.
- Saa'dawi, Nawal. (1996) *El Elah Yuqaddim Estiqaleteh fi Egtema' El-Qimmah (God Resigns at the Summit Meeting)*. الإله يقدم إستقالته في. اجتماع القمة. Cairo, Maktbat Madbouli.
- (2005) *Al-Riwayah*. Kotob Arabia <www.kotobarabia.com> الرواية
- . (2007) *Woman at Point Zero*. tr. Sherif Hetata. Zed Books. London.
- . (Feb 2012) *El-hakim bi Amr Allah* الحاكم بأمر الله <<http://nj180degree.com/>>.
- Note: translation to English from Arabic resources such as the poem in the play *El Elah Yuqaddim Estiqaleteh fi Egtema' El-Qimmah (God Resigns at the Summit Meeting)* is made by the researches being certified translators.