

## PROBING WOMEN'S OPPRESSION IN EGYPTIAN CULTURE PRESENTED THROUGH NAWAL EL SAADAWI'S CONTEMPORARY FICTION

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### ABSTRACT

*In this research, *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi is examined in terms of how women are portrayed as oppressed and suppressed. Specifically, this novel addresses the necessity for women to think over their involvement in the brutality, oppression, molestation, and suppression of other women in both Egypt and the wider world. The harsh experiences presented by Nawal El Saadawi clearly, are experienced by women in her male-dominated society (Egypt). Egyptian women faced intimidation, abuse, sexual harassment, and violence in their patriarchal society, all of which are depicted aesthetically in the novel. This research employs a Masculinist analysis of the text to argue that women not only foster an environment that is favourable to their form of unhappiness, but it also changes the suggestion of the author of a better future for Egyptian women who are living in the oppressed environment. The clear and concise argument of this research is that the theory of women's liberation, by El Saadawi, from the ongoing violence against them is completely inadequate. The representation of the conventional portrayal of women as helpless, docile, and weak has been successfully challenged in this novel, but it was unable to fully grant the long-awaited durable freedom that was anticipated of her subjugated counterpart. This research is about women's oppression. The protagonist, Firdaus is oppressed by both men and other women, as well as her eventual brief moment of freedom.*

**Keywords:** Patriarchy, Feminism, Oppression, Masculinist, Brutality.

### INTRODUCTION

This research examines the major subjugation of women, a phenomenon that gives rise to the feminist perspective in Nawal El Saadawi's *Women at Point Zero*. It does so by using the masculinist approach to literary analysis. English literature is extremely important for expanding our knowledge of human experiences and world issues, including ecological concerns (Akram, 2020; Amjad et al., 2021; Ramzan et al., 2023), because of its rich history and diversified body of work (Li & Akram, 2023, 2024; Ramzan et al., 2023). Its universality

enables it to cut across cultural divides, offering a forum for considering and addressing urgent environmental issues (Ahmad et al., 2022; Abdelrady & Akram, 2022; Ramzan et al., 2023). To portray women's oppression and emancipation in Egypt's predominantly patriarchal society in a rational, justified, and understandable manner, a detailed analysis of Egyptian socio-cultural lives and a synthesis of Islamic law with the Egyptian culture are necessary. The remarkable attention of today's scholars is towards the topic of the "Women

Liberation Movement" Scholars, readers, and researchers interested in the Afro-Arab community's literature will find great value in the novel viewpoint, the essay focuses on. One of the most well-known African feminist writers, Nawal El Saadawi, is also a highly accomplished doctor who has distinguished herself as a doctor, human rights advocate, and psychiatrist. She is a globally acclaimed controversial African female novelist. She writes prose fiction, theatrical literature, short tales, and nonfiction. She completed her medical college education, served as a medical practitioner, and researched medical issues while incarcerated in Kanatir Women's Prison. According to El Saadawi's research "women's psychological and physical issues are caused by female-to-female oppression, repressive culture practices and inter-gender oppression." (WPZ 15). Psychological issues are a complex yet integral part of human life (Javaid et al., 2024; Ramzan et al., 2023). They can range from mild stress and anxiety to more severe conditions like depression (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023), trauma, or personality disorders (Javaid et al., 2024; Ramzan et al., 2023). Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach that includes emotional, social (Al-Adwan et al., 2022), and environmental interventions (Akram et al., 2022; Javaid et al., 2023). Understanding the underlying factors and offering practical solutions can significantly enhance an individual's quality of life and overall well-being (Javaid et al., 2024; Ramzan et al., 2020).

Early in her medical career, Nawal rises to Director in the Ministry of Public Health. Nawal El Saadawi examines the numerous forms of oppression that are inflicted on women in her very controversial 1972 book *Women and Sex* (El Saadawi, 1972). Nawal El Saadawi's appointments as Chief Editor of a health journal, Assistant Secretary General of the Egyptian Medical Association, and Director of the Ministry of Public Health were terminated by the Egyptian government in an attempt to rein in the excesses of her confrontational and explanatory writings. Rather than lowering her spirits to an unbearable level, her refusal to attend several appointments inspires her to become a more outspoken feminist.

After being fired, using her artistic talents, El Saadawi has been seen to dedicate a great deal of

time and energy to drawing attention to the treatment of women. As a result, she discloses the oppressive order that Egyptian women must endure with clarity. El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* eloquently captures the combined oppression and harassment that women in her area face from males as well as from other women. Why women are the biggest barriers to their other women's fulfillment and happiness troubles Nawal El Saadawi. As Emecheta said in an interview with Adeola James, most women's dissatisfaction has been caused by other women over the years. "Half of the problems rest with women, they are busy bitching about one another such that when changes are suggested, our women don't like it" the speaker observes (James 1990:36). It might be said that El Saadawi's story depicts the oppression of women, which begins in the house with the women and is then nurtured and reaped by society.

Certain feminists, such as Flora Nwapa, have greatly popularised the theory that the mother is the first to introduce female oppression into the house, saying as follows: "The oppression of the women starts in the home" (James, 136). Similar to how women are oppressed and suppressed, men are not exempt from this as well. Malti-Douglas characterizes *Woman at Point Zero* as "a searing feminist indictment of male-female relation" (Malti-Douglas, 137), owing to the novel's primary focus on the exploitation, sexual harassment, and intimidation of women. Malti-Douglas essentially asserts that men are likewise major contributors to the mistreatment and abuse of women. Novelist El Saadawi explains that her main inspiration for her works stems from the oppression of women that is experienced by both matriarchal and patriarchal viewpoints. Alkali notes that "Nawal El Saadawi acknowledges that her writing was initially motivated by rage when quoting El Saadawi" (p.14). She says that she writes to let out her rage. She states that "were oppression: oppression of women and oppression of the poor" is what most infuriated her. This is the same attitude of rage that drives El Saadawi's direct and indiscriminate presentation of the repressive conditions that women must endure in her male-dominated environment. It becomes evident that women's emancipation in this largely male-dominated culture may be challenging to attain since both men and women participate in the

oppression and molestation of women. Noticing the disagreeable environment in which the majority of African women reside, one of the most well-known African female writers, Aidoo believes that, "There is no difference then. No difference at all between the white men and their apes. So, it should be easy now to see that there have never been people to save anybody but themselves, never in the past, never now, and there will never be any savior if each will not save himself. No savior, only the hungry and fed" (Aidoo, 15). El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* heroine is developed against this backdrop. Before being cruelly and unfairly put to death by the state, she endures constant abuse and harassment at the hands of both patriarchal and matriarchal authorities.

## 2.1 Literature Review

A lot of people have praised Nawal El Saadawi's "*Woman at Point Zero*" for its moving and realistic depiction of the difficulties faced by women in a patriarchal society. The novel was acclaimed for its unwavering analysis of women's exploitation, oppression, and marginalization when it was first published in 1975 and is now considered a classic of feminist fiction. Global readers have connected with the story of Firdaus, the protagonist of the book, who is a powerful and multifaceted figure. El Saadawi casts attention on the social mores and hierarchies that support gender-based violence, prejudice, and inequality through the story of Firdaus.

The novel has received accolades for its creative narrative structure, which combines aspects of psychiatric analysis, fiction, and autobiography. El Saadawi has been commended for her precise and powerful use of words, and her work has been characterized as poetic, evocative, and unwavering. The novel has had a particularly significant impact on the study of issues like sexuality, motherhood, and resistance; many other feminist writers and activists have drawn inspiration from it.

The seminal work *Woman at Point Zero* has influenced feminist thought and literature greatly overall. Readers still find its examination of women's challenges in patriarchal societies to be compelling, and its impact is evident in many other fields. Readers all over the world are still inspired

and challenged by this potent and thought-provoking classic of feminist writing.

## 3.1 Research Objectives

- i. To highlight the social and patriarchal issues in the world
- ii. To project the prostitution culture in Egypt
- iii. To examine the societal constructs and oppression

## 3.2 Research Questions

1. How does a patriarchal society show the consequences of pushing women to the margins of society?
2. How does the novel relate to contemporary issues and concerned with gender issues and social justice?

## 3.3 Research Methodology

This research is qualitative. Theories presented by Ama Ata Aidoo and the critical approaches of Chinweizu Ibekwe support this study to analyze the selected texts critically. This research examines the major subjugation of women, a phenomenon that gives rise to the feminist perspective in Nawal El Saadawi's *Women at Point Zero*. It does so by using the masculinist approach to literary analysis. To portray women's oppression and emancipation in Egypt's predominantly patriarchal society in a rational, justified, and understandable manner, a detailed analysis of Egyptian socio-cultural lives and a synthesis of Islamic law with the Egyptian culture are necessary.

## 4.1 Textual Analysis

### 4.1.1 OPPRESSION

It will be important to make an effort to define some of the key ideas, such as oppression and masculinity, before talking about the novel under study that examines the problem of women's oppression. Different scholars have taken diverse stances in interpreting the term "oppression." According to Barker, for example, "oppression" is defined as "the social act of placing severe restrictions on an individual, group, or institution. Typically, a government or political organization that is in power places these restrictions formally or covertly on oppressed groups so that they may be exploited and less able to compete with other social groups. The oppressed individual or group is devalued,

exploited, and deprived of privileges by the individual or group that has more power" (Barker, 2003).

In his definition of oppression, Johnson states: "For every social category that is privileged, one or more other categories are oppressed about it. The concept of oppression points to social forces that tend to press upon people and hold them down, to hem them in and block their pursuit of a goal in life. Just as privilege tends to open doors of opportunity, oppression tends to slam them shut." (Johnson, 39). Whatever definition we may attempt to apply, oppression is usually associated with the interaction between cultural, social, economic, and psychological exploitation and dominance. Therefore, the term "oppression" will be used in this study to refer to the unjust exercise of power, whether overt or covert, together with ongoing brutality and injustice that leaves the victim feeling uneasy and disturbed (Mohammed, 2010). "The female is objectified to fulfill the sexual desire of males. So, the writer challenges dominant social norms and values regarding women." (Zubair, 2021)

#### 4.1.2 The Masculinist Theory

The fact that women are more dominant and strong than men has been well shown by Chinweizu in his book "The Masculinist Dissection of Female Power." He makes it clear with force that the woman's authority is the "invisible six-seventh of an iceberg compared to the visible one-seventh, which is the man's" (Chinweizu, 1990). Chinweizu emphasizes that female power, not male power, is paramount in human civilization. This is related to the fact that, in his opinion, "men may rule the world, but women rule the men who rule the world" (WPZ 4-5). Given women's immense power, it is clear that reevaluating oneself and one's actions is one of the fundamental prerequisites for achieving complete independence. This theory assumes that women may be liberated from all forms of oppression and degradation if they use the immense power at their disposal to their advantage. This, incidentally, is the lesson that El Saadawi deftly conveys in *Woman at Point Zero*, her selected book. "Characterization is the key aspect of the mass appeal to enlighten and empower the women in their society that constructs the meaning, and norms and exercises them" (Zubair, 2020)

#### 4.1.3 Depiction of Women

In her artistic creations, El-Saadawi mostly addresses issues that persistently bring unhappiness and discomfort to other women by focusing with passion and unyieldingness on specific parts of men's and women's lives. Several difficulties are related to the practice of female genital mutilation or cutting. When the protagonist of *Woman at Point Zero* is questioned about how she was fatherless, she pitifully discloses the brutality with which she was raised by her mother. This is because the man she calls her biological father resembles other men "so closely that it was difficult to tell" who her genuine and natural father is, which speaks to her immaturity and juvenile mindset (WPZ 13), and as a result of this immature questioning, which in actuality ought to have given the mother the idea that the heroine was irrational and primitive, Firdaus tells us we witness her mother's shocking, spiteful, and brutal behavior that will permanently deny her access to some joy in life: "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" (WPZ 13). A brutal deed is extremely burdensome and harmful to Firdaus's life. In addition to causing Firdaus to sob pitifully all night long, it also robs the heroine of her independence, as her mother forbids her from having the chance "to go to the field to play with the other girls, climb over the water wheel, and swim with the boys in the stream" (WPZ, 13-14). Firdaus apologizes profusely for being made to feel guilty for not being allowed to play with Mohammedan, a young kid. In a tiny shelter constructed from some maize stalks, they used to pretend to be brides and grooms, as she recalls. During their game, she also discloses that Muhammadain is observed stroking certain areas of her body that typically cause intense pleasure to well up inside her. Every time she wants to feel this pleasure and the small kid, Muhammadain, is not with her, she just feels for the same place, and she does it right away: "The moment I touched it, I would realize that I had felt the sensation before" (WPZ 14). Firdaus regrets that the intense feeling she once experienced vanished right away after this cruel excision of her most prized flesh from her body.

The heroine's confession is, in fact, an outpouring of regret and resentment from a downtrodden woman who has been violently deprived of the pleasure of sexual fulfillment her entire life. Removing that "piece of flesh" from her body is the only thing that can excite her entire body and make even the tiniest cell in her body tremble. Therefore, depriving the heroine of the experience of sexual pleasure is akin to depriving her of her life. Therefore, it is ironic and perplexing that the mother, rather than the male, is to blame for her daughter's brutal behavior. Firdaus believes that her mother's plot with the female surgeon is an attempt to subjugate her by beating her into submission to their opulent behavior. With a depressing sense of oppression from her mother, the female surgeon in particular, and all other female supporters of the practice in general, the heroine pathetically unfolds: "They cut off a piece of flesh from between my thighs." (WPZ 54)

Furthermore, according to Chinweizu's theory, women who abuse their concealed power foster an environment that is hostile, dehumanizing, and ultimately destructive to one another. The lives of the impacted women are shaped or restructured by these harmful uses of feminine power. The abuse of the hidden powers by her uncle's wife is primarily responsible for what Firdaus becomes in *Woman at Point Zero*. Because Firdaus was an orphan living under his custody in his home, her uncle gave her compassion and provided for her necessities before his marriage to his wife. Firdaus's circumstances drastically alter the wife's appearance. When she returns to her uncle's house after completing her secondary education, she regrettably finds that everything has fallen apart since she was initially taken to the boarding school, where she was not given proper care. When the aunt of Firdaus asks her husband about his intentions for Firdaus, he responds kindly and says, "She can stay with us until I find her a job" (WPZ 35). However, the wife mockingly replies, "That could be for years. The house is small, and life is expensive. She eats twice as much as any of our children; we don't need her" (WPZ 35). To expose the scandalous and unreasonable actions of women that result in the ongoing misery and molestation of others, El Saadawi uses a small amount of satire. In a heartbreaking revelation, the author shows how a

woman can put another woman on the path to ruin just for food, for which she is not even the primary source. According to Chinweizu's theory, this woman is going to use her concealed power to foster an environment that will lead to the heroine's oppression, molestation, and eventual death. Sheikh Mahmoud, "a man who is thrice older than Firdaus age and suffering from a sickening facial deformity" (Tarabishi, 20). This immediately comes to mind when the woman decides she wants to send Firdaus away from her home.

Firdaus ends up being the most appropriate man because he eats twice as much as each of her children does. She chooses Sheik Mahmud right away since he is a well-off man who can easily supply her needs in terms of finances. "If I speak to him, I am sure he will agree. I intended to ask him for a big dowry, a hundred pounds or perhaps even two hundred." (WPZ 37). It is important to note that the wife's actions are consistent with Chinweizu's masculinist thesis, which holds that women are more powerful than men. Despite being stronger and more talented than the others, this lady uses her secret ability to subjugate other women into a state of constant servitude rather than using it for good. Her decision is usually the best and the last word in anything that has to do with the house. Even though a man should be the one to set bride prices, she insists on dictating not just the man and the heroine should marry but also the payment that must be made; despite this, Tarabishi characterizes her ideal husband for the heroine as "this ugly, disgusting husband whose malodorous lips ooze blood and pus." (Tarabishi, 21) Thus, a man denotes, "He never went out of the house... lest he be obliged to pay a few piasters for a cup of coffee" (WPZ 44). Furthermore, the unhappy marriage that Firdaus, the heroine, is forced into by her uncle's wife is one in which she endures cruelty and persecution. When Firdaus notices a piece of food left in the trash can, the husband, Sheik Mahamoud, is shown as a very cruel and spiteful man who beats him ruthlessly. Happiness, annoyance, and dissatisfaction characterize the heroine's married life with her spouse. After she returns from visiting her uncle's home to seek his assistance following a harsh beating at the hands of her abusive husband, the spouse becomes more violent and aggressive

towards her. "Women's plights become double or even triple when they get married." (Zubair, 2018) Then he jumped on me like a crazy dog, she says regretfully. Drops of putrefying pus were leaking from the hole in his swelling. This time, I didn't look away or cover my nose. It was as if all of my vitality had been drained out of me as I passively gave my face to his face and my body to his body. He once kicked me in all directions with his shoe. I developed bruises and edema all over my body. He struck me one day with a big stick until my ears and nose were bleeding. "I departed as a result. However, I skipped my uncle's place this time around. I had bruises on my cheeks and puffy eyes as I strolled through the streets." (WPZ 46-47)

The statement above does represent the heroine's unease and disgust with the marriage affair that her uncle's wife forces her into. Her uncle's wife found her the greatest possible partner in this repulsive individual. When Firdaus saw some food scraps in the trash, her husband could have mercilessly beaten her till she bled. It's clear from the novel's premise that Firdaus leads a life of persecution. She was routinely the victim of some sort of abuse in all of her interactions with both men and women. She also intends to leave her abusive husband and go to an unidentified place, where she may be able to find work using her secondary school diploma, once she has had enough of his abuse and dehumanization. Firdaus meets Bayoumi, the coffee shop owner, another "wolf in sheep's clothing," while looking for work. Another cruel and repressive experience for the heroine is Firdaus's meeting with Bayoumi, which creates the conditions for her sexual harassment, molestation, and other forms of oppression. "The process of changing patterns in his life brings physical difficulty and psychological torture" (Zubair, 2021).

Beyond his sexual abuse of the heroine, he brings some of his gang members home to assault her sexually, turning the innocent Firdaus into a mere object of lust and prostitute. If the aunt hadn't abused her secret authority, the heroine's predictable, oppressive, and unhappy predicament would never have happened. In every interaction she has with men and women equally, she experiences cruelty and brutality. From Chinweizu's viewpoint, the heroine could have avoided all the acts of violence, molestation, and sexual harassment if her uncle's

wife had made constructive use of her latent power. When it comes to the battered Firdaus, Bayoumi initially comes out as being very modest, kind, and empathetic. Food, clean clothes, and a comfortable place to sleep are all provided by him pretentiously. Later on, she witnesses the same Bayoumi mercilessly hitting her and again abusing her for her sex. In the evenings, he also brings other guys who pay him to satiate their lust for her. She describes her bad experience miserably: "He took to locking me in the flat before going out. I now sleep on the floor in the other room. He would come back in the middle of the night, pull the cover away from me, slap my face, and then bear down on me with all his weight. I kept my eyes closed and abandoned my body. Then one night his body seemed heavier than before, and his breath smelled different, so I opened my eyes. The face above me was not Bayoumi's." (WPZ 66-67)

As the novel's plot is examined, it does indeed become clear that the heroine's existence is painful and unpleasant. She has suffered physical and sexual abuse, psychological anguish, and complete dehumanization in each interaction she has had with the males. After having sex with Firdaus, Bayoumi's companion strikes her repeatedly on the breasts and belly, sinking his teeth into her shoulder and abusing her and her parents in the process, leaving the readers perplexed and stunned (WPZ 67). Unsurprisingly, Firdaus, the heroine, laments the following: "I became aware of the fact that I hated all men, but for long years I had hidden this secret carefully. The men that I hated most of all were those who tried to give me advice or told me that they wanted to rescue me from the life I was leading. I used to hate them more than the others because they thought they were better than I and could help me change my life" (WPZ 88)

Additionally, the theme of women mistreating each other is starkly depicted in the interactions between Firdaus and Sharifa Salah El-Dine. When Firdaus flees from the unscrupulous Bayoumi, she inadvertently falls into a more harmful snare set by Sharifa Salah on her path. Sharifa, without a hint of regret, exposes her brutal and malevolent nature, declaring that despite her outward softness, "my heart is cruel, and my bites are deadly" (WPZ, p. 54). Her heart is unforgiving, and her actions are vicious. She cunningly manipulates Firdaus into the

sex trade, exploiting the naïve young woman for her profit. Firdaus suffers extreme exploitation, being forced to engage with men willing to pay dearly to gratify their desires. Astonishingly, she gains no financial reward from these encounters and finds her only respite in the brief moments spent in the bathroom. She describes her experience as "day and night, I lay on the bed, crucified, and every hour a man would come in, for they were all married, all educated, all carrying swollen leather bags and swollen leather wallets in their inner pockets" (WPZ 57). Firdaus remains ignorant of the sums Sharifa collects from the men she is made to serve.

Firdaus starts to become aware of her exploitation by Sharifa when Fawzy, a regular client, points out that Sharifa is taking advantage of her. He warns Firdaus not to confuse business with pleasure, as Sharifa is the one profiting from Firdaus's exploitation. This realization prompts Firdaus to leave her life of prostitution under Sharifa, taking only a few clothes with her as she aims to become one of the most well-compensated sex workers in the city on her terms. This paper argues that the harrowing experiences Firdaus endures are largely due to the actions of other women in her life, such as her aunt's misjudgment and her uncle's wife's poor choice in finding her a husband. The discussion makes it clear that while men also contribute to her suffering, it is the actions of women that create the environment for such oppression and subjugation to occur. The key takeaway is that Firdaus's tragic circumstances could have been prevented if not for these betrayals by women in her life.

## 5.1 Discussion

The story vividly portrays the heroine's struggle against those who hold her back. El Saadawi presents a heroine who is steadfast and eager for education. Since her earliest years, Firdaus has harbored aspirations for higher learning. As her uncle departs for his studies at El-Azhar University, she expresses a desire to join him there. However, he laughs at her naivety and informs her that "El-Azhar is exclusively for males," which starkly emphasizes the gender-based obstacles she encounters in her quest for knowledge.

Disappointed by her uncle's reaction, Firdaus starts to reflect on her identity and future as she heads

home. She finds herself asking deep questions like, "What is my purpose? Who was my father? Am I destined to spend my days doing menial tasks like cleaning animal pens, carrying dung, mixing dough, and baking bread?" These thoughts become more pronounced, especially as she contemplates the domestic tasks assigned by her mother. When she returns home, she feels like an outsider, observing the mud walls as if she's seeing them for the first time. She feels disconnected, as though she wasn't born there but rather dropped from the sky or risen from the ground into a world where she doesn't fit in. This newfound awareness makes her question why she must endure such a life. Firdaus' drive to get a university education and her critical view of her strenuous and repressive existence are key to her quest for liberation.

As the story unfolds, the heroine's journey through prostitution, introduced by Sherifa, brings her to a turning point. Before becoming a prostitute, she suffers sexual exploitation by Bayoumi, his associates, and then Sherifat. Even after fleeing her home, she continues to be used by police and men on the streets without compensation. However, her perspective shifts when a sophisticated client gives her ten pounds for her time, an amount she's never seen before in her line of work. Typically, she would expect only a few coins, or at most one pound. When she holds the ten-pound notes, she describes a moment of clarity, "as if he had lifted a veil from my eyes and was seeing for the first time." (WPZ, p. 64)

This awakening is crucial for her to reassess her role in the world of sex work. With newfound clarity, Firdaus declares with conviction that she no longer fears the darkness of the night or the dangers of the streets. "I was no longer afraid. Nothing in the streets was capable of scaring me any longer" (WPZ, p. 61). This newfound courage signifies a deep transformation within her. El Saadawi appears to be highlighting that financial autonomy is key to liberating an oppressed woman, a freedom Firdaus has longed for, exemplified by her ambition for higher education. She now feels a sense of release from her previous constraints, experiencing a rebirth where her mind and body are entirely under her control. Firdaus shares with us her newfound autonomy, now able to choose where she lives, what she eats, and whom she associates with based

on her preferences, even if it's simply because a man is neat and well-groomed. She would no longer be swayed by her aunt or anyone else to marry against her will. At this stage, it's really important to highlight that Firdaus has managed to free herself, at least for a while, from the oppressive and dehumanizing circumstances that she has been subjected to.

Firdaus, working at a big company, aims to gain respect after her past as a sex worker was marked by harassment and mistreatment. In a short span, she achieves the respect she craves and is "considered one of the best employees in the company." (WPZ 77). Gaining this respect wasn't easy; she stood her ground and didn't let any high-ranking officials take advantage of her sexually. As she states, "I had no wish to humiliate my body... I even refused invitations to lunch or a drive along the Nile" (WPZ 75). She wouldn't compromise her dignity. All this was crucial for her to move beyond her troubled history.

Yeah, it's messed up how Sharifa, who was supposed to be like a mother to Firdaus, betrayed her and dragged her into prostitution. It's heartbreaking that Firdaus didn't even realize how messed up her situation was until Di'aa straight-up told her that "you are not respectable" (WPZ 70). But that wake-up call was what she needed to say goodbye to that life and prove to herself that she could earn the self-respect and dignity she deserved. It is now abundantly evident that Firdaus has been able to transform her perception of herself, even as a prostitute, and that she has taken control of her destiny to prosperously alter her standing to the social point of view that previously viewed her as perverted and unclean. She felt that her career had shackled her, but she was able to free herself if only temporarily. She musters the guts to smack the wealthy prince firmly in the face, and it is precisely this same confidence in her that motivates Firdaus to kill the pimp who extorts money from her. Firdaus' two deeds demonstrate that if a woman is determined enough, she may be a threat to males just as she is to other women. Thus, it is crucial to emphasize that the message that such a decision and the outcomes present to us are broad. It makes a strong statement about how repressed women are in general. It conveys a powerful message that women have the power to alter their circumstances and

status in life. While it's true that Firdaus goes back to prostitution, this return itself represents a search for long-awaited and sought emancipation, a demonstration of choice and independence, and an assessment of a deeper mentality. Put differently, Firdaus's realization that other female employees serve high-level executives without expecting anything in return be it a small raise in pay, a daily ride in their fancy cars, or even just a simple lunch out plays a significant role in her decision-making process now that she has achieved the much-coveted respectability. She chooses her former life once more at this point, drawing a comparison between it and the inexpensive "prostitution" that is occurring in the offices. In her former life, she was among the most expensive prostitutes in Cairo. This subsequent entry into the drama turns quite deliberate and voluntary. It presents Firdaus as a lady who knows what she wants and pursues it despite all obstacles. Women need to be this determined to successfully alter their oppressed situation in society.

In Nawal El Saadawi's *Women at Point Zero*, the journey of the protagonist is unsettling as she's led towards a tragic end. El Saadawi skillfully crafts a bold and defiant character, yet shockingly, the freedom she fights for eludes her. To do right by the character, especially considering the murder she commits, it's essential to blend the local culture, religious beliefs, and Egypt's legal framework. Indeed, in any society that respects the rule of law, taking a life is unequivocally a crime. Still, it's recognized that in many cultures, religions, and legal systems, self-defense against a lethal threat is legally justified, both under Islamic law and secular constitutions. "Muslims have felt targeted because of their ethnic and religious identity thereby fueling discussion on Arab/Muslim identity in this new light." (Zubair, 2018)

El Saadawi's narrative exposes the brutal exploitation of Firdaus by her pimp, Marzouk, who forcefully takes her earnings. When Firdaus attempts to escape the cycle of abuse by leaving prostitution, Marzouk violently strikes her. In the heat of the confrontation, as Marzouk draws a knife to kill Firdaus, she manages to turn the tables, seizing the weapon and using it against him in self-defense. This act of desperation highlights Firdaus's tragic situation her murder of Marzouk is a direct



result of her trying to protect her own life as she seeks a new path away from prostitution.

"I caught hold of the latch of the door to open it, but he

Lifted his arm up in the air and slapped me. I raised my

Hand even higher than he had done and brought it down

Violently on his face. The whites of his eyes went red.

His hand started to reach for the knife he carried in his

Pocket, but my hand was quicker than his. I raised the

Knife and buried it deep in his neck, pulled it out of his

Neck and then thrust it deep into his chest, pulled it out

Of his chest and plunged it deep into his belly". (WPZ 130)

Without a doubt, Firdaus kills Marzouk, her pimp, to protect herself from being cruelly murdered by the same pimp. The heroine is entitled to the full protection of the law, regardless of how we interpret it whether it is in the traditional constitution or the Islamic jurisprudence that Egyptian culture adheres to. When El Saadawi puts the heroine in a precarious scenario where she must be put to death just for killing a man who tried to end her life, the readers are left perplexed. Upon examining both the internal and external factors surrounding the heroine's murder, it becomes evident that her premature death was ludicrous and unwarranted. In addition, the heroine's liberation from her captor is too fleeting and incomplete after killing hi

## 6.1 Findings

### Internalized Patriarchy:

The book shows how certain women absorb and then reinforce patriarchal norms. For example, Firdaus' mother perpetuates the cycle of female subjugation by tolerating and even taking part in her husband's repressive activities.

### Complicity through Inaction:

Due to their passivity or acceptance of the status quo, a few of the novel's female characters could be viewed as complicit in their oppression. The dominant sociocultural factors at work may be seen

as shaping this as a form of survival or as a lack of agency.

### Social Conditioning:

The female characters in the book have been socialized from an early age to accept their place in a patriarchal society. When women believe in and defend the very rules that limit them, it can result in a type of self-oppression.

### Survival Strategies:

Firdaus herself partakes in actions, such as becoming a prostitute that could be interpreted as a continuation of her enslavement. But these behaviors could equally be seen as survival tactics in a system that doesn't provide her with many other options.

### Patriarchy-Enforcing Women:

Occasionally, women take up the role of upholding patriarchal standards. In Firdaus's life, for instance, the women who severely criticize her decisions frequently adhere to the same oppressive norms.

### Sophisticated Interplay of Oppression and Agency:

The book depicts the intricate relationship between oppression and agency. It is crucial to take into account the limited options available to women and the societal influences that influence their behavior, even though it may seem as though they are complicit in their subjugation.

## 7.1 Conclusion

A collection of creative depictions of how Egyptians, particularly women, treat other women is El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*. Her book unquestionably shows how multifaceted the persecution of women is in her Afro-Arab society in Egypt. Their tyranny comes from their mothers, who run their home; from their husbands, who run their married lives; from the security guard and regular males on the street; and lastly, from other women. El Saadawi's book poses the question of who should be held accountable for being the main planner behind women's subjugation in her male-dominated culture of Egypt. Hence, the novelist critically examines the collective role played by women in the subjugation and exploitation of other

women. It is perhaps important to emphasize that the heroine has always been oppressed, as we have seen from the previous discussion, by both men and women. But if Sherifa Sallah, her uncle's wife, and other women had used their hidden power for the benefit of the heroine, all of this would have prevented the heroine's unavoidable act of murdering a pimp, as well as the oppression she endured in her married home, her life of prostitution, and sexual harassment from both regular men and the security guard on the street. Consequently, Sherifa Salah El Dine, the lady who enticed Firdaus into the world of prostitution, and her uncle's wife's exploitation of the secret power are largely to blame for Firdaus' unhappy life, her life of brutality, molestation, and abuse. Therefore, by analyzing El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* from both an internal and external perspective, this thesis argues forcefully that women, not men, are the main architects of women's oppression and subordination. Because of this, Nawal El Adawi's portrayal of women's subjugation is distinct and predominantly from the perspective of the matriarchy.

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