



بحوث قسم اللغة الإنجليزية



**Reversed Scales and Self Rebellion in Nawal El
Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*: A Third Wave**

Feminist Study

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الملخص:

يهدف هذا البحث الى دراسة رواية امرأة عند نقطة الصفر للكاتبة المصرية والناشطة السياسية والنسوية والطبية النفسية نوال السعداوي والتي تحكى قصة حقيقية لنزيلة في سجن طرة محكوم عليها بالإعدام بتهمة القتل حيث قامت بقتل القواد الذي كان يهددها بالقتل و الاستيلاء على أموالها و تم الحكم عليها بالإعدام. قامت السجينة بسرد حكايتها ليلة الإعدام لنوال السعداوي بصفتها الطبيبة النفسية. تكشف الرواية عن بعض الممارسات ضد المرأة في ذلك الزمن في النصف الثاني من القرن الماضي والتي تعكس السمات المميزة للموجة الثالثة من النظرية النسوية وسيتم تتبع بعض هذه السمات مثل العنف الجنسي وتعدد النماذج النسائية والاستقلال الاقتصادي للمرأة ورفض المجتمع للمساواة الجنسية بين الرجل والمرأة و ختان المرأة وعدم المساواة الفعلية بين الجنسين في المجتمع.

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Abstract: This paper tries to investigate Nawal El Saadawi's novel, *Woman at Point Zero* (1975), from the point of view of reversed values and inverted scales. The study

displays the difference between social ethics and the real practices in Egyptian Society from the point of view of Nawal El Saadawi (1931–2021). This reveals that El Saadawi urges women to struggle and revolt against their societies, calling real equality with men. The study assumes that El Saadawi adopts the third wave feminism. It traces identity that is related to sex and the existence of different female models, economic independence, social refusal of male–female sexual equality and circumcision, violence, and informal social inequality with men, as aspects of the third wave feminism.

Keywords: Third Wave Feminism, Self-Rebellion, Economic, Sexual and Social Ethics.

Introduction

Nawal El Saadawi (1931), in *Woman at Point Zero*, says, “to be a criminal one must be a man....you are all criminals, all of you: the fathers, the uncles, the husbands, the pimps, the lawyers, the doctors, the journalists and all men of all professions” (129). Through the heroine, Firdaus, El Saadawi sometimes justifies the female killer, as some men deserve to be killed: “...she is innocent, and does not deserve to be hanged; they are them [men] who deserve to be hanged” (15). The study focuses on the novel, *Woman at Point Zero*, that has many elements of third-wave feminism. These elements

are obvious in the female characters of this novel. As an Egyptian Activist, El Saadawi focuses on the feminist movements, with the third wave being her main concern in all her fiction.

Third-wave feminism (1960s-1980s), the study's main concern, deals with a variety of things in women's rights, such as the accuracy of gender equality (Stein 1), with violence being escalated against women in many countries in the West as well as in the East. This wave is about acceptance and a true understanding of the term 'feminism', with this wave being used to describe a form of women's rights which discusses concepts such as, "global sisterhood and the universality of gender, which supposed that women could stand outside national formations...recognize[s] nationality, along with race, class... sexuality and ethnicity, as a significant axis of gender differentiation among women" (Zwicker 359). Third-Wave feminism accepts the "additional subjectivities of age, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation" (Meskell 27). Sara Mills says that feminism affects deeply the contexts and their interpretations and summarizes third-wave feminism in the following elements: being "aware of the context of words... It must be aware of the different levels of sexism within a text... it must analyze gender in relation to race, class and other variables" (241). The study uses Sara Mills's elements concentrating on the following elements of third-wave feminism: different female models and gender identity, economic independence

and informal social equality, sexual freedom and sexual violence. The analysis is conducted from the point of view of the relationship between women and men in their societies. The study also tackles social ethics, oppression against women, similarities and differences in the treatments of women and men. The reversed values practiced against women in the societies are going to be traced in Nawal El-Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*. As an Egyptian Activist, El Saadawi concentrates on feminist issues as one of the main concerns in her writings as well as in her life, particularly the social, economic and sexual patriarchal control over women which represent the elements of third-wave feminism. "Objectification and stereotyping of women in the Middle East on the part of patriarchy has been a debatable issue in the major feminist novels written by the women novelists." (Dar 13).

Nawal El-Saadawi, an Egyptian doctor, writer and activist, is one of the most famous feminist figures in the Middle East. One of her important works is *Woman at Point Zero* (1975). She writes more than 50 books and most of them are translated into more than 30 languages. Nawal El-Saadawi is a pioneer in the field of interdisciplinary studies where she says in an interview: "I graduated from the Faculty of Medicine ignorant, and I read in history, philosophy, medicine, religions

and psychology to decompose what the education did by separating these elements” (Hefny n. pag). She links between sex, religions, customs and the human soul. She also says that “in order for the writer to be creative, he should study the body well and learn about the emergence of the universe and religions .Creativity is the link between these elements in man” (1). She also says that “one needs the courage to escape from the prison of motherhood, idealism and concepts of morality and obedience” (1). She describes violence and extremism, features of the of the third-wave feminism in the east, saying:

... the concept of violence did not expand to include intellectual and cultural harassment of women, which is violence directed against them to hide their face and head with the veil. Concealment is the abolition of existence, a woman without a face or without a head, is a person with an amputated face or a beheaded person. Is there more violence than this? We witness it every day without seeing it or feeling that it is violence. Rather, the woman herself does not feel it, the most dangerous type of violence is intangible. (La Mahsous1)

Nawal El Saadawi has her own definition of feminism. She believes that “feminism includes everything. It is social justice, political justice, sexual justice...It is the link between medicine, literature, politics, economics, psychology and history... You cannot understand the oppression of women

without this."(Women Inspiring 1). She has a special interest in scientific literary writing as she likes to write about science from a literary point of view. She says that the living human conscience is fair by nature rather than by the fear of fire or the desire for Paradise. She also says that creativity is no longer considered a virtue but rather obedience, memorizing texts and performing rituals. For the writer to be creative, he/she should study the body well and learn about the emergence of the universe and religions .Creativity is the link between elements in man. (Hefny n. pag)

El Saadawi's detention makes her famous and attracts world's attention towards her works. She says, after being imprisoned, "danger has been a part of my life ever since I picked up a pen and wrote. Nothing is more perilous than truth in a world that lies"(Lakemfa n.pag). She is celebrated by non-Arab countries and nominated for the Nobel Prize .Her name continues as one of the most important names of feminist literature. She also says that there is a dual moral standard in our societies .Every human being has two lives, with the public life being totally contrary to the private one. That is because society itself is dual in traditions, religion, politics and morals:

Dr. El Saadawi was originally trained as a psychiatrist, but her medical work led her to develop highly critical views about women's sexual, social and legal treatment in Egypt and all

Islamic societies. Consequentially, El Saadawi began to publish fictional and critical work exploring these politically loaded and socially taboo topics, for which she was dismissed from her position as Director of Public Health and was later imprisoned. (Ball 215)

The writings of Nawal El-Saadawi attract many researchers and critics all over the world to study and discuss their topics and opinions, especially those ideas dealing with social traditions. Mervat Hatem describes Nawal El Saadawi, saying that the latter is: “ .. the one Arab feminist best known for the Western Readers. Because she also occupies a special position in the contemporary history of the Egyptian women’s movement, her work raises many questions about the relation of the feminist project to women’s experience in a patriarchal society(1). Muhammad Youssef Suwaed says that El Saadawi’s feminist agenda is a specific objective within a wider conception of comprehensive social liberty, exhibited in her view and expressed in many of her writings. To El Saadawi, liberation of women is impossible within a hierarchical, oppressive social system(3). All of these views are just a few of many that have been written about Nawal El Saadawi and her abilities to articulate women's issues in an eastern society. The researcher tackles one of her works that explains her points of view through the representation of characters, ideas and

incidents. Gloria Fwangyil stresses the oppression of women in some countries of the world, saying:

Women are subjected to male oppression and suppression at various stages of life. Unfortunately, female oppression is deeply ingrained in the culture of the societies which ensures the continuation of patriarchal control. This situation makes it impossible for women to seek ways of liberating themselves because doing so will be tantamount to challenging the age-long tradition and customs of the people (Cradle 15).

Muhammad Youssef Suwaed sheds light on the reason why El Saadawi treats the issue of oppressed women as she herself was brought up in an oppressive society: “Nawal El Saadawi was born into a traditional society ruled by outdated customs and false interpretations of religious scripts wherein women were born inferior to men. As a young woman, she absolutely refused to accept these conventions and rebelled against all aspects of female discrimination, exploitation and violation” (236). Fwangyil explores the different conditions of oppression that women face every day in “phallogocentric societies”, through El Saadawi’s novel, *Woman at Point Zero*. She mentions the different aspects of oppression such as the “domestic violence, sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, child-brides, bride-burning, discrimination in religious institutions and workplace and other harmful cultural practices

that inhibit the personal development of women in the society”(Cradle 16). El Saadawi spent all her life looking for freedom of life, thought, feelings and will for herself and for all women all over the world:

My freedom does not derive from weak cells of my body's cells, and my restrictions do not stem from a fear of flimsy virginity torn apart by random wrongs or made by the stitches of knowledge. I put my restrictions myself when I want restrictions, and I practice freedom by my own will as I understand freedom (A Doctor's Dairy 78).

On the other hand, some critics, like Daphne Gale, see that ElSaadawi's writings deal with “problems in her own society and radically engenders women's varied means of negotiating a new subjectivity, including women having to resort to murder to survive” (Alqahtani 102). He sees that El Saadawi's writings are raw and not refined to be among the major works of literature, Anastasia Valassopoulos confirms the importance of this rawness because El Saadawi is involved in a struggle for the emancipation of the spirit”(102). Vassopoulos demonstrates that the works of El Saadawi show the possibility of establishing universal feminism: “El Saadawi aims at exposing the local structures of domination in order to engage with the global discourse of women” (103).She writes:

I rode my small car with shameful head, ashamed of myself, ashamed of my life, ashamed of my lies, and ashamed

of my fear, and I saw people running in the streets, to their lies and hypocrisy, and I spotted newspapers raised installs, full of false headlines, false flags raised everywhere, I stepped on the gas pedal with all my strength, as if I was stepping on the whole world, and I realized as I was pulling over the car suddenly, before it is crashed with the world, that Firdaus was braver than me (Zero 69).

The novel shows “the way and means through which the self of woman is gendered, oppressed, stereotyped and objectified. The novel is an emphatic and vociferous narrative documenting the female suffering in the male-dominated society. The novel is hugely inclined towards the emancipation of women” (Dar 15).

Third Wave Feminism in *Woman at Point Zero* (1975):

Different Female Models, Social and Economic Inequality and Sexual Violence:

The New York Times Book Review writes about El Saadawi writing this novel, saying, “Nawal El Saadawi writes with directness and passion, transforming the systematic brutalization of women into powerful allegory” (Dar 13). El-Saadawi was inspired by the story of *Woman at Point Zero* from a real event when she met a female prisoner accused of murder in El Qanater prison, where El-Saadawi was doing a

case study as a psychiatrist in that prison. This prisoner did not want to tell her story to anyone at first; then she agreed the night before her execution. The story begins with a psychiatrist trying to talk to a special prisoner and murderess in Al Qanater prison. She never eats or sleeps or speaks with anyone and does not accept visitors, which is unusual for a prisoner like her who is facing murder crime and waiting for the execution of the death sentence. There are here two opposite types of women, the doctor who is doing her job interviewing prisoners as an ordinary successful woman, and the prisoner who is a free woman despite her failure and prison. The prisoner has the power and determination to refuse to meet the doctor or accept the interview against her will. There is a reversed unexpected action. The prisoned woman is, in reality, free to refuse while the socially successful doctor is unable to behave in the same freedom:

I tried to see Firdaus, but all my attempts failed, and my psychological research became threatened, and even my whole life seemed to be ahead my eyes were failing or threatened with failure, and I felt self-confidence starting to shake or really shake. I had such cruel moments that I thought that this murderous woman who would be killed after few days is better than me. And beside her, I am nothing; a small ant What kind of woman is she? And If she rejects me, does that mean that she is better than me? But she also refused to address the country president!. (16)

The psychiatrist, Nawal El Saadawi, feels here that the "killer" Firdaus is stronger than her and is different from any other woman. The third wave element of different female models is clear from the very beginning of the story. El Saadawi says that Firdaus is a more "real woman" than anyone she met. She becomes a symbol of truth, being cleared of all that is false and dishonest in society. She is a feminist model who fights to death for her rights. She kills a man to protect herself, to gain freedom and to achieve self-determination. She can refuse to meet El Saadawi or talk to her. She has control over herself despite being in prison, while the doctor does not have the freedom to live outside the bars. Prison does not prevent Firdaus's freedom while outside women are imprisoned in the restrictions of conventions and feelings. Freedom is not freedom of movement but freedom of decision-making. Prison condemns the world that desires to deprive Firdaus of her freedom but could not do that. Imprisonment has made Firdaus freer and her personality stronger than at any other time of her life. Prison bars could not deprive Firdaus of her freedom to see who she wants and to talk to whoever she likes. Despite prison, she has complete power over her will. Many of the free people outside those bars are unable to do what Firdaus can. Anyone who cannot

easily express his opinion is the real prisoner. Prison and death have no power over Firdaus.

When the psychiatrist meets Firdaus, she is certain that the latter is not the one who can kill anyone one day. Her innocent face does not suggest that she is a murderess or a criminal. The name “Firdaus” refers to her innocence just like that of Paradise. The psychiatrist, at the time, feels distrustful. Firdaus accepts the death sentence with full force and steadfastness. El-Saadawi here underlines a serious contradiction in a society that has a reversed balance in its principles, ethics and standards. Firdaus is hanged because she kills a man who used to oppress her and others too. Society may condemn the victim and exonerate the perpetrator. Firdaus says, “I am a killer, but I have committed no crime. Like you, I kill only criminals” (109). The girl with the name and innocent features has been oppressed by society and accused of the most heinous crimes and sentenced to death without hearing her cries. Society has not responded to her, or saved or protected her from childhood violators of her body and her innocence. Firdaus realizes that all criminals are men:

I read about a ruler who had several female slaves and prostitutes, like the number of his army's soldiers, and another ruler who would only occupy himself with wine, women and flogging slaves with whips, and another ruler who does not love women, but torments for war, murder and torture men,

and a mad ruler of himself and his greatness, who does not recognize another man rather than himself in the country, and a ruler who loves plots, maneuvers, and lies to people and history. They are all men, and their souls are greedy and deformed and their lust for money, sex, and power have no limits or censorship, and that they corrupt and plunder people, and they have strong voices, their voice is convincing, their words are smooth, and their arrows are poisoned. (27)

El Saadawi here is describing the utmost strength of the feminist woman. El Saadawi wonders why Firdaus decides not to plea for forgiveness to live longer, and why Firdaus remains so calm in the face of approaching death. Firdaus explains that she is not afraid of death. In fact, she is looking forward to it. Since she spent her whole life under male's control, and because that life never brought her any happiness, she looks forward to ending it. She believes that she is better than all men in her life. She scorns those rulers because they are deceivers and hypocrites. They cheat their people and they have false powers. Despite all their authority, they are full of fear of death and fear of losing power. Firdaus discovers how weak men are even if they are socially superior when, as a prostitute, she refuses to sleep with some of them. They panic and offer her more money, simply because it scares them to think that their power may not be as far as they think it is. However, even

though Firdaus proves, in this way, that her strength is incomplete, she knows full well that her strength is more dangerous. Only through death will she be free from them. Choosing death is one of the first real choices Firdaus has ever made, and in doing so, she is challenging the strength of those who believe they are punishing her. Firdaus also makes it clear that she will die before these strong men die. She would be a leader; she will no longer fear the thing that all those powerful hypocrites fear the most, death. Finally, in this way, she can feel superior to men.

Firdaus has shown more dignity and freedom than those around her, more than all the society. A female prisoner decides or refuses to talk and meet others, and she agrees or refuses to host a psychotherapist. Here, Nawal El-Saadawi explores the human souls full of contradictions and complications. The innocent seems murderous and the murderer seems innocent. The community is responsible for leading Firdaus to commit her crime, despite her being innocent and not a criminal by nature. The community is to blame rather than Firdaus. El Saadawi here explores the reasons of the patriarchal society subjugating women and forcing them to sink in a life of vice and exploiting them emotionally, physically and psychologically to their power. Firdaus returns to call the doctor at the time she chooses to tell her story.

El Saadawi shows the element of sexual violence in Firdaus's childhood. Firdaus describes a miserable child, violated physically, emotionally and psychologically by father and uncle, who used to beat her mother and send her to work in the fields and raise goats. There she meets Muhammadeen, a child who plays the game "Groom and Bride", violating her body. She feels the first fun moments in her life. But suddenly these moments end forever after the circumcision process and her family prevents her from going to the field again where she no longer sees Muhammadeen. Later, the uncle plays the role of Mohammedeen and more than that, but the pleasure has gone forever with that process. Here, El Saadawi illustrates the seriousness of social traditions and the fear of sick people in society from the shame and scandal, with which that the society stigmatizes the female only, depriving the girl of her femininity and lust through circumcision. Although this process did not stop the shame, men continued to violate Firdaus's innocent childhood body, whether she felt it or not. Feeling will not stop crime and not feeling will not turn society virtuous.

The writings of Nawal El-Saadawi, especially this novel, had a great impact, shedding light on this offensive process and calling for changing such social customs and traditions in eastern societies. Here, Nawal El Saadawi shows the impact of

the strict application of social traditions on the denial of women even enjoying the femininity created by God. Uncle's interest in Firdaus increases; then he marries and moves away from Firdaus, sending her to a boarding school. The girl is jealous of her uncle's wife, who has taken all the love, affection, attention and care. Firdaus then begins to love her teacher at school, which is far away from her.

After Firdaus graduates, her aunt persuades her uncle to let Firdaus marry Sheikh Mahmoud, a 40-year-old virtuous man who only needs a dutiful wife. This is the only personal quality of the virtuous wife of all Firdaus's men. Here is another type of physical and sexual violence. Firdaus tries to reject the marriage, but she is forced to marry him like most of the girls in the east at that time. Sheikh Mahmoud suffers from a sore in his chin that is disgusting for Firdaus. Her husband is just another man who used to beat her several times just because he is eastern and it is accepted in the east to beat wives: "He hit me once with the heel of the shoe until my face and body were swollen, so I left his house and went to my uncle, but he told me: All husbands beat their wives, and the virtuous wife is not to complain about her husband, and her duty is complete obedience" (37). It is clear in this passage that Firdaus is suffering physical violence, economic and social inequality with men who they used to beat their wives, depriving them of food and comfort. Firdaus does not even

find help or shelter in her uncle's house. On the contrary, he neglects her and returns her to Sheikh Mahmoud, who continues to abuse her sexually, raping her, despite being a husband. She rejects him:

Why are you pissing me off then? Why do you keep your face from mine? Is my appearance ugly? Do I smell bad? Why do you keep your nose away whenever I am close to you? And I feel like a mad dog, and rotten-smelling pus drops are falling from the hole in the tumor. I did not remove my face, I did not turn my nose away, I left my face under his face, I left my body under his body, I left it without will, without resistance, without any movement and without any life, as if it is a dead body, or a piece of furniture I leave it where it is, or a shoe I take off and leave under any seat (37).

Third-wave's element of sexual violence, even under the umbrella of formal marriage, is clear here. Emotional and sexual violence are more harmful than a physical abuse of women. Having been repeatedly abused physically, sexually and psychologically, Firdaus escapes and settles in a café owned by Bayoumi, who offers her tea and shelter, making use of her body in return: "Nobody asked me before: Do you like oranges or tangerines? My father did not buy us fruit, and my uncle or my husband was buying without asking me... And I

said: tangerines, and after he bought tangerines, I realized that I liked oranges; But because tangerines were cheaper, I asked for them (39)". Firdaus is accustomed that men determine everything for her and lead her life without caring about her will. Bayoumi asks Firdaus this striking question as she has never been offered a choice before. Her father used to decide everything for the whole family and later her uncle and husband never asked her about her opinion. That is why she makes the wrong choice after some hesitation. She says tangerine while she prefers oranges. She says that automatically as oranges are more expensive. Unconsciously, she chooses the cheaper option to escape her husband's violent punishment, although she no longer lives with him. Now, she realizes that she can make her own choice and decide for the first time in her life.

After several months, Firdaus asks Bayoumi to help her own a place and a job. He starts to hurt her, beat, lock up, sends his friends to assault and rape her in return. One day she can escape again with the help of her neighbor, the carpenter, who opens the door and lets her run away. Firdaus's departure from Bayoumi's house is harder than her escape from Sheikh Mahmoud's house as she asks for the help of neighbors. Despite his bad treatment, Bayoumi creates in Firdaus the ability to decide and choose for herself and her life and changes the way she sees life. Firdaus becomes an independent woman,

even a prostitute who can make choices for herself. She has a false sense of independence until she falls in the hands of Marzouk, the pimp who has control over her. Then she feels again that she is still just a woman under the control of men. After escaping from Bayoumi's house Firdaus falls into the hands of Sharifa Salah El-Din, who makes her a prostitute. Sharifa is another type of women who suffers from the power and oppression of men. Although she seems strong independent woman, yet she is just another victim of men in her life: "What did the dog do to you? They are all dogs under different names: who started: your father, your brother, your uncle? My body twitched over the stone bench: My uncle! (41)".

Firdaus finds delicious food and nice clothes for the first time in her life. But she does not find pleasure. Sharifa tries to teach Firdaus her principles, telling her if she wants to triumph over life, she must be stronger and harsher as all men are the same. Firdaus has been looking at Sharifa as a strong independent woman until she hears Sharifa talking to her lover Fawzi, who wants to take Firdaus as a mistress too, and when Sharifa gets angry with him, he beats and rapes her. Firdaus then discovers that even Sharifa, the symbol of a strong woman in her life, is also weak and oppressed by men, like any ordinary eastern woman. Firdaus then realizes that Sharifa, the leader,

has no real power and is subject to the power and oppression of another man. Firdaus then escapes, realizing that men invent prostitution, dominate the world of the earth and the world of heaven and force women to sell their bodies for a price.

Nawal El-Saadawi sheds light on how men oppress women in the east. This has reached its maximum level when virtuous women have become without prices, while prostitutes take prices, married women and employees are forced to sexual relations in order to take their rights. They sell their bodies free of charge, while prostitutes take money in return. Here values are reversed in the eyes of Nawal El Saadawi; the virtuous is condemned and the condemned is honorable. The prostitute gives her body willingly and in public, while virtuous women are secretly forced. Here Nawal El Saadawi reveals oppression against women, as shown here in these ideas with all cruelty and violence:

And she said: All people die, Firdaus, and I will die, and you will die, but what is important is that you know how to live. I said: How do I live? Life is cruel, and only those who are harder than life live, Firdaus. Life is cruel, and only those who are crueller live. I said, but you are not cruel, so how do you live, Sharifa? She said: I am very cruel. I said: But you are delicate and soft. She said: My skin is soft, but my heart is cruel, and its sting is fatal. I said: Like a snake? She said: Yes, like a snake, and a snake and life are one thing, Firdaus. If the snake

knows that you are not a snake-like it, it will sting you, and if the snake knows that you are not stinging it will sting you. (42)

These words are the first lesson Sharifa gives to Firdaus, to be independent. Here El Saadawi shows the way different types of women defend their identity through false power over men. Firdaus asks Sharifa once that she does not feel the pleasure and is shocked by the latter's answer: "And I said to Sharifa one day: Why don't I feel pleasure, Sharifa? Sharifa said: We work, Firdaus, and work is work, do not confuse work with feeling. I said: But I want to feel, Sharifa. Sharifa said: Firdaus, the feeling will give you nothing but pain" (43). Firdaus realizes that even Sharifa, the symbol of a strong independent woman, is nothing but just another type of woman under the control of man and is suffering from his oppression: "I [Fawzi] haven't beaten you [Sharifa] for a long time, and you seem to have longed for beating. If you hit me, I'll hit you, Fawzi. This is beautiful, and we will see who is victorious. - If you lay your hand on me, Fawzi, I will bring you Shawky." (46)

Firdaus walks in the street, is picked up by a strange young man, and sleeps with him without being disgusted. Then he gives her 10 pounds. Firdaus then wakes up to a new fact that she can subdue men in her body as if she had solved the

mystery that she had longed for. She can now decide whom she wants or refuses, decides the price and forces them to submit to her own will. For the first time, Firdaus gains self-confidence when she feels that she has a price as the others have no price. She becomes wealthy with a cook and a maid. She also forms strong friendships and relationships with important people. She gets false independence like that of Sharifa: “How much of my life pass before I owned myself and my body? How old do I become before I tighten myself and my body from the grip of others? So, I choose the food that I eat, and I choose the house in which I live, and I refuse the man I am averse to, and I choose men who are clean in morals and body!” (51).

Another type of male oppression and humiliation to Firdaus is her friend , Diyaa, who calls her “disrespectful”, which makes her feel deeply humiliated. Although men are responsible for her falling in humiliation, yet she realizes a new principle through Diyaa, being socially respectable. Firdaus ,in return, despises all men and avenges herself on them all through her body. But after Diyaa’s conversation with her, she decides not to return to prostitution:

One word that shed light on my life, I saw it for what it is, and tore the veil from my eyes: ‘Respected’, I did not know before, and not knowing was better. One word ran like an arrow into my head... even if I become miserable, tormented,

starved, and naked. I will be a respectable woman at any cost. (52-53)

She works as a clerk in a local office and refuses to give her body to her superiors to be promoted. El-Saadawi refuses that model of women who feels threatened to lose her future or some benefits. "If the body of a woman is subjected to physical violence and inhuman treatment, her soul is the target of negative essentialism, exploitative patriarchal discourse and ideology." (Dar 13) Although the new job gives Firdaus social respect, she gains much less money than before. Her conditions have become harsher, which deprives her of the independence and the freedom she highly values. Firdaus loves her colleague Ibrahim and this love changes her completely and cures her temporarily of the wounds of other men: "Love made me another person, and love made life beautiful in my eyes." (58) But suddenly Ibrahim announces his engagement with the daughter of their boss. Here Ibrahim explains his desire to benefit from this marriage in his career. Firdaus realizes that Ibrahim has deceived her, manipulating her sincere feelings and exploiting her in the name of love. Like other men, Ibrahim blackmails Firdaus emotionally: "Never in my life have I known such pain, and when I was a prostitute, my pain was less severe.... When I was a prostitute, I was not myself, and my feeling was not my own, and nothing was hurting me like this pain that I felt" (59). This is how Nawal

El-Saadawi once again sheds light on the principles reflected in society. When Firdaus was experiencing a sinful profession, the society rejected and despised her. When she wanted to gain respect, she got a job that the community appreciated, the situation for her did not change. There are those who want her body in exchange for promotion and those who blackmail her emotionally in the name of love and both see her only with the same previous look, her being disrespectful. The situation is still the same but what changed is the external demonstration only with respect and morality, but the goal of men around her is always the same. Firdaus returns to the same conclusion. Before she got well paid, but now men exploit her body without a price and against her will:

I realized that when I was a prostitute, I had more respect and value than all the employees of the company. My body was not squeezing between the bodies in the bus, and the body parts of the men were pushing against it from the front and the back. And the price of my body was not cheap, no more than a bonus, a dinner or a drive on the Nile, or just for pleasing the manager, or for avoiding the boss's anger. I spent these three years without being touched by any managers or seniors of the company. I did not want to abuse my body at such a low price, after I got used to high prices The employee is afraid of losing her job and becoming a prostitute, and she does not realize that the life of the prostitute may be

more valuable than her own. The employee pays the price for this deception fear of her life, health, body and mind, the most expensive thing for the cheapest thing. ... we are all prostitutes of varying prices. (54-55)

Firdaus realizes a new principle that all women are just different types of prostitutes. She is very disappointed that she must return to her former profession as a prostitute, to accumulate great wealth and become very influential: "I'd rather be a prostitute than a deceived saint." She realizes that truth: "Men force you to marry, then punish you with beatings, insults, and constant service. However, the women who are least deceived are prostitutes, and for the sake of marriage or love, women receive the most severe punishment." Her fame attracts the attention of Marzouk, a pimp with power and political relations, who threatens Firdaus with these relations and connections. Firdaus starts a new level of exploitation by men through their influence and power. Marzouk forces Firdaus to give him a large proportion of what she earns from prostitution. Firdaus's hatred of men increases day after day:

I hate men. I was afraid to reveal this long hatred Most of all I hated that man who was trying to preach me or tell me that he wanted to pull me out of what I was in. I used to hate him because he thought he was better than me, and that he was

able to save me. He thinks about saving me in order to assume the role of the savior hero who has failed to assume in other circumstances. He practices his supreme noble role over me. He feels his nobility when he reminds me of my degradation, as if he says to himself: I am noble and of high-ranking, trying to remove you, a fallen woman (61)

Society, in most of its aspects, calls for things contradicting with reality. Society pretends to be pious while it is full of vice, as Al-Saadawi embodies in her novel: “How much I have given without anything in return, as saints! I wanted nothing but love, to become myself, a respectful-self others would not despise, but I couldn’t reach to that; my sanctity as poor cannot be considered in the eyes of others as virtuous, but rather its weakness is more contemptuous than vice.” (60)

Firdaus tries to have a governmental job again, but Marzouk does not leave her alone; yet he forces her to return to prostitution. She understands that she is not free and cannot leave the profession when she wants. She is threatened with a knife and snatching the knife from Marzouk and stabs him to death. Firdaus feels that she has regained her freedom and life. Killing men and being thrown into prison as a punishment is a true freedom for Firdaus. What is the value of life outside the bars if her freedom is without her own will. She welcomes the

bars if she regains full will without having any man to abuse her body. El-Saadawi comes to the climax of incidents when Firdaus realizes that even very respectable authorities are deceiving themselves, claiming they are men of morals defending values but allowing themselves to sleep with prostitutes without being ashamed of themselves or without the society condemning them as it condemns prostitutes: "I do not know anything about patriotism, and that homeland ... robbed me of everything, even my honor and dignity...And I laughed at the paradox and moral duplicity, they take a prostitute to a man, they are pimps, and yet they speak respectfully of national and moral principles." (62)

Firdaus walks through the streets of the city freely and here is picked up by an Arab prince who agrees to offer 3000 pounds and after the completion of the deal she tells him that she has killed a man. The prince calls the police who arrests her and sentences her to death: "I am not as free as I imagined, and I am nothing but a physical machine that works day and night in order for some men of various professions to be extremely rich." (64) El-Saadawi says they sentenced her to death because they were afraid to let her live because "my life means their death and my death means their life. They want to live." Then she is imprisoned, and the doctor remains stunned by what she heard and learned from this tragic story. The doctor realizes

that Firdaus was right in what she did. She was the bravest of all those around her. She got rid of those who threatened her and ruined her life:

I do not want anyone to enslave me. He said: who told you that there is someone in the world who is not enslaved?! People, Firdaus, are two types: slaves and masters. I said: Let me be a master and not a slave. He said: How can you be one of the masters, Firdaus? Women alone cannot, so what if you are a woman and a prostitute? Don't you think that this is impossible? I said: I don't know the impossible (65).

Firdaus is a victim, not a perpetrator, a victim of a patriarchal society that exploits and enslaves women. To Firdaus, men look at women as just bodies for pleasure, ownership and exploitation. Firdaus is the victim of all men in her life and of society's racist view of women. By embodying Firdaus' personality, El-Saadawi refers to the bitter reality in eastern societies having inverted values and ethics. Eastern societies harbour many vices that, in the eyes of eastern men, are virtues. Although women and men are equal in the law of reward and punishment, society in the east divides them. For example, although the punishment of adultery in all divine religions is equal between men and women, eastern societies condemn women, dishonors and punishes them, leaving men, who seduce women, to commit adultery. These men are not

punished, and society does not look at them disgracefully, but often regard them as heroes. Even women themselves sometimes see men as legendary. In this way, women feel the victory over their rivals. A woman who commits the same act is criminalized by the community, denigrated, ostracized and condemned to shame forever throughout her life, even if she has sinned once in her lifetime: “I am a killer, not a criminal. I kill only criminals. no woman can be a criminal; Crime needs men... You are the criminals. Fathers, uncles, husbands, pimps, lawyers, doctors, journalists, and all men of all professions .. You are a dangerous, wild woman.. Because I told the truth, and the truth is savage and dangerous.” (67)

El-Saadawi ends the story with the power of Firdaus’s words on the doctor’s ears, the prison’s walls, the streets and the whole world that shakes out of the power of the truth, freedom and call for equality of the woman’s words: “... She causes terror in the whole world, the horror of deadly honesty, the horror of the simple brutal truth, the simplicity of death, the simplicity of a child who does not know lies, because the whole world lies, Firdaus had to pay a heavy price for honesty.” (69)

El Saadawi gives the solution to all oppression against women in many ways; First of all, social affairs must be separated from political matters. Second, equality and freedom must be practiced socially and taught through Education:

El Saadawi emphasizes her central and basic idea, discrimination of women, are a mark used by a pimp who says, 'there are two types of humans, masters and slaves.' She insisted that educational systems must be redesigned with curricula emphasizing equality between men and women, among all age levels, from birth until death, equality in rights and duties, outside the home and within it. Women need to be aware, she asserted that the road is long and weary, and this process needs heroism, force, patience and more knowledge and awareness. (Suwaed 238)

Conclusion

Thinking genuinely of El Saadawi's *Woman At Point Zero*, one discovers the moral duality of Egyptian society in dealing with men and women. The society forgives moral errors of men while punishing women harshly. El-Saadawi focuses on feminist waves, especially third-wave feminism in her novel *A Woman At Point Zero*. The study reflects some of the feminist concepts of this wave, such as the accuracy of equality between men and women, the universality of the concept of gender, the different female models, sexual identity, economic independence, informal social equality and sexual violence. The study deals with the elements of third-feminist wave through patriarchal social, economic and sexual control over women by tracing the life story of Firdaus, the heroine of El-Saadawi's *A Woman at Point Zero*, who suffers from fierce persecution of men throughout her life, starting from

childhood from her father, uncle and ending with Marzouk, whom she kills in revenge for her freedom and female gender. The study concludes that there are double standards in our patriarchal societies; in traditions, religions, politics and morals.

El-Saadawi's work as a psychiatrist leads her to form a very critical thought about the sexual, social, political, economic and religious treatment of women in Egyptian society. She deals with religiously and politically forbidden topics, which leads to her dismissal from her job and her imprisonment. Throughout her life, El-Saadawi advocates freedom of thought, will, feelings and life for herself and all women in the world.

The idea of reversed scales is applicable regarding women and issues of equality and rights with men. Eastern women's suffering is shown by the biased male society that rejects certain acts of females and does not reject those of males. In this way, the killer seems innocent, the innocent is a killer, the strong are weak, the weak are strong, the prisoner is free, and the free is the prisoner.

Society always underestimates women because of their different biological appearances. Some women accept humiliation as being females, because of their external biological appearances and sometimes accept slavery or possession by men. others adapt to find a place through

coexistence with a society biased against women. others try to get closer to men in their life who give them money or things they cannot give to themselves because they are women who are deprived of protection, appreciation, respect and social status. whatever their qualities are and their relations to men whether husbands, brothers, fathers, lovers, managers at work or even sons; they have to fully respect, obey and give them control over their lives. They are treated sometimes as pieces of furniture or less valuable than that. They may be oppressed by those who exploit them, whether at home or work, convincing themselves of the lies that they need protection, they are incompetent or unable to work, to make decisions or to lead because of their gender as females. This is where they lose their dignity forever. Some of them reject this situation and strongly try to resist it with all their might, turning into fighters in a battle, defending themselves against men who surround themselves with all weapons of support, community acceptance, power and control.

Through the character of Firdaus, El-Saadawi embodies the hidden vices in our patriarchal societies that force a woman to vice and exploit her physically, emotionally, financially and psychologically. Yet, Firdaus is a strong, rebellious and defender who does not fear prison and persecution. She rejects submission everywhere at home, at work and in society. She fights her freedom till death. She does not fear death and does not aspire to live. Rather, she prefers death to seek pardon of

the death penalty, while men fear death, even leaders fear losing power and death. By choosing death for herself, Firdaus defies men's punishment of her because of killing one of them, thus becoming stronger than all men. This way she achieves superiority over men.

Finally, El-Saadawi gives solutions to racism against women through separating religion, politics and society and through educating Egyptians on the necessity of equality between women and men. Then she explains how long and arduous is the road is to equality and how it requires heroism, strength, patience, faith, knowledge and awareness.

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