

**Women Resistance in Dystopian Novels: A Comparative
Study of Naguib Mahfouz's *Adrift on the Nile* and
Margret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale***

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Abstract

In a nightmarish phase of human history, the study of dystopian violence, irrationality, and oppression has become more crucial. This research paper aims to explore the concept of dystopian fiction and its features. The study also depicts the portrayal of the New Woman and her pivotal role in responding to the absurd dystopian ideologies in Naguib Mahfouz's *Adrift on the Nile* (1966) and Margret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986). The comparative method of analysis highlights how the two novels function as a testimony to policies of aggression and marginalisation practiced by dystopian regimes. It, moreover, tends to bring into light sights of resistance to such irrational practices. In that regard, the research adopts the Foucauldian concept of Power to explain how dystopian works record, and warn against, practices of oppression and irrational policies.

Key words: Utopia, Dystopia, Oppression, Resistance, Feminism, New Woman

المستخلص:

في ظل هذه المرحلة الكابوسية التي تحياها الإنسانية، تجلّت دراسات الأدب الديستوبي التي تعكس مظاهر العنف واللامنطقية والقمع. وتهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى دراسة مفهوم الرواية الديستوبية وعناصرها، كما تركز على تصوير المرأة الجديدة ودورها المحوري في مقاومة هذا الفكر الديستوبي في روايتي "ثرثرة فوق النيل" (١٩٦٦) لنجيب محفوظ و"قصة خادمة" (١٩٨٦) لمارجريت أتوود. ويسعى الباحث من خلال التحليل المقارن لتوضيح مدى نجاح الروائيتين كسجلٍ للسياسات الغاشمة والتهميشية التي تتبناها الأنظمة السياسية في عالم الديستوبيا، كما يوضح البحث أشكال مقاومة تلك السياسات. وفي هذا السياق، يتبنى الباحث مفهوم القوة كما طرحه ميشيل فوكو لتبيان الهدف من الروايات الديستوبية كونها شاهدًا على السياسات القمعية وفي الوقت ذاته ناقوسٌ إنذار من استمرارية تلك السياسات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اليوتوبيا، الديستوبيا، القمع، المقاومة، النسوية، المرأة الجديدة

Women Resistance in Dystopian Novels: A Comparative Study of Naguib Mahfouz's *Adrift on the Nile* and Margret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

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1. Introduction

The shift from the utopian to the dystopian thinking highlights the drastic changes humanity has experienced. From Plato's *Republic* and Thomas More's *Utopia* to what H. G. Wells described as the nightmarish nineteenth century, and from the times of peace and stability to the untold tragedies of military aggression from which the Arab world has suffered since the year 1948, both the Western and Eastern worlds have begun to develop a dystopian view of their socio-political circumstances.

The goal of this study is to explore manifestations of oppression and sights of resistance in two dystopian novels: *Adrift on the Nile* by Naguib Mahfouz and *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margret Atwood. The present paper focuses, in particular, on the portrayal of the *New Woman* in the two novels. In other words, the researcher aims to interpret the role played by models of the New Woman in resisting dystopian practices. The paper also looks at the parallel and contrastive portrayals of female characters in both works and how narrative techniques employed by the two novelists influence that portrayal. Tracing that objective, the researcher tries to show how the New Woman can be an active member of great potentials, capable of making unimagined changes in the socio-political arena, redressing the existing dystopian norms with all its absurdities and blatant deviations.

The significance of this comparative study springs from the literary weight of the two novelists. Mahfouz is a Nobel laureate who is widely recognised for his unparalleled depictions of the Cairene society. His legacy has been translated into other languages and his influence and impact have trespassed the borders of the Arab region. Likewise, Margret Atwood, a two-time Booker prize winner, has a respectable, long career, along which she has produced many poetic anthologies, short stories, and novels that have enriched the literary arena.

Moreover, both novels have been adapted into filmed productions. The 1971 Egyptian film *ثرثرة فوق النيل* Literally translated as *Thartharah*

Fawqal Nil, directed by Hussain Kamal¹, is based on the very novel of Mahfouz and is widely regarded as an iconic production in the history of the Egyptian cinema. Atwood's novel has, too, been adapted into a 1990 movie directed by Volker Schlöndorff² and is currently adapted into a TV series under the same title, produced by the American production company *Netflix*. These adaptations reflect the importance of the two works and that their impact has made them eligible to invade other forms of art, stressing the strength of their textual potentials, and that they are worthy of further exploration and study.

In addition, the two novels depict various forms of political, religious, gender, and social-based oppression practiced in two contrasting cultures; that of the east and that of the west. According to the researcher's best knowledge, both novels have not comparatively been studied together. Mahfouz's novel, in particular, has not been classified as a dystopian work of fiction before. This crystallises the rationale and significance of the present paper. The researcher attempts to show how the New Woman contributes to the complex of energies that work for change in societies as opposed to stagnant and irrational dystopian ideologies. Tracing elements of dystopian fiction in the two novels, looking deeper into how dystopia is practiced in different cultures, and depicting the active role of New Women in dystopia is thought to grant this paper its novelty, significance, and rationale.

In that regard the researcher adopts comparative and content analysis methodologies. The research explores the two novels, tracing elements of dystopian oppression, the feminist concept of the New Woman, and the power relations of oppression and resistance as demonstrated in Michel Foucault's theory. The researcher, moreover, compares the portrayal of the New Women in both novels, analysing their peculiarly active roles in contrast with other passive characters, both males and females. This also entails exploring and highlighting themes and narrative techniques that serve to frame and highlight the aforementioned portrayals.

To be able to read the two novels within the framework of dystopian fiction, it is, however, necessary to review the origins of dystopia, its relation to utopia, and how they both materialise in the real world in the form of heterotopic space. Also, the concept of the New Woman needs to

¹ Hussain Kamal: one of the most renowned Egyptian movie directors whose career extends from the 1960s to the 1990s

² Volker Schlöndorff: a German filmmaker who is a prominent member of the New German Cinema of the late 1960s and early 1970s

be put in context to better grasp the roles played by characters that qualify in the two works.

Scholars including Gregory Claeys, Maria Varsham, Martin G. Plattel, Martin Parker, George Kateb, Chad Walsh, Nell Eurich, Patrick Reedy, Tom Moylan, and others believe that typical utopias allow humans to make rational decisions and offer them the needed room to hope for better lives. In dystopia, on the other hand, humans are unequivocally deprived of their natural, fundamental rights. For instance, in a typical utopian society, one can enjoy freedom, whilst in a parallel dystopian society, unfreedom is mainstream. According to Karl Mannheim, ideologies adopted by ruling political systems are set against utopian thinking. Any ideology exists to preserve and support a ruling political system or a status quo. Utopian visions and thinking, consequently, look for creating a better version of human existence. Mannheim, therefore, considers utopia as the “complex of energies that work for change in societies as opposed to ‘ideology.’” Since dystopia is the opposite counterpart of utopia, it is, therefore, defined as “the complex of energies acting to preserve and support the existing order of things” (Booker 3).

However, dystopia aroused in response to the depression the world has experienced over the nineteenth century and continued to spread into the twentieth century. It encompasses the tragic repercussions of modernity and the negative visions of humanity. Moreover, dystopia exists when a humanity fails to interpret and practice utopia. Nonetheless, both concepts refer to imaginative, non-existent spaces that Michel Foucault attempted to connect by introducing his concept of *heterotopia*. According to Foucault, “utopias are sites with no real place... they present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case, these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces” (Foucault 3). On the other hand, Heterotopias are the spaces found in real life where utopia is enacted and juxtaposed, represented, and inverted. In a heterotopia, people can always come back to themselves and reconstitute their existence. Heterotopias represent a path through which we relate to our utopian imaginations and aspirations. Hence, “heterotopias enable us to both confront our illusions and to create new illusions of the utopias we cannot have” (Sudradjat 30).

Foucault also presented his model of *power* exchange in his book *Discipline and Punish*, where he illustrated this new interpretation of power relations. In an interview on his book *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault said that power “is not built up out of ‘wills’ (individual or collective) nor is it derived from interests.” Power, rather, stems from “myriad issues, myriad effects of power” (Foucault 188). He added that

power is not control or domination: physical, psychological, mental... etc. Rather, it is the “complex domain” which has influence on actions, not individuals (Foucault 188). By this, Foucault objects to the conventional understanding of power relations based upon a master and a slave or a superior and an inferior. He, nevertheless, introduces a new interpretation of the concept, which says that all individuals play the game and exchange roles all the time. Power exists as long as it is exchangeable among individuals of a community. In other words, power becomes materialised when everyone exercises it.

Dystopian fiction, as mentioned above, is written in response to oppressive and rather depressive socio-political circumstances where people are forced against their will and deprived of their fundamental rights. An oppressive ideology, patriarchy can never be any harsher as spotted in dystopias. The social, political, and economic oppression and manipulation of women are part of the dystopian thinking. However, dystopian writers usually intend to resist the irrationalities and absurdities their works depict. There is always a margin of resistance that corresponds the recording of oppressive practices.

In Naguib Mahfouz's *Adrift on the Nile* (1966) and Margret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), elements of dystopian fiction are abundant. The two works embrace the dystopian concept with its characteristics. Among the various forms of oppression that can be observed in both works is that which is exercised against women. According to B. F. Skinner, dystopian worlds represent “ways of life we must be sure to avoid” (Claeys 107).

Dystopian protagonists are constantly struggling, feeling incarcerated and confined to an unchanging system that oppresses everyone, forcing them to adopt a unified, stereotyped, and oppressive form of life. This pushes them to go into a loop of questioning the political system and social structure where they live, trying to find a way out of their trauma. Hence, authors of dystopian fiction depend on their key characters to help the audience spot and recognise elements of dystopia. Dystopian protagonists, therefore, always feel that something is wrong with the community in which they exist. This is because dystopian works focus on the social crisis and are intended as attempts of social criticism.

However, dystopia has its roots deep into utopian thinking. Critics mentioned above always refer to utopianism and the image of heaven on earth and “the dream-like state of Victorian optimism” (Claeys 107), which then shifted drastically to dystopian nightmares and utopia gone

awry. Plato's *The Republic* (375 BC) and Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) are widely considered as the two works that established the utopian thinking, embracing the innate goodness of mankind and calling for the common good of the society. Chad Walsh comments on Sir More's *Utopia* as he says that in *Utopia*, all materialistic aims are eliminated, and spirituality seems to rule the island where the novel takes place. The novel is also based on the same concepts Plato had earlier established in his *Republic*. Both works intend to teach people how to restrain the innate evil in humankind. As Jacob Talmon elaborates, utopian works reflect "the desire to create a much-improved society in which human behaviour [is] dramatically superior to the norm" (Claeys 108).

H. Bruce Franklin comments on the "literary visions of the future" (Fitting 140) that have turned into nightmares. He agrees with Chad Walsh as he says that "utopia [has been] replaced by dystopia in a century of disillusionment" (Babae, Kaur and Singh 65). That shift has been the result of some significant events that took place over the nineteenth century, including the two World Wars, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the industrial revolution, which warns against the "feeling of optimism" that was "displaced by human's incapacity to restrain [the] newly created destructive powers" (Claeys 107). The Freudian theories also contributed to that shift as it proved that humans are not innately good and that they are driven by their desires and needs, which are not as rational as thought to be.

The dystopian narrative is largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth century: A hundred years of exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, disease, famine, ecocide, depression, debt, and the steady depletion of humanity through the buying and selling of the everyday life provided more than enough fertile ground for this fictive underside of the utopian imagination (Moylan xi).

On the other side, the Arab world has also witnessed untold, destructive events over the nineteenth century, which has started with the Israeli invasion of Palestine in 1948. The three Arab-Israeli wars of 1948, 1956, and 1967 are significant traumas that eliminated the remaining glimpse of hope for a better future. Other intra-Arab conflicts have also deepened that pain. This includes the Syrian coup-d'état of 1961, the North Yemen Civil War of 1962, and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

Michel Foucault's essay *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* arguably discusses the existence of practical and realistic spaces in society instead of the imaginary utopian world. According to Foucault, heterotopias are emplacements that reflect "the representation of real

forms of utopia containing unordered or undesirable things within them.” They are the product of the society where “social ordering takes place, society’s policies come into effect” (Chowdhury 2-3). He adds that every society can create its own heterotopia where dystopian elements can be reviewed, reconstituted, and reformed.

However, in the late nineteenth century, a new feminist movement rose in England’s Victorian socio-political arena. The *New Woman* is a feminist wave launched by professional career women who tried to invade the public domain and worked to promote gender equality. They also called for their educational rights and showed peculiar intellect and understanding of the surrounding socio-political circumstances. The New Woman calls for more than just equality: she demands acceptance and respect by men as she attempts to redefine and reconstitute the concept of womanhood. Writers like Sarah Grand, Olive Shreiner, and Mary Egerton were among those many novelists who advocated that movement in their works. Some male authors including Thomas Hardy, George Gissing, and George Meredith, supported the movement, while others, like Bram Stoker, did not.

The New Woman seizes educational opportunities and works on enlightening and herself. She has a profound understanding of her surrounding environment and can lead her life and make the needed change. According to Vicente Edward Clemons, “the New Woman [is] a single, professional woman who [contribute] to society by their work in the public sphere” (Clemons 5). It is a movement “that led to the creation of a new breed of women who [are] active in public life” (Clemons 6). They are women who fight for the formulation of new moralities, codes of behaviour, cultural ethics, and a revolutionary reassessment of the female experience and assertiveness. Gail Cunningham also attempts to define the New Woman in his book *The New Woman and the Victorian novel* as follows :

Heroines who refused to conform to the traditional feminine role, challenged accepted ideals of marriage and maternity, chose to work for a living, or who in any way argued the feminist cause, became commonplace in the works of both major and minor writers and were firmly identified by readers and reviewers as New Women (Cunningham 3).

Winnifred Cooley, a critic who is one of the foremost writers to address the concept, agrees with Cunningham’s definition of the New Woman in her book *The New Womanhood*:

The new woman, in the sense of the best woman, the flower of all the womanhood of past ages, has come to stay — if civilisation is to endure.

The sufferings of the past have but strengthened her, maternity has deepened her, education is broadening her — and she now knows that she must perfect herself if she would perfect the race and leave her imprint upon immortality through her offspring or her works (Cooley 32).

Mona Russell's book entitled *Creating the New Egyptian Woman: Consumerism, Education, and National Identity* refers to Qassim Amin's definition of the New Woman as a "refined individual," "an improved, superior woman," and "a woman of 'advanced' views" (Russell 1-2). She further discusses the history of the New Egyptian Woman, whom she argues had appeared vigorously in the late nineteenth century and continued to gain power and sovereignty into the twentieth century. In that particular context, Qassim Amin comments:

Whom do you understand a woman to be? As a man, she, too, is a human being. Her body and its functions, feelings, and ability to think are the same as a man's. She has all the essential human traits, differing only in gender (Amin 11).

This definition of the New Woman is typically presented in the two works under study. In Naguib Mahfouz's *Adrift on the Nile* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the writers include different images of the New Women who play peculiarly influential roles in reconstituting and redefining the dystopian socio-political circumstances depicted through the two works. They are powerful models that show great understanding and awareness of their environment, capable of liberating themselves and their community and confronting dystopian absurdity, irrationality, and injustice. The following discussion section attempts to bring these models to light, reflecting their essential roles in the two narratives of Mahfouz and Atwood.

Through this study, the researcher attempts to answer three key research questions. The analysis explores how the two writers provide parallel and contrasting portrayals of female characters in the two novels, highlighting the rebellious New Women and the submissive female characters that internalised the dystopian atmosphere. Moreover, this paper explains how the New Women in the two novels tend to reshape their surrounding socio-political circumstances. Also, the study delves deep into the relations between the New Women and other main characters, proving how these rebellious females have a rebellious spirit which Mahfouz and Atwood intended to convey to their readers.

2- Analysis

2.1- The New Woman vs Traditional Submissive Female Characters

In the two works under study, the two writers include a wide array of female characters. Mahfouz's Samara Bahgat and Atwood's Moira stand out as influential, rebellious new women. As will be discussed later, Samara's character is delineated by Mahfouz with fine details and in a way that gives her great intellectual weight. She is the dream woman on whom Mahfouz builds his aspirations and through whom the entire intellects' community is reawakened and rescued. Unlike Mahfouz's approach, Atwood's portrayal of Moira rests on more physical than intellectual qualities. Moira's character is given extraordinary abilities, making her more of a superwoman who saves and protects all those who know her.

On the other hand, the two novelists include many submissive female characters that have done the narratives some service in many different ways. So, the dimensions of Samara and Moira's characters could not have been framed or understood clearly but in the presence of those contrasting and submissive female characters. In Mahfouz's *Adrift on the Nile*, the three other female characters of Sanniya, Sanaa, and Layla are all models who fully submit to the oppression practised against the intellects' community well as to the manipulation exercised against them by males on the houseboat. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood includes a wide range of submissive female characters encompassing destructed handmaids, brainwashed Marthas, and wickedly absurd wives of Commanders, as well as econowives who are left to live on the very margin of Gilead.

In light of the Western and Eastern views of the New Woman, previously mentioned in the introduction, this study attempts to explore rebellious and submissive female characters presented in the two works of Mahfouz and Atwood. Regarding rebellious female characters, the models presented in the two works share many characteristics relevant to the concept of the New Woman. Samara Bahgat, in Mahfouz's work, it can be claimed, is the very model of the New Egyptian Woman Russell and Amin advocate. Whilst in Atwood's work, it is the character of Moira that reflects this concept. The two characters are different, yet they both play the role of inspiring the main characters to revolt against the absurdity of the socio-political circumstances practised in dystopia. Samara is the character that awakens Anis Zaki from his hopelessness. On the other hand, Moira is the timeless emblem of rebellion and

resistance to whom Of-fred resorts for survival in the dystopian, absurdly oppressive world of Gilead.

2.2- Manifestations of Oppression: Socio-political Challenges

If *Adrift on the Nile* mainly depicts the crisis of the Egyptian intellectuals who were oppressed on all levels under the rule of late President Jamal Abdunnasir, *The Handmaid's Tale*, on the other hand, revolves around the crisis of women at a time when the American religious right was trying to push back women to their traditional gender roles. The two novels, it can be said, discuss the previous crises, reflecting their dystopian manifestations. Besides, they draw possible solutions and paths to socio-political reform. This can be seen through the characters of Samara and Moira, who show a profound understanding of their surrounding environments, which enables them to become critical characters of considerable influence all through the narrative.

To grasp the influential role of these models in both texts, one should first explore the challenges posed before them in the two works. The oppressive climate the characters suffer in the two novels is too cruel, even absurd and irrational. Anis Zaki, the critical character and narrator of Mahfouz's novel, who bears the title of "master of ceremonies and minister of pipe-smoking affairs" (Mahfouz 18) is an exceptionally cultured persona. Like other members of the houseboat, he belongs to the oppressed intellectuals who are marginalised and silenced. Hence, this kief-stuffed houseboat became their only resort to celebrate the meaninglessness of their lives. He expresses that particular meaning as he delivers a philosophical commentary on the houseboat:

الحب لعبة قديمة بالية ولكنه رياضة في عوامتنا، الفسق رذيلة في المجالس والمعاهد ولكنه حرية في عوامتنا. والنساء تقاليد ووثائق في البيوت ولكنهن مراهقة وفتنة في عوامتنا. والقمر كوكب سيار خامد ولكنه شعر في عوامتنا. والجنون مرض في أي مكان ولكنه فلسفة في عوامتنا. والشيء شيء حيثما كان ولكنه لا شيء في عوامتنا (محفوظ ١٠٧).

Love is an old, worn-out game, but it is a sport on our houseboat. Fornication is a despicable vice everywhere, but it is freedom on our houseboat. Women are deeply cherished and respected at homes, but they are nubility and allure on our houseboat. Even the moon, which is but a revolving body, cold and bold, turns to be poetry on our houseboat. Furthermore, madness is considered illness everywhere, but on our houseboat, it is philosophy. A thing is but a thing everywhere. However, it becomes nothing on our houseboat (translated by the researcher) (Mahfouz 107).

On the other hand, Of-fred, the heroine and narrator of *The Handmaid's Tale*, is a lady who had been inhumanely uprooted and deprived of her family; her husband, Luke, and her unnamed daughter. Enslaved and

indoctrinated to become a handmaid, Of-fred suffers untold torture and oppression on all levels at the hands of Aunts in the Red Centre and the Commander's family when she is sent there for pure sexual service. Atwood perfectly describes her heroine's suffering in genuine detail as their voices unite together:

Every night when I go to bed, I think, in the morning, I will wake up in my own house, and things will be back the way they were. It hasn't happened this morning either... this isn't a jail sentence; there's no time here that can be done and finished with (Atwood 180).

Mahfouz focuses his narrative on unravelling the untold and publicly unnoticed oppression from which the intellectuals suffered under the rule of Nassir. This included "the dissolution of all existing parties and organisations (ahl al-kafa'a: the capable men)" who were replaced by time with "(ahl al-thiqa: the trusted men)" (Abdel-Malek 40), who were usually officers and technocrats. This policy led to the development of several dystopian waves among the Egyptian intellectuals. Atwood's work focuses on another crisis which is both political and feminist. *The Handmaid's Tale* is a novel that depicts the imaginative Gileadean society where "all citizens, especially women, live under an oppressive theocratic regime" where "the elite of the ruling hierarchy have commandeered fertile women (male infertility is denied) for use as forced concubines" (Templin 144).

This atmosphere of menace and theocracy depicted in *The Handmaid's Tale* and that of absurdity and intellectual oppression depicted in *Adrift on the Nile* required a bold response by the writers. The models of the New Women, presented through Samara and Moira, represent one face of that reaction to dystopia. Mahfouz describes Samara Bahgat's character in a way that is exceptionally reflective of her role in the narrative. She is set in contrast to all other female characters who either submit to marginalisation or internalise the houseboat's corrupted nightlife. Samara is a journalist, an activist, and a dramatist who is romantic and revolutionary. Writing a play whose plot is based on the real-time nightlife at the houseboat, she enjoys profound insights into the lives of the oppressed intellectuals and their suffering. She is the one who succeeds in awakening Anis from his long-lived trauma and reviving his cultural, philosophical, and mental spirits. Anis could not have retained his consciousness without Samara believing in him.

Similarly, Of-fred survives in Gilead supported by the revolutionary spirit of Moira, the sole rebellious among all helpless handmaids. Of-fred's narration encompasses her thoughts, fears, and conflicts. However,

she always reminds herself and the readers of Moira, the only handmaid who was mentioned with her very name and identity. Of-fred tells the reader that if she was Moira, her life in Gilead could have been different, and many situations could have been altered.

From here, it can be said that Samara and Moira are typical New Women. They just differ in the ways they perceive dystopia, act within its boundaries, and attempt to change it, reforming their socio-political circumstances and creating their own heterotopias. That is, Samara depends on her mental and intellectual powers and skills: she writes a play on seriousness and absurdity, tries to address the kief-addicted intellects in ways that awaken them from their corrupted life, and succeeds in getting Anis back on track by the end of the novel. She is, moreover, an essential character for which Mahfouz allocates huge room in the narrative. On the other hand, Moira might seem a secondary character, as she does not appear in many scenes through the narrative of Atwood. However, her physical absence is compensated by an unparalleled spiritual and influential presence as she plays a key role in defining Of-fred's choices and actions. It can be claimed that Moira's influence on Of-fred has made a New Woman out of Of-fred herself, as it can be seen through the development of Of-fred's character.

2.3- Rebellion and Realisation: A Common Characteristic of New Women

At the beginning of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Of-fred is portrayed in a way that arouses readers' sympathy. Before meeting with Moira, she starts her first development towards understanding the Gileadean system and knowing how to survive; pushed by Moira as a role model, and acting within the allowed scope, which does not lead to her death.

Nevertheless, Moira was our fantasy. We hugged her to us, and she was with us in secret, a giggle; she was lava beneath the crust of daily life. In the light of Moira, the Aunts were less fearsome and more absurd, and tir power had a flaw to it (Atwood 125).

Supported by Moira, Of-fred rejects and resists the internalisation of Gileadean ideologies forced upon her. It is Moira who taught her that the authorities make "all other forms of thought impossible," and that in Gilead "meaning is singular and final," and "any variety of experience is excluded" (Stael 457). Of-fred becomes fully aware of where she is. Her detailed narration of her own story is, in itself, a solid resistance to oppression that will live even after her death. She faithfully records history to avenge for herself and all her incapacitated peers. However, Of-fred could not have embraced that development and realisation without Moira's presence. Moira's rebellious character and the way she

stands with dignity before Gileadean authorities, regardless of the torturing she experiences after being sent to the colonies or even to Jezebel to work as a prostitute, inspire Of-fred's survival. Of-fred always expresses her fondness of Moira at the moments when all her powers break down:

If I were Moira, I'd know how to take it apart, reduce it to its cutting edges. I have no screwdriver, but if I were Moira, I could do it without a screwdriver. I'm not Moira (Atwood 157).

Moira reminds Of-fred of her mother, an ultra-feminist who rejected all forms of oppression practised against women. In her new life in Gilead, Offred lost everything she once had; her name, identity, and family... everything. That is why she has always torn apart between her present tragedy and her past. This also explains why she always longs for Moira's presence as she can find shelter, support, and motivation to survive. Almost all women incarcerated at the Red Centre had had families, jobs, and a whole life that they left behind.

Like Atwood, Naguib Mahfouz creates a connection between Samara and Anis, ending in Anis adopting Samara's ideology of socio-political reform. If Of-fred survives in Gilead by Moira's inspiration and moral support, Anis's philosophical thoughts become materialised as his fondness and amazement by Samara's character increases. Samara reflects Mahfouz's view of the New Egyptian Woman. In a study of the oppression of women in Mahfouz's works, Abdulrahman Mahyoub speaks of the role of education in supporting women empowerment. Women's empowerment through education helps them to avoid violence.

Education and equal opportunity of work is seen by the novelist as a strategy for achieving the level of economic independence that he sees as a prerequisite for the establishment of equality (Mahyoub 13-14).

Unlike Atwood, who does not provide many details about Moira and focuses only on her heroine's development, Mahfouz provides a detailed depiction of Samara's character, which contributes to her influence on the entire work. Samara does not accept what other female characters do, and she is against all forms of exploitation on both levels; the social and the political. She refuses to become another Sanaa', Layla, or Saniyya, or to become a submissive intellect like other members of the houseboat. Mahfouz tailors the dialogues between Samara and Anis in indicative words. The intellects can act blindly to oppression, but they will not maintain their ignorance when things go out of control. The car accident which resulted in the murder of an innocent citizen can be compared to

the setback of 1967, which caused the loss of thousands of lives. Mahfouz's symbolic text creates a parallelism between what is fictional and what is real.

-لكنك تكلمت عن قول ما يجب قوله؟
-ذلك حق. لم يكن الغضب ولا الغيرة وحدهما، ولكن خطر لي بعد ذلك أن أقول ما يجب قوله،
وأن أقف موقفاً جاداً لأمتحن أثره، فوقع زلزال لا ندري شيئاً عن عواقبه، وحتى أنت انهزمت!
(محفوظ ١٦٧).

-But you mentioned saying what should be said?

-True. It was not merely because of anger or jealousy, and I also thought I should say what should be said and act seriously, then see where things would take me. Nevertheless, everything went out of our control, and even you submitted (translated by the researcher) (Mahfouz 167).

Moreover, there is a massive gap between Samara and the other three female characters. This gap is on all levels; the social, the intellectual, and the political. Samara, like Moira, is a typical New Woman who does not accept oppression and is a strong character that creates change and revolts against absurdity and passiveness. If all handmaids do not revolt against the tragedy they experience, Laila Zidan, Saniyya Kamil, and Sanaa' Al Rashidy are all ill models submitted to the corrupted dystopia on the houseboat or internalised the entire nightlife with its codes and view of women. In Atwood's narrative, Of-fred tells the readers that handmaids "are being looked at, assessed, whispered about" (Atwood 193), but for Moira, who relentlessly revolts in the face of the authorities. On the other hand, Mahfouz's female characters are all passive and corrupted, but for Samara, who is thought by other members of the houseboat to ruin their celebratory atmosphere of absurdity as they cast her as bit too severe for them. On one occasion, Samara explains her philosophy and the way she leads her life as reflected in her play:

وفضلاً عن ذلك فأبني أؤمن بأنه يوجد بطل كامل في كل فرد. ولم يكن يهمني معرفة حقيقتكم
بقدر أن أخلق منها ما ينفع المسرحية (محفوظ ١١١).

I also believe that there is a real hero inside each one. I never really cared for your truth; just wanted to serve the play as much as possible (translated by the researcher) (Mahfouz 111).

This particular extract reflects the core of Samara's character and her enlightened mentality with which she confronts dystopia. However, through her intellectual abilities, Samara attempts to make that change. On the other hand, Moira is fighting against the bloodiness of Gilead physically rather than intellectually. Confronting the brutality of Gilead, Moira unravels the powerful side of her character. She never submits and physically fights the authorities and the entire Gileadean system. Moira's character is truly inspiring; in an atmosphere of darkness and

predominant control, Moira is the sole means of liberation to which Of-fred clings. Of-fred's resistance is never materialised but in the presence of Moira, as she herself tells the reader.

I put my mouth to the wooden hole. 'Moira?' I whisper. 'Is that you?' she says. 'Yes,' I say. Relief goes through me. 'God, do I need a cigarette,' says Moira. 'Me too,' I say. I feel ridiculously happy (Atwood 72).

This intimacy between Of-fred and Moira continues to grow all through the novel; even after they both got separated, Of-fred kept holding this relationship so close to herself. When she met Moira anew at Jezebel, she felt like reunited with her very own salvage. It is in Moira's presence that Of-fred feels empowered. Remembering Moira makes her more calm, safe, and capable of making more rational yet courageous and rebellious decisions. This takes the exploration of the New Woman to another destination. Of-fred and Anis come to realise and deeper understand their surrounding in the presence of Moira and Samara. Both are empowered women of great wisdom, intuition and well-developed characters. They fear nothing on their journeys of self-determination, playing key roles in the development of the main characters of Of-fred and Anis.

I want Luke here so badly. I want to be held and told my name. I want to be valued in ways that I am not; I want to be more than valuable. I repeat my former name, remind myself of what I once could do, how others saw me... I can see my white shape, of tented body, hair down my back like a mane, my eyes gleaming. I like this. I am doing something on my own (Atwood 93).

This sense of self-recognition can be attributed to Moira's influence on Of-fred's development. Through the above extract, it is clear that Of-fred does not submit to Gilead's system, and she still wants to be called with her name and feel more than just valuable. This brings to light Margret Atwood's rejection of the policies adopted by the theocratic religious right, which tend to push back women to their traditional gender roles. Of-fred, in that context, stands for her sexuality, womanhood, as well as for her dignity.

Equal appreciation goes to Mahfouz's Samara Bahgat, who remained hopeful and inspiring amidst social and cultural deterioration and decay. She resisted deterioration on all levels and believed in her abilities to change the members of the houseboat, and finally succeeded. Whenever the conversation becomes about sex and open relations between men and women, Samara tries to make the houseboat members view things

through a less vulgar and more refined lens. She suggests love instead of sex, marriage, and stability instead of desire and immorality.

وذهب الرجال والنساء إلا رجب وسمارة!
-أليس الأفضل يا عزيزتي أن نستمتع بالحب؟
-فكرة طيبة!
-وإذن..
-قلت لك يا عزيزي إني جادة
-أخلاق بورجوازية؟
-جادة.. جيم ألف دال تاء مربوطة..
-بالله كيف تسلمين نفسك؟
ولما لم تجب استطراد:
-بالزواج مثلاً؟
-قل بالحب باعتباره الأصل.. (محفوظ ٨٩).

Everyone left but for Ragab and Samara!

-Isn't it a good idea that we enjoy love?

-Certainly!

-So, what do you think...

-I told you, dear, I'm serious

-Bourgeoisie thinking?

-Serious ... s-e-r-i-o-u-s

-So, tell me, how could you surrender, then?

When she didn't answer, he carried on: only in marriage, right?

-Say, real love! (translated by the researcher) (Mahfouz 89).

Through the above extract, Samara seems to be a woman of ethics and principles on whom Mahfouz depended in expressing his hopes for a better future. Being a female figure, Samara reflects Mahfouz's rejection of patriarchy. Her ability to push Anis towards revolting against the houseboat's chaotic atmosphere highlights the novel's potential for social reform. The very influence of Moira and Samara on Of-fred and Anis started to materialise as the journey of the main characters approached its end.

واختفى الحاضرون قلبت وحده مع الليل المضيء. ورأى فارساً يركض جواده في الهواء قريباً من سطح الماء فسأله عن هويته فقال إنه الخيام وأنه نجح أخيراً في الهروب من الموت. واستيقظ على منظر ساقه المطروحة لصق الصينية، طويلة بارزة العظام، باهتة اللون في الضوء الأزرق. كثيفة الشعر، كبيرة الأصابع مقوسة الأظافر من طول إهمالها بلا قص، فكاد ينكرها وعجب لعضو من جسده كيف يبدو كالغريب؟! (محفوظ ١٠٥-١٠٦).

Everyone disappeared, so he stayed alone all along the bright night. He then saw a knight with his galloping horse close to the surface of the water and asked him who he was. The knight told him that he was Omar Khayyam and had finally escaped death. Soon after, he woke up and found his outstretched leg next to the tray, long, bony, and pale-looking

under the blue lights, with hair covering it. His toes seemed big, with nails that had not been cut for long. He could hardly accept that it was his leg, astonished to the fact that one's body could seem strange to himself (translated by the researcher) (Mahfouz 105-106).

It is at this moment when Anis started to feel social estrangement. Although he was fully emersed into the chaotic atmosphere on the houseboat, this suddenly changed when he recalled Samara's words time and time again. On the other hand, Of-fred's recognition of social estrangement and her development of social resistance were more gradual. Although Moira's attitude inspires Of-fred's resistance to oppression, Of-fred, like Anis, showed more sagacity than her inspirer.

I said there was more than one way of living with your head in the sand and that if Moira thought she could create Utopia by shutting herself up in a women-only enclave she was sadly mistaken. Men were not just going to go away, I said. You couldn't just ignore them (Atwood 158).

Moreover, the contrasting portrayal between the rebellious characters of Samara and Moira and other submissive female characters is evident through the course of narration in the two works. This sharp contrast is further clarified through the narrative technique, bringing Samara and Moira into the foreground, pushing the submissive models towards the narration background. In *Adrift on the Nile*, one can rarely spot Layla, Sanniya, or Sanaa' contributing to the journey of realisation. On the other hand, all other handmaids, Marthas, and even the Commander's wife are models that internalised the Gileadean system of oppression and manipulation.

2.4- Narrative Technique

The two novelists, it can be claimed, polished and framed their critical characters in a way that makes them appear in the foreground in sharp contrast to the other characters kept in the background of narration. As *New Women*, Moira and Samara are depicted in fine details, bolder language, and are given more expansive room to act within the narratives. Other female characters in *Adrift on the Nile* are described as prostitutes in disguise or women who simply submit to absurdity and oppression. Although they are all well-educated and belong to the intellectuals' community, they could not survive in that dystopian atmosphere of socio-political oppression. Among those female characters are three significant characters. The first is a student at the faculty of arts who submits to an informal relationship with Ragab. Whilst the second is a translator in the ministry of foreign affairs which comes over to enjoy the houseboat's nightlife. The third is a housewife who cheats on her

husband and who is described by the other men as an expert in prostitution to other younger girls. However, they are all given a marginalised room. The main focus is on Anis's narration and profound commentary, which, in the beginning, shows his depression and continues to develop, covering his connection with Samara, and finally, the realisation of the very truth.

On the other hand, Atwood keeps the characters of Aunts, Marthas, and even other incapacitated handmaids in the background. We learn of them through Of-fred's well-versed narration. They are all female characters that reflect the absurdity of the Gileadean regime. Aunt Lydia, in particular, is the voice of Gilead. Of-fred remembers her throughout the novel, informing the readers of how absurd this lady is. Whenever Of-fred remembers her, it is always a remembrance of rejection of the Gileadean belief system. Marthas are incapacitated women who accept their roles in Gilead to survive and avoid being sent to colonies with the unwomen. Other handmaids who totally submit to the system are also mentioned but are bound to the background narrative. Only Of-fred, her emotions, actions, reactions, and voice are kept in the foreground of narration. Moira, too, is brought to the foreground, as Of-fred believes she is her sole salvation in Gilead. Atwood, like Mahfouz, carefully chooses the characters who are put in the foreground, serving certain roles and reflecting specific messages.

In *Adrift on the Nile*, Mahfouz's primary focus is the line of action, reflecting the shared burden of the entire intellects' community. The two characters of Anis Zaki and Samara are set at the very core of the narrative. They lead the line of action: Samara, the model of the New Woman, pushes things forward, whilst Anis, on the other hand, gives voice to Mahfouz himself, commenting on the socio-political situation with unparalleled insightful philosophy. However, Mahfouz resorts to multiple narrative techniques; meta-narratives, dialogues, monologues, allusions, and stories are manipulated to serve his ideas and argument.

On the other hand, Atwood's primary focus is the journey of Of-fred herself. The heroine's suffering is the crucial element for which Atwood allocates all her writing tools and efforts. It can be said that Of-fred is not just the heroine or the narrator, but the very core of *The Handmaid's Tale's* narrative. It is through Of-fred that the reader knows of every single action. Even other characters are introduced, depicted, and judged through Of-fred's view of things. Throughout the novel; it is only Of-fred speaking up through single-voice narration that explores and peculiarly describes Of-fred's trauma in Gilead. These techniques serve perfectly in polishing and framing the characters of weight. In the case of Mahfouz,

the dialogues that gather Samara and Anis perfectly show their intellectual abilities and profound understanding of the surrounding socio-political circumstances of the time. Anis's commentary is intricately woven and well-versed in the simple, witty language. These commentaries where Anis addresses historical personas as Omar Khayyam Harun Al Rashid, one of Egypt's Pharos, are blatant political allusions through which Mahfouz delivers his criticism. Moreover, the way Mahfouz contrastively depicts Samara on the one hand and the other female characters on the other hand is very much telling of the model of the New Egyptian Woman.

Margret Atwood's feminine style is also ambivalent. It can be said that Atwood's descriptive writing power is by far unparalleled. The way Atwood delves deep into the psychological developments of Of-fred is very much powerful and genuine. Since *The Handmaid's Tale* handles the crisis of women, such single-voice, detailed narration is the ultimate choice to bring this agitating issue into light. Through Of-fred's narration, the reader comes to live the trauma in detail, getting to touch the heroine's suffering and tormented psyche, as she is torn apart between her past and present, and finally embracing the New Woman within herself.

3- Conclusion

A more powerful version of rebellion, the New Woman, is a feminist model that does not merely reject patriarchy but seeks to become an active member of society; a member capable of making real change and tangible reform. The two models of the New Woman presented in the texts of Naguib Mahfouz, and Margret Atwood typically embrace the characteristics of the aforementioned feminist trend. However, each character practices the concept differently. As shown through the analysis, Mahfouz's model, Samara Bahgat, significantly uses her intellectual skills. She is a journalist and a dramatist of a promising literary future, depicted by Mahfouz in a way that serves his crucial issue of the crisis of the Egyptian intellects. On the other hand, Atwood's model, Moira, physically rather than intellectually rebels against the oppression practised by Gileadean authorities. The few appearances of Moira all through Atwood's narrative are of exceptional influence on the entire novel as she morally and physically supports the heroine, Of-fred. Both Samara and Moira share the idea of rebellion and utter rejection of all forms of oppression, and it is the technique of resistance each one exercises that differs. Moreover, the two models share another dimension of characterisation, supporting the main characters all through

their journeys of suffering in dystopia. Without Samara, Anis would not have been capable of recognising his own intellectual abilities, nor of making the right choice by the end of the novel. Similarly, Of-fred's fears and anxieties would not have been cushioned, and her survival would not have been that successful without Moira's existence. Moira, like Samara, is the very inspiration and hope to which Of-fred clings. The two New Women, Samara and Moira, play a crucial role in the two narratives of Mahfouz and Atwood, respectively. Through these two characters, Mahfouz and Atwood convey their criticism of the absurd socio-political circumstances they depict within their novels.

Samara is the actual model Mahfouz wished to create among the oppressed, rather depressed intellects. Through his portrayal of Samara, Mahfouz incorporated the needed spirit that revives the intellects' community. She is a writer, a woman of independent thought, and a peculiarly insightful and visionary dramatist. Most importantly, she is depicted with sharp contrast against the other female characters to confirm Mahfouz's intended message of resistance and needed socio-political reform. The character of Moira, on the other hand, is peculiarly delineated. Despite the limited appearances of Moira through the narrative of the novel, she enjoys great symbolic influence. Like Of-fred's mother, Moira is an ultra-feminist who does not accept oppression and does not submit to threats or fears. She revolted time and again and confronted Gileadean torture till the last breath. Moira, like Samara, is Atwood's emblem of rebellion and the perfect model of resistance that Atwood wished to witness in the real world. All Of-fred's attempts to survive in Gilead are internal; she created them within herself, but for Moira, who is Of-fred's sole materialised support and inspiration. As seen in the discussion, Of-fred's description of Moira and how she perceives her friend as powerful, fearless, and rebellious stressed that interpretation of Moira's character. Therefore, it can be said that the two characters support the needed change as against the depicted dystopian atmospheres in the two novels.

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