AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

A STUDY OF FEMALE SOLIDARITY IN THE POSTCOLONIAL AND CONTEMPORARY NOVELS OF SALIH'S *SEASON OF MIGRATION TO THE NORTH*, FAQIR'S *PILLARS OF SALT*, AND SAADAWI'S *ZEINA*

by
HANA ALI DAKWAR

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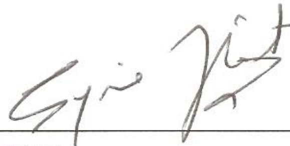

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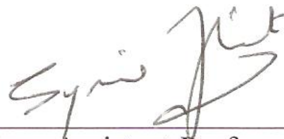

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS..v

ABSTRATCT………………………………………………...…………..……vi

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION…………………………………………………..…….1

II. DECOLONIZATION AT THE EXPENSE OF WOMEN'S BODIES: *SEASON OF MIGRATION TO THE NORTH*……........8

A. Literature Review……………..………………….................................13

B. Historical Background and Female Circumcision Practices…………....15

C. Woman versus Woman: Age, Class, and Sexual Experiences…………19

D. Internal Colonization of Women………………………………………..25

E. The Repercussion of Women's Decolonization: Death……………...…30

III. THE POLITICAL STRUGGLE: FADIA FAQIR'S *PILLARS OF SALT*……………………………………………………………………33

A. "Identity? What is identity? I think I have none.……………………….39

B. Marital Rights of Women in Islam…………………………………...…47

C. Faqir's Linguistic Double Agency……………………………..…….55

IV. MYTH OR REALITY: NAWAL AL-SAADAWI'S *ZEINA*…………………………..……………………………………......59

A. The Middle Eastern Pie: Politics, Religion and Sex………..…………..60

B. Women's Voice: A Weapon Against Islamic Patriarchy…………….....69

C. The Journalistic Gaze…………………………………………………...77

V. CONCLUSION……………………………………………………………81

WORKS CITED…………………………………………………………..............87

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Hana Ali Dakwar for Master of Arts
Major: English Literature

Title: A Study of Female Solidarity in the Postcolonial and Contemporary Novels of Salih's *Season of Migration to the North,* Faqir's *Pillars of Salt*, and Saadawi's *Zeina*

This thesis exposes the progress (or lack of) female solidarity in three novels of different temporal and geographical locations in the Arab World. The first chapter is a summary of the thesis and a brief explication of the methodology that stresses what factors influence the formation female collectivities.

The second chapter is dedicated to Salih's Season of Migration to the North. It investigates how the process of decolonization from British rule took its toll on women's body, particularly through the practice of cliterodectomy. Women's voices are not heard due to the consolidation of one form of hegemony – colonization – with another – patriarchy.

The third chapter tackles Faqir's Pillars of Salt. The novel is put in the context of the 1993 Jordanian elections to highlight the plight of women to become involved in the political arena. Different versus of the Quraan are explicated to demonstrate patriarchal men's misuse of religion to empower their status. It emphasizes that if women are not granted their civil and human rights in the legislative system, the nation's progress is but limited.

The fourth chapter explores Saadawi's novel Zeina. It is discussed in the light of pre-revolutionary Cairo. Close readings of specific passages are employed to suggest how violence is used to maintain power and control women's voices. It stresses the need for a sexual revolution and the establishment of secular grounds to achieve national liberation.

The fifth chapter concludes that unless women speak a language of difference that unites them within the same region, cross-cultural and universal female solidarity will continue to be an aim not achieved.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In my thesis, I put Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North, Fadia Faqir's Pillars of Salt, and Nawal Al-Saadawi's Zeina in conversation with one another to investigate the progress, (if any), achieved by regional feminist discourse in postcolonial and contemporary novels. I arrange the novels chronologically, from oldest to most recent, as well as geographically, from rural to more modernized and urban, to study the effects of colonization on the life-styles and social structures of locals from the very early stages of achieving independence to proclamations of political and economic powers. I employ Anne McClintock's notion that feminism must emphasize aspects of class, race, work and money in addition to sexuality in order to study why women's strategic essentialism, explicated by Spivak, fails or succeeds in the formation of female collectivities. I argue that the role of community is essential in the process of women's liberation, and consequently national liberation, yet it often fails to voice the needs and wants of women due to its adoption of patriarchy and the threat that women's agency can pose on male-dominated societies' interests. Through close reading of related passages, an investigation of the historical and political context each novel is written in, it becomes clear that the female characters, and the subaltern woman, is capable of fighting for her rights. However, their respective communities subvert women's voices so that the latter are not heard by female collectivities elsewhere in the world.

The first chapter of my thesis deals with Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, first published in Arabic in 1966. The novel takes place in a Sudanese village along the Nile at the dawn of independence from British colonization. Considering that it was actually written ten years after Sudan achieved its independence from the British Empire in 1956, Salih's work can be seen as a critique of the effects of British colonial rule on locals' life-styles in general, and on the patriarchal social structure, in specific. According to Said in *Oreintalism,* colonial discourses portray Europe in a masculine role which dominates a feminized Orient and results in a troubled gender configuration for African males, usually depicted as "hyper-masculine." Hence, I suggest that those colonized men who are robbed of their masculinities attempt to reassert a patriarchal rule over the local women in order to cast away feminine attributions. In other words, the men of Wad Hamid resist colonial hegemonies and decolonize their village by stressing traditionalism in the form of patriarchal powers. Therefore, by situating the novel in a rural Sudanese village which has recently embraced colonial modernity, the role of community can be studied in the process of reasserting male-dominance and through the abolishment of seemingly Westernized ideals.

I mainly focus on how Hosna's refusal to marry Wad Rayyis and to consummate the marriage is frowned upon and her death for fighting for her body is a novel and shameful behavior among locals. Her refusal is interpreted as a rejection of the decolonization and the patriarchy the men are seeking to impose. Having been previously married to a man who has adopted Western ideals, Hosna is "transformed into an independent-minded woman who is unafraid of defying traditional patriarchy" (Hassan 320), and one who is a reminder of the rule Sudanese people withstood and wanted to deny. Her community (father, brother, Wad

Rayyis, etc..) subdue her via coercion and violence; her refusal is not announced publically and her suicide is not to be spoken of in the village, dismissing her fight for, if not feminist, human right to not give away her body. Furthermore, attention is paid to Hosna's age and social demeanor and is juxtaposed to that of Bint Majzoub to provide insight to McClintock's assertion of how social status can influence women's fight for their rights. Indeed, it becomes clear that in Salih's novel, community is an obstacle rendering women's voice unheard; it is Spivak's notion of an "interruption" – explicated in *Death of a Discipline* – preventing the formation of a collectivity after encounters with the West. *Season of Migration to the North*, the oldest of the novels I discuss in my thesis, reflects the unjust treatment of women as an initial reaction to the colonization and modernization of a traditional and rural space.

The second chapter of my thesis explores Fadia Faqir's *Pillars of Salt*, published in 1996. Moving from Salih's rural village in Sudan, Faqir places her characters in Jordan, allowing for the depiction of lives of both Bedouin and urban women during and after the British mandate. Interestingly, the characterization of Maha and Um Saad can be said to have been influenced by the Jordanian elections in 1993. A study reveals that women were striving to take place in the political scene, but "social backwardness" was the women candidates' main concern (Faqir 166). In *Pillars of Salt,* Maha's stances and confrontations with the British officers, ones which indicate patriotism and a level of political maturity, are met with the socially backward behavior of severe beating and violence from her own brother. A close reading of related passages suggest that Faqir's Jordan has cast women out of the political scenes to establish interests of a dominating patriarchy. An overview of the context the novel was written in is essential to understanding and critiquing the novel's

depiction of how cases of domestic discrimination, violence and rape in a male-dominated Jordan are dealt with. Unfortunately, the novel implies that national liberation has not brought about women's libration in modern Jordan. Though *Pillars of Salt* transcends the tradition versus modernity dilemma governing *Season of Migration to the North*, and as is shown through the modernized urban life-style of Um Saad, it is unhinged by the need of incorporating women in the political scene and by the absence of democracy within the household. If decolonization means the assertion of patriarchal social structures, Faqir's Jordan, unlike Salih's Sudan, asserts male-dominance by giving women a false sense of liberation; modernization of the life-style but not in the governing and the legislative system that serves males' best interests.

Moreover, statistics on the Jordanian elections reveal that 68.5% of the women choose to vote for a male candidate because they believe that Islam prohibits the participation of women in politics (Faqir 166). Faqir's novel is rich with false Islamic beliefs that dominate women's lives and bodies, particularly the ones she critiques through the Storyteller. I introduce Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety: Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* to argue that women in Islamic societies embrace Islam as a means towards emancipation, not oppression; the misreadings and the extreme cultural practices that a male-dominated society adopts in the name of religion, and which are portrayed in the novel, are what reinforces the negative preconceptions. I also employ Nawal Al-Saadawi's *The Hidden Face of Eve* and Miriam Cooke's *Women Claim Islam* to investigate certain Quraanic verses which are widely referred to by men to justify their actions. I argue that Islamic feminists, though use religious discourse to empower their status, cannot achieve much progress by adopting ideals that privilege men. Maha and Um Saad both adopt

religious and certain social norms, yet they suffer physical abuse, and their defiance of gender roles is judged by their societies as mental illness. They are silenced by religious and cultural practices. Interestingly, and written thirty years after *Season of Migration to the North*, *Pillars of Salt* maintains the unjust treatment of women in a country recovering from colonial rule.

The third chapter comprises an exploration of Nawal Al-Saadawi's *Zeina*, first published in Arabic in 2009 and translated into English in 2011. Saadawi's novel is set in modern day Cairo, prior to a revolution to overthrow a corrupt president. Though the novel was published prior to the overthrow of ex-President Hosni Mubarak, it reflects a keen vision on the unraveling of events and the causes that led to the revolution in 2010. I employ Mirriam Cooke's theory on violence as the weapon to maintain power and link it to Accad's notion of how violence and military weapons are symbolic of the phallus in order to argue that men resort to physical violence against women, and in fact anyone who jeopardizes their authority, to establish and maintain power. Moreover, and since Egypt is a dominantly Muslim country, I employ several passages from the novel to argue that religion is still being used to justify men's actions, and that women ought to arm themselves with religious discourse in order to counter the arguments which religious men use to retrieve power over women and their bodies. Juxtaposition is made between the character Zeina, the symbol of freedom and revolution, and Mageeda, an Islamist journalist of high-class upbringing, to suggest that women under patriarchal rule will not achieve a sisterhood based on common goals because they have not yet rid themselves of societal and religious shackles that hinder their progress.

To carry on with *Zeina,* I trace the themes of the female voice and gaze throughout the novel to stress their importance in the process of women's liberation. I mainly focus on Zeina's voice, in the literal sense, as she is a performer and sings about her life, echoing the voices and the experiences of the masses. According to "Speaking from Silence: Methods of Silencing and Resistance", men attempt to only silence women, but control and shape their voice so that it only speaks of what the former want to hear. This issue becomes apparent when Zeina receives threats and is wanted dead by religious fundamentalists. Moreover, and according to theories on the female gaze as one which causes "social disorder" (Grace 90), Zeina's fiery eyes haunts the patriarchal society because it can see through their hypocrisy and reveal their insecurities. With references to Freud's "Medusa and the Female Gaze", Zeina's eyes become a symbol of castration; ones with a vision that is destructive to the state which men have built by drawing gender-biased realities so that they may thrive and maintain power. At the end of the novel, Zeina is shot and killed while performing on stage. Though blood runs down her chest, she continues to sing, and her body is carried by the audience, cheering her to chant louder. The last scene suggests that the masses have come to understand the importance of the female voice in liberating the state from corruption, but, nonetheless, reveals that severe measure are taken by authority figures against those who disrupt their rule.

Briefly put, my thesis takes into consideration the temporal and geographical location of the novels of Tayeb Salih, Fadia Faqir, and Nawal Al-Saadawi in regards to what their works entail on women's liberation in colonized countries. I build on Mohanty's and McClintock's notions of feminism to argue that women are capable of surpassing Western stereotypes; however, the religious and patriarchal ideologies keep the women silenced

irrespective of their attempts at emancipation. By providing an overview of the political undercurrents governing the context of each novel, I set out to prove that any national liberation that does not necessitate the liberation of women is a failed one. Moving chronologically from the oldest to the most recent, the women's struggles evolve from simple tradition/modernity binaries, to ones demanding for human rights and political agency, to a rejection of all cultural norms and a Westernization of the subject. In light of the Arab Spring being witnessed in the Middle East, the thesis can be said to emphasize that an Arab Spring cannot blossom by over-throwing corrupt political regimes without abolishing patriarchal ideologies and allowing for the participation of women in politics and the making of history.

Chapter II

Decolonization at the Expense of Women's Bodies: Season of Migration to the North

> "This world divided into compartments, this world cut in two is inhabited by two different species. The originality of the colonial context is that economic reality, inequality and the immense difference of ways of life never come to mask the human realities."
>
> Frantz Fanon

Originally written in Arabic in 1966, *Season of Migration to the North* is a classic in postcolonial literature and has been proclaimed as a pinnacle in modern Arabic literature by renowned scholars and critics. Put in the context of Sudan's independence, I use this novel to portray how the locals' initial reaction after gaining independence is to attempt to eradicate the traces of modernity that the British have left on the characters' rural village. However, this eradication takes its toll on women's bodies, identity, and well-being. Through close readings of related passages, it becomes evident that the local men substitute one form of dominion, colonization, with another, patriarchy. They reinforce the practice of cliterodectomy with false religious notions in order to attain a sense of masculinity which has been robbed from them by the colonizers. Moreover, I explore the different factors which influence female solidarity in the face of patriarchy in Salih's work, primarily, age, experiences, and social class. It becomes evident by the end of the chapter that a male-dominated community silences any woman, embodied by the character Hosna, who attempts to deviate and defy traditional cultural norms.

A. Literature Review

Tayeb Salih's novel has been studied by intellectuals for its creation of a space beyond hegemonic and binary conceptions of self/other, north/south, and feminine/masculine. Saree Makdisi, in "'Postcolonial' Literature in a Neocolonial World: Modern Arabic Culture and the End of Modernity," examines other dualistic dimensions of the novel, mainly tradition versus modernity. According to Makdisi, Arab intellectuals found themselves caught between the classical literary heritage of their predecessors and the appeals of modernizing which European education offers. He states that the latter came to be called *Al-Nahda*, meaning rebirth or an awakening, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and recalls warnings of intellectuals' beliefs that becoming modern means becoming the Other (Makdisi 87). The last scene of *Season of Migration* in which the narrator is swept by the Nile into a "geographically uncertain location" is similar to the novel's "unstable mixture of modern European and traditional Arabic styles and forms" (Makdisi 87). Makdisi suggests that similar to how some of the characters' identity is split between two different cultures, the post-colonial and literary work itself is caught between conventional and modern styles of writing.

Accad explores another layer of the novel when she studies the female characters in "Sexual Politics: Women in Tayib Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*" and argues that Arabic literature exploits misconceptions of European women being sexually needy, feeding Arab mens' sexual desires who, in turn, save their marriage to the virgin women back home. She explains Hosna's death as a result of her becoming Westernized through Mustafa Sa'eed, and, hence, is sought after by the local man,Wad Rayyes. Her work, however, falls short for her emphasis on women's sexuality. Having been written in 1985, non-Western

scholarship on feminism stressed sexual liberation primarily as a means to achieve women's liberation, and overlooked equally essential aspects of transcending differences in education, age, and social class that are necessary to address when advocating women's emancipation. To carry on, John E. Davidson in "In Search of a Middle Point: The Origins of Oppression in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*," refutes Evelyne Accad's claim that the women are the real victims in the novel because such claim simplifies Salih's work into one in which a woman is "symbolically murdered" for adopting Western values, where in fact the work surpasses those "inadequacies" and reveals that colonized oppression is already inherent in Sudanese culture through Islam and patriarchy (389). He also argues that the novel goes beyond the clashes between a rural Sudanese village and the British invasion seeking to modernize it, as explicated by Makdisi. In turn, Davidson reads the novel as a critique of the segregationist moods and the oppressions (gender, racial, religious and economic) which have existed in Sudanese culture even before the British invasion.

Though the previously mentioned scholars shed light on different layers of Salih's work, they overlook how and why national liberation does not mandate the liberation of women. Wail S. Hassan's "Gender (and) Imperialism: Structures of Masculinity in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*" brings insight to the matter as he explains how community is key for the formation of collectivities which would entail a genuine liberation in reality, and a movement in fiction which goes beyond the reflection of the unfortunate existence for the third-world woman. Women and feminist collectivities, ones which are not held back by a patriarchal and legislative social system are necessary to achieve such aim. Hassan argues that the difficulty of forming feminist collectivities is due to community's consolidation of one form of hegemonic power, colonialism, with another, patriarchy. This

notion of consolidation will be discussed more thoroughly in a later section of this chapter, but for the purpose of demonstrating the role of community, I will briefly explain Hassan's explication of Lacan's theory of the splitting of the subject to better understand the psychology behind men's subversion of women in colonial contexts[1].

Lacan explicates that women represent the "being" of the phallus while men are ones "having" the phallus, in which the phallus has the symbolic functions and is a condition for the establishment of the subject and the signifier of the desire of the other (Hassan 288). Hassan states that for Lacan, the being of the phallus "involves a necessary masquerade: the necessity to embody the Other's desire as a conduit to one's own. Such complicity can be found in a 'woman [who] will reject an essential part of her femininity, namely all her attributes in the masquerade" (Hassan 310). In other words, Lacan suggests that women are the reflection of men's desires in which men define themselves. Hassan argues that the masquerade Lacan explains is similar to Butler's concept of gender performativity; both insinuating a masking and an active control over representation. Hassan, therefore, applies this concept to colonial studies by arguing that the colonized are said to "be" the phallus while the colonizers are ones "having" the phallus. Hence, and in accordance with the gender paradigm, the colonizers take on the masculine role and demand confirmation for "having" the phallus by forcing the role of "being" the phallus on the colonized, feminizing them. The disruption of the colonial and gender identity shakes the roots of the patriarchal social system. Hassan's approach suggests that the colonized masculine subjects attempt to restore the previous balance through the reassertion of "having" the phallus. The masculine

[1] It is important to note that though Lacan's theory has been criticized by Derrida and feminist critics as Luce Irigary for being sexist with his discussion of the phallus, others like Butler believe that his work broadens and can further the discourse of feminist theory.

seeks its establishment through the feminine, forcing and expecting the latter to mask and control its representation more strongly. When the colonized feminine subjects carry the stigma of Westernization in any aspect, they act as a reminder of colonized men's position as feminized. Therefore, the colonized masculine subjects seek the destruction of the Westernized feminine subjects to compensate for their failure of destroying the colonizers who robbed the colonized males of "having" the phallus.

Through the above mentioned explication, it becomes clear that the formation of female collectivities rebelling against patriarchy is a struggle. In *Season of Migration to the North,* Hosna's refusal to be wed to Wad Rayyis is an act of rebellion dismayed by the people of the village seeking to decolonize their space from British ideologies and to rid their patriarchy from any feminized notions. The colonized male-dominated community of Wad Hamid is chief in the series of events leading to Hosna's death. Though the novel takes place at the dawn of independence from British colonization, liberation of the people, including men and women, is not established. Hassan's work and his emphasis on the role of community through a configuration between theories of Lacan and Butler are most fitting to the objectives of this thesis. The range of previously mentioned scholars are essential to provide insights to the different layers of Salih's novel. However, and before going into more details regarding community's influence on women's plight through tradition, religion, and the oppression of freedoms, it is vital to discuss the geographical, political and historical context of the Salih's work. An exploration of Sudan's legislative and political system during and after independence, in matters relevant to the novel and the thesis, are necessary for locating where Sudan falls in the scheme of Middle Eastern and third-world uprising (if

existent) of women when put in conversation with Fadia Faqir's Jordan and Nawal Al-Saadawi's Egypt.

B. Historical Background and Female Circumcision Practices:

Season of Migration to the North, among others of Salih's work such as "A Date Palm by the Tree," "A Handful of Dates," and "The Doum Tree," are all set in the village of Wad Hamid, located on the Nile about sixty kilometers north of Khartoum, Sudan. As the novel takes place at the dawn of Independence from British colonization, the village comes to represent the interplay of aspects of "spirituality, colonialism, resistance, tradition, modernization, patriarchy, and authority" (Hassan 32). In fact, *Season* was written ten years after Sudan achieved its independence from the British Empire in 1956, allowing for a reading of the novel as a critique of the effects of British colonial rule on locals' life-styles in general, and on the patriarchal social structure, in particular. The clash between Sudanese culture and the British rule and the implications the latter has on the former occur in the form of resistance to change, mainly by holding on to traditional practices and notions which the locals perceive as part of the Sudanese culture. One of those traditional practices is clitoridectomy and female genital circumcision which has been rooted in the history of Sudan and has captured the colonizers' attention who, in turn, sought to put an end to it through awareness, health education, and even the legislative system. I employ close readings of certain passages to provide a more thorough analysis of the historical and cultural background as reflected in the novel.

Very early in the novel, and upon the narrator's return to his hometown, Bint Majzoub tells the narrator "'We were afraid […] you'd bring back with you an

uncircumcised infidel for a wife'" (4). Bint Majzoub, one of the more important characters from the village and one who represents the older generation resilient to colonial progress, announces her concern, though teasingly, that one of her village people has gone astray to not only introduce a Western and Christian stranger to locals' home, but also, and more specifically, one who is "uncircumcised" (4). Salih sets the novel in a location where cultural resistance to colonialism reinforces an oppressive patriarchy which openly subverts women to discursive and physical violence. However, and before delving into feminist theories of why the female body became a part of the decolonization process in Sudan, it is essential to examine the mode in which female genital mutilation and circumcision captured the attention of colonizers and how the latter came to issue policies against it. In "Clash of Selves: Gender, Personhood, and Human Rights Discourse in Colonial Sudan," Janice Boddy writes that female circumcision, also known as pharaonic circumcision and pharoanic purification, is a practice dating back to pharoanic times and has been adopted in Northern Muslim Sudan since the Turco-Egyptian rule in 1820. The prepubescent girls would undergo infibulation, a form of genital cutting in which the vaginal opening is obscured. Though the practice started as a measure meant to protect the mother and her womb, it later became a means to control sexual reproduction and maintain family honor. In 1920, a British woman witnessed the "barbarous customs" of circumcision and was so "appalled" that she insisted on a midwifery school to spread awareness and stop the primitive practice, to which field officers yielded (Boddy 403).

Due to the fact that Northern Sudan is dominantly Muslim, locals saw the colonizers' attempts to stop the practice as an attack against Islam. Bint Majzoub refers to the Western female subjects as "infidel[s]" (Salih 4), for non-Muslims were viewed as ones who are

astray from the righteous path of God. Therefore, giving way to officials' desires and ending the practice of female circumcision does not only jeopardize Sudanese cultural practices, but also their religion, as they would be succumbing to the infidel Christians' demands. On the topic of sexual pleasure, Bint Majzoub protests:

> The infidel women aren't so knowledgeable about this business as our village girls […]. They're uncricumcized and treat the whole business like having a drink of water. The village girl gets herself rubbed all over with oil and perfumed and puts in a silky night-wrap, and when she lies down on the red mat after the evening prayer and opens her thighs, a man feels like he's Abu Zeid El-Hilali. The man who's not interested perks up and gets interested. (80)

Though Bint Majzoub's outspokenness is note worthy, she erroneously appropriates sexual pleasure with circumcision. As a form of patriotism and a debunking of foreign cultural beliefs, she refers to Abu Zeid El-Hilali, a heroic Islamic figure of the 11th century who sought to unite the Arab nation during crises. A reading of this passage suggests that female circumcision is a Sudanese custom meant to reunite the Muslim people of Sudan in the process of decolonization against the Christian British rule. In that sense, violence against women's bodies becomes key to regain the masculine status that the colonizers stripped off from the locals. Cliterodectomy, hence, is in the colonized Sudanese' minds a practice which British colonizers want to abolish because it threatens the latter's authority. Moreover, Bint Majzoub's statements emphasize the measures Sudanese women would take

to please their male partner neglecting any mention of women's own experiences of pleasure or sexual arousal.

In *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*, Anne McClintock explains that sexuality and the process of attainment of sexual pleasure entered the equation of British colonizers and the colonized Africans, for authority over pleasure and sexuality can be used to serve as a "paradigm of social order and disorder" (42). She uses Freud's psychoanalytic approaches to explain her notion of how "clitoral sexuality – sex for female pleasure – and reproductive sexuality – sex for male pleasure and child bearing – was projected onto the realm of empire and the zone of the primitive" (McClintock 42). According to McClintock's conceptions of sexuality in a colonial context, the colonized stressed reproductive sexuality over clitoral sexuality and regarded female genitalia with a Freudian eye as being "more primitive than those of the male" and the clitoris as "the normal prototype of inferior organs" (qtd McClintock 42). In other words, one can suggest that with accordance to the Lacan-Butler gender configuration in a colonized space, colonized men sought empowerment, this time in the domain of sexuality, by placing their sexual needs and desires on higher grounds than that of their women. The "having" of the phallus takes on a more literal meaning as men destroy the "inferior" phallic clitoris and make certain that their needs are the only ones which are satisfied. Female circumcision becomes for the males part of the decolonization process and a reassertion of their masculinity. It is no surprise, then, that when in 1945, a law against pharaonic circumcision was passed and midwives who broke the law were found guilty; the leader of the Republican party who called for the immediate independence of Sudan found the law "unjust" and riots

erupted (Boddy 421). Indeed, stopping the practice of female circumcision came to represent an attack not only on Sudanese people's religion but also on their sex lives.

In 1947, the British attempted to speak to locals to stop circumcision practices, particularly to young Muslim girls in elementary schools, by appealing to Islam and giving out leaflets that asked and cautioned "Which do you believe, Pharoah the enemy of God or Mohammad the Prophet of God? […] The doctors have advised that Pharaonic circumcision may cause sterility. Do you wish for sterility? Your religion forbids doing harm to the body. Will you disobey your religion?" (qtd Boddy 422). Though the leaflets were meant to speak the same language as that of the Muslim Sudanese people, the difficulty remained that the British did not comprehend why circumcision became more urgent for the Sudanese, especially since the former made it illegal, and ironically, triggered the Sudanese to embrace the practice more profoundly. Following the warnings, local people continued to practice circumcision, more discreetly however, and kept young girls away from school to minimize exposure to these cautions. Hence, "the modest success of female education" sought by the British became "endanger[ed]" (Boddy 422) as a result of foreigners' undervaluing of the significance of adhering to cultural customs in colonial contexts as a form of decolonization. In other words, not only did locals continue to fight Westernized ideals of proclaimed modernization by enforcing their own customs even more strongly, in this case circumcision, they also attempted to confine young girls in their homes away from the sort of exposure that would lead them away from the traditional line of thought.

In *Season of Migration to the North*, and on the topic of associating conservative Islam with circumcision, Wad Rayyes points to the wrongdoings of his people by upholding that the physical and sexual well-being of women does not go against Islam:

> 'The thing between their thighs is like an upturned dish, all there for good or bad. We here lop it off like a piece of land that's been stripped bare.'
> 'Circumcision is one of the conditions of Islam,' said Bakri
> 'What Islam are you talking about?' asked Wad Rayyes. 'It's your Islam and Hajj Ahmed's Islam, because you can't tell what's good for you from what's bad. The Nigerians, the Egyptians, and the Arabs of Syria, aren't they Moslems like us? But they're people who know what's what and leave their women as God created them. As for us, we dock them like you do animals.' (81)

Ironically, the same Wad Rayyes who is chief in the murder of Hosna, rightfully realizes that Islam's insistence on women's purity does not encompass harming or violating the sanctity of their bodies. Islam, hence, does not mandate female circumcision. The practice, however, is associated with Islamic religion due to the measures Sudanese Muslim men take in order to assert their patriarchy and control over women's bodies. After their colonization and in an attempt to restore the status of masculinity colonizers rob the colonized of, as previously explained, the Sudanese men created their own cultural norm and based it on false religious grounds to rid themselves of their feminized status, especially since it went against the laws the British wished to impose. Violence against and doing harm to women's bodies in the form genital mutilation becomes a sort of victory for locals against their colonizers.

Saba Mahmood comments on the topic of female circumcision by addressing Boddy's work and stating that "agentival capacity is entailed in not only those acts that resist norms, but also in multiple ways in which one *inhabits* norms" (qtd Boddy 408). Mahmood suggests that, and given the context in which putting the practice into a halt existed in, the Sudanese people chose to adopt the norm of circumcising their young girls as a form of agency to fight the British colonizers. However, by using female circumcision as a weapon

against Westernized ideals, the Sudanese jeopardized their females' physical health, psychological well-being as well as their lives. The brutality of the practice itself, the failed attempt to approach and stop it, and the hostile reaction the latter generated backfired on both colonizers and colonized; colonizers became unable to improve health and educational services in Sudan while the Sudanese jeopardized women's physical health and lives.

C. Woman versus Woman: Age, Class, and Sexual Experiences

It is note-worthy that in the previous quoted passage, Bint Majzoub is not only openly discussing sexual matters with men, but she is also advocating forms of physical violence, which one can rightfully assume that she was subject to as well, towards her fellow Muslim sisters. Western feminists, as Mohanty argues in "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," assume that third world women are sexually oppressed and are physically victimized by men. However, as Bint Majzoub's statements reveal, "sisterhood cannot be assumed on the basis of gender; it must be forged in concrete historical and political practice and analysis" (Mohanty 178). Put differently, the female subject, in this case Bint Majzoub, justifies and gives her consensus to practicing pharoanic circumcision as a form of resistance to Western cultural hegemony, one which is embodied by the British colonizers' attempts to halt the practice. Her approval of such form of physical violence proves that women are not only victimized by men but are also victimized by the mentality they themselves (the women) adopt and come to embrace willingly to repel Westernized notions from penetrating their own culture.

Bint Majzoub, following Mohanty's argument, brings to light how Western feminism's generalization that, in developing countries, men are "'subjects-who-perpetrate-

violence'" (Mohanty 178) and women are "'objects-who-defend-themselves'" (Mohanty 178) falls short. Bint Majzoub's advocacy of the practice renders her as one who perpetrates such violence along with men as she perpetuates and reinforces patriarchal ideologies. Her actions can be best described by Mahmood's study of how "suffering and survival – two modalities of existence that are often considered to be the antithesis of agency – come to be articulated within the lives of women who live under the pressures of a patriarchal system that requires them to conform to [its] rigid demands" (167). In other words, agency for women under patriarchal rule manifests itself in their coping with the demands of a male-dominated society as a means of survival. However, in the case of Bint Majzoub, her acceptance and advocacy of circumcision practices is not a survival mechanism in a patriarchal world, but one in a *colonized* patriarchal world. Bint Majzoub can be said to favor succumbing to Muslim Sudanese men's cultural and ideological beliefs than to adopt the ideals of the Christian Western enemy; she has "accepted the subjugation of women and decided to make the most of it" (Davidson 387). Indeed, she is described as being "famous in the village, and men and women alike were eager to listen to her conversation which was daring and uninhibited. She used to smoke, drink, and swear an oath of divorce like a man" (Salih 76). Interestingly, the only woman in the Sudanese village who is characterized as outspoken and is recognized on equal grounds with the elders is one who behaves "like a man" (Salih 76).

If gender performativity, according to Butler, is the performance of socially-constructed acts of how each gender ought to behave, men ought to be masculine and women be feminine, and that the masculine in a patriarchal society has authority and control over the feminine, then Bint Majzoub can be said to have abided by the norms, ones "that

seem to signify the regulatory or normalizing function of power" (Butler 219), specified for the male gender. In other words, her actions and demeanor reveal aspects of the masculinity normalized and performed by men in a patriarchal community. She uses the "power granted [to] her in the patriarchy and […] perpetuate[s] the misogynistic social structure" (Davidson 387) whether by advocating female circumcision, shaming Hosna for refusing to be wed to Wad Rayyes, or by her verbal subjugation of women and rejection of foreign notions. Those norms "bind" Bint Majzoub with the men of Wad Hamid and "form[s] the basis of their ethical and political claim" (Butler 219). However, Bint Majzoub's ability to embrace the norms of the male gender and be regarded "like a man" (Salih 76) involves several factors that aid her *with* her possession of power, compared to the other women in the village, and that directs her *for* and towards a purpose. As Butler explains, "One does not 'do' one's gender alone. One is always 'doing' with or for another, even if the other is imaginary" (1). Butler suggests that the configuration that (un)does one's gender based on norms requires aspects that aid "with", and a purpose "for", the (un)doing of the respective gendered life. An examination of these factors and purpose is necessary to better comprehend the men's embracement and acceptance of Bint Majzoub as an equal member in their patriarchal space.

For a start, the factors of age and experience are of great importance to why Bint Majzoub is not treated like the other women in the village. She is described as "a tall woman of a charcoal complexion like black velvet who, despite the fact she was approaching seventy, still retained vestiges of beauty" (Salih 76). Bint Majzoub, though held traces of feminine beauty, was far from being youthful and desirable by men. As mentioned earlier, colonized men stressed reproductive sexuality and the bearing of children; a need in which Bint Majzoub, at the age of seventy, cannot satisfy. Moreover, and in accordance with

Lacan, if women are the reflection of men's desires in which the latter define themselves, a reflection of Bint Majzoub would yield senility and infertility. The Sudanese men of Wad Hamid, even the elders, glorify their experiences and sexual conquests; they perceive themselves as youthful even if their physical states reflect a different image. If an elder is to marry an old woman, her aged body and health would make the elderly man feel old as well. Bint Majzoub, hence, is not the subject of male desire. Patriarchal men, especially after being colonized, seek to prove their masculinities and macho image in order to reclaim a sense of virility. Actions as such are why the Orient is stereotypically portrayed, as Said in *Orientalism* explains, "hyper-masculine." It can be said that colonized men's over-compensation of any sign of weakness, even old age, is what builds and reinforces the Occident's stereotypes about the former. A reflection which entails that colonized Arab men are wasted and impotent, by marrying an elderly woman for example, is one in which the colonized men would detest as it confirms their status as feminized, dominated by a masculine West.

Furthermore, and equally essential to the factor of age in dismissing Bint Majzoub as desirable to men is that of women's sexual experience. The emphasis on cliterodectomy and female genital circumcision is, if anything, a proof of the measures men took in order to control women's sexual appetite and preserve their virginity until marriage. Virginity is tied with honor in patriarchal and Muslim societies, and any woman who fails to preserve her chastity is disowned by her family and met with social rejection, if not with violence and with murder in the name of honor. Women are expected to be sexually inexperienced and 'innocent' to be desired by men and chosen as wives. Bint Majzoub, contrary to the previous statements, "had been married to a number of the leading men of the village" and is "daring

and uninhibited" (Salih 76). Her sexual experiences with multiple husbands and her unreserved conversations about her sex life characterize Bint Majzoub as a "strong woman" which makes her "belong to the men's rather than the women's camp in her behavior and attitude" (El-Nour 161). Indeed, a reflection on the generation a woman belongs to and the life she leads is necessary to better understand the factors that can bring women together as a 'camp' or drive them apart.

Another essential factor that ought to be considered is the social class, or the economic situation, of women in the process forming a female collectivity. Bint Majzoub, as previously mentioned, has had multiple husbands, "all of whom had died and left her a considerable fortune" (Salih 76). Though her riches do come from her dead husbands, she, now an elder, is not dependent financially on a man for support. She is able to support herself on her own, and, thus, is not reliant on a man to provide for her needs. Though Bint Majzoub does not strive to free herself from patriarchy, her well-to-do financial status does liberate and empower her to have a similar status as that of the men of the village. Her characterization can be used as a model to dispel feminist Western scholarship's view of "third-world women" as "universal dependents" (Mohanty 178). Mohanty examines the faultiness of such generalization and explains that when women are categorized according to a homogeneous sociological grouping "characterized by dependencies or powerlessness (or even strengths) that problems arise – we say too little or too much at the same time" (Mohanty 1778). In other words, feminist scholarship will not attend to the demands of women or mobilize them towards liberation if it does not cease to generalize and assume that women of developing countries stand under the same umbrella. Mohanty continues to explain that such generalizations of women as "dependent and oppressed" make it

"impossible" to analyze historical differences in order to approach the matter properly (179). Bint Majzoub, is neither dependent nor oppressed; her political views are what immobilizes agency from her part towards the liberation of women in Wad Hamid. The neglect of considering political directedness or affiliation can lead to erroneous and stereotypical representations of women, and, accordingly, a defective conclusion of why liberation of women in Africa is yet to be achieved.

Bint Majzoub does break free from the norms set for women in a patriarchal society; however, if her age, sexual experiences, and riches are liberating factors for her to "undo" her gender, she does not use her authority as an elder for the betterment of women in Wad Hamid. Her attitude towards the other women in the village, particularly Hosna, is traditional and she "disapproves of any uncustomary liberty taken by younger woman" (El-Nour 161). Her behavior and actions are indicative of the failure to form a collectivity between the women of Wad Hamid; or to use Spivak's terms, the failure of "strategic essentialism." To elaborate, strategic essentialism entails "a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (Spivak 214). In other words, the term suggests that people who might be differentiated internally would come together, surpassing their differences and essentializing their common aims, as a collectivity, to achieve certain political purposes. However, and in the case of Bint Majzoub and the younger women of Wad Hamid, and though they both rebel against patriarchal norms – Bint Majzoub through her outspokenness and Hosna, for instance, through her refusal to be wed to Wad Rayyis – they do not seek to achieve a common political goal. Bint Majzoub does not strive to abolish patriarchy. In fact, she reinforces it and joins the colonized men's collectivity in their political aims of decolonization from British rule, even if they be on the

expense of Sudanese women's well-being. On the other hand, the younger generation of women, represented by Hosna, is more influenced by non-local notions, particularly those retaining to a liberated status and emancipated existence; one free from the shackles constructed by men. Therefore, it can be said that aiming for common political goals cannot be excluded from the process of abolishing hegemonic patriarchy. If women are to be considered a minority group on the basis of gender, Bint Majzoub is as an example of a subject who "undoes" her gender *with* the aid of the previously mentioned factors, and *for* the purpose of decolonization.

D. Internal Colonization of Women:

Colonization in *Season of Migration to the North* has been so far discussed in terms of occupying space, in this case Sudan, as well as in terms of cultural practices and Western socio-political notions, those being the attempts to stop the practice of female circumcision, educate and liberate Sudanese women. However, there remains an essential aspect to be covered: internal colonization. Upon his arrival to the village, the narrator describes his hometown as unchanged, yet he includes depictions of the water pumps and narrates the debates over the advanced agricultural system Mustafa Sa'eed had introduced. Western influences as such have crept into and have become part of the traditional village, modernizing it. The water pumps are of great significance as they symbolize the embracement of Western technology by the locals, and, in a sense, the colonization engraved in the heart of the agricultural society. Similarly, and taking in mind that the locals have substituted colonial hegemony with a more conservative patriarchal one, the men have sought to colonize, creep into, and exert their rule in the hearts of what they consider their

'property': women. Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* explains that patriarchy is "everywhere" and that it has colonized the self and identity of women. If femininity is not exhibited in women as goes with the cultural standards of the patriarchal society, they are met with violence and coercion in order to reproduce the status quo (Millet 98). Accordingly, patriarchy colonizes the interiority of women's identity and becomes part of them. Bint Majzoub is a fit example of a woman who has internalized patriarchy, as previously discussed, while Hosna is a model of a woman who has not.

Though having lived her entire life in the village of Wad Hamid, Hosna adopts non-local notions and stands up to her male-dominated society. She rejects the feminine role written for her and undoes her gender in a manner that, unlike Bint Majzoub's, threatens her very existence. If undoing gender requires factors that aid with and is for a specific purpose, Hosna's aiding factor is her marriage to Mustafa Sa'eed, and her purpose lies in maintaining her independence and free will. Mustafa Sa'eed treated Hosna with respect and "seems to have transformed her into an independent-minded woman who is unafraid of defying traditional patriarchy" (Hassan 320). Her husband has engraved values in her which are foreign and unusual for Wad Hamid. However, and similar to how patriarchy is perilous and stands against achieving a genuine national liberation, women's rebellion against patriarchy is life-threatening when the highest political aim is decolonization. The narrator hints at that notion when he states,

> I imagined Hosna Bint Mahmoud, Mustafa Sa'eed's widow, as being the same woman in both instances: two white, wide open thighs in London, and a woman groaning before dawn in an obscure village on a bend of the Nile under the weight of the aged Wad Rayyis. If that other thing was evil, this too was evil. (87)

To the locals, Hosna carries the 'germ' of Westernization, as when imagined as "white" (Salih 87), and needs to be brought back in line to serve men's purposes and political plights. However, and more importantly, they, even the Westernized and educated narrator, view their women as a sexual object. The narrator only imagines Hosna as "wide open thighs" (Salih 87) instead of a complete and undivided subject. Salih includes depictions of Hosna as not belonging to her village people with her "noble carriage and a foreign type of beauty" (Salih 89). Even Mahjoub, a friend of the narrator, points to how she becomes "changed" after her marriage to Mustafa Sa'eed and how everyone who knew her since childhood "sees her as something new – like a city woman" (Salih 101). Westernized or not, she is an object, "something" (Salih 101), that is an essential 'prop' in the cleansing of Wad Hamid from British influences.

Evelyne Accad comments on Hosna's marriage arrangement to Wad Rayyes and states that "[h]ad Mustafa Sa'eed not corrupted Hosna with foreign ideas she would have never thought of resisting the match with Wad Rayyes" and argues that "oppressive customs tend to operate by assuming that the women will submit to whatever the men propose" (Accad 61). In other words, had she not been in contact with Mustafa Sa'eed, Hosna would have complied and maybe even welcomed the idea of being matched with Wad Rayyes, exactly as is expected of her. Accad's claim is derived from Kate Millet's theory of sexual politics, which she gives credit to at the beginning of her essay, and her examination of how power and domination are exhibited in sexual roles and activities in all literature (Accad 55). Accordingly, power relations are revealed through sexual roles in Salih's novel in Wad Rayyes's claim that "women are women whether they're in Egypt, Sudan, Iraq or the land of Mumbo-jumbo. The black, the white, and the red – they're all one and the same" (82). In the

patriarchal mindset, women, irrespective of ethnicity and race, are to be treated, viewed, and, in this case, victimized, in the same exact manner: as sexual objects and as men's possessions. This notion is made clearer when Wad Rayyes and Mahjoub declare that "men are the guardians of women" (Salih 98) and that "women belong to men, and a man's a man even if he's decrepit" (Salih 99). It can be said, given these statements, that Hosna's death becomes inevitable since her presence and rebellion is disruptive to the patriarchal state. To carry on with the notion of sexual roles and their relation to power and dominion, Mustafa Sa'eed announces that "[he] will liberate Africa with his penis" (Salih 120). He seeks to reclaim the masculinity he was robbed off by the English through sexually dominating English women. He seduces and stages the death of four English women as a form of vengeance to the rape of Africa. In *Black Skin, White Masks,* Fanon approaches colonial masculinity psychoanalytically and explains that sexual competition with the white man was the black man's method to reclaim his manhood and emphasizes that the white man's greatest fear was the sexual dominion of white women by black men. Accordingly, Mustafa Sa'eed, the black Sudanese, fits well into this paradigm and his battles against the English takes place in his orientalized bedroom and on English women's bodies. Accordingly, "women," irrespective of ethnicity and color, "are not just a symbolic space but real *targets* of colonialist and nationalist discourses" (Loomba 222). Salih makes that clear in his novel as he dedicates pages describing how women's very existence played a role in the novel, either through their conversations, rebellions, and deaths. In Wad Hamid, the embodiment of the white woman takes the form of Hosna. Wad Rayyes's interest in Hosna surpasses superficial marital and ego centric wantonness that his insistence and rage alarm the narrator to wrongly assume that the former might be in love with her (Salih 97).

Wad Rayyes, the eldest of the patriarchs, sees a white woman in Hosna, and, as Fanon suggests, seeks to dominate her sexually to decolonize his village. He maintains that he "shall marry no one but her" and that "she'll accept [him] whether she likes it or not" (Salih 97). Accordingly, Wad Rayyes becomes the duplicate of Mustafa Sa'eed for wanting to decolonize Wad Hamid from Westerners, and the Westernized – Hosna, "with his penis" (Salih 120).

If Wad Rayyes is the chief murderer of Hosna in terms of his brutal attack and attempt to rape her, her community, too, is compliant to the crime, namely her father and brother. Hosna is beaten till she accepts Wad Rayyes as a husband despite her threats that, if forced, she will kill herself and Wad Rayyes (Salih 96). The coercion used against Hosna goes against Islam's teachings that a woman is to willingly approve of a potential spouse. Similar to cliterodectomy, the pressure on women to get married is falsely tied with religion. Mahmood sheds light on the matter and explores the difficulties of remaining single in a society where heterosexual marriage is seen as a mandatory custom. She explains that an unmarried woman, in a Middle Eastern patriarchal community, is "rejected by the entire society as if she has some disease, as if she is a thief" (169). To the Egyptian women Mahmood studies, marriage can be agentival as it protects them from societal disownment and elevates them to the status of virtuous Muslims who are abiding by Islamic family laws. Therefore, Hosna's rejection of marrying Wad Rayyes is regarded by her community as a crime against her religious duties and against Islam even though forced marriage is shunned by Islam. Wad Rayyes exclaims at her refusal with "Does she imagine she's some queen or some princess? Widows in this village are more common than empty bellies. She should thank God that she's found a husband like me" (Salih 97). His statements suggest how

uncommon it is for a woman to refuse to be married, irrespective of who the potential husband is. Moreover, her family will not tolerate an unlawful daughter who would bring them shame and be looked down upon as a "thief" (Mahmood 169). Though she has been previously married and, speaking the cultural language, has proven that she has no disease (Mahmood 170), she is single again, young, and fertile; a burden that needs to be taken away. Once again, religion is misused in patriarchal cultures to bring forth the men's best interests.

E. **The Repercussion of Women's Internal Decolonization: Death**

Two weeks after her marriage to Wad Rayyes, Hosna killed her husband, who tried to rape her, and killed herself afterwards. Interestingly, Hosna and Wad Rayyes both cry for help, but only Wad Rayyes's cries call attention to the intensity of the situation. Hosna's cries and the passivity of the village people towards them are indicative of community's dismissal of women's needs. When Hosna fights for her body and lets out screams to aid her, Bakri's wife screams back, "Bint Mahmood, look to your honor. What scandals are these? A virgin bride doesn't behave like this – as though you'd had no experience of men" (Salih 126). The idea of marriage rape is non-existent in dictionary of Wad Hamid's community, and Hosna's cries are regarded as scandalous and unnecessary. More importantly, and after the discovery of the bodies, the women of the village are ordered to stay away from the crime scene. The men shout as they find the bodies, "Don't let any woman enter the house" (Salih 126). One can suggest that men's insistence that women not see that horrific scene is because they do not want to expose women to the "germ" of foreign thought in which a woman would die to protect her own body. Moreover, Hosna stabs Wad

Rayyes several times, but most significantly, she stabs him between his thighs (Salih 127). Such action is symbolic of Hosna's vengeance against the phallic weapon in which Wad Rayyes wishes to use to prove his domination and superiority. The men's plan works and Hosna takes the blame for the scandal that roams over the village. Hosna manages to "speak," through her cries and rebellion than to submit to Wad Rayyes and patriarchy in general, but her voice is shunned by men so that it becomes unheard by the other women in the village. Evidently, the patriarchal community takes action to make certain that a voice, spreading messages opposing men's interest, does not reach other women.

The latter notion is reflected in Bint Majzoub words that "the thing done by Bint Mahmoud is not easily spoken of. It is something we have never seen or heard of in times past or present […] They are shameful things and it's hard to talk about them" (Salih 124-125). Not surprisingly, the woman embodying the embracement of patriarchy is the one who provides the narrator with the details of the situation, narrating the events in a manner that criminalizes Hosna and victimizes Wad Rayyes. Bint Majzoub's role is to portray Hosna's actions as indecent and teach others how women will be viewed should they disobey the rules set by a male-dominated society. In "Images of Arab Women," Amyuni describes Hosna as the "precursor of the future woman of Sudan" (35). Though her death is horrific, her rebellion against Wad Rayyes's demands over her, and her "self-sacrifice in the name of dignity and autonomy" are factors which eventually will bring "the birth of the modern Arab woman" (Amyuni 35). In other words, the future of Arab women is dependent on those who will fight for the sake of civility and human rights, irrespective of what the obstacles are.

Whether it is the cliterodectomy, Bint Majzoub's acceptance and role in patriarchal Wad Hamid, Hosna's death and the village's shame in her actions, this first chapter is meant

to shed light on the unjust treatment of women, be it physical, mental or cultural, as an initial reaction to the colonization and modernization of a traditional and rural space. Salih's work calls attention to the failure of formation of women's collectivity due to a male-dominated community's prevention of such action. It reveals the misuse of religion and authority to justify men's best interests and keep women's voices unheard. In the process of reclaiming masculinity, as explicated by Said, the women of Sudan are victimized and are made a target for generalizations by Western feminists. The next chapter seeks to build up on Salih's work, moving geographically and temporally to Jordan and to the year 1996 to question how and if forms of agency have evolved to bring Arab women closer to their human rights. Faqir's novel examines if any progress has been made by feminist discourse, thirty years after the first novel is written, and the repercussions of not having achieved the target of transnational feminism as well as what it entails regarding the future of Arab women.

CHAPTER III

THE POLITICAL STRUGGLE: FADIA FAQIR'S *PILLARS OF SALT*

> "Legislation (and its implementation) is the instrument through which intended state policy on most issues is most clearly revealed, and gender is no exception. The Jordanian constitution states that all citizens are equal under the law in terms of rights and responsibilities. Nonetheless, it bars only race, language and religion as bases of discrimination; sex is not mentioned. […] In numerous laws, women's rights are unprotected and underprotected."
>
> Laurie A. Brand

Pillars of Salt was first published in 1996 and is written by the Jordanian Fadia Faqir. The novel is of essence to this thesis because it moves thirty years forward from Salih's novel allowing for the employment of feminist theories to explicate how (and if) urbanization and modernity have influenced women's lives in a religious and male-dominated setting. Before proceeding with an analysis of the novel, it is essential to examine the importance of the setting and the themes it inspires for the development of this chapter. Faqir's work is set in Jordan, a country which has three major categories of people: Bedouins, rural villagers, and urban city-dwellers. The Bedouin culture grounds itself on concepts of honor and gallantry. Bedouin men stress the need to protect their women because women are the child bearers and are of a weaker nature. Bedouin women ought to be guided by the concept of honor or *sharaf* and are expected to refrain from pre-marital sexual relations (Brand 104). If a woman's behavior hints at impropriety, the family or tribe

has the right to kill her in order to restore the family honor. Traditionally, Bedouin women are not entitled to refuse a suitor chosen by her male family members. The themes of women’s honor and marital rights run through the novel and are discussed more thoroughly in later sections. Similar to the Bedouins, the rural community stresses women’s worth based on her chastity and her production of children, particularly male children. The men of the agricultural society are ones who have the decision-making powers while women are expected to conform to whatever rules or obligations set for them. Even though women are part of the agricultural work force, they are typically unpaid and their contribution is not acknowledged (Brand 104). Finally, more than half of the population in Jordan resides in urban areas. City dwellers have more access to educational and health services than non-urban dwellers. The percentage of city women in paid labor and in schooling is also higher than in other areas of country. Nonetheless, and in spite of the seemingly modern lives of women in urban areas, and Amman in particular, residents maintain the basic importance of tribal and family values. The contrast between the different residents of Jordan is another issue which is discussed in this chapter. The mentioned themes allow for an investigation of the plights of women to adapt, tolerate or resist the patriarchal and Islamic cultural norms that govern their lives.

Returning to the novel, Faqir’s work has three narrators, Maha, Um Saad, and the Storyteller. Maha is a Bedouin woman who, considering that she lives among a conservative Bedouin tribe, is brave and hard working. She is put in sharp contrast with her brother Daffash who is lazy, immoral, and a disappointment to his father. Maha marries Harb, a courageous man who fights in battles against British occupying forces. Harb is killed in one of those battles, leaving Maha devastated and forced to raise his offspring on her own. Later

on, Daffash attempts to force his sister into marrying an elderly man. Though she tries to escape, she is captured and put into an institute for the mentally-ill; a scheme her brother devises in order to take over the land. At the mental asylum, Maha meets Um Saad, a Syrian woman who lived most of her life in Amman. The latter's brutal father marries her off to a much older man who treats her horribly, marriage-rapes her, and eventually kicks her out of the bedroom to make room for his new wife. Um Saad's retaliation at her husband's actions destines her to spend the rest of her life as mentally unstable. Finally, the Storyteller's narrative recounts Maha's stories but with a sexist and unrealistic perspective as well as with inaccurate religious and historical references. The novel itself is rich in Islamic references and is situated in an Islamic country which makes it fit to be put in conversation with earlier interpretations of the (mis)use of religion and, more importantly, the customs and habits of societies built on Islamic cultural norms that empower men's social status. If Salih's novel is a product of a nation that has recently gained independence and where decolonization is emphasized as an initial reaction after colonial rule, *Pillars of Salt* can be said to have moved forward from decolonization to the search of an alternative route that reflects Jordanians' – men's and women's – voices in what they perceive betters their lives and their existence in Jordan, forty years after the country's independence from the British colonization. I place the novel in the context of the Jordanian elections that took place in 1993 and in which women struggled to take a place in the political scene. As the novel is divided between three interlocking narratives, it is the versions of the two main female protagonists, Maha and Um Saad, that shed light on women's strife to be involved in the political arena, the challenges which hindered their involvement, and the causes which gave them incentive to be involved in the first place. The third narrative, the Storyteller's, is

interpreted as the version of a male-dominated and religious society that seeks to overpower and limit women's participation in modern Jordan. Saba Mahmood's "Politics of Piety" along with Nawal Al-Saadawi's *The Hidden Face of Eve* provide the theoretical base from which it becomes viable to state that Jordan's genuine liberation is rendered, yet, an aim not achieved due to the dominating patriarchy and the pressures it puts on potentially solid and successful female collectivities.

The Parliament of Jordan is bicameral and constitutes of the House of the Senate, which has 75 members elected by the king, and the House of Representatives, with 150 members elected by the people. In her article "Engendering Democracy and Islam in the Arab World," Faqir employs statistics and surveys done during the 1993 Jordanian elections to shed light on how "social backwardness" (166) was the major cause of why twelve female candidates failed to be elected and take an active role in their nation's political reformation. She suggests that women have been so "socialized to keep away from politics" and "brought up to believe in their own inferiority" that, according to the Center for Strategic Studies[2], 77.29% of Jordanian female respondents agreed that men's decisiveness in crucial matters as politics is incomparable to women's (166). Of those female respondents, 9.28% were convinced that Islam forbids the engagement of women in political affairs (Faqir, "Engendering" 166). These numbers are note-worthy because they suggest that, in a sex-divided society, if change is to occur in the political scene, awareness of the positions in which women are entitled to take, along with Islamic revivalism, ought to be addressed. The participation of women in politics is traced to men's lack of tolerance of female members in

[2] The Center for Strategic Studies in Jordan was established in 1984 and has aimed to conduct studies in social, political, military, and economic aspects of Jordan and the Arab world; aspects which influence regional conflicts, international relations and security.

the Parliament. When Tujan Faisal managed to win one of the three seats reserved for the Circassian minority and was sent to the Lower House – the part of the Parliament concerned with legislation and the process of accepting, amending, or rejecting legislative proposals – she reported that the Parliament is a hostile environment for women as the "establishment of a healthy, egalitarian relationship with women went against some of the male members' upbringing and socialization" (Faqir, "Engendering" 167). In other words, the participation of women in their country's political decision-making processes goes against men's best interests. This information is significant because Faqir manages to portray in her own novel how "hostile" (Faqir, "Engendering" 167) Maha's environment was when she took a political stance against the British officers. Moreover, and according to "Women and the State of Jordan: Inclusion or Exclusion?" Laurie A. Brand explains that due to the limited participation of women in Jordanian society, matters related to women were mainly left to the realm of personal status law , derived from *sharia*, or 'urf, and the legislation affecting women applies only to those in the work force, which encompasses only a small percentage of women. Accordingly, their exclusion in matters of governance entitles men to be the ones affording their protection, and in turn, dictating their modes of conducts.

As Miriam Cooke in *Women Claim Islam* points out, the end of the twenty-first century was marked with debates about women's roles and responsibilities in the age of technology and modernization. Religious authorities in the Arab world have deliberated over managing social, economic, and political aspects of a nation without forfeiting traditional and religiously cherished cultural norms. Though such authorities are giving importance to women's roles in virtuous Muslim societies, they are also setting constricting tenets on women's appropriate behavior and activities. Women who find those rules unjust and act to

change them are labeled as feminists. Accordingly, Cooke maintains that the term “feminist” in the Arab world ought to have the same meaning as that in a Western one; it ought to refer to those who “seek justice wherever [they] can find it” (x). Feminism, hence, is a term that encompasses and “involves political and intellectual awareness of gender discrimination, a rejection of behaviors furthering such discrimination, and the advocacy of activist projects to end discrimination and to open opportunities for women to participate in public life” (Cooke, “Women Claim” x). Though in Faqir’s novel Maha and Um Saad are not political activists, they, nonetheless, engage in actions and “seek justice” (Cooke, “Women Claim” x) in a traditional patriarchal society; hence, the two female characters can be considered feminists by Cooke’s definition. However, it is essential to take into consideration that the feminist behaviors they exhibit are not a rejection of religious norms and Islamic manners of conduct. For multiple reasons that are discussed later in this chapter, the two women, and Maha in particular, can be said to engage in forms of Islamic feminism. Though the term ‘Islamic feminism’ may be considered “oxymoronic”, it refers to a stand which “confirms belonging to a religious community while allowing for activism on behalf of and with other women” (Cooke, “Women Claim” 60). In other words, it refers to feminists who are attempting to take advantage of the transnationalism of Islam to empower themselves in international, local, and domestic institutions. However, and before investigating how and why women have taken the struggle to become more involved in ‘men’s’ fields of building a nation, it is important to highlight the reasons that have given women incentives to take on the task.

A. **“Identity? What is identity? I think I have none.”**

Early in the novel, Faqir incorporates a scene which points to how female characters are to be addressed and treated in their setting: Nasra, Maha’s closest friend in the Bedouin tribe, is raped. Maha’s first words after her discovery that her own brother, Daffash, is the rapist are, “My friend has lost her virginity, her honour, her life. She was nothing now. No longer a virgin, absolutely nothing. A piece of flesh. A cheap whore” (Faqir 12). In a conservative Bedouin and religious society, women are raised to believe that their worth is determined by how men desire them. They ought to remain the pure, sexually inexperienced, and passive partners. Women’s virginity is a determinant factor for men to choose their potential spouse and to guarantee they are moral. If a woman is raped, society puts the blame on the woman for not being responsible enough to manage to keep what defines her as honorable. However, Faqir characterizes Maha, from the start, as a woman who wishes to break free from patriarchal chains. Her first testimony in the novel reveals her struggle between the woman she desires to be, one who is free and in control of her own actions, and what her community expects of her, that is one who is not a “stupid idiot who risked her honour for love” (Faqir 11). Maha initially wears the mask her community expects of her, and refuses to meet with her lover, later her husband, abiding by the norms set for her. Nonetheless, when matters escalate and her friend is raped, Maha decides to take matters into her own hands, “kill that mule[,] and save the women of Karameh” (Faqir 12). If women’s participation is influenced by cultural factors, it is the violation of physical and bodily rights, ones that are given no proper legislative laws, that gives Maha the drive to hold out the barrel and point it to her brother’s face. Maha’s stance points to the first formation of a collectivity between Bedouin women; one that is meant to retaliate against

the physical and psychological harm done to her friend even if it is on the expense of cherished familial alliances. As Daffash steals the rifle from Maha and points it to the two women, the latter states:

> I knew he was serious so I shut my eyes and hugged Nasra who started weeping again. 'Don't cry. Your tears are gems. Hold your forehead high. Let him shoot us. Better than living without honour.' (14)

The women choose to die, together, for being robbed of their honor. Maha jeopardizes her own life and stands with her friend in the name of honor. The concept of honor in the Arab region is appropriated for patriarchy and ordinarily associated with honor crimes, in which a man is entitled to kill his wife if she brings shame to the family by going against male-set norms. According to Butler in *Undoing Gender,* "norms seem to signal the regulatory or normalizing function of power, but from another perspective, norms are what precisely binds individuals together, forming the basis of their ethical and political claims" (219). In other words, if norms are meant to normalize power in the hands of men and bind them regarding their encouragement of honor crimes, Maha shifts the meaning of honor to what binds her with her victimized friend. Maha chooses to die than to not be able to kill a rapist. She seeks justice against her brother's action, on behalf of and with another woman, Nasra, but her initial stance comes to an end shortly afterwards. The scene ends when Maha's father takes the rifle, asks Daffash to apologize to Nasra, and reprimands the latter with, "you should not have tempted him" (Faqir 14). To put it differently, not only is the attempt of forming a female collectivity, even if the collectivity is joined by death, obstructed, but also a crime as rape is blamed on the woman and is expected to be disregarded by an

apology from the rapist. The apology expected from Daffash can be read as a critique of the Jordanian law, Article 308, in which charges are dropped against the rapist if he agrees to marry his victim. Though several protests have been held by feminist organization to abolish this law, many believe that the law is fair as the marriage between the victim and rapist would protect the former from being disowned or murdered by her family and relatives. Nasra is left to play sad tunes to her goat lamenting her future as an unmarried, shamed woman. Nasra's rape marks the first step that brings Maha closer to becoming the "free" woman she believes she is and to defying her male-dominated society.

Pillars of Salt, as mentioned earlier, has three narrators with intertwining narratives. The suffering Maha endures and its implications regarding the lives of women in Jordan is but limited to a closed group, the Bedouins, which certainly does not represent the majority of people in the chosen setting. Accordingly, and to not fall into generalizations, it is essential to consider interactions between "class, culture, religion, and other institutions and frameworks" (Mohanty 183) when studying Faqir's novel and its representation of women in Jordan. To achieve this purpose, one must take into consideration the narrative of Um Saad, the urban and more 'civilized' city woman. The differences between Maha's and Um Saad's upbringing allows readers to be exposed to the experiences each woman had, which, nonetheless, brought both women to an asylum for the mentally ill.

Readers are first introduced to Um Saad through the first testimony entitled "Um Saad." However, the testimony opens with Maha's voice: "I, Maha, Daughter of Maliha, Daughter of Sabha […]" (Faqir 6). Readers would expect that the pronoun "I" in the statement above would refer to Um Saad until Maha's name follows. This line is significant because it suggests that Maha and Um Saad, have become joined together as one, even if

readers are not yet aware of how and why. Maha narrates Um Saad's first testimony which describes the two women's initial encounter. Um Saad who has just been brought to her room, screaming and cursing, sees Maha and bursts with, "What? A filthy Bedouin woman. Cannot you smell the stink of dung. You sleep with your sheep. […] I am an urban woman from Amman. I refuse to share the room with a grinning Bedouin" (Faqir 7). Readers now recognize that Um Saad comes from a more 'modernized' background; she enters with a white bundle of clothes (Faqir 7), sharpening the contrast between her fair skin and Maha's dark one. Um Saad is also older with a "thin grey figure" (Faqir 7). She shouts at the nurse and porters with, "My name is Um Saad" (Faqir 7), indicating that she identifies herself with familial relations, her title as the mother of Saad, unlike Maha, who states her name first and lines the generation of women she comes from; daughter of Maliha, daughter of Sabha. The close reading of the first encounter between the two female protagonists reinforces the clash between two women of the same country which, in turn, rejects the notion that women, Arab women in specific, can be grouped together under one umbrella, with no regard to economic differences, as Western feminists claim. Nonetheless, this scene suggests that the physical suffering of Um Saad, as she was tied down to her bed and brought to the institution against her will, initiated a bond between two women of different backgrounds. Though readers are not yet aware of the events that bring these two women together, Faqir has already joined the two characters linguistically. Faqir's innovative linguistic uses will be discussed more thoroughly in a later section of this chapter.

Furthermore, and interestingly enough, though Um Saad is the one who is born and raised in an urbanized environment, her life is a series of events that reveal that she is more resigned to be a woman who dedicates her life to her husband and children only. Laurie A.

Brand in *Islam, Gender, and Social Change* explains that city women tend to be more liberal than rural and Bedouin women in Jordan as they have more access to education and services. However, Faqir tips the balance when she characterizes Maha as more rebellious and more aware of her rights than an urban woman. Accordingly, not only do social and economic statuses influence women's strife to better their lives, but there are also personal traits which can influence and drive women to fight for their rights. Maha, the less economically privileged and the more tribal of the two women is the one with the more 'modernized' mentality regarding the roles of women. By giving the Bedouin woman a firmer belief than a city woman of what a woman's life and rights ought to entail, Faqir unsettles commonly held notions that only a modern woman can see through the corruption and hypocrisy of a patriarchal social structure. This matter becomes important when arguing against stereotypical and general representations of women of minority groups. Nonetheless, the differences in Maha's and Um Saad's backgrounds are made minor when one is reminded that their unity is made stronger by the fact that they are both present at an English hospital and under the mercy of an English doctor. As Mohanty states, "Sisterhood cannot be assumed on the basis of gender; it must be forged in concrete historical and political practice and analysis" (178). Accordingly, it cannot be stated that Maha's and Um Saad's bond is strengthened only by the suffering they have endured. In spite of the economic and racial differences between them, they share a common political enemy. The encounter between the colonizer and the colonized brings the two women closer together. In *Arab, Muslim, Woman: Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature and Film*, Lindsey Moore explains that Faqir's "inclusion of a British doctor 'who rules us like a king' consolidates an alignment of two contiguous frameworks of dominance, and containment: local patriarchy

and (neo-)colonialism" (107). In other words, Maha and Um Saad become more prone to overcome their differences when they are put under the same conditions which brought them to the asylum in the first place: rebelling against a dominating male figure and failing to accept 'modern' foreign hegemony. The two women resort to narrating their lives to one another and disregard the English doctor's continuous warnings to stop talking. Their actions can be read as a form of resistance to the authority represented by the doctor. When the doctor increases the women's medication to keep them silent, Maha and Um Saad choose laughter as a final weapon to overthrow the doctor's authority. However, each woman is then given electro-shock treatment and their "oppositional irony fades away" (Moore 107). The English doctor, similar to the majority of men in Maha's and Um Saad's lives, attempts to break their spirits and control them with his male-will. Having an English figure that controls the institution and, more implicitly, the minds of the women serves to prove that men will not aid women in the process of strengthening their stances and will attempt to manipulate their minds to surrender to men's own interests. Evidently, patriarchy is embedded in men's identity whether it is in Jordan or in Western educated figures.

Faqir introduces several scenes in which women group together when threatened by the colonizer, the English. Prior to Maha's entry to the mental hospital, she first encounters the English when her brother Daffash invites Samir Pasha and two English women to the tribal dwelling. Daffash and his party arrive on a Land Rover that damages Maha's planted radishes. Daffash introduces his sister as "the shrew bride" (Fadia 37) to which the two women burst out laughing. It is at that moment where Maha feels struck by the differences between the two cultures: "They were women and I was a woman too, but they were so different" (Faqir 37). Maha studies the two women's dress and demeanor and finds comfort

in her own norms and traditions. She criticizes the women for wearing tight and revealing clothes and exclaims about how the latter are not "not shy of showing their bodies to the gazing men" (Faqir 38). Maha decides to bring towels to the women to cover "their bare wide-open legs" as it is improper for Bedouins not to cover themselves in the presence of men. Maha, in a sense, attempts to protect the women from the gazes of men. However, the women who come from a less conservative background fail to comprehend what Maha intends: "The blonde fiddled with [the towel], folded it, then placed it around her neck. I suppressed a giggle" (Faqir 38). Maha laughs at the indecency of the women and shares the story with her friend, Hamda, and the latter confirms "City women. No shame or shyness" (Faqir 38). The clash between Maha and the British women is heightened by the differences in cultural norms. Maha and the Bedouin women find comfort in dressing conservatively in presence of men. Their comfort comes from conforming to religious teachings which Mahmood discusses comprehensively. On a further note, though the concept of women's dress ought to be considered as women's own personal choice, Islamic feminists protest that dressing conservatively is Muslim women's choice and it should not be addressed as a form of oppression. They are claiming that "Islam is not necessarily more traditional or authentic than any other identification, nor is it any more violent or patriarchal than any other religion" and that they have a "right to be strong women within this tradition, namely to be feminists without fear that they be accused of being Westernized or imitative" (Cooke 60). To put it differently, feminist theories ought to encompass that Arab women are entitled to embrace religious ideologies without being judged as oppressed and without the need to label them as deprived of their rights for being Muslims.

To return to the above mentioned scene, Maha's criticism of the British women is targeted at their lack of shyness. Shyness, in Maha's vocabulary, is not an indication of self-consciousness or lack of confidence. As Mahmood states, shyness and modesty are critical in defining pious Muslim women; they are markers of an Islamic identity (156). Whether by dressing conservatively in the company of men or by wearing the veil, repeated bodily acts are meant to discipline the mind and the self to be modest and to focus their devotion to the divine instead of to superficial matters. Muslim women regard the conservative dress-code as a form of agency marking their identity in a changing world. Accordingly, agency for Muslim women is "not simply a synonym for resistance to social norms but a modality of action" (Mahmood 157). In other words, it can be said that conservative and veiled Muslim women do not regard themselves as oppressed. Similar to the women of the Mosque movement in Egypt who Mahmood studies and who are training their selves to become more pious women, the Bedouin women in Faqir's novel also find strength in their conservative wardrobe and in conforming to religious Islamic teachings. Nonetheless, adopting Islamic ideologies cannot entail that Islamic cultural norms do not hinder women's progress and influence women's lives on a social and personal level. The need for Islamic revivalism has been called for due to the manner in which male-dominated settings empower themselves by the same religious teachings and their application of it. At a time when women seek justice to empower their positions in Islamic countries, men are interpreting Quraanic verses in a manner which deters the former's growth. The following section explains which verses of the Quraan are being adopted to justify the cultural norms men subject women to, which ones are being neglected, along with Faqir's portrayal of the matter.

B. **Marital Rights of Women in Islam:**

In *The Rights of Women in Islam*, Asghar Ali Engineer examines the rights of women in "the true Quranic spirit for there has been much deviation from this spirit in practice" (v). Engineer references the Quran to pinpoint the verses relating to women, its interpretation, and how those verses come to be translated in Muslim societies. Since a great deal of Maha's and Um Saad's lives have been shaped by their marriage, the issue of marital rights of women as stated in the Quran, how it is interpreted and applied in the Arab world, and the manner in which Faqir portrays it in the specific geographical local of Jordan ought to be addressed. To begin with, the Quran says:

> Surely the men who submit and the women who submit, and the believing women, and the obeying men and women, and the truthful men and the truthful women, and the patient men and the patient women, and the men who guard their chastity and the women who guard (their chastity), and the men who remember Allah much and the women who remember – Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward. (33:35)

According to the verse, men and women are equal in terms of the moral responsibilities as well as in the rewards and punishments Allah has decreed. Engineer reasons that such equality is "logically extended to the sphere of marriage" and that "men enjoy no superiority in this respect" (99). When the woman involved in a marriage contract announces the conditions and the man agrees to them, only then will the Qadi solemnize the marriage. Hence, without the woman's approval, a marriage cannot take place (Engineer 99). However, this matter is overlooked as men are considered the guardians of women in Islamic societies, and fathers and brothers have a great deal of control over daughters' and sisters' marriage partners. Women are not free to choose their marital spouse independently. As previously mentioned, women in Jordan can be categorized into three main groups:

Bedouins, village women, and urban women (Brand 103). Women are not entitled to accept or decline a marriage proposal and the dowry, whether lands, animals, or money, goes solely to the father. When Um Saad, as a young girl, receives a suitor whom she has had an innocent encounter with and whom she admires, her father dismisses him because the man is Circassian and already has knowledge of his daughter's name. Haniyyeh's father, only a week afterwards, marries his daughter off to a much older man. It is only at the wedding celebration that Haniyyeh discovers that she is the bride and that her husband to be is a stranger called Abu Saad. Not only is Haniyyeh not consulted about the arrangement with Abu Saad, her refusal, as she gave her father pleading looks, were of no avail. The application of what the spirit of the Quran preaches is by no means relevant to what Haniyyeh's father and guardian practices. Interestingly enough, Maha's marriage arrangement is more decent even though the Bedouins are usually associated with social backwardness when compared to city dwellers. When Harb proposed to Maha, Sheikh Nimer, Maha's father, told her about the arrangement and asked her "Will you accept Harb?" to which Maha nodded her head in consent. It is only after she has given her approval that the marriage ceremony took place. The Quran merits women with a voice concerning their potential spouse; however, the patriarchal community with its emphasis on guarding and controlling women's lives creates norms to further their powers and better suit their own interests. The more tribal stratum of the society, based on the passages, is more pious and righteous regarding the teachings of the Quran. When Faqir portrays the Bedouin society as more tolerant of women's marital rights, one ought to question what her work suggests about the Islamic practices in a more modernized setting.

In Amman and the cities of Jordan, women and young girls have more access to educational institutions. However, and contrary to common logic and to how Jordan prides itself on education and literacy, the more modern the surrounding environment is, the more regressive the cultural practices are. In *The Hidden Face of Eve,* Nawal Sa'dawi explains:

> Arab men, and for that matter most men, cannot stand an experienced and intelligent woman. It would seem as though the man is afraid of her because […] he knows very well that his masculinity is not real, not an essential truth, but only an external shell, built up and imposed on women by societies based on class and sexual discrimination. The experience and intelligence of women are a menace to this patriarchal class structure, and in turn, a menace to the false position in which man is placed, the position of king or demi-God in his relations with women. This is essentially why most men fear and even hate intelligent and experienced women. Arab men shy away from marrying them, since they are capable of exposing the exploitation inherent in the institution of marriage as practiced to this day. (120)

The prominent campaigner of women's rights traces the cause of the mal-practice of Islamic teachings to men's fear of powerful and intelligent women. She argues that a man is more likely to marry a woman with minimal or no education at all so that he may exploit his position as the guardian and the decision-maker, whether in a familial institution or on a local and nation-wide level. This matter is apparent in Faqir's novel when Haniyyeh's father pulls her out of school soon after Haniyyeh learns to write her name. He claims that she was growing up and should stay at home from then onwards. Um Saad confesses to Maha that at that age, she was like a dry sponge, yearning to learn and absorb everything she was not aware of before. She adds that school gave her "an excuse to leave [her] house" and to "escape [her] father's wrath" (Faqir 43). Accordingly, the passage suggests that Haniyyeh's father felt threatened that Haniyyeh was becoming more intelligent and would eventually expose and rebel against his abusive authority. Therefore, in urban settings where schools, universities, and educational services are more abundant, men with patriarchal mindsets

resort to more extreme measures to keep women away from being 'spoiled' by knowledge. However, in the Bedouin society where learning is limited to the tribe's necessities, such as knowledge about attending to plants and animals along with an understanding of their roots and norms, men would not feel as threatened by women's intelligence, and would accordingly refrain from unnecessary austerity towards them. Men, irrespective of their settings, who claim that intelligent women are immoral, are overlooking Prophet Mohammad's teachings that "Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim." The Prophet's wife, A'isha, was claimed to be a great scholar in "Quran, obligatory duties, lawful and unlawful matters, poetry and literature, Arab history and genealogy" (qtd El-Nimer 93). Men who claim to be the guardians of women in the name of Islam, are also disregarding their right to seek knowledge, as favored in Islam. Evidently, patriarchy empowers itself by adopting and effacing teachings in the name of religion. The more available knowledge is to women, the more extreme and strict men's measures are. Haniyyeh's endeavor towards education was cut-short by her father's ill-practice of religion in order to make his daughter eligible and amiable for more marriage suitors.

In addition to the marital rights of women in terms of what validates a marriage contract, one ought to discuss their rights (or lack of) on the matter of Islam's tolerance and allowance that men marry up to four wives. The Quran's doctrine is as follows: "Marry as many women as you like, two, three, or four. If you fear not to treat them equally, then marry only one." Accordingly, polygamy is permissible in Islam only if a man can be just to treat all his wives equally. However, the verse continues with, "You will not be just with your women, no matter how careful you are." Therefore, the Quran warns that no man can fulfill the conditions set for marrying more than one wife and ought to abstain from such

action. Nonetheless, many men, including the Prophet himself, have taken four wives. Theologians have justified men's need for more than one wife by arguing that men have strong sexual urges and have duties to bring Muslim children to the world, especially at a time when Arab tribes were primitive and great numbers were lost in battles; hence, one wife would not suffice to bring forth enough children for military wars. Ironically, Islam has recognized sexual passion in both men and women, yet it has only privileged the men to marry more than one wife, and not the woman to have more than one husband. Even if it was assumed that there existed a man who can be just to his four wives, whether in the financial, emotional, and sexual sense of the word, the fact remains that each of the four women will only have a quarter of a husband, while he will have four. Women can be said to be inferior to men in this regard. The Islamic feminists and the participants of the mosque movement in Mahmood's piece advocated women against marrying a man who already has a wife. However, one participant encouraged her friend to accept a married man for the sole reason that thirty-year old single women in Egypt suffered greater harshness from their surrounding than those who were involved with polygamous men. Men's authority in religious societies grows as they are aware that Islam has privileged them more than women. If feminists in the Arab world are calling for agency, yet with respect to the religion they have adopted and embraced, they cannot dismiss that this very religion is empowering men and putting them on a higher stand than women.

To continue with the latter idea, men who have taken more than one wife can be said to have disregarded the condition that they ought to be just to all. Faqir stresses that issue when Abu Saad, Um Saad's husband, takes another wife. Abu Saad surprises Um Saad one day when he enters their home with a strange woman and announces that she is his wife. He

kicks Um Saad out of her bedroom and later throws her belongings out. At mornings, he would ask Um Saad to make breakfast for him and his new wide and beats her if she does not comply. Evidently, Abu Saad is by no means just to his two wives. Even though Um Saad spent her life at home, dedicated to house work and raising the children, fulfilling the 'duties' Abu Saad expects of her, he still sought another woman. He argues that he has married another woman because of Um Saad's "grey hair. [Her] grey hair was responsible" (Faqir 192). In other words, Um Saad's worth has lessened as she has aged. The issue of men taking other wives because their first has aged is not uncommon in the Arab world. As Saadawi explains, men expect women's bodies to remain youthful, appealing, and fertile (78). When a woman reaches menopause, she is no longer desired and "her functions in life are over" (Saadawi 78). A woman's older age does not give her the same privileges as that of older men who are regarded as at their peak of their intellectual and physical maturity when they reach their forties. Women, on the other hand, become barren and do not serve any function to society. If men married second, third, and fourth women at an age when procreation was necessary for military purposes, they are now marrying other women to solely satisfy their sexual needs and their egos. Ironically, and returning the scene of Um Saad's encounter with the second wife, Yusra, the latter condemns Um Saad as well for aging.

To continue with the above mentioned scene, when Abu Saad beats Um Saad and injures her severely, Yusra watches calmly from a close distance and is indifferent to Um Saad's situation. If Abu Saad is the aggressor in this scene, Yusra, with her silence, is his accomplice. Even though Yusra might one day receive the same treatment from Abu Saad, in the sense of being a victim of domestic violence and in case her husband decides to take a

third wife, she remains silent and passive to Um Saad's cries. Yusra's silence can either portray her as an oppressor to other women or as someone who chooses silence over abhorring her husband's actions and receiving the same punishment. Yusra's youth and beauty privileges her over Um Saad and her tolerance of his violence defines her as an obedient wife in Abu Saad's dictionary. If Yusra is making the best of the situation and protecting herself by abiding by religious and cultural norms of being an obedient wife, she becomes both: oppressor and oppressed. She is an oppressor for not attempting to aid her predecessor against violence, and oppressed for accepting Abu Saad's aggression and fearing she would be beaten up as well if she condemns his behavior. Abu Saad's actions, in any case, are guarded by his Islamic religion, and more specifically, by the Quraanic verse: "Righteous women are therefore obedient, guarding the secret for God's guarding. And those you fear may be rebellious, admonish them; banish them to their couches and beat them. If they obey you, look not for any way against them. God is all High, all Great." The verse preaches men to beat and be violent against their wives if they are not obedient and compliant to their husbands' needs and demands. Abu Saad's beating of his wife for not being obedient and preparing breakfast for him and Yusra are, hence, just according to Islam and Islamic societies. Had Yusra interfered, he would also be righteous in the name of religion to beat her as well for interrupting his enactment of God's words. Religion, hence, advocates violence against women and empowers men's statuses. This point reiterates the argument of feminists who choose to embrace Islam as a means towards emancipation. If their own religion discriminates against them, violates their human rights, and advocates violence against them, Islamic feminists' progress in their religious societies is but minimal. Islamic revivalism becomes insufficient to allow for women's liberation in Arab societies.

According to what has been mentioned above, it becomes evident that men in Islamic societies have used their religion to empower themselves and maintain patriarchal norms. Moreover, the Quraan as a text, irrespective of the rights it gives women, it does not place men and women on equal grounds. Therefore, in the processes of building a nation, it is not surprising that women's voices are overpowered by that of men. Returning to the issue of women's participation in politics in Jordan, religion becomes a tool to for men to extend their authorities from guardians of women to guardians of their own country and to take the major responsibilities of decision making as well as foreign affairs. Similar to how Tujan Faissal found the parliament a hostile environment for women, Maha was beaten severely by her brother when she took a political stance against the British who killed her husband. When she was brought to assist the cook at Samir Pasha's mansion for an event he was holding, and later realizing that the guests were the very British officers that were involved in the battle that killed her husband, Maha becomes frantic and decides to reprimand the guests: "Tears running on cheeks, head held high, I stepped forward, wrenched the eagle of an elderly man, threw it on the ground and stamped on it. I collected as much saliva as I could and spat on the surprised face of the English officer" (Faqir 172). Maha takes a stance against the British who invaded her land and killed her spouse. However, her brother who worked for the English and insisted they wouldn't hurt a fly (Faqir 171) felt humiliated by her actions. Since her husband was dead and no longer her guardian, Daffash takes the responsibility of teaching his sister the consequences of interfering in matters that she had no business in. The next morning, he beats harshly and breaks two of her teeth with his slaps and kicks. Maha is not entitled to assault the British enemies who killed her husband because such action humiliates her brother. Maha's rights to express herself freely are

prohibited in a society led by patriarchy and which is based on a religion which permits and advocates male dominance. Women's participation in politics in Jordan, depicted by the scene in which Maha faces the British officers, is hindered by Jordan's patriarchal and religious society.

C. **Faqir's Linguistic Double-Agency:**

Interestingly, though Daffash has caused many miseries to the heroine of the novel, and has represented normative masculine behavior in terms of not showing signs of sensitivity as well as being almost always armed and in the company of powerful officers, Faqir manages to emasculate him through her language. Early in the novel, Daffash is portrayed as the womanizer and the city dweller who is not fit to uphold Bedouin traditions and principles. Unlike Harb who respected his background, fought in battles against the British enemy, and was esteemed by his tribe, Daffash laughed at the ignorance of his people, was a "slave to the English" (Faqir 174), and brought shame to his family and the tribe's elders, including his own father. Maha, on the other hand, was the "son" her father had wanted. She was a strong woman who respected traditions and took care of the land. At one instance, her father states, "My daughter, you are better than that scoundrel brother of yours. I wish you were a man because the land must go to its ploughman" (Faqir 184). Maha, with her outspokenness and decisiveness, is perceived as being masculine by those closest to her. Even though this portrayal of masculinity is admired rather than shunned and discouraged by the Bedouins, she is still nonetheless a victim of patriarchal rule. Faqir's writing skills have been praised by critics and authors because she manages to bring authenticity and tackle sensitive subjects such as religion, sexuality, and politics which otherwise would have been censored and banned. Faqir chooses English as the language fit

for her novel. However, the writer is aware of the consequences of choosing the language of the colonizer with regards to her countries' postcolonial condition. Faqir states that the "Arabic language is misogynist and whenever the gender is not clear the masculine overpowers the feminine" and that "dominant written Arabic was found to be inadequate to present sexual, religious and social experiences" (qtd Abdo 240). In other words, an Arabic text received by an Arab audience is most likely to be subject to censorship because it represents tabooed subjects, is addressed to Arab's patriarchal society, and reflects the unjust life of women in man-dominated societies. Arab patriarchs, as an audience, are likely to put limitations on women's publications in order to prevent women from exposing their hypocrisies. However, Faqir is also attentive to how her novel would be dissected by a Western audience and "avoid[s] simply exchanging one master, one misogynistic patriarchal normative system, for another, jumping from the old patriarch's arms into those of a new one" (Abdo 241). Though Faqir utilizes the English language to write her novel, she *colonizes* it with Arabic expressions and dialogue. Accordingly, a non-Arab reader would not manage to fully comprehend the scene and the statements she scribes. She "turn[s] a critical face both ways, towards the country of origin and the country of reception" (qtd Abdo 243). The writer exoticizes the text with her description of the Bedouin culture and reveals the oppression of women in their society, catering to Western audience's anti-Islamic perceptions, yet she incorporates scenes to criticize Westerners' comprehension of the culture. The Storyteller named Sami Al-adjnabi, or Sami the foreigner, narrates Maha's story with false depictions of the same events Maha reports. At one instance, the Storyteller mishears the British women calling Daffash's Bedouin dance "original" as "Aba-al-Jimal", or father of camels (Faqir 97). His mishearing of the word suggests that foreigners are

misguided to view Arabs according to stereotypical representations. On another note, though Faqir caters to Western audience, particularly Western feminists, the misery of Maha and Um Saad, she also uses mistranslated Qura'nic verses in the Storyteller's testimonies, to cater to Islamic feminists about men's misuse of religion. Faqir, hence, makes a statement about Western feminists who generalize and disregard different aspects in women's lives in their view of Arab women, and she offers a critique of Islamic feminists who fight for their rights while embracing their sexist religion at the same time. She chooses the English language but infiltrates it with Arabic idioms and expressions to tell the story of her main female characters, suggesting that the future of Arab women would entail more freedom, represented by Faqir's freedom of writing in English, when adopting certain Western characteristics.

To sum up, this chapter has highlighted the context in which Faqir writes in, the (mis)interpretations of Qura'nic verses and the effects it has on the potential progress of feminists in the Arab world, and the responsibilities an Arab woman writer has when using the English language. It becomes clear that though women have leaped in their proclamation of their rights, they have not yet achieved solid outcomes to ensure their representation in their societies. Islamic feminists might have initiated the process of fighting for women's rights, yet their growth remains challenged with their embrace of a religion that itself discriminates against them. The next chapter jumps to the most recent literary works of Arab women and questions if transnational feminism is the key to achieve a secular state and guarantee women's rights. Nawal Al-Saadawi's *Zeina* is chosen to highlight which aspects have been embraced in order to bring women closer to their human rights. Located in modern day Cairo, Al-Saadawi's novel reflects on the lives of women in the age of

technology, the age of revolution and rebels, and provides a glimpse to whether or not Arab states have a chance at being genuinely liberated.

CHAPTER IV

MYTH OR REALITY: NAWAL AL-SAADAWI'S *ZEINA*

> "[Women] will, if permitted, play a major role in bringing the Middle East into a new era of material development, scientific advancement, and socio-political liberation. Of all the people in the Middle East, women have the strongest vested interest in social and political freedom. They are already among its most valiant and effective defenders; they may yet be its salvation."
>
> Bernard Lewis

Written by the prominent Nawal Al-Saadawi, *Zeina* was first published in Arabic in 2009, and translated into English in 2011. Set prior to and during an Egyptian revolution to overthrow an unnamed president, I place the novel in the context of pre-revolutionary Cairo, allowing for an examination of the primary causes that have led up to the uprising against former president Hosni Mubarak, the role of women in the strife for political reformation, as well as the implications of revolting against a corrupt patriarchal and religious political system. Women's voice as key to their liberation is a crucial theme in the novel, and is explicated using the theories of Mirriam Cooke in *Women and the War Story.* Furthermore, and unlike Salih's and Faqir's works, Al-Saadawi's novel provides insight to not only to women's but also to men's psyche and sheds light on matters that were not previously discussed, such as men's weaknesses, insecurities, and incidents of their rape. This notion is of essence because it implies that religious and patriarchal regimes not only oppress women, but they also subject the men themselves to injustices as well as to social and psychological

pressures regarding their roles and image in society. Therefore, through close readings of related passages, and a cross-examination between the novel's pre-revolutionary setting and the results of the revolution against ex-president Hosni Mubarak in today's Cairo, it becomes viable that it is only by the adoption of a secular and civil political structure that grants women their human rights that Egypt will be liberated.

The novel jumps back and forth to unfold the life of the character Bodour, who as a university student got sexually involved with her college mate, Nessim, whom she adored. The young couple set their minds on getting married, but just before the light of day appears and Bodour discovers that their sexual encounter will bring forth a child, Nessim is captured by policemen for being involved in demonstrations against the president and is beaten to death in prison. Bodour hides her secret and, as soon as she gives birth, she abandons her baby girl in the streets of Cairo. She marries an up and coming journalist, Zakariah Al-Khartiti, and brings forth another daughter, Mageeda. Ironically, Zeina, Bodour's illegitimate child, would later attend Mageeda's school for music lessons by the benevolent Miss Mariam. Zeina excels in the domain of music and grows up to become a well-known performer – admired, envied, or desired by all. Al-Saadawi's training as a doctor and how that gave her insight into the psychological aspect of dealing with patriarchy and oppression is note-worthy and is highlighted in her characterization of the male characters' internal dilemmas, fixation on being powerful, and their resort to violence.

A. The Middle Eastern Pie: Politics, Religion, and Sex:

In *Women and the War Story,* Miriam Cooke explicates how violence is not power, but it is the tool used for empowerment. She defines power as being "group-related and

depend[ing] for its survival on legitimacy" whereas violence, whether in the physical or psychological sense, is "individual-oriented and depends for its survival on justifiability" (97). Power does not require justifiability as it is inherent in the core of political communities; however, it requires legitimacy and credibility in order to maintain itself. In other words, political figures in power do not need justifiability for being in charge, but they need legitimacy and the earning of people's lawfulness to remain in power. Violence, on the other hand, is a means to an end. It is the tool used by the powerless "when they perceive a chink in the armor of power" and it "should not be mistaken for anything but an instrumentality toward the goal of transforming itself into power or the means of maintaining power" (Cooke, "War Story" 98). To elaborate on that notion, when those in power start to lose their legitimacy, they resort to violence and physical aggression in the hopes to achieve ends that would justify its use. However, and instead of being a means to an end, violence becomes an end in itself and results in "the rule of the amoral individual or community without regard for the whole" (Cooke, "War Story" 99). When protestors in Egypt gathered in Tahrir Square to make a stance against their poor living situations and called for constitutional, economic, political, and social reform, they were met with rifles, armed vehicles, and tanks. Accordingly, when those in power lost their legitimacy, granted to them by their people, they resorted to violence as an instrument to silence the masses and keep themselves, the corrupt, in power. Interestingly, Cooke also explains that those who wish to win power must also perpetrate violent actions to short-term goals that, if proven to be successful, reinforce the justification for such behavior (98). To put it differently, resistance to power also resorts to violence to earn legitimacy as long as its goals are justifiable: overthrowing a corrupt power in charge. She sites how violence gave

independence to the Algerians against the French in 1954. It is only when resistance resorts to violence that does not prove successful that violence becomes an end in itself.

Cooke's discussion of power and violence can be complemented by Evelyn Accad's argument in *War and Sexuality* that violence, and more specifically sexual violence, and male domination are at the core of political and national struggles. She explains that man's military weapon and his sexual organ are used for the same purposes: "to conquer, control, and possess" (11). She continues to explain that sexual relations created in a system that has power struggles and a structure of submission and domination leads to rapes and the abuse of women. Indeed, to take revolutions in Middle Eastern Islamic and patriarchal countries as an example, during the demonstrations in Iraq against its former president, groups of government-backed thugs not only beat and stabbed peaceful protestors, but they also attacked, groped, sometimes even attempted to remove the clothing of female protestors, and called them sexually degrading terms (Muscati 83). In Cairo's Tahrir Square, women became the subjects of repetitive sexual assaults. One video in which security forces beat a veiled woman went viral on online social networks and dominated the headlines of opposition papers. In the video, security forces pull the woman's veil down, rip off her shirt and one guard stamps her repeatedly on the chest. A man who tries to aid her is beaten as well and fury explodes among protestors who begin to throw stones at the armed men. According to the Cooke-Accad paradigm, it can be said that as the legitimacy of governing powers falls apart, violence is used to subdue the masses, and female protestors are faced with sexual assaults as a means to conquer, control, and possess them in order to restore the sense of masculinity that is being stripped away from the former. Accordingly, female protestors, and in general women who are not afraid to voice and fight for their rights and

needs, represent the biggest threat for governing figures and their advocates. Moreover, and similar to how the patriarchal society attempts to enlarge its domain and authority through violence, its sexual relations become lacking of affection and tenderness, and conceived as instrumental for "the confinement and control of women for the increase of male prestige, and the overestimation of the penis" (Accad 32).

Furthermore, men's thirst for political domination and their patriarchal mindsets are reinforced by Islamic religion, which privileges men and enables them to rely on religious dogma that erodes women's voices in order to consolidate power. In *Zeina*, Al Saadawi provides multiple scenes in which the political and religious personnels resort to military weapons and rape in order to conquer and destroy. Early in the novel, readers are introduced to Nessim, a young political activist who is greatly interested in science and philosophy and who "didn't believe in the story of Adam or the apple that Eve tempted him with" (Saadawi 22). He is well-read, his room is full of books and magazines, and unlike the rest of the men in Bodour's life, he treated her with respect and admired women who took action and rebelled against corruption. His lack of faith in religion, or the governing authorities, as well as his support of women's agency make Nessim at once a political and religious threat to governing patriarchs. He is captured by the security police and beaten harshly. The act of detaining or punishing intellectuals who are seen to have violated Egypt's law against blasphemy is not uncommon. The law charges any individual whose action or words entail incitement to hate Muslims, defaming the President, and insulting Islam. In 1959, the Noble Prize winner, Nagib Mahfouz, was stabbed in the neck, causing a permanent damage to veins in his right arm, because attackers believed that his book, *Children of Gebelawi,* was blasphemous. Moreover, and ever since Egypt has had the Emergency Law in 1981,

authorities have been entitled to put restrictions detain on freedom of religion, freedom of expression, assembly, and association. They were permitted to detain and torture blasphemous transgressors. In 1992, Alaa Hamed was sentenced to prison for the first time for depicting a love-making scene on a prayer rug in his book *The Mattress*, and a second time for writing a philosophical reflection on religious faith and atheism. Some of those who were found as perpetuating blasphemy include employees of the Middle East Christian Association who offended Islam in their discussion of human rights in 2007. Moreover, and according to "Egypt News", the magazine *Ibdaa* lost its publishing license in 2009 for having published a poem that was "against God and against society, challenging its traditions and religious beliefs." Numerous examples of such nature serve two purposes: first, a patriarchal and religious system of governance puts restricts people's freedoms to avoid threats targeted at revealing the system's corruption, and, second, that only with education and awareness that one can have access to knowledge that shakes the system's grounds.

To return back to Nessim's imprisonment, the prison warden admires and envies Nessim's head which remains erect under the blows, and he stares repeatedly at the prisoner's penis, which, unlike the prison warden's, was not "tiny, thin and curved, with hardly any blood flowing through it. The […] blood that flowed there was [not] yellowish, anemic, and full of fear of God and of his superiors" (Saadawi 49). This scene suggests that, if the "military weapon and […] the sexual weapon are equal" (Accad 11), the rifles and arms of the security police that try to silence protestors' voices are as ineffective as their willowed sexual organs. In the same respect, Nessim, the embodiment of the revolution, has a sexual organ which strikes the prison warden with admiration and envy, implying that

power is, in fact, in the hands of the citizens. Accordingly, Nessim is killed in prison to eliminate the threat of potential agency among the impoverished Egyptians. The fact that Nessim's sexual organ is engrossed when compared to that of that prison warden's suggests that masculinity is not comprised by corrupt power but by freedom fighters who have disregarded religious teachings and are aware of women's rights. Saadawi's use of explicit imagery of the body suggests that men associate their sexual organs with their self-worth and the power they can exercise. By depicting the prison warden's genitals as willowed and anemic, she robs the authority figure in this scene from his powers and transfers it to the revolutionary Nessim.

Patriarchal corruption has made it possible for men to practice violence on any subject of any age and sex. Men would remain pious and hold their stance as honorable men because they are under the impression that God forgives everything, even adultery and perversion, except the worship of another God (Saadawi 47). When still at school, Zakariah, a child of middle class upbringing, was violated by a senior teacher, Zakariah did not voice or speak out against the injustice that he underwent but "banished these old, deeply buried memories from his mind" (Saadawi 57). As a young man, his rebellion against the corrupt political system and, implicitly, over his molestation by an elderly man, through engaging in demonstrations only resulted in guards chasing him and "beat[ing] him with batons" (Saadawi 62). In patriarchal societies, all are taught to respect authority and fear violence. Men are encouraged to become fiercer and to "channel fear into aggression" (qtd Accad 33). Therefore, instead of continuing his strife against injustice and keeping his head erect under the blows like Nessim, Zakariah becomes powerless and chooses to resort to violence in order to reclaim his masculinity. He wanted "to take revenge on the senior teacher who has

violated his virginity, on his father who had caned him" (Saadawi 62). His fear and anger of the system that has betrayed him is channeled into aggression and violence, and since "all forms of violence are combined [in rape]" (qtd Accad 34), Zakariah, in turn, becomes a sexual predator and an advocate of the same system that damaged him, both in the psychological and the physical sense. He fears the authority, whether in the form of the senior teacher or the university guards, and protects himself by joining it in the same form of violence. He rapes a young orphan boy (Saadawi 57) and a number of women, including students (Saadawi 61). Violence and pleasure become inseparable in his body and mind. One the one hand, he would vent anger by beating his wife and daughter, and on the other, he would fantasize about his wife beating him with a leather belt so that she would awaken "the desires that had lain dormant within him since childhood" (Saadawi 63). During his sexual endeavors, the more resistant a woman is, the more he desires her. Zakariah attempts to prove his masculinity, in the definition of a patriarchal society, by increasing the number of his sexual conquests, irrespective of whether his partners were consenting or not.

As previously mentioned, the importance of one's voice is a theme that runs through Saadawi's novel. The loudest voices are those of the political and religious leaders, as well as their advocates in journalism and media who publicize the latter's thoughts to be absorbed by the masses. The voices of women and freedom fighters are silenced and cut to conceal the corruption of those with power. Statistics have shown that one of the main causes of the revolution against former president Hosni Mubarak is that approximately 40% of Egyptian citizen suffered of poverty and lacked the basic needs for survival. In the novel, the demonstrators against the ruling president were those whose human rights were trampled on in order to maintain power and riches in the hands of the minority. The list included:

> "workers, students, low-ranking government officials, children born on the streets, [writers from] the opposition papers, obscure men and women artists, Mariam's music band, men and women thinkers whose names were on the death list, wives, divorced women, deserted lovers, girls raped by elderly men and carrying their children, peasant women selling watercress and radishes, servants, secretaries, prostitutes, elderly people walking with crutches, lame children and stray limping cats and dogs, meowing and howling and shouting with the people." (242)

Al-Saadawi stresses how it is the lower classes that bring forth the revolution, and more specifically, the women of the impoverished class. Already regarded as inferior to men, girls and women of a lower class are more likely to be the victims of sexual assault. In *The Hidden Face of Eve,* Al-Saadawi explains that boys and men experience less guilt when they assault "a creature who is socially very much their inferior" (23). Accordingly, assaults against servants in the houses of middle and upper class families as well against street children are the most common. In the novel, Bodour's father, a prestigious military figure, along with her husband, the well-known columnist, and her cousin, "El-Emir", or "Prince" are involved in raping street children, the 'inferior creatures.' The class division between upper and lower class gives the former a false sense of power and control over the latter. The upper class come to believe that they are "superior" and can exploit the lower classes as they please.

If patriarchal authoritarianism channels fear in men to aggression, it channels it in women into submission (qtd Accad 33). These behaviors of aggression and submission become the basis of men's and women's relations and account for the great number of forceful exploitation and sexism in the war system. In the novel, Zakariah declares that even the strongest women he raped "often stopped the fight and lay powerlessly underneath him (Saadawi 61). These lines suggest that fear in women eventually paralyzes them and forces

them submit to the violence that has befallen on them. Both Cooke and Accad agree that a revolution is not complete if it did not comprise a sexual revolution as well. Accordingly, and if revolution is to be initiated by the poor and those who suffer the most, it is the women of the impoverished class that carry the flame of reform, starting with their sexual rights. Saadawi makes that matter clear through the role she appoints to Zeina. Zeina is raped in the streets of Cairo at the age of nine. However, she soon learns to defend herself and her body. When Zakariah Al-Khartiti attempts to rape Zeina in his study room, she fights back with a strength that is unimaginable from a young girl. Zakariah, fifty one years her senior, attempts to penetrate her but "the route inside was completely blocked, as if there was no aperture there and no vagina" (Saadawi 60). Unlike girls and women of a higher born status, Zeina had no home or image that she was worried about getting tainted. She was unacquainted with the gender norms expected of her and, being born and raised on the streets, had no chains or male presence to in her life to direct her thoughts and actions. Zeina was free, and with her freedom, she fights back, fiercely and aggressively. With her teeth and nails, "she dug into the flesh of his shoulder, neck, belly, and into the top of his penis, which she tore off" (Saadawi 63). This scene suggests that when women rid themselves of social and religious chains, they can take action against the hypocritical religious and educated men who seek to "conquer, control, and possess them" (Accad 11). The scene ends with Zeina's escape and Zakariah moans with blood running profusely onto his expensive Persian rug. With regards to the Cooke-Accad paradigm, the fact that Zeina bites off the tip of Zakariah's sexual organ suggests that Zeina strikes at once the patriarchal society and the weapon they use to subjugate women. Zeina "wasn't like other females" (Saadawi 60) which makes her a threat that needs to be eliminated.

B. Women's Voice: A Weapon against Islamic Patriarchy

If women of the lower classes are to bring the revolution, their most powerful weapon is their voice. Remaining silent "signifies capitulation and abdication of all rights to participate in the construction of a democratic society" (Cooke 167). In other words, women's voices not only need to be expressed to begin with, but they ought to be known and heard. In "Speaking from Silence: Methods of Silencing and Resistance", Marsha Houston and Cheris Kramarae discuss the methods used by men to muffle women's voices, and they examine means of resistance women have utilized as forms of resistance. In addition to the their discussion of rape as a means to silence women, which reasserts Cooke's and Accad's notions, they state censorship on women's works – works in which they speak of their struggles and which are not compliant with patriarchs' preferred tunes – as one of tools to suppress women's voices. However, in addition to the importance of women's writings, which is discussed in another section, fundamentalists have put restrictions on women's verbal speech in public. In the novel, Ahmad Al-Damahiri, Bodour's religiously fundamentalist cousin, explains that a woman's voice, similar to her naked body, "is forbidden and must be concealed, even if we have to use the force of arms if necessary" (Saadawi 168). He issues a ruling that women's voices, in addition to every part of their body and their head, "the seat of the intellect", are a shame (Saadawi 174). The emir backs up his statement with religious discussion he has heard his father and grandfather utter when he was a little boy and asserts that verses in the Quraan back up his claim, but he just cannot remember which verse in specific. Accordingly, men with patriarchal mind-sets realize how vulnerable their status would become if women voiced their rights and attempt

to silence them through the use of fabricated religious teachings. Patriarchy can be said to be multi-generational and passed down through religious discourse.

To elaborate on the idea of silencing women's voices, Houston and Kramarae explain that silencing does not necessarily mean preventing a woman to talk; "it is also the power to shape and control her talk, to restrict the things that she may talk about and the ways she may be permitted to express them, to permit her to speak, but to suppress her authentic voice" (389). In other words, when women do speak and express themselves, their speech ought to be within the limits and boundaries that are set to them by men. The words that women utter and the manner in which they converse ought to be compliant with what the men want to hear. Censorship of women's freedom of speech has taken its toll on women's conversations and on their writings. Accordingly, in order to resist and remove this censorship, women need to speak the language of men and arm themselves against the arguments men make to oppress women. In a religious society, women ought to familiarize themselves with religious discourse in order to counter the societal and cultural rules patriarchal men issue and encourage. In the novel, when Ahmad Al-Damahiri attends his nephew's birthday celebration in which Zeina was singing, he states that art, music, and singing are forbidden. However, Safaa Al-Dhabi, Bodour's confident and outspoken best friend, angrily rejects Ahmad Al-Damahiri's declaration. Safaa has been married once to a religious man and another to a liberal communist, but both cheated on her with other women with the excuse that men's urges were untamable and that they are polygamous by nature. Safaa is resentful of men's hypocrisy and has armed herself with the discourse that men utilize to justify their actions. On Ahmad Al-Damahiri's rejection of all forms of art, she replies: "Why forbidden, Mr. Ahmad? Beautiful art is a gift from God, for God is beautiful

and He loves everything that is beautiful. Isn't that true, sir?" (Saadawi 113). Put differently, Safaa uses the same religious language as that of Ahmad Al-Damahiri and sensibly argues against his statements. This scene is also of importance because the religious and patriarchal figures are rejecting one form in which women express themselves: art and singing. Through her songs which she writes them herself, Zeina expresses herself and sings about her life and her country. Everyone is drawn to Zeina's voice and lyrics, even Ahmad Al-Damahiri; a matter which puzzles him as he acknowledges that her voice awakens something deep inside of him. Ahmad Al-Damahiri becomes determined to silence Zeina and to control her speech. At one of her concerts, Zeina sings that she is "not the daughter of gods or Devils," and that the woman who raised her, Zeinat – Bodour's nanny as a young girl and later her servant at the mansion – is "dearer to [her] in the sky" (Saadawi 164). Ahmad Al-Damahiri is perplexed and angered by her lyrics. He questions her intentions when she utters those words, and he wonders, "Why does this woman challenge heaven? What does she mean by her poor servant mother is dearer to her than the sky?" (Saadawi 165). His lines suggest that he is aware that Zeina is a threat to his beliefs, and the fact that she cherishes her mother, a woman, not the God he worships and the religion he derives his power from, can be dangerous, especially since she has a wide audience and can influence the masses. However, and before continuing with the significance of Zeina's voice as a means of resistance, it is essential to discuss another aspect of her features which Al-Saadawi refers to constantly: her eyes.

In *Women in the Muslin Mask*, Daphne Grace explains that the gaze, whether men's or women's, is powerful and can be damaging. On the one hand, she suggests that the male gaze can do as much damage to a woman as his sexual assaults on her body. On the other

hand, the woman's gaze has the power to disrupt social order (Grace 90). Her claim about women's gaze is traced back to theories and literary representation of Medusa. Medusa, the mythical goddess, was powerful when female authority was dominant. Her face, surrounded by snakes, was an ancient symbol of divine, female wisdom (Bowers 220). According to Freud, the eyes of women are the source of castration. Medusa's eyes turn men into stone out of horror of seeing the snakes, symbolizing castrated penises on her head. In "Medusa's Head and the Female Gaze", Bowers utilizes Freud's and other psychoanalytic theorists' conception on Medusa's gaze to argue that patriarchal men make women "the object of the male gaze as a protection against being objectified themselves by Medusa's female gaze. The defense against having their own free subjectivity ignored, their vulnerability and fragility revealed, and their world shared was the destruction of female subjectivity" (220). In other words, men fear a strong dominant woman who can see through their insecurities and, accordingly, they try to subdue her by veiling her eyes from their own hypocrisy. If patriarchal men empower themselves through religion and political powers by the very status of being men, of being born with male genitals, it can be said that the eyes of women become a symbol in which men unconsciously resent because it represents their castration, their dethroning from their seat of domination and the overthrow of their beliefs that privilege them. In the novel, Saadawi points to that matter when she writes that "a woman could not raise her eyes to meet those of her husband, just as a slave could not raise his eyes to meet those of his master. […] A woman had no such right. This was prohibited by religious and secular laws, by social customs, and by family ethics" (64). Her words suggest that patriarchal norms have conditioned women to look away from their husbands' eyes because their gaze symbolizes a threat to men's superior status. The author provides several

passages in which she sheds light on how occulocentrism and phallocentrism are central to patriarchal domination.

To elaborate on the power of the female gaze in causing “social disorder” (Grace 90), Zeina is portrayed as one with black bluish eyes, carrying the flame of revolution. During her concerts, Ahmad Al-Damahiri protests, “But who is she? Why did God give her these self-confident eyes when all other women’s eyes radiate humbleness and timidity?” (Saadawi 116). Zeina, who was not born and raised in patriarchal households and who has survived in the streets of Cairo along with many impoverished street children, has not been fed the decorum of women’s tolerance of men’s preferred norms. In fact, the fact that she performs on a stage allows her to be literally put on a platform higher than the rest of the audience. Instead of being the slave who ought not to look up to meet the eyes of his/her master, it is the audience, the men like Ahmad Al-Damahiri who are watching her, who have to look up to meet her fiery eyes. She “seemed like [a] goddess” with her “proud head” and with her “pupils radiating a unique light, [that] had the power to charm, to make the hearts throb” (Saadawi 116). Zeina resembles the goddess Medusa who has the power to literally “charm” with her detrimental gaze. Ahmad Al-Damahiri senses the threat of Zeina’s eyes which he feels travel to his depths. His eyes “couldn’t stop staring at her, wanting to discover her secret, to unravel her mystery, and to tear her apart” (Saadawi 178). Freud also adds that “the sight of Medusa’s head makes the spectator stiff with horror, turns him to stone” (qtd Creed 44) and explains that becoming stiff equates having an erection. Similarly, Ahmad Al-Damahiri is sexually attracted, horrified, and wants to destroy Zeina. He “wanted to hold her head in his hands and smash it, break the insolent eyes, and tame the unruly shrew in bed. He wanted her to lie beneath him so that he could penetrate her with his iron

rod and gouge her eyes with his finger" (Saadawi 117). He wanted to eliminate the source which can see through his hypocrisy through rape, for "rape, the ultimate violation of women by both the eye and the penis, is used as a systemized weapon against whole societies" (Grace 90). Ahmad Al-Damahiri wanted to kill the spark of revolution in her eyes because it would disrupt the order in which he is perceived as powerful and dominating. In his prayers, he would cry:

> "I want those eyes blazing with the black blue flame, burning with the desire to challenge and violate your laws, oh Lord, and that the laws of nature and the laws of private property, and the laws of the free market. This woman is depriving me of my freedom to possess her. Something in her is beyond possession and therefore beyond your will […] All my attempts at possessing her have produced the opposite results, exposing my weakness and my failure" (Saadawi 191).

This passage is significant for it reasserts that men fear women's minds and any potential action against the dominating systems. Women who have the powers to speak out and uncover hypocrisies are a menace because they cannot be possessed and ruled by patriarchal norms. Similar to how Medusa was beheaded, Zeina becomes an icon whose head, the source of her gaze and speech, ought to be removed before the women next to her can resemble her. Zeina's name becomes on fundamentalists' list of people who should be eliminated for threatening moral conduct. At the end of the novel, when the numbers of protestors against the ruling president escalate, Zeina sings to the masses and is shot during her performance. However, even with "blood-red lines […] leaking from her chest [,] her voice rose higher as she sang and danced to the tune" (Saadawi 245). Once again, violence, the defense of the weak, is used to subdue those who revolt against authorities. Nonetheless, the notion that Zeina's voice rises higher suggests that she still resists and refuses to be

silenced. The audience goes mad and cheer her to sing more, celebrating her voice and carrying her on their shoulders as their hero.

Zeina's voice was not controlled or altered even under patriarchal threats. A woman who has been subject to the misfortunes of a corrupt political system and hypocritical male-biased norms has nothing more to lose and sacrifices her life in order to be heard. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about women who did not suffer the calamity of poverty and who did not bear the marks of religious lashes. The contrast between these women is made apparent in the novel on whether concerning their physical appearance, their attitudes, and the messages they strive to send. Mageeda Al-Khartiti, Zakariah's and Bodour's daughter, can be said to project the image of high society, who has been fed the religious and cultural norms of a patriarchal society, and who has the powers and means to feed those notions to the masses. Mageeda, in many ways, is Zeina's opposite. The influence of social class and methods of upbringing can be employed to shed light on the struggles of forming a sisterhood in an Arab and Islamic country, especially since Mageeda and Zeina are in fact sisters and Bodour's daughters but are fighting for opposite causes. From the very first page of the novel, the contrast between the two is made clear. At the age of nine, Mageeda senses that Zeina's features resemble hers, but notes that Zeina looks much older, "as if she had been born a hundred years before" (Saadawi 7). Zeina appears Mageeda's senior because she seems "to have known life and death, God and Satan, and was no longer afraid of them" (Saadawi 51). Zeina's experiences on the streets of Cairo have shaped her much differently than Mageeda who was born and raised in a mansion with influential parents. Mageeda admired and envied Zeina for her voice and the freedom she appeared to have. When singing the national anthem, Zeina's voice rose high while Mageeda's was

“raucous, grating, stifled, suppressed” (Saadawi 9). Put in the light of the significance of women’s voices in taking part in the political decision-making processes, both Zeina and Mageeda sing the anthem which carries their nations’ ideals, but Zeina’s voice, in the literal sense, is genuine and rises high to reach the masses while Mageeda’s is muffled and struggling, oppressed with her father’s glorification of a nation that was ruled by a man who was chosen by God to lead. As she grew up, Mageeda took after her father’s ideals and became a journalist at a magazine with a column titled “Honoring Our Word”, echoing the latter’s column, titled “Honoring Our Pledge”. Mageeda’s name became more well-known, and she reached higher statuses the more she spoke the language that patriarchs wanted to hear. Mageeda confesses that she has always hated journalism and writing and would have preferred to pursue a career in sciences; however, she follows in her father’s footsteps because she realizes that the financial gain comes from servicing the dominating authorities. Unlike Zeina, Mageeda has the financial means and the powers to speak against her doubts about religion and the legitimacy of the rulers, but she chooses her self-interests and adopts the patriarchal mindset and behavior in order to advance her status and increase her financial gains. Accordingly, and returning to discussions in previous chapters of Mohanty’s argument that Western feminism ought not to generalize Eastern women’s struggles, it becomes evident that familial upbringing and social status shapes the voice in which women want to be heard. Mageeda’s words are read and heard, her voice is not silenced, but she chooses to embrace the ideals which grant her patriarch’s appraisal. On Women’s Day, Mageeda hires a writer to choose one of the accomplishments of their country’s First Lady and praise her and rejects the upcoming journalist’s contribution to write about Zeina, who has become the voice of the oppressed masses. Her rejection sheds light on the selective role

that the media takes in reflecting a nation's image. Her choice to disregard the cause that Zeina represents is compliant with governing authorities' preferred image.

C. The Journalistic Gaze:

To elaborate more on the role of media's and journalism's representations of their nation's image, it is worthy to consider the methodology used by the latter to heighten and increase authorities' powers. In "Strategic Essentialism and Ethnification: Hand in Glove?" Elizabeth Eide explores minority groups' experiences with the media. She uses Spivak's coined term to refer to how the media uses only certain interests to project to the masses and appeal to those with similar view points. Eide explains that the journalist's personal experience and journalistic conventions act as a filter to the information that they pass to audiences and readers. In the novel, and in reality, though the great numbers of the impoverished does not categorize them as a minority group, they are, however, not adequately represented, because in so doing, questions about the legitimacy of people in power would arise. Mageeda, having become an Islamist journalist, chooses topics and headlines that reinforce her own beliefs and ideology. She chooses to shed light on the First Lady, a woman who has learned the customs and decorum of Egyptian society and does not trespass the lines drawn for her, than to write about Zeina who is free, unlike Mageeda, and who is challenging social and cultural norms as well as encouraging the revolution against the president. When the young journalist, Mohammad, manages to publish his piece on Zeina in opposition papers, he is captured and killed. Mohammad challenges mainstream media's representations of the nation and is punished for his actions. Writing and journalism

becomes a means for the oppressed to speak of their needs, even if they end up paying the price with their lives.

Prior to the Egyptian uprising, newspapers in Egypt were divided between state, party, independent, and international newspapers. State newspapers were ones which report events from the government's perspective, while independent, or oppositional, newspapers were subject to prosecution under vague laws that prohibited publishing any works that might damage the image of peace and unity that state newspapers create. Journalists, bloggers, and television reporters were not made aware of where the lines are drawn, and could not anticipate "when the police might show up because they had crossed an invisible line" (Peterson 3). During the uprising, state newspapers were surprised by the size and sophistication of the protests and attempted to cover growing national tensions by broadcasting images of a calm and peaceful Cairo. When matters escalated, state newspapers created counter-narratives and ascribed the demonstrations to be the doing of organized foreign influences, such as Isreal and the United States, that seek to damage and disrupt the order of Egypt. They also referred to broadcasting news on affairs far from their own. For example, on Januaury 26, *Al Ahram,* a well-known newspaper in support of the state, reported protests that were taking place in Lebanon but not in Tahrir Square. A few days later, *Al Ahram* printed the title "Millions March in Support of Mubarak" on its front page (Peterson 6). Counter-narratives became increasingly inconsistent and journalists grew more baffled as they failed to receive coherent guidance from the Ministry of Information. On the other hand, independent newspapers grew bolder and many contributed and called for protests through social media networks. Despite efforts to limit and restrict the influence of the internet in allowing people to coordinate protests, such as blocking the internet to

disrupt communication, people “were forced to rely on traditional means of communication, including knocking on doors, going to the mosque, assembling in the street, or other central gather places. […] Tahrir Square was the obvious focal point” (qtd Peterson 8). The masses became unstoppable and carried on with their protests until they finally managed to overthrow the president on February 11th, 2011. Though the novel was written prior to beginning of the revolution, the author appears to have predicted that millions will unite and for a common cause. She writes that “people marched side by side like a huge barricade to fend off the attack and ward off the bullets” (242). When authority figures fail to maintain their legitimacy, they resort to violence as a means to silent and subdue the masses. However, the people come together and form a shield against all injustices directed at them until they reach their aims, for “life for them was like death, and death resembled life” (Saadawi 242).

In conclusion, Saadawi’s novel, being set in modern day life, encompasses many challenges and sheds light on the corruption of the Egyptian nation-state. Violence has become a key to resolve individual, societal, and national conflicts, be it in the verbal, psychological, or physical forms. Violence has been used incessantly against women to silence their voices and maintain power in the hands of men in this changing world. Though women have come together and joined the people to overthrow corrupt political figures, the failure of solidarity between social classes remains one of the major divides crippling women’s unity. Uniting women’s voices is more important now than ever in order to take part in the changing world and not be disregarded and silenced as laws and regimes are being rewritten. Unfortunately, and despite all efforts to pluck corruption from its roots, Egypt encountered further injustices when the rule fell in the hands of the Muslim Brothers.

Shortly after their seize of power, and not surprisingly, Islamic and conservative cultural norms which take its toll on women's rights and bodies resurfaced, such as the reemergence of the cliterodectomy and genital mutilation practices. Without the abolishment of religious and patriarchal rules and norms, women will not move much forward in seizing their rights nor will the Arab states be genuinely liberated from their shackles to achieve the stability and the progress of countries in which women enjoy their human and civil rights.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

> "So the borders […] are not really fixed. Our minds must be ready to move as capital is, to trace its paths and to imagine alternative destinations."
>
> Chandra Mohanty

In each of the three novels I tackle in this thesis, female characters have struggled to make their voices heard, but their community overpowers and subdues their wills. In *Season of Migration*, Hosna is beaten by her family's male members to force her to be wed to Wad Rayyis. In *Pillars of Salt*, Maha and Um Saad are physically assaulted and sent to a mental asylum for retaliating against the men in their lives. As for *Zeina*, and though the character Zeina is glorified, she is shot at the end of the novel for encouraging a revolution against the figures in power. The three novels are also set in Islamic Arab countries, where the female characters' lives are governed by Islamic and patriarchal norms and ideologies. Hosna, Maha, Um Saad, and Zeina attempt to supersede ideology, in their own ways, and unite with other women to free themselves from patriarchy. However, they fail to manage and overcome differences in race, class, education, and age. As a conclusion to this thesis, I investigate how women might be able to succeed in forming a solid female solidarity and reveal how and why the female collectivities in the novels failed to be established.

In a chapter entitled "Planetary Feminism," Robin Morgan sets out to "further the dialogue between and solidarity of women everywhere" (8). She suggests that women of the world have the potential to form a political force against patriarchy, whether in the United

States, Africa, the Middle East, or Latin America, based on their experiences of suffering. Moreover, Morgan argues that "to fight back in solidarity as a real political force requires that women transcend the patriarchal barriers of class and race, and furthermore, transcend even the solutions the Big Brothers propose to the problems they themselves created" (18). Put differently, Morgan suggests that cross-cultural female solidarity can be achieved when women rise above their conflicts in class and race; conflicts which patriarchy has caused in the first place. Mohanty, in *Feminism without Borders*, comments on Morgan's work and states that, for Morgan, women are unified as one group by their common perspectives as well as their shared goals and their experiences of oppression. The latter explains that the universal sisterhood which Morgan assumes "grows directly out of women's shared status as […] victims" (112). This matter is problematic for Mohanty because it places all women in one category which desires peace, while all men are grouped in another category that causes war (114). Morgan's analysis leaves out "politics and ideology as self-conscious struggles" as well as "choices" that women make and embrace (Mohanty 112). Mohanty believes that multiculturalism cannot unify the coexistence of diverse cultures in an unequal and colonized world. She suggests that feminists "become fluent in each other's histories" and be ready to seek "unlikely coalitions" in the process of ridding women from oppression. In other words, universalizing the experiences of women and categorizing them as one entity against men becomes fraught and may potentially sabotage coalitions which, in turn, would be necessary to achieve female solidarity.

Moreover, in *Scattered Hegemonies,* Grewal and Kaplan state that there are "roles for women everywhere to play in the politics of solidarity in transnational feminist practices … [to] acknowledge differences in women's lives as well as links between transnational

power structures" (26). Put differently, if female solidarity is to be achieved, women's differences, whether in race, religion, class, or experiences, need to be addressed and understood within cross-cultural power structures so that women can share those shared goals which Morgan discusses.

Considering that there are racial, class, religious, and individual-related differences in the geographical locations of each of the three novels, female solidarity ought to be established in national and regional grounds before setting out to achieve international and cross-cultural female unity. In *Season of Migration to the North,* Bint Majzoub, an outspoken female character who has the means to speak out on behalf of the women of the village, due to her riches, age, and experience, chooses to reinforce traditional patriarchal notions and argues for the marriage of Hosna to an elderly man. Hosna, on the other hand, and though is an offspring of Wad Hamid and has grown up with the same ideals as Bint Majzoub, has had the chance to experience a more liberated status with her marriage to Mustafa Sa'eed. She sacrificed her own life so that she does not give her body to an elderly man she was forced to marry. Solidarity between Bint Majzoub and Hosna, two women of the same village, fails due to each of the women's choices and experiences. Evidently, factors as choices and experience ought to be accounted for, starting within the same geographical setting and before expanding to engulf diverse locations and cultures.

In *Pillars of Salt,* the female characters Maha and Um Saad, one Bedouin and the other a city dweller respectively, manage to overcome their differences only when put under the mercy of an English doctor in a mental asylum. Based on experiences of suffering and oppression, the two women bond and unite against a common enemy. Their unity echoes

Morgan’s statement that women can unite through shared experiences of oppression; however, and as readers learn, such unity proves insufficient to free the women from their confinement. The two women have suffered within their patriarchal community, first, and under the mercy of the British doctor, second. Accordingly, even if women are capable of overcoming differences based on race and social class, the lack of organized political powers concerned with women’s rights leave the two women unheard and destined to an unjust treatment. As explicated in the second chapter of this thesis, both Maha and Um Saad can be classified as feminists because they engaged in actions to rebel against the norms and laws set for them. However, their embrace of Islam and cultural Islamic norms, whether in Maha’s adoption of shyness or Um Saad’s acceptance of her husband’s emotional and physical abuse, hindered their chances of taking more progressive choices and voicing their demands more confidently.

Put in conversation with Salih’s novel, female solidarity becomes a more realistic outcome when Islamic religion and the stakes it poses on women’s liberation are overcome and, more desirably, removed from the equation. Nonetheless, it is essential to note that if any progress is to take place for women in modern times, change needs to occur on the individual level first then on the collective or social level. The notion that Islam privileges men over women and is used to empower men’s social and political statuses ought to be highlighted and infused in girls’ upbringing and women’s awareness in the Arab and Islamic societies in order to incite change on the personal level. In Faqir’s work, Nasra’s rape by Maha’s brother, Daffash, is blamed on Nasra while Daffash is barely reprimanded for his actions. Nasra endures religious cultural norms and suffers in silence in order not to be shunned by her community for being dishonorable. Had the notion of honor not been so

closely tied up with women's virginity, Nasra would not have had to tolerate humiliation while her rapist's image remains unblemished. Taking into consideration that embracing Islam and worshipping God is a personal choice on which women ought not to be classified as oppressed because of it, Islamic revivalism becomes mandatory on a national level so that patriarchal men would not use religion to reinforce their claims and powers. Ridding oneself of the patriarchal and religious norms which encumbers female solidarity prove effective, as Nawal Al-Saadawi's novel suggests.

In *Zeina*, the character Zeina who is born and raised on the streets, free from a patriarchal and religious upbringing, grows to become a liberated woman and the people's symbol of freedom. She inspires other female characters, like Bodour, who abhor the patriarchal mind-set but fear to voice their needs, to rebel against political and social forms of oppression. Zeina not only achieves female solidarity among Egyptian women as she transcends male-biased, religious, class differences, but she also unites people of all walks of life to challenge the corrupt ideological and political systems. Accordingly, if Zeina is to lead by example, women ought to pursue choices which are not determined by traditional and conservative gender roles. Change on the collective level is a more lengthy process than that of the individual level; however, if leaders who reflect the image of what the collective ought to represent are in authority, more changes on the personal level are likely to occur. The fact that Zeina is shot in the novel is representative of the obstacles that women face and will face when they confront a corrupt and hypocritical social structure. Nonetheless, Zeina continues to sing and her voice grows louder with the cheers of the crowds, giving hope to a solidarity which even transcends gender.

The idea of universal sisterhood which is based on gender experience as a means to unite women irrespective of class, race, and ethnicity is an aim which feminist scholars are attempting to achieve. However, such goal, and as explicated in my thesis, faces challenges when the choices and personal experiences of women in the same geographical area, or even ones sharing the same blood-line, influence the coalition required to achieve it. A more feasible project, and one which Mohanty suggests, is solidarity "as the basis for mutually accountable and equitable relationships among different communities of women" (193). In other words, common goals and shared ideals are capable of bringing women together when a contemporary language of difference, diversity, and power is established and made on unbiased grounds. In light of the Arab spring the region has witnessed in the past decade, women have proven capable of coming together in matters which reflect their nation's greater good. Unfortunately, and after the revolutions, whether in Tunisia or Egypt, the status of women has remained almost unaltered. Accordingly, even if the revolutions succeeded in overthrowing corrupt political figures, the nations cannot be said to have been genuinely liberated. It is only with the liberation of women and the full realization of their human rights that Arab countries will progress and be free of the dogmas that limit their people's potentials. The novels reflect the society they spring from and shed light on the forces that limit the formation of collectivities. If Arabs wish to alter their representations in literature, change in the political, social, and ideological structures which grants Arab women their human rights is the first step.

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