

BREAKING THE SILENCE: NATIONALISM AND FEMINISM IN CONTEMPORARY
EGYPTIAN WOMEN'S WRITING

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Abstract

The works I examine in this thesis for Egyptian women's narrative liberation strategies span from the nationalist-feminist works of the 1920s in Egypt throughout the twentieth century. I include works by Huda Shaarawi, Zainab al-Ghazali, Nawal El Saadawi, Latifa al-Zayyat, the post-1970s generation such as Ibtihal Salem, Alifa Rifaat and Salwa Bakr and finally, Ahdaf Soueif. The works for examination are organised chronologically and surround anti-colonial independence struggles in Egypt. I argue that writing corporeality for contemporary Egyptian women complicates the modern national space and histories. Qasim Amin (1863-1908) is deemed Egypt's feminist founding father. His modernist reformist discourse is one of the attempts to create the interstitial space for Egyptian women's liberation in Homi Bhabha's concept. Amin's 'imitative' Western gender equality discourse renders the heterosexual relationship complex within Egyptian nationalist heteronormative discourses. It kindles numerous debates about Islamic definitions of womanhood. Not only does this cause the tension between Islam and Egyptian feminism but it also makes Islamic culture open to changes and a plethora of discourses.

This thesis aims at assessing narrative strategies through female bodies, which form an interstitial space in Egypt's histories. Romantic love narratives in contemporary Egyptian women's writing re-signify national space. Re-writing heterosexual relationships in El Saadawi's (1931-) secular gender politics unsettles heterosexual constitution in Egyptian modern fiction, which disrupts a sense of a linear time in inventing national identities. Writing against Freudian masculine discursive power, El Saadawi distinguishes her feminist stance from Western feminist colonialist discursive hegemony. Her strategy

renders an instantaneous frame of time, to use Bhabha's concept. It targets the assumption of tradition as a nationalist discourse. Latifa al-Zayyat (1923-1996), through the creation of Layla in *The Open Door*, suggests that female sexuality can articulate historical perspectives of Egyptian modernity which has been dominated by male-centred views. The central space conferred on female sexuality in *The Open Door* reveals the symbolic representation of female sexuality in the male-led nationalist and nationalist-feminist debates. In *Return of the Pharaoh*, al-Ghazali (1917-2005) demonstrates her body to be able to endure tortures better than men; it involves a complication of the nationalist invention revolving around feminine 'spirituality', dependent on women's roles of respectability. Her autobiographical writing is fluid between the personal and political and it becomes a vehicle for negotiating the national and female selves. Therefore, writing corporeality constitutes strategies for creating narrative time and space in Egypt as a nation. Also, Egyptian women's writing techniques bring forth narratives of the lower class in Egyptian women's movement.

In the writing of the post-1970s generation, Ibtihal Salem's (1949-) daily description of women's lives disrupts the masculine national linear time. For Salem, sexual life expresses disillusionment toward Jamal Abdel Nasser's socialist nationalism, lament for neo-colonialism and the fundamentalist revival. Alifa Rifaat's (1930-1996) representation of female genital mutilation integrates suturing, i.e. healing, and infibulations. Rifaat's writing renders nationalist discourse split by demonstrating this practice as a sense of belonging and a wound, and thus, she creates an alternative space for nationalist discourses. The short story genre is a strategy of conveying Egyptian women's culturally mixed daily life. Salwa Bakr (1949-) devises female madness as a strategy to create new space within the domestic sphere. Her approach is based on revisiting Islam.

She describes female psychological problems and carves out a representational possibility for Third World urban female subalterns. The *zar* ritual and psychoanalytic institutions introduce feminine circular time in Bakr's works. Ahdaf Soueif (1950-) adopts the feminine romance genre to seek narrative possibility for female sexuality and for formulating space for historical subalterns. I suggest that women's corporeality in Egyptian modern fiction articulates a series of performative ever-changing national identities.

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Introduction

Breaking the Silence: Nationalism and Feminism in Contemporary Egyptian Women's Writing

This thesis seeks to explore the tension and ambiguities between feminism and nationalism in writing by Egyptian women. This project manages to create a balance of Egyptian women's writing, in terms of religious or secular-based writing and Western or indigenous inspired writing, during the century-long feminist history in Egypt. It aims to look at the strategies that Egyptian women have developed in order to engage in the making of the Egyptian national identities, whilst being able to form Egyptian women's autonomous voices. This study will explore the different strands of Egyptian women's resistance within and without the nation and investigate their strategies to cope with the double patriarchal and colonial oppressions of modernised Egypt. I treat Egyptian women's writing as acts to create national identities and also as acts that posit Egyptian women in opposition to the forms and positions adopted by the newly independent nation. The various feminist positions, discourses, writing techniques and strategies throughout the history of modern Egypt have contributed to and conflicted with the collective struggle for the birth and re-generation of the nation. I examine Egyptian women's liberation through the re-creation of the Egyptian imagined communities and the strategies that empower and dispute nationalist discourses. In the introduction, I utilise Nawal El Saadawi's works to explain my approaches of the study relating to Egyptian women's performative identities.

In this study, I propose that the concept of Egyptian womanhood undergoes a process of re-signification. The thesis establishes and evaluates the strategies, and it describes how the strategies produce a continuous creative process of negotiation, thereby playing a part in the polyvocal space of the nation. Through this study, I intend to contribute to the narrative strategies of Third World women's liberation. It recommends, from the Egyptian modern context, the ways in which female narratives intervene in the male-centered national space.

Therefore, from the aspect of the Third Women's liberation struggle, this thesis aims to provide an understanding of female narrative strategies that disrupt the homogenous imagination of Egypt. I investigate interactions between cultures and map the changing meanings of 'womanhood' in Egypt's postcolonial era. More specifically, this study regards Homi Bhabha's national hybrid space from the perspective of gender politics. I also suggest the privileged position of the writers who are able to write in English. Egyptian women articulate their voices and discursive struggle to challenge the concept of national identities as 'authentic' and homogeneous. I employ Western feminist theories to illustrate that the creative space managed by the Egyptian writers complicates postcolonial history.

I argue that an 'instantaneous' time exists in Egyptian women writers' works as a strategy to capture subaltern voices. As Homi Bhabha indicates, the 'meanwhile' time in the nation disrupts the coherence of its communities.¹ His theory refers to immigrants in the Western metropolitan centres. It can be applied not only to Ahdaf Soueif's works in English but also to the translated works from Arabic because they address the Western audience. For instance, in the Islamic works, such as Alifa Rifaat's, the depiction of the traditional Islamic domestic lifestyle exceeds the Western Orientalist imagination of the oppressed docile Islamic woman. Also, tradition, which secures Rifaat's narrative world, becomes split, as she grasps women's radical voices in Islamic terms. As Bhabha argues concerning the unspeakable aspect of the national continuous time, 'There is, however, always the distracting presence of another temporality that disturbs the contemporaneity of the national present [...]'.² The daily life time that Rifaat's heroines demonstrate creates the splitting discourse that incessantly disturbs between the national continuous narratives and the unspeakable narratives that Bhabha states. In this thesis, I map the descriptions of femininity in Egyptian women's writing as ways to grasp peripheral voices in history. In the following

¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 226-27.

² *Ibid.*, p. 205.

section, I link the relationship between Egyptian women's images and the imagined communities, and discuss the narrative strategies they deploy in order to articulate their voices.

Egyptian Women's Writing and the Imagined Community

The introduction discusses the deployment of female strategies that contemporary Egyptian women writers forge. I establish a historical and methodological context for their textual alternative space in the face of the layered discursive oppressions. I organise the texts chronologically. Huda Shaarawi is the key figure in the early generation of nationalist-feminists in the 1920s. For the nationalist-feminist generation in the 1950s and 1960s, I inspect Zainab al-Ghazali, Latifa al-Zayyat and Nawal El Saadawi's texts. I move onto the post-1970s generation, including Alifa Rifaat, Salwa Bakr and Itihaf Salem, and finally, Ahdaf Soueif's transnational works written originally in English at the turn of the twenty-first century. This study considers eight writers and draws attention to the genres such as autobiography, novels and short stories with relation to national construction and Egyptian women's independent voices. The works I examine are organised according to the time frame: the turn of the twentieth-century, Egyptian independence during the 1950s, the period after the June war in 1967, and finally, the globalisation after the 1980s.

Due to Muhammad Ali's rule in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Egypt was modernised.³ Ali not only enhanced Egypt's modernisation in terms of agricultural, industrial and commercial aspects but he also centralised his control over Egypt.⁴ In order to build a dynasty ruled by his family, he disrupted traditional village lifestyle and guild organisation.⁵ He strengthened governmental interventions on economic affairs and opened Egypt to foreign

³ Selma Botman, *Egypt from Independence to Revolution, 1919-1952* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), p. 15.

⁴ Op. Cit.

⁵ Op. Cit.

goods.⁶ After Ali's modernisation attempts, Egypt experienced drastic changes at home and abroad. In addition to the power of Ottoman Empire in Egypt, it also underwent pressure from Western superpowers. Ahmad Urabi led an anti-foreign, anti-governmental patriotic revolt in the 1870s and 1880s against the Ottoman Empire. In 1882, however, Britain dominated what seemed to be a nascent form of Egyptian nationalism.⁷ Egypt's secular liberals had a complex relationship with the nation. According to Anshuman Mondal, the Egyptian élite was comprised of 'large and medium landowners, professionals, and bureaucrats',⁸ and they had every reason to diminish the autocratic and arbitrary power from the Khedive. As a result, for them, removing Islam was a way to protect their political interests. However, Egyptian nationalism was based on its identification of Egypt as an Islamic nation. As Mondal suggests, quoting Nadav Safran, the Constitutions in 1923 espoused secular-liberal principles, but the *sharia* law remained the legal framework.⁹ Mondal points out, in the 1920s and the 1930s, there was an Islamic turn among the Egyptian intellectuals because Egyptian identity is deeply embedded in Islam.¹⁰ Mondal claims that Muhammad Abduh is an Islamic reformist rather than secularist.¹¹ In 1919, Saad Zaghlul led anti-British independence campaign and demanded the British to withdraw from the Nile Valley. Zaghlul was to become one of the leaders of the famed Wafd party. Jamal Abdel Nasser brought the downfall of the last king from Ali's reign, Farouk. In 1952, Nasser staged a military coup by the low-level military officers.¹² The military force of the Free Officers movement came from the liberalisation of military admission policy, opening to youths,

⁶ Op. Cit.

⁷ Ibid. p. 18.

⁸ Anshuman Ahmed Mondal, *Nationalism, Literature and Ideology in Colonial India and Occupied Egypt* (London: University of London Press, 2000), p. 148.

⁹ Ibid., p. 159.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 179.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 140.

¹² For July Revolution, see Arthur Goldschmidt, *A Brief History of Egypt* (New York: Infobase, 2008), pp. 143-46. In 1948, Egypt was defeated in Palestine by the seemingly more ill-equipped Israelis. In the meantime, King Farouk's corruption and the urge for democracy in the parliament made a revolution necessary in Egypt. The 1936 peace treaty brought about the founding of the Egyptian Military Academy. Those young men often came from modest family background and were ambitious to bring changes to the nation. The commissioned Egyptian officers, or called the Free Officers, felt that the power of the king, the Wafd and the British must be destroyed. The coup met no resistance. King Farouk abdicated and was exiled. But, Nasser's sixteen-year rule showed no parliamentary democracy.

despite their backgrounds in the 1930s.¹³ The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of Alliance in 1930 allowed Britain to have military control in Egypt.¹⁴ After World War Two, Egypt's negotiation with Britain for independence also failed.¹⁵ During the pre-Nasserite period, the parliamentary politics led by the Wafd party was dominated by Britain and the palace which backed Britain openly or tacitly.¹⁶

The defeat of June war in 1967 changed Egypt's policy making between Nasser and Anwar Sadat. Nasser started a project of building the Aswan High Dam in order to improve the agricultural and industrial situation of Egypt. Withdrawal of financial aid from America, Britain and the World Bank in 1956 made Nasser react and declare the nationalisation of the Suez Canal.¹⁷ Egypt suffered greatly from the British, French and Israeli forces in the Suez Canal crisis and it caused immense casualties.¹⁸ But in history, Egyptian society felt that they had withstood the Tripartite Aggression and that it was a national accomplishment.¹⁹ This war made Nasser's revolutionary regime stronger and between 1956 and 1967, Nasserism was consolidated by the reputation of the crisis.²⁰ As a result, Nasser tightened his fist on the issue of Israel and negated the existence of Israel.²¹ He insisted on the disappearance of Israel and the restoration of Palestine.²² After the defeat, although Nasser still spoke of Israel as a foreign element in the Middle East and an appendage and extension of imperialism, his tone softened.²³ Anwar Sadat, who participated in the Free Officers coup and who was then Nasser's speaker of the National Council, remarked that 'those who knew 'Abd al-Nasir realized that he did not die on September 28, 1970, but on June 5, 1967, exactly one hour

¹³ Jankowski, James P., *Nasser's Egypt, Arab Nationalism and the United Arab Republic* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002), p. 14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁷ Yoram Meital, *Egypt's Struggle for Peace: Continuity and Change, 1967-1977* (Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 1997), p. 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁹ *Op. Cit.*

²⁰ *Op. Cit.*

²¹ *Op. Cit.*

²² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

after the war broke out'.²⁴ Sadat remarks that Nasser became a 'living corpse'.²⁵ The 1967 defeat made the public demand openness to governmental organisation and administration.²⁶ The public also asked for freedom of expression and democracy.²⁷ Egyptian society generated an attitude from a distant knowledge of the Arab-Israel conflict to daily preoccupations.²⁸ Egyptian people from different classes, professions and vocations were involved in public discussions of domestic and foreign policy.²⁹ Between 1970 and 1973 under Sadat's rule, policy-making changed. Socio-economic factors and social realities were given more concern than the intent of war, since war investment was thought to produce negative effect on social welfare.³⁰ Sadat moved diplomatically between Egypt's traditional role for Palestinian nationalism and a peace settlement with Israel.³¹ The loss of the Sinai gave Sadat motivation to regain the territory.³² Egypt's success in the Yom Kippur war in 1973 redeemed Egypt's self-esteem, and also more importantly, Sadat was able to use the success to avoid fatal confrontation between the Arab World and the Jewish state.³³

Anwar Sadat opened the Suez Canal in 1975, since its closure in 1967.³⁴ Egypt had suffered great financial loss due to its closure. In 1977, because of the pressure from the International Monetary Fund, Sadat cut the governmental subsidies on bread and beans, and soon bread riot broke out in Egyptian cities.³⁵ Sadat's peace negotiation in the Arab-Israeli conflict caused enemies against him. He lifted the ban on the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1970s, and yet, he signed the peace accord with Israel and this warranted his death.³⁶

Fundamentalism is not to separate from the issue on Israel and the superpower, that is, the

²⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

²⁵ Op. Cit.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 15.

²⁷ Op. Cit.

²⁸ Op. Cit.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 16.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 132.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 133-35.

³² P. R. Kumaraswamy, ed. *Revisiting the Yom Kippur War* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), p. 3.

³³ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁴ Magdalena Alagna, *Anwar Sadat* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2004), p. 83.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 86.

³⁶ Steve Bruce, *Fundamentalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), p. 3.

United States. As Steve Bruce suggests, an understanding of fundamentalism is not to divorce from its social, political and economic contexts in the relationships of Egypt, Israel and the United States after the Egyptian July Revolution.³⁷ Nasser's defeat in the June War contributed to fundamentalist upsurge. Under Sadat's rule, although he used fundamentalist revival to balance the leftists, fundamentalist protests on governmental handling of inflation, housing, education and transportation became too strong for him to tolerate.³⁸ Islamic fundamentalists refer to a group of people who regard the Islamic Scriptures as complete and without errors, but not in terms of traditionalism but innovation.³⁹ In the 1970s and 1980s, facing many problems in Egypt, Islamic fundamentalists intended to take their own stand on Islam in their lives.⁴⁰ The Islamic fundamentalists include various groups of people: veterans of the Muslim Brotherhood released from Nasser's prison, university students, lower and lower-middle artisans and merchants influenced by modernisation, poor immigrants in the fast-growing cities and clerics who reject radical interpretations of Islam.⁴¹ Egyptian women's piety movement, also called the women's mosque movement, is part of the Islamic revival; starting around 1980, it became very popular by the mid-1990s.⁴² Egyptian women from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds taught and learned the Islamic Scriptures at the neighbourhood mosques.⁴³ There was a dramatic increase of attendance at the nearby mosques and there were also proper conduct and dress codes involved in the male-dominated Islamic teachings and religious activities.⁴⁴

In the text by Huda Shaarawi, I deal with the changes from the turn of the twentieth century to the 1920s and 1930s. During the stage of nationalist-feminist development, Muhammad Abduh's ideas greatly influenced the generation of modernists, such as Qasim

³⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

³⁸ Rubin Barry, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 17.

³⁹ Steve Bruce, *Fundamentalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), p. 12.

⁴⁰ Rubin Barry, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 5.

⁴¹ Op. Cit.

⁴² Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: the Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 2-5.

⁴³ Op. Cit.

⁴⁴ Op. Cit.

Amin, who was to be recognised as the most significant figure for women's rights. Since Abduh's approach to women's position in Islam is the *ijtihad* method, an individual interpretation of the Quran and the Hadiths, he is an Islamic reformist more than a secular-liberal.⁴⁵ His opinion on women's right for education is based on the individual interpretation, as he argues, 'How can a nation prosper in this life and the next when one half of its members are like beasts of burden, neglecting their duties toward God, themselves, and their relatives?'⁴⁶ In these texts I choose, women's bodies form the discursive space as symbols of the nation: 'Islamic womanhood' is a signifier of cultural boundaries. 'Islamic women' have come to be the marker of the national boundaries, differentiating between 'we' and 'they'. According to Nira Yuval-Davis, women and the nation are mutually constitutive.⁴⁷ Yuval-Davis points out that women are significant national boundary markers due to their roles of biological, cultural reproduction and their symbolic role of representation.⁴⁸ Women's bodies are endowed with symbolic values as they assert cultural identities; as Nira Yuval-Davis shows, they have the 'burden of representation'.⁴⁹ For instance, in the wartime writing, such as Muhammad Husayn Haykal's, the secular-liberal ideology is favoured and mapped onto the spatial distinction of the East as heart and the West as head.⁵⁰ Egyptian postcolonial writing reflects conflicts and amalgamation of Eastern and Western cultures.

In the context of postcolonial Egypt, the concept of tradition in the conservative camp is reproduced to keep women in an inferior position. The marriage between feminism and nationalism in Egypt means that nationalist-feminists walk a fine line between the tension of working hand in hand with nationalism and continuing the inferior gender position. I argue that writing sexuality subverts both gender stereotypes and a self-consolidated homogenous

⁴⁵ Barbara F. Stowasser, 'Women's Issues in Modern Islamic Thought', *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*, ed. Judith E. Tucker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 9.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁷ Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 2000), p. 21.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁵⁰ Anshuman Ahmed Mondal, *Nationalism, Literature and Ideology in Colonial India and Occupied Egypt* (London: University of London Press, 2000), p. 176.

national identity. Moreover, the depiction of Egyptian women's private life shatters the masculine-oriented history, discourses and literary canonisation. For Egyptian women, writing heterosexual relationships contests the co-option of a progressive time which gives rise to a self-consolidated national identity. I argue that fiction better accommodates Egyptian women's silence because writers' imagination deals with and explores possibilities in their society. Also, since fiction creates a space of imagination, it can accommodate non-normative situations that writers experience. Therefore, fictional writing can capture Egyptian women's unspeakable experiences. For Evelyne Accad, the novel is a new form for Arab world: This form is one of ambivalent national self-writing.⁵¹ Through writing fiction, Egyptian women provide their nation with possibilities and changes. As Accad suggests, fictional writing is multidisciplinary, since it comprises all aspects of religious, economic, cultural and social domains.⁵² For Egyptian women, writing sexuality offers the nation iterations of cultural scripts and therefore, their writing acts generate militant effects for nationalism and women's liberation. The writing on private experiences about individuals articulates a heterogeneous sense of communities as anti-colonial struggles. As Accad argues, Arabic writers adopt the novelist genre with originality.⁵³ On the other hand, for short stories, Nawal El Saadawi employs consciousness fragmentation, Arabic frame story and arabesque circular narrative patterns. The short story form already exists in Arabic. Its short length is suited for grasping individuals' voices. For short story genre in Arabic, capturing individuals' narratives, rather than more stable collective identities, displaces the idea of tradition made up by nationalism. In Egyptian context, it is a radical vehicle for individuals to express their silence. I will examine the emergence of the nationalist-feminist narrative paradigm in the following discussion.

⁵¹ Evelyne Accad, *Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of the Middle East* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), pp. 5-6.

⁵² Op. Cit.

⁵³ Op. Cit.

Since the late-nineteenth century, Egyptian women and men have launched the Egyptian women's liberation movement to modernise Egypt. Egyptian women's liberation movement intended to separate from western feminisms to combat colonialism and was also born out of its local context. The discourse of women's liberation is a new one. Bhabha indicates that the discourse of colonialism uses fixity as an effective mode of representation.⁵⁴ Also, Bhabha points out that the mode of fixity, or stereotyping, is ambivalent because it takes repetition to claim identities. The colonial subject is dependent on the colonised since his subjectivity is defined by the repetition of the colonised.⁵⁵ Qasim Amin's feminist works are open to an interstitial zone of the colonial and postcolonial discursive space. Amin's ideas transform Eastern women by 'imitating' western women and incorporating gender equality discourses from America and Europe:

A Woman's life will be controlled by her mind, she will be committed to him through the marriage contract. Her family will also realize that she is sufficiently mature to make her own choice. They will agree with that choice and she will not fear their anger or other people's criticism. When women achieve these changes, men will know the value of women and will taste the pleasure of true love.⁵⁶

Amin argues that modernising Egyptian women means the nation's transformation: '[T]he development of a country depends on numerous factors, the most important of which is the development of women. Similarly, the underdevelopment of a country is a product of numerous factors, the most important of which is the inferior position of women'.⁵⁷ The Egyptian female bodies signify the nation's backwardness and are in need of being liberated from the indigenous patriarchal oppression. The view of Islamic women is racialised in Egyptian nationalism. Reina Lewis's investigation of Orientalism in the nineteenth century on Western painters' representation of the harem indicates that Orientalist production is multiple: Western men and women regard Orientalism in different manners and Orientalism

⁵⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 94.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁵⁶ Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women and The New Woman: Two Documents in the History of Egyptian Feminism*, trans. Samiha Sidhom Peterson (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000), p. 80.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

shows national differences.⁵⁸ According to Lewis, the representation of sex and idleness in the harem genre reflects one pattern of Orientalism.⁵⁹ In the harem genre, Orientalism represents Islamic patriarchal system through depictions of women's oppression: sexual domination in its different manifestations, such as subservience, polygamy and Islamic men's sexual indulgence. Amin's gender reform shows that Western subjecthood is not stable when it assimilates otherness into selves. Nawal El Saadawi manipulates Orientalist views of Islamic women's inferior images. She follows Amin's ideas and also reveals that Egyptian identities are polyphonic.

Qasim Amin's feminist view is that in order for the nation to be liberated, women must be liberated first from the old order that binds them to ignorance and passivity.⁶⁰ For him, women must be prepared in education and employment to be the educators of their sons for national progress.⁶¹ I argue that in Amin's discourse, the stereotyped Eastern woman is a new discourse of colonialist ambivalence. Yet, Amin's new woman model reduces the aspect of sexuality as women's rights in Islam. Egyptian women's textual endeavours suggest the perfunctory element in the mere promotion of women's rights in the 1920s. The 'Islamic womanhood' is pivotal in the development of women's liberation strategies. Amin's works can be said as one of the first steps to re-signify the colonialist fixity of imitation discourse. His feminist offspring continue to show the colonialist undermined ground.

Qasim Amin's ideas about women's rights and gender equality allow Egyptian women to have the freedom working outside, but they can do so when they continue to be the caretakers of the family. They have the rights to gender equality insofar as they keep households, act as the soul mates of their husbands and educate their sons. As Mervat Hatem points out by using the pioneering feminist, Aisha Taymur, in the latter half of the nineteenth

⁵⁸ Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 1-5.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁶⁰ Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women and The New Woman: Two Documents in the History of Egyptian Feminism*, trans. Samiha Sidhom Peterson (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000), p. 12.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7.

century as an example, the modernist and feminist discourses of Egyptian women's rights overlook Taymur's role as mother and wife, whilst emphasising men's social experiences as women's model.⁶² According to Hatem, valorising Taymur's writing and downplaying her role as mother and wife offer Egyptian women limited definition of liberation dependent on masculinity.⁶³ Beth Baron also suggests that Egyptian women's press at the turn of the twentieth century disseminates nationalist ideas of men and women relationship in the family, although it does not explicitly engage in nationalism.⁶⁴ Pertaining to the trend of feminine virtues of Islamic fundamentalism in the 1980s in Egypt, Lila Abu-Lughod suggests that Islamic fundamentalists' rejection of women's sexual freedom and insistence on women's roles in the family are not traditional.⁶⁵ According to Abu-Lughod, Western thoughts influence the definitions of Islamists' call for return to home.⁶⁶ In Islamist context, feminism is seen as colonialism. In Islamist innovation, femininity is restricted to women's roles in the family; as Barry suggests, 'On the role of women, the structure of the family, and its concept of social justice, Islam is the basis of the customs by which most Egyptians live'.⁶⁷ Femininities are construction, rather than something that can be fixed.

Aisha Taymur is considered a 'founding mother of feminist expression' at the turn of the twentieth century.⁶⁸ She writes poetry in Arabic, Turkish and Persian. As Richard Jacquemond argues, her works are ignored because she does not write in French, a language used by cosmopolitan elite at that time in Egypt due to Arab and Western Orientalist views.⁶⁹ Taymur also publishes an allegorical tale, *The Results of Circumstances in Words and Deeds* and a treatise on relationship of men and women, *The Mirror of Contemplation on Things*.

⁶² Mervat Hatem, 'Tears and the Critique of the Modernist and the Feminist Discourses on Nineteenth-Century Egypt', *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, Lila Abu-Lughod, ed. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 85-6.

⁶³ Op. Cit.

⁶⁴ Beth Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 37.

⁶⁵ Lila Abu-Lughod, 'The Marriage of Feminism and Islamism in Egypt: Selective Repudiation as a Dynamic of Postcolonial Cultural Politics', *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, Lila Abu-Lughod, ed. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 263.

⁶⁶ Op. Cit.

⁶⁷ Rubin Barry, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 4.

⁶⁸ Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 14

⁶⁹ Richard Jacquemond, *Conscience of the Nation: Writers, State, and Society in Modern Egypt* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), p. 11.

Her views on love and education are similar to Qasim Amin's: She emphasises women's right of education because '[t]hey would make brilliant their jewels, and would become clever in making its value rise'.⁷⁰ Zainab Fawwaz, who is contemporary with Taymur, writes poetry, three novels and edits a compendium of biographies for famous Arab and European women, *Pearls Scattered Throughout the Women's Quarters*. As Beth Baron points out, these early attempts on fiction by Egyptian women receive little attention.⁷¹ Fawwaz adamantly supports Egyptian women's political rights and their involvement in the professions in public space.⁷² She turns to another genre, the biographical dictionary because it is a medieval form and a respected genre like poetry.⁷³ This compendium contributes to the portrayal of women's lives in the male-dominant contents of the traditional form.⁷⁴ This thesis focuses on Egyptian women's contribution in fiction because its narrative dimension has relevance to time in the nation.

The generic forms are strategies of contesting the national symbolic space. The particular genres of autobiographies, short stories and novels are signifying practices that Egyptian women deploy to contest cultural inequality and gender identities. Benedict Anderson indicates that the spread of the printed word contributes to the emergence of national consciousness.⁷⁵ Anderson points out that the rise of the print culture makes the 'horizontal-secular, transverse-time' possible.⁷⁶ According to Anderson, the printed word establishes the calendrical time which moves from the past into the future by way of accidental occurrences.⁷⁷ The rise of the 'horizontal empty time' is a new emergence of consciousness that differs from the Messianic time. The Messianic time is based on an

⁷⁰ Aisha Taymur, 'Introduction to *The Results of Circumstances in Words and Deeds*', *Opening The Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*, eds. Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 130.

⁷¹ Beth Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and The Press* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 52.

⁷² Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 15.

⁷³ Beth Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and The Press* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 51.

⁷⁴ Op. Cit.

⁷⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 37.

⁷⁶ Op. Cit.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 24.

instantaneous present determined by pre-figuring and fulfilment between the events.⁷⁸

Furthermore, as Anderson indicates, the particular genre of the novels, combined with the widespread print culture, gives rise to the sense of the 'homogeneous, empty time'.⁷⁹ The particular implementation of time enables a sense of linear historical memory to consolidate the national communities. For Anderson, the novels use the 'horizontal empty time' to create the 'novelty of this imagined world conjured up by the author in his readers' mind'.⁸⁰

For the novels in Egyptian women's writing, time, generic forms and Egyptian female bodies are connected. The novels emulate a heterosexual comradeship that constitutes Amin's new woman model and nationalism, such as Yusuf Idris's *City of Love and Ashes*. Egyptian women's writing of female bodies deconstruct the so-called national horizontal empty time by utilising genres. Egyptian women's writing brings forth the power of writing sexuality for constructing new voices. Sabry Hafez notes that, fictional writing, both novels and short stories, does not have a root in the Arabic literary tradition.⁸¹ Hafez argues that the generic forms are not separated from colonial influence.⁸² The question of generic roots is one of degrees: Whilst novels are a complete new genre, short stories share the root of Arabic prose fiction. For autobiographical writing, Mary Ann Fay works on premodern Mamluk women in the Middle East, and she argues that this genre has multidimensional implications.⁸³ First of all, for premodern Arabs, auto/biography is historical writing.⁸⁴ Also, poststructuralist power theory provides a vantage point for examining relative truths, and therefore, regional and marginal auto/biographical writing aligns with the challenge of metanarratives and universalism.⁸⁵ Auto/biographical writing is dynamic between personal and historical

⁷⁸ Op. Cit.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 25-6.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 26.

⁸¹ Sabry Hafez, *The Quest for Identities: The Development of the Modern Arabic Short Story* (London: Saqi Books, 2007), p. 36.

⁸² Sabry Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse: A Study in the Sociology of Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Saqi Books, 1993), p. 20 and p. 27.

⁸³ Mary Ann Fay, *Auto/Biography and the Construction of Identity and Community in the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 2.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 1.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 2-3.

accounts.⁸⁶ Further, Fay points out that Cynthia Nelson's investigation of Doria Shafiq's biography shows that it is more fictive than methodological.⁸⁷ Fay also demonstrates Samar Artar's examination on a quasi-autobiographical Damascene girl.⁸⁸ For Samar, autobiographical writing contributes to a new selfhood composed of autobiography, memoirs and documentary.⁸⁹

Genres can challenge the homosocial bond of God's community, the *umma*, established by common religious belief. For instance, gender equality discourse in Egyptian women's novels disrupts men's homosocial bond in Amin's discourse. Regarding the *umma*, as Stefano Allievi and Jørgen S. Nielsen argues, in the latter half of the twentieth century, as the world becomes globalised, it becomes transnational, or called migratory *umma*, making it different from traditional static sense of the *umma*.⁹⁰ De-territorialisation renders the inside/outside *umma* boundary blurred.⁹¹ Hafez notes the social, economic and political changes in relation to the birth of the genres at the turn of and throughout the twentieth century in Egypt.⁹² During the modern era, the colonialist and domestic conflicts dominated Egyptian people's consciousness.⁹³ They experienced political factions, instabilities and the class struggle between the old feudal system and the new modern nation as part of their daily lives. Drastic social changes were particularly felt in the phenomenon of urbanisation.⁹⁴ This rapid urbanisation was accompanied by the deterioration of the lower working class.⁹⁵ In the meantime, the expansion of education contributed to the broadening of the literate class and expanded a new readership to the middle-class people, traditionally reserved for the upper

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

⁸⁷ Op. Cit.

⁸⁸ Op. Cit.

⁸⁹ Op. Cit.

⁹⁰ Stefano Allievi and Jørgen S. Nielsen, *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities* (Boson: Brille, 2003), pp. 7-8.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 6.

⁹² Sabry Hafez, *The Quest for Identities: The Development of the Modern Arabic Short Story* (London: Saqi Books, 2007). pp. 41-67.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 52.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 55.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 56.

class.⁹⁶ I argue that the short story genre is apt for capturing religious revival of the lower-class in urban areas in El Saadawi's writing and that of the post-1970s generation. Amongst the political factions, Egypt faces class re-structuring and the economic depression in her national independence.⁹⁷ The literature produced in modern-day Egypt registers the battles between the old and the new system.⁹⁸ The birth of the new narrative genres echoes these upheavals. In his *The Quest for Identities: The Development of the Modern Arabic Short Story*, Sabry Hafez argues that the emergence of 'experimental, symbolic and nightmarish writings' happens because of the atmosphere after World War Two.⁹⁹ He suggests that the post-war atmosphere of terror, violence, assassination and instability gives rise to the emergence of new narratives.¹⁰⁰ Genres reflect intertextual relationship with the West when they are adopted in Egypt.

The 1946 massive demonstrations appear in Latifa al-Zayyat and El Saadawi's novels. The defeat in Palestine in 1967 shakes the nation's self-confidence.¹⁰¹ Egyptians demanded independence after World War Two, and the government's meek dealings were not satisfying to them.¹⁰² In 1946, Egyptians took to the streets with massive demonstrations.¹⁰³ Ismail Sidqi resumed his leadership after the demonstrations with more oppressive measures and imposed serious censorship; many intellectuals were arrested.¹⁰⁴ Nuqrashi formed a new cabinet after the student massacre but was assassinated.¹⁰⁵ In the short stories by El Saadawi, Bakr, Rifaat and Salem during the 1980s and onwards, Islamic ramifications, associated with discontent at the government, are picked up. The religious beliefs and practices become individualised and politicised for urgent problems that the people faced under secular governments. The short

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 53-4.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 55.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 63.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 45-6.

¹⁰⁰ Op. Cit.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁰³ Op. Cit.

¹⁰⁴ Op. Cit.

¹⁰⁵ Op. Cit.

story form remains a vehicle to express different Islamic identity ramifications and to voice evolution and democracy from minority groups.

For Egyptian women, apart from social critique, the concern of women's bodies introduces silenced voices in the peripheral of history. El Saadawi's works, published during the 1970s and afterwards, deal with the anti-colonial struggle during Nasser and Sadat's regime. Her works show her involvement in student demonstrations regarding colonialism and governmental policy making in foreign affairs. Her writing also demonstrates the transition between Nasser and Sadat's political decisions. Her position contributes to secular national identities. Nawal El Saadawi's emphasis on Egyptian female masculinity is an anti-colonialist gesture and it challenges male-led nationalism in her works. Also, her realist and experimental novels react to the horizontal empty time, achieved by emphasising heterosexuality in Egyptian realist novels. In promoting Egyptian female masculinity, El Saadawi inherits Amin's strand of nationalist-feminism, and she radicalises it by questioning the Egyptian male leadership. She achieves anti-governmental critique by re-writing heterosexual relationships.

The romance genre in Egyptian novels and short stories has been ways to construct Egyptian national identities from Egyptian intellectuals' point of view. The rise of a reading public during the latter half nineteenth century in Egypt during Muhammad Ali's rule contributes to the development of modern Arabic prose literature.¹⁰⁶ Muhammad Haykal's *Zaynab*, written during his stay in Paris between 1910 and 1911 and published in 1913, is considered the first novel in Arabic.¹⁰⁷ Haykal's social critique of the Eastern and Western cultural exchanges shows in the plot of his *Zaynab*.¹⁰⁸ The educated student in Cairo, Hamid, returns to the village and flirts with the peasant girl, Zaynab. She is in love with a peasant boy but is married to another man who can offer bride prize. She eventually contracts tuberculosis

¹⁰⁶ Paul Starkey, *Modern Arabic Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 79.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

and dies, still with her love on her mind.¹⁰⁹ The romance writing from Europe is translated in Egypt and Abd al-Qadir al-Mazini's *Ibrahim the Writer*; published in 1931, it is a mature work of the romance genre in Egypt. Al-Mazini's romantic novel shares the feature of criticising modernity and tradition in Egyptian society by the writer's numerous encounters with different women.¹¹⁰

For the short story form in Egypt, plot still surrounds love and marriage.¹¹¹ In Egypt, the Modern School makes contributions to the maturity of the short story genre in the 1920s.¹¹² The writers in this group are influenced by writing translated from Russian and French.¹¹³ For Egyptian writers during this time, the main task lies in transforming the plots and techniques from the West in order to make them suited for expressing Egyptian social problems.¹¹⁴ The romantic element in both novels and short stories in Egypt serves to construct the conflicts of the time. Romance in Egypt is an expression of postcolonialism. As Emily Suzanne Davis notes in Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel*, the novel form, particularly its romantic element, is associated with the emergence of the middle class and modern capitalist culture.¹¹⁵ Patrick Brantlinger investigates the masculinised Gothic novel in the nineteenth-century England during the imperial expansion.¹¹⁶ According to Brantlinger, the popular imperial novel combines occultism and Darwinism with adventures, and it is a form of Orientalism and reflects the imperial rejection of differences in the Third World.¹¹⁷ The imperial Gothic novel is not necessarily about love affairs, but has to do with Victorian Gothic novel of esotericism.¹¹⁸ Emily Suzanne Davis argues that the feminine romance in the colonised countries opposes the imperial Gothic novel and that the romance genre in

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 102.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 104.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 107.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 110.

¹¹³ Op. Cit.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 107.

¹¹⁵ Emily Suzanne Davis, *Global Romance as Political Aesthetic and Transnational Commodity* (University of California, Santa Barbara: PhD Diss, 2007), p. 3.

¹¹⁶ Patrick Brantlinger, *Rules of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 227.

¹¹⁷ Op. Cit.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 237.

postcolonial countries does critique to nationalism.¹¹⁹ I argue that the romantic love affair element in Egyptian novels and short stories writes back to the Islamic women's oppression myth in Orientalism.

The circular time in El Saadawi's short stories disrupts the comradeship of romantic relationship. It expresses multiple variations of heterosexual desires and women's rebellions. In 'A Modern Love Letter' of her short story collection, *Death of An Ex-Minister* [1987], El Saadawi depicts subtle feminine sexual desire of the modern woman. El Saadawi's 'The Veil', also in *Death of An Ex-Minister*, is an example, illustrating the signficatory power of the instantaneous time in women's bodies. 'A Modern Love Letter' is about the love affair of a successful professional woman in Cairo, who addresses romantic love in modern urban Egypt. She finds it hard to voice love. She is caught in a situation where she has a great difficulty approaching her lover actively. The short story captures her anxiety when she drives on the streets pondering over love. The instantaneous time of the short story creates the sense of fluid heterosexual relationships. She is aware of the lack of autonomous feminine sexuality in language: 'I cannot deny that the idea of rape, like the idea of suicide, holds some attraction for me and has been with me since time immemorial, no matter how I wrestle with its vestiges or seeds'.¹²⁰ She is fearful of her sexual desire which relates her romantic initiation to indecency.

In the modernised and crowded Cairo, the protagonist complains of her loneliness because 'it is crammed with males, not one of whom can meet a woman alone without thinking of jumping on her'.¹²¹ Her anxiety carves out an interstitial space for a lack of discursive sexual space in male-centred nationalism. She is also aware that the sense of modernity is not homogenous. Fundamentalist construction of proper femininity is multi-

¹¹⁹ Emily Suzanne Davis, *Global Romance as Political Aesthetic and Transnational Commodity* (University of California, Santa Barbara: PhD Diss, 2007), pp. 10-11.

¹²⁰ Nawal El Saadawi, 'A Modern Love Letter', *Death of an Ex-Minister*, trans. Shirley Eber (London: Minerva, 1987), p. 69.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

faceted. As Sherifa Zuhur's research indicates, for Islamists, polygamy is not forbidden, but the wife's virtue, education and contribution should avoid this option.¹²² Also, for Islamists who are active from the 1960s on, restricting divorce is not to abuse women but to protect their marriage.¹²³ At the thought of active participation in a love relationship, the heroine is frightened of herself: 'It is not, as you once told me, that I kill or castrate men'.¹²⁴ The romantic game with active and passive involvement constitutes flexible discursive space. Gender and sexual 'nature' is called into question. 'A Modern Love Letter' is a multiple textual ground, consisting of unresolved meanings to construct modern Islamic 'womanhood'.

The protagonist in 'The Veil' has the opportunity to stay with her lover privately to indicate her positive sexuality, free from men's lust. At the end of the story, the heroine adopts her veil. El Saadawi's heroines re-signify gender ideas by their corporeal experiences. In 'The Veil', the heroine acknowledges the linguistic power of gender as she asks: 'Is love simply a fairy tale, like the stories of Adam and Eve or Cinderella or Hassan the Wise?'¹²⁵ For Judith Butler, there is no pre-existing subject prior to the corporeal deployment of gender identities.¹²⁶ Butler's significance lies in that the corporeal deployment has potential to construct gender identities. El Saadawi's psychoanalytical practice sets in motion an in-between space of Western and Eastern cultures in gender-construction discourse. Also, she utilises women's bodies to re-write the neo-colonial state: 'I look at him [her boyfriend] steadily and once again see the strength and youthfulness and cleanliness and good eating. I almost tell him what it is I see'.¹²⁷ The standoff between the two about whether to have the night together or not lasts till three o'clock in the morning and both of them are tired. The

¹²² Sherifa Zuhur, *Revealing Reveiling: Islamist Gender Ideology in Contemporary Egypt* (Albany, New York: State University of New York, 1992), p. 95.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹²⁴ Nawal El Saadawi, 'A Modern Love Letter', *Death of an Ex-Minister*, trans. Shirley Eber (London: Minerva, 1987), p. 69.

¹²⁵ Nawal El Saadawi, 'The Veil', *Death of an Ex-Minister*, trans. Shirley Eber (London: Minerva, 1987), p. 33.

¹²⁶ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 41.

¹²⁷ Nawal El Saadawi, 'The Veil', *Death of an Ex-Minister*, trans. Shirley Eber (London: Minerva, 1987), p. 34.

heroine is stuck in the limited space left by her association of men as women's deity: 'To the extent that man worships his masculinity, so woman repulses him'.¹²⁸

In 'The Veil', the disappointment comes to a climax where she wants to 'trample on the fallen veil at [her] feet and stamp on it with new-found strength'.¹²⁹ The narrative time is restricted to the few hours around midnight. With regard to the construction of feminine writing, Earl G. Ingersoll suggests that Teresa de Lauretis exposes the 'masculinist self-absorption in expounding on a paradigm for *all* narrative grounded in the rhythm of male sexuality' in order to create alternatives to the male narrative paradigm.¹³⁰ The heroine returns male gaze that demonstrates sexual dominance. The heroine's prolonged acts represent a time element that establishes that her identity has no pre-given destiny. El Saadawi's heroines in the short stories represent the ordinary and solitary figures that Sabry Hafez argues.¹³¹ The short story form, as opposed to the collective identities of realist novels, disrupts occurrences in time and place homogenised by horizontal empty time, in Anderson's concept. The heroine sexual desire articulates the unspeakable aspect in the national space, and this contributes to heterogeneity in nationalist discourses. I continue to discuss El Saadawi's discussion on the veil in Chapter One, as a signifier of sexual hierarchy and colonialist and governmental manipulation.

Female subalterns in the Third World break silences in between time and space. As Nadje Al-Ali uses Bhabha's concept of subalterns, Bhabha defines 'subalterns' as minority groups which the majorities rely on for self-definition and as those who can subvert the hegemonic culture.¹³²

From the place of the 'meanwhile', where cultural homogeneity and democratic anonymity articulate the national community, there emerges a

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 33.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 35.

¹³⁰ Earl G. Ingersoll, 'Nawal El Saadawi's *The Fall of the Imam* and the Possibility of a Feminist Writing', *The International Fiction Review* 28 (2001), pp. 25-6. The emphasis is made in the original.

¹³¹ Sabry Hafez, *The Quest for Identities: The Development of the Modern Arabic Short Stories* (London: Saqi Books, 2007), p. 34.

¹³² Nadje Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 133.

more instantaneous and subaltern voice of the people, minority discourses that speak betwixt and between times and places.¹³³

Also, Gayatri Spivak suggests that subaltern voices can be heard by way of overdetermined cultural intervention.¹³⁴ She investigates two women subalterns in colonial India and during the struggle of independence. She shows that indigenous patriarchy and colonialism silence their voices. Moreover, feminists in metropolitan centres embracing multiculturalism silence them.¹³⁵ In the next section, I regard Egyptian women's representation of subalterns.

Egyptian Women's Bodies, Patriarchy and the Nation

How could feminine subalterns, marred by colonial history, speak through narrative practices that suppress them in the case of Egyptian women's postcolonial literature? There is a sense of impossibility for feminine unrepresentability formulated by Nawal El Saadawi's narrative design. Her answer for feminine subalterns resides in disclosing the normalising conventions and laws. In this section, I discuss the difficulty in articulating the feminine suppressed voices in Egyptian context and Egyptian women's revisionist approach of restoring herstory.

Qasim Amin's gender equality, emulating the Western model of gender equality, is but one standpoint of multiple discourses in the debate. The debate is a discursive effort to maintain social order and to preserve a Muslim identity. Egypt achieves discursive re-orientation by deploying Muslim women. Barbara Stowasser analyses the debate of 'Islamic womanhood' at the historical conjuncture of national identity quest. For Stowasser, the debate on the proper role of Islamic women at the turn of the twentieth century consists of three positions: the modernist, the conservative and the fundamentalist positions.¹³⁶ The

¹³³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 227.

¹³⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward A History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 237.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 309.

¹³⁶ Barbara F. Stowasser, 'Women's Issues in Modern Islamic Thought', *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*, ed. Judith E. Tucker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 3-25.

modernist position, of which Qasim Amin is a representative, suggests that Islam embraces gender equality.¹³⁷ The conservative position proposes that Islamic women's place is in the domestic space due to women's natural biological constraints supported by a discourse of reproduction and menstruation.¹³⁸ The fundamentalist position maintains that the Islamic women's traditional role is immutable and that they must not be lured away by imperialist conspiracy.¹³⁹ The Quranic interpretations of women's position are subject to changes in history. In terms of interpretational methods and authorities, the *ulama*, are the educated class of legal scholars and they serve as the legal staff in the state.¹⁴⁰ The *ulama* generally support the conservative and fundamentalist views.¹⁴¹ In fact, Islamic fundamentalists have ramifications; they are scriptural activists and there are also activists who actually use *ijtihad*, the method of personal interpretations.¹⁴² Modernists are condemned by fundamentalists and conservatives for contaminating God's Pan-Islamic community in terms of changing women's traditional roles. Yet, modernists' adoption of *ijtihad* is attacked, whilst fundamentalists' are not. Also, few *ulama* would join the rank of modernists.¹⁴³ The debate led by Islamic men eclipsed Islamic women's voices by suppressing feminine sexuality. By proposing that a virtuous society is born out of women, the nationalist men do not necessarily contribute to the benefits of women. There is a continuum of men's control over women. Further, the debate shows that the socio-economic situation and class difference were often overlooked in the turn-of-century debate of Islamic women's position. As Stowasser states, the rural women were presented as 'models of health, strength, and independence', but in fact,

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁴¹ Op. Cit.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 7.

their voices were disregarded.¹⁴⁴ The image of peasant women is mobilised to represent the nation in nationalist discourses.

In Saadawi's writing, romance relates to the construction of Egypt's modern histories. She describes women's masochistic aspect in her romance. By doing so, she contributes to the legacy 'all-too-lovable vice' in Islam in order to formulate Egyptian postcolonial identities. This strategy departs from Western feminists, who deem heterosexuality a practice of gender hegemony. In Arabic-Muslim culture and in the world's major religions, women's position is defined by absolute heterosexual hierarchical relationship. The Western word, feminism suggests equality of both sexes.¹⁴⁵ In Arabic, there is no such a word that can match the meaning of sexual equality. Fatima Mernissi elaborates on the sensitive place of love in Islamic regulations of heterosexual relationship. According to Mernissi, Islam does not object to equality in heterosexual couples; it is love in the heterosexual relationship that it opposes because women's position in Islam is posited in terms of the relationship of men to God.¹⁴⁶ Fedwa Malti-Douglas clarifies the antithetical relationship of women's bodies to Allah: 'There is a consistent and underlying binary opposition operating between woman and the deity'.¹⁴⁷

The hierarchical gender relationship cannot be changed in the Islamic doctrines. Any change in the patriarchal heterosexual relationship would occasion chaos, or *fitna* in Arabic, of the God-sanctioned masculine social order. In Islam and major religions, women's presence, bodies, writing and even voices are guarded. El Saadawi's emphasis on the heroines' anger and her negative attitude toward sex points to the fundamental hostility between men and women built around maintaining social order. Images of women with seductive power and sexual corruption have lingered since the emergence of feminism in the

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 24.

¹⁴⁵ Soha Abdel Kader, *Egyptian Women in A Changing Society, 1899-1987* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1987), p. 12.

¹⁴⁶ Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Mail-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 20.

¹⁴⁷ Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 59.

late-nineteenth century in men's presentation of the colonialist struggle. Also, the stereotype of women as associated with guile and trickery can be seen in the Shahrazad frame story in *The Thousand and One Nights*. The sexually negative female stereotype is expressed by King Shahriyar's exclamation, 'Indeed, the malice of woman is mighty', when he finds that he is betrayed by his queen, who sleeps with her black cook.¹⁴⁸ During an excursion away from the palace and away from the wily queen with his brother, King Shahriyar and Shah Zaman meet a lady with a *jinn* who has an unquenchable sexual appetite. Consequently, King Shahriyar decides to sleep with a virgin each day and has her executed in the morning to put women in their inferior position. Shahrazad offers herself up to the king to save other women. She reverses her fate by telling him a story each day. King Shahriyar not only decides to spare her life but also marry her. She has also born his children during the course of three years.

As Gayatri Spivak points out, 'The subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow'.¹⁴⁹ Egyptian women encounter tension between feminism and Islam. Literary production is disguised as speaking universal truths, whilst in fact, it exerts discursive power, and consequently, gender politics are produced in literature as if certain stereotypes were truths. Edward Said points out that the Arabs are looked at with sexism.¹⁵⁰ According to Said, the colonialist conquest is described in sexual terms, and particularly in a negative way in which 'the Arab is scarcely more than a neurotic sexual being'.¹⁵¹ The concept which dictates women's conduct produces the effect to exclude female readership from white middle-class men in the twentieth-century America, an effect that Judith Fetterley calls emasculation. By emasculation, Fetterley refers to a literary production effect in which the subject is always implicitly male, and thereby results in female selfhood, defined against herself.¹⁵² I argue that strictly dictating gender regulations in nationalist men's discourse makes women suffer from

¹⁴⁸ Sir Richard F. Burton, trans. *The Arabian Nights: Tales from A Thousand and One Nights*, (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), p. 9.

¹⁴⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Post-colonial Reason: Toward A History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 274.

¹⁵⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 207 and p. 309.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

¹⁵² Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. xii.

the tendency of emasculation. As Fetterley claims, ‘As readers and teachers and scholars, women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny’.¹⁵³ Egyptian masculine nationalist narratives find their subtle anti-woman voices in the pro-feminist, emancipatory advocacy, such as Naguib Mahfouz and Youssef Idris’s representation of romantic love.

Feminine respectability enhances Egyptian women’s visibility in public domain, and it also reinforces paternalistic definition of gender boundaries. The personal status laws in Egypt continue to diminish women’s rights. To counter the restriction of women’s rights, the Egyptian Feminist Union, was founded in 1923. In the 1920s, it demanded regulations on men’s easy access to divorces, their practices of polygamy and the institution of house of obedience.¹⁵⁴ Unfortunately, the struggle on gender equality in the private space was not met, and patriarchal structure in family prevailed.¹⁵⁵ Anshuman Mondal uses ‘neopatriarchy’ to describe the seemingly pro-feminist stance in modern-day Egypt in Naguib Mahfouz’s *The Cairo Trilogy*.¹⁵⁶ According to Mondal, Mahfouz’s representation contributes to Egyptian men’s neo-patriarchal ideas. *The Cairo Trilogy* focuses on the middle-class family, al-Jawad, in the early twentieth century, typical of the Egyptian élitist concern with class re-structuring between the old and new society. Novels are in favour of secular-liberalism due to the emerging class struggle and the expanding middle-class in Egypt. According to Mondal, *The Cairo Trilogy* allows mobility for sexually unacceptable women to enter the newly-emergent middle-class family, but it does so by co-opting them into the respectable familial order. In the novel, mother figures such as Amina are praised, whilst those who cross the respectable gender boundary, such as Aisha, are subtly punished in the narrative by not having happy

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. xx.

¹⁵⁴ Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 126.

¹⁵⁵ Op. Cit.

¹⁵⁶ Anshuman Mondal, ‘Naguib Mahfouz and His Women: The Cairo Trilogy’, pp. 1-4. 16 June 2008. <<http://www.soas.ac.uk/soaslit/issue1/MONDAL.PDF>>.

marriages. The women who do not conform to their familial roles are represented as cunning, dangerous and threatening in the novel.¹⁵⁷

The emasculation tendency in literary production at the incipient stage of Egyptian nationalist-feminism reinstates feminine stereotypes. The discourse of love and nation by nationalist men is a result of colonial ambivalence. The purpose for romance writing is to define cultural boundaries by promoting a modern Eastern woman, who comes up against sexual oppression, i.e. traditional Islam. Murqus Fahmi's play, *The Woman in the East*, in 1894 produces a model of liberation for the Eastern woman.¹⁵⁸ Fahmi's play indicates that the failure for Egyptian women to choose their spouses signifies cultural backwardness.¹⁵⁹ Also, there are feminist overtones in the nationalist writings of Mahmud Tahir Lashin, Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi and Naguib Mahfouz's writing. Although their writing exhibits images of women who transgress appropriate behaviours defined by tradition and religion, female sexuality does not find voices in the re-construction of national masculinity in the newly-emergent middle-class. Lashin's *Eve without Adam* depicts a well-educated and intelligent lower middle-class woman, Eve, who has crossed the public/private boundary destined for women by falling in love with a man from the landed gentry. Further, her sexual desire is displaced by the class concern in the novel. She distinguishes herself from the women on the street by wearing demure dress, but she cannot hide her sexual emotions toward the man she pursues. Eve is a symbol of the lower-middle class, dominated by the old feudal system. Her secularity indicates the need to deal with the aristocracy in the class struggle. Likewise, Egyptian female bodies are an appropriated symbol for the bankrupt patriarchal tradition in Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi's *Egyptian Earth*. In *Egyptian Earth*, Wassefa is explicit and active in demonstrating enticing sexuality and Western modern dress, and yet its fatality is

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁵⁸ Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 17.

¹⁵⁹ Op. Cit.

used to point out the double-standard and hypocrisy of the Sheikhs. In the meantime, the leitmotif of problematic masculinity is a symptom of society, progressing from the old to the new, and Ibrahim Abdul Qadir al-Mazini's *Ibrahim the Writer* is an example. Romantic love provides a place for Ibrahim to contemplate his relationship with the world and God.

Masculine transcendence produces new national identities. This novel presents a male image whose vulnerability is due both to love and physique, but it is more about the uncertainty of his masculinity than subversion to the superior/inferior, rational/emotional, mind/body gender binaries.

Regarding the mutually constitutive relationship between women and the national collective identity, Partha Chatterjee probes the discursive interstitial space in the nationalist discourse on Bengali women's liberation in India.¹⁶⁰ According to Chatterjee, the nationalist discourse resolved Bengali women's liberation in ways that complicated the idea of the universal bourgeois home.¹⁶¹ Bengali women's liberation was settled in a complex way so that Indian national identities were disturbed by nationalist discursive paradigms. For Chatterjee, Bengali women were dominated by a set of dichotomies such as inner/outer, the spiritual/the material, the godlike/animal-like and the feminine/masculine that both tie them with racial purity and allow them to cross the private/public boundary.¹⁶² Therefore, the nationalist resolution of postcolonial women's liberation achieved discursive hybridity between Western liberalism and the indigenous religious sources, whilst being able to associate postcolonial women with national self-identity by the marker of spirituality. Thus, regulating Bengali women's clothing indicated spirituality, and yet it facilitated gender boundary crossing. For Chatterjee, 'women' emerge in Indian nationalist history as an ambivalent sign, both representing the nationalist élitist men's failed anti-colonialism and

¹⁶⁰ Partha Chatterjee, 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question', *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, ed. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 233-53.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 238, p. 242 and p. 249.

appearing in history as marginal groups.¹⁶³ Fear of seductresses in nationalist history signifies nationalist men's unfulfilled transcendent self, dependent on inner spirituality.¹⁶⁴

Nawal El Saadawi's writing purports to 're-constellate' meanings for Egyptian women. Spivak's concept of 're-constellation' refers to a teacher of literature must represent the subalterns by unraveling texts and designating subject-positions to them.¹⁶⁵ Spivak points out this act would reveal the silence that Western élitist discourses impose on the Third World texts.¹⁶⁶ El Saadawi short stories create Egyptian women's daily lives. By doing this, Egyptian female bodies construct interstitial histories through the slice of life. In 'A Modern Love Letter', the heroine's eyes seek love. Her gazing defies the Islamic definition of eyes as a powerful erotogenic zone that can give as much pleasure as penis.¹⁶⁷ This suggests El Saadawi's gender equality discourse. For Chatterjee, the place of domestic life is ambivalent in the construction of nationalist history, both as the space of inner indigenous spiritual self and a retreat from a failed anti-colonial struggle in the public sphere.¹⁶⁸ Speaking to the nationalist constraint, making women stand for a specific model community, Irene Gedalof also addresses the meanings of women's daily domestic life.¹⁶⁹ Feminine static time, described by Gedalof, is added by the sense of becoming entangled in the daily non-linear activities: women 'have to manage that never-ending series of encounters between staying put, arriving and leaving'.¹⁷⁰ Gedalof cautions against the restricted ability to address female agency, and she argues that women's daily lives are capable of altering community

¹⁶³ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 136-37.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹⁶⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 241.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

¹⁶⁷ Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 27.

¹⁶⁸ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 72.

¹⁶⁹ Irene Gedalof, 'Taking (a) Place: Female Embodiment and the Re-grounding of Community', *Uprootings/Regrounding: Questions of Home and Migration*, eds. Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier and Mimi Sheller (Oxford: Berg, 2003), pp. 91-107.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

boundaries.¹⁷¹ I argue that time in short stories is a borderline space to draw out the silence in Egyptian nationalism and Western élitist literary criticism, as Bhabha suggests:

The ‘meanwhile’ is the sign of the processual and performative, not a simple present continuous, but the present as succession without synchrony—the iteration of the sign of the modern nation-space. In embedding the *meanwhile* of the national narrative, where the people live their plural and autonomous lives within homogenous empty time, Anderson misses the alienating and iterative time of the sign.¹⁷²

For Bhabha, the people produce narrative strategies and their stories represent heterogeneity within the national homogeneous time.¹⁷³ Bhabha attempts to grasp what Anderson’s ‘homogenous empty time’ misses. In Chatterjee’s case, wearing appropriate traditional outfits is an ambivalent sign of cultural assimilation in Indian nationalist development. I argue for Egyptian women writers’ strategies concerning traditions to depict lives for Third World women.

In this section, I have illustrated my methodological approach by taking El Saadawi’s writing as an example of interstitial feminine time. In her writing, daily life re-writes the traditional life in nationalism. Time arrangement constitutes the plural and autonomous voices of the Egyptian people. Egyptian women link their writing with corporeality and launch the goal of ‘talking back’ to colonialism and patriarchy.

Narrative Strategies of Egyptian Women’s Writing

The birthing of modern genres corresponds with the Egyptian historical development. As Sabry Hafez points out, literary genres are ‘inseparable from the emergence of the new social and cultural experiences which gave rise to a new perception of national identity’.¹⁷⁴ The corpus of Egyptian women’s literary works can be compared to a Shahrazad figure in terms of building Egyptian women’s images and producing narratives for Egypt. According

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 95 and p. 99.

¹⁷² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 228.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 208 and p. 218.

¹⁷⁴ Sabry Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse: A Study in the sociology of Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Saqi, 1993), p. 22.

to Suzanne Gauch, the stories that Shahrazad tells ‘represent a compendium of cross-cultural, transnational influences’¹⁷⁵ from European and Arabic manuscripts. Therefore, *The Thousand and One Nights* is ‘plural and mercurial’.¹⁷⁶ Shahrazad represents a historical collaboration of translators’ work. Borges claims that the king heard his story on the night of 602 among other stories.¹⁷⁷ Shahrazad reverses men’s authorities of speech. In Egyptian women’s writing, heterosexual identities in Egypt enact fluid gendered practices. Fundamentalist revival in the 1960s and 1980s has assimilated the ambivalence of Egyptian modernisation in Qasim Amin’s time. El Saadawi strategises feminine masochistic desire. This strategy produces new meanings in heterosexual matrix. Writing femininities manipulate patriarchal systems. Shahrazad’s narrative power saves her life. More importantly, her corporeality changes the course of the heterosexual relationship. As Fedwa Malti-Douglas indicates, ‘Shahrazad’s desire, couched in her wish to liberate the world from Shahriyar’s tyranny, is to wed the monarch.’¹⁷⁸ Egyptian women’s pattern of time resembles Shahrazad’s repetitive and circular re-generation of sexual pleasure. The sexual desire in the narrative acts changes Shahryar.¹⁷⁹

Bouhdiba depicts the sexual nature in *The Thousand and One Nights*, ‘For *The Thousand and One Nights* is a sort of sexological encyclopaedia before its time. And nothing is missed out: prostitution, polygamy, homosexuality, male and female, impotence, frigidity, voyeurism, narcissism—and almost anything one can think of’.¹⁸⁰ As Bouhdiba’s eroticism in *The Thousand and One Nights* shows: ‘Shahryar, whose sexual appetite is renewed, after having been very well satisfied, was in no doubt that he was giving in against his will to a militant, frenetic, ardent, but effective Feminism [...] in every point in accordance with

¹⁷⁵ Suzanne Gauch, *Liberating Shahrazad: Feminism, Postcolonialism, and Islam* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 2.

¹⁷⁶ Op. Cit.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁷⁸ Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Woman’s Body, Woman’s Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 23.

¹⁷⁹ Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam* (London: Saqi, 1998), p. 132.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 137.

Islamic teaching'.¹⁸¹ This paradox is grounded in the sexual practices: As Bouhdiba indicates, 'Arab culture abounds in misogynist features and moral austerity. But mysticism, Sufism and Marabutism also express, in their own ways, this flight from women that is reinvested in a state beyond love.'¹⁸² The sacral and the sexual are not mutually exclusive in Islam: As Bouhdiba suggests, 'Sexuality is a mystery of procreation that has meaning only in projection into God'.¹⁸³ Male homosexuality is forbidden in Islam, whilst female homosexuality incurs condemnation equivalent only to autoeroticism, bestiality for necrophilia, as Bouhdiba suggests.¹⁸⁴ New heterosexual relationship envisions new national narratives in Egypt. Abdelwahab Bouhdiha notes that the violation of the heterosexual relationship is based on the order of God's community rather than a kinship relationship.¹⁸⁵ Heterosexual relationships form Islamic collective identities. I argue that sexuality plays an important role in Islam and that its concept of sexuality is heterogeneous.

El Saadawi's writing includes the elements of sexuality such as prostitution, homosexuality, male and female and feminine narcissism as the strategies of cancelling patriarchal power in heterosexual practices. In her 'A Modern Love Letter', the eyes suggest suppressed feminine desire. The eyes articulate that desire, and moreover, are a narrative desire. As Mary Ann Doane suggests, femininity as masquerade recovers the eviction of women as spectators in films.¹⁸⁶ Eyes re-signify female sexual fantasy and open up a new textual revision to challenge androcentric linguistic order in El Saadawi's writing. For instance, El Saadawi's heroine in 'A Modern Love Letter' expresses their sexual fantasy by the eyes' circular appearance in the text, as she chases her lover in the car and in the meetings. According to Doane, one way of making women men's sexual object is making them

¹⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 132-33.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 116.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁸⁶ Mary Ann Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator', *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, eds. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 185.

desirous images.¹⁸⁷ As Latifa al-Zayyat points out: Female writing is not simply a passive reflection of patriarchy; women do not assume the image created by men.¹⁸⁸ El Saadawi challenges the heteronormative relationship in 'The Veil'. For the heroine in 'The Veil', the meeting of the eyes suggests an emergence of ambivalent heterosexual desire:

When we began meeting regularly or semi-regularly, my relationship with him did not extend to parts of his body other than his eyes. For long hours we would sit and talk, my eyes never leaving his. It was a sort of meeting of minds, and gratifying, but the gratification was somehow lacking. What did it lack?¹⁸⁹

The heroine in 'The Veil' proposes her masculinity, as opposed to the eyes' erotogenic zone in Islam, as a correction to the male-defined masculinity in the nationalist discourse. Traits of femininity and masculinity co-exist in the heroine. She achieves a disruption of masculinity by reversing the patriarchal asymmetric relationship. Also, she exhibits maternal feelings toward the man: 'I put out my hand, like a mother does to stroke the face of a child, and place a tender motherly kiss on his forehead'.¹⁹⁰ For El Saadawi, men should also acquire the element of motherhood. In her *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor*, which I will discuss in Chapter One, the female doctor re-discovers motherhood in her through taking care of her patients. The idealised patriotic man's image is also achieved through his motherhood, projected by the female doctor: 'For the first time in my life I felt that I needed someone else, something I hadn't felt even about my mother'.¹⁹¹ He is the man to whom she wants to be married. He must be able to find a balance with her traits of masculinity and recognise that she has a mind with an independent sense of body. Although El Saadawi claims that her ideas are not from the West, her gender theories come from Western psychoanalysis and gender constructivism. El Saadawi's concept of gender derives from fluid

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 177.

¹⁸⁸ Latifa al-Zayyat, 'On Political Commitment and Feminist Writing', *The View from Within: Writers and Critics on Contemporary Arabic Literature*, eds. Ferial J. Ghazoul and Barbara Harlow (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1994), p. 184.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁹⁰ Nawal E. Saadawi, 'The Veil', *Death of an Ex-Minister*, trans. Shirley Eber (London: Minerva, 1992), p. 35.

¹⁹¹ Nawal El Saadawi, *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor*, trans. Catherine Cobham (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989), p. 100.

discourses. Her writing in Arabic becomes a translational space challenging imperial hegemony.

Egyptian women's strategies have dialogues with historical legacy and figures in Islamic culture. In Islamic cultural legacy, there are Islamic women who do not belong to the passive stereotypes in nationalism, including the Prophet's wife, Khadija, who is after all a noblewoman and a businesswoman. The images of the temptresses stand out in the examples of Aisha, despite her participation in war leadership; Aisha represents the Prophet's 'virtuous coquette' and in particular, the Quranic Zuleikha is another example.¹⁹² In the Quran, Joseph triumphs at not being seduced by Zuleikha, and yet, the Islamic tradition sympathises with Zuleikha for her 'all-too-lovable "vice"'.¹⁹³ The Islamic idea toward sexuality is a paradox: both tolerating sexual love and keeping it under severe surveillance. For Judith Butler, the concept of sex and gender is governed by regulatory norms.¹⁹⁴ The regulatory norms include not only biological and social categories but also a linguistic one.¹⁹⁵ What constitutes the concept of men and women is done by the regulatory norms in discursive power. Also, according to Butler, gender regulatory norms do not exist only in the realm of gender; gender norms are productive in all power fields.¹⁹⁶

El Saadawi's works inter-mix with Western feminist theories because she comes from a position of anti-Freudian psychoanalytic critique. According to El Saadawi for her psychoanalytic approach, 'In my work there are revolutionary heroines rebelling against the concepts of femininity, masculinity, obedience, honour, morals, and so on. But this rebellion in no way implies psychological illness or neuroses'.¹⁹⁷ In El Saadawi's works, female madness creates an alternative time that works between the nationalist traditional time and

¹⁹² Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Saqi Books, 1998), p. 20.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁹⁴ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 40.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁹⁶ Op. Cit.

¹⁹⁷ Georges Tarabishi, *Woman Against her Sex: A Critique of Nawal el-Saadawi*, trans. Basil Hatim and Elisabeth Orsini (London: Saqi Books, 1988), p. 193.

Westernised anti-colonial discursive hegemony. Her works are a process of negotiating and defining the meanings of womanhood in postcolonial Egypt. She holds that reading her works with Freudian terminology is to accept Freud's definition of femininity:

This view regards femininity as a set of fixed characteristics, including weakness, submission, infatuation with violent men and seeking hopelessly to have a penis—and replacing this with a baby and becoming absorbed in the role of motherhood as the only way of coping with this natural disaster.¹⁹⁸

El Saadawi absorbs Western concepts of gender equality and poststructuralist feminism. Her Egyptian middle-class formulation of gender and sexuality rejects the sexual misogynist view in the heterosexual relationship. She appropriates patriarchal discourse and reveals an anti-sex view toward prostitutes. I discuss El Saadawi's depiction of prostitutes in Chapter Two.

Secularism and fundamentalism are opposing discourses in Egypt, deploying their images of women to claim national identities. However, the element of hostility should not obscure the changes and different interpretations of Islam. In this thesis, Western feminisms are applicable to writers, such as El Saadawi, Zayyat al-Latifa, Ibtihal Salem and Salwa Bakr, who knows English. Also, there are writers such as Zainab al-Ghazali, who are from an anti-Western fundamentalist position, and Alifa Rifaat, who lives a traditional lifestyle and who neither knows English nor travels abroad. Al-Zayyat's *The Open Door* relates to the period of time after World War Two and Egyptian society was economically unstable. During the independence war, the superpowers fought on Egyptian soil. The negotiations for national independence in the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty was not satisfactory. The Turkish palace, which ruled Egypt since Muhammad Ali founded his dynasty, was still in power.¹⁹⁹ The conflict between the Wafd and the Liberal Constitutionalists in the Egyptian Parliament became a power struggle rather than concern for people's needs.²⁰⁰ Not only was the Liberal

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 195.

¹⁹⁹ Latifa al-Zayyat, *The Open Door*, trans. Marilyn Booth (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003), p. xix-xx.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. xx.

Constitutionalists in support of the landowning élitists, but the Wafd party was also involved in the struggle for more power.²⁰¹

El Saadawi, Latifa al-Zayyat and Zainab al-Ghazali's works set their scenes during the 1950s and 1960s. The development of Communist thinking in Egypt is manifested in the 1940s and during Nasser's rule. El Saadawi's class thinking and her development of class patriarchy are influenced by communist movement after World War Two.²⁰² In her autobiography, *A Daughter of Isis*, El Saadawi relates to her involvement in the Communist Party after World War Two. She expresses concern over the 'workers, the peasants, the toiling classes, the proletariat, the bourgeoisie, the conspirators, the traitors, the class struggle, the ruling classes, the oppressed majority, the minority of opportunists and the thieves who stole the daily bread of the people'.²⁰³ The 1946 demonstrations were concerned with the emergence of the middle-class, the problem of class polarisation in the countryside, the emergence of communism, the development of working class and the cooperation of students and working-class.²⁰⁴ Nasser used communists and leftist intellectuals' support to appease the reactionary power in the nation, such as the Muslim Brotherhood.²⁰⁵ His approval of communism resulted in worsening relationship between Egypt and America.

Ibtihal Salem, Salwa Bakr and Alifaat Rifaat's works have fundamentalist revival in the background. Fundamentalism refers to scripture-bound but still creative religious beliefs. This study will consider the post-1970s generation and Ahdaf Soueif's works for the relationship of gender politics and fundamentalism. Fundamentalism applies to Jewish, Christian and Islamic beliefs.²⁰⁶ Islamic fundamentalists stipulate women's position drawing

²⁰¹ Op. Cit.

²⁰² Sabry Hafez, *The Quest for Identities: The Development of the Modern Arabic Short Story* (London: Saqi Books, 2007), pp. 45-6.

²⁰³ Nawal El Saadawi, *A Daughter of Isis: The Autobiography of Nawal El Saadawi*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Zed Books, 1999), p. 213.

²⁰⁴ Sabry Hafez, *The Quest for Identities: The Development of the Modern Arabic Short Story* (London: Saqi Books, 2007), p. 45.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 51.

²⁰⁶ Youssef M. Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism: The Story of Islamist Movements* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), p. 9.

on the Scriptures.²⁰⁷ Michel Foucault's research on sexuality indicates that Christianity emphasises sexual moderation between men and women, too.²⁰⁸ As a religious discipline, fundamentalism is reserved for Muslim scholars studying principles of jurisprudence and religion.²⁰⁹ Whilst fundamentalism refers to Quranic study, they are not equivalent.²¹⁰ As Youssef M. Choueiri's study shows, fundamentalism can refer to different Islamic developments in history: revivalism, reformism and radicalism.²¹¹ Islamic revivalism took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²¹² This was an internal Islamic dialogue in a predominant tribal society.²¹³ Islamic reformism started as an urban phenomenon during the nineteenth century and continued well into the twentieth century.²¹⁴ The Islamic decline made the *ulama* reform their traditional interpretations and have dialogues with Europe.²¹⁵ By the middle of the twentieth century, Islam was relegated to private space and political and economic realm.²¹⁶ Islamic radicalism was popular during the latter half of the twentieth century and dealt with the decline of the artisan and shopkeeper class and the population moving from rural areas to cities and towns.²¹⁷ Islamic radicalism recruited a myriad of young Muslim men and women who grew up under the secular and nationalist government.²¹⁸ It engaged in new and creative ideas of strictly religious beliefs rather than revived or reformed religious interpretations.²¹⁹

Salem and Bakr grew up during Nasser's rule. Nasser was an advocate of pan-Arabism and tackled national and internal issues in the middle-Eastern countries. The warfare expenses contributed to price increases on basic commodities, inflation and rampant growth

²⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

²⁰⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 63 and p. 253.

²⁰⁹ Youssef M. Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism: The Story of Islamist Movements* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), p.1.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 167.

²¹¹ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

²¹² Ibid., pp. 20-2.

²¹³ Op. Cit.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 42.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 66-7.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 65-6.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

²¹⁹ Ibid, p. 10.

of black markets.²²⁰ Salem and Bakr's works are full of poverty that Egyptian society faces. Price increases were devastating during the years between 1963 and 1966 on the Eve of the June War, and there were violent protests by the workers in Port Said.²²¹ Port Said is the scene of Salem's many short stories. Bakr describes the bread riot in 1977. Port Said has been a busy port since the mid-nineteenth century during the construction of the Suez Canal.²²² In Port Said during the mid-1980s, the importing of luxurious goods deepened the gap of the rich and poor.²²³ Salem describes its free-port capitalism and the lower-middle-class daily life.²²⁴ Port Said suffered from the tripartite aggression in the Suez crisis in 1956. Also, Al-Zayyat's *The Open Door* describes students' participation in the Suez war. Ibtihal Salem's *Children of the Waters* portrays the impact of wars, such as the June War in 1967 and the Yom Kippur war in 1973. Alifa Rifaat did not publish her short stories until 1974 when her husband died, although she had started writing and published her first short story when she was quite young.²²⁵ Her writing developed between the 1940s and 1970s before its publication. This period of time ranges from the post-war and post-1967 aftermaths. Ahdaf Soueif's writing hinges upon the Egyptian nationalist development at the turn of the twentieth till late of the century with the prevalent Islamist movement.

In Soueif and al-Ghazali's work, fundamentalism, or Islamist movement, needs to be contextualised throughout the twentieth century. As Youssef M. Choueiri points out, the religious leaders, intellectuals and, state officials, or called *ulama* in Arabic, were dissatisfied with traditional interpretations.²²⁶ *Jihad* activities, or Islamic radicalism, that Zainab al-Ghazali devotes herself to, refer to the Quran verses, and yet, the Scriptural adoptions are not

²²⁰ Sabry Hafez, *The Quest for Identities: The Development of the Modern Arabic Short Story* (London: Saqi Books, 2007), p. 50.

²²¹ Ibid., p. 52.

²²² Ibtihal Salem, *Children of the Waters*, trans. Marilyn Booth (The University of Texas at Austin: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2002), p. 5.

²²³ Ibid., p. 6.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

²²⁵ Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, eds., *Opening The Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 72.

²²⁶ Youssef M. Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism: The Story of Islamist Movements* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), p. 8.

traditional nor are they literal.²²⁷ The claim made on religious Scriptures is intended to deal with urgent tasks, although the adoptions are paradoxically creative and abiding.²²⁸ As Choueiri suggests, Islamic radicalism has to do with urban centres after 1945; it arises from the concern of the class strata from ‘small merchants, middle traders, artisans, students, teachers and state employees’.²²⁹

El Saadawi propounds that the struggle for feminine sexual expression is ‘a moral, political and social struggle and not a biological struggle against the organs of the body, whether masculine or feminine’.²³⁰ As Kim L. Worthington points out, in poststructuralist radical assessment of patriarchy, ‘the text of femininity is understood to be the creation of phallogocentric patriarchal discourse’.²³¹ Poststructuralist concepts of the self as narratives are attractive to the feminists who are interested in re-writing their version of selfhood beyond the implicit masculine subjects in the humanist patriarchal discourses.²³² The poststructuralist concept is inviting in that the poststructuralist feminists seek to escape the phallogocentric signifying system.²³³ El Saadawi also presents textual disruption of Muslim women’s sexuality. Her heroines have little sense of their bodies in ‘A Modern Love Letter’ and ‘The Veil’. Therefore, the heroine proclaims on the idea of having a sexual relationship to be something inexpressible: ‘The idea strikes me as new, even strange, and a frightening curiosity takes hold of me. I wonder what the meeting of my body with his could be like’.²³⁴ In ‘The Veil’, the heroine does not have a body, as El Saadawi explains, ‘Desire, or the libido, or positive sexual desire has been seen as a purely masculine desire. The woman has become “the thing”, “the vessel of this desire”, “the sex object”’. It was impossible for women to

²²⁷ Ibid., p. 10.

²²⁸ Op. Cit.

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 11.

²³⁰ Georges Tarabishi, *Woman Against her Sex: A Critique of Nawal el-Saadawi*, trans. Basil Hatim and Elisabeth Orsini (London: Saqi Books, 1988), p. 206.

²³¹ Kim L. Worthington, *Self as Narrative: Subjectivity and Community in Contemporary Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 107.

²³² Ibid., p. 106.

²³³ Op. Cit.

²³⁴ Nawal El Saadawi, ‘The Veil’, *Death of an Ex-Minister*, trans. Shirley Eber (London: Minerva, 1992), p. 33.

enjoy the same freedom as men in expressing positive desire or feminine libido'.²³⁵ El Saadawi's gender binaries make her politics conservative regarding sexual victims and prostitutes; her proposition of gender fluidity is reserved for middle-class educated women.

As I will investigate in Chapter One, literary novelist narratives, by Egyptian women writers, articulate the ambivalent space of the nation. In Homi Bhabha's words, the repetitive signification initiates a present temporality, a split moment that 'moves between cultural formations and social processes without a centred causal logic'.²³⁶ He describes the heterogeneous time and space of the nation in novelist writing by using Walter Benjamin's words, 'In the midst of life's fullness, and through the representation of this fullness, the novel gives evidence of the profound perplexity of the living'.²³⁷ In El Saadawi's case, the marginal voices can be heard in the nation in the split present moment of the signifying practices, always escaping the nationalist progressive time, always to be constructed by the present moment. Bhabha's concept of the national enunciative ambivalence is not gender specific. I examine cultural hybridity by means of narratives of Egyptian female bodies. This thesis intends to contribute a gender perspective to Bhabha's national hybrid space. Enunciative practices by Egyptian women writers are 'a liminal form of signification that creates a space for the contingent, indeterminate articulation of social "experience" that is particularly important for envisaging emergent cultural identities',²³⁸ using Bhabha's words. The cultural opposition between secularism and fundamentalism in Egyptian feminisms reinscribes instantaneous experiences. Zainab al-Ghazali and Alifa Rifaat are the only two writers that come from strictly Islamic positions in my study.

In Chapter One, I will discuss four nationalist-feminist writers, Huda Shaarawi, Nawal El Saadawi, Latifa al-Zayyat and Zainab al-Ghazali. I examine Shaarawi's memoir,

²³⁵ Georges Tarabishi, *Woman Against her Sex: A Critique of Nawal el-Saadawi*, trans. Basil Hatim and Elisabeth Orsini (London: Saqi Books, 1988), pp. 198-99.

²³⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 202 and p. 228.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

Harem Years [1987], al-Ghazali's memoir, *Return of the Pharaoh* [1974], al-Zayyat's novel, *The Open Door* [2000], El Saadawi's memoir, *Memoirs from the Women's Prison* [1986], her autobiographical novel, *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor* [1988] and her short story collection, *Death of An Ex-Minister*. The thesis deals with genres as Egyptian women's enunciative strategies. Genres are devices for counterhegemonic narratives of the colonial and postcolonial patriarchal systems. In Chapter Two, I will consider Nawal El Saadawi's short stories and novels and particularly her postmodernist novels. For novels, I consider *Two Women in One* [1985], *Woman at Point Zero* [1983], *God Dies by the Nile* [1985], *The Circling Song* [1989], *The Innocence of the Devil* [1994] and *The Fall of the Imam* [1988]. For the short stories, I examine 'In Camera', 'The Death of His Excellency' in her short story collection, *Death of an Ex-Minister*, and 'Eyes' from *Opening the Gates*, an anthology of women's writing from Arab world edited by Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke. In Chapter Three, I examine Ibtihal Salem, Alifa Rifaat and Salwa Bakr's works, situated in the generation published in and after the 1970s. Salem's short story collection, *Children of the Waters* [2002], and Rifaat's short story collection, *Distant View of A Minaret* [1983] are studied. For Salwa Bakr's works, I analyse her short story collections, *The Wiles of Men* [1992], *Such A Beautiful Voice* [1992] and her novel, *The Golden Chariot* [1995]. Salem and Bakr's secular feminist politics are compared with Rifaat's Islamic traditional position. The deployment of metaphors disturbs the nationalist-feminist legacy and re-constitutes feminine views of histories, in poststructuralist sense of patriarchy. This can be seen in Rifaat and Salem's deployment of women's bodies. In Chapter Four, I work on Ahdaf Soueif's two novels: *The Map of Love* [1999] and *In the Eye of the Sun* [1992] and her three short story collections, *Aisha* [1983], *Sandpiper* [1996], and *I Think of You* [2007]. *In the Eye of the Sun* is an autobiographical fiction. The semi-autobiographical Asya adopts a feminine perspective of romantic relationship to feature Egyptian women's personal histories as articulations of

histories. The short story, 'The Water-Heater', suggests that textual 'femininity' is unrepresentable in the nationalist discourse of the nation, if her sexuality remains silent. Also, I contrast the two sets of Shahrazad figures presented by the indigenous heroines, of which Asya al-Ulama is one and by the white heroines such as Anna Winterborne in *The Map of Love* and the British woman in 'Sandpiper' to illustrate Egyptian women's search for feminine sexual selfhood in the constitutions of national narratives.

Chapter One

Disruptions and Tensions: Egyptian Women's Writing and the Quest for Independent National and Personal Identities

Introduction

This chapter explores the development and discourses of women's liberation since the late-nineteenth century in Egypt with a focus on the period between the 1920s and the 1960s, that is, the prime time of nationalist consciousness. Egyptian women's liberation had a cooperative and conflicting relationship with Egyptian nationalism. The modern Egyptian women's writing is political, a process of undoing phallogocentric inscriptions, a dialectical relationship between Western and Egyptian patriarchal systems. This creative space, by the Egyptian women writers, is an 'interstitial' space, which borrows from Homi Bhabha's repetition of voices that cannot be assimilated in the tradition of the nation and a linear future.¹ Bhabha states the translational, rather than transitional position, of the migrant, diasporic existence:

The 'time' of translation consists in that *movement* of meaning, the principle and practice of a communication that, in the words of de Man 'puts the original in motion to decanonise it, giving it the movement of fragmentation, a wandering of errance, a kind of permanent exile'.²

Bhabha's position is anti-nationalist. He uses 'translational', rather than 'transitional', to conceive the time in the nation. According to this concept, the movement of meanings is fragmentary, putting the original in permanent unexpected cultural amalgamation. Egyptian women's writing is an ambivalent site within nationalist discourses. 'Tradition' is re-deployed by conservative nationalist men to keep women under patriarchal control. Egyptian nationalist-feminists manipulate their subservient roles to speak for nationalist struggles and utilise them for public purposes. For instance, Huda Shaarawi's Islamic feminine strategies in *Harem Years: The Memoirs of An Egyptian Feminist*, which describe the discrepancy of

¹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 224.

² Ibid., p. 326.

politics and practices, is an example of subversion by way of Islam-defined feminine subservience. Shaarawi's writing is a narrative act that stages a process of identity unsettlement in the national space. The corporeal element in *Harem Years* disrupts the symbol of the new unveiled modern Muslim woman in Egyptian nationalist gender equality discourses and Western secular discourses.

In Egyptian nationalist-feminist context, femininity refers to the construction of the virtuous woman in the new woman discourse and Islamism. Qasim Amin's spiritual discourse enables Egyptian women to have voices in the nation. Egyptian women's boundary-crossing supports their familial roles in Amin's discourse. Latifa Al-Zayyat and El Saadawi follow Amin's gender equality discourse, but they launch strategies of writing sexuality to challenge male-led nationalist discourses. Western gender construction thinking influences Al-Zayyat and El Saadawi. For example, El Saadawi's sense of femininity is in line with poststructuralism in which women's bodies are potential for disrupting phallogocentric linguistic order by reversing gender binaries. As Judith Butler indicates, gender construction theorist, Simone de Beauvoir, claims that one becomes a woman and this idea suggests that there is not a fixed body prior to corporeal acts.³ For Al-Zayyat's *The Open Door*, I argue that the heroine, Layla's gender construction practices recover women's linguistic absence by a fluid performance of her body relating to patriarchal discourses. Both El Saadawi and Al-Zayyat's gender fluidity constructs a possibility of Egyptian women's linguistic absence. Their discourses struggle against the Islamist ideas of virtuous women. Since family is the foundational unit of *umma*, Islamists re-deploy essentialist discourse and encourage women to stick to their domestic duties before their career. As Sherifa Zuhur indicates, Islamists concur on the idea that 'a woman has a biological need to create a nest

³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 12.

and nurture her loved ones within it'.⁴ Islamism stresses biological differences, and the traits of femininity are passivity and commitment.⁵ Whether education should have gender distinction is debatable among Islamists.⁶ For al-Ghazali, gender practices are not coherent, although she also utilises biological argument to support Islam as the authorities of belief systems.

Huda Shaarawi's *Harem Years*, Zainab al-Ghazali's *Return of the Pharaoh* and El Saadawi's *Memoirs from The Women's Prison* are autobiographical works. I include Yusuf Idris's novel *City of Love and Ashes* as an instance of generic significance. Heterosexual stereotypes reveal that female sexuality is overlooked in the realist novels, such as in *City of Love and Ashes*. Autobiographical writing demonstrates Egyptian women's self-representation and its translational element, such as Shaarawi and El Saadawi's reception in the West. As Gayatri Spivak discusses the slide of the two senses of representation as substitution and as reflection,⁷ narrating always involves an establishment of subjectivity. As Spivak argues, narrating acts become problematic in postcolonial contexts because they show that 'how *one* explanation and narrative of reality was established as the normative one'.⁸ *Return of the Pharaoh* narrates al-Ghazali's experiences in Gamal Abdel Nasser's prison during 1965-1971, resulting from his subjugation of the Muslim Brotherhood. For gender politics, al-Ghazali evokes the Islamic idea of gender hierarchy that her role as a woman is secondary to her husband. She understands the hierarchical gender relationship in marriage that she tells her husband right before their marriage: 'I cannot ask you today to share with me this struggle, but it is my right on you not to stop me from *jihad* [religious duty] in the way of Allah. Moreover, you should not ask me about my activities with other *mujahidin*

⁴ Sherifa Zuhur, *Revealing Reveiling: Islamist Gender Ideology in Contemporary Egypt* (Albany, New York: State University of New York, 1992), p. 94.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 88-99.

⁶ Ibid., p. 93.

⁷ Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Post-colonial Reason: Toward A History of The Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1999), pp. 257-59.

⁸ Ibid., p. 267.

[fighters], and let trust be full between us.⁹ *Return of the Pharaoh* enunciates al-Ghazali's momentous deeds of the political body sacrificed for the *umma* as a female Sufist. Feminine subservience in Islamic definition is complicated by her masculine corporeal demonstration of the spiritual strength in the believers. The 'originary' Islamic domestic role is subverted by al-Ghazali's masculine Sufi practices in prison life. Also, her defense for tradition relies on opposing modernist discourses, and thereby is an inverted discourse of tradition. Further, for Islamists, the problem of women's rights lies in the application of *sharia* law in personal status law reform,¹⁰ and not in opposing personal status law reform.

The Open Door is a hybrid text adopted from Western novels. It is deemed the first nationalist-feminist novel in Egypt. Pertaining to novels' origin, Richardson and Fielding believe that their writing is a new genre.¹¹ Realism is the defining feature of the romance form that divorces it from previous romances.¹² Realism assumes the unreal characteristic of its previous romances.¹³ This word is taken to mark indecency and immorality that surround Flaubert's work.¹⁴ The novel's other features lie in its application of traditional plots, taken from legend, mythology, history or previous literature.¹⁵ Also, the names of the novelist characters are regarded as particular individuals in contemporary society.¹⁶ The novel, as a new genre in the West, breaks away from tradition in that it initiates a causal time and that the structure is more coherent.¹⁷ Latifa Al-Zayyat's *The Open Door* can be regarded as a historical romance. Layla belongs to the wealthy middle class. Carol Thurston is concerned about whether romantic fiction conforms to or subverts social order and examines the

⁹ Zainab al-Ghazali, *Return of the Pharaoh: Memoir in Nasir's Prison*, trans. Mokrane Guezzou (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2006), p. 38.

¹⁰ Sherifa Zuhur, *Revealing Reveiling: Islamist Gender Ideology in Contemporary Egypt* (Albany, New York: State University of New York, 1992), p. 97.

¹¹ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1987), p. 9.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹³ *Op. Cit.*

¹⁴ *Op. Cit.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

existence of feminist consciousness in this genre.¹⁸ Layla's love shares the romance element in which love conquers all obstacles. Thurston's research indicates that the erotic content in the 1970s and 1980s romance boom in America shows power balance in the relationship of men and women. According to Thurston, 'the female persona is no longer split between two archetypal female characters: the plain-naïve-domestic-selfless-passive-chaste heroine and the beautiful-sophisticated-worldly-selfish-assertive-sexually active Other Women'.¹⁹ Layla's portrayal can be said to be a romance form of Amin's New Woman model, when considering her education and intention to be involved in the public space.

Latifa Al-Zayyat's deployment of the heroine, Layla, in *The Open Door* feminises feminist-nationalist histories. She brings in women's marriage, romantic love, sexuality and middle-class delicate decorum in the novel. *The Open Door*, published in Arabic in 1960, is first and foremost a nationalist-feminist work, contemporary to El Saadawi. The female protagonist Layla's personal life is interwoven with national independence from the 1940s to the 1950s. The main issues of marriage and sexuality around which Layla's life revolves are her search for personal identity and modern national identity. Romantic love is a secular call for a re-thinking of religious codes on men and women in *The Open Door*. Layla, who finally finds true love in the nationalist-feminist man, Husayn, is a nationalist promotion for a new, modern national identity in the heterosexual relationship. Layla struggles against Isam, her cousin, and her professor and fiancé, Professor Ramzi, and this indicates a journey of freedom. Layla articulates her sexual discovery denied to her.

In El Saadawi's *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor*, the female doctor uses her experience and body to construct a life unthinkable in the terms of gender binaries. As *The Open Door* does, *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor* corrects conjugal relationship. Experiencing gender inequality in her family and in medical institutions, the female doctor finally finds her

¹⁸ Carol Thurston, *The Romance Revolution: Erotic Novels for women and the Quest for A New Sexual Identity* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1987), p. 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

spiritual lover who cares more about her heart and mind than her body: 'I never once saw him stare at my thighs or glance stealthily at my breasts'.²⁰ The corporeal experience in the narrative contests the symbolic fixity of the body in the nationalist discourse. As a doctor, the anonymous heroine forcefully dissects the physical corpses of a man and a woman, only to show that corporeality has no essential meanings:

A woman had a heart, a nervous system and a brain exactly like a man's, and an animal had a heart, a nervous system and a brain exactly like a human being's. There were no essential differences between them! A woman contained a man inside her and a man concealed a woman in his depths. A woman had male organs, some apparent and some hidden, and a man had female hormones in his blood. Human beings had truncated tails in the form of a few little vertebrae at the base of their spinal columns; and animals shed tears.²¹

The act of dissection reveals that corporeal meanings are constructed. The body has meanings only as it is constructed by language and as it can orchestrate signifying changes in language. The female doctor's scalpel re-constructs meanings of men and women and renders heterosexual gender boundaries fluid. In the next section, I discuss al-Zayyat's *The Open Door* for its construction of Egyptian womanhood as a blank page.

The Emergence of Nationalist-Feminist Writing

This section starts by discussing the emergence of modern Arabic fiction as an integral part of the political turbulence in Egypt. It arose out of the needs to raise consciousness about a new social reality. It sought to break away from the classic Arabic literature which stresses aesthetics and imagination in poetry.²² For instance, Sabry Hafez argues: 'In the Arab world, the changes in the social reality are closely related to changes in the Arabic novel and have altered the nature of the relationship between them'.²³ For Hafez,

²⁰ Nawal El Saadawi, *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor: A Novel by Nawal El Saadawi* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989), p. 95.

²¹ Ibid., p. 32.

²² Sabry Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse: A Study in the Sociology of Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Saqi Books: 1993), pp. 14-5 and p. 228.

²³ Sabry Hafez, 'The Transformation of Reality and the Arabic Novel's Aesthetic Response', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London 57:1 (1994), p. 93.

the images of women created in the textual world are tied in with the social reality: Before the 1960s, 'the "self" was identified with the country, often represented in literature as a beloved peasant girl [...] with her familiar attributes of beauty and good nature'.²⁴ As Hafez argues, from the 1960s on, 'In the literature of this period the symbol of the country ceased to be the beloved country girl, and became the controversial middle-class urban woman as is the case of Latifa al-Zayyat's *al-Bāb al-Maftūh* (The Open Door)'.²⁵ As Marilyn Booth suggests, al-Zayyat's *The Open Door* captures middle-class adolescent girlhood well.²⁶

Nabawiya Musa, a nationalist-feminist predecessor, presents her ideas of gender construction theories. Musa is one of the pioneering nationalist-feminists during the independence struggle in the 1920s. She links her theory to animals: 'The male animal is no different from the female except in reproduction'.²⁷ She sees gender as construction rather than as a stable identity: 'We should not be deceived about men's and women's innate abilities when we know how differently they have been raised. We must educate them the same way'.²⁸ Musa opposes the notion in the Quran about women's trickery: 'It is a snare of you women. Truly mighty is your snare', and she balanced it by the Quranic verse about men's connivance: 'And the unbelievers plotted and planned, and God too planned, and the best of planners is God'.²⁹ Simone de Beauvoir's thesis conveys the idea that women are written out of histories: 'Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being'.³⁰ Nabawiya Musa is an adamant opponent for women's rights in education and work in her lifetime, believing in what changes can do for women. In Musa's essay written in the 1920s, the references were made to women's liberation both in America and Europe: 'I say that the woman should be trained for

²⁴ Ibid., p. 94.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 95.

²⁶ Latifa al-Zayyat, *The Open Door*, trans. Marilyn Booth (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003), p. xxvi.i

²⁷ Nabawiya Musa, 'The Effect of Books and Novels on Morals', *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 261.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 266.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 263.

³⁰ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Picador, 1988), p. 16.

work and allowed to do it. If she goes out she should go out for work and not for fun'.³¹

A'ishah al-Tamuriyah in the late-nineteenth century, the founding mother of feminist expression in Egypt, also articulates the pain of being written out of histories: 'The exile of solitude which is harder to bear than exile from one's homeland'.³²

Insipient Egyptian feminisms at the turn of the twentieth century revolve around Western gender construction theory. Both Amin and Musa's theories focus on the importance of education and work for changing Egyptian women's inferior position. Amin and al-Zayyat belong to the secular and élitist strand of Egyptian women's rights movement. The concept of female masculinity appears both in al-Zayyat and El Saadawi's works in a more disruptive manner. For Paul Starkey, sexually explicit writing occurs during Nasserist Cairo in Egyptian men's writing and has references to Camus.³³ Writing sexuality indicates the sense of rootlessness in post-revolutionary society.³⁴ Utilising sexuality as an expression of social problems is not exclusive to El Saadawi's writing. There is an outspoken tendency pertaining to sexuality in the literature of commitment after 1967, compared to that of the 1950s.³⁵ El Saadawi regards her gender equality theory her original work to contest imitation theory based on the notion of backwardness.

El Saadawi and al-Zayyat's works relate to female masculinity and sexual pleasure. Judith Halberstam's work on female masculinity continues the work of queer theories after Judith Butler, as she explores female masculinity transcending gender binary: 'What of a biological female who presents as butch, passes as male in some circumstances and reads as butch in others, and considers herself not to be a woman but maintains distance from the

³¹ Nabawiya Musa, 'The Effect of Books and Novels on Morals', *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 269.

³² Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and The Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 14-5.

³³ Paul Starkey, *Modern Arabic Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 141.

³⁴ Op. Cit.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 139-40.

category of “man”’.³⁶ In the 1980s, the Third wave feminism in America advocates sexual nonconformity, promoting ‘naming the unspeakable’³⁷, the pleasure and danger in naming sexual activities. Carole Vance spells out the feminist task, ‘The overemphasis on danger runs the risk of making speech about sexual pleasure taboo’.³⁸

Egyptian women are expressions for distinctive national identities. Mahmud Tahir Lashin’s *Eve without Adam* touches upon the feminist movement in the 1920s. This is when Egyptian feminism formally starts, as Huda Shaarawi founds the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923. Eve is a discursive ploy of the Egyptian nationalist-feminist position whose image represents the idea of the liberated Egyptian woman in the 1920s. Eve is depicted as a typical feminist brought up in the 1920s, whose efforts earn her a modern education. She does not treat her body like an object, ‘pampering and polishing it in preparation for an animalistic marriage [...]’.³⁹ Eve’s sexual love reveals fear of commodifying her body and narrow definitions of femininity. Steeped in Westernised secular feminist thinking, she regrets that ‘[...] her eyes reflect the seriousness of men rather than the softness of women.’⁴⁰ Eve resents torture in love and this is a Westernised nationalist élitist expression, an anxiety about the tenacious feudal system.

Wassefa, in Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi’s *Egyptian Earth*, is portrayed as a deliberate violation of the sexually submissive role, assigned to women in society. Al-Sharqawi uses this novel to criticise Ismail Sidqi’s rule. As one of Wassefa’s admirers is getting absorbed in her physical attraction, for him, possessing her becomes interchangeable with owning the land. Her suitor’s love toward the land becomes intertwined with his love toward Wassefa

³⁶ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 21.

³⁷ Carole S. Vance, ‘Pleasure and Danger: Toward A Politics of Sexuality’, *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance (Boston: Pandora, 1993), p. 23.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁹ Mahmud Tahir Lashin, *Three Pioneering Egyptian Novels: The Maiden of Dinshway (1906), Eve without Adam (1934), and Ulysses’s Hallucinations or the Like (1985)*, trans. Saad, El-Gabalawy (Fredericton: York Press. 1986), p. 58.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

and the village.⁴¹ Wassefa's father blames the suitor jokingly, 'You're turning to love songs, are you? Is your heart turning to love? Has it come to this? The tyranny of the Government [Ismail Sidqi]...and your thoughts turn to love?'⁴² Her body is linked to the symbol of the land suffering from the bureaucratic power of the Government. As Sabry Hafez has observed, the 'endless battle between the old and the new' was the feature of the struggle in order to create a new national identity in modern Arabic fiction throughout the period between the 1930s and 1970s.⁴³ Using women's images as a ploy to constitute social changes is also demonstrated in Yusuf Idris's *City of Love and Ashes*.

City of Love and Ashes sets its scene around the year 1952 when the hated King, Farouk, is finally expelled and the British troops withdrawn. Hamza engages in the anti-imperialist underground resistance in order to reclaim the British occupied zone in the Suez Canal. The novel acquires an optimistic element due to the success of the July Revolution. Fawziya's desire for love is mingled with Hamza's fantastic lifestyle and his political passion. Hamza describes Fawziya in this optimistic spirit and shows textual confinement on women's bodies:

You're very dear to me, Fawziya. It's no ordinary love I have for you: I love Egypt in you, I love the Nile that's in your blood, I love the whiteness of the ripe cotton in your face, I love our gentle sun that slumbers in the honey of your eyes.⁴⁴

The City of Love and Ashes demonstrates a horizontal empty time for a hopeful future. Their romantic love embodies horizontal comradeship:

Fawziya, our love keeps on growing because it's a part of our great love for the people and for human values, and the people are on the move and evolving. And also, our love now is just a baby—it'll go on getting bigger.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi, *Egyptian Earth*, trans. Desmond Steward (London: Saqi Books, 2005), pp. 40-1.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 113-14.

⁴³ Sabry Hafez, *The Quest for Identities: The Development of the Modern Arabic Short Story* (London: Saqi Books, 2007), pp. 41-67.

⁴⁴ Yusuf Idris, *City of Love and Ashes*, trans. R. Neil Hewison (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2002), p. 92.

⁴⁵ *Op. Cit.*

The time in *City of Love and Ashes* is progressive and reaches its climax when Hamza proclaims that he loves Fawziya: ‘I’m not just marrying you--I’m marrying society through you, know what I mean?’⁴⁶ Fawziya is alienated by literary emasculation.

In *The Open Door*, in the crowds of the demonstrations in 1946, Layla feels that her body is transformed into a symbol for national identities: ‘It seemed a voice that summoned her whole being, that united the old Layla with her future self and with the collective being of these thousands of people—faces, faces as far as she could see’.⁴⁷ Her body is linked to the 1946 demonstration at the beginning of the novel, the 1952 July revolution and the 1956 Port Said war at the end. The Wafd party unilaterally breached the 1936 Treaty in 1951 and guerrilla warfare against the British started around the Suez Canal zone.⁴⁸ These actions contributed to the Free Officers revolution in 1952.⁴⁹ During 1951 and 1952, in Cairo, the universities recruited students for military training and they left for the Suez Canal region where the British soldiers still remained.⁵⁰ The universities became a training camp for students.⁵¹ In the Suez Canal area, students joined hands with ‘industrial workers, the union of Suez Canal workers, military officers, [and] peasants’.⁵² The agreement for the British to be evacuated from the Suez Canal zone was reached in 1954.⁵³ However, British control remained over the Suez Canal zone.⁵⁴ Nasser’s nationalisation of the Suez Canal and Israelis’ withdrawal in the Suez crisis strengthened Nasser’s reputation and rule. He suppressed students’ activities in politics, but encouraged their energies spent in soccer and ballet.⁵⁵ Workers received better pay and housing was improved.⁵⁶ Land was redistributed to needy

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 116.

⁴⁷ Latifa al-Zayyat, *The Open Door*, trans. Marilyn Booth (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003), pp. 50-51.

⁴⁸ Ahmed Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt, 1923-1973* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), p. 4.

⁴⁹ Op. Cit.

⁵⁰ Latifa al-Zayyat, *The Open Door*, trans. Marilyn Booth (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003), p. xxi.

⁵¹ Op. Cit.

⁵² Op. Cit.

⁵³ Arthur Goldschmidt, *A Brief History of Egypt* (New York: Infobase, 2008), p. 152-53.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 153.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 167.

⁵⁶ Op. Cit.

peasants.⁵⁷ The construction of Aswan High Dam promised a better future.⁵⁸ In general, Egypt enjoyed improvement in the eyes of other countries.⁵⁹ Layla's body becomes fluid after she serves the warfare and discovers her sexual needs. Her body wrenches a historical space by demonstrating its link with the perfunctory promise of the personal status law.

The linkage of land to Layla's body by Husayn, a nationalist fighter, marks the element of Western modernity in Egyptian women's liberation. That is one of the strands in Islam, the modernist position. Layla becomes Husayn's symbol of Egypt as he imagines that he leaves Egypt for his study in Germany. This echoes Qasim Amin's point, 'God's plan for this beautiful institution was based on love and mercy between husband and wife, but thanks to our [Islamic] scholars it is presently a tool of pleasure in man's hand. It has also become customary to neglect whatever fosters love and mercy, and adhere to whatever violates them.'⁶⁰ Husayn connects his passionate love for Layla to the nation:

But he would not be waking up every morning to that face. Tomorrow he would depart without having accomplished anything, unable to change anything. All he had in his grasp was her image, to be saved in his mind and preserved in his psyche; and then he must live on the memory throughout the years of exile. If that were to happen, her face must be the last thing he would see when the ship put distance between him and the homeland, the last thing he would see of the homeland—a symbol for all he loved in his nation.⁶¹

Husayn's thought is with the nation. He also has a plan for Layla to elope with him to Germany. He tells Layla that her free decision on marriage will help liberate her, 'You'll find what it is that you've lost, you'll find yourself, you'll find the true Layla'.⁶² Husayn's love is set up as contrast to her cousin, Isam's, for two reasons: Islam betrays the nationalist commitment because he does not go to the war in the Western tripartite aggression, and he has sexual relationship with his maid. Isam conveys sexuality, compared with Husayn's love.

⁵⁷ Op. Cit.

⁵⁸ Op. Cit.

⁵⁹ Op. Cit.

⁶⁰ Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women and The New Woman: Two Documents in the History of Egyptian Feminism*, trans. Samiha Sidhom Peterson (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000), p. 77.

⁶¹ Latifa al-Zayyat, *The Open Door*, trans. Marilyn Booth (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003), p. 192.

⁶² Ibid., p. 191.

Isam regards Layla's body with Islamic term, *fitna*. If she allows herself to give in to the abandonment of the sexual feelings aroused by Isam, she is on the verge of breaching the religiously defined 'womanhood', and on the verge of becoming a prostitute. Layla actively participates in sexual exploration and she questions the essentialist view of sexual segregation. Husayn encourages her to 'finally able to push that door open and to walk through it'.⁶³

Layla is defined as a sexual object, governed by Islamic concepts of *fitna*, chaos, and *awra*, shame. Her participation in the demonstrations causes her father's violent objection, and she is severely punished. The 1946 demonstration in *The Open Door* represents the political instability fermenting in the 1930s and 1940s.⁶⁴ The power conflicts among the Palace, the British Ambassador and the Egyptian Parliament were not resolved. The student protests were directed at the unsuccessful independence negotiation in the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty and continuous British financial domination. In *The Open Door*, the demonstrations are based on the Cairo Faculty of Medicine in which Mahmud and Isam study and are extended to pre-universities which Layla attends. At first, being a member among other demonstrators 'she felt an embarrassed shyness about her full body and was sure that every pair of eyes on the street was focusing on her'.⁶⁵ However, gradually she heard herself 'calling out with a voice that was not her own'.⁶⁶ Her father's eyes follow her and discourage her: 'A fierce shudder ran through her body and at once her legs felt as though they would collapse'.⁶⁷ Gender construction theory influences Egyptian nationalist-feminism between the 1920s and the 1940s, as Layla opposes, 'she was a girl, and a girl was not really a person'.⁶⁸ She expresses gender construction view: 'Our esteemed headmistress says that woman belongs in the home and man belongs in the struggle. I want to say that

⁶³ Ibid., p. 280.

⁶⁴ Latifa al-Zayyat, *The Open Door*, trans. Marilyn Booth (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003), pp. xviii-xix.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 50.

⁶⁶ Op. Cit.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 51.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 65.

when the English were killing Egyptians in 1919 they didn't distinguish between women and men'.⁶⁹

In *The Open Door*, Layla's sexual discovery is a process to prepare her participation in the independence warfare. She is aware that menstruation is a way that the patriarchal system controls her body.⁷⁰ Menstruation means natural 'constitutional, psychological, and intellectual weakness'⁷¹ in religious conservative view. Layla finds the moment uncanny, as she notices that the whole family's attitude toward her changes after her first menstruation. Her father weeps:

A sobbing wail sliced through the silence and Layla jumped out of bed as if stung. But immediately she recognized her father's tones in that wail. She stood transfixed in the middle of the room. She heard pleading invocations to God cut into the sobbing—'Lord, give me strength! She's just a helpless girl. Oh God!'—interrupted from time to time by her mother's voice, calm and low.⁷²

Layla figures out that 'womanhood' is constructed by practices: 'She grew to the realization that to reach womanhood was to enter a prison where the confines of one's life were clearly and decisively fixed'.⁷³ The cultivation that she receives makes her become what she is. The feminine cultivation is so minute that the ways she engages with conversation, smiles and the ways she shows interest by listening are imposed on her.⁷⁴ One of the virtuous woman constructions by Islamists is the idea of *riqqa*, or shyness, as delicate quality for women.⁷⁵ This idea is re-invoked in the Cairo mosque movement in the 1990s and it is used to facilitate women's empowerment. I argue that it depends on how women invoke shyness for their advantages. I will discuss Ibtihaal Salem and Ahdaf Soueif's descriptions of the mosque movement in Chapter Three and Chapter Four respectively.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 48.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

⁷¹ Barbara F. Stowasser, 'Women's Issues in Modern Islamic Thought', *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*, ed. Judith E. Tucker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 15.

⁷² Op. Cit.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 24.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 33.

⁷⁵ Sherifa Zuhur, *Revealing Reveiling: Islamist Gender Ideology in Contemporary Egypt* (Albany, New York: State University of New York, 1992), p. 99.

In *The Open Door*, Layla comes to the realisation that the private world she lives in actually separates her from the category of human beings that men belong to. Her father treats her as if she were just a 'doormat for shoes.'⁷⁶ He yanked Layla's shoes and against her feet sounded the slap of the hard slipper' because of the demonstrations.⁷⁷ Neither her strict father nor her open-minded liberal nationalist brother accepts such an act of violation. She protests to her brother, 'On paper, right? Right, Mahmud? On paper'?⁷⁸ The Egyptian nationalist man, such as Mahmud, has hesitated before the breach of gender boundaries. 'You know I respect women. I believe that women are exactly like men,' says Mahmud, explaining away the discrepancy between theoretical equality and equality in practice.⁷⁹ At first, Layla 'was afraid someone she knew would catch sight of her; she felt an embarrassed shyness about her full body and was sure that every pair of eyes on the street was focusing on her'.⁸⁰ The gaze is full of erotic connotation making her a sexual object. Gender equality that nationalist-feminists strove for was granted by the new constitution made in 1923.⁸¹ However, the rights for women to be elected were conferred and then quickly withdrawn. Layla's instance is an example of the continuity of the old patriarchal system disguised in the promise of democracy.

Shortly after the demonstrations, Layla becomes more aware of her sexuality. Sexually aroused by her cousin, Isam, Layla feels loved. A sense of self is established by sexual feelings:

She went over to her mirror and leant her cheek against it. But the pure coldness of the glass did not extinguish whatever it was that flamed like sparks inside her chest. In fact, it seemed to fuel that warmth even more. She ran to the window, flung it wide open, and hung over the windowsill, dipping her head and arms into the air.⁸²

⁷⁶ Latifa al-Zayyat, *The Open Door*, trans. Marilyn Booth (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003), p. 55.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁷⁹ *Op. Cit.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁸¹ Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and The Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 207.

⁸² Latifa al-Zayyat, *The Open Door*, trans. Marilyn Booth (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003), p. 59.

Sexuality culminates in the scene of the Cairo fire in the July Revolution in 1952. Gamal abdel Nasser came to power after the bloodless coup he led, which banished Egypt's last king, Farouk. This is a nationalist-feminist convention in which women's bodies and sexuality stand for political disappointment at the nation. Isam's sexuality reveals a sense of guilt: 'Lying in bed, his thoughts turned back to Layla, or rather to Layla's body. Here he was, thinking about her again in this filthy, disgraceful way, as if she were no more than . . . than a woman encountered in the street'.⁸³ The night of the Cairo fire is one of fire and blood, all in red. The palace betrays the nationalist movement and Layla's love is deceived by Isam as she realises that Isam has been having a sexual relationship with the maid to save Layla's honour. Layla drifts away from Isam toward Husayn. Her cousin, Gamila, expresses the omission of women's sexuality, and she is sympathetic with Isam: 'Any fellow his age, and not married—you know—he has to do that. If he doesn't, he isn't much of a man'.⁸⁴

In *The Open Door*, Professor Ramzi demonstrates the pre-conceived domineering patriarchy. He stands for the feudal element of Egyptian élite class. He represents the convergence of sexual and intellectual domination. Intellectually, he is eager to rectify Layla's 'imaginative' approach of philosophy that is supposed to be 'firm principles'.⁸⁵ Sexually, Professor Ramzi reminds Layla of feminine modesty when she dresses up for an evening party.⁸⁶ He suggests that the adoption of lipstick is not proper: 'That's descending to the gutter. Just because a wave of vulgar behavior has engulfed the city, does that mean we are all obliged to act immorally?'⁸⁷ His view shows men's double standard toward women's sexuality. Eric Hobsbawm notes that the nation is made up by the invention of traditions that are repetitively demonstrated in the symbols and icons.⁸⁸ Hobsbawm argues that the

⁸³ Ibid., p. 71.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 148.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 230.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 232.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 233.

⁸⁸ John McLeod, *Beginning Post-colonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 69.

invention of tradition keeps the continuation between the past and present intact.⁸⁹ It creates an imagination of a shared past.⁹⁰ Mervyn Morris indicates the symbolic suggestiveness of the landscape.⁹¹ Morris suggests that the white cliffs of Dover evoke a sense of something grandiose and a border function.⁹² Egyptian women are produced as the landscape of the national terrain. Ramzi's sexuality intimidates Layla. Ramzi's sexuality is customary of the Islamic conjugal relationship that Fatima Mernissi describes. In this relationship, sexual domination and love are mutually exclusive.⁹³ The sexual relationship between Prof. Ramzi and Layla elicits her fear: 'On fear; I will live in fear of Ramzi. Day after day, my blood will go dry with fear: The fear gone by and the fear to come'.⁹⁴

Ramzi insists that Egyptian women should not wear makeup, but it goes totally bankrupt at their engagement party when his eyes roam on the body of her married cousin, Gamila: 'Layla could see Ramzi's eyes fixed avidly on the shadowy line between Gamila's breasts, his lips rounded in a smile that she found disgusting, reminding her of the grimace of a predatory animal'.⁹⁵ This echoes Fatima Mernissi's comment on both Western and Eastern view of men's masculinity: 'man as the hunter and the woman as his prey'.⁹⁶ Ramzi disregards women's sexuality: 'Anyway, what does any woman want besides a house and children and a husband who fulfils the duties of marriage? What?'⁹⁷ Gamila marries someone who is wealthy and whose social status matches hers, but whom she does not love. She is flirtatious not only with Ramzi but also engages in extramarital relationships with other men. Gamila conveys her sexual dissatisfaction:

Do you know how a woman feels when she realizes that she's become like an old rag? She's all dried out—her body has dried out, and her heart, too,

⁸⁹ Op. Cit.

⁹⁰ Op. Cit.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 71.

⁹² Op. Cit.

⁹³ Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 20.

⁹⁴ Latifa al-Zayyat, *The Open Door*, trans. Marilyn Booth (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003), p. 290.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 275.

⁹⁶ Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 33.

⁹⁷ Latifa al-Zayyat, *The Open Door*, trans. Marilyn Booth (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003), p. 291.

because no one looks at her with a glow in his eyes, no one says to her ‘I love you.’⁹⁸

Nasser succeeds in the Port Said war and this brings about a hopeful atmosphere for Layla and Husayn, fortifying their love. It brings hope for the 1946 demonstrations on subduing Western superpowers. Layla unravels the myth of female sexuality, being liberated from gender boundaries. Her gender identity becomes masculine and fluid. She is not restricted to the view that women cannot explore the issue of sexuality or that their sexual pleasure conforms to the idea of being conquered like a prey. The 1946 demonstrations signify her practice of female masculinity: ‘When I get bigger I’ll show those Englishmen! I’ll carry a gun, I really will and I’ll shoot them all. When I grow up’.⁹⁹ Layla’s body, being exposed to male gaze in the anti-colonial demonstrations, develops masculinity. Joan Riviere discusses a practice of femininity as masquerade in women who are neither clearly homosexual nor heterosexual.¹⁰⁰ She suggests that this practice of submission is used to avoid retribution from both men and women for the desire to have access to masculinity.¹⁰¹ Layla’s body is a text that disrupts the subject/object binary. Mary Ann Doane points out that in films, women’s images as mystery and desirous beings make them singular between the signifier and signified.¹⁰² For Doane, women’s hysteria results from becoming the desire of men, and their masquerade is antihysterical because this strategy recovers the distance between their images and themselves.¹⁰³ In *The Open Door*, female sexuality is deemed a taboo that books do not teach and mothers do not relate to, and yet, a history of female sexuality with relation to love is narrativised between Layla and Gamila for instance. As Paula Webster points out for the third wave feminism in America, stereotyping of eroticism limits both heterosexual women

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 279.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ Joan Riviere, *The Inner World and Joan Riviere: Collected Papers 1920-1958*, ed. Athol Hughes (London: Athol Hughes, 1991), pp. 89-102.

¹⁰¹ Op. Cit.

¹⁰² Mary Ann Doane, ‘Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator’, *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, eds. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 178.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 185.

and lesbians to explore sexual possibilities.¹⁰⁴ Transformed by the Port Said war, Layla's body acquires a new strength that is 'quiet and warm and steady, a light that emanated from within',¹⁰⁵ rather than men's desirous object.

In this section, I argue that *The Open Door* constitutes the corpus of textual space created by Westernised middle-class Egyptian feminism. It creates a subversive heroine whose body is a dialogue with the heterosexual normalisation inherent in the period of modernisation by romantic comradeship. Layla's body challenges the polarisation of gender attributes. It sets in motion an interstitial narrative that re-signifies traditional Islamic gender control and nationalist progressive thinking. Layla's body is developed into a version of masculinity that fits well with her femininity. It is as if each political event undid a myth, or a layer of linguistic inscription, on her body. First of all, the student demonstration in 1946 unveils Islamic cultural inscription. Then, the setback of the feudal system lays bare the myth of love alienated from sexuality. Finally, the military experiences in the Port Said war unmask the inner frailty in her and supplant the supposedly weak femininity with strength. At the end of the novel, Layla is not a sexual object of men's gaze, or a text that men create. In the next section, I investigate El Saadawi's *Memoirs Of A Woman Doctor*, which demonstrates the multiple discourses of nationalism, feminisms and postcolonialism. I argue that psychoanalytic discourse is translated into El Saadawi's works as one strand of her feminist writing.

Resistance: Egyptian Nationalist-Feminist Writing

Nawal El Saadawi's *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor* is a *bildungsroman*. In this novel, an Egyptian female doctor is treated by a patriarchal double standard. This section focuses on the particularity of autobiographical genre and the portrayal of female sexuality for a

¹⁰⁴ Paula Webster, 'The Forbidden: Eroticism and Taboo', *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 387.

¹⁰⁵ Latifa al-Zayyat, *The Open Door*, trans. Marilyn Booth (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003), pp. 363-64.

discussion of El Saadawi's writing strategies. The female doctor is not happy with the ways her body is tied down by gender regulations. She is conscious of the different ways that her mother treats her and her brother. Her mother is described by her as someone whose values are inscribed by patriarchal values: 'I used to hear it from my mother all day long. "Girl!" she would call, and all it meant to me was that I wasn't a boy and I wasn't like my brother'.¹⁰⁶ Not only that, she feels gender compulsion shown through her hairstyle that her mother forces on her. She abhors the gender regulations even to the extent of the biological hindrance of menstruation: 'Why had God created me a girl and not a bird flying in the air like that pigeon? [...] I was bounding ecstatically along when I felt a violent shudder running through my body'.¹⁰⁷ She also realises that her womanhood is intelligible even in the eyes of the doorman: 'I felt the rough edge of his *galabiya* brushing my leg, and breathed in the strange smell of his clothes. [...] This horrible man had noticed my womanhood as well!'.¹⁰⁸ El Saadawi's strategy is promoting motherhood to re-constitute the new heterosexual relationship. *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor* ends hopefully as the doctor learns the altruistic lesson of sacrifice for the poor. This echoes the philanthropist strand of Egyptian nationalist-feminism that Huda Shaarawi belongs to.¹⁰⁹ The heroine resists against gendering patriarchy. Her ideas of sacrifice are fully understood by her lover. The female doctor's masculinsation is affirmed as better than men's, as demonstrated by balanced gender relationship. The heroine's gender equality thinking constitutes the romantic horizontal comradeship in the Egyptian nationalist legacy but opposes biological foundation of gender. In *Memoirs of A*

¹⁰⁶ Nawal El Saadawi, *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor*, trans. Catherine Cobham (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989), p. 9.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p. 13.

¹⁰⁹ Margot Badran discusses the development of Egyptian nationalist-feminism. Please see Margot Badran, 'Independent Women: More Than A Century of Feminism in Egypt', *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*, ed. Judith E. Tucker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 129-44. The late-nineteenth century feminists focus on public philanthropy. During the independence struggle in the 1920s, Egyptian feminists are concerned about education and work in the public space. After World War Two, there is a resurgence of the Muslim Brotherhood due to economic depression. Socialism develops during Nasser's time. In the 1970s, El Saadawi's sexual feminism and the second wave Islamic fundamentalism are prevalent because of the Open Door policy. From the 1980s on, El Saadawi's the Arab Women's Solidarity Association has branches in Arab countries and in the West.

Woman Doctor, the idealised ‘motherhood’ transcends patriarchal definition, which combines a sensitive femininity and an aggressive resistance against men’s masculinity.

El Saadawi wants to reach a point where she can break away from both Western cosmetics and veil because she considers these behaviours conformity to biological destiny.¹¹⁰ Ahdaf Soueif discusses the meanings of the veil in the twentieth century since Huda Shaarawi’s unveiling in Cairo Central Station.¹¹¹ She indicates there is no Arabic word for the ‘veil’ in English.¹¹² In urban areas in England and in the Middle Eastern world, Saudi women wear layers of black chiffon and Jimmy Choo slingbacks.¹¹³ Dress codes did not mark Christian and Muslim identities in the 1960s.¹¹⁴ Also, there are a variety of veils, such as *tarsha*, *bisha* and *burqu*. They indicate shifts of marking class. For instance, in the 1920s, *bisha*, worn over the whole face, was class neutral in the 1920s; but in the 1960s, it could be found only in black-and-white art photographs.¹¹⁵ Sadat’s peace treaty with Israel made veiling a political act.¹¹⁶ In the 1960s, miniskirts meant liberation, whilst in the 1990s, black, long and loose garment, *hijab*, was adopted to show that women are not sexual objects.¹¹⁷ Also, the full *niqab* worn in the 1990s represented anti-government political protests.¹¹⁸ Manipulations of the veil for women’s interests and national identities are heterogeneous.¹¹⁹ El Saadawi intends to undo colonial cultural hegemony by establishing a discourse of feminism that can represent Egypt. *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor* is about the female doctor’s search for autonomous gender identities. It is also a narrative for the purpose of constructing national identities through El Saadawi’s semi-autobiographical accounts. Judith Tucker argues that biography is regarded as part of historiographical traditions in Arab

¹¹⁰ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* (London: Zed Books: 1998), pp. 138-39.

¹¹¹ Ahdaf Soueif, *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), p. 266.

¹¹² Op. Cit.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 267.

¹¹⁴ Op. Cit.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 270-71.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 272.

¹¹⁷ Op. Cit.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 273.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 274.

consciousness.¹²⁰ The compilation of the Prophet Muhammad's life and community represents history.¹²¹ Semi-autobiography, as a form that El Saadawi chooses for crafting a narrative of an Egyptian woman's sexual autonomy, embodies her radical sexual politics. For Egyptian women, such as Ibtihal Salem, who write after the 1970s, 'branding women's writing as necessarily, transparently, and damningly 'autobiographical', is a common tactic of denigrating their attempts to portray female sexuality.¹²² Fiction for Egyptian women is a form of experiential writing in this instance. *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor* is an ambivalent form which wrenches space for resistance in women's corporeal practices. When experiences can be disguised as fiction, unspeakable sexualities become tangible.

El Saadawi's gender politics echo the Western concept of constructivism, a legacy inherited from Nabawiya Musa's generation in the 1920s. El Saadawi was given the title of 'the de Beauvoir of the Arab world' due to her view that 'womanhood' is constructed, rather than predestined.¹²³ *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor* is an example in which El Saadawi unravels the socialising gender hegemony in the development of boys and girls. As Evelyne Accad illustrates El Saadawi's underlying beliefs: 'She believes that the "differences" between men and women are not inherent in their "nature", but are learned within society'.¹²⁴ In *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor*, the female doctor has no doubt of her freedom on the body since she grows out to be tall and strong, until she has menstruation: 'God must really hate girls to have tarnished them with this curse. I felt that God had favoured boys in everything'.¹²⁵ By pointing out the power of the father's laws in *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor*, El Saadawi emphasises the biological determinism of Freudian penis-envy. In the meantime, El Saadawi resists against being defined by Egyptian male intellectuals. She protests the

¹²⁰ Judith E. Tucker, 'The Exemplary Life of Khayr al-Din al-Ramli', *Auto/Biography and the Construction of Identity and Community in the Middle East*, ed. Mary Ann Fay (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 12.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 9.

¹²² Ibtihal Salem, *Children of the Waters*, trans. Marilyn Booth (The University of Texas at Austin: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2002), p. 9.

¹²³ Evelyne Accad, 'Rebellion, Maturity, and The Social Context: Arab Women's Special Contribution to Literature', *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*, ed., Judith E. Tucker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 235.

¹²⁴ Op. Cit.

¹²⁵ Nawal El Saadawi, *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor: A Novel by Nawal El Saadawi* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989), p. 12.

representation of women by men in a renowned magazine in Egypt, *Nisf Al-Dunia*, or Half the World in meaning, in which Ibrahim Nafi, by quoting Jean Jacques Rousseau, claims that ‘a woman is like a cat—if you show affection to her she keeps rubbing up against you’.¹²⁶ By citing a Western example, El Saadawi also intends to show that she is mistaken for being Western simply because she undertakes feminist campaign.

In *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor*, the female doctor pursues a form of sexuality that is not contaminated by masculine sexuality, by ceaselessly unchaining the linguistic masks of the father’s laws from various discourses such as colonialism, nationalism and the Freudian theorisation of gender. El Saadawi believes in women’s rights of sexual orgasm: ‘Once sexual satisfaction is obtained she [a woman] is able to turn herself fully to other aspects of life’.¹²⁷ For El Saadawi, female genital mutilation is an instance, showing that female bodies are constructed by patriarchal power: ‘You can’t separate sex from politics or religion,’¹²⁸ as El Saadawi explains the discursive problem of female genital mutilation in an interview. Gayatri Spivak criticises victimisation of this practice in the Western discourse.¹²⁹ She indicates that the ‘choice’ of honour in the Third World is overdetermined.¹³⁰ However, the construction of female genital mutilation shows complicity between victimisation and Irigaray’s sexual organ morphology.¹³¹ For El Saadawi, both female genital mutilation and wearing cosmetics undermine female autonomy. These practices are disguised in postmodernist discourses of pluralism. In El Saadawi’s writing, the re-orchestration of romantic love constructs a new discursive formation for Egyptian women between the interstices of colonialism, nationalism and anti-Freudian gender theory. In *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor*, the pattern of love between the heroine and her lover exhibits an intention to look for a feminine possibility not defined by masculinity. Her lover tells her:

¹²⁶ Nawal El Saadawi, ‘Why Keep Asking Me About My Identity’, *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* (London: Zed Books, 1998), pp. 128-29.

¹²⁷ Nawal El Saadawi, ‘The Bitter Lot of Women: An interview’, *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* (London: Zed Books, 1998), p. 67.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹²⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 134-35.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹³¹ *Op. Cit.*

I've never met a woman like you before. . . . Women always hide their feelings and wear masks on their faces so you don't know what they're really like. But you don't hide anything. You don't even wear make-up.¹³²

In *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor*, the seemingly narcissistic attention to the doctor's unusual beauty, combined with her cleverness, undermines the patriarchal dichotomy between women as the body and men as the mind. As El Saadawi observes in her article in *The Hidden Face of Eve*:

An Arab man, when he decides to marry, will almost invariably choose a young virgin girl with no experience, imbued with a childish simplicity, naïve, ignorant, a blind 'pussy cat' who does not have an inkling of her rights, or of her sexual desires as a woman, or of the fact that her mind has its needs and should have its ambitions.¹³³

In *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor*, the female doctor responds to her lover about the suppression of women's mind pertaining to the separation of body and mind as gender attributes:

Then I'll tell you: because from early childhood a girl is brought up to believe that she's a body and nothing more, so her body becomes her main concern for the rest of her life, and she doesn't realize that she's got a mind as well which must be looked after and encouraged to develop.¹³⁴

The female doctor's sexual pursuits disrupt patriarchally defined feminine submissive sexuality. The mind and body gender binary is disrupted by El Saadawi's gender ambivalence. For instance, the female doctor is the active party in the relationship and she telephones him to make the advances: 'I didn't think about different ways to be flirtatious or take refuge in womanly evasiveness'.¹³⁵ Because her idea of gender is ambivalent, subject to a free play of masculinity and femininity, her act divulges only that heterosexual identity is a copy, an imitation of itself. El Saadawi's ideas anticipate Judith Butler's gender theory of performativity. For Butler, to say that gender can be imitated through the demonstration of

¹³² Nawal El Saadawi, *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor: A Novel by Nawal El Saadawi* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989), p. 94.

¹³³ Nawal El Saadawi, 'Distorted Notions About Femininity, Beauty and Love', *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Zed Books, 2002), p. 77.

¹³⁴ Nawal El Saadawi, *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor: A Novel by Nawal El Saadawi* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989), p. 56.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

performance is to assume the imitation nature of gender identity even in heterosexual identity.¹³⁶ Also, because gender identity is achieved by imitation irrespective of sex, the notion of sex is determined not by biology itself but also by gendering performative acts.¹³⁷ El Saadawi's construction of femininity also partakes of poststructuralist sense of femininity that breaks away from the phallogocentric linguistic system.

In *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor*, the female doctor links the village with the nation, expressed through her liberated body:

Face to face with nature, I saw its enchanting magic unspoilt by the hollow clamour of the city; the debased, imprisoned womanliness of women; the arrogant overbearing masculinity of man; and the limited, ineffectual chatter of science.¹³⁸

Nature and village represent a timeless element for the young female doctor. The emphasis on the preference of the rural life evokes national identities. 'Origin' is invented by the timeless natural imagination to contend men's creation of women. El Saadawi's creates an anti-Orientalist Egyptian rural woman. The rural woman defies the colonialist projection of Eastern women as sexual objects. Fatima Mernissi calls the gendering of Eastern women 'Western harem'. That Arab women are pictured as sexually ready to obey is an example of race lived in the mode of sexuality.¹³⁹ Mernissi holds that 'women's obsequiousness, their readiness to obey, is a distinctive feature of the Western harem fantasy'.¹⁴⁰ In El Saadawi's depiction, the rural woman image mobilises the timeless element of nature to re-define the value of motherhood in nationalist discourses.

In El Saadawi's writing, love is a strategy that reveals men's fear of women. Love calls sexual hierarchy into question. Fatima Mernissi suggests that love in Islam is a

¹³⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 175.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹³⁹ Fatima Mernissi, *Sheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), p. 26.

¹⁴⁰ *Op. Cit.*

demonstration of women's feminine power, and it threatens the homogeneity of the *umma*.¹⁴¹

Love and anti-Freudian penis-envy are synthesised to form El Saadawi's anti-imperialist Egyptian feminism. The female doctor in *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor* dissects stereotypes, and this challenges the homogeneous spatial time, founded on the progressive romantic couple. El Saadawi's couple, falling in love, decanonises the nationalist romance. In *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor*, stabilising a certain romantic relationship as canons becomes impossible. The heroine divorces her husband because there seems to be no way that he can control her: 'I don't want you examining men's bodies and undressing them'.¹⁴² Gender defamiliarisation occurs to her in a situation when a male corpse is laid out before her for dissection. Her scalpel is both symbolic and corporeal. El Saadawi utilises her knowledge in psychoanalysis to illustrate that the meanings of Egyptian women's bodies are constituted by patriarchy in language. She demonstrates her secular position and presents her postmodernist suggestion by dissecting the male body into pieces. With each act of dissection, the female doctor intends to loosen the association of men from father's laws. With the acts of dissection, father's laws are fragmented into pieces, and thereby set nationalist claim of traditions in permanent signification exile:

A man's body! The terror of mothers and little girls who sweltered in the heat of the kitchen to fill it with food, and carried the spectre of it with them day and night. Here was just such a body spread out before me naked, ugly and in pieces.¹⁴³

El Saadawi's writing rather resembles a scalpel that shreds the linguistic meanings into pieces in order to assemble the sabotaged face of Egyptian women in postcolonial time. The moment of dissection suggests a resistance against identity unity: As El Saadawi indicates, 'Can we be creative if we submit to the rules forced upon us under different names: father, god, husband, family, nation, security, stability, protection, peace, democracy, family

¹⁴¹ Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Mail-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 21-2.

¹⁴² Nawal El Saadawi, *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor: A Novel* by Nawal El Saadawi, trans. Catherine Cobham (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989), p. 63.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-6.

planning, development, human rights, modernism or postmodernism?’¹⁴⁴ El Saadawi disagrees with a relativist postmodernist position of feminisms. I examine El Saadawi’s view of postmodernism in Chapter Two.

El Saadawi’s *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor* is based on her experiences as a psychoanalyst and many references correspond with her life. El Saadawi’s autobiography, *A Daughter of Isis*, confirms the experiential basis of *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor*. Also, the feminist consciousness in *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor* coincides with El Saadawi’s own political thoughts. For instance, discontent at biological determinism, at women’s roles of sexual reproduction, the secular, socialist bent and being a doctor and psychoanalyst correspond with the heroine in *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor*. Therefore, *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor* can be regarded partially as El Saadawi’s autobiographical accounts or as a literary embodiment of her political thoughts and a reflection on her life. Pertaining to the question of autobiography as Chatterjee points out, the indigenous intellectuals assume the indigenous women’s voices to own up to their weaknesses, and therefore ‘[t]he autobiography would seem to be obvious material for studying the emergence of “modern” forms of self-representation’.¹⁴⁵ This autobiographical strategy is for El Saadawi to launch a position of a self-fashioned Egyptian feminism. Her creation of ‘I’ blurs boundaries between experience and fiction. Her self-image contests multiple dominations of colonialism, patriarchy and class; it is a strategy to launch her politics for Egyptian women.

As Amal Amireh points out about El Saadawi’s presentation of the self-image, she presents her feminist stance which relies on an upwardly-mobile rural woman.¹⁴⁶ Further, I argue that the circulation of El Saadawi’s sociological work on Islamic women’s sexuality, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, demonstrates the continuation between Orientalism and

¹⁴⁴ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* (London: Zed Books, 1997), p. 158.

¹⁴⁵ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post-colonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 136-37.

¹⁴⁶ Amal Amireh, ‘Framing Nawal El Saadawi: Arab Feminism in a Transnational World’, *Intersections: Gender, Nation, and Community in Arab Women’s Novels*, eds. Lisa Suhair Majaj, Paula W. Sunderman, and Therese Saliba (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), p. 51.

postmodernism. Sabry Hafez establishes that novels are new in Arabic, but they are not an imitation of the West.¹⁴⁷ This view of imitation overlooks the changes of novels within Islamic culture and the historical changes within Islam itself.¹⁴⁸ Miriam Cooke suggests that El Saadawi has a ‘multiple consciousness’, that marks El Saadawi’s feminism and others like her: ‘They know who they are and how others perceive them, both from within the nation and beyond it’.¹⁴⁹ As Amal Amireh points out, the English edition of *The Hidden Face of Eve* is altered to the extent that the issue of female genital mutilation is accentuated when the text goes from the East to the West.¹⁵⁰ The alterations made from the Arabic edition to the English version are predicated upon the intention to cater to a Western reading taste. Amireh analyses the ambivalence of El Saadawi’s writing: her self-representation as a nationalist-feminist and her image in the West.¹⁵¹ She becomes the image of women’s rights fighter against Islamic patriarchal oppression as *The Hidden Face of Eve* goes from the East to the West. Her emphasis on women’s inequality in Islam, Christianity and Judaism is downplayed.¹⁵² The English version omits chapters on women’s oppression in capitalism and Arab women’s progressive demands of women’s equality.¹⁵³ It also emphasises female genital mutilation and sexual molestation, in particular by adding the dramatic title of ‘The Mutilated Half’ to the topic.¹⁵⁴ In addition, the book title is changed from ‘the Naked Face of the Arab Woman’ to ‘the Hidden Face of Eve’.¹⁵⁵ El Saadawi’s works are received less positively in the Arab world. The ways in which El Saadawi is framed as an Islamic patriarchal fighter tend to endorse the views of the Western critics rather than those of the Arabic counterparts.¹⁵⁶ The Arabic views toward El Saadawi’s works are not homogeneous, and the criticism of Arab

¹⁴⁷ Sabry Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse: A Study in the Sociology of Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Saqi Books, 1993), p. 21.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁴⁹ Miriam Cooke, *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 80.

¹⁵⁰ Amal Amireh, ‘Framing Nawal El Saadawi: Arab Feminism in a Transnational World’, *Intersections: Gender, Nation, and Community in Arab Women’s Novels*, eds. Lisa Suhair Majaj, Paula W. Sunderman, and Therese Saliba (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), p. 46.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

males is easily labelled as anti-feminist.¹⁵⁷ El Saadawi's writing is not an anomaly, but belongs to the critique against corrupt power in the post-1967 literature and neopatriarchy.¹⁵⁸ In *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor*, the female doctor's thinking on sexuality and active pursuit in love affairs creates new cultural scripts for women's sexual life.

In *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor*, the sexual battle between her and the male doctor attacks linguistic phallogocentrism which subdues feminine libido. During a sexual encounter, her fellow doctor treats her as nothing but a sexual object. The heroine disputes biological nature. Biology is not a static idea, as the female doctor tells her colleague: 'My emancipation doesn't stem from a physical change within my body'.¹⁵⁹ Cast by the male doctor's phallic gaze, the female doctor becomes phallic, her mind becomes 'as sharp as a sword'.¹⁶⁰ The phallic mind reverses the male doctor's sexual gaze. El Saadawi's utilises the genre of autobiographical fiction to create fluid space. Like Shahrazad, story-telling re-constitutes a heterosexual relationship; and also, the Shahrazad image transforms discursive boundaries as an icon of Eastern women, when exploiting the story-telling strategy. In this section, I have examined El Saadawi's synthetic feminist writing by her strategies of anti-Orientalist, anti-postmodernist and anti-Freudian views. El Saadawi's later works have the sense of a self-defeating feminist. The possibility of women's libido in *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor* vanishes followed by the defeat of the June War in 1967. The defeat tarnishes the dream of independent struggle. I will discuss three autobiographies, *Harem Years*, *Return of the Pharaoh* and *Memoirs From the Women's Prison* in the next section and elaborate on the idea of the textual deployment of 'I', as corporeal acts that generate signifying practices. In Chapter Two, I will demonstrate El Saadawi's pessimistic representation.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 60 and p. 62.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 53 and p. 62.

¹⁵⁹ Nawal El Saadawi, *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor: A Novel by Nawal El Saadawi* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989), p. 74.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 75.

Ambivalence: Re-Writing the Nation

In this section, I read Zainab al-Ghazali's *Return of the Pharaoh* as an example of a fundamentalist position and El Saadawi's *Memoirs from Women's Prison* as an example of a secular leftist position, and Huda Shaarawi's *Harem Years* as an example of a secular liberal position. Al-Ghazali's autobiographical account in *Return of the Pharaoh* depicts her prison life during Nasser's regime from 1965 to 1971. El Saadawi's *Memoirs from Women's Prison* describes her imprisonment under Sadat's rule in 1981. Shaarawi's *Harem Years* deals with her early life and the period of Egypt's independence struggle in the early 1920s. Studying the three texts together weaves a historical linkage which tells the story of the development of Egyptian feminist activism. I will also elaborate on the genre of autobiographies as linguistic strategies for establishing the subject position of the Egyptian liberated women. As Nawar Al-Hassan Golley notes, Shahrazad's *The Thousand and One Nights* is a major work that demonstrates Arab women's self-narration as strategies of defying Arab men's ways and male-dominant traditions.¹⁶¹ The narrative design in *The Thousand and One Nights* has a temporal element that corresponds to the discussion on national narratives in Egypt due to its lack of narrative centres in reaching a progressive climax. Al-Hassan Golley contends that Arabs produce significant autobiographies and that this genre is not unique to the West.¹⁶² Further, she indicates that autobiography resurged in the nineteenth century as a response to colonialism and search for national identities.¹⁶³ By autobiographies, I argue that what Egyptian women say about their own bodies defines their meanings on the modernising scene of the nation.

Al-Ghazali and El Saadawi's autobiographical accounts illustrate the corporeal element in Egyptian women's self-representation to complicate the nationalist articulation of

¹⁶¹ Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, *Reading Arab Women's Autobiographies: Shahrazad Tells Her Story* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), p. 80.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 76.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

Egypt's modern histories. Islam and the so-called unchangeable tradition are re-generated in the feminist evocation of a unitary origin for their legitimacy, just as the private space is where nationalism mobilises its complex dialogues with rapid social changes. For instance, as al-Ghazali's Sufi practices demonstrate, corporeal acts generate meanings in which a homogenous concept of Islam is decanonised. Concerning the concept of tradition and a return to home during the fundamentalist revival in Sadat's regime, Abu-Lughod argues that it is very difficult to differentiate between Islamic-traditional practices and Western-inspired influence.¹⁶⁴ Abu-Lughod points out that the call for the return to domesticity prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s was a manifestation of cultural intertwinement.¹⁶⁵ Further, Abu-Lughod argues that it is likely to be a trap of cultural 'authenticity' to claim that the return to women's domestic roles was a return to a national tradition. Gender equality discourse in Egypt is the result of cultural amalgamation. As Abu-Lughod argues, 'It was Nasser who in the 1950s and 1960s could be said to have nationalised many of these feminist projects, removing at least from the goals of women's education and employment the taint of foreign influence with his own impeccable nationalist credentials'.¹⁶⁶ I suggest that discourses on tradition are subject to change according to environment and purposes.

Al-Ghazali and El Saadawi's autobiography synthesises the opposing positions, witnessed in al-Ghazali's *Return of the Pharaoh* and El Saadawi's *Memoirs from the Women's Prison*. Al-Ghazali accuses Westernised feminists of moral decadence:

If you travel across the country you will see on the streets, and on the foot paths scores of atheistic newspapers, magazines and cheap periodicals calling for a loosening of manners. Their aim is to propagate Communism, atheism, prolixity and a general loosening of character.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Lila Abu-Lughod, 'The Marriage of Feminism and Islamism in Egypt: Selective repudiation as a Dynamic of Post-colonial Cultural Politics', *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in The Middle East*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 262-63.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

¹⁶⁷ Zainab Al-Ghazali, *Return of the Pharaoh: Memoir in Nasir's Prison* (Markfield: The Islamic Foundation, 2006), p. 130.

Al-Ghazali refers to Nasser's socialist bent and his secular regime. The opposing relationship between them is featured by polarities between the secular and religious regimes and between the Western and Eastern division. Being the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Ghazali has a great spiritual influence on the younger generation of her time. She brings about a restoration of Islamic dress code and a return to women's domestic role. Al-Ghazali is a role model for Islamic female leaders. Opposing Nasser's regime (1954-1970) as a threat to Allah's order and Islamic community, she is arrested and severely tortured. *Return of the Pharaoh* accounts for the recurrent tortures imposed by Nasser's authorities. She is released when Anwar Sadat becomes the president. In *Return of the Pharaoh*, the depiction of the erring women reaches its highest intensity at the moment of the 1967 defeat led by Nasser. The defeat of the June War, broached at the end of *Return of the Pharaoh*, signifies the triumph of her suffering and the hope for a religious nation-state. Her suffering anticipates fundamentalism resurging in the 1980s. Egypt's defeat in the June War indicates Egypt's failed leadership in dealing with the Palestinian question for the Arab world. The defeat also brings the conflict between Jews and Arabs in the area to a worldwide question. The occupation of the rest of Arab Palestine, including Jerusalem, Gaza and West Bank, is a devastating result of the June War. It results in more Palestinian refugees in the Arab world and under Israeli rule. The Palestinian question is a problem for Israelis, Arab states and great powers.

Al-Ghazali intends to detach from Huda Shaarawi's feminist agenda. Shaarawi's liberal reform on the personal status law and philanthropist efforts on improving the lives of the lower-class women are taken from contemporary reform in Europe. According to Omnia Shakry's accounts, in Egyptian women's journals at the turn of the twentieth century, the tendency to give 'practical advice and tips for mothers and housewives on child-rearing and

household management'¹⁶⁸ is based on the movements taking place in Europe. Al-Ghazali breaks away from Shaarawi's Egyptian Feminist Union because she wants to develop Egyptian women's liberation from the Islamic point of view. Al-Ghazali's tortured body demonstrates her masculinity and an element of martyrdom. But al-Ghazali does not label herself as a feminist.¹⁶⁹ Al-Ghazali's veiling suggests an entrance into the public space. Daphne Grace examines the meanings of the veil in the late-Victorian period and twentieth century.¹⁷⁰ She indicates that they are determined by who describes veiling, to whom, by what standards and for what purposes.¹⁷¹ For instance, veiled Victorian women reveal 'middle-class "white" European attitudes'.¹⁷² She points out that male-veiling exists in pre-Islamic period.¹⁷³ In the contemporary Maghreb, veiling can be cross-gender transgression for women to distance themselves from their gender identities so that they can be recognised by men in patriarchal society.¹⁷⁴ For Grace, veiling is comparable to Freudian discourse in which women are a mystery, both 'desirable and dangerous for men'.¹⁷⁵ This is shown in the veil's fascination that depends on unveiling.¹⁷⁶ Grace also demonstrates that despite Western-based negative representation, veiling is considered a means of protection for Muslim girls in Britain.¹⁷⁷ In *Return of the Pharaoh*, Zainab al-Ghazali deploys her veiling as a new expression of femininity in Egyptian nationalism. As Miriam Cooke points out, 'War for al-Ghazali is an activity that includes women'.¹⁷⁸ Al-Ghazali affirmed that women could act as leaders of the communities, and her advocacy is rallied under the banner of *jihad*.¹⁷⁹

¹⁶⁸ Omnia Shakry, 'Schooled Mothers and Structured Play: Child Rearing in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt', *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 139.

¹⁶⁹ Pauline Lewis, 'Zainab al-Ghazali: Pioneer of Islamist Feminism', p. 41. 30 May 2009.

<http://www.umich.edu/~history/pages_folder/articles/W07_Lewis.pdf>.

¹⁷⁰ Daphne Grace, *The Woman in the Muslim Mask: Veiling and Identity in Postcolonial Literature* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), pp. 1-36.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁸ Miriam Cooke, 'AYYĀM MIN HAYĀTĪ: The Prison Memoirs of A Muslim Sister', *Journal of Arabic Literature* XXVI (1995), p. 150.

¹⁷⁹ Pauline Lewis, 'Zainab al-Ghazali: Pioneer of Islamist Feminism', p. 24. 30 May 2009

<http://www.umich.edu/~history/pages_folder/articles/W07_Lewis.pdf>.

Living as a Sufi master, al-Ghazali's life, first and foremost, is dedicated to her disciples. Sufism, providing Egyptian society with religious practices, social structures and education to local communities, was a lifestyle before the time of modernisation in Muhammad Ali's rule in the nineteenth century.¹⁸⁰ Ali established a dynasty in 1805 that lasted till the July Revolution in 1952. He is considered the founder of modern Egypt for his reform on military system, economics and culture. Sufism has been popular throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Egypt through the authorities of individual spiritual leaders.¹⁸¹

Marilyn Booth works on women's biography in twentieth-century Egypt. She suggests that Egyptian women collect and write famous women's biographies to promote exemplarity.¹⁸² As Booth indicates, women have been 'symbols of changes' and 'carriers of tradition', since the late-nineteenth century.¹⁸³ She argues that contemporary biographies for 'famous women' are discursive struggles to define the nation-state at the end of the twentieth century: 'For inscriptions of women's lives still constitute one arena in which feminists, radical Islamist gender activists, and traditionalists contest the gendered organization of society'.¹⁸⁴ For instance, in the 1990s, the Prophet's wife, Khadija's biography depicts her as a domestic woman and promotes her ideal heterosexual love.¹⁸⁵ For Al-Ghazali, her autobiography advocates exemplarity for women and society. Her work intends to provide a narrative for teaching and strengthening Islamist communities with the ways women participate in God's communities. She thus distinguishes herself from other women prisoners, such as Jews for the crime of spying, as living in 'Hilton'.¹⁸⁶ For al-Ghazali, the authorities of the Sufi masters, a status of sainthood, are based on their abilities to work miracles and

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁸¹ Op. Cit.

¹⁸² Marilyn Booth, *May Her Likes Be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politics in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. xxxiii.

¹⁸³ Ibid., pp. xxiv-xxv.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. xxxv.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 303.

¹⁸⁶ Zainab Al-Ghazali, *Return of the Pharaoh: Memoir in Nasir's Prison* (Markfield: The Islamic Centre, 2006), p. 179-80.

asceticism as messengers between God and the believers.¹⁸⁷ As a female Sufi master, her spirituality derives from her masculine demonstration. The trials of beating, whipping, fire and drowning play a major role in *Return of the Pharaoh*:

By now my body was swollen like an inflated balloon, and I could feel my heart beating so rapidly it almost jumped from out of its place. So weak, I was unable even to groan, I submitted myself to the One Who holds in His Hands the decrees of everything.¹⁸⁸

The repeated tortures are used to persuade her to surrender to Nasser's power as the ruler of the secular nation. Al-Ghazali's body proves to endure more than men's bodies. The tortures establish her gender malleability. She does not comply; instead, her body makes a statement that she is a martyr, irrespective of the extreme tortures. Nasser's soldiers inflict such pain on her to make her body surrender. But she prefers defiance and death. She intends that her body is meant to inspire an Islamic identity as a spiritual symbol. If she capitulates to Nasser's tortures, she fails to fulfil God's duty required of a Sufi master. If she dies under the condition of proclaiming Allah's name, she achieves the definition of martyrdom in Islam. The definition of martyrdom in Islamic definition of duty is a serious matter. According to David Cook, for the jurists of Classical Muslim scholarship, '[A]lways, the martyr was one who died in battle or as a result of wounds incurred in fighting'.¹⁸⁹ Further, martyrdom is always directed against non-believers.¹⁹⁰ Al-Ghazali's only choice is either torture or death. The endless series of tortures is met by Nasser's persuasion: 'By orders of President Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir, Zainab al-Ghazali al-Jubaili is to be tortured more harshly than men'.¹⁹¹ More severe tortures follow Nasser's letter.

The purpose of Sufi practices is to have union with God. Sufi masters conceive of themselves as seeking elevation of self-integration into mythic astronomical space in order to

¹⁸⁷ Scott Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 234.

¹⁸⁸ Zainab Al-Ghazali, *Return of the Pharaoh: Memoir in Nasir's Prison* (Markfield: The Islamic Centre, 2006), p. 106.

¹⁸⁹ David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 44.

¹⁹⁰ Op. Cit.

¹⁹¹ Zainab Al-Ghazali, *Return of the Pharaoh: Memoir in Nasir's Prison* (Markfield: The Islamic Centre, 2006), p. 84.

escape the miserable exile of human beings.¹⁹² To seek union with God, being sacred, or *halal*, ‘that which has been made lawful to men by God’, must be maintained by Muslims.¹⁹³

However, according to Julian Baldick, it is not necessary to credit the origins of Sufism to the Quran.¹⁹⁴ Scott Kugle’s research about the relationship of bodies and Sufism suggests that female Sufi sainthood is achieved by domesticity and that austerity is imposed on female Sufi masters.¹⁹⁵ Most significantly, Kugle’s research demonstrates the ways in which female Sufi saints deploy their bodies to negotiate with the patriarchal society which requires women to purify their bodies.¹⁹⁶ For instance, belly is a significant body part for female saints, as the offering of olive oil with chili peppers in their tomb rituals shows.¹⁹⁷ The Quran also associates women with reproduction and nourishment.¹⁹⁸ Whereas the association of pregnancy of women’s bodies is required for female Sufi saints, Kugle points out that their spiritual authority also comes from their practices as transgressors.¹⁹⁹ Female Sufi saints also invert the meanings of women as bellies by turning the bleeding and menstrual bodies into the wounds of *jihad*, the spiritual warfare that the Sufi masters must undergo.²⁰⁰ Scott Kugle’s research expands feminist binaries and sheds light on subversive practices of patriarchy in existent Sufism.²⁰¹ As Kugle demonstrates, male homoerotic practices reverse worldly self-righteousness and are an alternative of corporeal pursuit to achieve spirituality.²⁰² Kugle’s radical method indicates multiple gender relationships within Sufism, if the terms of Western queer studies can apply to premodern figures.

Al-Ghazali does away her roles as mothers and wives since domestic bodies associate her with women’s menstrual bodies. In her practice, the uneasy management of the public

¹⁹² Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam: an Introduction to Sufism* (London: Tauris Parke, 2000), p. 4.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁹⁵ Scott Kugle, *Sufis and Saints’ Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality and Sacred Power in Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 96 and p. 110.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 194.

and private division renders tradition a fluid concept. She reifies female masculine traits and renews the feminine roles in the traditional religious lifestyle. In *Return of The Pharaoh*, the tortures are punctuated by al-Ghazali's prayers five times a day for God's vision: The Prophet tells her in a dream to climb a mountain and she discovers what he means when she sees naked women.²⁰³ Al-Ghazali depicts the defeat of the June War as a nation led astray by Nasser in the image of women's immoral sexuality. She is later transferred to al-Qanatir prison for women, in which El Saadawi is to be imprisoned as a political detainee in 1981. Al-Ghazali distinguishes herself from the women who commit crimes such as theft and murder. She also compares prostitution to secular feminists:

Nothing but animals with no meaning to their lives except eating and intercourse. Blind animals led by blind men on a road which zigzagged endlessly in front of them. Those who want corruption on earth, the people of atheism and falsehood, of evil and crime, had helped these women to sink into this abyss of profanity. The call to *Fajr* prayer was the only thing to break this electrified atmosphere of evil, injustice and darkness. We headed towards the Merciful, the Compassionate, praying and asking Him for His pleasure and relief.²⁰⁴

She establishes her superiority by pointing out that she serves her term in military prison. She separates herself from the secular political detainees who are incarcerated in a women's prison. For al-Ghazali, Sufism defines her role as a woman sacrificing for building a religious nation.

By contrast, In *Memoirs from the Women's Prison*, El Saadawi objects to the return of the veil. In the memoirs, during the time El Saadawi was imprisoned under Anwar Sadat's arrest, one of the major issues she tackled was *niquabs*, a kind of heavy veiling that leaves only the eyes uncovered. Apart from the control on the dress code, prostitution, too, signifies economic problems and social predicament faced by women in Egypt under Sadat in El Saadawi's writing. Nadjé Al-Ali analyses the tension between the Egyptian women's movement and the state, despite the fact that the state supports women's rights. Compared to

²⁰³ Zainab Al-Ghazali, *Return of the Pharaoh: Memoir in Nasir's Prison* (Markfield: The Islamic Centre, 2006), p. 153.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 175-76.

Nasser, Sadat does not promote women's issues.²⁰⁵ Instead, he espouses fundamentalism in their call for women to return home. He also embraces that women's issues are controlled by the state. Besides, Al-Ali notes that feminists experienced the contradiction of economic freedom and domestic dependence in the 1970s.²⁰⁶ Therefore, there is the outcry from El Saadawi under Sadat's regime, 'Now, in the public sector, women like my daughter suffer, women are being discouraged from working, because of unemployment, because of the veil. This is the regression in our society'.²⁰⁷ Sadat's Open Door policy, *infitah*, enhances the relationship between Egypt and the United States, but it also reinforces the fundamentalist resurgence. Sadat reformed the personal status law in order to present a democratic image and gain political and economic support.²⁰⁸ For a generation of intellectuals such as El Saadawi, the defeat of the June War leaves a deep scar since Nasser is the figure for the anti-colonial struggle and the symbol of Egyptian independent modernity. In *Memoirs from the Women's Prison*, the nation-state is represented by the incompetent government employee in the detention centre:

He remained standing, facing the door, his back to me. The sound of his breathing came to me monotonously, continuous sound like that of air under pressure escaping from a hole in the neck of a closed bottle. He moved the rosary between his fingers. Allah...Allah...Allah.²⁰⁹

El Saadawi mocks the oddity of the man who invokes the idea of tradition. She accentuates the sense of national regression by the ill-equipped vehicle which takes her to the prison: 'Lucky for me that I was born in an underdeveloped country where the police cars are ancient and liable to break down'.²¹⁰ El Saadawi manipulates the autobiographical genre to contest the nationalist symbolic terrain, such as the concept of tradition.

²⁰⁵ Nadjé Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 66-74.

²⁰⁶ Op. Cit.

²⁰⁷ Nawal El Saadawi, 'Reflections of A Feminist', *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*, ed. Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 401.

²⁰⁸ Nadjé Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 73.

²⁰⁹ Nawal El Saadawi, *Memoirs from the Women's Prison*, trans. Marilyn Booth (London: Women's Press, 1986), p. 12.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

El Saadawi dealt with sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and virginity in the 1970s under Sadat. Fadia Faqir points out that women's self-writing makes them in a risky situation in which women writers are associated with whores and belly-dancers.²¹¹ For Faqir, autobiography, as a form, challenges sexual division because the literary world and publishing environment is male-dominant in Islamic culture.²¹² In *Memoirs from Women's Prison*, El Saadawi links Egyptian female bodies to re-writing the national space. These issues caused anger from the fundamentalists and her attempts were labelled as colonialists. The prison memoirs are not written only during the prison stay but also penned and completed after she is released. El Saadawi's memoirs are thus a political and a body-based signifying space. El Saadawi launches her corporeal challenges promoting the stereotyped image of a Muslim woman escaping patriarchal oppression:

My nationalist reputation and my honour as a literary person are as valuable to me as my life. I did not inherit them from a father or grandfather, and they have not given me authority or a high position, but I built them up over the years through my struggles and determinations, and through them I was able to make my own name: Nawal el Sa'adawi, the Egyptian writer, known—in Egypt, the other Arab nations, and the entire world—for her free pen and her courageous, original thinking.²¹³

El Saadawi's all-pervasive rendition of patriarchal discourses results in criticism for '[inverting] the patriarchal order'.²¹⁴ She exploits the well-represented liberated Egyptian rural women. They are usually both sexually powerless and resiliently resistant in her depiction. This strategy contributes to winning space for giving voices. El Saadawi was arrested by Sadat because of her opinions on the Camp David Accords in 1978, and not because of her feminist cause. But, she formulates a self-fashioned feminist image out of imprisonment. El Saadawi was arrested in 1981 with other leftist intellectuals who opposed Sadat's peace negotiation in the Camp David Accords because they considered it falling short

²¹¹ Fadia Faqir, ed., *In the House of Silence: Autobiographical Essays by Arab Women Writers*, trans. Shirley Eber and Fadia Faqir (Reading: Garnet, 1998), p. 12.

²¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 8-12.

²¹³ Nawal El Saadawi, *Memoirs from the Women's Prison*, trans. Marilyn Booth (London: Women's Press, 1986), pp. 188-89.

²¹⁴ Sabry Hafez, 'Women's Narrative in Modern Arabic Literature: A Typology', *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature*, eds. Roger Allen, Hilary Kilpatrick and Ed de Moor (London: Saqi Books, 1995), p. 166.

of Egyptian commitment to Palestinian rights and Arab unity. She launches the image of an oppressed woman in prison to render an exemplar speaking position. In the prison, El Saadawi enjoys the feeling of the shower on her body and she cannot express the pleasure except by singing:

As I washed my hair, the scent of the soap and the taste of the water had a sweetness of which I had not been conscious since my childhood, and the feel of the water on my body was as strongly pleasurable as if I had not had a bath since I was a child. My voice, too, took on a sweetness of tone which resounded in my ears as if I had not sung since I was little.²¹⁵

She rejects the Islamic concept of singing as taboo.²¹⁶ Her attempts are engagement in the debate of the Islamist re-signification on Egyptian womanhood in the 1980s. She accomplishes the discursive space-wrenching act by linking her body to her memory of childhood life in the village. Consequently, she emphasises the agency of the upwardly mobile women in the global discursive fields; but, she gives the signifying power of the self-determined body to peasant women too easily. For instance, El Saadawi describes her peasant cellmate as someone whose 'heart is as sweet and gentle as the spring breeze, and it's impossible to believe that she would kill a mosquito'.²¹⁷ Yet, this peasant woman is capable of murdering her husband with the hoe she uses to plough the land because he is a scoundrel and even rapes their daughter.

El Saadawi's writing displaces the concept of home as a private place and also deconstructs the homogeneous Egyptian nation by setting up the relationship between her body and the nation. At the beginning of her *Memoirs from the Women's Prison*, El Saadawi shares the nationalist-feminist self-exile sentiment that echoes the founding feminist expression since 'A'ishah al-Tamuriyah. At the start, her memoirs open with the scene in which she is actually writing a novel before the arrest. She accentuates the relationship between writing a novel and herself:

²¹⁵ El Saadawi, *Memoirs from the Women's Prison*, trans. Marilyn Booth (London: Women's Press, 1986), p. 64.

²¹⁶ Op. Cit.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 73.

I could write scientific studies, draft agreements, write books on women's issues—everything except the novel, this particular novel. It is a strange business: the more I distance myself from Egypt, the further the novel travels from me. No sooner do I land at Cairo Airport, and breathe in the odours of dust and people's sweat, the car horns and pale, fly-laden children's faces, the queues of women in their black gallabiyyas, and the broken, exhausted eyes of the men, than the novel comes ever closer.²¹⁸

Writing a novel for her, that is, novel writing, and not other kinds of writing, resembles the relationship of her country to her. Her self-representation and the nation are mediated through the intimate feeling of her body. Corporeal intimacy sets up the self-exile experience of being put in prison by Sadat. Imprisonment relates to her passion for writing a novel. This novel does not only slip from her when she is away from home, but also when she is put in jail by her country. Female bodies become an expression against the socio-political incarceration. For El Saadawi, nation resides in each encounter of corporeal relationship: The nation represents odours, sweat, sound, flies and people. El Saadawi's *Memoirs from the Women's Prison* is fluid between reality and self-representation. Her encounters with people are not static experiences. Corporeal encounters with the Egyptian people re-define the meanings of her womanhood. El Saadawi's self-representation is a strategy for Egyptian postcoloniality.

El Saadawi romanticises her depiction of peasant women and it disregards the lack of agency on the peasant woman's side. In *Memoirs from Women's Prison*, El Saadawi continues to claim that veiling and prostitution are two sides of the same coin:

In the women's prison, a man—any man even an elderly convict coming in to collect the garbage—became a figure of consequence one who would generate a major commotion among the veiled women on the one hand and among the imprisoned prostitutes on the other.²¹⁹

The predicament, whether of theft or prostitution of women, is caused by men and the corrupt government, as El Saadawi indicates. She observes in men their 'smiling faces, cocky in their new-found importance'.²²⁰ El Saadawi considers it a contradiction for a prostitute to veil. She

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p.88.

²²⁰ Op. Cit.

mentions that the prostitutes twist their body in a suggestive manner.²²¹ The prostitutes' bodies are mobilised to represent Sadat's Open Door policy, and in the meantime, they are deprived of their own voices by El Saadawi. The representation of the prostitutes ignores the complexity of prostitution in the Islamic context.²²² I will discuss El Saadawi's conservative element in her gender politics in Chapter Two.

Self-representation is also a strategy that disrupts discursive fixity concerning nation and identities. Huda Shaarawi's *Harem Years* exhibits feminine strategies, and for her, complying with feminine submissiveness enhances women's boundary crossing from the private to the public space. Huda Shaarawi founds the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923 and she is noted for her liberal and socialist contributions for Egyptian women's rights. She is also known for her contributions in the anti-imperialist fights, and for her life in the upper-class harem. To sum up her eminent contribution, Rula B. Quawas states:

Whether writing about education, the social and political equality of the sexes, moral standards, marriage, polygamy, divorce, woman's suffrage, or politics itself, she was always arguing and exerting a substantial effort to be independent and original in an Arab world that demonized feminine independence and would not tolerate deviations from the commonplace.²²³

Shaarawi is awarded the highest state decoration of Egypt for the contributions made to the country.²²⁴ Except for the services she rendered, particularly women's civil rights, indicating the secularist approach in gender equality, Shaarawi's memoirs record her private life in such a strategic way that her political role does not interfere with her role as a wife. This strategy echoes what Fadia Faqir characterises as feminine writing for seeking subjectivity in Arab-Islamic context: Plural and fluid.²²⁵ Shaarawi lives a life of harem in Egypt at the turn of the twentieth century when Egypt has been integrated into the global market. Margot Badran

²²¹ Op. Cit.

²²² Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Saqi Books, 1998), p. 195.

²²³ Rula B. Quawas, "A Sea Captain in Her Own Right": Navigating the Feminist Thought of Huda Shaarawi', *Journal of International Women's Studies* 8:1 (November, 2006), p. 219.

²²⁴ Huda Shaarawi, *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist (1879-1924)*, trans. and intro. Margot Badran (London: Virago, 1986), p. 136.

²²⁵ Fadia Faqir, ed., *In the House of Silence: Autobiographical Essays by Arab Women Writers*, trans. Shirley Eber and Fadia Faqir (Reading: Garnet, 1998), pp. 17-20.

discusses the changes of everyday life in the harem because '[n]ew technology and material prosperity altered conditions of everyday life in urban Egypt for the wealthy'.²²⁶ Shaarawi's feminist practices are performed in a semi-harem environment. As Shaarawi mentioned the organisations of women's lectures in 1914: 'I looked for a headquarters for our association, which we did not dare to call a club (*nadi*) because our traditions would not allow it, and in fact it was still not acceptable for women to have a place [in public] to congregate'.²²⁷ At the time, Egyptian upper-class women were not allowed to speak publicly. Shaarawi invited Marguerite Clément to give the inaugural talk for the lectures organised by the Women's Refinement Union.²²⁸ If Shaarawi's public roles do not seem to disrupt feminine subordination, her narrative acts break the silence for her.

Huda Shaarawi re-accounts her life in the memoirs. She demonstrates the complexity for being a wife of a nationalist husband. There is an occasion in which Shaarawi has to mediate between the political clash that her husband, Ali Pasha Shaarawi, has with the Wafd party and her role as his wife.²²⁹ As his wife, she is supposed to remain loyal to him, but as the president of the Wafdist Women's Central Committee, she is also required to be hospitable to Saad Zaghlul, who is in dispute with her husband. Shaarawi successfully restores their relationship by negotiating between her roles as the leader of the Wafdist Women's Central Committee and as the wife. She triumphs at repairing the relationship between the Wafdist leaders by strategically adopting domestic roles; that is, she works through it by maintaining the custom of sexual segregation. Another case in point is the

²²⁶ Huda Shaarawi, *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist (1879-1924)*, trans. and intro. Margot Badran (London: Virago, 1986), p. 13.

²²⁷ Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 55.

²²⁸ Op. Cit. Women's Refinement Union was one of the many charitable organisations created by Egyptian upper or upper-middle class women. It was formed in Cairo in 1914 and Shaarawi was one of the founders. It organised speeches and discussions for local Egyptian, Syrian and European residents. It also welcomed the international visitors' participation. Women received talks and made informal exchanges at the gatherings. The dues were quite expensive at the time and were affordable only to wealthy classes. See also Beth Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 170. Intellectual women intended to play a role in the social welfare movement in the early 1900s. Their activities and organisations enabled them to work in the public space. They believed they helped the poor in this way, and also improved the nation's progress.

²²⁹ Huda Shaarawi, *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist (1879-1924)*, trans. and intro. Margot Badran (London: Virago, 1986), pp. 121-25.

meetings discussing the anti-colonialist boycott which takes place at Shaarawi's harem.²³⁰

Shaarawi's account reveals that this space called harem is penetrated by colonial surveillance in an attempt to locate the meeting documents.²³¹ In this sense, Shaarawi shows domestic roles, and this does not signify a passive-aggressive suppressed mode of femininity nor is it a subordinate stance. She appropriates domestic roles to regain her autonomy and her home becomes a suitable place for nationalist activities.

Harem Years is a contesting narrative against traditional fixed ideas. For Shaarawi, re-constructing her role in the nationalist-feminist struggle recovers a personal history. Nawar Al-Hassan Golley suggests that the self of autobiographies is not a stable concept as it is subject to ever-constructing experiences between the present re-construction of the past.²³² The 'I' is re-constructed by narrative acts. Shaarawi's campaign for suffrage is a practice of cultural ambivalence. Noting the development of suffrage in Egypt, Shaarawi said, 'The Arab woman also demands with her loudest voice the regaining of political rights, rights that have been granted to her by the *sharia* law'.²³³ In the 1920s, the EFU, led by Shaarawi, engaged in the improvement of women's position through social reforms. The primary issues that the EFU tackled involved the imposition of a minimum marriage age, restrictions of polygamy, regulating divorce, denouncing the practice of House of Obedience and the reform of inheritance.²³⁴ As John L. Esposito argues, as long as the *sharia* law is regarded as a statement of traditions, *sharia* reform is inevitable.²³⁵ The legal reform of personal status law remained slow. Consequently, in the 1930s, the EFU advocated the improvement of women's roles in family not only through the legal reform but also through advising on the significance

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 125.

²³¹ Op. Cit.

²³² Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, *Reading Arab Women's Autobiographies: Shahrazad Tells Her Story* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), p. 58.

²³³ Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 216.

²³⁴ Ibid., pp. 128-35.

²³⁵ John L. Esposito, *Women in Muslim Family Law* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982), p. 134.

of women's family roles in a society which stressed patriarchal culture.²³⁶ In fact, enhancing Egyptian women's familial feminine roles enables gender equality to happen.

The autobiographical 'I' in Egyptian women's writing is a strategy of making personal practices visible. In analysing autobiographical accounts from Egypt, Wail Hassan suggests that self-representation is a strategy disrupting 'essentialist notions of national and cultural identity'.²³⁷ Self-representation is a textual strategy, rendering a position of subjectivity to battle against discursive annihilation derived from essentialism and colonial grand narratives. As Daphne Grace points out, the significance of autobiographies resides in its power of conflating reality and fiction, and substantiating subdued experiences.²³⁸

Although Shaarawi conforms to a Muslim woman's role, it is not to be pre-determined as submitting to gender asymmetry. This thought is an instance of repeating Orientalism. As Mohja Kahf suggests, 'Huda Shaarawi' is constructed as a victim, who escapes Islamic patriarchal system in American reading reception.²³⁹ The image is made possible by the editorial renditions that omit Shaarawi's father's presence and that eliminate the event about a French woman, who murders a man because he slanders her sexual honour.²⁴⁰ The upper-class tone and élitist privileges are also softened. Further, the European influence is exaggerated.²⁴¹ By the editorial rendition, 'Huda Shaarawi' is kept in Western harem literature, catering to an existant American market and Orientalist imagination.²⁴² In this way, 'Shaarawi' is fictionalised, becoming an image signifying Islamic gender oppression. As a

²³⁶ Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 135-141.

²³⁷ Wail Hassan, 'Arab-American Autobiography and the reinvention of identity: Two Egyptian Negotiations', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 22 (2002), p. 22.

²³⁸ Daphne M. Grace, 'Arab Women Write the Trauma of Imprisonment of Exile', *Arab Women's Lives Retold: Exploring Identity Through Writing*, ed. Nawar Al-Hassan Golley (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), p. 184.

²³⁹ Mohja Kahf, "'Huda': Sha'rawi's Memoirs in the United States Reception Environment', *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers*, eds. Amal Amireh and Lisa Suhair Majaj (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), p. 149. According to Kahf, Margot Badran's edition of *Harem Years* undergoes changes compared to the Arabic version. The English version downplays Shaarawi's accounts about her father, exaggerates the European element in her life, omits the problem of women's oppression in Europe and accentuates the victim stereotypes of Arab women. Also, Badran's edition dodges the class question, since Shaarawi is a lady more than a victim. With respect to class, Shaarawi was kept in the house just as the British ladies were. Kahf argues that the text of Shaarawi is changed from the Arabic version to the English one because of the Orientalist imagination which produces the idealised victim under Islamic patriarchal system.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 159 and p. 163.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 158 and p. 162.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 164.

result, 'Shaarawi' appropriates the position of the oppressed Islamic subject, and this suppresses subaltern speeches. Neither is the Islamic gendered subject given speech agency nor is Huda Shaarawi's corporeal signification heard in the circuit of epistemic violence in this instance.

The production of the 'authentic' other in both the fictional and autobiographical representations can be integrated within Western individualist humanism. As Amal Amireh explains about El Saadawi's works, El Saadawi's fictional representation of Egyptian women is received homogenously as the historically unchanged oppressed object in the American classroom by being portrayed as being caught in the 'endless repetition' of Islamic patriarchal oppression.²⁴³ In Chapter Two, I continue to elaborate on El Saadawi's female bodies as narrative acts that initiate a liminal space and allow 'corporeality' to become a strategy to implement changes for Egyptian women.

In this section, I have examined the autobiographical element in Egyptian women's writing as a signifying process and for rendering a speaking position in postcolonial Egypt. Autobiographical writing is subject to the epistemic violence of the West shown by the reception of Shaarawi's *Harem Years*. El Saadawi's *Memoirs From Women's Prison* shows the political element in autobiographical writing. Penning the life in prison launches self-representation to render space for her nationalist-feminist position, marginalising peasants and prostitutes once again. Al-Ghazali's corporeal performance is an expression that searches for creative power within the nationalist discursive terrain, and I argue that it is an alternative narrative of 'traditions'. Al-Ghazali's reiterations of daily prayers, on the one hand, and El Saadawi's corporeality of nation, on the other hand, are multifarious aspects of Egyptian nationalism. For al-Ghazali, Sufism also achieves gender equality for women. Her bleeding body transforms the static origin of menstrual blood.

²⁴³ Amal Amireh, 'Framing Nawal El Saadawi: Arab Feminism in a Transnational World', *Signs* 26:1 (fall, 2000), p. 241.

Conclusion

This chapter explores the strategies in which Egyptian female bodies, particularly their corporeality in daily lives, initiates a process of enunciative practices, or a 'performative' time in Bhabha's word. As a nationalist response to imperialism, the realist representation of women in Egyptian novels embodies a horizontal empty time for the new nation. In this romantic genre, Egyptian women's bodies are a ploy to consolidate the invention of the national time, which progresses from the traditional society to the new order. The liberation discourse from Egyptian Muslim women manifests dynamic cultural relationships by their re-adoption of the romance. Al-Zayyat's *The Open Door* shows that Egyptian feminist novels resemble a blank page of Egyptian women's bodies on which they construct multiple identities for Egyptian women. As Hafez maintains, 'The relation of modern Arabic narrative to either Western narrative discourse or classical Arabic archetypal fiction is, therefore, not one of genealogy but of dynamic intertextuality'.²⁴⁴ Al-Zayyat, El Saadawi, Huda Shaarawi and al-Ghazali's writing embodies the interstitial space of identity constitution. *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor* demonstrates El Saadawi's Egyptian feminism achieved by re-articulating heterosexual relationship. The collapse of the fictional and autobiographical 'I' in El Saadawi's *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor* and *Memoirs From The Women's Prison* suggest her political contestation. Self-representation for El Saadawi is effective to create national identities, since El Saadawi's 'I' looks for possibilities in linguistic and discursive terrain to grasp the ever-changing meanings of Egyptian women's corporeality. In *Harem Years*, Shaarawi's feminine conformist strategy demonstrates that corporeality can generate a re-interpretation of femininity which is not to be fixed as submission. Al-Ghazali's *Return of The Pharaoh* competes against men's masculinity by her

²⁴⁴ Sabry Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse: A Study in the Sociology of Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Saqi Books, 1993), p. 27.

Sufi practices. In Chapter Two, I discuss El Saadawi's play on gender construction theory, with a focus of the translational corporeal element. Her experimental writing in *The Circling Song*, *The Fall of the Imam* and *The Innocence of the Devil* explores the lost feminine identity and is a discovery of feminine consciousness excluded from the masculinist construction of national history. El Saadawi highlights the unintelligibility of the female gender, exhibited by an obscure language of hysteria and aphasia.

Chapter Two

Images of the Liberated Women: Nawal El Saadawi's Nationalist-Feminist Politics and Textual Strategies

Introduction

This chapter concentrates on nationalist-feminist Nawal El Saadawi's writing, including her realist novels, experimental novels and short stories. I argue that El Saadawi's writing, marked by its Western feminist bent, is dynamic. As a psychoanalyst, her works convey influence from poststructuralism and psychoanalysis. Nawal El Saadawi is a prominent nationalist-feminist in Egypt. She uses 'creative dissidence' to characterise her politics of nationalist-feminism. This phrase points out her writing as a boundary-less activity, as opposed to the bounded-ness of the nation. She stresses her sense of writing in an interview with Fedwa Malti-Douglas and Allen Douglas, 'I want to write freely about . . . religion, sex, God, authority, the State'.¹ In her article, 'Dissidence and Creativity', she clarifies that she opposes neo-colonialism, Western intellectualism and all forms of domination.² In the previous chapter, I have covered two of Nawal El Saadawi's many works, *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor* and *Memoirs From the Women's Prison*. In this chapter, I probe her other works, including *Woman at Point Zero*, *Two Women in One*, *God Dies by the Nile*, *The Circling Song*, *The Death of The Imam* and *The Innocence of the Devil*. In this chapter, I continue to read the 'I', Firdaus, in *Woman at Point Zero*. El Saadawi's corporeal 'I' is a discursive interstitial space in her Islam-inflected psychoanalytic narrative. She utilises stereotypes to criticise patriarchal systems. I analyse her works moving from realist works to experimental ones. In this chapter, the organisation of the texts starts from El Saadawi's earlier toward her later ones, with *The Circling Song* as the departure of her experimental works.

¹ Allen Douglas and Fedwa Malti-Douglas, 'Reflections of A Feminist', *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*, ed. Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 403.

² Nawal El Saadawi, 'Dissidence and Creativity', *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* (London: Zed Books, 1998), pp. 157-75.

I also include El Saadawi's short stories, 'Eyes', from *Opening the Gates* and 'The Death of His Excellency the Ex-Minister' and 'In Camera' in her short story collection, *Death of An Ex-Minister*. Her short stories reflect an unlinear time in the nation, and it enables the representation of hysterical sexuality. In general, postmodernism refuses origins, centres or fixed point of views.³ For Fredric Jameson, postmodernism refers to the production of art in the time of capitalism.⁴ The work of art reflects 'a collection of scraps and fragments pasted together, hybridising high art and mass culture, recycling images and narratives, determinedly unoriginal'.⁵ I argue that the short story form facilitates Egyptian women's expression of women's unrepresentable sexuality in El Saadawi's writing.

The Innocence of the Devil, *The Fall of the Imam* and *The Circling Song* are her experimental and structurally fragmented novels. In El Saadawi's re-writing of Egyptian womanhood, femininity is a masquerade of trickery, a layered linguistic play. As a matter of fact, pertaining to the potential of narratives in re-constituting postcolonial Egypt, El Saadawi points out, 'In medicine we dissect the body to understand the nerves, or the liver, and the relationship of each part to the others. It is the same with the community. The human being is a microcosm of the whole society.'⁶ Firdaus in *Woman at Point Zero* represents women's issues under Anwar Sadat. Firdaus suffers from the most violent narrative attacks from her experiences of being sexually violated by her uncle, then by her elderly husband, by the coffee shop owner, by the allegedly nationalist patriotic lover, by the police, by the foreign prince and by her pimp. The narrative assaults her, as if the men were just one identical patriarchal figure, of different social positions, occupations, personalities, or intentions, who rape her.

³ Jennifer Wicke, 'Postmodern Identities and the Politics of the (Legal) Subject', *Feminism and Postmodernism*, eds. Margaret Ferguson and Jennifer Wick (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 18.

⁴ Ibid., p. 13-14.

⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶ Nawal El Saadawi, 'Reflections of A Feminist', *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), eds., Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, p. 398.

I illustrate El Saadawi's example of the nationalist-feminist women: Firdaus in *Woman at point Zero*, Bahiah in *Two Women in One* and Zeinab in *God Dies by the Nile*. In *Two Women in One*, Bahiah searches for her female identity unshackled by patriarchal systems. She strategically articulates her sexuality. The novel title sums up the two sides of Bahiha's female selves, with a self-conflicting sense of sexual desire. On the outside, she is the model girl: asexual, obedient and a hard-working medical student. On the inside, she hides the masculine self with a self-destructive tendency and a heart to sacrifice her life for the nation; she also has sexual domination fantasy. Firdaus and Bahiah on the one hand, and Zeinab, on the other hand, are two sides of the same coin. El Saadawi mobilises them to displace colonialist production of oppressed Eastern women. Firdaus and Bahiah's radical images disturb the male defined masculinity in nationalism. Sexually innocent Zeinab emphasises the issues of Sufism in Islamist practices to uncover the linguistic domination of patriarchy through a Westernised lens. El Saadawi establishes her women models to promote her nationalist-feminism. For example, Zeinab's position, as the Mayor's object of gaze, speaks for El Saadawi's gender politics in an increasingly globalised realm. Zeinab's construction exhibits El Saadawi's Occidentalist element, a nationalist legacy to consolidate an authentic self. The half-British Mayor is morally decadent and his image reflects Occidentalist construction in Egyptian contemporary culture.

Margot Badran foregrounds El Saadawi's particular stance as 'sexual Feminism'.⁷ In *God Dies by the Nile*, El Saadawi shows the discursive power of stereotyping in neo-colonialism. Zeinab is a narrative site, complicating homogenous construction of Islamic culture. Her image points out the prevalent consumption culture under Sadat's government because it results in feminisation of poverty. Zeinab is maneuvered by the Mayor of the rural town and she is eventually sold into prostitution. El Saadawi mobilises the middle-class

⁷ Margot Badran, 'Independent Women: More Than A Century of Feminism in Egypt', *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*, ed. Judith E. Tucker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 140-41.

position to build a sense of horizontal national comradeship. In her writing, both Sufism and prostitution signify cultural backwardness and sexual oppression. Regarding prostitution, it is used as a discursive ploy to magnify a middle-class heterosexual relationship, which enhances Egyptian self-created modernity. I argue that El Saadawi's sexualisation of narratives transcends the boundary of Egyptian nationalism, but with a reservation that the feminine subaltern representation is subversive. El Saadawi's Occidentalist view does not imply that El Saadawi's Western construction is monolithic, although it does suggest her self-denial for assimilating Western thinking. The 'I', no matter how biographical it might seem, or no matter how 'real', as El Saadawi claims, is a discursive contestatory device rather than merely a representation of what Egyptian liberated women are really like. El Saadawi seeks representational possibility for feminine libido in her heroines. She disrupts the phallogocentric symbolic system in her experimental works. *Woman at Point Zero* and *Two Women in One* have repetitive narratives, demonstrating her experimental element in the realist works. The possibility for representing feminine libido in El Saadawi's depiction lies in cultural translations of these repetitive acts.

In 'Eyes', the feminine, dominated body, hidden under *niqab*, articulates women's desire by constructing traditions. She lives under the roof of a tyrannical father, and takes a safe job as a librarian in an urbanised city, counting mummies in the basement so that she does not have an opportunity to commit sin. But she commits fornication by looking into the eyes of a male mummy. It triggers a psychotic reaction. In 'Camera', El Saadawi continues the investigation of the male gaze. In 'In Camera', El Saadawi shifts the male gaze of sexual domination to the one that demonstrates the fear of female power. The incarcerated woman in 'In Camera' is punished for participating in political issues and for breaching male authorities over women. In 'In Camera', Egyptian female bodies enunciate the heterogeneous terrain of traditions in the nationalist-feminist literary corpus. In 'The Death of His Excellency the Ex-

Minister', the Ex-Minister realises that his power is shattered by female gaze. El Saadawi's focus on women's return of gaze translates between Islamic gender concepts and Western psychoanalysis. In El Saadawi's writing, Egyptian female bodies disrupt self-consolidating linear time. This revises nationalist imagination of a shared past by her anti-Freudian and the anti-traditional views.

The time is circular in *The Circling Song* and *The Fall of the Imam* and it is unlinear and breaks the boundary of past and future in *The Innocence of the Devil*. El Saadawi disrupts discursive boundaries to produce Egyptian selfhood. As a nationalist-feminist, El Saadawi expresses her desire to experiment with her writing: 'Now I have to experiment. Before, I didn't have the pleasure or the freedom to experiment. But, now I want to go beyond that, to experiment with the language, to have more freedom'.⁸ *The Circling Song* depicts the twin brother-sister relationship in which the brother hunts the sister because a man rapes her and she thus violates the code of honour. As Nancy Kaymar Stafford indicates, looking at contemporary honour crimes in sub-Saharan Africa, '[W]omen are often blamed for men's inability to control their sexual urges'.⁹ Courtney Howland points out that in Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Islam, women are considered evil and destructive for men.¹⁰ Stafford suggests that patriarchy, religious and colonialism all play roles in honour crimes.¹¹ The question of female honour and female genital mutilation alternates with consumption culture during Sadat's rule in El Saadawi's descriptions as a response to neo-colonial presence in Egypt. Cultural fragmentations in *The Circling Song* exhibit El Saadawi's concern over neo-colonialism and poverty in Egypt. *The Fall of the Imam* introduces Bint Allah, the Imam's illicit daughter, who is killed by the Imam and comes to life again to be killed. Bint Allah's body stands for the liminal space of cultural encounters

⁸ Nawal El Saadawi, 'Reflections of A Feminist', *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), eds., Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, p. 404.

⁹ Nancy Kaymar Stafford, 'Ending Honour Crimes in Sub-Saharan Africa: Looking at a Long Hard Death', *Honour, Violence, Women and Islam*, eds. Mohammad Mazher Idriss and Tahir Abbas, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 169-70.

¹⁰ Op. Cit.

¹¹ Op. Cit.

not secured by one central consciousness. *The Innocence of the Devil* displays El Saadawi's experiment in terms of religious inter-textuality. This novel is situated in the psychiatric hospital which suggests that she adopts Western psychoanalysis to challenge patriarchal oppression. The fragmented time and space do not embrace a Utopia for dispelling neo-colonial presence. In *The Innocence of the Devil*, the Head Nurse, Narguiss, wins the medal for her performance in nationalist activities. However, she has a traumatic experience where her elastic hymen leads to her father's suicide after her wedding night. Her father's suicide criticises Abraham because he sacrifices his son in the Bible. Ganat's lesbian relationship with Narguiss challenges sexual hierarchy. El Saadawi uses the psychoanalytic concept of female same-sex relationship to recover suppressed memory before Oedipal stage. Pertaining to neo-colonialism, she criticises struggles initiated by poststructuralists such as Derrida for being too academic and Foucault and Deleuze for interpreting for subalterns.¹² This chapter addresses El Saadawi's articulation of postmodernism in her texts.

The Narrative Terrain of El Saadawi's Writing

In this section, I describe El Saadawi's nationalist-feminist textual terrain. Egyptian women are not static constructions. In El Saadawi's writing, daily life depiction, such as sexual activities, formulates an unlinear time. As Jennifer Wicke points out, postmodernism inherits from Derridean poststructuralism, and postmodernist identities are necessarily 'dissolved, unbound, or at least thoroughly spliced and diced [...]'.¹³ As Judith Butler propounds the postmodernist feminist task: 'The task is to formulate within this constituted frame a critique of the categories of identity that contemporary juridical structures engender, naturalize, and immobilize'.¹⁴ I argue that El Saadawi formulates Egyptian women's

¹² Nawal El Saadawi, *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* (London: Zed Books, 1998), p. 164.

¹³ Jennifer Wicke, 'Postmodern Identities and the Politics of the (Legal) Subject', *Feminism and Postmodernism*, eds. Margaret Ferguson and Jennifer Wicke (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 12.

¹⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 172.

identities relating to changing concepts of the *umma*. In this section, I read *Two Women in One*, 'In Camera', 'Eyes' and 'The Death of His Excellency the Ex-Minister' that form an unlinear temporality of the nation. Homi K. Bhabha discusses the non-synchronous time of the 'present'. He argues:

From the place of the 'meanwhile', where cultural homogeneity and democratic anonymity articulate the national community, there emerges a more instantaneous and subaltern voice of the people, minority discourses that speak betwixt and between times and places.¹⁵

According to Bhabha, the postcolonial migration in the metropolitan areas has its history elsewhere and overseas.¹⁶ 'Eyes', 'In Camera' and 'The Death of His Excellency the Ex-Minister' show El Saadawi's multiple positions of Islamic gender politics, anti-Orientalism and Egyptian nationalism. Concerning Orientalism, El Saadawi demonstrates that religious thinkers differ greatly in their opinions of polygamy in the *Sura* of "Women" in the Quran: 'Marry as many women as you wish, two or three or four.'¹⁷ For El Saadawi, this verse suggests that men cannot distribute love equally among their wives and that polygamy depends on situations. She suggests that the ways in which fundamentalism is portrayed must be re-considered because women from the poor class are mobilised for nationalism in Islamic fundamentalism.¹⁸ Gender equality that influences Egyptian modernity does not draw on a model from a clear-cut origin of cultures. El Saadawi moves between past and present time in her works to contest the Orientalist idea of the West as being modern and civilised. Homi Bhabha argues that if the myth of nation, created out of the 'synchronous and spatial representation of cultural difference'¹⁹ is re-worked, the subaltern voice can come into existence. Bhabha describes the time lag of postcolonial migrants:

The post-colonial space is now 'supplementary' to the metropolitan centre; it stands in a subaltern, adjunct relation that doesn't aggrandize the *presence* of the West but redraws its frontiers in the menacing, agonistic boundary of

¹⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 227.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

¹⁷ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* (London: Zed Books, 1998), p. 80.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 345.

cultural difference that never quite adds up, always less than one nation and double.²⁰

For Bhabha, the subaltern voice is articulated in the time lag that migrants play out in the postcolonial metropolitan areas.²¹ The migrants bring their histories to the postcolonial metropolitan space. Their histories precede the nation's assumption of national cultural origin and will be heard by the nation in their perplexity of everyday life.

A proper autobiography on El Saadawi cannot say as much as what she does in her autobiographical fiction such as *Two Women in One*. As El Saadawi embodies her political ideas, Bahiah's sexuality formulates the tension between nationalism and feminism in Egypt. Bahiah captures the changing *umma* under Anwar Sadat. As Stefano Allievi suggests, under the influence of globalisation, the relations between Islam and the West show 'pluriculturalisation', and so do communities within Islamic diaspora and the *umma*.²² I explore the nationalist-feminist images as an example of 'pluriculturalisation' by illustrating the ways in which the heroines engage themselves in various discourses. El Saadawi's politics are strengthened by Jamal Abdel Nasser's socialism during the 1950s and the 1960s. Nasser needed more than mere nationalism to create a national consciousness.²³ Since the Muslim Brothers challenged the state power, Nasser invoked socialism for a national consciousness to balance them. As he suggests, Egyptian socialism is neither formulated in Marxist sense nor is it a class struggle:

It can mean state ownership factories and other means of production, workers' participation in the management of industries, national policies aimed at equalizing personal incomes, state economic planning, or charitable actions by individuals to share their material goods.²⁴

²⁰ Ibid., p. 241.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 346-47.

²² Stefano Allievi, 'Islam in the Public Space: Social Networks, Media and Neo-Communities', *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities in and Across Europe*, eds. Stefano Allievi and Jørgen S. Nielson (Boston: Brill, 2003), pp. 5-6.

²³ Arthur Goldschmidt, *A Brief History of Egypt* (New York: Infobase, 2008), p. 168.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 169.

In the 1956 constitution, the Egyptian government vowed to achieve social justice by improving social benefits and living standard.²⁵ During the 1960s, in the economic, political and intellectual aspects, Egypt committed itself to modernisation programs under Nasser's banner of socialism.²⁶ Anwar Sadat succeeded Nasser after his death in 1971. Because of Sadat's reversal of Nasser's socialism, anti-Israel policy and compromises on the superpowers, he is well-accepted by the West.²⁷ Sadat's *infitah*, or the Open Door policy, brought Egypt closer to America and away from the Soviet Union.²⁸ It also resulted in capitalism and co-ordination with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.²⁹ Labour migration to the Gulf countries caused problems in family structure: Women had to share the husbands' responsibilities and working-class women's migration affected them negatively.³⁰ More adversely, the Open Door policy increased the gap between the rich and the poor; also, it brought about high inflation and the insufficiency of basic goods and housing.³¹ In 1977, the rampant consumerism and the increasing poverty in urban areas led to demonstrations by students and workers alike.³² Members from radical Islamic groups protested against consumerism and Western culture. In addition to rampant consumerism, Sadat signed peace treaty in Camp David accords and this also made way for a sense of nostalgia for Nasser's regime.³³

El Saadawi's criticised the Muslim Brothers and the more general movement of Islamic radicalism for sexual hierarchy. Her approach of Islam is personal interpretations, or *ijtihad*. For example, she interprets the verse in the Romans: 'He it is who created out of you

²⁵ Op. Cit.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 172.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 187.

²⁸ Nadjie Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 72.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 72.

³⁰ Op. Cit.

³¹ Op. Cit.

³² Ibid., p. 71.

³³ Ibid., pp. 70-3.

couples, so that you may live together, and have mercy and love for one another'.³⁴ She holds that this verse ascertains Muslim women's rights to choose and leave their husbands.³⁵ She argues that women are responsible for perpetuating gender hierarchy in Islam. As she states: 'One of our slogans in the Arab Women's Solidarity Association is "unveil the mind"'.³⁶ Sexual relationship is fundamental in Islamic society because it defines religious, legal and social relationships. As Abdelwahab Bouhdiba defines the significance of sexuality in Islam, '[i]t is one of those signs by which the power of God may be recognized'.³⁷ Sexual relationship is bound by *nikāh*, legal marriage, and thus sexuality violating marital bond is strictly forbidden and is referred to as fornication, or *zinā*.³⁸ The third verse of the *Sura* 'Light' compares fornication with beliefs in other gods: 'The fornicator (*zāni*) shall marry none but a fornicatress (*zānia*) or an idolatress, and the fornicatress none shall marry her but a fornicator or idolator'.³⁹ Fornication transgresses God's community dependent on *nikāh*. Since *nikāh* is defined by blood, milk and sperm, that is, by consanguinity, suckling and legal coitus, orphan adoption has no recourse to legal status.⁴⁰ Based on the concept, Islam tolerates a child that a man has outside his marriage, but not a child born of adultery.⁴¹ He can adopt a child who has no blood relationship with him, but he cannot adopt his child who is born in an extramarital affair.

El Saadawi uses her fiction to show what she sees as social inequality, of which orphans are one. In *The Fall of the Imam*, Bint Allah, the illegitimate daughter, is born of the national leader and a prostitute. In the Quran, God takes care of orphans: 'If you fear that you cannot act as justly among orphans, then marry women who seem good to you, two or three

³⁴ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* (London: Zed Books, 1998), p. 82.

³⁵ Op. Cit.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 97.

³⁷ Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam* (London: Saqi, 1998), p. 14.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

³⁹ Op. Cit.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 17

⁴¹ Op. Cit.

or four [...]'.⁴² For El Saadawi, orphans have no recourse to adoption and this indicates men's unjustified power.⁴³ In *Woman at Point Zero*, Firdaus is an orphan. In 'The Death of His Excellency the Ex-Minister' and *The Innocence of the Devil*, El Saadawi challenges patriarchal symbolic order in the Quran and in language. Zeinab in *God Dies by the Nile* is also an orphan. In the *Sura* of 'Women', men's authority over women is defined:

Men have authority over women on account of that with which God has caused one of them to excel over the other, and for what they spend of their sustenance; therefore, righteous women are obedient, guarding the unperceivable just as God has guarded.⁴⁴

For El Saadawi, the differentiation between men and women exist in Christianity and Judaism.⁴⁵ 'In Camera' utilises the instance captured by the camera to convey Egyptian modern nation. The protagonist is tried for her political engagement. The trial commences with the weeping wound, the rape, in her body incurred by retaliation: 'The cold air hit her face and bare neck, crept down to her chest and stomach and then fell lower to the weeping wound, where it turned into a sharp blow'.⁴⁶ The camera represents three perspectives: the male fear of women's rebellion, the female subversion of male objectifying gaze and her gaze looking at herself as a nationalist-feminist. She is tried for speaking against religion. As the judge pronounces the accusation against her, 'Imagine, ladies and gentlemen. This student, who is not yet twenty years old, refers to Him, whom God protect to lead this noble nation all his life, as "stupid"'.⁴⁷ The male fear of women's rebellion shows in the retaliation by rape in 'In Camera'. Ten men rape her. The heroine links virginity and her words.

Sadat's economic affiliation with America and his attempts of normalisation with Israel is the background of 'In Camera'.⁴⁸ In 'In Camera', the applause from the audience

⁴² *The Koran Translation*, ed. Yasin T. al-Jibouri, trans. S. V. Mir Ahmed Ali (Lake Mary, Florida: United Muslim Foundation, 2005), p. 54.

⁴³ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* (London: Zed Books, 1998), p. 81.

⁴⁴ *The Koran Translation*, ed. Yasin T. al-Jibouri, trans. S. V. Mir Ahmed Ali (Lake Mary, Florida: United Muslim Foundation, 2005), p. 58.

⁴⁵ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* (London: Zed Books, 1998), p. 83.

⁴⁶ Nawal El Saadawi, 'In Camera', *Death of An Ex-Minister*, trans. Shirley Eber (London: Minerva, 1992), p. 77.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁴⁸ Nadje Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 48.

implies men's inferiority complex, pointing out that they are not satisfied with the government, too, although they do not have the heroine's courage. It is indicated by her attempt to look at Sadat's picture on the wall in the courtroom. She imagines that Sadat's eyes in the picture winks at her in the way as if he were flirting with her.⁴⁹ And then she realises that the wink Sadat gives her is similar to the foreign tourists' on the streets. She discovers that it is an American form of greeting. Further, imperialism is substantiated in Egyptian people's daily life during Sadat's reign seen in a congregation of issues, such as mass consumption, the loss of family values, sexual promiscuity and the AIDS epidemic.⁵⁰ Whilst all she can smell is the gaping wound in her body, during the rape, she manages to tell the rapist, 'You fool! The most valuable thing I possess is not between my legs. You're all stupid. And the most stupid among you is the one who leads you'.⁵¹ The protagonist's attempts of straining to see are threatening as a sign of confrontation against the androcentric social order. The heroine wants to insert herself in the literary symbolic terrain concerning issues such as veil, virginity and female genital mutilation. The protagonist's father is disgraced because she speaks for public issues. She also loses familial honour: 'Her poor father! Do you know him! They say he's ill in bed. Maybe he can't face people after his honour was violated'.⁵² The protagonist's gender transgression in 'In Camera' reveals that words, or writing, as the most threatening strategy. The threatened phallus is prevalent throughout 'In Camera'.

In El Saadawi's writing, eyes are a confrontation against the father's laws. In 'The Death of His Excellency the Ex-Minister', the threat is so menacing that the Ex-Minister is on the verge of losing the sense of self when his female junior employee looks straight into his eyes: 'I jumped, as though all my clothes had dropped off me, all of a sudden. I felt ashamed;

⁴⁹ Nawal El Saadawi, 'In Camera', *Death of an Ex-Minister*, trans. Shirley Eber (London: Minerva, 1992), pp. 89-90.

⁵⁰ Nadje Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 48.

⁵¹ Nawal El Saadawi, 'In Camera', *Death of an Ex-Minister*, trans. Shirley Eber (London: Minerva, 1992), p. 93.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 92.

it reminded me in a flash of my little daughter's eyes'.⁵³ In 'The Death of His Excellency the Ex-Minister', women's return of gaze points to the Freudian/Lacanian theorisation and Islamic culture. For El Saadawi, women are conceived as absence in both cultures, the former by penis-envy theory, and the latter, by *awra*, or shame in Arabic. For another instance, in *Two Women in One*, Bahiah Shaheen notices that she is constructed by absence: 'Once, with a child's innocence, she told her mother that she had discovered she was a girl, not a boy—and undressed to prove it. But her mother slapped her hand, and told her "Promise me never to do that again"'.⁵⁴ The Islamic concept of absence is associated with *awra*, literally female genitalia, or generally shame. Nakedness in public and in private is considered not appropriate in Islamic conventions. Bahiah's body parts must be covered to ascertain sexual hierarchy.

El Saadawi refers the inability to write freely to internal censorship which restricts her expression of freedom in writing.⁵⁵ She disapproves of the postmodernist evaluation of the sexual oppression in the Third World as a solution to the inequality on representational power between the West and East. She maintains that Third World women remain defined by the economic domination of neo-colonialism:

For the first time in the history of cultures like ours we are watching the homogenization of Western or Northern culture into a consolidated, alluring image of the other, of a liberal, capitalist, materially and sexually enticing market, of a world that in comparison with our life we can see only with envy and even reverence.⁵⁶

For El Saharawi, in Egypt the standardisation of beauty and femininity in the capitalist mode is not only global, but also fundamentally a Western domination. El Saadawi's postmodernist position echoes Nira Yuval-Davis's idea of the emergence of so-called 'post-modernist

⁵³ Nawal El Saadawi, 'The Death of His Excellency the Ex-Minister', *Death of an Ex-Minister*, trans. Shirley Eber (London: Minerva, 1992), p.16.

⁵⁴ Nawal El Saadawi, *Two Women in One*, trans. Osman Nusairi and Jana Gough (London: Al Saqi Books, 1985), p. 12.

⁵⁵ Nawal El Saadawi, 'Reflections of A Feminist', *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 403.

⁵⁶ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* (London: Zed Books, 1998), p. 130.

Feminism', in which Islam and feminisms co-operate in a piecemeal tactical fashion.⁵⁷ For El Saadawi, veiling is no different from the capitalist cosmetic culture. Haideh Moghissi points out the danger of postmodernist view of fundamentalism.⁵⁸ She suggests that regarding fundamentalism as a form of multiculturalism would risk the persistent gender hierarchy in the fundamentalist revival.⁵⁹ In 'Eyes', female sexualities signify the breakdown of the Eastern and Western veils as cultural boundaries. For El Saadawi, Freudian gender discourse perpetuates the gender binaries such as presence/absence, masculinity/femininity and superiority/inferiority. El Saadawi indicates that she approves of Lacan's incoherence of gender identities: 'I do not belong to Lacan's school, but I believe him to be more modern and up-to-date than Freud'.⁶⁰ Her engagement in psychoanalysis indicates that the adoption of gender equality theory in Egypt from the West is not characterised by one between copy and origin.

For El Saadawi, Freud's discourse encumbers the place of clitoris in the formulation of the human psyche. In 'The Death of His Excellency the Ex-Minister', El Saadawi employs the Lacanian castration complex to rectify Freud's penis-envy theory. For Lacan, the phallus marks the rupture of the mother-child relationship by the father.⁶¹ As Lacan explains the meaning of the phallus, as a signifier, he suggests 'the threat or the nostalgia of lack-in-having' that functions in the symbolic order in language.⁶² The castration complex is so inherent in the Ex-Minister's superiority that he experiences a shattered sense of selfhood: 'Every day, as I searched the papers for my name and did not find it, my feeling that I'd become a nameless body was confirmed'.⁶³ The Ex-Minister's daughter and female employee

⁵⁷ Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 2000), pp. 123-24.

⁵⁸ Haideh Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis* (New York: Palgrave, 1999), p. 75.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁶⁰ Georges Tarabishi, *Woman Against Her Sex: A Critique of Nawal el-Saadawi* (London: Saqi Books, 1988), p. 200.

⁶¹ Jacqueline Rose, 'Introduction-II', *Feminine Sexuality*, eds. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, trans. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p. 38.

⁶² Jacques Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality*, eds. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, trans. Jacqueline Rose (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p. 83.

⁶³ Nawal El Saadawi, 'The Death of His Excellency the Ex-Minister', *Death of an Ex-Minister*, trans. Shirley Eber (London: Minerva, 1992), p. 21.

gaze back into his eyes, and this reflects his sexual anxiety. He responds to the female employee's gaze: 'Don't you know that whoever you are, you're nothing but a junior employee and I am a minister and that no matter how far up the ladder you go, in the end you're a woman whose place is in bed underneath a man'.⁶⁴ The Ex-Minister complains his threatened sense of self and his parents' relationships. He converses with his mother in the monologues throughout the story: 'If you'd raised your eyes once to Father's, maybe I too would have been able to raise my eyes to his'.⁶⁵

In 'Eyes', El Saadawi raises the question of feminine sexual desire and describes feminine libido. In 'Eyes', she utilises traditional narrative space to represent a possibility of feminine desire. The heroine's eyes are a sexual engagement. She is guarded by the father at home with the Quran as her only mediation with the outside world. She is carefully hidden away like a statue. Her job, as a librarian taking charge of mummies, protects her, until one day, she looks into a male statue's eyes: 'They were looking at her with a movement in the pupils that she had never seen before in any other statue.'⁶⁶ Every day, she thinks of him intensely that 'she had become afraid of seeing him. She didn't know why she was afraid.'⁶⁷ Her desire toward men turns so great each day that it leads to looking for men on the streets with the same eyes looking at her. The gaze looking back at her mirrors her sexual desire: 'She knows she was weeping over his drowning. What made her weep most was that he was not a follower of God; that he was a follower of the devil.' Each encounter with men on the streets finally fails and she has to consult a female psychiatrist. The meanings of the heroine's sexuality are eventually determined by the female psychiatrist, who considers her a case of psychotic reaction due to sexual repression.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 16.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 19.

⁶⁶ Nawal El Saadawi, 'Eyes', *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*, eds. Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 206.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 211.

El Saadawi uses the heroine's feeling of guilt in 'Eyes' to interrogate the monotheistic religions. Her body is with the Prophet Noah where the sinners are left to drown in the dreams she has. The mummies are national symbols and become the object of the heroine's sexual desire. In Western mythology, Pygmalion creates women as his reflection of the world.⁶⁸ The heroine in 'Eyes' looks into the man's eyes and it reveals the father's laws that constitute her sexuality in language. The dreams bring her back to the time of Noah seven thousand years ago where the mummy is drowned in front of her. Through a criticism of sin, El Saadawi's challenges the oft-quoted *Hadith* that when a man and a woman are alone together, the third person present is the Devil.⁶⁹ El Saadawi explains the link of women with the devil in the depiction of the story of Adam and Eve in which Eve is blamed for luring Adam to have the forbidden fruits in her essay, 'Man the God, Woman the Sinful': 'The original story of Adam and Eve, as told in the Old Testament and Koran, shows clearly the injustice suffered by women, and the attempt to mask her situation by religious sanctification aimed at smothering all doubt, all discussion and all resistance'.⁷⁰ The dreams take the heroine back to the crisis of the human race to challenge the meanings of women as the devil's instrument. In 'Eyes', the dreams re-activate the static interpretation of religious texts. The short story form articulates the polyvocal space through the instantaneous moment between the meeting of the psychiatrist and the heavily-veiled Muslim girl. Sabry Hafez points out that the short story is appropriate to represent multiplicity of identities and reinvent collective communities.⁷¹ El Saadawi's short story has the brief and incessant moment. This

⁶⁸ Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity', *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: 1985), p. 292-93.

⁶⁹ Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Men, Women, and God(s): Nawal El Saadawi and Arab Feminist Poetics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 98 and p. 225. According to Malti-Douglas, this hadith constantly happens in Kariman Hamza's contemporary guide to the Muslim woman. It can be seen in modern hadith materials, such as Idris's 'al-Amaliyya al-Kubra'.

⁷⁰ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Zed Books, 2002), p. 102.

⁷¹ Sabry Hafez, *The Quest for Identities: The Development of the Modern Arabic Short Story* (London: Saqi Books, 2007), p. 37.

deconstructs the postmodernist relativism which is made possible by the 'synchronous spatial' representation that Homi Bhabha cautions against.⁷²

El Saadawi's novels contain a complex time element. *Two Women in One* contains Bhabha's 'incessant instantaneous' time, contributed to by Bahiah's process of sexual awareness. I explore the cyclical element in El Saadawi's realist novels, *Two Women in One* and *Woman at Point Zero*. El Saadawi's rejection of Western consumerism is a gesture of Occidentalism common in the portrait of Egyptian nationalism. Regarding the question of the Occidental construction, Nadjé Al-Ali argues that 'unequal distributions of political and economic power characterize orientalism and occidentalism as two similar yet distinct processes'.⁷³ She argues that Occidentalism in contemporary Egypt is a critique of modernity, showing deep awareness of Orientalism and contesting against it.⁷⁴ Further, El Saadawi's *Two Women in One* gives women more voices for sexuality than her autobiography. *Two Women in One* is a layered textual space, although the main time is progressive and is organised by her equal gender relationship for the new nation. Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke indicate that in *Two Women in One*, El Saadawi reflects upon her life during her study in the Faculty of Medicine at Cairo University.⁷⁵ Through *A Daughter of Isis*, Nawal El Saadawi constructs not only her life, but she also establishes a link between her life and her politics. In this autobiography, El Saadawi compares herself to Isis, the weaver, essentially a mother figure and a goddess revered for her magic power. However, female sexuality embodying her politics is lacking. By equating herself to Isis, El Saadawi intends to restore a broken relationship of female inheritance.⁷⁶ Also, naming herself as Isis, El Saadawi puts forward her position as a nationalist-feminist in which Isis is the inheritor of Noot, suggesting a lineage:

⁷² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 349.

⁷³ Nadjé Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 26.

⁷⁴ Op. Cit.

⁷⁵ Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, eds., *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 203.

⁷⁶ Nawal El Saadawi, *A Daughter of Isis: The Autobiography of Nawal El Saadawi*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Zed Books, 1999), p. 4.

For was it not Noot who, speaking to her daughter, had said before she died, 'I say to you, my daughter, who will inherit the throne after I am no longer here, be a merciful and just ruler of your people rather than a goddess who depends for her authority on sacred power.'⁷⁷

El Saadawi was brought up around the 1940s in the Egyptian village of Kafr Tahla and she came of age in the early 1950s, encountering the independence struggle in which the secular and socialist Gamal Abdel Nasser came into power. In 1972 during Sadat's regime, El Saadawi was dismissed from the position of Director-General of Health Education due to the publication of her book *Woman and Sex*. El Saadawi notices that Egyptian women had rights in public space, whilst their rights of equality were not extended at home in the 1970s.⁷⁸

Bahiah in *Two Women in One* represents woman's personal voice, complementing El Saadawi's feminist political ideas regarding female sexuality.

In *Two Women in One*, the main theme is progressive, demonstrated by gender equality in heterosexual relationship. Bahiah is a sexual object in male projection:

Shortly before dawn she moved her brush over the painting, changing the lines and creating new moments in her life, new moments that she chose to create through her own will. With that deliberate movement across the paper—in any and all directions—she destroyed other wills and designed her own lines and features. She would make her eyes blacker, her nose more upturned and her lips pursed in ever greater anger and determination.⁷⁹

Because women's existence is conferred only by male projections, Bahiah feels that her body is lost within the signifying system which generates and shapes the 'reality' about gender.

Something new must happen to her life to demolish the patriarchal signifying system:

She wandered down al-Moski street, watching the women and girls as they walked with their closely-bound fat legs, pounding the street with their bodies, their bottoms visible under their glossy dresses. Their made-up eyes devoured the shop windows; they lusted after clothes, transparent night-dresses, slippers, make-up, perfume and body lotions. Their sharp, penetrating voices mingled with the popping of chewing gum and the clacking of pointed high heels bearing bodies laden with shopping.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Op. Cit.

⁷⁸ Nawal El Saadawi, 'Reflections of A Feminist', *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 399.

⁷⁹ Nawal El Saadawi, *Two Women in One*, trans. Osman Nusairi and Jana Gough (London: Al Saqi Books, 1985), p. 118.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 121.

For El Saadawi, the consumerist culture among Egyptian women signifies the loss of national identity. Bahiah rectifies women as a feminine passive symbol by launching female masculinity and by elevating the place of the clitoris in gender relationships to contest Freudian normative penis-envy discourse. Bahiah echoes El Saadawi's coming of age in Nasser's reign and reflects the antagonism against the Open Door policy experienced by the generation of feminists cultivated and strengthened by Nasser's expansion of women's rights in seeking education and profession. During Sadat's rule in the 1970s, the more Westernised the outfits showed, the more affluent class those women belonged to.⁸¹ Also, university students wore jeans, tight jumpers or miniskirts without their hair covered.⁸² Anwar Sadat's Open Door policy invites a contradictory existence of capitalist fashion and veiling, as an act to protest his peace treaty. In the 1980s and 1990s in British and the Middle Eastern metropolitan cities, women with loose-fitting *abayas* veil their faces, wearing fancy shoes, and shopping for luxurious goods.⁸³

In *A Daughter of Isis*, El Saadawi opens the narrative with a comment on the replacement of the green tree next to her window by the McDonald's.⁸⁴ Also, in her essay, 'Distorted Notions About Femininity, Beauty and Love', El Saadawi points out that Egyptian women are doubly colonised by global capitalism and patriarchy and she calls for a symbolic re-engagement:

A continuous flow of vulgar, erotic films, built on the most superficial stories, depend for their attraction on belly dances or other forms of sexual provocation that cater for a sexually suppressed young public. The closer the links between the local capitalist or feudal classes and the politics or Western imperialism, the greater the number of advertisements and films based on the commercialization of sex and the female body.⁸⁵

Consumerist images of women in Cairo differ from the generation like El Saadawi, who grew up in the rural town. The narrative of *Two Women in One* reaches its climax with her growth

⁸¹ Ahdaf Soueif, *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), p. 270.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 271.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

⁸⁴ Nawal El Saadawi, *A Daughter of Isis: The Autobiography of Nawal El Saadawi*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Zed Books, 1999), pp. 14-5.

⁸⁵ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Zed Books, 2002), p. 83.

of masculinity, which signifies her political participation in Nasser's nationalism and anti-imperialism in the 1940s and 1950s:

She wrapped up the painting and went out the small wooden door, her tall body slim, her straight legs enveloped by her trousers. One foot trod firmly on the ground before the other, and her legs parted noticeably. The men of the neighbourhood gazed at her from the shops; the women stared through keyholes and cracks in the windows. Was she woman or man?⁸⁶

Her relationship with the patriotic nationalist, Saleem, corrects biological and discursive domination. In the end, they re-unite at the police station for political activities. Bahiah is as masculine as Saleem and acts as his mother. Judith Butler demonstrates that heterosexual identity coherence is 'assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender and sexuality'.⁸⁷ As El Saadawi shows, heterosexuality is achieved by imitation. She discusses the traditional separation between body and soul and between sex and love in her essay in Egyptian society, 'Love and Sex in the Life of the Arabs': 'The Arabs throughout the ages have expressed in song and verse the tortures of love, and the pleasurable pain of separation and yearning between lovers deprived of one another'.⁸⁸ By contrast, Bahiah intends to sacrifice herself with Saleem for the nation.

In Bahiah's case in *Two Women and One*, sex, gender and sexuality in the heterosexual relationship are a complex networking which does not necessarily guarantee identity coherence. In *Two Women in One*, essentialist division of discourses is permanently disturbed. The fluidity between her feminine and masculine selves disrupts the heterosexual romantic love in the Egyptian contemporary nationalist novels. For El Saadawi, theories of gender construction need to disrupt Freud's Oedipal complex model because he also renders feminine sexual desire repressed. El Saadawi's depiction of Bahiah's clitoral pleasure echoes Western feminists' investigation of Freud, who treats clitoris as an atrophied penis'.⁸⁹ For

⁸⁶ Nawal El Saadawi, *Two Women in One*, trans. Osman Nusairi and Jana Gough (London: Al Saqi Books, 1985), p. 120.

⁸⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 23.

⁸⁸ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Zed Books, 2002), p. 149.

⁸⁹ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 149.

instance, as Nancy Chodorow argues, 'It is biologically the homologue of the penis, and we might ascribe to both the same character, but we cannot consider this character either feminine or masculine [...]'.⁹⁰ Bahiah claims that her libido can be liberated from the father's laws: 'When her fingers approached her genitals while washing, she would jerk them away, as if her hand had touched an electrified or prohibited area. She still remembered the rap her mother gave her as a child'.⁹¹ The alternation between Bahiah's feminine and masculine selves begins to blur so that neither identity can be said to represent Bahiah. Gender is performative as she does in her portrait: Each stroke is a doing of her identity.⁹² Although each stroke seems imaginary to her, the strokes create selfhood. El Saadawi joins Western feminists' critique of biological determination. Bahiah's sexuality is portrayed as a sexual prey in her encounter with Dr. Alawi, a Westernised medical professor. Bahiah experiences sexual exploration, one Orientalist with Dr. Alawi and the other the modernised with Saleem. The sexual themes, along with the encounter she has with her husband, represent unsettling discursive fields. Dr. Alawi signifies the Westernised élitist patriarchy and dares to think of her in submissive feminine terms. Bahiah becomes self-conflicting. Bahiah opposes Dr. Alawi's domineering sexual advances. For El Saadawi, sexual advancement signifies colonial oppression:

He held both her wrists in one hand and started to undress her with the other. She kicked at him strongly and he fell. As he picked himself up, he stared at her in astonishment. She was even more surprised than he was. He sat on a chair near the fireplace.⁹³

Bahiah's feminine sexual fantasy is revealed in the form of a dream through the encounter, featured by the gap of power between the two:

She had seen him once in a dream. He was wearing a shirt and trousers and he was as slim as an athlete. His arm was hairy and looked reddish in the sunlight. He picked her up and tried to embrace her, but she slipped away. He put his

⁹⁰ Op. Cit.

⁹¹ Nawal El Saadawi, *Two Women in One*, trans. Osman Nusairi and Jana Gough (London: Zed Books, 1985), p. 74.

⁹² Ibid., p. 26.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 111.

arms round her, tore her hands from her mouth, and kissed her. She pushed him away, only to find there was no one there.⁹⁴

With Saleem, Bahiah once again walks on the crossroads for finding meanings of sexual activities: 'She knew that to turn would be a matter of supreme importance'.⁹⁵ Even her father's control ignites her sexual imagination. She needs to break out of her father's domination: 'He thought she was unlike other girls, that her body was unlike other girls', in fact, that she had no body at all, no organs, especially no sexual organs liable to be aroused or stirred by someone of the opposite sex'.⁹⁶

In *Two Women in One*, Bahiah's wedding nights with her husband challenges credibility of traditions, when she is married off hurriedly due to her political activities. Her father has thought that marriage would put her political activities to an end. At the wedding night, her resistance is taken to indicate her virginity. Modesty is required of women in the *Sura* of Light in the Quran: 'And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest. . .'.⁹⁷ Her husband is aroused: 'He assumed that the strength of a virgin's rejection would increase in direct proportion to her purity and ignorance of the male'.⁹⁸ The more she rejects, the more she is read as a virgin's reaction to male virility. It is assumed that feminine rejection arouses more male sexual passion. Her resistance only enhances the idea that she attempts to seduce. Bahiah's asexual female masculinity and her imagination of being sexually conquered disturb essentialist discursive boundaries. The two separate identities, caught between masculine and feminine selves, makes Bahiah schizophrenic, shuffling between sexual oppression as reality and as sexual fantasy. Bahiah's symbolic disruption is based on her romantic love narratives, drawing on a polyphony of voices that indicate no origin of discursive authorities.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 55

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 57.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 63.

⁹⁷ *The Koran Translation*, ed. Yasin T. al-Jibouri, trans. S. V. Mir Ahmed Ali (Lake Mary, Florida: United Muslim Foundation, 2005), p. 257.

⁹⁸ Nawal El Saadawi, *Two Women in One*, trans. Osman Nusairi and Jana Gough (London: Zed Books, 1985), p. 101.

In this section, I have mapped El Saadawi's narrative terrain and discursive fragmentation. Her strategy reveals the myth of the homogeneous nation. The short story, 'Eyes', demonstrates the unlinearity of the national time. The 'eyes' of the Islamic little-educated urban girl constructs the feminine subaltern position in the nation. Her obsessive symptoms reveal a possibility of women's voices, uncovering Muslim women's oppression stemming from multiple discourses and from anti-colonial nationalist re-deployment of the veiled woman image. 'In Camera' and 'The Death of His Excellency the Ex-Minister' disrupt the symbolic sexual hierarchy by depicting the male phallus as fractured by the father's figure. *Two Women in One* launches attacks against patriarchal systems in multiple discourses. In the following section, I regard El Saadawi's critique of stereotyping.

The Nationalist Discourse and the Corporeal Narrative Disruption

In this section, I read Firdaus in *Woman at Point Zero* and *God Dies by the Nile* as national self-representation by peasant women. I examine the ways in which El Saadawi shows conservative elements in her gender politics. Also, both realist novels are attempts by El Saadawi to give voices to Egyptian female peasant subalterns. El Saadawi deploys Firdaus in *Woman at Point Zero* to voice her protests against Sadat's governmental policies. Sadat's relationship with Islamists is ambivalent. The reform of the personal status law by Sadat is meant to undercut Islamist power which contributes to the enhancement of secular gender relationship and an elevation of Egypt's international image.⁹⁹ The rise of Islamists is an inevitable result of the political and economic alliance between Sadat and America. El Saadawi's *God Dies by the Nile* has Zeinab as the victim of the imperialist and Egyptian patriarchal systems. El Saadawi produces her for an anti-governmental position. These two novels are written after the ban on El Saadawi's non-fiction, *Women and Sex* in 1972. El

⁹⁹ Nadje Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 73.

Saadawi notes in the preface of *Woman at Point Zero* that ‘the year 1973 saw a new stage of my life: it also witnessed the birth of my novel *Firdaus*, or *Woman at Point Zero*’.¹⁰⁰ Also, in the preface she expresses her prison experience under Sadat’s rule in a flashback: ‘Little did I know that one day I would step through the same gates, not as a psychiatrist, but as a prisoner arrested with 1,035 others under the decree issued by Sadat on 5 September 1981’.¹⁰¹

In *God Dies by the Nile*, Zeinab, grows up and lives in the rural town of Kafr El Teen. Her body signifies Orientalist and nationalist discourses: ‘She held herself upright, balancing the earthenware jar on her head. Her tall figure swayed from side to side, and her large black eyes were raised and carried that expression of pride he [the Mayor] had seen so often in the women of Kafrawi’s household.’¹⁰² Zeinab accentuates the Orientalist voyeuristic view through the bluish eyes of the Mayor, whose mother is British: ‘He could see her firm, rounded buttocks pressing up against the long *galabeya* from behind. Her pointed breasts moved up and down with each step’.¹⁰³ His eyes are emblematic of Sadat’s rule. Regarding the question of female bodies and textuality, Sandra M. Gilbert points out that feminist revisionist criticism demystifies the ‘connections between textuality and sexuality.’¹⁰⁴ Gilbert argues that the element of ‘sexual self-definition’ and ‘psychosexual meanings of writing’ play a role in relegating women to marginal and guilty positions in the nineteenth-century Western literature.¹⁰⁵ El Saadawi’s textual deployment uncovers the multi-layered patriarchal oppression residing in urbanising Egypt, the feudal system and religious discourses. One strand of her challenges derives from Western psychoanalysis, that is, critiques of Freud. As Nancy Chodorow indicates, feminists oppose Freud’s explanation which valorises maleness

¹⁰⁰ Nawal El Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Zed Books, 2001), p. i.

¹⁰¹ Op. Cit.

¹⁰² Nawal El Saadawi, *God Dies by the Nile*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Zed Books, 1985), p. 14.

¹⁰³ Op. Cit.

¹⁰⁴ Sandra M. Gilbert, ‘What Do Feminist Critics Want? A Postcard from the Volcano’, *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p. 36.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 35-6.

and masculinity.¹⁰⁶ These feminists, such as Karen Horney, who disagree with Freud suggest that the lack of theorisation of vagina is in fact a denial of its existence.¹⁰⁷ They agree on the penis-envy symptoms that their female patients show and acknowledge symptoms, such as masochism and narcissism, that women suffer from.¹⁰⁸ But, they differ from Freud by suggesting that these symptoms are imposed by patriarchy and thus can be treated.¹⁰⁹ The Mayor's voyeuristic presence presides over the narrative progression, and Zeinab ends up being beguiled to prostitution. The narrator depicts her under the Mayor's sexual assault in such a way that it is as if Zeinab could not distinguish between rape and pleasure, showing also symptoms of masochism and narcissism:

She gave a half-throttled shriek, part pain at the hard pressure of his hand around her breast sensitive with youth and inexperience, part fright running through her body with an icy shiver, and part pleasure, a strange new pleasure almost akin to an ecstasy, the ecstasy of salvation, of being free of the heavy load which had been weighing down on her heart. Now she could leave herself in the hands of God, deliver her body and soul to Him, fulfil her vow, and savour the relief of having done so.¹¹⁰

Preceding the catastrophe of being raped, Zeinab experiences the *zar* ritual in El Sayeda Zeinab mosque where she feels unity with God. The narrative reveals one more attack on the peasant woman for her ignorance and for coming all the way from her small town to receive God's healing power.

El Saadawi uses Zeinab to criticise Islamic practices of Sufism and *zar*. Sufism is a corporeal ascetic practice in which the body is viewed as a vehicle for knowing the divine spirit.¹¹¹ As Scott Kugle points out, Sufi corporeal practices are a process of refinement to uncover God's qualities: The bodies 'serve as the locus for the indwelling of God's spirit and

¹⁰⁶ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 152.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹⁰⁹ *Op. Cit.*

¹¹⁰ Nawal El Saadawi, *God Dies by the Nile*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Zed Books, 1990), p. 99.

¹¹¹ Scott Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality and Sacred Power in Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 30.

the vehicle for inspiration'.¹¹² According to Kugle's argument, male homosexual practices are accepted and known in Sufism.¹¹³ El Saadawi's criticism of Sufism has more to do with sexuality as a trope of patriarchy and dissatisfaction at governmental policies. On the other hand, *Zar* is a conventional practice for Egyptian women who experience psychosomatic illness.¹¹⁴ The *zar* ritual derives from Ethiopia and Sudan and it is spread to Egypt and absorbs Muslim cultures.¹¹⁵ Janice Boddy notices that *zar*'s origin is not clear and it is a common practice in Africa.¹¹⁶ Boddy observes that Christians in Ethiopia participate in *zars*.¹¹⁷ As Pamela Constantinides points out, *zar* was common in Sudan by the mid-nineteenth century and it was popular toward the end of Anglo-Egyptian rule.¹¹⁸ It was so popular that it became a threat to orthodox Islam in Sudan.¹¹⁹ *Zar* is a spirit and it takes possession of the bodies which incur sickness.¹²⁰ The rituals involve costumed dancing, drumming and singing for the patients to enter a state of trance to bring healing effects. Notably, the rituals revolve around symbolism of women's reproductive roles in society, and they are run by women and centred on women. As Constantinides points out the role of the *zar* in Muslim society, 'Men, the economically dominant sex, pay to gain control of the power of women. Women, however, control the ritual pathways which affirm their particular role in the continuation of society'.¹²¹

In *God Dies by the Nile*, El Saadawi utilises Sufism to point out that women are created by men. Zeinab is trapped by the Mayor's setup and is led to believe that she follows what God wants her to do. The Mayor and God at El Sayeda Zeinab mosque are identical:

¹¹² Ibid., p. 33.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 196.

¹¹⁴ Maggie N. Nassif, *El Zar: A Tool of Oppression and Liberation*, *Studies in the Humanities* 30:1-2(2003), p. 170-76.

¹¹⁵ Janice Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zar Cult* (Madison, Wisconsin: the University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p. 132.

¹¹⁶ Op. Cit.

¹¹⁷ Op. Cit.

¹¹⁸ Pamela Constantinides, 'Women Heal Women: Spirit Possession and Sexual Segregation in a Muslim Society', *Social Science and Medicine* 21: 6 (1985), pp. 685-692.

¹¹⁹ Op. Cit.

¹²⁰ Op. Cit.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 691.

Zeinab's heart was beating wildly as she cried out 'O God'. It seemed to leap against her ribs, and shake her small breasts under the bodice of her long robe. Her eyes shone with a mysterious gleam like moonlight on a dark, silent stream. She shivered every now and then with a strange fever hidden in her depths, and the blood rose to her face in a virginal flush though this was the first time her heart had beaten for anyone.¹²²

As Kugle elaborates on the Sufi body not as a natural given: 'In times of political crisis, bodies are no longer accepted as a natural given but rather seen as highly charged with symbolic, social, and ethical significance'.¹²³ El Saadawi's writing strategy in the 1970s echoes French feminism, which disrupt phallogocentrism by constructing body-based writing. Hélène Cixous creates space for feminine writing by making writing a voice and women are fully present in the voice so that writing is materialised by their bodies.¹²⁴ Zeinab's misconception about her body starts from her involvement in *zars*. In *God Dies by the Nile*, during a *zar* ritual, Zeinab enters the state of trance. El Saadawi constructs *zars* as sexual domination for Zeinab: 'Every time she struck the ground with her foot, the material rent, and the split crept higher up'.¹²⁵ El Saadawi criticises gender inequality in all of its manifestations,¹²⁶ as she points out the Sheikhs' eyes and their dark whiskers and long beards in the *zars*, who are supposed to command the spirits to leave.¹²⁷ El Saadawi mentions a Sufi practitioner, Mahomet E Sahaba, 'who led an ascetic life would break their fast by having sexual intercourse before food' in her article, 'Love and Sex in the Life of the Arabs'.¹²⁸ In *God Dies by the Nile*, *zars* also evoke women's painful memories for Zakeya, Zeinab's aunt. For instance, Zakeya starts to remember the times when she is oppressed. During the trance, '[Zakeya's] wail went back and back to such times and others she could not forget like a

¹²² Nawal El Saadawi, *God Dies by the Nile*, trans. Sherif Hetata (Reading: Zed Books, 1985), p. 89.

¹²³ Scott Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power* (Chapel Hill: the University of North Caroline Press, 2007), p. 9.

¹²⁴ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 114.

¹²⁵ Nawal El Saadawi, *God Dies by the Nile*, trans. Sherif Hetata (Reading: Zed Books, 1985), p. 74.

¹²⁶ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Zed Books, 2002), pp. 137-38.

¹²⁷ Nawal El Saadawi, *God Dies by the Nile*, trans. Sherif Hetata (Reading: Zed Books, 1985), pp. 73-4.

¹²⁸ Nawal El Saadawi, 'Love and Sex in the Life of the Arabs', *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Zed Books, 2002), p. 138.

lament which has no end, and sees no end to all the pain in life'.¹²⁹ Her body gives the voices for the unspeakable pain in her life, the wife beating experienced by her mother and herself, the abusive experience of female genital mutilation and the trauma of giving births to children who die early.

El Saadawi uses dissidence strategy to demolish oppression. As she claims, '[...] it is important for us to identify the new victims and the new victimizers in the neocolonial era—for we do not live in a postcolonial era as the postmodernists claim'.¹³⁰ In *God Dies by the Nile*, Zakeya represents El Saadawi's nationalist-feminist image. Her eyes that are 'wide open' and 'quite brazen' create a narrative space that responds to the double colonisation of patriarchy in the Eastern-Western cultural encounters.¹³¹ Her return of the Mayor's gaze uncovers the Mayor's fear. For Foucault, gaze secures power over the object.¹³² For Daphne Grace, male sadistic and masochistic gaze demonstrates men's fear of women's power 'to castrate and to reproduce'.¹³³ El Saadawi utilises Zakeya's body to formulate a corporeal rebellion that reverses male scopophilia. French poststructuralist feminists after the 1960s challenge patriarchy under the banners of 'the death of God, the death of man, the death of the privileged work of art'.¹³⁴ For instance, Luce Irigaray revises Freudian theory of women as either vaginal lack or clitoral activity.¹³⁵ Monique Wittig argues that women are a myth because they are produced both by biology and history.¹³⁶ She claims that women are compelled into their inferior roles and that "'woman" does not exist for us; it is only an imaginary formation'.¹³⁷ Poststructuralist feminism constructs femininity left as a blank by patriarchal symbolic order. For example, Mary Ann Doane argues that cinema produces

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 75.

¹³⁰ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* (London: Zed Books, 1998), p. 174.

¹³¹ Nawal El Saadawi, *God Dies by the Nile*, trans. Sherif Hetata (Reading: Zed Books, 1985), p. 17.

¹³² Daphne Grace, *The Woman in the Muslim Mask: Veiling and Identity in Postcolonial Literature* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), p. 32.

¹³³ Op. Cit.

¹³⁴ Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (New York: Schocken, 1981), p. xi.

¹³⁵ Luce Irigaray, 'This Sex Which is Not One', *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, eds., Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken, 1981), p. 99.

¹³⁶ Monique Wittig, 'One is Not Born a Woman', *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, eds. Katie Conboy, Nadia and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 310.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 313.

voyeuristic pleasure, 'reduplicating the spectator's position in relation to the woman as screen'.¹³⁸

In *God Dies by the Nile*, *Zars*, demonstrated through Zakeya, are corporeal narratives, and this constitutes her absence in language. For Juliet Mitchell, *zars* are related to hysteria and deal with the loss of position in polygamous society.¹³⁹ Mitchell regards human emotions and behaviours, deemed normal or pathological, as having relevance to hysteria.¹⁴⁰ For Mitchell, the emptiness of inner feelings in a hysteric person can produce both creative and traumatic responses.¹⁴¹ Also, according to Mitchell, hysteria is feminised in psychoanalysis. Mitchell's approach to hysteria in psychoanalysis would challenge patriarchal explanation in Oedipal complex. In *God Dies by the Nile*, Zakeya's bodies in *zars* register a history of suffering in which madness expresses the silence. I argue that female madness in El Saadawi's representation expands discourses of women's oppression to include women's sexual fantasy and cultural play. Firdaus in *Woman at Point Zero* is an example.

In *Woman at Point Zero*, Firdaus seeks true love and El Saadawi utilises her to point out the textual construction of sexuality. Firdaus demonstrates a predominantly passive-aggressive masochistic corporeal strategy. Her silent corporeal counterattacks would remain unheard, vanquished alongside her death, unless through the female psychiatrist's writing. Georges Tarabishi, using Freudian psychoanalysis to read contemporary Arabic literature, criticises El Saadawi's corporeal strategies as counterproductive. He maintains that by creating the sexually oppressive heroines such as Bahiah and Firdaus, El Saadawi's feminist rebellion in fact conforms to internalising the patriarchal oppressive thinking.¹⁴² Tarabishi disagrees with El Saadawian heroines because for him, Firdaus's masochistic corporeal

¹³⁸ Mary Ann Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator', *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, eds. Katie Conboy, Nadia and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 179.

¹³⁹ Juliet Mitchell, *Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. 238.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁴² Georges Tarabishi, *Woman Against Her Sex: A Critique of Nawal el-Saadawi*, ed. Basil Hatim and Elisabeth Orsini (London: Saqi Books, 1988), p. 10.

strategy makes her a voluntary prostitute and practise frigidity to annul the patriarchal logic.¹⁴³ As Tarabishi states, ‘Can we then imagine a more neurotic condition than that of a woman who chooses to be a prostitute and a murderess in order to wage a war of the sexes, reassert herself and win “the crown of a princess” in a society of men?’¹⁴⁴ I suggest that El Saadawi creates such a sexualised heroine as narrative strategies and that consequently, they cannot be taken as simply the models of feminist liberation. As Richard Jacquemond points out, realism in Arabic context assimilates the function of social guidance.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, ideas of social reform and didacticism are present in realist representation in Arabic, such as El Saadawi’s writing. For El Saadawi, the psychotic form of sexuality stands for suppressed sexual desire. Firdaus’s sexual rebellions represent her fantasy, which remains silent in male-dominant nationalist-feminist discourses.

In *Woman at Point Zero*, Firdaus usurps a prostitute’s position, as she claims, ‘A prostitute always says yes, and then names her price. If she says no she ceases to be a prostitute’.¹⁴⁶ El Saadawi, practising frigidity is a means through which to defy patriarchy and more importantly, to assert the autonomous interpretation of her body:

But when I was a prostitute I protected myself, fought back at every moment, was never off guard. To protect my deeper inner self from men, I offered them only an outer shell. I kept my heart and soul, and let my body play its role, its passive, inert, unfeeling role. I learnt to resist by being passive, to keep myself whole by offering nothing, to live by withdrawing to a world of my own.¹⁴⁷

Due to El Saadawi’s political ideas to speak through Firdaus, she ought to become a tragedy in the narrative design. El Saadawi’s anti-Freudian opinions aim at Western superpowers and Sadat’s affiliation with America. The emphasis on Firdaus’s competency of education indicates the legacy of Nasser’s rule when he nationalises Egyptian feminism. Firdaus, whose narcissism reflects sexual fantasy, should not be obscured by gender equality discourses.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁴⁴ Op. Cit.

¹⁴⁵ Richard Jacquemond, *Conscience of the Nation: Writers, State, and Society in Modern Egypt*, trans. David Tresilian (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), p. 88.

¹⁴⁶ Nawal El Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Zed Books, 2001), p. 89.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 85.

Firdaus's quest for love on equal footing with the nationalist revolutionary, Ibrahim, is dashed, since he marries a wealthy woman to raise his social status. Ibrahim betrays his nationalist cause and this demonstrates El Saadawi's disappointment at Sadat's policies. There is no true love in Ibrahim. He wants her only because he can have sex for free. Many years after they break up, Firdaus encounters Ibrahim at her brothel, realising that she has been regarded as a prostitute all along. Prostitution is El Saadawi's Occidental critique of consumerist culture represented by Firdaus's contradiction of wealth and despising of it. For Anne McClintock, fetishism as sexual deviation is invented in European modernity to police the minorities.¹⁴⁸ For El Saadawi, sexual fetishism of Firdaus's body exhibits Western sexual and cultural projection. El Saadawi uses prostitution to illustrate gender inequality. However, in the Islamic context, prostitution is not necessarily an oppressive practice. Bouhdiba's account shows that the presence of the prostitute is deemed the place of freedom, apart from a patriarchal phenomenon: 'She represents a double promise of freedom: freedom from social constraint and freedom from the constraints of desire'.¹⁴⁹ In a highly normative gendered society, prostitution is an ambivalent place. El Saadawi sees it as a practice of sexual oppression and it reveals El Saadawi's class privilege.

As Firdaus murders the pimp, who forces her to marry him in order to control her wealth, she condemns heterosexual relationship. She criticises the emphasis on feminine beauty, exhibiting a narcissistic element:

I crossed by a number of men working in the police force, but none of them realized who I was. Perhaps they thought I was a princess, or a queen, or a goddess. For who else would hold her head so high as she walked? And who else's footsteps could resound in this way as they struck the ground? They watched me as I passed by, and I kept my head high like a challenge to their lascivious eyes. I moved along as calm as ice, my steps beating down with a steady unfaltering sound. For I knew that they stood there waiting for a

¹⁴⁸ Anne McClintock, 'Screwing the System: Sexwork, Race, and the Law', *Feminism and Postmodernism*, eds. Margaret Ferguson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 104.

¹⁴⁹ Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Saqi Books, 1998), p. 195.

woman like me to stumble, so that they could throw themselves on her like birds of prey.¹⁵⁰

Freud formulates femininity in such a way that women are subject to normative regulations in relation to men.¹⁵¹ Freud acknowledges that girls are bisexual and are like little boys until they develop a normative sexual relationship with men.¹⁵² Freud suggests that the constitution of feminine normative sexuality will not occur without a struggle.¹⁵³ According to Freud, sexual differences are a strict normalising practice and those who refuse the struggling process would inevitably lead to hysteric symptoms.¹⁵⁴ The representation of Firdaus borders on being a victim and a manipulator. El Saadawi uses prostitution to escape from being men's property. In *Women at Point Zero*, prostitution is a trope of women's rebellion because they can have a form of income. When she is raped by a policeman for the first time on the street after escaping the coffee shop owner, she is given money. She realises that '[my] father had never given me money'.¹⁵⁵ This threatens direct male control, as she realises that her bodies are exploited. Firdaus earns income from prostitution and this serves to criticise Anwar Sadat's surrender to capitalism.

Same-sex practice is a strategy accusing patriarchal laws in heterosexual relationships in El Saadawi's writing. In *Woman at Point Zero*, same-sex practice is a cultural interstitial realm in which Western psychoanalysis is employed and becomes hybridised with Islamic concept of gender relationship. El Saadawi uses the frame story of the encounter between the female psychiatrist and Firdaus to ascertain that the novel is based on a real woman's life. The frame story, which starts '[t]his is the story of a real woman',¹⁵⁶ is a statement of making the silent figures heard. Firdaus's accounts of personal history ends in her words before

¹⁵⁰ Nawal El Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Zed Books, 2001), p. 97.

¹⁵¹ Jacqueline Rose, 'Introduction--II', *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*, eds. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, trans. Jacqueline Rose (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p. 28.

¹⁵² Juliet Mitchell, 'Introduction--I', *Feminine sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*, eds. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, trans. Jacqueline Rose (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p. 24.

¹⁵³ Op. Cit.

¹⁵⁴ Jacqueline Rose, 'Introduction--II', *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*, eds. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, trans. Jacqueline Rose (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p. 28.

¹⁵⁵ Nawal El Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Zed Books, 2001), p. 64.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 1.

execution: 'Tomorrow morning I shall no longer be here. I will be in a place which no one knows. This journey to an unknown destination, to a place unknown to all those who live on this earth, be they king or prince, or ruler, fills me with pride'.¹⁵⁷ Firdaus's love relationship, be it heterosexual or same-sex relationship, has no beginning and no ending. Melissa Matthes argues for a linkage between El Saadawi as an autobiographer and as a political figure that demonstrates a Shahrazad legacy.¹⁵⁸ Like Shahrazad, story-telling is a strategy that demonstrates transformative power of self-narratives. As Matthes states, writing memoirs for El Saadawi is designed to 'dispel the fallacies of Western misconceptions, whether such misconceptions take the form of depicting Shahrazad as an exotic belly dancer or of reducing women's oppression to the presence of a piece of cloth across their faces'.¹⁵⁹ Firdaus is devised to deconstruct Orientalist stereotypes of the erotic harem. El Saadawi uses her as a speaking agent against these fixed negative images of 'captivating women creatures who use magic and sorcery to reach their lovers' in *The Thousand and One Nights* in her article entitled 'The Heroine in Arab Literature'.¹⁶⁰

The same-sex relationship between the female doctor and Firdaus in the frame story is a strategy to express the pre-Oedipal same-sex relationship. El Saadawi describes the homoerotic element as if they were in deep sleep, in a dream, and in water: 'I swam through its waters. I was naked and knew not how to swim'.¹⁶¹ Fedwa Malti-Douglas considers this closed watery prison environment a womb-like space between dream and reality.¹⁶² During the encounter, the female doctor feels as if she were to meet her lover: 'It was a feeling I had known only once before, many years ago. I was on my way to meet the first man I loved for

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 101.

¹⁵⁸ Melissa Matthes, 'Shahrazad's Sisters: Storytelling and Politics in the Memoirs of Mernissi and Ashrawi', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 19 (1999), p. 78.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 72.

¹⁶⁰ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Zed Books, 2002), p. 161.

¹⁶¹ Nawal El Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Zed Books, 2001), p. 7.

¹⁶² Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 48 and p. 50.

the first time'.¹⁶³ The frame story sets up women's solidarity as the primacy of interpretation. This enclosed space creates silence between the two women as an alternative response to patriarchy. As Julia Kristeva suggests, sentences are uttered in sequential order and consequently, this fragments timeless eternity.¹⁶⁴ In this Pre-Oedipal space, children communicate not through naming but through mothers' bodies.¹⁶⁵ In *Woman at Point Zero*, there is another same-sex love relationship between Firdaus and Ms. Iqbal at the secondary school where she studies. In El Saadawi's writing, female same-sex relationship is a narrative strategy for creating Egyptian women's histories:

I [Firdaus] held her [Ms. Iqbal's] eyes in mind, took her hand in mine. The feeling of our hands' touching was strange, sudden. It was a feeling that made my body tremble with a deep distant pleasure, more distant than the age of my remembered life, deeper than the consciousness I had carried with me throughout. I could feel it somewhere, like a part of my being which had been born with me when I was born, but had not grown with me when I had grown, like a part of my being that I had once known, but left behind when I was born.¹⁶⁶

Firdaus's sexual relationship, either with Ms. Iqbal or Ibrahim, is aborted until she meets the female doctor in jail. Female same-sex relationship intercepts the androcentric libidinal economy. El Saadawi's pre-Oedipal infantile same-sex relationship seeks to elevate motherhood in patriarchal society. She uses Firdaus to signify a linguistic possibility beyond libidinal economy as 'having no thing', in Luce Irigaray's theorisation, I argue. Irigaray reformulates Freud's penis-envy theory and argues for women's phallic difference: 'Woman's castration is defined as her having nothing you can see, as her *having nothing*'.¹⁶⁷ Irigaray supplements Freud's theory: '*Nothing to be seen is equivalent to having no thing. No being and no truth.*'¹⁶⁸ Firdaus's femininity is not determined by the logic of the penis. The traits concerning feminine passivity and passive-aggressiveness are a fluid play.

¹⁶³ Nawal El Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Zed Books, 2001), p. 6.

¹⁶⁴ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 114.

¹⁶⁵ Op. Cit.

¹⁶⁶ Nawal El Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Zed Books, 2001), pp. 29-30.

¹⁶⁷ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 48.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 48.

In this section, I have regarded the Western and Eastern elements in El Saadawi's anti-Orientalism, that is, her objection against Western discursive domination, and anti-normative gender politics. The Mayor represents the phallogocentric linguistic order and Western capitalism in *God Dies by the Nile* and Zakeya's eyes subvert the layered discursive oppressions. Zeinab represents the limitation of women's speeches. In *Woman at Point Zero*, male sexual assaults lead to women's suppressed desire. Firdaus marks the possibility to represent women's sexuality by madness. In *Two Women in One*, Bahiah's middle-class position enables her to be more fluid in her gender performance. In *Woman at Point Zero*, same-sex relationship remains a possibility of seeking multiple femininities.

The Cultural Interstitial Space in El Saadawi's Linguistic Play

In this section, I discuss El Saadawi's experimental novels, *The Circling Song*, *The Fall of the Imam* and *The Innocence of the Devil*, to further explore El Saadawi's textual world of Egyptian women's liberation struggle in relation to sexuality and nation. I look at the brother-sister dyad in *The Circling Song*, the narrative fragmentation in *The Fall of the Imam* as strategies to give women their voices and the strategy of female madness as a feminist expression in *The Innocence of the Devil*. The ambivalent sexual relationship between the father and daughter relationship in *The Fall of the Imam* and between the brother and sister relationship in *The Circling Song* expresses El Saadawi's desire to reform the heterosexual relationship. The reform is directed toward the fundamentalist revival and static brotherhood of the *umma*, which does not help benefit Muslim women from the poor strata who are mobilised in the movement. Stefano Allievi suggests that technology allows Muslim diasporic communities to have contacts with countries of origin.¹⁶⁹ Muslim women's identities in the *umma* have internal and transnational networks in El Saadawi's writing.

¹⁶⁹ Stefano Allievi and Jørgen S. Nielsen, *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities* (Boson: Brille, 2003), p. 10.

In *The Circling Song*, El Saadawi continues the link of patriarchy, sexuality and religion through the brother-sister twins, Hamido and Hamida, who are so identical as to produce the effect of being indistinguishable:

Hamido and Hamida had been one embryo, growing inside one womb. From the beginning they had been one cell, a single entity. Then everything split into two, even the tiniest features, even the minute, tiny muscle under each eye. No longer could anyone distinguish Hamido from Hamida. Even their mother used to confuse them.¹⁷⁰

Hamido, the brother twin, is given a knife by their father to murder his sister because she is raped by a man and becomes pregnant. Sexual relationship outside marriage is considered adultery, no matter how it happens. The narrative is shown to have neither a beginning nor an ending as the ending of *The Circling Song* suggests:

In fact, there is no ending, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the end and the beginning are adjoined in a single, looping strand; where that thread ends and where it begins can be discerned only with great difficulty.¹⁷¹

The narrative of *The Circling Song* centres on the brother-sister dyad. In Arabic context, the brother-sister relationship is a continuation of the patrilineal structure. As Suad Joseph's research indicates, in Arabic context, 'The brother, then, as a representative of the patrilineal line, exerts patriarchal authority to protect and control the sister in order to maintain family honor'.¹⁷² In *The Circling Song*, the patriarchal control of the father and brother is suggested by the father who hands the knife to the brother. Also, the brother-sister relationship is complicated by the brother's romanticised role of protecting and caring for the sister even after marriage. As Joseph points out from a Lebanese context, 'Sisters identified with their brothers as their security. A Woman without a brother was seen as somewhat naked in the world'.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Circling Song*, trans. Basil Hatim and Malcolm Williams (London: Zed Books, 1989), p. 23.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹⁷² Suad Joseph, 'Brother-Sister Relationships: Connectivity, Love and Power in the Reproduction of Patriarchy in Lebanon', *Intimate Selving in Arab Families*, ed. Suad Joseph (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), p. 120.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

The Circling Song represents female genital mutilation under Sadat's rule. Not only is Hamida chased by her brother's knife, signifying power, but she is also raped by a policeman after she flees to Cairo. Familial gender asymmetry is coupled by the policy of the government and the cleft in Hamida's sexual organs, which is demonstrated by the policeman's power: 'I'm the government'.¹⁷⁴ In 1977, large-scale demonstrations broke out in Egypt as a result of the price raise on essential goods.¹⁷⁵ The World Bank and international capitalist economy played a role in pressurising the Egyptian government to make the decision of the price raise. El Saadawi criticises neo-colonialism in Egypt. As Stefano Allievi comments on the process of networks in Europe, the Muslim diaspora and the countries of origin, Salman Rushdie affair and female genital mutilation are examples that the West is connected to countries of origin.¹⁷⁶ Also, *Jihad* shows that it has entered Western consciousness and it is a vocabulary that the West understands Islam in the countries of origin and in diasporic communities.¹⁷⁷

In *The Circling Song*, Hamido resembles Hamida even in his sexual organs: 'Hamido stole a quick glance between his thighs, but did not find the member in question. Instead, and in its place, he found a small cleft which reminded him of the cleft he used to see on Hamida's body'.¹⁷⁸ Hamido happens to have a shrivelled penis that he sometimes has difficulty in establishing that he is not a woman. A medical examiner is even summoned to measure the 'shrivelled and terror-stricken member' with a 'finely calibrated plastic ruler'.¹⁷⁹ On the other hand, Hamida has a penis but it is cut off as she lifts up her *gallabiyya* and realises that 'the familiar appendage was not there; in its place she found a small cleft, which

¹⁷⁴ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Circling Song*, Basil Hatim and Malcolm Williams (London: Zed Books, 1989), p.32.

¹⁷⁵ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* (London: Zed Books, 1998), p. 14.

¹⁷⁶ Stefano Allievi and Jørgen S. Nielsen, *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities* (Boson: Brille, 2003), p. 14. Salman Rushdie published his novel, *The Satanic Verses*, in 1988. Many Muslims accused him of blasphemy, and in 1989, the Iranian political and religious leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, ordered a *fatwa*, a juristic ruling concerning Islamic law, to kill him. Rushdie Affair refers to the violent reaction by some Muslims caused by the publication of this novel.

¹⁷⁷ Op. Cit.

¹⁷⁸ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Circling Song*, trans. Basil Hatim and Malcolm Williams (London: Zed Books, 1989), p. 41.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 49.

looked just like that old, closed-up wound'.¹⁸⁰ In *The Circling Song*, the brother-sister encounters are an endless circle which introduces the Shahrazad figure as a narrative device to negotiate the meanings of Egyptian womanhood in a postcolonial context. Suzanne Gauch demonstrates the significance of Shahrazad as a powerful narrative ploy for seeking women's identities in the previous French colonies.¹⁸¹ She suggests that the translations of *The Thousand and One Nights* make Shahrazad an Orientalist image to the West but they also contribute to the possibilities of contemporary interpretations. For Gauch, these Orientalist images include 'chaste beauty', 'wily seductress', cultural stasis and homogenous Oriental or Muslim woman.¹⁸² She points out that Shahrazad is capable of transforming the paths of past and future by her creative narrative ability in the present.¹⁸³

In *The Circling Song*, the brother hunts her down from the village to Cairo to kill her, like his father tells him to do: 'Only blood washes out shame. Go on, follow her'!¹⁸⁴ The brother-sister encounters seek to define the meanings of female genital mutilation and the gender relationship in postcolonial Egypt. The chase, aimed at washing out the shame with blood, ends up in the revelation of the age-old wound between Hamida's thighs: 'Hamida lay on the cement floor, surrounded by four cement walls, her arms and legs rigid and bound together into a single bundle. Between her thighs hung the iron padlock of a hard metal belt'.¹⁸⁵ Female genital mutilation is bizarrely contrasted with Hamida's mini-dress in Cairo worn by the wealthier class. Her wound is compared with the shrunken dress that exposes her 'arms, shoulders, bosom and thighs'.¹⁸⁶ For El Saadawi, the wound in heterosexual relationships needs to be given a voice in Egyptian postcolonial context, including the issues of honour killing and female genital mutilation. In *The Circling Song*, Hamida dies again and

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁸¹ Suzanne Gauch, *Liberating Shahrazad: Feminism, Postcolonialism, and Islam* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 6.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. xi.

¹⁸³ Ibid., pp. 5-6.

¹⁸⁴ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Circling Song*, trans. Basil Hatim and Malcolm Williams (London: Zed Books, 1989), p. 27.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 74.

again under her brother's knife. The circular gesture constructs meanings of female genital mutilation: 'He [Hamido] looked between its legs. Seeing there the old, scabbed over wound, he knew it was a female, and that she was dead. He clapped his other palm over her, and she died again'.¹⁸⁷ Female genital mutilation establishes discursive inequality in Muslim national and transnational networks in El Saadawi's writing. She uses Hamida's narrative to construct heterosexual relationships and female genital mutilation. Seyla Benhabib suggests the tension between national sovereignty and international human rights in the postcolonial era.¹⁸⁸ As Benhabib elaborates on the concept of democratic iteration: 'Defining the identity of the democratic people is an ongoing process of constitutional self-creation'.¹⁸⁹ She uses the scarf affair taking place in France in 1989 as an example of the ongoing process of self-creation.¹⁹⁰ The discursive contestation is caught between the tension of interpreting Islamic patriarchal oppression and protecting religious freedom, and Benhabib argues that the scarf affair does show the need of space for immigrant women to speak up for their interpretation.¹⁹¹ In the context of immigration in France, veiling does not signify tradition between generations that parents intend to pass down. Rather, Benhabib suggests that wearing scarves 'is resignified as an act of conscience and as the expression of one's moral freedom'¹⁹², since for the immigrants, veiling is an assertive statement: 'You should respect it as long as it does not infringe on your rights and liberties'.¹⁹³

In *The Circling Song*, female genital mutilation articulates Egyptian women's protests that it is caught in the postmodernist discourse, whilst the practice is a political symbolic manipulation between the economic superpowers and the ruler's inability to cope with neo-colonial pressure. Female genital mutilation has to be defined in the unequal process of

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 72.

¹⁸⁸ Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents, and Citizens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 21.

¹⁸⁹ Op. Cit.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 183-98.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 187.

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 194.

¹⁹³ Op. Cit.

Orientalism and Occidentalism. In Cairo, Hamida becomes a maid in a wealthy family. Her genital mutilation appears again as she slaughters the ewe for the family:

She washed the animal's thighs carefully, from below and above and in between. Her eyes wide in surprise: the space between was smooth and sealed shut, showing no appendage. At the uppermost part lay a long cleft that looked like an old wound.¹⁹⁴

Up against her master and mistress's gluttony, Hamida's body stoops because of her class background and because of her hunger. The pain from her thighs and the trail of blood are contrasted with the mistress's wealth and stinginess. Hamida is compared to the animal, which belongs to the family's property. As Anne McClintock points out, colonised people are homogenously regarded as sexually degenerate in Western discourses.¹⁹⁵ El Saadawi suggests that economic domination is left not dealt with concerning sexual and class-based exploitation. She argues that the Orientalist image of the oppressed Muslim woman is predominant and that postmodernism is continuous with a hegemonic view of the West. El Saadawi's nationalist discourse is considered Islamist in the 1990s. For instance, in 1991 during Mubarak's reign, Arab Women's Solidarity Association was banned. Mona Helmi, El Saadawi's daughter, claimed that the association was labelled both as Islamists and Westernised.¹⁹⁶ This indicates how these arbitrary labels attached to El Saadawi's gender politics are influenced by changes brought about by the interaction between the *umma* and the West. A young generation of women's rights emerged which marked the tension between the older and the new generations of activists.¹⁹⁷ A new generation of Islamist activists raised their voices in the 1980s. For this generation, Mubarak's ambivalent relationship with activists of women's rights was characterised by his allowance of women's activities and his

¹⁹⁴ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Circling Song*, Basil Hatim and Malcolm Williams (London: Zed Books, 1989), pp. 48-9.

¹⁹⁵ Anne McClintock, 'Screwing the System: Sexwork, Race, and the Law', *Feminism and Postmodernism*, eds. Margaret Ferguson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 115

¹⁹⁶ Nadje Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 81.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

repressive regulations on women's activities of association.¹⁹⁸ In the 1980s and 1990s, the non-governmental organisations sought funding from foreign donors.¹⁹⁹ The international donors and their agendas also had an impact on the new generations of activists in Egypt.²⁰⁰

The Fall of the Imam particularly points to Sadat's regime. Writing caused El Saadawi to be exiled by Sadat and resulted in her American journey in 1993. It deals with cultural amalgamations in Sadat's postcolonial regime. Further, *The Fall of the Imam* embodies El Saadawi's political ideas of postmodernism and challenges Western cultural hegemony. Bint Allah signifies the cultural admix process. *The Fall of the Imam* opens the narrative with the chase after Bint Allah. The chase is caused by Bint Allah's linguistic transgression against phallogocentrism. The fact that she usurps the position given to Jesus Christ by claiming that she is the daughter of God and that she is born of the virgin points out that social and religious conventions treat women unfairly: 'My mother died a virgin and so will I. They said: You are the child of sin and your mother was stoned to death'.²⁰¹ El Saadawi's allusion to the monotheistic Scriptures is used to establish her critique of gender inequality established in religious discourses. Jesus Christ is born by the Virgin Mary, whilst Bint Allah is an illicit child, or even the daughter of a whore. The fact that Bint Allah is the illicit daughter of the Imam born after a night's recklessness puts a danger to the Imam since in his heart he harbours the fear of being betrayed by women. The Imam is afraid of Bint Allah because her presence threatens his invincibility and he has inferiority complex in relationships. Answering the Imam's assumption that 'a daughter would never kill her father even if he rapes her like a wolf',²⁰² Bint Allah retorts, 'You, she said, are the one who is in love, the one who stands under the lights and the lights are blinding your eyes. Look carefully'.²⁰³ Bint Allah is chased by the Imam because she has the potential to reveal his infidelity and she has

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 80.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 79.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 90-1.

²⁰¹ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Fall of the Imam*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Saqi Books, 2002), p. 13.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 52.

²⁰³ Op. Cit.

to be on the run to save her life. Indeed, Bint Allah's presence in the narrative suggests the danger of female power because it has power to change meanings. She questions the Imam's sexual desire when he asks her about the reason driving his fair wife to have extramarital relationship with the black slave. 'But what can her lover have that her husband does not have? Love, said I [Bint Allah]'.²⁰⁴

The religious allusion sets off Bint Allah's narrative journey which alternates between textual reality and discursive references: Bint Allah asks, 'Why do you always let the criminal go free and punish the victim'?²⁰⁵ Her life is not to be tied down by any authorities, suggested by her permanent exile. El Saadawi's writing reflects the influence that poststructuralist feminism has on her. Bint Allah's presence signifies how women's bodies can represent the heterogeneous discourses in one text. This strategy echoes Julia Kristeva's idea of inter-textuality. It refers to systems of signs are transposed in a discursive field.²⁰⁶ The narration of Bint Allah's journey shuffles between Bint Allah as the first-person narrator and the narrator of the text. Earl G. Ingersoll comments on the technique that is mediated through Bint Allah: 'Often that voice [the consciousness of the narrator in the text] merges with the central consciousness of Bint Allah, so that [El] Saadawi's voice is also Bint Allah's'.²⁰⁷ According to Ingersoll, this technique brings the expectation between the reader and author closer.²⁰⁸ Further, in *The Fall of the Imam*, 'I' is a multiple consciousness. It refers to Bint Allah: 'When I was a child God used to visit me while I slept'.²⁰⁹ The narrative voice adopts 'I', when the Imam gives his speech at the Big Feast.²¹⁰ The narrative does not settle for a singular and predictable 'I'.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 143.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

²⁰⁶ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 156.

²⁰⁷ Earl G. Ingersoll, 'Nawal El Saadawi's *The Fall of the Imam* and the Possibility of a Feminine Writing', *The International Fiction Review* 28 (2001), p. 28.

²⁰⁸ Op. Cit.

²⁰⁹ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Fall of the Imam*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Saqi Books, 2002), p. 20.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 111.

The Fall of the Imam is a national allegory in which El Saadawi uses Bint Allah to convey her voices against Sadat. Indeed, as Sabry Hafez remarks, *The Fall of the Imam* is marked by a strong authorial presence.²¹¹ He further points out that the novel is a political allegory founded on Sadat's regime.²¹² According to Rita Ann Faulkner's research, the national allegory genre has a tradition in the contemporary Egyptian writing in which female bodies are made to symbolise the land.²¹³ Following Homi K. Bhabha's national double writing which is both pedagogical and performative, Faulkner argues that the writing of the national allegory is also double.²¹⁴ In other words, the national allegory genre can be adopted to stabilise the relationship between female bodies and the nation; it can also strategise female bodies to strive for political and social negotiations. Rather than focusing on a developmental plot construction, *The Fall of the Imam* concentrates on narrative acts which oscillate among different textual allusions such as the monotheistic Scriptures, *The Thousand and One Nights* and Sadat's fundamentalist revival. The Imam, who has absolute power, is linked to the nation and God. This linkage is a strategy pointing to Western cultural hegemony by representing Sadat as the father in terms of psychoanalytical theoretical power.

In *The Fall of the Imam*, Bint Allah re-inscribes the Shahrazad narrative. In an encounter with Bint Allah, the Imam tells her that he is shocked that Shahrayar's fair-skinned wife would choose his black slave over him. Bint Allah retorts with the rhetoric of love. In this way, El Saadawi inserts the modern idea of gender equality into Islamic concepts of gender relationship. By appropriating *The Thousand and One Nights* narrative about Shahrazad, El Saadawi inserts the process of cultural amalgamations commenced by Qasim Amin's appropriation of Western modernity. Sara Ahmed argues that the space of home is mediated through skin as a form of inhabiting the space but not through an oppositional space

²¹¹ Sabry Hafez, 'Women's Narrative in Modern Arabic Literature: A Typology', *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature*, eds., Roger Allen, Hilary Kilpatrick and Ed de Moor (London: Saqi Books, 1995), p. 167.

²¹² Ibid., p. 169.

²¹³ Rita Ann Faulkner, *National Allegory: Land and Body in Nawal El Saadawi and Assia Djebar* (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign: PhD Diss., 2005), p. 49.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

of being home and away.²¹⁵ She suggests that ‘by being defined negatively in this way, home becomes associated with stasis, boundaries, identity and fixity’.²¹⁶ The encounter between the Imam and Bint Allah, as a narrative of inhabiting home, is mediated by other discursive encounters. Home is arrived at by having numerous encounters with the West. The poststructuralists’ ideas of feminine writing are transposed into El Saadawi’s writing by her knowledge in psychoanalysis. French feminists’ ideas, such as Cixous and Kristeva, are characterised by their refusal to adopt labels such as feminism and sexism to their feminine writing because these terms contradict their intention to challenge phallogocentric drive to stabilise signifying systems.²¹⁷ In *The Fall of the Imam, The Thousand and One Nights* is arrived at through other encounters, such as the Imam and Bint Allah’s mother’s narratives. El Saadawi utilises the creation of the character, Bint Allah, as a discursive mediation that dissolves the oppositional thinking of being home and away.

In *The Fall of the Imam*, another example of Egypt as home, not subject to fixity, is the creation of the Philosopher, who works for the Imam in *The Fall of the Imam*. He is hired from overseas and is converted to Islam because he works for the Imam. Moreover, the Philosopher is a test-tube baby. The origin of his identities is called into question. The Philosopher’s test-tube baby background merges with Bint Allah’s in that they are narrative devices to re-visit the male-dominated view in which Jesus Christ is said to be God’s child, not born through sexuality. This background challenges the origin of identities. He cannot resort to a patrilineal origin from his father:

He died without telling me how I was born, and my grandmother knew nothing about his life at all. If I asked her, she would say you looked a handsome baby through the glass of the test-tube, and in my sleep I used to dream of myself swimming in a test-tube looking for my mother when suddenly a huge whale swallowed me up in one gulp, and a moment later I would wake up bathed in sweat.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 88-9.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

²¹⁷ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 159.

²¹⁸ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Fall of the Imam*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Saqi Books, 2002), p. 119.

In *The Fall of the Imam*, the concept of Virgin Mary, along with Bint Allah and the Philosopher, is used to criticise the myth of female virginity. This strategy challenges the silence of Egyptian women's sexuality in the male-dominant representation of women in nationalist discourses. The evocation of Virgin Mary also demonstrates El Saadawi's concern with sectarian strife in Egypt. In *The Fall of the Imam*, the Philosopher disputes Virgin Mary's supernatural power that the Copts claim.²¹⁹ El Saadawi uses this to criticise Sadat's manipulation between Muslim and Coptic communities in Egypt to deal with Nasser's socialist forces.²²⁰ She further utilises this to broach that both Coptic and Muslim families practise female genital mutilation on their daughters.²²¹ El Saadawi challenges patriarchal symbolic order in the Islamic concept of female presence, including her body, her mind and her voices that are considered men's property.

Writing itself is the most powerful strategy accomplishing Egyptian women's liberation. After all, the Philosopher's wife is raped as a child and she claims that the loss of her virginity inspires her ambition in writing. Therefore, she links writing to female virginity in that women are written out of the religious symbolic system. The Philosopher refers his test-tube baby background to Adam. He claims that he is sinless even when he is not born in marital relationship, or *nikah*, considered the only legitimate way through which one requires one's membership in society. The Philosopher explains, 'I was an embryo in a test-tube womb and knew nothing about adultery or sin or fornication'.²²² The Philosopher's identity is a process of definition resembling Bint Allah's. They make similar claims: 'My body was my own, and I had no desire to possess the body of somebody else'.²²³ His test-tube baby identity disputes God. He is the test-tube baby, from the West, who is hired in the East. He is also the

²¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 123-24.

²²⁰ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* (London: Zed Books, 1998), p. 186.

²²¹ Ibid., pp. 88-9.

²²² Nawal El Saadawi, *The Fall of the Imam*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Saqi Books, 2002), p. 125.

²²³ Ibid., p. 120.

culturally self-alienated subject who is lost in the tubes of Western cities and lives an insignificant mechanical life. Similar to him, Bint Allah's cultural origin cannot be traced: 'A woman without name, without father, without mother...'.²²⁴ The parentless identity confronts the family unit as the base of forming identities in Islam. Also, the textual encounter between Bint Allah and the Philosopher, one, the daughter of God and the other, test-tube baby, are not through face-to-face meeting but through the contact of consciousness. The 'I' consciousness is fragmented and comes from multiple time and space. El Saadawi's *The Fall of the Imam* represents the heterogeneous Egyptian modern space, which is constituted by self-regeneration of discourses and which does not depend on Western modernity only.

The Innocence of the Devil is an intricate narrative of three women's life stories, namely, Ganat, the Head Nurse, whose name is Narguiss, and Nefissa. Writing violates the logic of virginity and defies the male authorities as the standard of defining identities. The setting of the novel is a psychiatric hospital, formerly a palace. In *The Innocence of the Devil*, El Saadawi uses the word 'lesbian' in English to describe the relationship between Ganat and Narguiss. Narguiss is questioned by the Director of the psychiatric hospital, concerning her relationship with Ganat: 'To be a lesbian is a sin, don't you know that?'.²²⁵ Narguiss retorts: 'No, sir. It is not mentioned in God's Book'.²²⁶ Whilst male homosexual practices are condemnable in the Quran since it breaches the male homosocial bonding of God's community. As Kecia Ali relates to female same-sex love, 'There is no consensus as to whether or not the Qur'an even mentions female same-sex activity'.²²⁷ According to Ali's accounts, female same-sex sexual activities are less recorded than male homosexual acts because 'the most important is simply that many legal effects of sex depend on penetration by

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 144.

²²⁵ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Innocence of the Devil*, trans. Sherif Hetata (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 173.

²²⁶ Op. Cit.

²²⁷ Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), p. 81.

a penis'.²²⁸ Therefore, the question concerning female same-sex activities is whether or not compensation must be paid in the case if the hymen is ruptured.²²⁹

In *The Innocence of the Devil*, El Saadawi's challenge of religious sexual order is manifested in the perception of menstruation and the concept of feminine honour. Narguiss remembers that '[h]er mother called it the *bad blood* or the *monthly sickness*'.²³⁰ Another challenge is Narguiss's elastic hymen which does not shed blood on the night of her wedding. The inability to prove her virginity results in her father's suicide by his barber's razor the next morning. Narguiss's elastic hymen is used to accuse the religious patriarchal system of associating the hymen with chastity. The next morning, her father is found dead 'lying in a pool of blood with the white towel soaked in it'.²³¹ The blood represents the consequences for men when women's bodies are violated by other men in the patriarchal system. In *The Innocence of the Devil*, lesbian relationship represents women's erased history. Narguiss's father once says that '[women] were the accomplices of the Devil. They opened the doors to Hell'.²³² Islamic convention associates women with evil. Women are supposed to guard their bodies against spirits, or *genii*. Narguiss's father asks her, 'But daughter, why then was there no blood?'²³³ Narguiss abides by the Quranic teaching and 'she slept with her knees held together, her thighs closed so tightly that no human being or spirit could ever separate between them'.²³⁴ Narguiss turns her father's question to God: 'Tell me, God, where was the blood?'²³⁵ El Saadawi's answer is that the devil is the scapegoat of patriarchal oppression. The blank sheet signifies a hidden layer of text: Narguiss's lesbian relationship. Nefissa, another inmate of the psychiatric hospital, is raped by the Director, who represents God in her eyes. She is portrayed as the victim of believing in the Islamic teaching at school. While at

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 80.

²²⁹ Op. Cit.

²³⁰ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Innocence of the Devil*, trans. Sherif Hetata (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 120. The Italics are marked in the original.

²³¹ Ibid., p. 44.

²³² Ibid., p. 167.

²³³ Ibid., p. 46.

²³⁴ Ibid., p. 39.

²³⁵ Ibid., p. 46.

school, Sheikh Masoud tells Nefissa to be in awe of God that she must not open her eyes to God: 'Sheikh Masoud said that if she opened her eyes she would be struck blind by the powerful light'.²³⁶

In *The Innocence of the Devil*, the dialogues that take place between Nefissa and the Director where she is forced to act the role of an obedient slave is an indication of sexual hierarchy in heterosexual relationship. The Director asks Nefissa, 'You shall be my obedient wife, Nefissa'.²³⁷ Female return of gaze is a significant strategy in El Saadawi's writing. Nefissa's failure to gaze back against the Director results in the rape. Fedwa Malti-Douglas argues that the Islamic theocratic debate unfolds in the psychiatric hospital.²³⁸ Miriam Cooke places El Saadawi in the ranks of 'Islamic feminists' because El Saadawi's opposition to fundamentalism needs to be framed in a wider global context when the distortions of Islam happen.²³⁹ Narguiss is able to gaze back against the Director after thirty years when she receives Ganat's medical prescription: 'For thirty years she had reached out with her hand to take written orders from him. For thirty years she had stood with bent head, unable to lift her eyes to him'.²⁴⁰ Female return of gaze as a writing strategy echoes Luce Irigaray's critique of Freud whose theory of sexual difference depends on gaze.²⁴¹ It is by visual perception that women are conceived as lack.²⁴² Narguiss's return of gaze is threatening to the Director because she reveals men's scopophilia relies on his gaze as penis. Without specularising penis, men cannot secure their domination.²⁴³ Therefore, Narguiss's return of gaze threatens to reveal the Director's fear of castration. As Toril Moi points out, 'If our theorist were to think the feminine, he might find himself tumbling from his phallic lighthouse into the

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 82.

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 83.

²³⁸ Fedwa Malti-Douglas, 'Introduction to The Innocence of the Devil: from Theology to Rape', *The Innocence of The Devil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. xii and p. xiv.

²³⁹ Miriam Cooke, *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 76 and p. 79.

²⁴⁰ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Innocence of The Devil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 172.

²⁴¹ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 132.

²⁴² Ibid., p. 133.

²⁴³ Ibid., p. 134.

obscurity of the dark continent'.²⁴⁴ El Saadawi's postmodernism appropriates poststructuralist feminism to do a critique of patriarchy as a universal phenomenon.

Nefissa's rape is described in actual rather than merely metaphorical terms: 'She felt her *gallabeya* being lifted, his fingers creeping up over her body. . . . Then suddenly she felt something searing like a flame'.²⁴⁵ The rape indicates institutional oppression, making women sexual beings. Malti-Douglas's reading points to the age-long debate of God's attributes: first about the anthropomorphic nature of God and second, His essential unity.²⁴⁶ Like Firdaus in *Woman at Point Zero*, Nefissa's rape suggests the laws that govern women's relationship with men in family and in society. El Saadawi's representation of prostitution is a critique of the conjugal relationship in Islamic regulations and therefore, she retains a normative view of prostitution as a form of oppression. In the psychiatric hospital, the Director labels Narguiss a 'whore' when she ceases to obey his orders. He rebukes Narguiss's lesbian relationship with Ganat in such a way, '[A] woman was low, was a whore by nature, even if she wore a veil, and was clothed in virtue'.²⁴⁷ Prostitution is under-represented in postcolonial society in El Saadawi's work.

In *The Innocence of the Devil*, gender transgression, characterised by Ganat and Narguiss's lesbian relationship, is deemed as a mental disease and is the reason of Ganat's imprisonment in the psychiatric hospital. The literal and metaphorical prison in *The Innocence of the Devil* is a feminist critique against gender transgression as a psychological problem. In *The Innocence of the Devil*, the psychiatric hospital is said to exist in the days of the Pharaohs, which signifies the prevalence of patriarchal history:

The Yellow Palace was also called the House, a word which by itself had no special significance. It evoked nothing in the mind unless it was preceded by another word composed of only three letters: *mad*. It had been an old palace built in the days of the Pharaohs. A King had lived in it. He thought that the

²⁴⁴ Op. Cit.

²⁴⁵ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Innocence of The Devil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 84.

²⁴⁶ Fedwa Malti-Douglas, 'Introduction to The Innocence of the Devil: from Theology to Rape', *The Innocence of The Devil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. xxv and p. xxvii.

²⁴⁷ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Innocence of The Devil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 167.

heavens and the earth, that men and women were his property, that he owned them.²⁴⁸

For El Saadawi, men usurp the origin of writing history, and thus for her, violating virginity and having no blood shed commence the negotiation process. Lack of blood does not only signify virginity. For Narguiss, it signifies the father's self-sacrifice for the daughter's virginity. Lesbianism that inspires the feelings of love and sexual pleasure is a construction of the transhistorical women's solidarity. Ganat tells Narguiss, 'I love you as I love the forbidden fruit. On the tree of knowledge'.²⁴⁹ In El Saadawi's writing, the symbolic father in psychoanalysis and the physical father are conflated. Lesbian relationship signifies a female genealogy and lack of knowledge of female sexuality. That is why Ganat expresses her desire to write as a way to break the silence because Ganat realises that 'amongst men only her grandfather and God knew how to write'.²⁵⁰ Ganat's appearance in the narrative brings out Narguiss's lesbian past which she puts behind. Her elastic hymen reveals a past beyond a failed marriage, that is, a lesbian relationship. Not shedding blood on the wedding night has multiple meanings. Ganat moves in and out of Narguiss's present and past which disrupts the sequence of time and makes narrative acts full of the potential to disrupt linear time sequence. Time disruption enables the happening of multiple consciousnesses in *The Innocence of the Devil*.

El Saadawi adopts Western psychoanalysis, aiming at a critique of Orientalist portrayals on the practices such as sexual segregation, veiling and polygamy that facilitate the West's civilising mission. Haideh Moghissi argues that accentuating feminine virtues in Islamic fundamentalism is not a reaction to colonialism.²⁵¹ Rather, Moghissi contends that Islamic fundamentalists 'recycle the totalizing colonial conception of Islam and women's

²⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 3. The Italics are made in the original.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 96.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 92.

²⁵¹ Haideh Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Post-modern Analysis* (London: Zed Books, 1999), p. 17.

rights as a static, unchanging and unchangeable order'.²⁵² Moghissi cautions against the idea that the fundamentalist revival, as a protest against Western cultural invasion, is a construction of cultural difference:

To reject modernity in the Middle East without offering a more humane and egalitarian alternative is to validate fundamentalism, celebrating its non-Western, non-Eurocentric, home-grown, culturally harmonious values as the only hope appropriate for the Islamic world.²⁵³

In *The Innocence of the Devil*, El Saadawi demonstrates her postmodernist description of Egypt. Ganat's madness formulates a pre-Oedipal linguistic possibility which language order deprives. Dianne Hunter accounts for the case of Anna O, or Bertha Pappenheim, her real name. The case establishes 'talking cure' in psychoanalytic practices.²⁵⁴ For Hunter, Pappenheim's regression of mutterings in foreign languages and the corporeal symptoms are feminist rebellion. Hunter suggests that in psychoanalytic practice, primary transference, in which patients crave for an omnipotent mother, is activated, suggesting the destruction of the 'rhythmical, corporeal rapport with the mother,'²⁵⁵ before entering linguistically constituted subjectivity. It is a form protesting against the domestic patriarchal assignment because it subjects women to monotonous nurturing and stressful tasks.²⁵⁶ Elaine Showalter's view is similar to Hunter's as they both suggest that Pappenheim's 'hysteria was a "creative" escape from the boredom and futility of her daily life'.²⁵⁷ For Showalter, Dora's hysteria resists Freud's diagnosis. Her 'hysteria' might be a necessary reaction to talking cure, since 'Freud was eager to penetrate the sexual mysteries of her hysterical symptoms and to dictate their meanings to her'.²⁵⁸ In *The Innocence of the Devil*, women's madness manifests patriarchal domination in psychoanalytic institutions. The Director makes sure that Ganat is cured by

²⁵² Ibid., p.30.

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 56.

²⁵⁴ Dianne Hunter, 'Hysteria, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism: The Case of Anna O.', *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, eds. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 257-73.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 264-65.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 266.

²⁵⁷ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 2007), p. 156.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 159.

treating her with sessions of electrical shocks. She is ready to be discharged: '*Loss of memory indicating complete cure. To be discharged tomorrow before dawn.*'²⁵⁹

In *The Innocence of The Devil*, the creation of Eblis is used to convey El Saadawi's idea of the patriarchal view in the religious texts and interpretations, particularly the narrative of Adam and Eve in the monotheistic Scriptures. Eblis, meaning devil in Arabic, is the point of contrast with Eve, who is blamed for eating the fruit on the tree of knowledge. Eblis brings out the Director's insecurity about his mother and the fear of strong women: 'It had been like that ever since his mother had squeezed his head between her pelvic bones. . . . He hid from her in the cupboard, suffocating with the smell of her clothes, as they hung down over his head, with the odours of dried sweat and milk, with the rattle of bracelets and bangles, with raw chewing gum, and red henna, and sanitary napkins'.²⁶⁰ *The Innocence of the Devil* shows that God is not the only guiding principle of interpretations. When the Director and Eblis has argument over provoking temptation in the hospital inmates, he wants Eblis to cite verses thirty and the following verses of the *Sura* 'Cow', in which angels retort that God has appointed a King who causes evil and disaster, and Eblis is punished because he refuses to prostrate before Adam as God commands'.²⁶¹ El Saadawi uses the Quranic verses playfully to launch her nationalist-feminist position by creating the character, Eblis.

Narguiss's elastic hymen attempts to deconstruct the antithetical relationship between God and women: 'Her father was better than the Prophet Abraham. He had sacrificed himself for his daughter'.²⁶² Nefissa's brother, Eblis, is marked by the original sin and is used to problematise the association of women with the devil in monotheistic religious texts. The Director tells Eblis to 'go around whispering into people's ears and leading them into

²⁵⁹ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Innocence of The Devil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 171. The Italics are marked in the original.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 52-3.

²⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 62-64.

²⁶² Ibid., p. 49.

temptation'.²⁶³ Eve is blamed for being tempted in the Garden of Eden. Eblis is associated with Adam's transgression of God's orders, although Eve is the one who is to blame for the sin, as Eblis's grandfather tells him: 'It was a rotten evil apple and should have stopped in Eve's throat not in that of Adam's'.²⁶⁴ His grandfather makes Eve take the blame. For Ganat and Narguiss, they leave the psychiatric hospital. This indicates El Saadawi's promotion of the pre-Oedipal stage in which the sense of self is connected to bodies and mother. As they leave, they feel as if there were butterflies: 'They hovered together in the air, laughed with the voices of children and embraced'.²⁶⁵ They are chased by the Director and shot to death. The narrative brings women's oppression into a circle without an opening nor an ending.

In this section, I have examined El Saadawi's narrative creation not only as a critique of social inequality, but she also presents a complicated view of Occidentalism to counter Western postmodernist discursive power. In *The Circling Song*, El Saadawi makes the radical claim that fundamentalist revival is a form of the colonialist continuation of economic exploitation. For El Saadawi, unexamined postmodernism and fundamentalism are a continuum in Bhabha's sense that 'the hegemonic structures of power are maintained in a position of authority [the missionary position] through a *shift in vocabulary* in the position of authority [the philanthropic aid]'.²⁶⁶ El Saadawi is aware of the narrative structure in her novels and she develops it to disrupt postmodernist stasis. As she notes in the introduction of *The Circling Song*, 'I felt that this world and I were utterly incompatible, and the novel was simply an attempt to give that incompatibility concrete form'.²⁶⁷ The incompatibility refers to the difference between Sadat's rule and her gender politics. El Saadawi presents the fragmented subjective points of view and this technique transforms postmodernist discursive stasis.

²⁶³ Ibid., p. 64.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 60.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 175.

²⁶⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 347.

²⁶⁷ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Circling Song*, trans. Basil Hatim and Malcolm Williams (London: Zed Books, 1989), p. 3.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined El Saadawi's narrative practices both in her short stories and her novels and I have looked at her representation of Egyptian women which opens up an alternative space for Islamic postmodernism. I argue that her female bodies articulate nationalism in the short story in 'In Camera' and as a quest for a form of feminine libido in 'Eyes'. El Saadawi complicates the images of Egyptian women and the comrade-like heterosexual couple, evoked in postcolonial narrative works. As Homi K. Bhabha discusses the ruptures in the production of the colonial truths: That the colonised people imitate the colonisers is an assumption, since 'to "identity" is to assimilate conflictually'.²⁶⁸ El Saadawi's critique of stereotyping suggests her self-reflected Occidentalism. I argue that El Saadawi's Egyptian female corporeality is the vehicle of negotiating a liminal cultural space, demonstrated by the metaphor of the unending circle. In 'In Camera', the heroine's vision utilises the brief moment in the short story genre to constitute the translational element of Egyptian women's bodies in Sadat's rule. In El Saadawi's writing, cultural essence and authenticity is a myth. In her novels, feminine sexuality, a narrative of circularity and repetition undermines the constitution of textual and sexual meanings. Writing is significant to Ganat in *The Innocence of the Devil* and Bint Allah in *The Fall of the Imam*, since female presence and sexual practices have the power to grasp men's weakness in their sexual dominance. The narrative acts purport to re-write the religious and literary traditions through a non-synchronous time given by women's expression of sexuality. In the next chapter, I continue to look at how the meanings of 'Muslim womanhood' are constructed by the post-1970s generation. I touch upon the usage and creation of language and the narrative construction of female genital mutilation in their writing. Alifa Rifaat's writing concerning

²⁶⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 195.

traditional space is contrasted with Ibtihal Salem and Salwa Bakr's secularity for an interstitial consideration of women's bodies as a heterogeneous time and space in the nation.

Chapter Three

Re-writing the Patriarchal System: Contemporary Egyptian Women's Writing and the Imagined National Communities

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the textual strategies employed in the acts of writing in works by Egyptian women since the 1970s. I inspect the ways in which women and female sexuality are posited in the narrative works, whose emergence is the result of the nationalist sentiment. I will examine how female textual strategies in Salwa Bakr's *The Golden Chariot*, her short story collections, *Such A Beautiful Voice* and *The Wiles of Men*, Alifa Rifaat's short story collection, *Distant View of A Minaret* and Ibtihal Salem's short story collection, *Children of the Waters*. Egyptian female identities are constituted by the narrative acts that reflect cultural hybridity and Egyptian women's take on postmodernism. What it means to be an Egyptian woman is performed by the narrative acts, rather than preconceived essence. Judith Butler articulates the link between gender and textuality: The intelligibility of gender is made possible by the preconceived father's laws, as if one were pantomimic in the texts set by the father's laws.¹ Writing gender and corporeality contributes to the translational space within and without the nation. I explore the narrative time and space in their writing that grapples with translations of cultures.

Although these texts from the novels and short stories by Bakr, Salem and Rifaat are written in Arabic, they consist of a production of inter-textuality. Pertaining to the question of femininity and race, Ann McClintock points out that femininity and the discursive space of female sexuality have become an expression of economy and are implicated in the discourse of race.² David Simpson draws attention to the feminising tendency in postmodernism, and this tendency poses a challenge for feminism since feminism should be able to work beyond

¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. xiv-xv.

² Ann McClintock, 'Screwing the System: Sexwork, Race, and the Law', *Feminism and Post-modernism*, eds. Margaret Ferguson and Jennifer Wicke (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 105.

simply a feminisation of postmodernism.³ Linda Nicholson also elaborates on the challenge that feminism faces. She argues that feminism, which draws its strength from Lacanian poststructuralism, needs to develop new conceptual strategies. Poststructuralism poses a problem for a monolithic symbolic analysis of gender, based on associating men with phallus and women as lacking this attribute.⁴ For Nicholson, it is important for poststructuralism to point out the linguistic constitution of women within the phallogocentric system, allocating women to the inferior position, but it is equally important to note that the anti-language alternative can be another reproduction of the phallogocentric system.⁵ Nicholson suggests that postmodern feminism needs to deal with its historical situatedness, values and political interests.⁶

As Wen-Chin Ouyang demonstrates, in Egypt, 'women' are a symbol to express postcolonial circumstances and political disturbances.⁷ Yet, it is not true that Egyptian men do not put the re-definition of female sexuality and gender equality on the agenda of modern writing. A plethora of men's works attests to the essentialised signifier of woman. Some examples can show that the realist tradition and representation produces women as convenient signifiers. In Lashin's *Eve Without Adam*, 'women' are the disillusionment of the class struggle. The female body is the props for men's contemplation about the meanings of the self. Ibrahim's romantic encounter in al-Mazini's *Ibrahim the Writer* also shows this. In al-Sharqawi's *Egyptian Earth*, woman represents distrust toward the old feudal system and religious authority. In Mafouz's *The Cairo Trilogy*, woman is inscribed in a neopatriarchal position of a modern gendered order. Ibrahim Farghali's *The Smiles of the Saints* is about a

³ David Simpson, 'Feminisms and Feminizations in the Post-modern', *Feminism and Post-modernism*, eds. Margaret Ferguson and Jennifer Wicke (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 56 and p. 66.

⁴ Linda Nicholson, 'Feminism and the Politics of Post-modernism', *Feminism and Post-modernism*, eds. Margaret Ferguson and Jennifer Wicke (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 80.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 84-5.

⁷ Wen-Chin Ouyang, 'Feminist Discourse between Art and Ideology: Four Novels by Nawal El Saadawi', *Al-'Arabiyya*, 30, pp. 105-06..

male protagonist's sexual encounter with different women, foreign and Egyptian.⁸ Setting the novel at Sadat's death and fundamentalist resurgence in the 1980s, the male protagonist in *The Smiles of the Saints* is seeking his identity in an atmosphere of isolation.

The post-1970s generation is also called 'a new generation' by Marilyn Booth,⁹ and the 1967 defeat is a marker of disillusionment and pessimism. According to Amal Amireh, the nationalist 'committed literature' in Egypt had a turning point after 1967 in that the patriarchal establishment was criticised for causing and being responsible for social problems.¹⁰ This generation also shows revolt by moving away from the realist mode. This is embodied in Rifaat's symbolic world in 'My World of the Unknown', in Salem's metaphoric expression of women's sexuality in 'Behind Closed Doors' and in Bakr's depiction of the heroines' 'abnormal' mental state in 'Such A Beautiful Voice' and 'Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees'. The writing produced in and after this generation valorises the fragmented rather than the unified,¹¹ and echoes the de-centred postmodernist ethos. Butler's performative gender theory is an example of postmodernist feminism, since she works out a possibility in which a normative definition of gender is open to signifying. She compares gender performativity with anticipating the law and waiting for it to disclose an interior essence.¹² Butler's law refers to the phallogocentric order in language. For her, regulating the law is productive and constructive. She suggests that 'performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition, a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalisation in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration'.¹³ In Butler's theory, gender identification is a process of repetitive acts that combine corporeal and psychic inscriptions. I consider Egyptian women's phallogocentric challenges by their Islamic

⁸ Ibrahim Farghali, *The Smiles of the Saints*, trans. Andy Smart and Nadia Fouda-Smart (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007).

⁹ Marilyn Booth, 'Introduction', *Stories by Egyptian Women: My Grandmother's Cactus* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), p. 8.

¹⁰ Amal Amireh, 'Framing Nawal El Saadawi: Arab Feminism in a Transnational World', *Signs* 26:1 (2000), pp. 223-34.

¹¹ Angele Botros Samaan, 'Introduction', *A Voice of Their Own: Short Stories by Egyptian Women*, ed. Angele Botros Samaan (Guizeh: Prism Publications Offices, 1998), pp. 9-10.

¹² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. xiv-xv.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. xv.

postmodern approach in terms of their psychic and corporeal descriptions. This chapter starts by illustrating the postmodernist turn of nationalist-feminist writing in Ibtihal Salem's short stories. Three aspects are concerned in this chapter: female madness as a rebellious tactic, autoeroticism as an expression of the unrepresented feminine self and the use of erotic power. Female genital mutilation in Rifaat's writing plays a role in the narrative construction of Egyptian female identities. The erotic power illustrates the narrative pleasure and the feminine imaginary third-zone that is neither androcentric nor anti-man, and is a system of ever-changing process.

Narrative Form, Heterogeneous National Identity and Cultural Hybridity in the Works of Ibtihal Salem

Continuing the efforts of maintaining integrated national identities, the postcolonial nationalist-feminist works confess identity crisis. Salem's short stories assert the sense of identity crisis in the neo-colonial capitalism and identity conflicts in religion and class. I examine Salem's short stories in *Children of the Waters*, including 'Behind Closed Doors', 'Making Bets', 'February', 'Bags of Candy', 'An Empty Tin Can', 'Rape' and 'The Boot' to demonstrate her double vision of women's voices and the nation. In her writing, female bodies are the most powerful medium to articulate the postcolonial issues in Egypt. Female bodies are not fixed metaphors representing the nation only, but allow women the freedom to present their voices. The unresolved sense of social issues is manifested in the suspense of closure in Salem's style. 'Rape' discusses the consequences of Anwar Sadat's Open Door policy, which uncritically favoured American-led capitalism. The body parts, including the heroine's feet, vision and hands, correspond to the destruction of the seashore by industrialisation, which she associates with rape. 'Making Bets' describes the reunion of the playmate with the heroine in his fancy Mercedes-Benz on a bitterly cold day. The heroine

relates to Nasser's rule when they are young and when they have dreams and ambitions. Now in his luxurious car with his boast of his wealth brought by the welcome of capitalism, the mention of wealth only makes the man seem as chilly as the weather. The man's unwillingness to touch his childhood memory signifies the impasse: He cannot go back to the past and the future seems bleak, as the heroine realises at the end of the story, 'The frost dug its claws into the hunched body, and the distance between her waiting and a long line of barely distinguishable cars was an interminable stretch of ice'.¹⁴ Between the stifling past and future lie the daily lives searching for hope. 'The Boot' describes the wife's hopeful waiting for her husband who serves in the Yom Kippur war. She looks for him in the military bases, administrative offices, hospitals, and among sick beds and corpses until she finds his boots, reminiscent of his odour, their sexual passion and their child, born during their separation.

'An Empty Tin Can' discusses the relationship between women and writing. On the one hand, the heroine's writing is subject to censorship. On the other hand, the paltry pay from writing cannot sustain her life. She leads a life with a sense of surveillance, not only from censorship as a writer, but also from a general political atmosphere. Also, the lack of water in her residence and the inconvenience of life caused by the ill-built infrastructure bring forth a sense of dim hope in the future. In 'February', Salem clearly states the intention of the story, 'We must free ourselves from sources and symbols of overbearing power and authority, even if they are mere bits of cloth'.¹⁵ This story talks about the fundamentalist revival in the 1980s. It utilises the girl who is at the age of puberty to demonstrate the symbolic burden that imprisons women's bodies. The girl is forbidden to be in touch with the liberating power of the ocean only because it is deemed inappropriate for a woman, if she does not properly cover herself up. In 'February', a woman's body is fragmented by her transition from girlhood to womanhood. Salem further manifests the space of home as a prison for women in

¹⁴ Ibtihal Salem, *Children of the Waters*, trans. Marilyn Booth (The University of Texas at Austin: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2002), p. 31.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

‘Behind Closed Doors’. This married woman is trapped in marriage. Her husband continuously cheats. Her mother-in-law tells her, ‘Birds fly away but they come back to their nests’.¹⁶ She cannot obtain help from her mother because she is married. There is nothing she can do except feeling swallowed by time and dragging the unhappy marriage on. In ‘Bags of Candy’, religious identities are a sensitive but also a daily problem that influences women’s lives. The little girl, whose name is Fatima, lies that her name is Theresa in order to get a bag of candy and the bread round dotted with sesame in church. Her body is punished by her father and alienated by politics of sectarian identities. Fatima’s body represents the political atmosphere during post-Sadat period of time. As Nawal El Saadawi explains the sectarian problem, capitalism encourages religious unity in Egypt, but in the meantime the Western countries disrupt it when they need to raise conflicts for their interests.¹⁷

Writing female sexuality in Egyptian women’s writing exposes the anti-colonial nationalist patriarchal thinking as a restrictive framework for describing feminist discourses. In his article, ‘Erotic Awareness in the Early Egyptian Short Story’, Ed de Moor looks at the emergence of the short story form launched by the Modern School in the 1920s. The aim of the Modern School is to create a new literary narrative that could convey ‘Egyptianness, local colour, and modernity’.¹⁸ This expresses the élitist men’s identity crisis. However, as he shows, even though the explicit description of the love theme is taken for indecency by society, the representation of erotic awareness reveals patriarchal thinking.¹⁹ The erotic awareness portrayed by the pioneering generation for a national literature shows that the non-conventional narration was gender biased.²⁰ Images of women are endowed with seduction.²¹ The portrayal of characters leads de Moor to wonder whether the representation is based on

¹⁶ Ibid., 24.

¹⁷ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* (London: Zed Books, 1998), p. 243.

¹⁸ Ed de Moor, ‘Erotic Awareness in the Early Egyptian Short Story’, *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. Roger Allen, Hilary Kilpatrick and Ed de Moor (London: Saqi Books, 1995), p. 66.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 76.

²⁰ Op. Cit.

²¹ Op. Cit.

realities experienced by the Egyptians or the creation of the élite.²² Regarding the distinction between realities and fiction of the sexual theme in the article, Stephan Guth touches on the expanded meaning of realities in realist works of the generation between the 1960s and 1980s, as opposed to the generation of Naguib Mahfouz and Yusuf Idris.²³ The realist and explicit representation of the sexual theme in the Egyptian male writers' fiction is realist in the sense that the sexual themes are metaphorical, devised in order to point out the corruption of the ruling power.²⁴ The sexual theme is an expression of the unspeakable oppression in society, particularly, the violation of the ruling power against human existence of the innocent people.²⁵ However, this kind of sexual representation conforms to the traditional idea that sexuality is shameful, rather than liberating.²⁶

The June War shattered Egyptians' confidence. In order to break the political deadlock between Egypt and Israel, to Anwar Sadat, another war was inevitable.²⁷ The goal of the war was also to reclaim the lost territory of the Sinai Peninsula in the June War. Sadat launched the war in October, 1973 and because it took place on the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, it was also called the Yom Kippur war. In the beginning, the Egyptian attack was successful; but, Israelis had a breakthrough and reached as close as Cairo and Damascus.²⁸ Although Egypt suffered from a great amount of casualties, Israel's confidence was severely shaken because they were caught unprepared.²⁹ In 1977, Anwar Sadat signed the peace treaty at Camp David in America, acknowledging the existence of Egypt and making peace with Israel.³⁰ In 1979, Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in exchange for Egypt's

²² Op. Cit.

²³ Stephan Guth, 'The Function of Sexual Passages in some Egyptian Novels of the 1980s', *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature*, eds. Roger Allen, Hilary Kilpatrick and Ed de Moor (London: Saqi Books, 1995), p. 125.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 129

²⁵ Op. Cit.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 129

²⁷ Daniel Asher, *The Egyptian Strategy for the Yom Kippur War: An Analysis*, trans. Moshe Tlamim (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2009), p. 9.

²⁸ Frank Mitch, *Understanding the Holy Land: Answering Questions about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (New York: Viking, 2005), p. 63.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 64.

³⁰ Op. Cit.

recognition of Israel and its borders.³¹ For the first time, Israel learned that it was possible to make deals with Arabs.³² Because of making peace with Israel, Egypt lost its membership in the Arab League. Sadat was assassinated by Islamists for his peace treaty with Israel.³³

I borrow from the Western poststructuralist concept that links sexuality to textuality to illustrate Salem's disruption of the androcentric symbolic order. By textual strategies, I refer to narrative practices that aim at disturbing the androcentric linguistic order. Toril Moi calls this deconstructive textual practice 'liberating'.³⁴ The purpose of 'liberating' writing is to subvert the fixity of meanings in the androcentric linguistic order in unconsciousness.³⁵ According to poststructuralist feminist thoughts, women's liberation lies in releasing women from normative social practices that have connection to the linguistic unconsciousness. For poststructuralist feminists, the masculine/feminine hierarchical relationship, inherent in the unconsciousness, can be resolved by questioning the suppression imposed by Oedipal logical construction.³⁶ However, liberation from the father's laws engenders a lapse into the pre-Oedipal imaginary phase and incurs mental illness. Therefore, the cost for breaking through the symbolic order is high. In El Saadawi's writing, that is why symbolic breakthrough and psychiatric establishment are questions tied in with each other. Nadjé Sadig Al-Ali enquires whether there is an inherent gendering metaphysical symbolic order that distinguishes women from men's writing in Egypt.³⁷ Fadia Faqir regards it too early to conclude whether women writers' entrance into the modern Arabic scene represents autonomous voices.³⁸ Nadjé Sadig Al-Ali's research confirms Faqir's view and holds that male writers tend to maintain gender

³¹ Op. Cit.

³² Op. Cit.

³³ Op. Cit.

³⁴ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 3.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 9.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁷ Nadjé Sadig Al-Ali, *Gender Writing/Writing Gender: The Representation of Women in A Selection of Modern Egyptian Literature* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1994), p. 16.

³⁸ Fadia Faqir, ed. 'Introduction', *In the House of Silence: Autobiographical Essays by Arab Women Writers*, trans. Shirley Eber and Fadia Faqir (Reading: Garnet, 1998), p. 22.

inequality.³⁹ Al-Ali also maintains that there is a growing sense of gender difference in the male writing and that the absence of sexuality is not taken for granted, and is indeed regarded as a manifestation of sexual dominance.⁴⁰ After the 1967 defeat, the relationship between sexuality and patriarchy is acknowledged.

The short stories in Ibtihal Salem's *Children of the Waters* were published throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Her works are full of self-doubting atmosphere resulting from the disappointment of Nasser's performance in the June War in 1967. In fact, Salem talks about her writing as dealing with pain, relating to the catastrophe of 1967:

I continued to dream; to read, to imagine a better and more welcoming world through the stages of childhood and adolescence—until I was slapped by the Catastrophe of 1967.... I saw with my own eyes the destruction of my early dreams and the hurt was born inside of me.... writing was the best, maybe the only, support as I tried to stand up again.⁴¹

The catastrophe of 1967 was a blow to Egyptian intelligentsia who embraced Nasser's socialist ideas. The emotional catastrophe caused by the defeat in 1967 was unresolved and was followed by the political shift of Sadat's capitalist policy. Ibtihal Salem's 'Making Bets' speaks to the new wealthy class hegemony as a consequence in the nation. The female body parts, the hole in the stocking, the worn shoes, and the lack of a proper winter coat are compared with the Mercedes-Benz that her male friend drives, the heating system, the cassette player, and the steering wheel. During the lift he gives from her office in the government bureau to her house, the sense of women's alienation is described by the sharp contrast between the heroine's body and the cold modern car:

The warmth teased at her roving thoughts, making her forget the hole in her stocking that she'd tried to hide with the hem of her dress, and her big toe, which had almost a clear view from the tip of her dilapidated shoe, and her

³⁹ Nadje Sadig Al-Ali, *Gender Writing/Writing Gender: The Representation of Women in A Selection of Modern Egyptian Literature* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1994), p. 16 and p. 111.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 96.

⁴¹ Marilyn Booth, 'Introduction', *Children of the Waters*, trans. Marilyn Booth (The University of Texas at Austin: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2002), p. 8.

recurring disgust at the paltriness of her salary that didn't stretch, and wouldn't stretch, to buying a winter coat.⁴²

Women's bodies stand for a fragmented historical moment: a childhood promised by Nasser's social accomplishment, such as rent control and free education. This is a past that she cannot dream again, which divides between her and the man. His show-offish masculinity, boosted by the Mercedes-Benz, represents a time that drives toward the future. She suggests the man, now successful and middle-aged, to stand outside for an hour at the bus stop, as they did when they were young. However, the man wouldn't even want to touch the part brought by the putrid smell in the neighbourhood he leaves behind. 'His face grew dark and his features seemed to sharpen'⁴³ at her mention of childhood. The headstrong hope, suggested by standing outside at the bus stop in the cold, is defeated by the power of driving a fancy car and living a wealthy life. Salem participates in the appropriation of women's bodies as social criticism in the intellectuals' writing.

'Rape' embodies the consequences of capitalism and industrialisation. The heroine's childhood memory is torn asunder by the metal wall, encircling the wharf, and the disappearance of the white fishing boats. The iron wall prevents her from a view of the ocean: 'My eye runs ahead of my gasping stride, and my hopeful thoughts fall away from me, flattened under my worn-out shoes'.⁴⁴ The feet cannot enjoy the sensation of the ocean any more as she 'descended the steps to the town slowly, deliberately, and the streets flirted with my feet'.⁴⁵ The fingertips, 'feeble as they are, work to unlace the iron plaits. But it's of no use at all. I clutched at the metal wall. I shook it with both hands'.⁴⁶ She feels that this is a rape to the port:

⁴² Ibtihal Salem, 'Making Bets', *Children of the Waters*, trans. Marilyn Booth (The University of Texas at Austin: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2002), p. 28.

⁴³ Ibid., p.30.

⁴⁴ Ibtihal Salem, 'Rape', *Children of the Waters*, trans. Marilyn Booth (The University of Texas at Austin: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2002), p. 81.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 82.

⁴⁶ Op. Cit.

Today the image will come together in my mind: a high screen of dust, little mountains of pebbles and wood, wires, a bulldozer, hoes and pickaxes, bags of sand. Two foreigners, one tall and blond and the other stocky, wearing thick glasses. They talk in a language I don't understand.⁴⁷

In 'February', the girl's liberating experience with nature is interrupted by the heavily-veiled mother. 'February' opens up another vision of nation. Both in 'Rape' and 'February', women's bodies and nature express a hope, despite the destruction of imperialism. The short story form is significant for Egyptian women writers for several reasons. As Marilyn Booth indicates as a practical reason, the short story form allows Egyptian women writers to perform their duties, whilst being able to find time for writing.⁴⁸ I argue that the short story is important for Egyptian women to articulate their daily lives in ways that complicate heterosexuality. Salem's plural metaphors of 'womanhood' delve into nationalist re-definition of women's sexuality. The multiplicity of femininity displayed by national symbols and in daily life pertains to Bhabha's performative time of the nation:

To write the story of the nation demands that we articulate that archaic ambivalence that informs modernity. We may begin by questioning that progressive metaphor of modern social cohesion—*the many as one*—shared by organic theories of the holism of culture and community, and by theorists who treat gender, class, or race as radically 'expressive' social totalities.⁴⁹

In 'February', the mother has no choice but to enforce gender regulations on the daughter, as the mother 'tightened the covers over her chest and brought them up to her chin' exactly like a shadow.⁵⁰ Salem's metaphors demonstrate fragmented body parts. The story relates to her feet: 'Her bare feet crunched oyster shells and conches that lay flung across the sand'.⁵¹ As Arlene Elowe Macleod notes, the veil is both political and social.⁵² In Egypt,

⁴⁷ Op. Cit.

⁴⁸ Marilyn Booth, 'Translator's Introduction', *The Open Door* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003), p. xvi.

⁴⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, 'Dissemination: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation', *Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 177.

⁵⁰ Ibtihal Salem, 'February', *Children of the Waters*, trans. Marilyn Booth (The University of Texas at Austin: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2002), p. 35.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 33.

⁵² Arlene Elowe Macleod, *Accommodating Protest: Working Women, the New Veiling, and Change in Cairo* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 98.

veiling can mean feminine modesty. It can also mark class difference.⁵³ It can even be a fashion statement. A rural woman might agree with the importance of feminine modesty, but she will challenge that veiling means obedience to feminine modesty because wealthy women use elaborate veil styles as decorations.⁵⁴ In the meantime, women might choose to unveil before marriage for the purpose of attracting men's attention, while after marriage, she might decide to veil to indicate her marital status.⁵⁵ As Sherifa Zuhur's interview in Egypt shows, there is a group of lower-middle class women, *bint al-balad*, literally daughter of the country, who belong to the artisan and tradesmen class, and who do not veil but believe they are Islamic and Egyptian.⁵⁶ They live in traditionally gender segregated environment, do not go to mosque to pray, although they do attend *zars*, visit shrines and go to the saints' festivals.⁵⁷ As Zuhur indicates, veiling suggests pluralism of gender interpretations.⁵⁸ I argue that women have a say of their lives through veiling. In Salem's writing, women's body parts represent their political implications. As in 'Making Bets' and 'Rape', the heroines' feet are a focus of metaphors because of the coastal areas they come from and represent the history of Port Said. It is one of Salem's water settings besides the Nile and the Red Sea.⁵⁹ During the Suez Crisis in 1956, Port Said was heavily demolished. After the Suez war, Nasser declared the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. During the decade between the Suez War and the Arab-Israeli war in 1967, the preparation for wars with the primary concern of solving the Palestinian question was underway.⁶⁰

In 'The Boot', the husband's boot represents the Yom Kippur war and it has a sense of optimism for this short story resulting from the confidence the war produces. It stands for

⁵³ Ibid., p. 105.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 113.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 115-17.

⁵⁶ Sherifa Zuhur, *Revealing Reveiling: Islamist Gender Ideology in Contemporary Egypt* (Albany, New York: State University of New York, 1992), pp. 121-23.

⁵⁷ Op. Cit.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 125.

⁵⁹ Ibtihal Salem, *Children of the Waters*, trans. Marilyn Booth (The University of Texas at Austin: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2002), p. 5.

⁶⁰ Moshe Shemesh, *Arab Politics, Palestinian Nationalism and the Six Day War: The Crystallisation of Arab Strategy and Nasir's Descent to War, 1957-1967* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2007), p. viii.

the wife's hopeful waiting and search of the husband. The boot signifies that the husband is still alive during the war and it creates a narrative of women's sexuality: 'Each time he came to visit he pulled off his boots and the smell of buried sweat rose, stifled and hidden sweat with time had intermingled with fumes of their passion'.⁶¹ The protagonist provides her view of the nation and war with her narrative of sexuality. Regarding the relationship between war and sexuality, Evelyn Accad argues that in a way, war writing signifies the oppression of women.⁶² For Accad, men's war writing tends to relate the origin of evils to problems of civilisations with metaphors of prostitutes.⁶³ In 'The Boot', the protagonist relates the boots back to her night of henna, her wedding night, and the baby that she carries since the night of their wedding. She waits for him, believing that he would return: 'They would take in each other's aroma and hug exactly as they'd done on the night of henna'.⁶⁴ The night of henna represents the national landscapes of the sea and the lighthouse beam. She signifies home, and her waiting, with her suckling baby boy, has been a hopeful one: 'return to their homes, and the nation's good name'.⁶⁵ The baby boy has the same almond-shaped eyes like her husband's. 'The Boot' introduces a narrative in which an Egyptian woman demonstrates her role of sexuality and reproduction in re-generating national identities.

Salem's representation of female bodies and description of sexuality is associated with Egyptian daily items. For instance, in 'February', the girl's growing breasts are compared to lupine beans, an ordinary snack sold in the streets: 'The lupine beans have grown into green apples, and by tomorrow they'll be giving way to pomegranates'.⁶⁶ Feeling the impending physical restriction, the daughter's eyes become pensive at her aunt's complimentary teasing: 'I've never seen you go down to the shore, summer or winter, mama.

⁶¹ Ibtihal Salem, 'Boot', *Children of the Waters*, trans. Marilyn Booth (The University of Texas at Austin: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2002), p. 123.

⁶² Evelyn Accad, *Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of the Middle East* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), p. 2.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶⁴ Ibtihal Salem, 'Boot', *Children of the Waters*, trans. Marilyn Booth (The University of Texas at Austin: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2002), p. 124.

⁶⁵ *Op. Cit.*

⁶⁶ Ibtihal Salem, 'February', *Children of the Waters*, trans. Marilyn Booth (The University of Texas at Austin: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2002), p. 34.

If you would come once, just one time, mama, you'd fall in love with it. Like I have. Even in the middle of February'.⁶⁷ The freedom achieved through the various parts of her body shifts away from a penis-centred economy:

Drops pelted her forehead. She stretched out her tongue as far as she could to catch the cold pellets of water. She invited the rain to come along. Lifting the two of them, the waves hurled both her and the rain, her companion, straight into the heart of the blue expanse. Cold and refreshed, she and the rain rose once more with the leaping wave, their delirium washed by salt and the fragrance of iodine.⁶⁸

Salem introduces the liberated female bodies in the freedom of 'feet', 'breasts', 'forehead', and even 'tongue'. Employing the girl's voice, Salem argues that the body should not be jailed by the black thick cloth simply because the hair is beautiful and the ocean is inviting. The new veiling, that al-Ghazali advocates, is not homogenous as a sign for supporting Islamist resurgence.⁶⁹ As Arlene Elowe Macleod shows, there is a sub-group of people in Cairo during the 1980s, who veil, because they are not accustomed to urban life.⁷⁰ El Saadawi has a tendency of adopting sexual organs as her focus of critique, whilst Salem employs daily foods.

The difference of articulating women's silences between them is also a generational one; it is shifted from men's authority to men's irresponsibility. In 'Behind Closed Doors', Salem pushes her point further about female sexuality by Egyptian women's daily house chores and staples. 'Behind Closed Doors' commences with the wife's inner protest, 'If only the walls could talk'.⁷¹ For the wife, the time to come is excruciatingly oppressive:

The turning hands of the clock surrounded her. She clamped her teeth together. Her eyes shifted between the closed door and the wall, and gazed at the time that divided the two of them, the years that sat ready to pounce.⁷²

⁶⁷ Op. Cit.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

⁶⁹ Arlene Elowe Macleod, *Accommodating Protest: Working Women, the New Veiling, and Change in Cairo* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 110.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 111.

⁷¹ Ibtihal Salem, 'Behind Closed Doors', *Children of the Waters*, trans. Marilyn Booth (The University of Texas at Austin: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2002), p. 23.

⁷² Ibid., p. 26.

Throughout the story, there is the metaphor of the traditional staple, the platter of steamed rice that she is invited to have at her in-laws' place. She has not touched the rice, and eventually, 'she abandoned the platter of rice, a corpse on the table'.⁷³ Like a mechanical line, the husband tells her, 'I stopped by to see my buddy, found him in a tight spot--'.⁷⁴ The wife visits her mother-in-law and her husband is not there and '[t]hreads of steam rose from the platter of rice'.⁷⁵ His extramarital affairs are an open secret to all the family members. They all urge her to stay on under the protection of marriage. She catches her husband at home just having had sex with a girl with dull silver, spike-heeled shoes. Her marriage is meaningless and she has no appetite for a life like that. She cooks as usual to see 'the strands of steam curling up from the rice platter seemed to halt, to freeze in midair'.⁷⁶ She has a frustrated sexual life and time eats her heart away behind the closed door. Day in and day out, the unbearable time implies generational shifts of marital meanings. Where her mother-in-law would persuade her by remarking that 'birds fly away but they come back to their nests', her sister-in-law would interpret marriage differently: 'Putting your trust in men is like putting water in a sieve'.⁷⁷ She needs to express her marriage that is no longer there: 'Going into the kitchen, she collected plates and glasses. She scrubbed the pots and shallow metal bowls so hard that she practically wore them through...'.⁷⁸ Her need in the relationship is suppressed and channelled into stifled fits of temper, as she notices that 'the coils of steam dwindled and faded to nothing above the platter of rice'.⁷⁹ Her life revolves around cooking the platter of rice, like the ticking away of the clock; nothing is of any certainty.

In 'Behind Closed Doors', Salem adopts the metaphor of a traditional staple food, rich in evoking shared cultural symbols, to express an alternative national time by women's

⁷³ Op. Cit.

⁷⁴ Op. Cit.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 24.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 25.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

conception of men. Whereas sleeping with a servant girl signifies the legacy of traditional patriarchy in *The Open Door*, sleeping with a girl, with kitsch shoes, indicates a shift of 'home' as anchorage of traditional values and rampant consumerism. Irene Gedalof argues that women's reproductive work should be viewed as a double move: both as that which ties women to the collective communities and as agents that challenge the static communal identities.⁸⁰ Salem's work points out that sexual liberation does not necessarily mean sexual satisfaction.

Salem pushes static identities further in 'Bags of Candy' and 'An Empty Tin Can'. In 'Bags of Candy', Fatima's father punishes her because she lies about her name in order to have a bag of candy from the priest. Farag Fouda's assassination in 1992 by Islamists motivated Salem to write the story. He was an important Egyptian thinker. He was accused of blasphemy by Al-Azhar, and was assassinated by fundamentalists. They claimed that he was killed because he was an apostate. The event evoked Salem's childhood memory when she was punished by her father because she memorised some of the Christian rituals. In 'Bags of Candy', Fatima is isolated on Sundays because the school divides the students into Muslims and Christians: 'The dirt of the courtyard choked her little shoes as she stood waiting her turn to be called. [...] She perched motionless on a wooden bench as dusty as her shoes [...]'.⁸¹ The Muslim girls are led into the chilly, badly-lit schoolrooms and the Christian girls go into the East Hall where 'she had seen little butterflies dancing around the piano by candlelight and a man cloaked entirely in black whose beard seemed to reach all the way down to his paunch'.⁸² Fatima gives the nun her Armenian neighbour's name and slips into the East Hall: Theresa. But her father forbids the girl to have contact with Christianity: 'Her back was plastered against the hedge-topped wall and her eyes rolled away from his shadow, a

⁸⁰ Irene Gedalof, 'Taking (a) Place: Female Embodiment and the Re-grounding of Community', *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, eds. Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier and Mimi Sheller (Oxford: Berg, 2003), p. 92.

⁸¹ Ibtihal Salem, 'Bags of Candy', *Children of the Waters*, trans. Marilyn Booth (The University of Texas at Austin: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2002), p. 59.

⁸² Op. Cit.

silhouette that sat implacably on her chest.⁸³ 'Where's the belt'⁸⁴: The father beats up the girl, with the piano music in the background, suggesting her religious boundary transgression. Fatima's isolated and fragmented body points out feminisation of poverty and its relationship to Islamic fundamentalism and consumerism. Fatima's body, her isolated figure, her chest, her shoes and the scattered pieces of candy, present fragmented social realities. Her body translates a newly emergent, non-synchronous voice of postcoloniality. Fatima's body signifies the hybrid space of the nation in which she does not distinguish between 'we', the Islamic revival and 'they', the West and Christianity.

'An Empty Tin Can' depicts the woman writer's stifled sense of uncertainty and her life, relying on a meagre sum of money. The writer's life is unstable and contingent, suggested by the empty tin can that she bumped into on the street: 'My feet stumbled over an empty tin can. I kicked it as far as I could, following its bumpy progress along the hot asphalt'.⁸⁵ The writer's political views subject her to threat. She comes across the mosque, crowded with 'stooped figures' for the midday prayer. The Islamist revival, or *dawah*, was popular in Cairo in the 1990s, calling for a lifestyle that followed religious conventions, grounded in observing Islamic styles in daily lives.⁸⁶ The purposeless action is contrasted by the background of the prayer call at the small mosque. The meanings of 'Muslim woman' are involved by political and economic factors. For Salem, it is imperative to represent the ceaselessly changing communities that put forth women's conduct as significant cultural values. In El Saadawi's writing, the interpretation of politics and gender is politically oriented, whereas Salem's explanation derives from personal views and generational differences. The Islamist revival is different from the previous generations in which national and cultural

⁸³ Ibid., p. 58.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 60.

⁸⁵ Ibtihal Salem, 'An Empty Tin Can', *Children of the Waters*, trans. Marilyn Booth (The University of Texas at Austin: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2002), p. 72.

⁸⁶ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 57.

identities are the primary concern.⁸⁷ For Saba Mahmood, the religiosity of the piety movement represents the performative element of collective identities.⁸⁸ Mahmood argues that the ‘self-willed obedience’ has performative space for autonomy.⁸⁹ She uses the case of female teacher trainings in the movement to illustrate that religiosity and obedience win the participants more space in the private sphere, and that this actually gives them authorities to influence their husbands.⁹⁰ She argues that the meanings of the religious attire can be separated from the concept of virtues.⁹¹ The writers of the post-1970 generation articulate the implicit minority voices.

Nadje Al-Ali’s research into feminist activism in Egypt endorses the view of women’s daily practices for forming national identities not necessarily out of clear-cut political groupings.⁹² Al-Ali states: ‘Rather than imagining bounded categories, it might be more productive to conceive of secular and religious positions and attitudes in terms of a continuum’.⁹³ In this section, I demonstrate that Ibtihal Salem’s short stories in which female bodies articulate a daily life time that in turn, give heterogeneous narratives in postcolonial Egypt. In the following section, I continue to look at the question of the time in Salwa Bakr and Alifa Rifaat’s works for their creation of poststructuralist feminine psychic space.

Narrative Space, Sexuality and Textual Strategies in the Works of Salwa Bakr and Alifa Rifaat

This section regards the embodiment of Egyptian female voices in the works of Salwa Bakr and Alifa Rifaat who published their works during and after the 1970s. Hoda El Sadda points out that the generation after the 1970s in Egypt was claiming femininity as a female

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 45.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 162.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 148.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 176-79.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 160.

⁹² Nadje Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women’s Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 147.

⁹³ Op. Cit.

expression.⁹⁴ As El Sadda suggests, quoting Elaine Showalter, about the literary development of women's autonomous voices: At the stage of claiming an autonomous femininity, women 'reject both imitation and protest—two forms of dependency—and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature'.⁹⁵ In Bakr's *The Golden Chariot*, narrative acts are the means for down-trodden women to survive. Rifaat is a generation older than Bakr and Salem. She started writing in the 1960s. However, due to her husband's control, Rifaat did not publish her works until the late 1970s. In Rifaat's 'Bahiyya's Eyes', 'Who Will Be the Man' and 'My World of the Unknown' in her short story collection, *Distant View of A Minaret*, female sexuality seeks its space in the metaphorical realm and same-sex love is rather an embodiment of the pre-linguistic world in which the sense of self is formed by sexuality. Rifaat's creation of the metaphorical world echoes what Dianne Hunter suggests a 'dyadic, semiotic world of pure sound and body rhythms, oceanically at one with our nurturer' in the pre-linguistic stage.⁹⁶

In *The Golden Chariot*, the twelve life histories of the inmates are framed by Aziza's hidden incestuous love story. The love affair between Aziza and her stepfather offers a narrative voice that differs from the paradigm of the freedom to choose a husband in the nationalist discourse. Aziza's psychological state is associated with social structure in Egypt. The life histories of the twelve prisoners are twelve isolated stories: None entails more importance than the other. Caroline Seymour-Jorn terms Bakr's cyclical narrative 'the arabesque' style because this narrative strategy is characteristic of its having no beginning and no ending.⁹⁷ For Seymour-Jorn, narrative circularity is a way to capture a time element

⁹⁴ Hoda El Sadda, 'Introduction', *Such A Beautiful Voice and Other Stories*, trans. Hoda El Sadda (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1992), p. ix.

⁹⁵ Op. Cit.

⁹⁶ Dianne Hunter, 'Hysteria, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism: The Case of Anna O.', *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, eds. Katie Conboy, Nadia and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p.265.

⁹⁷ Caroline Seymour-Jorn, 'A New Language: Salwa Bakr on Depicting Egyptian Women's Worlds', *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 11:2 (2002), p. 167.

that is capable of expressing Egyptian women's daily life.⁹⁸ Seymour-Jorn uses Bakr's words on the adoption of the narrative technique, the prisoners 'exist largely on their memories of their past lives, and that the arabesque allowed her to bring the inmates' pasts into their present experience of the jail'.⁹⁹ The prison memories are thus capable of creating a non-synchronous time in the nation. The arabesque technique allows the solidarity beyond class difference and forms an alternative community. The untold stories can only be heard by the inmates. Each story challenges the dominant normative discourse.

In Rifaat's short story, 'Bahiyya's Eyes', Bahiyya relates to her life story before she is about to lose her eyesight. The voice, whilst revealing the repressed life story of an old lonely woman, lifts the veil off the traditional Muslim woman's private life. At the moment of re-telling her story to her daughter, Bahiyya has found that her eyes have been shedding tears and she could barely see things. Before she is finally totally blind and her whole life shut to all, the tears start to narrate Bahiyya's sufferings about the heterosexual lifestyle she has lived. Egyptian women's lives in Rifaat's representation are still orientated toward the traditional private space. Seeking sexual gratification outside marriage with another man is simply a sin.¹⁰⁰ 'Who Will Be the Man?' relates to the heroine's genital mutilation. The narrative hinges upon the question of female sexuality and marriage and ends up in her lament, 'Who will be the man? Who will be the Man?'¹⁰¹ Rifaat's heroines both inhabit in the Islamic patriarchal culture and are critical of its practices.

In 'My World of the Unknown', sexual contact with the female snake does not describe female sexual desire as lacking, as opposed to men's. She has both men and women's sexual organs. The unknown world, a world outside the patriarchal system, offers a space where feminine sexuality is not defined by the patriarchal penis-envy discourse, or by

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 166.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 168.

¹⁰⁰ Denys Johnson-Davies, 'Translator's Foreword', *Distant View of A Minaret and Other Stories*, Alifa Rifaat (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1983), p. viii.

¹⁰¹ Alifa Rifaat, 'Who Will Be the Man?', *Opening The Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*, eds. Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 77.

masochism as feminine pleasure. This space is a co-existence of the symbolic order and the pre-linguistic space of the same-sex desire and autoeroticism. In Rifaat's short stories, producing narratives of female sexualities is tied in with the practice of female genital mutilation. As Chantal Zabus suggests, Egyptian women employ in-passing strategy to break the silence of this experience.¹⁰² Rifaat's description of female genital mutilation is radical because it resembles narrative suturing that creates a new home for Muslim women.

In Salwa Bakr's short story, 'That Beautiful Undiscovered Voice', in her collection, *The Wiles of Men and Other Stories*, she creates a heroine, Sayyida, who constructs a space that evades the patriarchal dichotomy which validates masculine rationality as the only normative principle. Bakr's 'That Beautiful Undiscovered Voice' shows the relationship between language and the creation of female identities. Sayyida, is a middle-aged mother. As Dinah Manisty claims pertaining to the relation between madness and sexual difference, 'a woman is first and foremost a daughter/mother/wife'.¹⁰³ Sayyida's life is caught up in endless trivialised unappreciated house chores and her children, until one day she discovers her true voice in a shower. "O Sayyida. . . O Sayyida", as she calls out to herself in the newly-discovered melodious voice. It is as if a new Sayyida were discovered. A new narrative is born out of the discovery of her voice.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak complicates the question of representation and epistemic violence. Rifaat's representation of female genital mutilation is at issue. Spivak criticises the production of narratives and elucidates the ways in which narrative practices can obliterate what they set out to show about the subjugated knowledge.¹⁰⁴ The natives of the Third World are obliterated in the Western discursive constitution; Spivak argues that the natives cannot

¹⁰² Chantal Zabus, *Between Rites and Rights: Excision in Women's Experiential Texts and Human Contexts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 90.

¹⁰³ Dinah Manisty, 'Madness as Textual Strategy in the Narratives of Three Egyptian Women Writers', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 14: Madness and Civilization (1994), p. 153.

¹⁰⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 25.

speak for themselves.¹⁰⁵ The grand narratives, embracing the Western view as the truth, continue to incorporate what they view as the reality of the natives into the grand narratives, or the continuum of ‘epistemic violence’ in Spivak’s terms.¹⁰⁶ Spivak’s investigation shows that reality production is not ideology free.¹⁰⁷ She problematises talking back to Western centre, and particularly the poststructuralist discourse of liberating the oppressed.¹⁰⁸

Narratives are the carriers of power. The poststructuralist contribution in the logocentric power of language suggests that self is constituted within language and that there is no existence of self except in language. To supplement the universalist tendency of poststructuralism in interpreting Egyptian works, Nadjé Sadig Al-Ali proposes a dialectical reading between the symbolic construction in the gendering meta-narratives and the sociological aspects in Egypt.¹⁰⁹ Edward Said also demonstrates the blurred space of reality and fiction that makes the Orient emerge as if it were real.¹¹⁰ For Said, the Orient is nothing but a production of knowledge by the West made available by scholarship of which literary works play a role in post-Enlightenment colonial thinking.¹¹¹ An example of representing the reality about the Third World women is Spivak’s critique of Julia Kristeva’s accounts of Chinese women.¹¹² It is rather in the interests of the West to define their own identity that Chinese women emerge in Kristeva’s research.¹¹³ Chinese women remain in a mode of femininity that is defined by the phallogentric language as illogical and opaque in meaning.¹¹⁴ Rather than reading Rifaat’s and Bakr’s works as demonstrating an opaque and undecipherable world, I argue that the non-realistic element conveys a psychic reality and introduces meanings for Egyptian women and nation. Fictional works are aimed at

¹⁰⁵ Op. Cit.

¹⁰⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward A History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 198-311.

¹⁰⁷ Op. Cit.

¹⁰⁸ Op. Cit.

¹⁰⁹ Nadjé Sadig Al-Ali, *Gender Writing/Writing Gender: The representation of Women in a Selection of Modern Egyptian Literature* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1994), p. 7.

¹¹⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), p. 22.

¹¹¹ Ibid., pp. 2-3.

¹¹² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1987), pp. 134-153.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 137.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 136 and p. 138.

negotiating 'realities'. Autobiographical accounts are not mere reflections of realities. Fadia Faqir argues that the autobiographical female writing in the Arabic language is to 'negotiate a textual, sexual, linguistic space for themselves [the Arab women] within a culture which is predominantly male dominated'.¹¹⁵ Faqir thus contests the face value of female self-representation, although she reserves the idea that the female use of language is distinct from the male.¹¹⁶ She maintains that Arabic female writing is using a new language to discover women's voices.¹¹⁷

In terms of techniques in the novel, the cyclical narratives of the inmates' stories and Bakr's coinage of a new language disrupts a gendered middle-class consciousness in Egyptian nationalism. Novels can be utilised to promote a normative bourgeois consciousness even in its trivial representation of the nature of femininity. For instance, Ian Watt investigates the rise of the novel in the eighteenth-century England for the permeation of the realms as distinct as fiction and reality.¹¹⁸ The aesthetics of the novel are indeed political. According to Watt, the conjugal sexual relationship is a new code in the novelist form.¹¹⁹ A figure such as Pamela in Richardson's *Pamela* serves as an example. Pamela is not simply a trivial novel-reading girl. Instead, her demonstration of a feminine virtue, with frailty as the reification, sets in motion a middle-class normative heterosexual ideology.¹²⁰ The realist embodiment in the novel, particularly, the unity of time and space, creates what Benedict Anderson calls a deep horizontal comradeship among the national members.¹²¹ As Anderson demonstrates, 'That all these acts are performed at the same clocked, calendrical time, but by actors who may be largely unaware of one another, shows the novelty of this imagined world

¹¹⁵ Fadia Faqir, 'Introduction', *In the House of Silence: Autobiographical Essays by Arab Women Writers*, ed. Fadia Faqir, trans. Shirley Eber and Fadia Faqir (Reading: Garnet, 1998), p. 6.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18 and p. 20.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-2.

¹¹⁸ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1987), p. 13.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 136-37.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

¹²¹ John McLeod, *Beginning Post-colonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 72-3.

conjured up by the author in his readers' mind'.¹²² In postcolonial contexts, novels as a form are adopted to resist the winners' power. For example, in a Third World context, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues for the importance of the novels as anti-colonial struggles; particularly, he contends that an African literature written in European languages was continuous with the colonial division of African countries.¹²³ Therefore, for Ngũgĩ, the adoption of African languages in literature becomes a threat to a neo-colonial state ruled by a native bourgeois class.¹²⁴ Ngũgĩ's manipulation of the Western novelist genre allows 'a variety of narrative voices at different times and places in the same novel'.¹²⁵ *Egyptian Earth* adopts vernacular language, showing an attempt to struggle against a neo-colonial presence and to give voices for the peasant class. Bakr coins a new language, which Seymour-Jorn terms as *al-'ammiyya al-fasiha*, meaning a standard colloquial language, to express the lower-class women's lives without isolating her works from the tradition of classical Arabic.¹²⁶ Therefore, Bakr's rendition of language disrupts the novel genre in Arabic.

In 'Bahiyya's Eyes', Rifaat gives imaginary journeys that empower women and re-organise metaphors alongside their recognition of the father's laws. The doctor tells her that her eye problem is caused by flies and dirt, a problem shared by rural women. But her eyes tell another story. The very act of holding her up by the leg and finding that she is a girl ascertains her gender. She sheds tears the moment when her gender is declared: 'It all comes from the tears I shed since my mother first bore me and they held me up by the leg and found I was a girl.'¹²⁷ She is deterred from seeing a doctor because of her situation as a lower-class woman in her old age. Tears well from her eyes when she flashes back to the moment as the

¹²² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 26.

¹²³ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1981), p. 16 and p. 28.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹²⁶ Caroline Seymour-Jorn, 'A New Language: Salwa Bakr on Depicting Egyptian Women's Worlds', *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 11:2 (2002), p. 160-61.

¹²⁷ Alifa Rifaat, 'Bahiyya's Eyes', *Distant View of A Minaret*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1983), pp. 6-7.

mutilation is wrought on her body. She blames genital mutilation for failing her as a woman; in the end, she searches for a possibility of being a woman:

Daughter, I'm not crying now because I'm fed up or regret that the Lord created me a woman. No, it's not that. It's just that I'm sad about my life and my youth that have come and gone without my knowing how to live them really and truly as a woman.¹²⁸

Talking brings the daughter closer to the mother: 'But what's the point, daughter, of going on talking? A man's still a man and a woman will remain a woman whatever she does'.¹²⁹ The tears are the ways in which Bahiyya renders her voices since talking is least expected of her. She marries her husband and not the one who loves her, Hamdan, because as a woman she has no say in deciding to whom she is married. Bahiyya cries as her father marries her to another man. The tears mark the trail of her life where she loses her voice, 'I was an ignorant girl and who was I to say I wanted this man and not that one?'¹³⁰ Her father would 'have cut [her] throat for [her]'.¹³¹ Her tears pave a narrative misrecognised by the male doctor, and stage a hidden vision for nationalist-feminism. In 'Bahiyya's Eyes', the water channel, the Suez Canal, where her brother Awwad plays, marks the emergence of a different narrative pattern through Bahiyya's eyes. At the Suez crisis during the late 1950s, it became clear that the withdrawal of the British troops meant the independence struggle in a new form.¹³² The Arab countries were drawn into the economic and political influence of the superpowers. Bahiyya's talking suggests the emerged space in the short stories for nationalist-feminism beyond wars for Egyptian independence. Her narrative voice cuts into a space unlive and unknown, or a vision. Bahiyya is supposed to serve her brother as her mother is submissive to her father. She suspects what it would be like to live 'really and truly as a woman' as God has created her:

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

¹²⁹ Op. Cit.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 10.

¹³¹ Op. Cit.

¹³² Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (New York: Warner, 1991), p. 365.

One day I said to myself ‘Why don’t I make my mother and father.’ I made both of them with arms and legs and a head and then I put a thing like a cat’s tail on my father. I didn’t know what to put for my mother, so I lifted my *galabia* and didn’t find anything there except for something lying there between two leaves, all hidden away inside, something like a sort of mulberry.¹³³

Bahiyya’s voices cut into the competing discourses of female genital mutilation. As Natasha Maria Gordon points out about the nationalist representation of the novels concerning female genital mutilation, ‘The form of the novel tends to lend itself to more elaborate readings of politics, rather than an immediate vocalisation of the narrative of female circumcision’.¹³⁴ Gordon shows the close connection between novels and nationalism. It can constrain women’s feelings to express the experience. Before Bahiyya finds out about the mud figures she has made are laid out to dry in the sun, the mutilation is performed on her. She is forbidden to find out the whereabouts about the meanings of God’s creation. She seeks the space beyond the symbolic order of being a woman. Womanhood is reduced to child-bearing and child-raising. The metaphors of the sexual physiology relates to nature, such as cat’s tails, leaves and mulberries. Bahiyya recalls the moment of playing with mud and when she really enjoys herself when other boys look at her breasts. It is the eyes that her playmate, Hamdan, sings to praise. She is not happy with her husband and she suspects ‘the reason was what those women did to [her] with the razor when [she] was a young girl’.¹³⁵

As Susan Gubar points out in her concept of the blank page, the work of literature is one of carving, moulding and cutting operated by male writers. As Gubar argues about the relationship between the female body and the textual blank page, the blank page registers the female sexuality projected by male writers.¹³⁶ Due to the authorship which has been in the

¹³³ Alifa Rifaat, ‘Bahiyya’s Eyes’, *Distant View of A Minaret*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1983), p. 9.

¹³⁴ Natasha Maria Gordon, ‘To Write What Cannot be written: Female Circumcision in African and Middle Eastern Literature’, *Changing English: Studies in Culture and Education*, 11:1 (2004), p. 86.

¹³⁵ Alifa Rifaat, ‘Bahiyya’s Eyes’, *Distant View of A Minaret*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1983), pp. 10-11.

¹³⁶ Susan Gubar, ‘“The Blank Page” and the Issues of Female Creativity’, *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985), p. 294.

hands of male writers, writing has been an activity associated with the penis.¹³⁷ This process of producing literature mutes female voices and it is done at the expense of appropriating the female body as the metaphor of writing. For Gubar, the blankness of bed sheets can be interpreted in different and multiple ways other than a sign of adultery. According to Gubar, the blankness can signify women's refusal to be possessed by men, impotent husbands or even nuns' vows of purity within marital relationship.¹³⁸ Clitoris is regarded as an atrophied penis, when countering male-dominant discourses. However, women do not only have two sexual organs. As Irigaray points out, they have neither one nor two sexual organs; women are not bisexual.¹³⁹

Rifaat's 'My World of the Unknown' is the continued episode of 'Bahiyya's Eyes' in that the realm that the physical eyes cannot see and that in the end the blindness prefigures her desire to know what it feels like to live truly as a woman. In 'My World of the Unknown', the space where the wife's sexual desire takes place is a dreamy world that escapes the mundane world of her everyday life. Adhering to the religious teaching that a woman's central role is one of mother and wife, Rifaat demands for female sexual fulfilment. The revolt for sexual fulfilment within the confines of marriage from the pious Islamic position renders Rifaat an unusual writer.¹⁴⁰ The representation of women's lives in Rifaat 'lifts the veil on what it means to be a woman living within a traditional Muslim society,'¹⁴¹ as Denys Johnson-Davies claims. In 'My World of the Unknown', the autoerotic feminine pleasure in the sexual encounter with a female snake embodies a form of feminine libido.

In Rifaat's 'My World of the Unknown', as if to evoke a reality that the textual world has disregarded, the heroine comes across this particular space which reminds her of the

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 295.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 305.

¹³⁹ Luce Irigaray, 'This Sex Which Is Not One', *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, eds. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 251.

¹⁴⁰ Denys Johnson-Davies, 'Translator's Foreword', *Distant View of A Minaret and Other Stories*, Alifa Rifaat (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1983), p. viii.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. vii.

place in the dream exactly resembling the place and of some distant memories. Settling into the place, prepared for her as a temporary residence, she exclaims that she is 'overcome by the feeling that [she] had been here before'.¹⁴² In her physical world, she is bound up by households and children, a world revolving around her husband, who is absent most of the time because of his job. This space, which occurs in the garden of her renovated residence, 'was inhabited by the mysterious lover who lived in a world other than mine'.¹⁴³ The father's laws govern the home which prescribes the script for her life, till the heroine encounters the mad woman who lingers around her house. The itinerant woman's madness is linked to her extramarital affairs, connected with her transgression of gender boundaries in society. In 'My World of the Unknown', the self-gratification of the body is accomplished without the husband figure in the other world. The heroine and the mysterious woman, whose life can be best described as itinerant, are deviant, albeit as a hidden text, from the male-centred symbolic order and form of sexuality.

In 'My World of the Unknown', the house signifies the patriarchal order that the husband stands for. The mysterious woman's intention seems to be snatching away the heroine's husband and stealing her family. The itinerant woman serves as the mirror image of the heroine who harbours jealous emotions toward her husband's possible relationship with other women. The crack of the walls at the garden providing the secret of sexual elation underlies the role that sexuality played in forming female subjecthood. This episode of the female snake's sexual seduction at the garden is resonant with the scene at the Garden of Eden in the Bible. The encounter is mediated by the Scripture, the *djinn* and the historical imagination about Cleopatra. The snake's meaning is changed in 'My World of the Unknown' in that the snake no longer represents sin. The snake now signifies the heritage of unrecorded female sexual pleasure as wives and mothers in the heterosexual relationship. The

¹⁴² Alifa Rifaat, 'My World of the Unknown', *Distant View of A Minaret*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1987), p. 62.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

narrative space refers to Cleopatra whose sexuality is fulfilled not by men but by the serpents, which rebels against the masculinist re-inscription of pleasure. The heroine reflects to herself after she experiences sexual elation with the snake in the vulva-like crack:

An idea would obtrude itself upon me sometimes: did Cleopatra, the very legend of love, have sexual intercourse with her serpent after having given up sleeping with men, having wearied of amorous adventures with them so that her sated instincts were no longer moved other than by the excitement of fear, her sense no longer aroused other than by bites from a snake?¹⁴⁴

In 'My World of the Unknown', the female snake tells the heroine that this is a hidden world that only God and no one else watches over, and therefore this idea differs from the view that sexuality is forbidden knowledge to women. This world which God watches over does not distinguish between sin and innocence. The heroine is allowed to taste the fruit of sexual knowledge that she is forbidden to know. The reference protests against Christian sexual asceticism. The serpent clarifies to her concerning the sin of their relationship, thereby ascertaining the role of sex in love: 'And is sex anything but food for the body and an interaction in union and love?' she said. 'Is it not this that makes human beings happy and is the secret of feeling joy and elation?'¹⁴⁵ The snake also assures the heroine that the force she gains in the process of the erotic encounter is more valuable than wealth in the earthly world.¹⁴⁶ Notably, the snake is female. The erotic encounter is marked by a plural form of pleasure:

I began to be intoxicated by the soft musical whisperings. I felt her cool and soft and smooth, her coldness producing a painful convulsion in my body and hurting me to the point of terror. I felt her as she slipped between the covers, then her two tiny fangs, like two pearls, began to caress my body; arriving at my thighs, the golden tongue, like an *arak* twig, inserted its pronged tip between them and began sipping and exhaling; sipping the poisons of my desire and exhaling the nectar of my ecstasy, till my whole body tingled and started to shake in sharp, painful, rapturous spasms—and all the while the tenderest of words were whispered to me as I confided to her all my longings.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Op. Cit.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁴⁶ Op. Cit.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 73.

In 'My World of the Unknown', the same-sex relationship in Rifaat is an Islamic embodiment of Irigaray's autoeroticism where female sexuality is not modelled on the male-oriented form of vaginal passivity. According to Irigaray, female sexual identity is not stabilised by the singular pattern of vaginal passivity.¹⁴⁸ A woman is not singular: Her sexual organ is marked by the double of the vulva and is multiplied by the plural erogenous zones.¹⁴⁹ Irigaray compares the plural structure of the female sexual identity to women's existence in language in which her existence is not contained by the patriarchal symbolic order.¹⁵⁰ Irigaray suggests that the masculine form of sexuality leaves women unable to come into contact with their sexuality except in the way that renders women the props of men's sexuality.¹⁵¹ In 'My World of the Unknown', the crack in the wall of the mysterious house where the snake is discovered and where the heroine finds her connection with God, without reproach, is an entrance into a sexual economy not mediated by the singular explanation of the phallic penetration. The crack is also a wound of female genital mutilation. There is a palimpsest underneath the master narratives, as the snake has told the heroine that the world of the crack is no Garden of Eden of sin, but 'the azure sea of pleasure'.¹⁵² The crack is re-written by the signifiers of the sipping and exhaling tongue. The multiple signification of the heroine's sexuality echoes Spivak's critique of Western discourses that assign subaltern positions, when reading Third World texts.¹⁵³ Heterosexuality is a gendering power, including the gendering power of Western body-based theories. Spivak further suggests that the sexually oppressed women subalterns are obliterated by Western literary theories, including Julia Kristeva's because her framework of the abject mother ignores the political and material

¹⁴⁸ Luce Irigaray, 'This Sex Which Is Not One', *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, eds. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 252.

¹⁴⁹ Op. Cit.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 253.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 250.

¹⁵² Alifa Rifaat, 'My World of the Unknown', *Distant View of A Minaret*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1987), p. 72.

¹⁵³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 254.

aspect of such a figure.¹⁵⁴ Paula Sanders shows the ways in which jurists in Islamic Medieval era determine a ‘true sex’ existing in hermaphrodites, people with vulva and penises.¹⁵⁵ The urinary orifice determines the sex despite extra organs.¹⁵⁶ Sanders demonstrates that it is difficult for Islamic Medieval jurists to maintain the integrity of gendering discourses.¹⁵⁷ As Irigaray postulates, female sexuality is both none and plural which does not privilege phallomorphism: ‘*She is neither one nor two*. Rigorously speaking, she cannot be identified either as one person, or as two. She resists all adequate definition.’¹⁵⁸ In ‘My World of the Unknown’, the eviction of the snake by the husband leads to evacuation of the family from the white house; the white house is disrupted, abandoned to its original state inhabited by the snakes.

Female sexuality is regulated by the practice of genital mutilation in ‘Who Will Be the Man?’ Rifaat’s short stories about female genital mutilation and sexuality are narratives suturing up the female circumcised body cut up by the nationalist and homogenous explanation of female genital mutilation as patriarchal oppression. In her ‘Who Will Be the Man?’ the heroine provides a woman-centred perspective on female genital mutilation. Rifaat’s short stories suture up the wound and create interstitial narrative recovery. As Chantal Zabus argues, the discourses of female genital mutilation are first and foremost men’s territory.¹⁵⁹ For Zabus, literature is still the privileged site to break the silence, imposed by patriarchal practices upholding patriarchal structure, particularly the first-person experiential texts.¹⁶⁰ The lived body, through autobiographical voice, sutures up the broken voices knifed by the patriarchal physical and psychic imprinting of the phallic traces of

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 264.

¹⁵⁵ Paula Sanders, ‘Gendering the Ungendered Body: Hermaphrodites in Medieval Islamic Law’, *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*, eds. Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 77.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 77-8.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 88.

¹⁵⁸ Luce Irigaray, ‘This Sex Which Is Not One’, *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, eds. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 251. The italics are re-produced in the original.

¹⁵⁹ Chantal Zabus, ‘Writing Women’s Rites: Excision in Experiential African Literature’, *Women’s Studies International Forum* 24:3-4 (May-August 2001), p. 335.

¹⁶⁰ Op. Cit.

clitoris.¹⁶¹ The merry atmosphere after the operation dilutes the protagonist's pain and yet, amongst the concern of the family and relatives, the heroine asks her mother, 'Since you love me, why did you sacrifice me?'¹⁶² In 'Who Will Be the Man?' female genital mutilation is carried out in a positive environment and encouragement from women, 'when your husband goes away for a long time, you won't suffer at all'.¹⁶³ Furthermore, for Zabus, writing about the experiences of clitoridectomy, heals the wound, violated by the discourse of banning clitoridectomy. The kind of anti-clitoridectomy is rallied under the banner of neo-colonialism, positing the African female body as a homogenous group of oppressed women.¹⁶⁴ The bodily experiential writing eventually is to recover the doubly colonised African female body.¹⁶⁵

In 'Who Will Be the Man?' the heroine's pain is contrasted with the women's ululations. As she experiences the pain, she has 'shrieks of a slaughtered baby rabbit,'¹⁶⁶ a celebration, which lightens her pain, takes place at the same time. The celebration includes gold gifts under her pillow and loud, melodious singing which marks her identity as a purified woman, 'Get up, oh bride, let down your braids and take off your silken gown'.¹⁶⁷ The heroine feels belonged: 'For I, too, am the daughter of pure parents. [...] Certainly the angels must have purified me also even though I didn't understand what purity meant at that time'.¹⁶⁸ The narrative site of female genital mutilation, for Rifaat, reaches out to women's sense of self-alienation. The heroine asks herself: 'Who will be the man?'¹⁶⁹

Sara Ahmed contends that migrancy for privileged people can constitute an experience of being-at-home, since the migrant subject can 'inhabit the world as a familiar

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 340.

¹⁶² Alifa Rifaat, 'Who Will Be the Man?' *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*, eds. Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 77.

¹⁶³ Op. Cit.

¹⁶⁴ Chantal Zabus, 'Writing Women's Rites: Excision in Experiential African Literature', *Women's Studies International Forum* 24:3-4 (May-August 2001), p. 341.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 342-43.

¹⁶⁶ Alifa Rifaat, 'Who Will Be the Man?' *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*, eds. Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 75.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 77.

and knowable terrain'.¹⁷⁰ For Ahmed, being at home is not to experience home as 'pure, safe and comfortable'.¹⁷¹ Further, for Ahmed, being-at-home is a speech act, that is, an act of reaching out to strangers without presuming them to be knowable:

We can think of the lived experience of being-at-home in terms of inhabiting a second skin, a skin which does not simply contain the homely subject, but which allows the subject to be touched and touch the world that is neither simply in the home or away from the home.¹⁷²

In 'Who will Be the Man'? the home for her, as the daughter of the village headman in the Third World, is idyllic until coarse hands seize her younger sister and her: 'I'm still confused. How could my mother abandon me to their coarse hands?'¹⁷³ She relates to the uncanny element of becoming belonged to the community. The heroine's daily rural life is interrupted by memory that makes her wake up every morning, aware of 'that dreadful morning'.¹⁷⁴ The repetitive morning echoes Cathy Caruth's argument concerning trauma: The event happens unexpectedly and returns repeatedly later; and this belated repetition suggests that the meanings of the event cannot be responded immediately.¹⁷⁵ Rifaat's narrative is a reaching out to women's selves and touching on the strangeness of the daily life. She expresses the ambivalence of belonging. As Anika Rahman and Nahid Toubia indicate, female genital mutilation is practised before Islam and Christianity and there is no evidence showing that the Quran or the Prophet Mohammed approves it.¹⁷⁶ I argue that Rifaat's narrative of the female genital mutilation trauma includes the silence coming from Orientalism.

The structure of Bakr's *The Golden Chariot* does not invoke a unity in time and space, as Anderson notices in the identity consolidation of realist novels.¹⁷⁷ The suffering of each individual woman is presented in a repetitive fashion, until the moment of Aziza's death. The

¹⁷⁰ Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodiment Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 85.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. p. 88.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁷³ Alifa Rifaat, 'Who Will Be the Man'? *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*, eds. Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 74.

¹⁷⁴ Op. Cit.

¹⁷⁵ Cathy Caruth, *Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University), p. 91 and p. 103.

¹⁷⁶ Anika Rahman and Nahid Toubia, *Female Genital Mutilation: A Guide to Laws and Policies Worldwide* (London: Zed Books, 2001), p. 6

¹⁷⁷ John Mcleod, *Beginning Post-colonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 72-74 and p. 94.

prison signifies a breakdown of the inside/outside demarcation and especially of political/criminal and private/public dichotomies.¹⁷⁸ The breakdown of these dichotomies allows the cellmates' narratives to go beyond the walls of the prison, a metaphor of sexual, cultural and political hegemony. The cyclical narrative contends not only social normative practices that marginalise the inmates but also the patriarchal symbolic order which causes Aziza to seek liberation in death. As P.T. Whelan argues about the function of the frame story, even within the restriction, that is, the physical walls of the private world, the protagonists engage in a journey that is no less hazardous.¹⁷⁹ Aziza's madness conveys an alternative time. The circular narrative pattern resembles Shahrazad, who transforms her daily life to give new meanings to heterosexual relationships.

In *The Golden Chariot*, the association of prison with psychiatric hospitals indicates the extent to which the patriarchal system controls women. Aziza is sent to prison, but not psychiatric hospital, because she insists that she premeditates the murder of her lover, who is actually her step-father. She claims that she is a criminal, rather than a mad woman. She is sentenced to life imprisonment and is content to live a life full of the memories being with her step-father. She enters the prison at age forty and her hair turns grey when the narrative traces her life. The time that *The Golden Chariot* depicts covers the period between the 1950s and 1970s when nationalism is prevalent and up to the 1980s, when rapid urban development causes social problems and crime. During this time, the inmates' lives are influenced by the loss of men's lives in the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973. For instance, Shafiq's murdered sister loses her husband in the 1967 war. Further, the 1967 war implicates women's lives in a broader sense of discursive confinement. An example of this is the aristocratic woman, Zaynab, whose practice of the *zar* ritual is considered a nationalist act against

¹⁷⁸ Barbara Harlow, *Barred: Women, Writing, and Political Detention* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1992), p. 135.

¹⁷⁹ P.T. Whelan, 'Women's Domestic Quest: Minimal Journeys and Their Frames in the Thousand and One Nights, "The Mark on the Wall" and "The Man with the Buttons"', *The Comparatist: Journal of the Southern Comparative Literature Association* 18 (May 1994), p. 155.

imperialism, when her lawyer defends for her. And for Aziza, during this period, 'Aziza's amazingly vivid memory preserved the smallest details of her strange life'.¹⁸⁰

The opening of the narrative describes Aziza in her old age, waiting to ascend the golden chariot, which will take her to heaven. With Aziza's death imminent, she is brought back to her childhood when the step-father transforms her into a woman. Toril Moi regards representation politics behind both realism and experimental writing in feminism, and she maintains that textual strategies are crucial to feminist politics.¹⁸¹ Moi deems the neglect of narrative strategies one in the tradition of humanism in which realism embraces the male transcendent self.¹⁸² The breakthrough in language and structure helps strategise the realist gender binaries and grasp women's perspectives. The narrative in *The Golden Chariot* is brought to a circle: She resembles 'the Nile eel which remembers the precise journey to the Mediterranean sea where it lays its eggs and breeds'.¹⁸³ The novel is a glimpse, looking back in her life before ascending the golden chariot. Similar to Lacan's idea of death as a healing of the split consciousness caused by the father's laws, Aziza seeks healing in death. Right before her death, Aziza recalls her mother and realises that her mother lavishes her love on her to the extent that she is willing to allow the illicit love to take place under her eyes. Regarding women and time, Julia Kristeva argues that women offer a cyclical time and a monumental time that disrupt historical time of the nation.¹⁸⁴ The heterogeneous time Kristeva conceives is neither a linear time argued by egalitarian feminists nor outside the linear time suggested by poststructuralist feminists¹⁸⁵; rather, it is 'a third attitude' within the historical time.¹⁸⁶ The narrative arrangement of *The Golden Chariot* helps create a space

¹⁸⁰ Salwa Bakr, *The Golden Chariot*, trans. Dinah Manisty (Reading: Garnet, 1995), p. 18.

¹⁸¹ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 3-8.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁸³ Salwa Bakr, *The Golden Chariot*, trans. Dinah Manisty (Reading: Garnet, 1995), p. 18.

¹⁸⁴ Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 188.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

where the historical time is co-existent with the time outside history and a circular female hysteric time.

Bakr's design of language, standard colloquial Arabic, conveys the women's daily lives. The language is an interstitial space re-signifying the literary canon in classic Arabic, or *fusha*. Bakr's concern is lower-class women and the language design is suited for this purpose. The standard colloquial Arabic portrays Sayyida's voices in 'That Beautiful Undiscovered Voice'. Sayyida is revitalised through singing:

She watched herself, her lips dancing with the tuneful words, her eyes sparkling with joyful enthusiasm, her cheeks ruddy with blood which she imagined had gushed from hidden springs in her body, her eyebrows that met and separated in ordered movements, leading the features of the face in a brilliant concord of sounds, as though they were the two skilful hands of the conductor of a superb orchestra.¹⁸⁷

The discovery of her voice changes her deeply as if there were some hidden spring which has issued within her body. In Bakr's writing, madness renders masculinity/femininity and reason/madness dichotomies collapsed; also, madness is an expression of breaking away from sex-role stereotype because of the tendency to pathologise femininity.¹⁸⁸ Sayyida's sexuality is tied up to motherhood, and her husband reminds her of the consequence because it diminishes the mother's status quo in front of the children.¹⁸⁹ Her husband would not give her any extra money to run the household, not even if 'Sayyida—as the saying goes—were to see her own earlobe'.¹⁹⁰ As Seymour-Jorn points out, this expression would not be found in the colloquial language; it is resonant with everyday speech and a direct translation of the colloquial phrase into *fusha*.¹⁹¹ The new language suggests Sayyida's new selfhood: 'It's

¹⁸⁷ Salwa Bakr, 'That Beautiful Undiscovered Voice', *The Wives of Men and Other Stories*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (London: Quartet Books, 1992), p. 64.

¹⁸⁸ Dinah Manisty, 'Madness as Textual Strategy in the Narratives of Three Egyptian Women Writers', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 14: Madness and Civilization (1994), pp. 152-53.

¹⁸⁹ Salwa Bakr, 'That Beautiful Undiscovered Voice', *The Wives of Men and Other Stories*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (London: Quartet Books, 1992), p. 62.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁹¹ Caroline Seymour-Jorn, 'A New Language: Salwa Bakr on Depicting Egyptian Women's Worlds', *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 11:2 (2002), p. 164.

happened that I've discovered my voice'.¹⁹² The language captures Sayyida, whose selfhood is excluded by the male-constituted standard language. Her life is cut off from even a friend, until this strange vital force resuscitates the suppressed energy within her. At first, Sayyida compares this vital force to the power of *afreets*, a kind of evil spirits. In *The Thousand and One Nights*, the *afreets* are the evil spirit that snatches a virgin at her wedding night, but in the end suffers from sexual revenge by the virgin having turned into a sexually voracious woman. In the Islamic conventions, female sexuality is associated with devils; once it is released, it gives rise to women's creativity. In the same manner, muse and art are regarded as devils in Arab culture.¹⁹³

In this section, I have argued that Alifa Rifaat's representation of women inserts an interstitial time which disrupts Orientalist assumption and displaces nationalist gender equality discourses. For Rifaat, the representation of female sexuality in 'My World of the Unknown' offers an Islamic psychic space which stresses the multiplicity of women's sexuality. From the private world, Rifaat's short stories re-construct anti-phallogocentric narratives beyond nationalism and anti-imperialism. Her narratives of female genital mutilation exceeds the Western theoretical framework of body-based writing. The design of language is also an interstitial space for contemporary Egyptian women's writing. For Bakr, the techniques of forging a new formal language, circularity and the adoption of the frame story are designed to reflect experiences as lived by women.¹⁹⁴ The repetitive pattern and shifting perspectives, as opposed to realist coherence in perspectives and linear structures, negotiate Bhabha's 'third space' outside gender binaries of nationalist discourses. In Bakr's writing, I argue that narrative circularity represents a non-synchronous time for capturing the voices of Egyptian female subalterns. Writing women's sexuality renders Egypt an

¹⁹² Salwa Bakr, 'That Beautiful Undiscovered Voice', *The Wiles of Men and Other Stories*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (London: Quartet Books, 1992), p. 66

¹⁹³ Nawal El Saadawi, *The Innocence of the Devil*, trans. Sherif Hetata (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 153.

¹⁹⁴ Caroline Seymour-Jorn, 'A New Language: Salwa Bakr on Depicting Egyptian Women's Worlds', *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 11:2 (2002), p. 172.

instantaneous ambivalent national space in their novels and short stories. I continue to discuss the relationship of eroticism and circular time in Bakr's work in the next section. I will also discuss the bodies as the site of encoded speech by allegedly mad women in Salwa Bakr's writing. In Bakr and Rifaat's writing, the erotic power is evoked to counter patriarchal accounts of female sexualities.

Madness, Deviance and Feminine Autoeroticism: Salwa Bakr and Alifa Rifaat

In this section, I consider Bakr's *The Golden Chariot*, her short story, 'Thirty-one Beautiful Trees' in her short story collection, *Such A Beautiful Voice and Other Stories*. The psychoanalytical discourse sets up a normalising effect that reflects the patriarchal heterosexual regime, and in doing so, it ascribes mental illness to individual personal problems and ignores the structural injustice caused by society. As Pauline Ada Uwakweh analyses women's militancy in African and African-American women's fiction, she identifies the combating strategy which does not seem empowering enough to be deemed one.¹⁹⁵ Internalising the structure of social injustice is optimal. The method of resistance can incur psychological disturbances and is riskier than conformism.¹⁹⁶ Madness can be one of its consequences. Bakr and Rifaat's writing suggests that writing sexuality has influence on society. Therefore, Bakr and Rifaat's sexuality writing continues the purpose of social critique. For Rifaat's short stories, I explore her 'Distant View of A Minaret', 'Badriyya and her Husband' and 'The Long Night of Winter' in *Distant View of A Minaret*. The erotic power in Rifaat's writing concerns female genital mutilation and the lack of sexual gratification. 'Distant View of A Minaret' describes a traditional woman who cannot have sexual satisfaction with her husband. She reaches out to her culture and encounters with technology. Rifaat explores the issue of sexual gratification as men's duty in Quranic

¹⁹⁵ Pauline Ada Uwakweh, 'The Dimensions of Female Militancy in African and African-American Women's Fiction: Buchi Emecheta, Nawal El Saadawi, Alice Walker, and Gloria Naylor', (Temple University: PhD Diss, 1995), pp. 48-9.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

teachings. In *The Golden Chariot*, Aziza's madness and sexuality create an instantaneous time for the minorities by relating to other individuals in the prison community. Aziza's love affair with her stepfather writes against the patriotic romantic couple. Her love affair and madness make space for the subalterns in the Third World.

Karima is a misfit for the sake of gender normalisation in 'Thirty-one Beautiful Trees'. The eyes, watching her to ensure that she put on her bras, the eyes, admonishing her behaviour for kissing a man in public subject her to gender surveillance. Female genital mutilation performed at age nine on her has even far-reaching impact. Eventually, gender division silencing her is turned against herself and ends up an internal violence of cutting her own tongue. Karima is full of fighting spirit. Cutting her own tongue is the extreme form of the combat. 'The Long Night of Winter' tells a story of an alienated ageing lady, living a life inscribed by the patriarchal system. The mistress's body is empty without memory of love, as the maid's 'rough loofah scraped painfully across her back', arousing her sensation.¹⁹⁷ Her husband leaves her lonely in the room and has sex with various young maids one after another. Bakr, from a secular position, and Rifaat, from a traditional position, challenge the restriction of erotic power. The mistress does not have a language to express this kind of pain because women also play a role in endorsing patriarchal practices and because even her mother tells her that men are all like her polygamous husband. As if a wake from her lost memory of the body, the mistress tells the maid to scrub her back harder so that her body does not feel self-alienated. In 'Badriyya and Her Husband', Badriyya is a lower-class urban girl. She is afraid of her husband having an affair with other women, which is common, and he is a handsome young man. Her marriage is not consummated because he has been in prison and idling away. It leaves her with an 'appetite for something unknown and untried deep within her. She was like a piece of land that has been prepared for sowing and suddenly

¹⁹⁷ Alifa Rifaat, 'The Long Night of Winter', *The Distant View of A Minaret*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1987), p. 59.

left'.¹⁹⁸ While she is worried about his extramarital affairs, the shop owner tells her the news which the wife is the last to know: '[I]f he were a woman, he would have been pregnant years ago'.¹⁹⁹

The palimpsestic element of the silenced text is suggested by the fact that 'Thirty-one Beautiful Trees' is a manuscript that Karima hides inside her mattress in the psychiatric hospital where she is detained for the rest of her life. Karima tells her reader she has not only decided to be silent but she has also decided to execute the tongue-cutting. Elaine Showalter suggests the history of psychiatry is male-dominant.²⁰⁰ Bakr criticises the psychiatric hospital which only makes women with mental illness to move from their domestic confinement to a misogynist institution. Another layer of silence is the patriarchal etching of the female body, the normalising etching on Karima's clitoris. The tongue-cutting is the ultimate act of silencing her sexuality. For 'Thirty-one Beautiful Trees', writing sexuality expresses the discontent at industrialisation in the city which the government does nothing about improving. Women's madness from the margins of an urban modernised city in the Third World makes space for subalterns. In 'Thirty-one Green Trees', one event leading to another sets the scene for Karima's eventual detention in the psychiatric hospital. Susan Bordo argues that the disorder symptoms of the body, such as anorexia, hysteria and agoraphobia, are a text that protests the patriarchal normative control.²⁰¹ The symptoms of the body are strategies against the patriarchal definition of femininity. Karima's body is a negotiation of the historical time, the hysterical, circular time in prison and it suggests the possibility of her subjectivity after death by passing on her writing. As the industrialisation increases and the trees are killed, men's obesity symptom reflects the relevance of patriarchy, capitalism and governmental corruption.

¹⁹⁸ Alifa Rifaat, 'Badriyya and Her Husband', *Distant View of A Minaret*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (Oxford: Heinemann, 1987), p. 33.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁰⁰ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 2007), p. 250.

²⁰¹ Susan Bordo, 'The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity', *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, eds. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 90-110.

Tongue-cutting signifies the patriarchal discursive power, substantiated through the power of the father's words and the mother's complicity. The will to cut her tongue also suggests the threat of female solidarity. Karima's mother once threatens to cut off her tongue because she divulges her brother's wrongdoing to her father, thereby causing him trouble. Anything which transgresses feminine docility and decorum is penalised. This relates to the Quranic regulation: 'Tell the believing women to cast their gaze down and guard their modesty, and not to display their adornments'.²⁰² Stifling women's speech has to do with destroying their creativity. Audre Lorde indicates the pertinence of the erotic to women's 'deepest and nonrational knowledge'.²⁰³ As Lorde implies, 'The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings'.²⁰⁴ Karima is considered insane, when she voices her opinion about not wearing bras. She looks at herself in the mirror and contemplates the practice of wearing bras, 'My breasts were only hanging down a little loosely and I said to myself: what is wrong with that?'.²⁰⁵ The situation is aggravated by the dispute with her boss when he penalises her for telling him that she will no longer be coming to the office wearing bras. Karima's madness echoes Elaine Showalter's idea that mental problems express 'the insoluble conflict between their desires to act as individuals and the internalized obligations to submit to the needs of the family, and to conform to the model of self-sacrificing "womanly" behavior'.²⁰⁶

In 'Thirty-one Beautiful Trees', Karima writes down her life when her death is near. The meaning of her life narrative dwells in the space of the beginning of another journey into death, and this suggests a circular structure of time that she experiences. Writing sexuality has to do with breaking women's silence because their desire is not represented in male authorship. Mary Ann Doane suggests the conflict between rejecting women as spectators

²⁰² *The Koran Translation*, ed. Yasin T. al-Jibouri, trans. S. V. Mir Ahmed Ali (Lake Mary, Florida: United Muslim Foundation, 2005), p. 257.

²⁰³ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1998), p. 53.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

²⁰⁵ Salwa Bakr, 'Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees', *Such A Beautiful Voice and Other Stories*, trans. Hoda El Sadda (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1992), p. 70.

²⁰⁶ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 2007), p. 144.

under the patriarchal gaze, turning them into the object and forbidding them to assume the position of the knowing subject in discourses.²⁰⁷ Karima's concern of the government's politics and election shows the significance of raising consciousness about patriarchy and about the disruptive power of sexuality. There is nothing she can do for the dying trees and for governmental corruption in Egypt. Karima has not lived the fullness of being a woman in her definition. Time loses meanings to her, 'I have lost track of the time I have spent here, probably many years'.²⁰⁸ Juliet Mitchell discusses the relation of hysteria and trauma, and she suggests the definition of memory as 'only a past whose meaning is realized in the present'.²⁰⁹ The reminiscences of pasts constitute the time of a hysteric. Her death and tongue-cutting attempts reveal a hysterical time by living in the memory. In the end, Karima awaits death with her body ageing, hair whitened and feet weakening and becoming an object not suited for men's sexual desire.²¹⁰

In Rifaat's writing, describing female sexualities makes space for subalterns. In 'The Long Night of Winter', the maid's young body makes the ageing mistress think of hers. In her 'Bahiyya's Eyes', Bahiyya looks at herself, and figures that it consists of 'two leaves' and 'mulberry'.²¹¹ This gaze from Bahiyya usurps the right of gaze reserved for men and re-writes the masculine penis and feminine vagina dichotomy. With regard to deconstructing female sexuality, Luce Irigaray explores female sexual practices, not defined by patriarchy, but by what she calls 'autoeroticism'.²¹² She offers 'autoeroticism' to supplant heteroeroticism which designates the clitoris as the atrophied penis. The vagina, as defined by Freud, establishes female sexuality as feminine and passive and this kind of theorisation regards female

²⁰⁷ Mary Ann Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator', *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, eds. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 176-194.

²⁰⁸ Salwa Bakr, 'Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees', *Such a Beautiful Voice and Other Stories*, trans. Hoda El Sadda (New Dehli: Kali for Women, 1992), p. 75.

²⁰⁹ Juliet Mitchell, *Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. 284.

²¹⁰ Salwa Bakr, 'Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees', *Such a Beautiful Voice and Other Stories*, trans. Hoda El Sadda (New Dehli: Kali for Women, 1992), p. 75.

²¹¹ Alifa Rifaat, 'Bahiyya's Eyes', *Distant View of A Minaret* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1983), p. 9.

²¹² Luce Irigaray, 'This Sex Which Is Not One', *Writing On The Body: Female Embodiment And Feminist Theory*, ed. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, And Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 249.

sexuality as no more than a function of procreation.²¹³ Irigaray's female autoeroticism disrupts female sexual singularity, focused on the vagina, and expands female erogenous zones to a doubleness of the two clitoral lips and also a multiplicity of other stimulations.²¹⁴ Womanhood, as Irigaray perceives, is not static; when women expresses themselves in language, the meanings are not fixed.²¹⁵

In Rifaat's 'The Long Night of Winter', the protagonist at her senior age expresses a sense of bodily alienation with her husband, who sleeps with his young servants: '[T]he hopes that things would change had now gone, but the ache to love and be loved was still there, as physically part of her as her sight or sense of smell'.²¹⁶ The maid's young body gives the ageing mistress a reflection on her marriage. Chantal Zabus examines Islamic same-sex relationship in contemporary sub-Saharan African literature and she shows the difficulty of naming and defining it. Same-sex practices are relatively difficult to be named because Islamic social networking relies on a strict distinction between men and women.²¹⁷ As Paula Sanders suggests, the gender of the ungendered person has to be determined: That person has to be either a male or a female for him/her to be a social being in Medieval Islamic law.²¹⁸ Zabus argues that same-sex desire takes place in places where it is least expected; for instance, '[T]he exciser's stimulation of the girlchild's clitoris so as to facilitate the nicking of the then aroused clitoris'.²¹⁹ Zabus describes the brides-to-be, who ask for anal sex so as not to damage their infibulations.²²⁰ A typical Orientalist image of Islamic sexual segregation is a timeless space full of sex and idleness. However, the old woman's corporal narrative creates a still time, maternal and repetitive, that renders the present moment of cultural

²¹³ Ibid., p. 248 and p. 252.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 251 and p. 252.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 253.

²¹⁶ Alifa Rifaat, 'The Long Night of Winter', *Distant View of A Minaret*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (Oxford: Heinemann, 1987), p. 58.

²¹⁷ Chantal Zabus, 'The text That Dare Not Speak Its Name: Contextual Heterosex and Same-Sex Desire in African Fiction', *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 28:1 (2005), p. 10.

²¹⁸ Paula Sanders, 'Gendering the Ungendered Body: Hermaphrodites in Medieval Islamic Law', *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*, eds. Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 75.

²¹⁹ Chantal Zabus, 'The text That Dare Not Speak Its Name: Contextual Heterosex and Same-Sex Desire in African Fiction', *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 28:1 (2005), p. 14.

²²⁰ Op. Cit.

translation visible. She articulates an unrepresented Islamic womanhood as a process of cultural splitting and ambivalence by pointing out self-alienation in domestic life.

Rifaat's 'Distant View of A Minaret' takes place in a Cairo urban area. She uses sexuality to describe the heroine's encounter with changing time. The heroine's husband always brings his sexual acts to an abrupt end. He has heart problems and when he is just about to reach the point of orgasm, he slips away from her, 'Are you mad, woman? Do you want to kill me?'²²¹ In fact, she has not had the experience of reaching that point because it seems to her that 'all she needed was just one more movement and her body and soul would be quenched...'.²²² In the story, her traditional space is penetrated by the skyline of Cairo. She lives in the cultural liminal space in which she tries to understand her life of globalising, technological modernity and only 'the call to afternoon prayers filter[s] through the shutters of the closed window and bring[s] her back to reality'.²²³ The wife's sexuality articulates a subaltern position which reveals the split tradition and uncovers the interstices of modern life. Standing on her sixth-floor flat, she ponders on how globalisation invades her life:

This single minaret, one of the twin minarets of the Mosque of Sultan Hasan, with above it a thin slice of the Citadel, was all that was now left of the panoramic view she had once had of old Cairo, with its countless mosques and minarets against a background of the Mokattam Hills and Mohamed Ali's Citadel.²²⁴

As Denys Johnson-Davies suggests, her pace is 'five daily prayers [...] like punctuation marks that divided up and gave meaning to her life'.²²⁵ Then, in between the afternoon and sunset prayers, she finds that her husband has another heart attack. Her life is so monotonous that 'she was surprised how calm she was'.²²⁶ The present renders the Muslim woman, who is to be rescued from oppression, knowable and available to the West, uncannily visible.

²²¹ Alifa Rifaat, 'Distant View of A Minaret', *Distant View of A Minaret and Other Stories*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (Oxford: Heinemann, 1987), p. 2.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²²³ *Op. Cit.*

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²²⁵ *Op. Cit.*

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Both Rifaat and Bakr's writing feature the erotic power. In 'Badriyya and Her Husband', writing heterosexuality elicits a narrative of male homosexuality. As Murray and Roscoe show, homosexuality in Islamic society challenges Eurocentric model of gay/lesbian study.²²⁷ They argue that homosexuality develops in Muslim society and urbanisation contributes to changes of patterns.²²⁸ They point out that Western homosexuality is not unique to modern homosexuality.²²⁹ Their research further points out that the notion of homosexuality based on egalitarian concept comes from European and North American regions after World War Two and that it assumes that homosexuality in traditional societies is repressed.²³⁰ The fact that Badriyya's husband is homosexual emphasises that female sexuality is not treated according to Quranic teachings. As the Quran indicates in the Chapter of 'The Cow', verse 187, 'It is made lawful to you on the nights of the fast to cohabit with your wives; they are an apparel for you and you are an apparel for them'.²³¹ Rifaat points out that silence remains in the area of female sexuality. Abdelwaha Bouhdiba's research affirms that although Islam acknowledges the spiritual aspect in sexuality, conventional beliefs and practices do not reflect the spiritual consideration in sexual practices.²³² Moreover, Islam does not only sanction male sexuality but also female sexuality.²³³ Bouhdiba suggests that sexual liberation is an indication of Westernisation; however, it does not necessarily mean quality of sexuality.²³⁴ In 'Badriyya and Her Husband', their unconsummated marriage is prohibited in Islam. Sexual pleasure is well accommodated in Islam. As Bouhdiba argues, 'the sexuality encountered in others is also a projection in God'.²³⁵ Bakr also contends that the reduction of sexuality to practices of the flesh diminishes sexuality to a shallow sensation. In *The Golden*

²²⁷ Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe, *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History and Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p. 5.

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

²²⁹ Op. Cit.

²³⁰ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

²³¹ *The Koran Translation*, ed. Yasin T. al-Jibouri, trans. S. V. Mir Ahmed Ali (Lake Mary, Florida: United Muslim Foundation, 2005), p. 20.

²³² Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Saqi, 1998), p. 100.

²³³ Ibid., p. 92.

²³⁴ Ibid., p. 243.

²³⁵ Op. Cit.

Chariot, Hinna ends up murdering her husband, who is only concerned about her body in sexual acts and reduces sexuality to fetishism. Not only does his excessive demand for sexual activities deprive her of any sexual pleasure, but his male fantasy of female coquettishness also makes their sexuality merely a matter to procure his sexual gratification. At a senior age, Hinna's husband still imposes on her the meticulous feminine stereotypes; without that, he accuses her of not fulfilling her religious duty as a wife.²³⁶ It makes the case worse since sexual matters are forbidden to be publicly discussed, not even to be mentioned to her mother. It remains an untold story until she is in jail with her fellow female inmates who give her a sense of collective identity.

Erotic power in Rifaat and Bakr's writing generates a polyvocal space in Egypt. Audre Lorde expresses the problematic attitude in which sexuality is abused by patriarchal culture and is reduced to pornography:

The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For this reason, we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, fusing it with its opposite, the pornographic.²³⁷

Consequently, the spiritual aspect of sexuality is ignored and the creative force in erotic power cannot be channelled into life and work as a whole.²³⁸ Lorde advocates erotic power as the core within oneself.²³⁹ Drawing on the recommendation of the erotic power by Lorde, Paula Webster cautions against the silence of sexual pleasure as a forbidden area.²⁴⁰ She suggests that the lack of a 'documented erotic heritage' from one generation to another in life and in fictional tradition, results in lack of knowledge for individuals.²⁴¹ Writing sexuality in Egyptian women's writing shows the discrepancy of knowledge and cultural intermixture

²³⁶ Salwa Bakr, *The Golden Chariot*, trans. Dinah Manisty (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 1995), p. 45.

²³⁷ Audre Lorde, 'Uses of The Erotic: The Erotic As Power', *Writing On The Body: Female, Embodiment And Feminist Theory*, eds. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 278.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

²⁴⁰ Paula Webster, 'The Forbidden: Eroticism and Taboo', *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 393.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 394.

between the East and West. The gathering up of women in prison in *The Golden Chariot* recovers the lack of generational memories of female sexualities. The theme of romantic love links together the women who come from different class background and who fall in love with men from different religious beliefs. In *The Golden Chariot*, the widowed older sister of Shafiq is murdered by her father and brother who base their justification on the *sharia* law. The novel suggests that it is impossible that the young widowed woman so beautiful 'would not want someone of the male sex'.²⁴² In fact, her vow of not marrying is due to the fact that she falls in love with a Christian man. The vow only serves as a pretence of her love affair. The concept of love as an empowering energy connects the inmates' lives. Azima, the skilful grave mourner, is two hundred centimetres tall, and consequently prevents her from love. Her tragedy is that her desire of love is so obvious that she becomes the prey of a fortune seeker who covets her wealth. Aziza's love memory is lived again and again hysterically and it becomes her sense of time in prison. She remembers that the murder of the stepfather-lover is meant to be executed in a most artistic fashion in order to match up to her love. For Aziza's hysteria, killing her stepfather-lover is the only way of 'preserving these beautiful, unblemished memories, sweet and pure'.²⁴³ She once thinks about 'drugging him heavily so that he couldn't move, then coating him with vast quantities of boiling dark-coloured chocolate until it hardened into an enormous mould of sweetness which no one can resist'.²⁴⁴

The French feminists offer the female body as a site of resistance to deconstruct the patriarchal system, in language and psychoanalysis.²⁴⁵ Women's bodies have resistance power based on the sexual pleasure during infancy and the forms of sexuality not effaced by patriarchal repression.²⁴⁶ Compared to Elaine Showalter's hysteria hypothesis as a resistance against pathologising femininity, Juliet Mitchell's account of hysteria expands the Oedipal

²⁴² Salwa Bakr, *The Golden Chariot*, trans. Dinah Manisty (Reading: Garnet, 1995), p. 170.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁴⁴ *Op. Cit.*

²⁴⁵ Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of Écriture Féminine', *Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p. 361.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 362.

complex. Mitchell explains that the both gendering mechanisms and sibling rivals can stage the survival drive.²⁴⁷ Mitchell comes from object relation theory and she contends that the loss of recognition in an infant's life results in hysteria in which the body is used to present the desire to fuse with its mother.²⁴⁸ More importantly, Mitchell reclaims hysteria in contemporary practice of psychoanalysis and she suggests that sexualisation is a powerful expression of wanting; therefore, a hysteric's expression of sexuality is rather a sexualisation of absence or desire.²⁴⁹ In *The Golden Chariot*, Aziza has always felt that the person she kills is not her step-father, but someone else who resembles him. Aziza's father dies before she was born. Her feelings toward her step-father are ambivalent. Failing to be his stepfather's wife leads to her hysteria. Mitchell links the lost sense of the body in hysterics with the spirit possession of the *zar* ritual and points out the unbearable feelings in the loss of recognition.²⁵⁰ Mitchell suggests that the unwanted feeling of grudge and jealousy causes the hysteric reaction in a polygynous society.²⁵¹ She shows that 'hysteria and its performances enable the presentation of absence rather than the representation of loss'.²⁵² Julia Kristeva points out about the obsessed time of the hysteric as cyclical and monumental.²⁵³ Kristeva indicates that the word 'woman' has the 'negative effect of effacing the differences among the diverse functions or structures which operate beneath this word'.²⁵⁴ In *The Golden Chariot*, Aziza's psychic time, by her sexualisation of wanting and her hysteric body, exposes the violent erasure of women's differences.

In *The Golden Chariot*, Aziza remembers vividly the day when her stepfather-lover takes her innocence away from her young body. Afterwards, both the mother and daughter wait for the man to return home. The mother has been happy about the good relationship

²⁴⁷ Juliet Mitchell, *Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. 19.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

²⁵¹ *Op. Cit.*

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 242.

²⁵³ Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader: Julia Kristeva* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 192.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

between the stepfather and the daughter. The two women's lives are bound together by their common fate of the seclusion, confined by the four walls. Aziza has grown to play the two roles of the daughter and lover well, and as she thinks of the relationship in prison, she does not think the roles are incompatible. Juliet Mitchell suggests that hysterics' dramatisation is an indication of the disappearance of their body/mind.²⁵⁵ Her narcissism of love indicates a strategy of the absent body. Her narcissism and erotic feelings in hysteric behaviours stand for her disappearing body. The pain that her step-father marries someone else threatens to annul her body:

She killed for the sake of preserving her unique passionate love and she only lived so that its tree should for ever mature and flourish. The person she killed was another person who resembled him. She had decided to get rid of him after he had taken on the guise of her mother's husband and only so that she could protect what she had cherished throughout her life. He stole the eternal flame of her passionate love and uprooted the tree of life from its very depths.²⁵⁶

Aziza starts to show un-restrained symptoms of violence toward the other cellmates and she has to be confined in a separate cell.

In this section, I have argued that Salwa Bakr's writing has a breakthrough by means of an Islamic revisionist counter-normative politics of female sexualities. In both Bakr and Rifaat's writing, daily life is a time that transforms cultural boundaries; in Bakr's case, the concept of love, and in Rifaat's, the uncanny and alienating element of tradition. In *The Golden Chariot*, hysteria enacts a process of telling national narratives. Shahrazad's repetitive narratives delay her and other women's execution. Similarly, in the post-1970s generation, temporality unravels vanishing bodies from a fixed interpretation of heterosexuality.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 226.

²⁵⁶ Salwa Bakr, *The Golden Chariot*, trans. Dinah Manisty (Reading: Garnet, 1995), p. 185.

Conclusion

Salem's short stories provide a feminine thrust into the masculine tradition in Egypt's realist social criticism. *Children of the Water* records women's daily lives that are deteriorated by the socioeconomic factors brought about by the drastic changes during the rules of Nasser and Sadat. The body parts in Salem's writing, standing for the nation, construct the dashed hope. Novels by contemporary Egyptian women writers, revealed in *The Golden Chariot*, are subversive in that they do not embody unification of time and space, such as the nationalist romantic love discourse. Different times, consisting of the after-life journey, historical time and hysteric time, co-exist in *The Golden Chariot*. Rifaat's writing of intimate relationship touches upon the symbolic androcentric order. Being dutiful wives and mothers, surrounded by timely prayer calls, is un-homely in her depiction of female sexualities. Egyptian women's autoeroticism and same-sex desire disrupt patriarchal system and reflect the splitting of Islamic concept of sexualities. Salem, Rifaat and Bakr present a plural sense of living as Egyptian women. In Chapter Four, I argue that Egyptian-British writer, Ahdaf Soueif's transnational writing is interstitial negotiations of Muslim identities. In the concluding chapter, I demonstrate that romantic love is an effective strategy of all in narrating stories in Egyptian women's writing.

Chapter Four

Ahdaf Soueif: Embodying Egyptian Women's Histories in the Transnational World

Introduction

This chapter investigates the narratives of women's sexualities in Ahdaf Soueif's novels and short stories. I read her two novels, *In the Eye of the Sun* and *The Map of Love* and her short stories, 'Her Man', 'The Nativity', 'Sandpiper', 'The Water-Heater' and 'Chez Milou', selected from her three collections, *Aisha*, *Sandpiper* and *I Think of You* for her anti-nationalist accounts. Soueif relocates women's sexual silences and her writing actively constructs Egyptian national ambivalence. The romance genre that Soueif uses tends to be discredited. Soueif's representation of women's sexual life articulates a third space that Homi Bhabha conceives as a 'liminal signifying space'.¹ Progressive time is made possible by excluding women and ignoring the representation of their sexualities. *The Map of Love* constitutes Anna's love affair that must be mediated through encounters with women. For instance, Anna's life must be accessed through Amal and Isabel. Also, time, composed of by tracing Anna's writing and objects left behind her, in *The Map of Love* becomes a re-signifying space of the nation. For Bhabha, this liminal space is an in-between space: a space that is forever split and subject to a performative re-signification. The character of Anna Winterborne, whom I consider a white Shahrazad figure, constitutes a corporeal and discursive borderline space. In this chapter, I explore Soueif's strategy of discursive fluidity and her representation of women's sexual bodies as both corporeal and discursive borderline figures.

I read Soueif's novel, *In the Eye of the Sun* to consider how the representation of female daily private lives overlaps with specific historical accounts. *In the Eye of the Sun* accounts for the historical moments between 1967 and 1980. It revolves around the heroine,

¹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 212.

Asya's relationship and marriage to Saif. Asya studies in England in the 1970s and returns to Egypt in the 1980s. Saif's impotence is an unspoken secret and it leads to Asya's extramarital affairs and practices of masturbation. In *In the Eye of the Sun*, personal lives are involved in and determined by history, and in the meantime, historical accounts are fluid discursive manipulations. Personal encounters give rise to the possibilities of forming unheard voices. In *In the Eye of the Sun*, not only do female sexualities form an anti-colonialist transnational space, so does the discussion of the Palestinians' struggle, whose nationalist identities are shaped by displacement and migrancy. *The Map of Love* accounts for Egyptian history at the turn of the twentieth century during the nationalist struggle and transnational discourses at the turn of the twenty-first century. This novel is developed around interracial marriages between Anna and Sharif at the turn of the twentieth century and Isabel and Omar at the turn of the twenty-first century. About one hundred years later, Anna's journals and diaries are discovered by Isabel in New York and brought back to Amal in Egypt to find that they belong to Amal's British ancestress, Anna.

For Soueif's short stories, 'The Water-Heater' signifies the masculine feminist-nationalist discourse. The brother's legal guardianship is questioned by his sexual desire over his young sister. His sexual desire amplifies patriarchal control over women's sexuality. Zeina in 'Her Man' deploys her body in order not only to save herself from Islamic polygamous practices but she also complicates heterosexuality as a strategy in Islamic narratives. She seizes the opportunity of sexual activity with her co-wife and leaves a bruise on the co-wife's buttocks. Adopting the patriarchal logic that the first wife would be jealous of sharing her husband with other women, Zeina successfully fabricates the story that the bruise is not her doing but his co-wife's lover. In 'The Nativity', the Westernised, intellectual Aisha is cast as a stranger to herself, who must re-experience herself in order to know herself. She embarks on the corporeal journey to experience Egyptian local culture. Rape ends

Aisha's exploration of her sexual self. Aisha and Asya are cosmopolitan figures living in England and Egypt, whilst Anna, the British woman in 'Sandpiper' and Milou in 'Chez Milou' are white Shahrazads constituting Egyptian history. Milou's life is inscribed in Egypt between the 1920s and 1980s, but is lived like a repeated film she has watched in the Russian restaurant her father starts. In 'Sandpiper', the British woman relates maternity to her life in Egypt and Africa, and thereby disrupts the symbolic appropriation of women's roles and Orientalist imagination of the national characteristics.

Ahdaf Soueif moves in and out of different discourses with ease. Personal relationship in her writing re-signifies the national imagination, inclusive of the aspects of the 'historical, biological, geographic, and cultural-linguistic', which constitutes the nation's myth as Jonathan Rée points out.² Soueif's position is a cosmopolitan one. On the one hand, Rée's point suggests that internationality presumes the existence of the nation 'through sentiments of national character or national identity'.³ On the other hand, Pheng Cheah indicates a position of postcolonial hybridity, which is equally problematic. As Cheah argues, 'Hybridity theorists suggest that if we view culture as something constructed by discourse or signification, then the subject of culture becomes the site of permanent contestation'.⁴ Cheah's statement points to the romanticising view of subalterns whose labour is outside the circuit in the global division of work, but who hardly have any power of subversion for reversing grand narratives.⁵ In Soueif's writing, fundamentalist revival becomes the discursive site to suggest Asya and Aisha's more fluid and privileged identities.

² Jonathan Rée, 'Cosmopolitanism and the Experience of Nationality', *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, eds. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 83.

³ Ibid., p. 87.

⁴ Pheng Cheah, 'Given Culture: Rethinking Cosmopolitical Freedom in Transnationalism', *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, eds. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 293.

⁵ Ibid., p. 302.

Capturing Women's Silences in Soueif's Writing

In this section, I examine Soueif's revelation of women's sexualities and when they are expressed, they are a device to articulate the defeat of the June War. I offer a historical background of Soueif's writing, particularly on the Palestinian question. I start with the historical moment demonstrated in Soueif's short story, 'The Water-Heater', a nationalist-feminist narrative. This serves as a counternarrative to masculine national romance. The national gender order is disrupted in 'The Water-Heater' so that the sovereign male subject is no longer valid in the face of gender boundary collapse. This short story calls into question Egyptian men's feminist ideal at the turn of the twentieth century. In *In the Eye of the Sun*, women's sexualities are deployed in constituting Egyptian history. In this case, Asya's students, who express the idea of *awra* through their *niqab*, are distantly related to her extramarital affair imagination in England. In this sense, the sexual encounters that Asya and the British, Gerald, are already involved in other encounters. The silence of Soueif's women is broken by seeking discursive fluidity.

Soueif writes during Hosni Mubarak's time. Mubarak became Egypt's president after Anwar Sadat was assassinated in 1981. Mubarak dealt with the sensitive issue of Israel; he never renounced Sadat's peace policy, but he and other Arab governments restored diplomatic relationships.⁶ This indicates the acquiescence to peace policy from the Arab countries.⁷ Also, Mubarak mended Egypt's relationship with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation.⁸ Mubarak's role between the PLO and Israel made Israelis have the view that Egypt has returned to support anti-Zionism.⁹ With regard to Mubarak's relationships with the superpowers, the United States had been Egypt's main economic and military funding supporter, as the price of ensuring peace with Israel.¹⁰ The money funded was paid for arms

⁶ Arthur Goldschmidt, *A Brief History of Egypt* (New York: Infobase, 2008), p. 214.

⁷ Op. Cit.

⁸ Op. Cit.

⁹ Op. Cit.

¹⁰ Op. Cit.

sold by America, for improving the water and sewer system in Cairo, bettering phone systems, building new schools and helping family planning and importing foods.¹¹ Although consumerism and capitalism, such as cola, Kentucky Chicken, Hilton and Sheraton Hotels, were prevalent, human rights issues were not more liberating.¹² In 2005, the 1971 constitution was changed to permit an open electoral contest, but the main challenger, Ayman Nur, was arrested.¹³ He also took repressive measures on the Law of Associations, which restricted associations of voluntary groups, including radical Islamic groups, communists and women rights supporters.¹⁴ Mubarak took stricter measures against entrepreneurial corruption.¹⁵ This was resented by those whose ambitions were thwarted. Thus, it was easy for the urban poor population to be manipulated under the banner of restoration from *jahiliyya*, or pre-Islamic ignorance.¹⁶ Islamic extremists propagated information and images of consumerism and sexual and behavioural immorality committed by Westerners and Gulf Arabs.¹⁷ However, although Islamic extremists recruited the poor youths for Islamic *Jihad*, the rally did create a national religious identity.¹⁸

During the nineteenth century, the Arabs living in Palestine started to feel that they were a distinct ethnic group, rather than Arabs affiliated with the Ottoman Empire.¹⁹ In 1805, Muhammad Ali rebelled against the Ottoman Empire and seized Egypt.²⁰ In 1831, he took over Palestine and had his nephew govern Palestine.²¹ In 1914, the Ottoman Empire entered the First World War to fight against Great Britain, but it was too weak. At the end of the war in 1919, Great Britain controlled most of the Middle East, including Palestine.²² The Balfour

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 214-15.

¹² Ibid., p. 217.

¹³ Op. Cit.

¹⁴ Nadje Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 79-80.

¹⁵ Arthur Goldschmidt, *A Brief History of Egypt* (New York: Infobase, 2008), p. 222.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 224.

¹⁷ Op. Cit.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 222.

¹⁹ Frank Mitch, *Understanding the Holy Land: Answering Questions about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (New York: Viking, 2005), p. 28.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 31-2.

²² Ibid., p. 36.

Declaration in 1917 started the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.²³ The British position on the Palestinian question was contradictory because it promised a homeland for Jews and non-infringement of Palestinians' rights. The British Mandate government took charge of Palestine in 1919 and Jewish immigration, or *aliya*, brought a great deal of Jewish population to Palestine during the next few years.²⁴ In the 1930s during the British Mandate, Palestinians became radical and they formed groups, such as Istiqal, calling for Arabs inside or outside Palestine to create a nation of their own.²⁵ Istiqal resorted to violence against both Jews and the British. After World War Two, the British lost control of Palestine and the Jews, suffering from the holocaust, together with Zionists, believed that Palestine was their new homes. The United Nations tried to settle the dispute between Jews and Palestinians by dividing the Mandate into two countries.²⁶ However, the fight began before the partition was scheduled to take effect in 1948. In 1948, when Israel declared independence, five Arab nations waged war against Israel. During the war in 1948 and 1949, the Palestinians' dream to have their own country was dashed and an estimated one million Palestinians fled the fighting.²⁷ They were scattered in the Arab countries and were not allowed to return to their homes. Palestinians were not an immediate threat after the Israeli independence, but the Arab nations were. They were not going to admit the existence of the Israeli nation. Pan-Arabism against the Western power, including Israel, dwindled after the defeat of the June War. For the Palestinians, who fled during and after 1948, they lived in the camps or shantytowns in the surrounding countries. Those places were supposed to be temporary, but they were still there for the next fifty years.²⁸ In 1964, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation was created to represent the divided and dispersed Palestinian groups. The PLO, whose goal was the Palestinian independence, was an umbrella organisation, which was composed of many

²³ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 36-8.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 41.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 49.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 52.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 65.

different groups with a variety of ideologies.²⁹ The PLO's lack of real power contributed to the founding of Fatah, led by Yasser Arafat, dedicated to the Palestinian cause by violent measures.³⁰ Arafat's goal was a Palestinian nation in all of the Mandate territory.³¹ The Palestinians who lived in the Occupied Territories developed a conflicting identity in the process of incorporating into Israel.³² From 1967 to 1987, Israel and the Occupied Territories gradually grew into one society, and Palestinians became more economically dependent on Israel, since they were isolated from the Arab world.³³ Palestinians started *intifada*, which means boycotting Israelis by 'shaking off a slumber'³⁴, and strengthened their identity and their Palestinian nationalism.³⁵ The *intifada* created groups such as Hamas, a militant and religious group, dedicated to the establishment of an Islamic state in the Occupied Territories.³⁶

In *In the Eye of the Sun*, partaking of the nationalist-feminist narrative paradigm, the 1967 defeat is coupled with Asya's commencement of university education and her encounter with her future husband, Saif. Female bodies that are determined by their burden as national boundary marker are reversed. *In the Eye of the Sun* emphasises the male bodies to reverse the gaze that always focuses on the feminine bodies as the object. If the casualties of the Egyptian troops in the 1967 defeat signify the frailty of the patriarchal thinking on the gender attributes, two more major events emphasise the subversion against the patriarchal symbolic power by bringing the male bodies to attention. The image of the Egyptian soldiers captures the calamity befalling the nation; they are devastatingly exhausted because of not being protected from the bombing of the Israeli troops in the hot deserts under the sun. Saif is impotent and Asya's uncle, Hamid, is maimed and diseased, his life forever changed by the

²⁹ Ibid., p. 65-8 .

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 68.

³¹ Ibid., p. 69..

³² Ibid, p. 74.

³³ Ibid., p. 77.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 80.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 80-5.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 82.

car accident due to the negligence of the army truck in 1967. They suggest the crisis of the Egyptian identity. Women's sexuality, as symbolic and experiential constitution, in the process of making national identity, is problematised by Saif's impotence. It is as if masculinity, as biological destiny, were profoundly fictive, and Saif is forced to perform his gender. Saif's unspeakable pain of impotence shows the wound of articulating history.

In 'The Water-Heater', the ideal of the progressive male-feminist image promoted by modern Egyptian men at the turn of the twentieth century is questioned by the very brother-sister relationship. Salah, a law student whose view originally echoes Qasim Amin's affirmative stance toward women's education, fails to sustain his positivistic view of women. On the contrary, Salah has to hasten to agree on the marriage of his sister, Faten, at the young age of sixteen. In the story, Faten's body becomes an empty signifier, a fixed image of a young curvaceous woman with the fragrance of soap after a shower. Salah reaches the limit of revealing his illicit sexual desire toward his own sister when he accuses her of reading French magazines in which the materials are deemed improper for girls of decent upbringing. Indeed, Salah projects his suspicion onto his sister and he begins to obsess over her innocence: 'How do I know she is innocent?'³⁷ The supposed guardian role of the brother is aggravated by his belief as a nationalist-feminist and as an enforcer of religious piety.

There is the brother's hidden text in 'The Water-Heater': female bodies as the signifier of nationalism and the brother's insatiable sexual desire. The brother's lack of control on his sexuality reverses men's sexual domination. The nationalist gendering rationale cannot be attained as it is constantly subverted by the brother's sexual desire:

And he [Salah] had never been tempted to transgress God's law and stare at their persons or covet them. Since he had become a man the only women he had raised his eyes to were those he could look at without sin, with impurity, because they were forbidden to him: his aunts, his mother and his sister.³⁸

³⁷ Ahdaf Soueif, 'The Water-Heater', *Sandpiper* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), p. 79.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

Now that Salah's sexual desire is aroused by his own sister, if not by the girls on the street, it renders the Islamic community sustained by a coalescence of brotherhood problematic. The patriarchal symbolic order which constructs historical accounts becomes untenable. The Egyptian Islamic female bodies must be distinctive from the erotic French women. As the days wear on, Faten's body is devoid of its daily existence. She becomes the brother's projection, or exactly the erotic figures in the magazines:

Her face was in the shadow and all he could see was the light, shining through her thin cotton night-dress, silhouetting a curved shimmering figure, while her clean, wet hair clung to her neck. She only stood there an instant but he felt the steam new-released from the bathroom surround him and a great heat rise in his body.³⁹

The reason why Salah's progressive thinking on women's education as the nation's evolution is quickly abandoned is not due to her sexuality but his fear. Indeed, Faten does not have a voice, but is quickly arranged for marriage. The progressive idea of education for women is expendable, as if it were only for showing Salah's progressive thinking, or even for saving himself from sexual drives. Salah's thoughts vacillate between Faten's trickery and innocence, a thinking which alienates Faten's body in the making of the textual world and deprives her of corporeality. 'The Water-Heater' emphasises the new time-space with an anti-nationalist position. In Soueif's writing, the representation of heterosexual relationship disturbs nationalist identities and forms a heterogeneous thinking of gender politics in Egypt. In so doing, Soueif brings the question of Egyptian masculinity as biological destiny to the fore.

The national history is perceived differently with masculinity at risk as the symbol of the nation in 'The Water-Heater' and in *In the Eye of the Sun*. The heterosexual couple, Saif and Asya, are not enemies in the sense of the Muslim couple in which the men are in fear of the power of female sexuality. On the contrary, through this couple, *In the Eye of the Sun* describes heterosexuality in an even more silent and bleak form, Saif's impotence. The low-

³⁹ Ibid., p. 72.

spirited atmosphere caused by Saif's impotence hovers about Asya's marriage and along the postcolonial history in Egypt. The discrepancy between the heterosexual marriage and Saif's impotence is so great that heterosexuality is an effective strategy to represent Egypt and the problem of rendering historical accounts. The heterosexual malleable identities are the site to articulate the psychological effect of the historical moment and serve as an instantaneous postcolonial time.

In the Eye of the Sun, just as Soueif shows Salah's unsuccessful attempts to project his sexuality on Faten, in 'The Water-Heater', Saif's silence is even graver. His silence on his impotence and by contrast, Asya's parents' surveillance on her, accentuates the problem of the patriarchal regulation and women's welfare and the problem of surveillance mechanism. The gender regulations are exposed as lies in Saif's case. Once again, the separation of love and sexuality occurs in *In the Eye of the Sun*.⁴⁰ The construction around men's sexual dominance naturally keeps Saif's impotence a secret. He wouldn't touch where the wound comes from and what he can do to deal with it. Even Saif's mother is so benign in treating the matter so that the wound exists as if it never did. Furthermore, she lies by turning the defect into something that would make up for the patriarchal vice, loyalty. His mother tells the truth in another way, 'He'll always be loyal to you, Asya. He'll carry you in his eyes and will always be faithful'.⁴¹ Asya in *In the Eye of the Sun* asks the role of sexuality in the union of the couple: 'Do you think it's possible for a couple to go on wanting each other for years and years after they're together?'⁴² However, the whole issue of sexuality as a cultural taboo prevents Asya from articulating that it is actually his impotence that weighs her down and makes her sad.

Each Sunday lying in Saif's bed, being left alone in his own room, Asya is being told about what Saif and his mother do not say directly. If one of them touched the truth about his

⁴⁰ Isam Shihada, 'Politics of Desire in Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun*', *Nebula* 7:17:2 (June, 2010), p. 3.

⁴¹ Ahdaf Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), p. 159.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 197.

impotence, Asya would be able to make her own choice. But, each Sunday at Saif's home, Asya believes that they have been doing their best to avoid breaching the patriarchal, religious rule by having physical contact but restraining from having sex. The need to maintain Saif's masculinity is so great that the lies even start to gain a sense of truth, as he lies about his German shepherd and the location of the room in his house. Saif's mother talks about his ex-fiancé, who breaks the engagement, as if the problem resulted solely from the dispute in her family. But still, this does not explain the sense of lies that Saif gives:

Asya tortures herself with the thought of Didi Hashim. But it is a kinder, more homely pain than the German Shepherd Torture or the Room Upstairs Torture. She waits in dread for others to unfold. She tries not to build on information he gives her and she is cautious in front of others in case she unknowingly contradicts him. She watches him and wonders what he thinks.⁴³

Saif's impotence, like the lies he always gives Asya, hidden among the trivial lies, is seen as simply one of those. One lie after another leads to the untenability of the sense of reality in Asya's life. Saif's casual lies are heaped up until someday Asya comes to find that reality and what Saif tells her are totally upside down:

It is Sunday afternoon, and she is sad. She is lying in his arms, and she is sad. They have just made—after their fashion—love, and she is sad. Saif is stroking her arm. Should she tell him about the sunlight, 'the sunlight in the garden hardens and grows cold/you cannot cage--' oh, stop it. It is just—it's always on Sunday. Always on Sunday. And always after lunch. And always the same.⁴⁴

Saif's lies articulate the defeat in the June War. His lies signify the corruption surrounding the defeat of the war. The performance of Egypt in the June War is a total surprise.⁴⁵ The heavily armed Division received orders to be withdrawn to Cairo and Ismailia at noon, which literally made the soldiers exposed to Israeli attacks. It remained a mystery about the reason they had to make the retreat from the Sinai, when they were untouched or as to why the orders were changed, as long as they arrived in Cairo. When the soldiers approached the

⁴³ Ibid., p. 160.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 161.

⁴⁵ Richard B. Parker, 'The June 1967 War: Some Mysteries Explored,' *Middle East Journal*, 46:2 (spring, 1992), p. 177.

Sinai, they were bombed and wiped out. It was unbelievable that Nasser would make such an arrangement and drag Egypt into a defeated war. The Washington intelligence community suspected that Nasser and his military commander, Abd al-Hakim Amr, fell into the crisis, rather than provoked it.⁴⁶ Yet, Richard B. Parker's research indicates that it is now generally concluded that Amr's military power exceeded Nasser's and he was not sure about the loyalty of the army and was also dragged into the war with enthusiasm.⁴⁷ *In the Eye of the Sun* describes the intimate and tense relationship between Nasser and Amr: 'Taller than any other man there—except possibly his friend Field Marshal 'Amer who kept abreast with him but was colourless and bland'.⁴⁸

In *In the Eye of the Sun*, Soueif's position is anti-nationalist and anti-Orientalist, an idea associating with wife-beating, polygamy, and sexual dominance and so on. Explicit description of female sexuality in *In the Eye of the Sun* causes the ban on the novel in Egypt; Soueif notes that responses show stereotypical views.⁴⁹ Soueif was criticised for writing a sexually explicit novel.⁵⁰ The novel was dismissed as an insult to Egypt and not part of Arabic literature.⁵¹ This response echoes Chandra Talpade Mohanty's caution against a Western feminist approach which casts Third World women as homogeneous: 'Each of these examples illustrates the construction of "third world women" as a homogeneous "powerless" group often located as implicit victims of particular socioeconomic systems'.⁵² Asya aptly responds to the stereotype on the Arab women's oppression, as Saif finds out about her extramarital affair with the British Gerald and he actually beats her up. A passer-by suspects that she is a battered wife of a Muslim man, but she replies: I've broken his heart. . . I've ruined his life—Just because he's walking round with no visible sign of damage—it's so

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 178.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 195-96.

⁴⁸ Ahdaf Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), p. 62.

⁴⁹ Mrinalini Charkravorty, 'To Uno what the North has Done: Fragments of A Nation and Arab Collectivism', *Arab Women's Lives Retold: Exploring Identity Through Writing*, ed., Nawar Al-Hassan Golley (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), p. 145.

⁵⁰ Op. Cit.

⁵¹ Op. Cit.

⁵² Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 57.

unfair'.⁵³ Evelyne Accad argues that the perspective of sexuality as central in the nationalist struggle reveals the patriarchal thinking in the nationalist framework.⁵⁴ With regard to the question of female sexuality in the Middle East in the 1980s, Accad argues that 'silence [...] reigns over the subject of periods, virginity, masturbation, sexual pleasure in general, abortion, birth and the feminine body as a whole'.⁵⁵

Saif never addresses his sexual incompetence in their married life. The lack of intimacy is felt but is not resolved, as the only answer Saif reassures her is by way of the old saying, 'I love you well enough to live with you like a sister'.⁵⁶ Asya returns to Egypt to teach in the 1980. Her privilege as an emigrated upper middle-class intellectual obstructs a view of female subaltern sexuality. Asya's presence, as an unveiled woman showing up in public and speaking, is looked down upon as a hindrance to God's path. A flash of thought enters Asya's mind in contrast to the denial of the Western cultural values: 'What if they knew—what if they had looked through the window of the cottage and seen a blond, blue-eyed man kneeling, his head between her thighs'.⁵⁷ When her heavily-veiled student expresses that 'I want to learn the language [English] of my enemy'; another student speaks up, 'she cannot speak. . . . because the voice of a woman is an *awra*'.⁵⁸ Asya has figured out the stereotyping imagination before an answer is elicited from the girls: 'So as far as this girl—and the others who thought like her—were concerned she was doing a sort of porno-spread up here on the podium for the world to see'.⁵⁹

Whilst Asya can admire the Islamist student's seemingly independent voice that expresses, 'I want to learn the language [English] of my enemy',⁶⁰ her sister points out: 'How

⁵³ Ahdaf Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), p. 667.

⁵⁴ Evelyne Accad, 'Sexuality and Sexual Politics: Conflicts and Contradictions for Contemporary Women in the Middle East', *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), p. 239.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

⁵⁶ Ahdaf Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), p. 302.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 754.

⁵⁸ *Op. Cit.*

⁵⁹ *Op. Cit.*

⁶⁰ *Op. Cit.*

genuine is it, though? [...] I mean, it's essentially an urban phenomenon—'.⁶¹ Veiling is supposed to be an assertion of the 'genuine' national voice in the urban areas of the 1980s, as Asya has figured out for them, 'And their answer is genuine, it's not imported or borrowed from anywhere--'.⁶² At this historical moment, veiling is not totally identical with the original sense of *awra*. Saba Mahmood's research on the mosque movement in Cairo points out that the Cairo piety movement in the 1990s cut across 'secularist, leftist, liberal and Islamist lines'.⁶³ Feminine modesty does not necessarily lack agency or demonstrates the gender norm in this context.⁶⁴ Nılüfer Göle also points out the hybridity of the veiling revival in Turkey of the 1980s.⁶⁵ According to Göle, the modern urban context suggests the particularity of the Islamist revival and that it is not a return to traditionalism but a critique of Western modernity.⁶⁶ The heavily-covered students are the marker of fundamentalism. They engage in asserting Egyptian identities and inevitably respond to colonial culture domination.

Soueif's sexual encounter with Gerald is mediated by other encounters such as the ones with the fundamentalist students. Orientalist thinking is constituted by an assumption of national characteristics which include the pre-conceived idea of women's oppression in Islam. The sexualisation of the Middle Eastern women, such elements as homosexuality, slavery, violence, polygamy, concubinage, harem life and public baths are not merely realities but also a metaphor of the 'white men's burden', in which the penetrated female bodies are the justification of imperialism.⁶⁷ Asya's students respond to the neo-colonial economic situation by rejecting Western culture and adopting the *niqab*. Fawzia Afzal-Khan points out the problem:

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 755.

⁶² Op. Cit.

⁶³ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. xii.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 157.

⁶⁵ Nılüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 3-6.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

⁶⁷ Irvin Cemil Schick, 'Review Essay: Representing Middle Eastern Women: Feminism and Colonial Discourse', *Feminist Studies* 16, no. 2 (Summer 1990), p. 347, p. 350 and p. 361.

And of course an important part of that subservience has to be in the form of dress, since to expose the body is tantamount to creating *fitna* or chaos, an idea that is misogynistically linked to women's bodies and women's sexuality under the patriarchal class system common to all religious ideologies, including Islam.⁶⁸

Asya students' hostility against the West is contrasted by her nanny's idle talk on sexuality. Her sexual exploration is mediated through her students and her nanny. Dada Zeina tells her, 'It's not normal that he [Saif] shouldn't want to do anything'.⁶⁹ Asya reasons with her and comes up with an answer that he is afraid because she marries him only because they have had a sexual relationship before marriage. After an argument, Dada Zeina concludes: 'No man behaves like this. You've been together more than five months'.⁷⁰ This short talk only confirms that Dada Zeina is right. Dada Zeina shows that sexual regulations are imposed because of male sexuality and virility: 'I'm never saying you should let him, but why doesn't he try?'⁷¹ Islam and tradition are still a place in Soueif's writing to express the complexity of heterosexual gender politics in Egypt without having to employ the term, 'feminism'. Saif's impotence is involved in showing the peasant women's voices. In this section, I have argued that Soueif's representation of female sexualities as an anti-colonialist, anti-nationalist position such as 'The Water-Heater' suggests. The foregrounding of sexual impotence in *In the Eye of the Sun* also features Soueif's anti-nationalist politics. In the following section, I discuss the arrangement of time in *The Map of Love* and the anti-nationalist and anti-internationalist position in *In the Eye of the Sun*.

Theorising Egyptian Female Subjects

⁶⁸ Fawzia Afzal-Khan, 'Unholy Alliances: Zionism, U.S. Imperialism, and Islamic Fundamentalism', *Shattering the Stereotypes: Muslim Women Speak Out*, ed. Fawzia Afzal-Khan (Gloucestershire: Arris, 2005), p. 24.

⁶⁹ Ahdaf Soueif, *In The Eye of The Sun* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), p. 134.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 136.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 135.

This section first establishes the constellation of discursive fields into which the Egyptian body enters. In *The Map of Love*, the present time, which is the turn of the twenty-first century that Amal lives in, is constantly referred back to the turn of the twentieth century by her reading of Anna's writing. By connecting the two time schemes, *The Map of Love* opens up cosmopolitan politics that are an alternative to the singularity of the nationalist time. The coming back and forth between the late nineteenth century and the late twentieth century is an act of translating the past and acts of introducing time. Amal is the point of connection between two moments of history and two love affairs, the narrator of heterosexual love, just like Shahrazad's narratives which turn out to be a correction of the King's misogynist view of heterosexuality. In 1997, when Isabel Parkman brings her great-grandmother's trunk full of materials from the Manhattan apartment to Amal in Cairo, Amal realises that 'if I come into it [the trunk] at all, it is only as my own grandmother did a hundred years ago, when she told the story of her brother's love'.⁷² The acts of narrating love by Anna and Amal's grandmother, Layla, are acts of cultural translations. In this section, I will establish the discursive fluidity rendered by Ahdaf Soueif in *The Map of Love* and in *In the Eye of the Sun*.

An example of the methodological difficulty, in understanding the agency of the women as being capable of changing their social situation, is Saba Mahmood's consideration of the mosque movement in Cairo during the 1980s and 1990s. Women's agency, particularly the emphasis on *al-haya*, shyness and modesty, demonstrated in the movement, needs a new conceptual vocabulary for the significance of the acts to be understood.⁷³ Mahmood's approach does not make the women under her study either one of subaltern feminists or fundamentalist Others.⁷⁴ She does not draw her analytical edge from the feminist resistance discourse which derives from a liberal, humanist tradition, but from Butler's performative theories. The practices of shyness and veiling are not determined by the feminine symbolic

⁷² Ahdaf Soueif, *The Map of Love* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), p. 11.

⁷³ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 158.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

values alone, but are regarded as acts that can create feelings in the doers.⁷⁵ Mahmood argues, 'Norms are not only consolidated and/or subverted, I would suggest, but performed, inhabited, and experienced in a variety of ways'.⁷⁶ Bhabha's splitting consciousness in subalternity enables new meanings in the process of enunciation without making subalternity get caught in a form of un-representability. As Bhabha argues, 'It [Benjaminian temporality of the present] is a strange stillness that defines that present in which the very *writing* of historical transformation becomes uncannily visible'.⁷⁷

I suggest that Soueif's re-constellation of narrative paradigms is a strategy Gayatri Spivak terms 'affirmative deconstruction'.⁷⁸ This strategy makes it possible to bring the subaltern into our reach. The subaltern can be brought into a significatory system and be understood as if the subaltern could be fixed as a singular signifier. The caution of such an 'affirmative deconstruction' that Spivak has in mind is the complicity between the investigating subject and the subaltern as the object of the critique.⁷⁹ The caution is necessary due to the humanist legacy in imperialism: the author of the significatory system is the imperialist sovereign subject, and this significatory system is the text that the subaltern enters.⁸⁰ The strategy to retrieve the subaltern becomes problematic because it is retrieved as the excluded subject of the hegemonic discourse.⁸¹ By recuperating the subaltern, it means it is always already an act of embracing imperialist subjecthood. The solution to the impasse of the practical un-representability of the subaltern is to come to the awareness that the disclosed truths done by the 'affirmative deconstruction' must not be taken as final truths.⁸² One must be aware that the subaltern marks the limits of the significatory system and that it remains

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 157-58.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 22.

⁷⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 321.

⁷⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 207.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 180.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 202.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 179-80.

⁸² Ibid., p. 207.

different from, and heterogeneous to, the signifiatory system.⁸³ Further, in order to achieve a kind of ‘affirmative deconstruction’, Spivak suggests that the critic (the subject) ‘can and must “re-constellate” the text (the subaltern) to draw out its use’.⁸⁴ This strategy avoids subaltern unrepresentability.

Sharif’s death remains mysterious in *The Map of Love*. His assassination is inevitable probably because his interracial marriage, his nationalist struggle, or the political conflicts within Egyptian nationalism itself. Amal, whilst re-constructing Anna’s life, reveals the mystery resulting from the Denshwai incident in 1906. In this incident, the British officers killed the villagers’ pigeons and seriously injured a village woman. The villagers were tried for murdering British soldiers by a court mostly composed by the British. The involved Egyptians were punished or hanged. In *The Map of Love*, this incident leads to Cromer’s reinforcements of military forces in Egypt, since he believes that an indigenous uprising is impending. A letter written by Harry Boyle, which serves as the evidence of the uprising for the Foreign Office in England, is involved. In the letter, Boyle uses a flowery style of English which he claims to be a domesticated translation of the original letter in Arabic: ‘To the Branch of the Fair Tree, the Light Rain of the Generous Cloud, the Son and Daughter of the Prophet—’.⁸⁵ When the letter is translated into Arabic from English, Anna and Sharif realise that the letter is forged. Amal’s investigation confirms that Boyle’s letter is the original letter and not a translated one through Boyle’s wife’s memoirs sixty years later. Wail S. Hassan argues that recuperating the original text in order for the ideology not to be assimilated by the target language, nevertheless retains the imperial dominant position in the translated text.⁸⁶ Hassan suggests that Soueif’s writing is a translational practice in which her original text is a translational space.⁸⁷ Isabel has once asked, ‘If people can write to each other across space

⁸³ Op. Cit.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 241.

⁸⁵ Ahdaf Soueif, *The Map of Love* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), p. 417.

⁸⁶ Wail S. Hassan, ‘Agency and Translational Literature: Ahdaf Soueif’s *The Map of Love*’, *PMLA* 121:3 (2006), p. 764.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 754.

[...] why can they not write across time too?’⁸⁸ In Soueif’s writing, the temporality of the present transforms historical accounts.

In *In the Eye of the Sun*, Asya’s migration to England displaces the concept of home as a fixed point of origin. As Ketu H. Katrak argues, ‘home’ can be a space of borderlands.⁸⁹ In nationalist discourse, women are the strangers of the communities because they are often homogeneously mobilised to distinguish racial or national boundaries. But the un-homely space is a transformative space that is not always fixed in order to mythologise the past of the communities. Irene Gedalof argues that the community identity and women’s identity can be mutually constituted without assuming that women’s identity is forever repeated as sameness in the national or racial communities.⁹⁰ Gedalof suggests that the un-homely element of the home constitutes the endless process of production and reproduction.⁹¹ The concept of ‘home’ due to migration also transcends the physical element and includes the psychological borderlands.⁹² For Asya, in England, the space in which she is most comfortable with in the house is the boiler-room: ‘Sometimes Asya thinks that this is her favourite room: it is a light, warm room which has no particular function except that it houses the boiler’.⁹³ The boiler-room is attached to the house but does not have a particular function. It is isolated like the stairs, but is also open on to the back. And she can lie down in the boiler-room. She is more at home in the boiler-room because this is such an ambivalent and creative space. This space is for her to freely contemplate her private life and it is symbolic of the ever-evolving nationalist space. The liminal space suggests how Asya’s identities are shaped and re-shaped in the re-constellation of narrative paradigms, or through the corporeal encounters.

⁸⁸ Ahdaf Soueif, *The Map of Love* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), p. 493.

⁸⁹ Ketu H. Katrak, *Politics of the Female Body: Post-colonial Women Writers of the Third World* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), p. 38.

⁹⁰ Irene Gedalof, ‘Taking (a) Place: Female Embodiment and the Re-grounding of Community’, *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, eds. Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier and Mimi Sheller (Oxford: Berg, 2003), p. 92.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁹² Ketu H. Katrak, *Politics of the Female Body: Post-colonial Women Writers of the Third World* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), p. 38.

⁹³ Ahdaf Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), p. 489.

Sara Ahmed argues that lived experiences, in particular the physical encounters of bodies, are constituted by first inventing the category of the stranger's bodies in the postcolonial cultures.⁹⁴ In the age of globalisation, it is increasingly important to decipher the figure of the stranger because, as Sara Ahmed has said, the category of a homogenous stranger 'functions to elide the substantive differences between ways of being displaced from "home"'.⁹⁵ Ahmed calls for an examination of the opposition between the other and selfhood and homeliness and otherworldliness.⁹⁶ In *The Map of Love*, Soueif's narrative practice transforms Orientalist historical perspective. Sharif's writing in 1911 before his death states the problem of Orientalism: 'This attraction [A religious, historical, romantic attraction] is born in the European while he is still *in this home country*'.⁹⁷ The cultural and personal encounters transform fixed ideas about Egypt in Soueif's writing. When Isabel proposes to meet Amal for the trunk, Amal is reluctant: 'The fundamentalists, the veil, the cold peace, polygamy, women's status in Islam, female genital mutilation—which would it be?'⁹⁸

Historical factors and the Orientalist paintings on harem life in the South Kensington Museum draw Anna to make the excursion to Egypt whilst she is still in England. Anna's first husband participates in the warfare in Sudan, and the atrocities committed by Jingoism make him ill and eventually lead to his death. Anna is in Egypt both because she intends to know what happens to her first husband, and to visit Egypt in the painting by Frederick Lewis: 'One wedge of sunshine—from the open window above her head—picks out the sleeper's face and neck, the cream-coloured chemise revealed by the open buttons of her tight bodice'.⁹⁹ Amal's encounter with Anna is an excursion into the discursive fields in which national histories, as Bhabha suggests, are non-synchronous. The encounter is linked to the nation and to the voices in the Denshwai Incident and in Tawasi. In Anna's diaries and

⁹⁴ Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 3.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁹⁷ Ahdaf Soueif, *The Map of Love* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), p. 481. The Italics is reproduced in the original.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

journals, there are the ghost voices such as Amal's: 'I got to know Anna as though she were my best friend'.¹⁰⁰ Amal can see that Anna is conscious of the letters-from-Egypt genre at first. Anna and Amal's views hybridise the narrative space of Western Orientalist travelogue. Amal eventually accepts Anna as she starts also to form an alliance with Isabel, who is an American journalist: 'I wish I were there to welcome her take her in, show her around'.¹⁰¹ Amal once steals a look into Anna's Thomas Cook book and finds the descriptions about the Arabs: 'They are apparently a cheerful, contented race, very much like the American Negroes in their simplicity, thoughtlessness and good humour...'.¹⁰² The stereotyping is a means through which to legitimise the colonial rule. In a way, Amal's voice is heard by Anna, which in turn also mobilises Anna to disrupt Egyptian nationalism.

In *The Map of Love*, Arabness and Englishness are culturally hybrid. It reflects in a discussion about the word origin of mirror in English. Anna's diaries and journals insert her into Egypt's nationalism in which Anna's has the same position with Sharif and his sister, Layla. They are the generation which can be compared to Huda Shaarawi who organised a literary salon, funded philanthropic work and provided lectures for women. In one of Anna's letter to her previous father-in-law, there is a reference roughly alluding to Huda Shaarawi about the period of her estrangement from her husband. As an Englishwoman, Anna's position is like Huda Shaarawi's: It is based on Islamic culture, Egyptian nationalism and Egyptian women's rights in relation to its nervous relationship with men-led nationalism. Soueif's construction of women's bodies is anti-nationalist. The whole discussion about whether the root of 'mirror' comes from Arabic is tied in with veiling. In Arabic, the word, woman, *mar'ah*, sounds like mirror, *mir'aah*. Also, the word, woman, in Arabic, means being visible, if the roots are considered in their combinations. Sharif's mother is present; her comments reveal that Islam is not particularly misogynist, 'Is it just people who are visible,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 209.

child? Animals and trees and all the created world is visible'.¹⁰³ As Cynthia Enloe shows, nationalist identities use veils to establish women as possessions of national communities, generational cultural transmission, mothers, and as victims of foreign cultures and cultural op-option.¹⁰⁴ Soueif's demonstration of the word, woman, in Arabic shows that she rejects any form of essentialism. G.J. V. Prasad examines contemporary Indian-English novels and he argues that they write for Indian audience and convey qualities of Indian expressions in English.¹⁰⁵ Salman Rushdie's English masters the skills of integrating grammatical and lexical deviation, indicating speakers' religion, class and gender.¹⁰⁶ Prasad shows that Indians would switch codes and mix in English.¹⁰⁷ He points out Indian English writers use 'various strategies to make their works read like translations'.¹⁰⁸ Amal's view, from the privilege of English background it offers her, opens up a possibility for constructing Anna's position. Layla's translation reflects hybridity of English to its speakers. Amal has returned from England to Sharif's home in Tawasi. Having experienced land reform in Nasser's time and the aggravated neo-colonial economic exploitation, the peasants in Tawasi who have been taken care of by Sharif and his offspring are discontented with the government. They are easily misrecognised as 'terrorists'. Amal's view and her construction of Sharif's death offer a perspective for the subalterns, that is, the deaths in Denshwai and the arrested peasants in Tawasi.

Regarding the linguistic ambivalence as in the narrative blurring and inflections, Asya's experiences with English and Arabic stages a new re-writing of cultural meanings. In 1976, the Egyptian authorities made it hard for the protest singer, Sheikh Imam, to perform, and this occasioned a discussion on one of his songs. The song criticises the neo-colonial

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 375.

¹⁰⁴ Daphne Grace, *The Woman in the Muslim Mask: Veiling and Identity in Postcolonial Literature* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), p. 26.

¹⁰⁵ G. J. V. Prasad, 'Writing Translation: the Strange Case of the Indian English Novel', *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, eds. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 43.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁰⁷ Op. Cit.

¹⁰⁸ Op. Cit.

power over the Arab world. The purpose was economically inspired under the guise of peace-making. The content relates to the oil crisis during 1973 and 1974. The Nixon administration managed between the oil embargo and the peace negotiation in the Middle East. The Palestinian cause was blurred by the economically-minded arrangement. Asya explains this Arabic protest song to her British friends. Her translation manages to keep the track of the foreignness in Arabic in order not to be domesticated by English. She is ill at ease with the direct translation that would erase the foreignness in Arabic. Hence, she needs to explain the nuances and the layers of meanings, tones and styles in order to fully convey the song. Consequently, there is no way Asya can translate except by coupling her translation with the cultural context. The result does not look like translation but inter-textual attempts between English and Arabic. In these arduous attempts, Asya is able to retain the structural irony of the song and confer agency on Arabic non-élite voices. It takes so much knowledge to translate even ‘Sharraft ya Nixon Baba’, or ‘You’ve honoured us, Nixon Baba’.¹⁰⁹ Her translation reaches the point where the communication between English and Arabic sounds like a creative re-writing. Asya’s mediation between languages so transforms the original text that her sister, Deena, comments: ‘I’m sure Sheikh Imam himself would be curious to hear this exposition.’¹¹⁰ The boundaries between the colonial and colonised languages are broken down to the extent that the translational acts embody the transformative potential characterised by Spivak as ‘the most intimate act of reading’, or by Abdelkébir Khatibi as erotic ‘bilingual love’.¹¹¹ Subaltern voices emerge between language boundaries.

Corporeal encounters on the one hand and linguistic hybridisation on the other hand are Soueif’s strategies. Amal notices that Anna is conscious of not falling into the genre of Orientalist travel writing from the West such as Lady Duff Gordon’s *Letters from Egypt*, A

¹⁰⁹ Ahdaf Soueif, *The Map of Love* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), pp. 496-97.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 498.

¹¹¹ Wail S. Hassan, ‘Agency and Transnational Literature: Ahdaf Soueif’s *The Map of Love*’, *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 121:3 (May 2006), pp. 755-56.

Nile Voyage. Also, the narrative of their romantic love is modelled on Arabic folklore. Anna is kidnapped by those who work for Sharif in order for his brother-in-law to be released by the British. As Anna meets Sharif's sister, Layla, what comes across her mind is an Oriental tale: 'What had she to do with my abduction: I had been abducted as a man and in the Oriental tales I have read it has happened that a *Houri* or a princess has ordered the abduction of a young man to whom she has taken a fancy'.¹¹² Eventually, the princess realises that the young man she is fond of is a woman. Soueif's writing is a translational space of this Arabic folklore as a source for the interracial marriage.

In this section, I have argued that across time and space, womanhood is constituted as a series of linguistic acts that subvert the Orientalist view. Anna's voyage implicates nationalist discourse, colonial and Orientalist discourses. The encounters of people from different cultures constitute new meanings, such as Amal's encounters with Anna. In *In the Eye of the Sun*, Asya's position in England, as an immigrant student, is determined by other encounters. Asya cannot be separated from Egypt as home, which also defines who she is in England. In the following section, I look at heterosexual narratives in Soueif's writing which constitutes the heterogeneous aspect of Egyptianness. In Soueif's writing, discursive terrain is corporeally experienced, and reveals its element of meaning constituting process, especially through 'The Nativity'.

Nation and the Body

Like a Shahrazad, the sexualised encounters re-tell the stories of Egyptian women, their silences and articulate a heterogeneous discourse of Third World women identities. In this section, 'Nation and the Body', I will regard Soueif's 'Her Man', 'The Nativity' and *In the Eye of the Sun* as examples of the sexualised encounters. 'The Nativity' and 'Her Man'

¹¹² Ahdaf Soueif, *The Map of Love* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), p. 134.

call into question the cultural stasis in the opposition of cultural identities between Islamic fundamentalism and Western Orientalism. In 'The Nativity', the hybrid Aisha finds her sense of sexual selfhood in the *zar*. The representation of the *zar* is a demonstration of Soueif's narrative fluidity through an Orientalising fundamentalist lens. Emily S. Davis argues that the romance genre that Soueif adopts is downplayed.¹¹³ She suggests that the importance of the romance genre in Soueif's writing is a narrative exertion challenging the Eastern nationalist realist genre and the imperialist travelling narratives in the East.¹¹⁴

Ahdaf Soueif's blending of historical and literary narratives demonstrates what Spivak states about the nature of the narrativisation of history.¹¹⁵ Therefore, history-writing, particularly nationalist history, has elements of what Spivak suggests about the mobilisation of the subaltern into the context of decolonisation.¹¹⁶ In Soueif's writing, unrepresentability and representation are critically at stake with the Palestinian question and the question of peasants. Spivak offers a reading of 'Breast-Giver' by Mahasweta Devi, not as a nationalist allegory in which the female body stands in as a metaphor of the nation, but as a practice of the subaltern subject-position.¹¹⁷ The female body that supports her family through suckling other people's children might have spoken through breast-feeding that her body can produce a capitalist kind of value and that her suckling is not necessarily always exploited.¹¹⁸ Spivak's point is that in constructing the subaltern's voice, the breast-giver must be distanced from the Marxist, feminist and nationalist discourses in which she is implicated.

In 'Her Man', Zeina is operated within Islamic and Orientalist discursive terrains. Her sexual manipulation in Islamic conventions is a hidden text. For Butler, discursive practices have the ability of producing the materiality of reality.¹¹⁹ According to Butler, physical

¹¹³ Emily S. Davis, 'Romance as Political Aesthetic in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*', *Genders* 45 (2007), p. 30.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 243-44.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

¹¹⁹ Vicki Kirby, *Judith Butler: Live Theory* (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 23-4.

materiality can be understood as an effect of discursive power; and in the meantime, the body can exert a language that subverts what has been established as normative: namely, heterosexuality.¹²⁰ In 'Her Man', Zeina has been married to Sobhi for ten years and they have two children. Sobhi volunteers to marry the daughter of a Sheikh in order to protect his honour. Being unhappy with him taking pleasure in another much younger woman, Zeina makes bruise marks on the girl and pretends that these marks are left by some unknown lover of the girl. Knowing that her husband has not slept with the girl, Zeina succeeds in making her husband believe that the girl has fornicated. Zeina, who uses the patriarchal logic and the technique of talking, resembles Shahrazad. 'The Nativity' and 'Her Man' demonstrate that the Islamic discursive site is fluid and is the place to articulate Egyptian feminine heterosexual matrix. In Soueif's writing, heterosexuality has the potential of disrupting the gender binaries. In 'Her Man', Zeina uses her body to speak for herself but she does so by using patriarchal tools. Zeina is a common uneducated peasant woman, and has no Westernised background, unlike Aisha in 'The Nativity'.

In 'Her Man', the Orientalist patriarchal assumption made to the oppression of Islamic culture is re-interpreted by Zeina's acts. She has made a few comments concerning men: 'Life without a man was worth nothing,'¹²¹ and 'my man is as big as a bull and knows how to make a woman happy'.¹²² As a woman who knows about masculinity in Islam and who enjoys sexual pleasure, Zeina knows how to manipulate her co-wife's body to her satisfaction and without suspicion. Indeed, her knowledge of sexual pleasure gives the young co-wife heightened pleasure: 'The bite seemed to heighten the girl's pleasure for she crashed around crying out and Zeina kept her teeth in and sucked hard'.¹²³ Her sexual tactics resemble Sobhi's: 'Her touch was strangely like Sobhi's, her hands did the same things, pressed in the

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 39 and p. 44.

¹²¹ Ahdaf Soueif, 'Her Man', *Aisha* (London: Black Swan, 1985), p. 94.

¹²² Ibid., p. 98.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 103.

same ways and Tahiyya's body answered'.¹²⁴ Zeina's imitation of Sobhi's position in sexual activities enables her to observe Tahiyya's reactions as a woman: 'Tahiyya's eyes were closed, her mouth half open and her forehead gleamed with sweat. So this was what she was like. This was what she was like with him'.¹²⁵ Being able to assume Sobhi's position with fluidity also makes her understand the heterosexual dynamics in a strictly gendering society. Moreover, Tahiyya does not find out what happens and is divorced immediately. She has believed that Zeina acts differently from other first wives who would resort to fights and beatings. Zeina's same-sex activities are motivated by her wish to win over her husband. Her practice demonstrates that her complicity with patriarchy does not necessarily result in sexual exploitation.

In 'The Nativity', the masquerade element works toward an adversarial result. The encounter of the Western theories and the Third World female subject is an act of wrestling the subaltern from its context and mobilising her for the use of women's liberation.¹²⁶ In Spivak's sense of the disappearance of the female subaltern, the subaltern might have spoken with her body as a language to convey messages but she is unheard as a signifier again in the context of the international division of labour where the Third World texts are translated to be consumed in the West.¹²⁷ Or, as Sara Ahmed puts it about the encounter of the textual female figure in the Third World with the Western reader: She is faced with the disappearance as the distance between the Western subject and the indigenous object is shortened and she becomes the object to be consumed.¹²⁸ The silences become too much to bear in 'The Nativity' and in *In the Eye of the Sun* for the heroines. Commenting on the multiple discourses such as the 'nationalist, feminist, orientalist, colonialist, globalist' discourses in *The Map of Love*,

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 192.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 103.

¹²⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Post-colonial Reason: Toward A History of The Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 309.

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 308-311.

¹²⁸ Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality* (Routledge: London, 2000), p. 142.

Margot Badran points out the interlocking of ‘public politics and private desire’.¹²⁹ By rendering the multiple discourses and intertwining the public and the private, Soueif complicates both gender and nationalist discourse.¹³⁰ The heroines’ journeys in the form of *Bildungsroman* in Soueif’s writing are giving new possibilities to the fixed boundaries of existing discourses. Aisha’s complication of discursive paradigms enables her to make her own meanings out of the corporeal encounters.

‘The Nativity’ describes Aisha’s being in touch with her culture as a way of exploring her sexual self. Aisha experiences a problem in her marriage and she feels that she doesn’t love her husband anymore. Aisha’s nanny suggests that she pay a visit to the shrine of Sidi Abdul Soud, the healer of hearts. There, she meets the butcher, who volunteers to take her to the *zars*. Once experiencing the *zar*, Aisha is in touch with a liberating power that is different from her parents’ middle-class upbringing. Whilst she explores the *zar* and indigenous cultures, the butcher takes her friendliness as a sexual invitation because of the sign of accepting a man’s emotional offering. The result is rape. In ‘The Nativity’, Aisha’s experience is depicted as pre-destined. Aisha is a Westernised married woman who wants to penetrate the secret power of the *zar*. The narrative reverses the assumed Orientalist homogeneity in which it is the white man who penetrates the East. The narrator’s voice is in tune with Aisha’s nanny, Zeina’s voice, as if Aisha were dragged into the set script which turns against her. Aisha’s journey is cast in the unknown, supernatural tone set by the narrator which merges with the voice of a *zar* master at the end of the short story: ‘[...] I know she will come back to me. Aisha. She always does’.¹³¹ Aisha becomes the cultural other in the textual design. Aisha’s ominous journey penetrating the local *zar* ritual is characterised as one of returning to herself, and therefore this journey into the Egyptian *zar* ritual is one of the

¹²⁹ Margot Badran, ‘Post/Colonial Politics, Post/Colonial Desire’, *Al-Jadid: A Review and Record of Arab Culture and Arts* 6:32 (summer 2000), p. 32.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹³¹ Ahdaf Soueif, ‘The Nativity’, *Aisha* (London: Black Swan, 1983), p. 169.

cultural encounter and female self-discovery. The narrator, actually in the voice of a *zar* spirit, casts herself as unknown to Aisha and yet, she is so intimate to Aisha almost as if the narrator knew her more:

My poor and precious darling. I hated to feel happy while she is in such despair. But it was only in despair that she was with me; not pushing me out of her life, denying me. It was not my fault that my presence caused her such unhappiness. It did not have to be so. I knew that she was aware of me. Even if, most of the time, she found it expedient to pretend I did not exist. But I would not let her rest. I would lie low for days, lurking in dark corners until she came upon me. I would feel her recognise me. And then she would fight. But she knew. I know she knew.¹³²

There is an unknown part about Aisha that makes her unable to come to terms with her unhappiness, which is signified in the narrator, 'I'. Furthermore, Aisha adopts an Orientalist perspective to understand her sexual unhappiness. Aisha expresses sexual unfulfilment through her meeting with Set Habiba in Sidi Abul Suoud. Looking through the grille between Set Habiba and herself, Aisha imagines that she had a glimpse into the private life of the unhappy women in Cairo: 'Set Habiba. Some middle-class wife lying stiffly frigid in her nest of pink nylon under the jeering eye of the whore on the wall'?¹³³ In Soueif's writing, subaltern representability is expressed through a challenge of the middle-class population in the nation. The moment which is one that turns the gaze upon herself through an Orientalist perspective is identical with Asya's sexual experience. In *In The Eye of the Sun*, when she imagines herself having sex with Gerald in the English cottage, the perspective immediately shifts to her fundamentalist female students. Cultures are constructed by a process of contacts. Soueif's writing is a narrative movement in which the corporeal encounters elicit other encounters at home and render the subaltern representability possible in the encounters. There is a return to home for Aisha in the repetition of the narrator's voice as her *zar* master, repeatedly entering and distancing from Aisha, which urges her to the limits of narrative boundaries to elicit a new sense of selfhood. The butcher, who takes Aisha

¹³² Ibid., pp. 131-32.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 149.

through *zar*, and makes her aware of his power as a man, his protection and her loneliness of being a woman whose sexuality is dictated by the indigenous Islamic culture and by a dominant middle-class culture, Western or indigenous.

In 'The Nativity', whether Aisha can survive her sexual transgression, is the ultimate protest of the right to have an existence in language. She is finally at peace, as the narrator whispers: 'But I know she will come back to me'.¹³⁴ The Orientalist perspective describes the lack of mutual understanding in the couple's sexual relationship. She does not know herself, particularly at the moment of sexual acts with her husband.¹³⁵ Aisha's belated pregnancy adds to her anxiety and alienation. In order to be loved by her husband, Aisha fakes orgasm and by doing so, protects his manhood. And yet, it becomes hard to do that. Aisha's melancholy mood is taken lightly by her husband as trivialities from the start. Her suppressed sexual desire erupts at her husband's dogmatic attitude toward scientific evidence. It is through the indigenous *zar* rituals that the local Egyptian women defy the inexplicable catastrophes in lives and Aisha wants to find about the unknown lacking piece in her life. In terms of functions, *zars* are a healing cult for Egyptian women who struggle in the patriarchal society. This practice involves music, wild dancing and swaying, and its purpose is to heal mental illness, which the Egyptian women find no ways to resolve. Discursively, *zars* signify different things here: superstition that the nation needs to do away with, drunken parties that Aisha compares to a Western Bacchanalia, and an individual expression of female sexual energy. Or, in Juliet Mitchell's opinion, *zars* are a sexualisation of absence, as I have discussed in Chapter Three.¹³⁶

This moment echoes the resurgence of the Islamist revival in the 1980s in Saba Mahmood's study. Mahmood looks at the Islamist trend with the caution of the ideological stasis between Islamist religiosity and Islamic Westernised secularisation as a colonial

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 169.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 132.

¹³⁶ Juliet Mitchell, *Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. 30.

interpretation.¹³⁷ The *zar* ritual, as a traditional religious activity particularly pertaining to women as a means of female empowerment, becomes ambivalent, as Aisha shifts between national and transnational space. Aisha's sexual transgression elicits her encounter with subalterns, particularly those women whom she can see only through the slits of the veils. The comradeship of men's blood and women's veiling as an assertion of national identity is not exempt from a masculinising transcendence which conversely reinforces feminine virtues as symbolic essence.¹³⁸ Minno Moallen argues that feminism needs to be aware of the complicity between fundamentalism and universalism which leads to an essentialist concept of the category of woman.¹³⁹ Aisha's self-alienated sexual desire cuts through the discursive stability. In 'The Nativity', the narrative encounter with the *zar* master offers a corporeal sense to the mass Islamic peasant women. Aisha's encounter with the butcher gives rise to the representability of the Islamic peasant women as an individual:

He [the butcher] grabs the girl by the waist and holds her up. As the musicians bang their tambourines above her head and shout in her ears, he dances and shakes her. He leaps in the air and carries her with him. He rattles her so her head shakes giddily from side to side. Her head shakes from side to side, then steadies. Still wobbly, still uncertain, but better.¹⁴⁰

The private relationship of Soueif's romantic couple provides an in-between space of the singularised discursive boundaries of modernity, colonialism and fundamentalism.

It is Aisha's nanny, Zeina, who knows what will befall her by mixing herself up with the stranger, a butcher and Aisha's *zar* informant. Aisha's naiveté, on the one hand, and the indigenous *zars*, on the other hand, end in a rape and pregnancy by the butcher. The rape and pregnancy question the husband's fertility, which is a common theme in the representation by Egyptian women and in Soueif's representation of Egyptian men's masculinity. Aisha's encounter with *zars* is an encounter with herself who wants to articulate her feminine

¹³⁷ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 78.

¹³⁸ Minno Moallen, 'Transnationalism, Feminism, and Fundamentalism,' *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*, eds., Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcón, and Minno Moallem (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 325.

¹³⁹ Op. Cit.

¹⁴⁰ Ahdaf Soueif, 'The Nativity', *Aisha* (London: Black Swan, 1983), p. 146.

traumatic, unspeakable feeling of lack: 'Does not love him as a woman should love her man. When even as he enters her, she is closed to him'.¹⁴¹ Her mood is simply taken as trivialities by her husband, and it becomes a characteristic that he is fond of. At the beginning of 'The Nativity', the feminine unknown power is linked to pleasure and also to death, as Aisha expresses to her husband: 'So you believe that everything there is to be known has been known. . . . Why don't we just die? Now?'¹⁴² The husband's infertility reverses the singular representation of female sexuality in the nationalist masculine discourse and Arabic éitist modern literary canon. Aisha's parents, her nanny and the pressure of being a proper woman are so stifling that gender transgression with a sense of deliberate self-annihilation becomes inevitable. The narrator invites sexual transgression by addressing the nanny: 'You believe you know all about her: your first nurseling, your pride, the apple of your eye, slipping silently in through the back door, her fingers on her lips. . . . The time is right, now, and you will remind her of us; of me. And she will listen as she used to, long ago'.¹⁴³

Zars become the place, a discursive possibility, to voice the sense of living without a sense of really living. Aisha's involvement of the *zars* is to touch upon the self that is repressed by patriarchy, as she watches the women abandon themselves and reach the state of rapture. Sara Ahmed suggests that the physical encounter is pre-determined by the many prior encounters, and that the physical encounters are a signifying process of that which cannot be grasped in the distance of the self and other.¹⁴⁴ The sexual encounter between the Westernised Aisha and the butcher is determined by the many previous signifying practices before the encounter. Aisha takes notice of the butcher's energy when he dances in *zars*. His energy makes the whole ritual different, and even more effective. His dancing resuscitates the lifeless peasant girl and amazes her. Aisha wants to break the silences to her husband and

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 131.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 155.

¹⁴⁴ Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 155-56.

tells him about the magic that *zars* work on the girl in a coma. In a sense, the experience of the other implies proximity with the self and it entails the missing articulation of the ungrasped traumas, scars and wounds that are not communicable in the very acts of encountering.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, Aisha's encounter with the *zars* is the means through which she, as a stranger's body, in the Western dominant culture, draws in the other encounters of other strangers in the postcolonial urban Cairo. Unfortunately, rape is an experience with the man of other culture in order to articulate her unhappiness being a wife.

In *In the Eye of the Sun*, Saif forcefully and repeatedly looks at Asya and Gerald's sexual acts. He wants to know exactly the details of the extramarital affairs, especially the sexual acts. Each sexual act reminds him of what he cannot have. He flies to England to give Asya a prolonged interrogation on the sexual acts. His virility is put on trial each time he wants to visualise the sexual details. Virility is valued in Islamic culture, and growing beard is a demonstration of that. Each time Saif pushes Asya to be honest, the questions become repetitive: 'Did you suck him off?'¹⁴⁶ Saif loses himself: 'Did he watch you undressing?'¹⁴⁷ The sadistic interrogation leads to his forced love-making and then to their divorce. This is their only and last love-making in their nine years of marriage: 'I held her hands above her head and fucked her, truly fucked her, for the first time in our marriage'.¹⁴⁸ The homogenous time of the imagined national community that literary realism contributes to, as Benedict Anderson argues,¹⁴⁹ is incessantly interrupted by the pulsation of women's private lives. Emily S. Davis argues that the personal must not be regarded as the mere stand-in for the construction of the nation-state in which it is merely a signification of the social order.¹⁵⁰ Asya's sexual encounters with her husband make visible strangers and subalterns of different positions in the construction of Egyptian modern histories.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 156.

¹⁴⁶ Ahdaf Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), p. 650.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 653.

¹⁴⁸ Op. Cit.

¹⁴⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 25-6.

¹⁵⁰ Emily S. Davis, 'Romance as Political Aesthetic in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*', *Genders* 45 (2007), p. 10.

Homi Bhabha argues against Anderson's homogeneous concept of the nation.¹⁵¹ Bhabha argues that the incessant pulsation of the present, forming the national identities within the progressive empty time of the nation, is ignored in Anderson's formulation.¹⁵² The meaning of the present is not predetermined by the progressive time of past and future.¹⁵³ Bhabha argues that the meaning of the present is constituted by the instantaneous act of enunciation.¹⁵⁴ According to Bhabha, the act of the enunciation constitutes the nation's plural narratives.¹⁵⁵ As Bhabha suggests about the self-alienation in the act of enunciation: 'The subject is graspable only in the passage between telling/told, between 'here' and 'somewhere else', and in this double scene the very condition of cultural knowledge is the alienation of the subject'.¹⁵⁶ In *In the Eye of the Sun*, Asya's friend at the Cairo University, Chrissie, is involved in the June War, in which her cousin and lover, Issam, dies as a member of the Fourth Division. Issam's body is never discovered. Chrissie tells Asya: 'What does it really feel like to miss someone and know you would probably miss them for ever?'¹⁵⁷ Chrissie's corporeal encounter is featured as a loss. The students in Egypt organised demonstrations in 1968, demanding democracy from the government and the liberation of Palestine. Another friend, Noora, marries Bassam against her parents' wishes. Although Bassam comes from a decent family background, Chrissie's mother spells out Bassam's stateless situation in Egypt:

Governor of Gaza? Houses and lands in Nablus? Houses and lands in the palm of the Devil. Are you all mad? Don't you live in this world? Tomorrow his mother could go out shopping and come back to find she hasn't got a house to put her shopping in.¹⁵⁸

Families in Egypt avoid marrying their daughters to Palestinians. Like Issam, who makes the last call to Chrissie in Cairo, one day Bassam flies to Beirut and does not come back to his family in Cairo. As Palestinians in Egypt, they do not know when they are going to be

¹⁵¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 228.

¹⁵² Op. Cit.

¹⁵³ Ibid., pp. 228-29.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 235.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 228.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 215.

¹⁵⁷ Ahdaf Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), p. 90.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 115.

deprived of their citizenship. The arbitrary politics and the government's affiliation with the United States in Sadat's rule in the 1970s caused dissident voices among the students. The dissident voices formed solidarity between the protests of economic neo-colonialism and the Palestinian question. For instance, Asya's brother-in-law was stalked by the police and can be subject to jailing at any time as a result of the anti-government opinions. Asya's mother, who is a university professor, has to take a job in the oil-rich countries because life becomes difficult in Egypt. *In the Eye of the Sun* argues for an Egyptian history which can hear the voices elsewhere, a history which can perish at any time.

Edward Said points out that the link between terrorists and fundamentalism is due to the effect of Orientalism as a question of representation. Said points out that terrorism has occupied an extraordinary place in American public discourse, and this is because '[m]ost of the traditional orientalist tend to have been carried by the Zionist worldview, so long as the view prevailed on the ground and in Washington'.¹⁵⁹ The Palestinian detainees were tortured by UN troops and yet it was under-represented in the US media.¹⁶⁰ Said argues that the Palestinian question is presented in such a polemic manner that the Israeli and Palestinian question is postulated as one between classical anti-Semitism and terrorism. In Soueif's writing, the image of Edward Said is visible, such as Isabel's husband, Omar in *The Map of Love* and Bassam in *In the Eye of the Sun*. According to Said's view, the polemic assumption is so prevalent that the Palestinian question can be used to suggest hatred toward the Jews.¹⁶¹ Palestinian history is also subject to disappearance since scholarly research fakes evidence in order to serve its political purpose.¹⁶² Pertaining to the question of faking historical evidence,

¹⁵⁹ Edward Said, 'Introduction', *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question*, eds. Edward W. Said and Christopher Hitchens (London: Verso, 2001), p. 14.

¹⁶⁰ Edward Said, 'The Essential Terrorist', *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question*, eds. Edward W. Said and Christopher Hitchens (London: Verso, 2001), p. 155.

¹⁶¹ Edward Said, 'Introduction', *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question*, eds. Edward W. Said and Christopher Hitchens (London: Verso, 2001), p. 4.

¹⁶² Norman G. Finkelstein, 'Disinformation and the Palestine Question: The Not-So-Strange Case of Joan Peters's From Time Immemorial', *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question*, eds. Edward W. Said and Christopher Hitchens (London: Verso, 2001), p. 39.

ancient history can be manipulated for present political purposes.¹⁶³ Bassam works for the PLO's broadcasting system and he suggests that the Palestine Resistance 'should resist from within their occupied homeland, not from Arab capitals'.¹⁶⁴ His view is similar to Said's who suggests the creation of a Palestinian state and equal rights of the Palestinians in Israel. Said becomes controversial when he acts as a member of the Palestinian National Council. The idea of Palestinian state settling in the occupied land echoes Nasser's policy toward Palestinian nationalism. Nasser's policy on the Palestinian question has been clear: 'The Palestinian people's self-determination, and the establishment of Palestinian national institutions, that is, the rise of a Palestinian state on Palestinian lands'.¹⁶⁵ In the aftermath of the June War, the Palestinian question became the main issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict.¹⁶⁶ After the June War, the grass-root New Palestinian National Movement endorsed by Nasser emerged with a pan-Arab colouring, which worked toward the liberation of Palestine and establishing Palestinian government in the Palestinian territories.¹⁶⁷ The resolution of the liberated West Bank to Palestine, rather than Jordan, caused a struggle between the PLO and Jordan.¹⁶⁸ In *In the Eye of the Sun*, Asya once wants to ask Bassam: 'what was it really like to be him? To be so displaced?'¹⁶⁹ The concept of home is a process in which for Bassam it is to be missed forever.

In this section, I have argued that intimate sexual encounters are acts of heterogeneous national enunciation. The romantic narratives must be placed in the context of their significance. The ambivalent boundary between homeliness and un-homeliness makes it possible to represent subaltern voices. Soueif's novels and short stories are practices of generic fluidity which cuts across imperial romance, Orientalist travelogue and nationalist

¹⁶³ G.W. Bowersock, 'Palestine: Ancient History and Modern Politics', *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question*, eds. Edward W. Said and Christopher Hitchens (London: Verso, 2001), p. 190.

¹⁶⁴ Ahdaf Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), p. 309.

¹⁶⁵ Moshe Shemesh, *Arab Politics, Palestinian Nationalism and the Six Day War: The Crystallization of Arab Strategy and Nasir's Descent to War, 1957-1967* (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2007), p. x.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

¹⁶⁸ *Op. Cit.*

¹⁶⁹ Ahdaf Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), p. 233.

romance. The historical concern reflects in her short stories. Her short stories grapple with the individuals' voices and the historical narratives, which represent a translational time-space of Egyptian history. In the following section, I look at the role of white women in the creation of hybrid Egyptian identities and a cosmopolitan position which makes subalterns visible in Soueif's short stories, *The Map of Love* and *In the Eye of the Sun*.

The Body and the Feminine Daily Lives as a Narrative Strategy

In *The Map of Love*, Amal's settling down in Cairo and then in Tawasi from England is a process of corporeal encounters with her ancestors and the peasants who live under her family's protection. The weaving of the romance into historical accounts in *The Map of Love* aims at the taken-for-granted aspect of the male-dominant national narratives.¹⁷⁰ In *The Map of Love*, journals and letters find their way into the historical accounts to signify the encounters among Anna, Amal and Isabel across time and space. Amal's daily life is a corporeal embodiment of the narrative movement which grows from the discursive interstices through the stories hidden in the trunk. Amal elicits a new position from re-living life accounts made by Anna. In *In the Eye of the Sun*, Asya and Saif's daily lives, blurred between public/private space, de-mystify the concept of motherhood inherent in nationalism. Amal and Asya's life trajectories do not form a heterosexual practice which gives rise to the position of motherhood that the middle-class family embraces. Anna's England in her journal makes up for the space about England Amal leaves behind. Amal has a family in England and stays alone in Cairo. She lives alone like many women do in Egypt in her time. 'That woman there across the road—who knows where her children will go when they grow up: Canada, Dubai, the moon'.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Emily S. Davis, 'Romance as Political Aesthetic in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*', *Genders* 45 (2007), p. 1.

¹⁷¹ Ahdaf Soueif, *The Map of Love* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), p. 75.

The representation of the Western women in *The Map of Love*, 'Chez Milou' and 'Sandpiper' demonstrates the re-construction of the normative heterosexuality as potentially destabilising for generating heterogeneous national narratives. 'Chez Milou' describes a woman's life story spanning from the 1920s to 1980s. *The Map of Love*, 'Chez Milou' and 'Sandpiper' feature the position of the white women in the transnational romance. The inside look of the private space in Egypt by the white women complicates the private space of the postcolonial nation. The transnational figuration of the Shahrazad by Anna Winterborne in *The Map of Love*, Milou in 'Chez Milou' and the anonymous English woman in 'Sandpiper' writes against a colonial Orientalism in which the colonised people are regarded as incapable of self-governing and against a heteronormative Orientalism.

This Orientalist view is manifest in *The Map of Love* through Lord Cromer's position in which Egyptian modernity is impeded due to his disbelief of the religious leaders' patriarchal attitude.¹⁷² Moreover, Edward Said cites an example of Cromer's Orientalism: Cromer totally rejects Egyptian nationalism, its native institutions and national sovereignty because 'although the ancient Arabs acquired in a somewhat higher degree the science of dialectics, their descendants are singularly deficient in the logical faculty'.¹⁷³ Anna's transformation from the Orientalist exotic thinking to her open-mindedness and to new experiences opens up colonial discourse to hybridisation. The white women's presence lends a hybridised complexity to the Arabic, Islamic Shahrazad. The tension between the national and the transnational that Aisha and Asya's privileged positions represent also indicates what Bhabha argues as the ambivalent identification of the nation.¹⁷⁴ The scattered people in the metropolitan area around the world enunciate with different voices that amount to what Bhabha says about the performative time.¹⁷⁵ Milou's daily life, if still privileged, enacts a

¹⁷² Ahdaf Soueif, *The Map of Love* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), p. 248.

¹⁷³ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 38.

¹⁷⁴ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 239.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 214 and pp. 243-44.

time where other subaltern's voices can be represented. In *In the Eye of the Sun*, sexuality is increasingly tied to love and less to motherhood. The lack of sexuality makes Saif and Asya's marriage become acts of pretending: 'It is *fraudulent*. And the worse sham of all is how they pretend they're normal people with nothing at all odd about their marriage'.¹⁷⁶ The fact that Asya purchases a dildo indicates the problem of the heterosexual marital practice. The home that Asya has with Saif is a fraudulent one, which can be expressed through her use of a dildo. Asya's sexual experience has become one challenging home and leads to her extramarital affairs. Her relationship with Gerald is still a practice of separation between sexuality and love. Mrinalini Chakravorty indicates that *In the Eye of the Sun* is an autobiographical fiction in which history and novel are blended.¹⁷⁷ Soueif's fluid generic blending of fiction and autobiography and the portrayal of the individuals' lives suggest the liminal space of Asya's corporeal encounters in transforming the Western colonialist modernity and in rendering subalterns visible.

In 'Chez Milou', Milou is a descendant of a French mother and a Russian father. Milou is orphaned shortly after her birth because her mother elopes with a Turkish soldier. She has settled down in Cairo with her father and they open a restaurant. During this period of time, for Milou, life is mundane and patriarchy is expressed in this kind of daily routines, built into a pensive face. Her dream life is not realised, although she has dreamed a life with love. Patriarchy is recorded in her look of a daughter who has decided to take care of the father. For years, this is a look that her friend's young daughter also observes in her other auntie.¹⁷⁸ 'Chez Milou' focuses on Milou's aborted love affair. The failure leads to her unmarried and monotonous life and only to find that her first love, Philippe, is homosexual. The only experience of falling in love that Milou has is cast in silence at the end of the story.

¹⁷⁶ Ahdaf Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), p. 444. The Italics are reproduced in the original.

¹⁷⁷ Mrinalini Chakravorty, 'To Unto What the North Has Done', *Arab Women's Lives Retold: Exploring Identity Through Writing* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), p. 136.

¹⁷⁸ Ahdaf Soueif, 'Chez Milou', *I Think of You* (New York: Anchor Books, 2007), p. 119.

When her friend's young daughter shares her encounter with Philippe, Milou's young love at age twenty, the revelation from the past gives a space for Philippe's homosexuality. She first meets him in the Greek Orthodox cathedral and his boyish quality captures her. Yet, he has not given his voices throughout the story. Milou's femininity is kindled by Philippe, a homosexual: 'She had never before felt this rushing frailty, this tremulous energy, and it never occurred to her to wonder whether he had felt it too'.¹⁷⁹ Philippe's tendresse for Milou has been mysterious to her the whole life time until her friend's daughter shares with her the same tendresse that she has also felt almost forty years ago. Then, it dawns on her about his sexual identity. The two women hide the tendresse they are longing for to themselves. Their love experience as heterosexuals, or rather, its unhappiness, draws out the deeper silence of homosexuality.

Milou has gone so far as to purchase ingredients from Philippe's father's grocery store. She has advanced to test Philippe's real intention by showing him her sexual passion for him. She has led a traditional life and is puzzled about Philippe's tendresse. It is difficult for her to manage this far to approach her Philippe whose delicate appearance is attracted to her. Milou's active initiation takes a life time, forty years after, to be deciphered. Philippe is silent and well-mannered in her test of leaning onto him and whispering his name in his ears. Milou's love runs contrary to the male-dominant heterosexual conventions, and Philippe's sexual identity is even more marginal to an old lady's unfortunate love story, as he remains a mysterious, silent figure in the story. Michel Foucault argues that sexuality is production, rather than a given.¹⁸⁰ The heterosexual identity is produced discursively, institutionally and socially. According to Foucault's concept, the production of the category of sexual abnormality is not to forbid sexuality, but to produce pleasure.¹⁸¹ For Foucault, power is anything but suppression: 'The power which thus took charge of sexuality set about

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 110.

¹⁸⁰ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 105.

¹⁸¹ Op. Cit.

contacting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatization of troubled moments. It wrapped the sexual body in its embrace.¹⁸² Power has intimate relationship with the sexual feelings of the body to the extent that it is felt like an instinct. Milou's life as a narrative elicits the point of sexuality as regulations in the private lives of the modern nation. Regulations on gender boundary contribute to Milou's monotonous life. Milou and her young friend's unhappy lives are in contrast to Philippe's parents. Their parents have sex every Monday morning and his mother still behaves like a new wife on a honeymoon vacation.

The forty years between the two encounters are Milou's monotonous life after the shameful feeling of being rejected: 'How strange that then it had seemed that she must die, that tomorrow could not happen. And now it was as though the whole thing were a film she had seen. A film that had moved her for a while'.¹⁸³ It is as if the forty years in between the recognition were a life of repetition for Milou, a life as if it were a watched film. In 'Chez Milou', time has not progressed. It is a watched film in which she would not be surprised any more at Philippe's homosexuality. The restaurant for which she has worked her life time loses a sense of reality, unsurprised but also uncanny, a private, daily life time experienced like a watched film, moving backward to re-constitute the meanings of her life. Ketu H. Katrak's study indicates that one dimension about patriarchal control is by way of rendering female sexuality mystified and obscuring it into motherhood.¹⁸⁴ It seems as though Milou led a traditional life as a daughter and in the space of the restaurant. The private, daily life time of winding back reveals 'home' as a space that disrupts the imagined national communities. The symbolic silence of Milou's forty years in the restaurant enunciates the mystery of motherhood and another even more silenced and invisible subject position, the homosexual

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁸³ Ahdaf Soueif, 'Chez Milou', *I Think of You* (New York: Anchor Books, 2007), p. 107.

¹⁸⁴ Ketu H. Katrak, *Politics of the Female Body: Post-colonial Women Writers of the Third World* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), pp. xvi-xvii.

position. The feminine non-progressive time gathers other voices, voices that are repetitive but cannot be fully articulated beyond the sexual pleasure in the life of Philippe's parents, that is, Philippe's mystery. Men's masculinity, since it is taken seriously in Islamic culture, is a disruptive narrative in Soueif's writing. The seemingly mundane life also shows the economic situation beyond the idealised narrative of motherhood. Milou's father complains about the lack of bouillabaisse ingredients. In old times, it takes fourteen types of fish to make the dish, but now all he can find is but four types. Milou's young friend also mentions her difficulty as a divorced woman. She has bought a house and she does not know when it will start being built, since it is all on paper.

'Sandpiper' demonstrates another romantic relationship between a British woman and an Egyptian man taking place in Alexandria. The story is about the British woman who comes to be in touch with Egypt when she falls in love with the Egyptian man and gets pregnant. For her, falling in love with the Egyptian man means an important transformation in her life as a woman, then a pregnant woman and then a mother: 'For seventeen years my body had waited to conceive, and now my heart and mind had caught up with it'.¹⁸⁵ If the body of the Egyptian woman is taken in colonial discourse as a symbol of cultural backwardness, the body of the anonymous British woman in 'Sandpiper' gives experiential accounts. Her body is the process of making sense of the geographical terrain of Africa and a counter-narrative of the female body as a trope of the nation. Her experience of love and sexuality is tied with her impression about Egyptian land, but not as a symbol. It is as if her voice must be voiced through the sound of the ocean, representing her time. At the end of the story, she looks at her corporeal experiences of being a woman as if she were asking to have her voice heard, 'And what does the beach know of the depths, the cold, the currents just

¹⁸⁵ Ahdaf Soueif, 'Sandpiper', *Sandpiper* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), p. 26.

there, there—do you see it? where the water turns a deeper blue.¹⁸⁶ The silence of the body is recorded in the waves as she ‘sat there watching them flirt and touch.’¹⁸⁷

The story is the British woman’s personal history. The story of the ‘I’, her silences that only the sound of the ocean can represent, break from between the interstices of the colonial discourse, in order to have an insider’s perspective about life of other cultures. She fails to keep her marriage, as later in her marriage, her body shows signs of not being able to blend in the Egyptian way of life, even in the aspect of the environment. Her body lives the complexity of cultural differences. Motherhood does not mark cultural boundaries but reveals their alterations. Because of the relationship with her Egyptian husband, she travels to areas in Africa previously occupied by the British rule and produces her Africa story. She is once the admired lover who risks her life to get a photograph of a lion, but now her foreignness and the sun, water and mosquitoes become the reason of their divorce. She does not know him through an Orientalist understanding of a domineering man, but through a language of sexuality: ‘My body could not get enough of him.’¹⁸⁸ Sexuality does not figure as a sign of Western feminism as in the preeminent nationalist discourse, but as a language of rendering her story. As a journalist having a business trip in Africa, she expresses the dominance of cultural differences which eventually fails her marriage. In the market in Kaduna, over the meat stalls, vultures, treated as if they were as common as the sparrows in an English market square, hover in the fierce sun. She is sick for home, but moreover, she says, ‘I am sick for a time, a time that was and that I can never have again. A lover I had and can never have again’.¹⁸⁹ She turns her journalist assignment on Africa into her own story. She thinks about the second trip she makes to Africa when he is crazy about her and marries her, the time separating their relationship and not to be reclaimed.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 33.

Egyptian women writers' novels are a 'third zone' in their different ways, a linguistic space from the margins of the national imagined communities. In *The Map of Love*, Anna Winterbourne comes into being in the journals, diaries and tapestries she leaves behind. Amal has commented on the transformation of history from Anna's daily life accounts as a wife of an Egyptian nationalist: 'Anna [...] wrote in her journal at the end of every day, and sometimes in the middle'.¹⁹⁰ The interracial romance is re-constructed by Amal's dialogue with Anna and Layla. Anna has become intimate in Amal's daily life that she thinks, 'My heart had beaten in time with Anna's, my lips had wanted her lover's kiss'.¹⁹¹ Anna is no longer merely a historical figure that Amal looks up in the British Council Library, but has become part of her daily life. The tapestries that Anna weaves which are composed of the Isis, Orisis and Horus family suggest a transnational solidarity, which is not stable as compared to the reproductive role of the family in the maintenance of collective communities. Orisis and Isis are brother and sister and later become husband and wife. In Egyptian religious beliefs, Isis is the goddess of origin from which all beginnings arise. Horus is their son. *The Map of Love* transforms the Egyptian mythology into a transnational alliance. Soueif also employs the mythology to suggest the instability of masculinity in the men-led nationalism. Isis is the one who resurrects Orisis after he is murdered. She gathers the pieces of his body, although she cannot find his penis thrown into the Nile. She is conceived by divine fire and gives birth to Horus, who serves as the source of Pharaonic power and of its lineage. Anna's private life probes into the disruption of nationalism as an embodiment of cosmopolitanism. Her marriage with Saif puts her in a liminal situation where both Egyptian nationalists and Lord Cromer show suspicion toward her.

In *The Map of Love*, home as a place where women live their private lives, where one is born and where one lives, is a liminal space subject to be re-shaped. Isabel quotes her

¹⁹⁰ Ahdaf Soueif, *The Map of Love* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), p. 133.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

mother's words and states the position of women whose existence shapes history and forms a fluid narrative pattern through the romantic encounters: 'She used to say Anna had set a pattern for the women of our family: they would all marry foreign men and live far from home'.¹⁹² More importantly, the Third World subalterns are made to appear in Soueif's transnational connection. Amal has come home to Egypt and to Tawasi, her ancestral land, to find home is no longer how it was one hundred years ago. She finds that common peasants and the teachers at the school her family runs for the village children are taken as terrorists. As Amal points out, 'fundamentalism' is a term, which reflects the imperialist and neo-colonialist construction of history. The poor population, the young anti-Western generation, the groups who are not satisfied with the governmental policy, including the protests against the manner in which Palestinians are dealt with in Egypt, are all labelled in these terms, which reflect the neo-colonial cultural, military, historical and economical domination of the United States. *The Map of Love* offers a view in which fundamentalism, or the fundamentalist revival, is embedded in a neo-colonialist context of the nation, the government's policy and economic factors.¹⁹³ The term, fundamentalism, eclipses the subalterns' voices, such as the Palestinians, which is a question of representation in the US media. Isabel's question to Omar reflects the power of representation for obliterating suppressed voices in history: 'Are you involved with the fundamentalists?'¹⁹⁴ Omar's attachment to the Palestinian National Council associates his reputation with fundamentalism. Yet, he objects to the armed forces of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, which puts him in a position of conflict with 'fundamentalists'. The word, when associated with Islam, becomes equivalent of 'terrorists'.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 205.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 225-26.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 178.

¹⁹⁵ Daphne Grace, *The Woman in the Muslim Mask: Veiling and Identity in Postcolonial Literature* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), p. 19.

In this section, I argue that Egyptian women's daily life in a repetitive manner is a process of re-signification. From one repetitive moment to the next, the Egyptian female identity is self-splitting. Writing daily life demonstrates the historical suppressed voices and shows the Western presence in Egypt. The corporeal encounters enable feminine desire to be represented. The secrets of feminine desire emerge in the interstices of discursive boundaries. In the case of the British woman in 'Sandpiper', her voice of sexuality and maternity is incessantly moving within the interstices of nationalism and Orientalism. This is particularly true in the representation of the white woman, Anna, in *The Map of Love*. In the following section, I continue to consider Soueif's strategy of narrative hybridity and the feminine re-signification in *The Map of Love* as a conclusion of Soueif's works.

The Narrative Hybridity and an Alternative to the Nationalist-Feminist Paradigm

In *The Map of Love*, personal encounters re-signify narrative boundaries and they disrupt the nationalist-feminist paradigm that I analyse in Chapter One. As Ketu H. Katrak points out, postcolonial women in the Third World have a sense of self-exile for their bodies from the colonial, indigenous and nationalist cultures.¹⁹⁶ Anna's accounts re-construct Egyptian earliest feminist activities of the late-nineteenth century. The al-Baroudis are one of the first advocates who set up a school for the peasants as part of the Egyptian modernising project. Sharif's position argues for a possibility of Egyptian modernism, which the British presence obstructs. Sharif's family participates in the Urabi revolution resembling Huda Shaarawi's father, who keeps a distance from the Palace and European influence. This part of history deals with issues that correspond to Huda Sharrawi's time. Anna's daughter, Nur al-Huda Hanim in the novel can be said to be modelled on Huda Sharrawi's position, who represents a hybrid position of nationalism. Huda Shaarawi came from a Circassian mother

¹⁹⁶ Ketu H. Katrak, *Politics of the Female Body: Post-colonial Women Writers of the Third World* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), pp. 156-58.

and an Arabic father of aristocratic class. Madame Rushdie also appears in the novel criticised by Lord Cromer because of her conversion to Islam. Anna's position translates the history of colonial encounters by her practices of cultural hybridity. Sharif mocks the love affairs of Orientalist imagination which ignores the historical complexity by pointing out about the Orientalist view which underlies cultural distinction: 'Or, if not forgotten, he [Sharif] would have receded into an exotic part—a remote part—of her [Anna's] Egyptian journey'.¹⁹⁷ Sharif's mother's attitude toward sexuality is not confined to sexual hierarchy but admits that 'men need that thing which God has lawfully ordained for them' in marriage.¹⁹⁸ Her mother adopts Islamic point of view about women's sexuality without a sexually misogynist view, whereas Orientalist discourse is full of misogynist assumption. Anna participates in the debate of Egyptian women's liberation and modernity. Familiar modernised figures such as Muhammad 'Abdu and Qasim Amin are evoked in the re-construction of Egyptian history.

In *The Map of Love*, Egyptian women's liberation is re-constructed by revealing women's absence in the debate and by including Anna in the Egyptian nationalist scene. Also, Anna's gender and racial identities become fluid in her Egyptian journey. The dress-code cannot determine the 'authenticity' of identities. The debate on whether women should be liberated from the veil and given the opportunity for education shows Anna's ambivalent position in nationalist discourse. The debate among Sharif, Qasim Amin, Tal'at Harb, Ahmad Lufi al-Sayyid and Muhammad 'Abdu is complex as the arguments are compromised under the agreement that women should receive education. Complex questions of the social order dictated by Islam influenced by the reception of education remain unresolved. Whether the right of women's education would lead to the collapse of the traditional social order, whether the veil should be retained or whether Islamic laws would be impacted are under scrutiny in

¹⁹⁷ Ahdaf Soueif, *The Map of Love* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), p. 262.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

the debate. The questions of women's liberation are part of the native intellectuals' project of anti-colonialist politics. But, as Layla points out, women do not have a position in the debate: 'They are discussing us'.¹⁹⁹ Layla includes Anna in this debate of the education and veil. Anna is a member of 'we', and she also teaches in the lectures open to Egyptian women. Notably, Anna's practice of veiling is not for the purpose of asserting cultural identities, but for the purpose of implementing her travel and for disguise. Anna's intention to travel brings her body to the experiences of cross-dressing. She first dresses up as an English man, as an Egyptian woman and then as a Frenchman. In order not to be discovered on the train dressing as an Englishman in the first-class cabin mixing up with the Englishmen, Anna dresses up as an Egyptian woman. Anna's experience of cross-dressing is not merely superficial: '[...] I suddenly saw them as bright, exotic creatures, walking in a kind of magical space [...]'.²⁰⁰ She is transformed into another space as a result of the veil. Anna's practice of cross-cultural and cross-gender dressing deploys her body as a hybrid zone. She is not purely one thing.

The alliance between Anna and Sharif puts Anna in a complex situation, as the journey also brings her back to England abruptly after Sharif's death. 'In Egypt she met a man she could love and married him, she had his child, she found a place within his family.'²⁰¹ The marriage puts her in a most difficult position: Interracial marriage is not liked by the Agency; it also might be the cause of Sharif's assassination. Anna's anti-imperial and anti-Orientalist ideas are firm: Orientalist stereotypes such as 'subscribing to a system of Baksheesh, their propensity to falsehood, their ability to bend with the wind' are altered in her excursion into Egypt.²⁰² Anna's position echoes Edward Said's idea of Orientalism which criticises Lord Cromer's view: 'knowledge about and knowledge of Orientals, their character, culture, history, traditions, society, and possibilities'.²⁰³ The romantic love paradigm in

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 374.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 194-95.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 465.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 98.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 38.

Soueif's writing brings out a hybrid perspective. Omar and Isabel are another pair in *The Map of Love*. Tara D. McDonald's reading suggests that there is a circle of pairs among Sharif, Anna, Nur and Omar, Isabel, baby Sharif, and Osiris, Isis and Horus in Anna's tapestries.²⁰⁴ Like Sharif, Omar dies in the end because of his political enterprise in the Palestinian question. As Edward Said points out, the Palestinian question involves representation and the discursive hegemony of Zionism as identical with liberalism in the West and he suggests that representation is crucial. An anti-Orientalist position links Omar to his ancestress, Anna. The re-construction of the Denshwai Incident reveals the question of representing Egypt in the postcolonial world. Anna suspects that if Harry Boyle had not faked an Arabic letter, the Incident would not have happened and Sharif would not have died. By emphasising the ability to speak for Egypt, Anna means 'not just the ability to translate Arabic speech into English but to speak as the English themselves would speak, for only then will the justice of what they say—divested of its disguising cloak of foreign idiom—be truly apparent to those who hear it'.²⁰⁵

The atmosphere of the millennium is pessimistic as is presented to American Isabel by the peasants in Amal's ancestors' land, Tawasi, when Amal states that the present situation is more difficult than in Anna's time. Romantic love links un-homely memories through the twentieth century. Amal's grandfather is a French-educated lawyer working for Lord Cromer.²⁰⁶ Her mother is a Palestinian, who loses her home after 1948. Omar was born in Palestine. The discovery of the Horus tapestry and the birth of Sharif, Isabel and Omar's baby boy signify hope for transnational intellectuals to reach out to subalterns. Amal chooses to dedicate herself to the peasants reliant on her family land. On the margin of the metropolitan migration and through the linkage of romantic love affairs, the peasants who bear the catastrophe of neo-colonialism become the focal point of the local intellectuals'

²⁰⁴ Tara D. McDonald, 'Resurrecting Isis in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*', *Hermes and Aphrodite Encounters* (2004), p. 164.

²⁰⁵ Ahdaf Soueif, *The Map of Love* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), p. 399.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

concern for alliance over the century-old history. The economic emphasis, alongside cultural debates, illustrates the pessimistic atmosphere of the native intellectuals who are conscious of their powerlessness in the Atliers. This serves as an awareness of the local intellectuals' complicity in suppressing the peasants' voices. They are not heard because of global division of labour, such as 'Israeli brains and Arab hands'.²⁰⁷ Capitalism is prevalent and the media advertises products people cannot possibly afford.²⁰⁸ People are not allowed freedom to debate issues. For instance, Nasser confiscates the al-Baroudis' land and restricts activities for unofficial schools.²⁰⁹ An artist can be detained for singing against the land laws.²¹⁰ This awareness of the distance between the discussion at Atliers and people suggests a caution about Bhabha's intellectual tendency: 'We're a bunch of intellectuals who sit in the Atlier or the Grillon and talk to each other'.²¹¹ This statement echoes the caution against Bhabha's intellectualist theorisation of the possibility in instantaneous enunciation.

Sharif, the baby boy, embodies the hope of representing Egypt in the postcolonial world for his ability to translate subaltern voices. The encounter between the white anti-imperialist, Anna, and the indigenous colonial, Layla, forms a cultural translational space in which the encounters not only alter Anna's writing which originally might re-inscribe Orientalist thinking but also the accounts of Egyptian history. Anna is transformed by the encounters, while she records in her diaries about the experience in which they converse about the globalising world of the nineteenth century. Anna and Amal's relationship renders Anna a figure disrupting nationalist-feminist men's cultural symbolic order. Their encounters transform the preeminent nationalist-feminist discourse at the turn of the twentieth century in which a cultural hybridisation already takes place exhibited by their lives and practices. Amal's time can be said to precede Anna's since it is by her reading that the ghosts of history

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 222.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 225 and p. 229.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 123-24.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 220.

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 224.

about Anna are translated into visibility. The double scene between a British lady's life and an Egyptian's in Egypt constitutes the history of Egyptian modernity. Anna's existence, demonstrated by her daily records being pieced together by Amal, suggests that the corporeal encounters in daily lives re-signify cultural meanings. Amal's encounters with Anna's records of personal histories elicit other encounters which enable subalterns to make appearance in these encounters. The personal encounters stage negotiations of collective identities in which the sufferers in the Denshawai Incident and the Egyptian peasants can escape being spoken for by Egyptian government and neo-colonialism.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argue for the complication of nationalism and its shift toward a transnational and cosmopolitan perspective through Soueif's writing. The feminine corporeal silence-breaking creates space in which gender linguistic performativity re-signifies the national discursive field by a transnational perspective. These texts demonstrate a re-signifying process of the signifier 'woman' in the preeminent nationalist gender equality discursive paradigm. The sexual desire and romantic relationships are an effective strategy. The romantic relationships in Soueif's writing reveal a mystification of women's sexual experiences in nationalist discourse. Soueif's heroines do not have a clear-cut sense of home in nationalist discourse. The release of the corporeal element is potential for translating the ghosts of history into their voices. Soueif's descriptions of women's sexual desire are corporal and discursive borderline space. 'The Water-Heater' signifies women's silence in nationalist discourse. In 'The Nativity', Aisha's sexuality finds its expression in the encounter of the fundamentalist and Orientalist discourses. Whilst Aisha feels isolated in the *zar* ritual and among the veiled women, she articulates her sexual unfulfilment in the *zar*, suggesting her disappearing body. The silence of the 'I' in 'Sandpiper' finds her sexual selfhood in the

Egyptian water as she watches the water and sand ‘meet and flirt and touch’.²¹² The British woman does not feel at home in Egypt. Her body suggests the tension between the national and transnational positions. The ceaseless meeting of water and sand by the African coast is her time as a woman. The water articulates a time and a love affair that she deeply misses. Her sense of conquering the wilderness, as an English journalist, becomes a story for herself and not a contribution to Orientalist tales. Women’s romantic relationships signify a performative time of the nation, a time of hybridity which can connect between the migratory diasporic voices and Egypt. Soueif’s writing describes cosmopolitan voices in Egypt. In ‘Chez Milou’, Milou’s life from her youth to her old age is interlocking with Egyptian history. The colonial and postcolonial time is signified by Milou’s re-memory and her coming to realisation of Philippe’s homosexuality. The life of Milou, who hides her love story, constitutes a Shahrazad position, which in turn creates a translational space of Muslim communities.

In Soueif’s writing, the private, daily life time is able to accommodate the gender ambivalent subjects. In ‘Chez Milou’, Milou’s repetitive re-memory of the sexual advances leads to the discovery of Philippe’s silence. Her flashback translates the silence in nationalist discourse. ‘Her Man’ is a disruption of the stereotyping of the Islamic patriarchal system. The wife’s strategy shows the malleability of heterosexuality as a way to make Third World women heard to English readers. The heavily-veiled body, featured at the moment of Asya and her deeply veiled students in *In the Eye of the Sun*, does not suggest the origin of ‘authentic’ identity. Rather, Asya’s extramarital affairs are connected with the encounter. This non-normative narrative space, the sexual practices in a marriage of impotence, undermines the nationalist masculine romance. Fundamentalism is an ambivalent discourse in the formation of national identities, as it is an articulation of protests toward the Western

²¹² Ahdaf Soueif, ‘Sandpiper’, *Sandpiper* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), p. 26.

modernity and of a class discontent. *Zars*, when being experienced as a way of searching identities, become heterogeneous in 'The Nativity'. In *The Map of Love*, the interracial romance complicates the nationalist-feminist romance mediated by a collage of Amal's narrative voice and Anna and Layla's personal journals. To conclude the thesis, I evaluate the strategies provided by the writers examined in the thesis and recommend the most effective strategies in their writing.

Conclusion

Contemporary Egyptian Women's Writing: Writing Gender and Sexuality

This thesis covers contemporary Egyptian women's writing, including their novels, short stories and autobiographies, from the 1920s to the 2000s. I describe the series of 'womanhood' enacted in the examined writers and evaluate their textual strategies in the following sections. I argue that writing heterosexuality is an effective strategy to articulate the interstitial space of the postcolonial nation. The romance element in Egyptian women's writing competes against imperial narratives that unify cultural differences, such as an Orientalist view of Egyptian gender equality discourse at the turn of the twentieth century. As Soroya Duval suggests, this Orientalist view presumes that women's oppression in Arab culture is either unchanging or starts to change in the nineteenth century due to the influence of Western culture.¹ Also, Egyptian women resist women's inferior position in male-centred nationalist discourses. For instance, *City of Love and Ashes* by Yusuf Idris describes warfare in Alexandria before the July Revolution in 1952. Fawziya's love affair embodies Qasim Amin's Western, secular gender equality politics. Amin is considered the feminist founding father in Egypt at the turn of the twentieth century for his Westernised gender equality discourse. The representation of the heroines is a deployment of female bodies in the Egyptian women's writing. Further, writing sexuality forms a translational realm in postcolonial Egypt. As Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi indicate, when Gayatri Spivak translates Mahasweta Devi's works into English, they enter postcolonial discourse set up by the Western academy.² Therefore, there are multiple Mahasweta Devis, one in postcolonial discourse, one in her native Bengali addressing post/colonial political and cultural issues, and many others in Hindi and various Indian languages untranslated and unknown to postcolonial

¹ Soroya Dural, 'New Veils and New Voices: Islamist Women's Groups in Egypt', *Women and Islamization: Contemporary Dimensions of Discourse on Gender Relations*, eds., Karin Ask and Marit Tjomsland (Oxford: Berg, 1998), p. 46.

² Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, eds., *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 10-11.

discourse.³ In contemporary Egyptian women's writing, the incompatible discursive systems are ever-changing literary terrain where the Egyptian heroines create their autonomous sexual expressions in the male-led nationalist discourses.

Tensions and Disruptions: Huda Shaarawi, Zainab al-Ghazali, Latifa al-Zayyat and Nawal El Saadawi

The autobiographical accounts by Shaarawi, al-Ghazali and El Saadawi share the element of political identity negotiations in the re-structuring process of the new Egyptian society. *Harem Years* reveals Shaarawi's alliances and tensions in the nationalist-feminist politics in the 1920s. The autobiographical writing of *Harem Years* is an engagement of signifying practices that introduce the interstitial element of her feminist practice. Self-representation is full of political implications because autobiographical writing, such as Shaarawi's, can be edited to cater to an Orientalist view. Her writing throws tradition in nationalist discourses into question. Shaarawi's conformity to the wife's role is aimed for winning political space for her husband, Ali Shaarawi, in the Wafd party and for her anti-colonialist women's organisation, the Egyptian Feminist Union. Tradition is a liminal space in Shaarawi's narrative. Her strategy of feminine subservience demonstrates the multi-layered narratives beneath the Eastern oppressed woman preferred by Western audience, which considers her as an oppressed Eastern woman escaping Islamic patriarchal system in the West. Fixed discourses on tradition point out uneven power relationship between Occidentalism and Orientalism.

Harem Years is edited and translated into English and the alterations in the English version satisfy an Orientalist taste. As Edwin Gentzler points out on the cultural turn of translation studies in the 1990s, the study of translation moves closer to the field of cultural

³ Op. Cit.

studies.⁴ I argue that corporeal narratives are cultural translational strategies to have Egyptian women's voices heard in the works examined in this thesis. Zainab al-Ghazali's masculine corporeal practices during imprisonment by Jamal Abdel Nasser in 1965 shown in *Return of the Pharaoh* wrest masculinity from men. Her autobiography serves the function of setting an example for Muslim women, based on Sufi tradition. Her reification of female masculinity complements the traditional role of women and re-defines hierarchical heterosexual relationship as an *umma* member, or God's communities. As Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi point out, 'Translations are always embedded in cultural and political systems, and in history'.⁵ Egyptian women's corporeal writing is a cultural translation device of building Egyptian identities in the *umma* in al-Ghazali's instance, by introducing Sufism in male-dominant nationalist discourses and using traditionalism to empower Muslim women.

Zainab al-Ghazali's female masculinity is later joined by Nawal El Saadawi's *Memoirs from Women's Prison*. El Saadawi provides disruptions against patriarchal hierarchy by drawing on Western-inspired gender politics. She is aware that translation can be cultural imperialism, regarding issues such as female genital mutilation, veiling and fundamentalism. In *Memoirs from Women's Prison*, El Saadawi's self-representation exploits the autobiographical genre and serves the purpose of creating an Egyptian identity through her own image of an upwardly mobile peasant girl fighting for the patriarchal system in Islam. Reading translated works from Arabic needs to attend to complex differences of cultural systems. As Edwin Gentzler suggests, translation is a primary form of literature rather than a minor or derivative form, since translation is cultural manipulation for those in power.⁶ The concept of Egypt as home is an ever-constructed process in which national identities are produced by corporeal narratives against Anwar Sadat's rule in El Saadawi's instance. I

⁴ Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translations* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998), p. ix.

⁵ Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, eds., *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 6.

⁶ Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translations* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998), p. x.

suggest that reading the texts translated from Arabic into English is a practice of attending to heterogeneity of Islam. I argue that the original work in Arabic is not homogeneous, and it has undergone cultural exchanges.

Latifa al-Zayyat's *The Open Door* offers sexually-subdued femininity as a historical construction for the 1952 July Revolution. I suggest that romance writing in Egypt is culturally translational practices in al-Zayyat's work by introducing Western-inspired gender construction theory. The re-union of Layla and Husayn at Port Said War in 1956 implies the establishment of Nasser's Egypt and his conflicting relationship with the Arab world against imperialism. In *The Open Door*, Layla's gender identities become more fluid in the heterosexual matrix, and female sexuality enters disruptively into the male-centred narrative patterns, starting from Qasim Amin. *The Open Door* disrupts the heterosexual gender equality romance with gender construction theory from the West. The patriotic couple constitutes an alternative horizontal comradeship against the novels of male-led gender equality discourse. Layla, as a signifier, is deployed in Egyptian independence history to form an alternative narrative pattern, as opposed to the perfunctory masculine definition of women's liberation that endorses masculine values in public space.

Huda Shaarawi and Zainab al-Ghazali's feminist ideas form a translational space by their disruptions of Islamic femininity based on the evocation of familial roles. In Egypt, the failure of the 1967 war led to the polarity between Islamist and secular feminists, shown in al-Ghazali's writing where she links prostitution with the secular nation. Further, Al-Ghazali's practice of *hijab*, meaning covering in Arabic, articulates cultural heterogeneity, contesting Western domination from the 1960s on. By contrast, Shaarawi's unveiling act in 1923 signifies that Shaarawi is Westernised and bases her feminism in Islamic reform starting from Amin. Al-Ghazali's practice of putting on her *hijab* fights for nationalism and women's

rights. Her ideas of tradition are based on an Occidentalist position, opposing the Western influence in Egypt. Veiling, for al-Ghazali, speaks to a particular audience, that is, the urban lower class population, resulting from drastic changes after World War Two. She is a model for fundamentalist radicalism in the latter half of the twentieth century, consisting of university students, lower and lower-middle artisans and merchants influenced by modernisation, poor immigrants in the fast-growing cities and clerics who reject radical interpretations of Islam.⁷

An ambivalent relationship with the Western gender discourses is a feature of El Saadawi's works. As Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi argue, using Salman Rushdie as an example, his writing in English has the privilege of inhabiting translational and transnational third space.⁸ I argue that subversion in Arabic texts seems to be marginalised. Huda Shaarawi, Zainab al-Ghazali, Latifa al-Zayyat and El Saadawi are all representative Egyptian nationalist-feminists in different ways. In El Saadawi's writing, the politics of femininity and female sexuality demonstrate her re-writing on the Islamic concepts of *fitna*, i.e. chaos, *awra*, i.e., literally pudenda, and *hijab*. Her works are new 'enunciative' fields, and Egyptian women's re-writing strategies are complicated by her anti-Freudian approach concerning Egyptian women's roles.

'Creative Dissidence': Nawal El Saadawi

El Saadawi's creative gender politics grow out of her anti-colonialist position. As Susan Bassnett suggests pertaining to the maintenance of Oriental hierarchy, the assumption of translation as copies in which something will miss upholds the Europe as the original.⁹ Gender equality discourses tend to be regarded as imitating the West since Amin's adoption

⁷ Rubin Barry, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 5.

⁸ Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, eds., *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 12.

⁹ Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translations* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998), p. 129.

of Western thinking. El Saadawi contests universalist phallogocentric order in a culturally piece-meal manner. Her critique of Sadat's rule represents her fragmented articulation as a result of the Open Door policy and fundamentalism. She contests Western postmodernist relativism and develops her view of Egyptian postmodernism, refusing to offer settled narratives. Translated works are subject to Orientalist domination. For example, when translating *The Thousand and One Nights*, Edward Lane makes the claim that the Arabs were gullible and that they did not make distinction between fiction and rationality.¹⁰ I argue that Egyptian women's writing in Arabic is self-conscious translational practices, resisting Western, postmodernist static differentiation of Islamic practices. El Saadawi enacts an interstitial space of the bizarre co-existence of consumerist capitalism and fundamentalism. Forming a piecemeal networking of postmodernism and Islamic feminisms, she re-signifies Islam.

In El Saadawi's writing, the narrative space, seeking a possibility to represent feminine sexuality in language, introduces a process of cultural translations. In *Woman at Point Zero*, love is a strategy to revise inequality of gender politics in Egyptian nationalism. Love, particularly female same-sex desire in pre-Oedipal sense, forms the plot of the frame story in *Woman at Point Zero*. This design responds both to Egyptian patriarchal system and global capitalism by adopting anti-Freudian psychoanalysis. El Saadawi's translational strategies intend to influence culture, and as André Lefevere suggests, culture is not monolithic and it contains different groups of people and individuals with different ideas of shaping culture.¹¹ For instance, in *God Dies by the Nile*, Zeinab, who is supposed to give voices to subalterns, is used to re-signify the *zar* rituals and Sufi practices for launching Egyptian nationalism. El Saadawi's translational writing in Arabic still maintains a degree of

¹⁰ Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, eds., *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 6.

¹¹ André Lefevere, ed., *Translation/History/Culture: a Source* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 8.

Westernised privilege and a middle-class consciousness. Zeinab translates among the discourses of Western cultural dominance, *zars* and psychoanalysis. But, Zeinab is devoid of the possibility of feminine libido that El Saadawi argues for. Time in El Saadawi's writing is also a device for facilitating cultural translational writing. For instance, in *Two Women in One*, Salem and Bahiah are a typical heterosexual nationalist couple. The romantic couple initiates a linear time by gender equality narratives in nationalist-feminist men's discourses. In *Two Women in One*, however, Bahiah, as a nationalist-feminist, simultaneously demonstrates repetitive sexual encounters that disrupt the heterosexual matrix. Her performative gender acts create an unsettled cyclical time, cutting across different discursive fields, such as nationalism, Orientalism and colonialism. Her fluid gender identities enable discursive shifts in the nationalist-feminist romance paradigm and create new dissident politics, describing emerging voices in the nation.

El Saadawi's heroines are political figures from Firdaus, Bahiah, Zeinab to her heroines in the more overtly postmodernist works, *The Circling Song*, *The Fall of the Imam* and *The Innocence of the Devil*. In these novels, the anti-colonial resistance, the psychiatrist language and the struggle against patriarchy co-exist in the texts. *The Innocence of the Devil* is set in a mental hospital governed by the patriarchal Director. The Head Nurse, Narguiss, in the hospital further demonstrates the resistance of the nationalist romantic love shown by women-identified lesbianism adopted from Western poststructuralism. Pre-Oedipal and same-sex sexuality show alternative time to the national horizontal empty time, described by Benedict Anderson. Although Narguiss is a nationalist with a medal, she is disgraced by her sexual practices: her elastic hymen that does not shed blood on her wedding night. Moreover, this represents a hidden palimpsest of her lesbianism. The hymen that does not shed blood uncovers possibilities of interpretational multiplicities. Her girlfriend, Ganat, whose memory about lesbianism is erased, becomes hysterically shifting between the past and future. El

Saadawi's focus is on reforming modern Egyptian heterosexual relationships and she integrates the notion of madness in Western poststructuralism and Freudian discourses to achieve that.

As André Lefevere suggests, translation is a rewriting of an original text, and this kind of rewriting can introduce new concepts, new genres and new devices and it also shapes power and culture.¹² I argue that the genres are adopted to hear subalterns' voices in El Saadawi's writing and that genres are used to accommodate new voices for social critique from peasants, artisans and urban lower class who are attracted to fundamentalist radicalism. Her short stories form heterogeneous enunciations, negotiating the drastic social changes in Egypt. For instance, 'Eyes' and 'The Death of an Ex-Minister' complicate the concept of women as tradition in nationalism, the former by grasping subaltern sexuality, and the latter, by a Freudian/Lacanian language. 'In Camera' equates women's speech with virginity/textuality. El Saadawi benefits from psychoanalysis and poststructuralist feminism. *Memoirs of A Woman Doctor* demonstrates the fluid space of genre between fiction and autobiography in which the narrative space breaks the silence for new experiential accounts. The generic design enables her sexual politics to be embodied and creates a Western audience through her nationalist-feminist self-representation. Sexual and romantic encounters between the heroine and her love are an interstitial space in which heterosexual relationships are complex and multiple translations of Eastern and Western discursive fields.

Femininity as a Third Zone: Alifa Rifaat, Salwa Bakr and Ibtihal Salem

In conclusion, I argue that the female self is an ever-changing signifier in language. Ibtihal Salem's multi-faceted metaphors contest patriarchal binaries, and consequently they

¹² Ibid., p. xi.

stage an Islamic re-vision of women. Octavio Paz gives a radical definition of translation, as he points out, language is already translations. He states, '[...] each sign and each phrase is a translation of another sign, another phrase'.¹³ In Alifa Rifaat's writing, the Islamic revisionist approach signifies a space to stand for Egyptian feminine libido. To access hidden voices of the oppressed in the Third World through English translation is an example of Spivak's re-constellation strategy.¹⁴ For Salem, women's body parts re-write history, providing another aspect of war memory by women's sexuality. She represents the nationalist-feminist legacy of social criticism in her writing, articulating new cultural practices between Jamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar Sadat. She also deals with the internal conflicts, instability and incompatibilities in her time. In 'Behind Closed Doors', for the heroine, time and sexuality relates to each other. Time and lack of sexual satisfaction are unbearable for her. Egyptian women's sexuality becomes the space in which Salem associates their silence with the spatiotemporal multiplicities of the postcolonial national space. In Salem's representation, 'women' are the element that enacts alternative historical perspectives in which 'women' create a time-space of generational differences by shifts of focus on women's fragmented body parts. The short story genre is an interstitial space for Salem where Egyptian women are both represented in terms of daily staple foods and a multiplicity of body parts within the realist nationalist-feminist romantic comradeship. Salem's short stories intend to serve as social critique. Egyptian women, as signs, are translations in Arabic by employing the short story form to mobilise changes for society.

The third zone of private lives formulated by these women authors of the post-1970s generation takes both class and gender into consideration, and in so doing, they maintain polyvocal narratives of the nation. The liminal national time is involved in a process of social

¹³ Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, eds., *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 3.

¹⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1987), p. 241.

transformation where each entrance of new culture is neither an origin nor a copy.¹⁵ In Salem's writing, Egyptian women's bodies are a performative element in her textual world where female bodies express a hybrid space of religious sects, when Christianity is mobilised to cause social division in Egypt. On the other hand, Rifaat's heroines tell their stories from an isolated space of a traditionally Islamic home to re-formulate the still home as a place of a new national space. The bodies of Rifaat's heroines constitute a splitting un-homely element regarding female genital mutilation and romantic love. Rifaat's writing provides new enunciations for Islam with her critique, challenging the symbolic boundary marker function in nationalist-feminist novels by her experiential accounts in daily lives. She carves out a space to deal with the trauma of female genital mutilation. This narrative space is home to the wounds of the unexpected experiences that can be understood later through the haunting memories. In Bakr's *The Golden Chariot*, women's sexual accounts link the cellmates' lives together and give rise to a hysteric time, competing within the nationalist romantic comradeship. The inmates' sexual stories link generational gaps, and importantly, create a cyclical hysteric narrative space. The heroine, Aziza falls in love and murders her step-father, who takes her virginity away at a young age. She ends up in prison re-living the memory of love with her step-father. Their relationship constitutes a shift for gender equality discourses to express national identities. In Bakr's writing, both her novel and short stories, madness, as rebellious behaviours, creates a feminine time by living in the traumatic past, thereby challenging heteronormative conventions. Her description of madness reveals the totality of being women as wives and mothers.

Rifaat's creation of metaphors relocates a pre-linguistic possibility, and corporeality is the way to be in touch with the world she lives in. For Rifaat, women seek their selfhood in multiplicity of women's metaphors in language. Also, her rendition of same-sex love and

¹⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 325.

autoeroticism make the Islamically-defined heteronormative society ambivalent and become multiple. An example of this is 'Who Will Be the Man?': The heroine expresses same-sex behaviour in the female circumcision, when her clitoris is aroused before the nicking.¹⁶ As Chantal Zabus indicates, the Western framework of queer theory, framed by 'Gay-Lesbian-Transgender-Bisexual and Friends', fails to account for same-sex activities in African Muslim societies.¹⁷ Rifaat's domestic world cautions against a settled sense of belonging, such as the concept of tradition in nationalist discourse. She introduces heterogeneity of Islam, obscured by male-centred nationalist discourses. For her, belonging is un-homely because female genital mutilation expresses a sense of belonging to her culture, rather than an indication of oppression in discourses such as imperialism and nationalism. I suggest that a strictly-observed heteronormative world is presumed as a feature of patriarchal structure in Islam. Rifaat's writing reveals the myth of the Islamic private space as traditional and sexually heteronormative. Writers of this generation introduce discursive manipulation by the representation of women's madness and an ambivalent representation of Islamic heteronormative relationships. Their literary techniques introduce a new time-space to formulate contemporary Egyptian identities.

Writing the Transnational through the Strategy of Femininity: Ahdaf Soueif

In Soueif's novels, *In the Eye of the Sun* and *The Map of Love*, women's experiences render the novel genre more fluid by her autobiographical fiction. Her works disrupt the paradigmatic nationalist discourse by an alternative impotent narrative through the nationalist man, Saif's impotence in *In the Eye of the Sun* to reverse masculinity. His impotence signifies

¹⁶ Alifa Rifaat, 'Who Will Be the Man'? *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*, eds., Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 75.

¹⁷ Chantal Zabus, 'The Text That Dare Not Speak Its Name: Contextual Heterosex and Same-Sex Desire in African Fiction', *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 28:1 (2005), p. 23.

Egypt's defeat in the June War in 1967. Homi Bhabha's national time refers to the tension between the national and transnational: The nation is not a homogenous and comfortable space. For Bhabha, the national time is split, locating at disjunctive sites; it has no inside/outside boundary.¹⁸ In *The Map of Love*, the romantic love narrative attempts to hear the subaltern voices in the country of origin. The nation as home is liminal for Soueif's heroines such as Anna, a British, cosmopolitan woman, married to an aristocratic nationalist, Sharif, and Amal in *The Map of Love*, whose views are concerned with the existence of anti-imperialist and anti-governmental voices in Egyptian history. *The Map of Love* calls into question translation as a genuine reflection of the original text, since the Denshwai Incident in 1906 results from a fabricated letter in English claimed to be a translation of an original Arabic document. Egyptians are tried and executed for murdering British soldiers in a court composed mostly by the British in the incident. The cause is that the British soldiers shoot Egyptian villagers' pigeons and seriously injure an Egyptian woman. Whilst translation is a re-writing of the original text, it is possible that a text, claimed to be a translational work, is, in fact, an original work. For example, Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is claimed to be a translation of the lost original work because it gives the work authority.¹⁹ Further, the manipulation of translation plays a significant role in forming a national identity.²⁰ As André Lefevere indicates, the English translation of the *Kalevala*, a collection Finnish oral poetry, draws on the grid of the classical Nordic epic because Finnish is a lesser-known language at the turn of the nineteenth century, and the Finnish historians had to use source from Swedish, the predominant language at the time to create national literature recognised by the world.²¹ It is when Anna and Saif translate the English text into Arabic that they find out that this might be

¹⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 247.

¹⁹ André Lefevere, ed., *Translation/History/Culture: a Source* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 2.

²⁰ Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translations* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998), p. xiv.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 76-89.

a fake letter. Also, it is by Amal's further pursuit of this question that she feels sure that it is a fake letter.

Soueif's writing is fluid in the rendition of genres, time and transnational narratives. In 'Chez Milou', Milou's life revolves around the love affair when she is young. The white Shahrazad figure in Soueif's work such as Milou maintains the tension between the national and the transnational. The brief moment of the short story enables Milou's monotonous life to become a generic vehicle to disrupt the novels' middle-class heterosexual romance in the work of male-led gender equality discourses. Her single lifestyle provides a space for the Islamist emphasis on women's proper roles in the family. The myth of the nation is founded not only on making women sexual objects in literature but also on excluding male homosexuality in the national communities. The short story form enables Soueif to utilise corporeal encounters and to hybridise literary narrative paradigms. For instance in 'Sandpiper', the British woman's desire to be a mother reverses Western women's travelogue writing, such as Lady Duff Gordon's in the nineteenth century for an exotic taste, mentioned in *The Map of Love*.²² It also calls into question Egyptian women as national boundary markers and demonstrates maternity as a possibility of women's personal narratives. In 'Aisha', Aisha's corporeal encounters with her British husband and the Egyptian butcher are a trajectory that involves her expression of sexuality as a pursuit of selfhood through shuffling in and out of unstable discursive boundaries, such as *zars* and Orientalism.

Asya's personal encounters in *In the Eye of the Sun*, consisting of semi-autobiographical, fictional, and historical elements, exert a strategy of genres. Saif's sexual impotence inflects the nationalist masculine-oriented romance. Asya's sexual practices and the questions on women's sexualities account for the nationalist exclusionary practices in

²² Ahdaf Soueif, *The Map of Love* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), p. 58.

dealing with a variety of women's sexual problems. For instance, her extramarital affairs and use of dildo express the un-homely element of the private space. Pheng Cheah argues that it is important to be aware of the unpredictability of a changing globality in influencing the postcolonial nation-state.²³ Asya's transnational position is a privileged liminal narrative space that draws out subaltern voices. For instance, Asya's trajectory of sexual encounters makes the nanny and the fundamentalist students visible. Their views on men's sexuality in Islam do not conform to sexual hierarchy that fixes Islam as a homogenous discourse. Soueif benefits from her Western education and her works do not need to be translated. Her works in English show the author's significance mainly as a translator where she has the privilege to cross national borders. Similar to Asya's transnational position, Amal, in *The Map of Love*, is the one who can translate Anna's love with an Egyptian nationalist man from her forgotten trunk, resembling Shahrazad in *The Thousand and One Nights* for narrating heterosexual relationships by her story-telling ability. She is able to translate Anna's anti-Orientalist thoughts in her love affair with Sharif.

Conclusion

The thesis explores the ways in which subaltern voices can be reflected in the adoption of the Egyptian women writers' strategies. The strategy of critiquing women stereotyping demystifies the myth of cultural origin in El Saadawi's instance. There are no fixed meanings to one signifier. 'Egyptian women' enact an instantaneous time that re-constellate literary genres and discourses in order to draw out suppressed voices. Maria Tymoczko suggests that there are two kinds of translation: literal translation and postcolonial

²³ Pheng Cheah, 'Given Culture: Rethinking Cosmopolitical Freedom in Transnationalism', *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, eds. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 324.

re-writing.²⁴ She points out that there are similarities between the two kinds of translation.²⁵

For the Egyptian writers, they have imported Western elements into their writing in Arabic or they have used their creative language techniques to contest nationalist men and imperialism.

There are already radical transnational elements in their Arabic works.

²⁴ Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, eds., *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 19.

²⁵ Op. Cit.

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