

Isn't It Time to Take Off That Mask? Muted Trauma, Radical Refusal, And the Unmaking of Female Subjugation in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*

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Abstract

Nawal El Saadawi mirrors Arab women's continued struggle against a persistent male-centric ideology that insists on framing women within a narrow framework of humiliating surrender. This paper examines El Saadawi's novella *Woman at Point Zero* to capture the patriarchal obsession with authority in Egypt in the 1970s, which confines women's will and strips them of their social, legal, and religious rights. Using postcolonial/Arab feminist theory alongside trauma and voice theory, I examine Firdaus's radical transition from a socially confined identity to a character with a criminally invasive selfhood. I interrogate the murder she committed not as a sign of moral delinquency or a vicious transgression, but rather as a rebellious call for a woman's mental, vocal, and social freedom from the larger jail cell of a male-dominated social order that embraces traditions and distorts religious discourse to normalize misogynistic practices against women. These codified scripts perpetuate Firdaus's imprisonment within gendered forms of violence, which include the violation of her body and the shattering of her dignity. I argue that Firdaus's nonchalant response to her death sentence not only unsettles the conventional meanings of freedom, justice, and punishment but also puts the state and the female voice in direct confrontation. What the state viewed as a punishment for a wrongdoing, Firdaus saw as deliverance from an unjust social order that debased her.

Keywords: Arab Feminism; Fatal Rejection; Female Agency; Female Trauma; Patriarchal Authority