

# A Comparative Study of Interconnectivity between the Woman's Novels and the Autobiography of the Woman Writer. Nwal al- Sa'dawi as a Sample

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**Abstract**—The writer in women's autobiography is not the narrator, and therefore, we thought it is appropriate to read Nawal Al-S'adwai as a narrator at a distance from Nawal Al-Sa'dwai as a writer. It is possible to consider rebellion against norms, breaking social shackles, overcoming all the difficulties of reality and aspiration for emancipation to be among the most important motives that characterize the woman autobiography in the modern era. This motive characterizes the modern woman's discourse and it is actually achieved in her autobiography at all levels as the woman seeks to declare herself as a woman in a stronger way than the man.

In Nawal Al-Sa'dawi's autobiography, the writer did not fear to talk about her personal life or to reveal the hidden experiences in her life. Nawal Al-Sa'dawi talked about the 'female' and her suffering when talking was forbidden. She talked about society's encroachments and treatment of the woman as a weak creature when it was forbidden. Her stories repeatedly talked about the woman's suffering, revealed the hidden facts and uncovered the invisible and the unseen by people's eyes and minds and she put her finger on the wounds in the woman's physical and spiritual entity.

This approach that Al-Sa'dawi adopts was intended to be a cry to the reader's conscience to help her to stop the injustice that has been done to the woman and therefore her texts deal with these contents. When we read Al-Sa'dawi's texts, we realize that her autobiography is connected most to these issues.

**Keywords**— Woman's Novels, Woman Writer.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The woman writer of autobiographical works is generally not the narrator, and therefore, we think that it is appropriate to read Nawal Al-S'adwai as a narrator that is at a distance from Nawal Al-Sa'dwai as a writer.

In Nawal Al-Sa'dawi's autobiographical works, the narrator-writer does not fear to talk about her personal life or to reveal the hidden experiences in her life. Nawal Al-Sa'dawi talks about the 'female' and her suffering, though it was forbidden in reality. She talks about society's treatment of the woman as a weak creature. Her stories repeatedly talk about the woman's suffering, reveal the hidden facts and uncover the unseen by people's eyes and minds, and touch the wounds in the woman's

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physical and spiritual entity.

Al-Sa'dawi's novels send a cry to the reader's conscience to help the woman to stop the injustice that has been done to her for centuries. When we read Al-Sa'dawi's texts, we realize that her real life and her autobiographical works are interconnected.

## II. NAWAL AL-SA'DAWI AS A SAMPLE

This paper deals with various thematic issues that appear in Nawal Al-Sa'dawi's real life as reflected in her real life as she described in a number of her autobiographical diaries and her novels. It also shows how certain artistic techniques are employed in both her autobiography and her novels.

The main intersection occurs in the parallel between the *fictional characters of the novels* and the *real character of the writer*.

Artistically, Al-Sa'dawi's narrator's voice in her novels play similar roles to the narrator's voice in her real life autobiography that expresses her female voice in general and Al-Sa'dawi's voice in particular.

Generally speaking, the writer of a woman's autobiography is not necessarily the narrator, and therefore this study deals with Nawal Al-Sa'dawi at two levels, Nawal the narrator, and Nawal the writer. In fact, the narrator and the writer have close ties. Certain situations and events that are related to her personal life reveal her as we see in her works.

For example, at the beginning of her novella *Imra'ah Inda Nuqtat al-Sifr, A Woman at Zero point*, Nawal Al-Sa'dawi says: "This is a real woman of flesh and blood. I met her at al-Qanater prison a few years ago. I was looking for a character of some women who were accused of or convicted for different cases."

In her preface to the novel of *Suqut al-Imam/ The Fall of the Imam*, she says: "I tried to write this novel while I was a pupil at school but I did not know how to write it. The idea was in my head, the feelings and the characters... and since I met the Iranian Shahrabanu Siraz, who told me about her daughter's rape at prison, and when I met the Sudanese Fatima Taj al-Sirr and saw her teenage son and his companions in the hand-cut association after the Shari'a was applied, and after I

lived three months in prison in Egypt with I'tidal Mahmoud, and other girls, this novel has been chasing me."

At the beginning of her novel *Zenah*, the narrator says: "Her image does not leave my memory, her appearance is engraved in my brain, within the head bones and the tunnels of the unconscious mind..."

The idea that al-Sa'dawi's texts introduces is that the woman is a submissive one who has no choice; she waits for the man to decide. In fact, her fate is in his hands. The texts show the woman's dependence on the man, and even though she is rich and has economic ability and social status, she is still subordinate to him. The man is the one who controls her life. Fardous-Marzuq/Fardous-Ibrahim, Jannat-Zachariyya/Jannat's grandfather- Jannat's grandmother, Bdour-Zachariyya al-Khartiti are examples of such woman. Consequently, the man becomes a central axis in the woman's life, and the family cannot disobey him.

The narrative reveals the extent of the Al-Sa'dawi's focus on the man, and makes him control all the woman's affairs. In this way, the narrator emphasizes society's habitual belief that the woman is just for plowing and reproduction. In fact, "she is owned in the same way as the land is owned, and produces what the land produces and she is plowed as the land is plowed. She is subject to the man's action, his choices and his different pursuits. This is exactly what indicates her inferiority.

In my view, Al-Sa'dawi is expected to try to correct this image or criticize it rather than submit to it as we know about her thoughts about masculinity and virility. Instead of making the woman character have an aesthetic value, a mother a sister and a friend, her value lies in her being "a frame for the man's lusts and whims; she is submissive to him in his anger and pleasure, his justice and injustice."

All the themes of the fictional texts in Nawal Al-Sa'dawi's works revolve on the woman, and the narration is given through her voice, which turns her and her versions into the focus of the tale. Therefore, she invents a language that is mastered the woman's ego that draws the attention and directs the track of reading. It is a language that comes closer in a cautious way to her life constraints. For example, the woman's 'body' becomes a subject that is omitted or disregarded in many autobiographical experiences that were written by women.

Nawal al-Sa'dawi deals with this issue and condemns the man and considers him responsible for choosing the easy and weak works of the beautiful woman to publish and leaves the good and high quality ones.

She says: "More than two months ago, I sent a copy of my last book called *Awraq Hayati/ Leaves of My Life*, but this type of work had no space in any literary or non-literary journal. The whole space is occupied by men over sixty and young ladies below thirty... and I asked people about the reason for this phenomenon, and they answered: Most chief editors of journals, magazines, and newspapers are over sixty, and most of them are naturally drawn to young women as a

result of their fear of mortality. Therefore, they ignore women writers and female thinkers if they are over forty or fifty. What would a woman who is sixty say?"

Women's writing in general suffer from social obstacles and is considered a taboo. The situation regarding women autobiography is even more difficult because it is an act of linguistic exposure of the writer's body, her history, her emotions, her ambitions and her instincts.

Nawal Al-Sa'dawi deals with the act of literary writing as a type of struggle and search for justice. Nawal Al-Sa'dawi considers corruption to be the root of the problem in all the Arab countries. Corruption of the political elites is connected to suppression and oppression of the woman.

In her novel *Death of the Only Man in the World*, the major character, Sheikh Hamzawi says to Sheikh Zahran: "All the people have become corrupt, Sheikh Zahran, and there is neither Islam nor Muslims."

al-Sa'dawi says also about her writing: "Writing in my life is like Mom's lap, like love that occurs without any reason, and despite that, I have not stopped looking for the reason...probably I have been looking for something... to draw to the world around me my true image, that image which they effaced with another one... to make the silent baby girl in my depth speak."

Al-Sa'dawi believes that writing has been her only resort and refuge since her childhood: "I escape to it from the Mom the Dad and the Groom." Writing remained even in her middle-age her only and last refuge and shelter at the same time. It is the only possible reconciliation between the past and the present "despite all the wounds that I have had in my homeland."

Writing is an individual act but it is an existential condition, too. Al-Sa'dawi moves her pen in her hand and writes: "Writing in my life was taking me into a deep well in the Earth... to a place that is empty of people...I was holding my pen and sheets of paper and leave my home. I walk and walk without stopping. I looked around me as if I were looking for something? ... I looked for a cleft to escape into it. I disappear within it and shut seven doors behind me. It was not enough to shut one door to dismiss the voices."

Nawal al-Sa'dawi writes about the passage of sixty three years from her life without taking them into account: "Parts from this age fell into oblivion; minutes that want to flee and disappear far away from memory and the eyes of people; minutes of pain and despair and weakness and decline; today I am not a young lady; I have become and elderly one; I have passed the age of sixty."

In her novels *Imra'ah Inda Nuqtat al-Sifr, Suqut al-Imam Jannat wa Iblis, and Zenah*, Nawal al-Sa'dawi reproduces her social reality putting ideological theoretical standards for the woman's nature on the one hand, and the man's nature on the other explaining certain social and behavioral rules by natural biological rules that devote to the woman an eternal behavioral nature that differs from the man's eternal behavioral nature.

Al-Sa'dawi's novels draw her relationship with her mother

and her father and her relationship with her past as a whole (through recalling) in addition to aspects of the external world that frames her existence (home, school, playing, learning and university). The baby Nawal al-Sa'dawi grew within a contradictory family system, where the boy is treated differently. The text continues with this contradiction, though in ideological versions that raise some of the ideal values.

Al-Sa'dawi introduces a system of memories in her novels, whether in connection with the past in her childhood and youth. In fact, they are the memories that she loves despite the pain they cause her.

She says about her family in her autobiography (*Awraq Hayati/Leaves of My Life*) and in some press interviews: "My father is a rural person from Kafr Talha. He left the village and married an educated Egyptian. My mother is characterized by openness, and my father is liberal in his view, especially regarding the woman's education."

In her writing about Kafr Talha and the Egyptian countryside and the woman and the beauty of the village and al-Umdiyya and the Nile (in *Imra'ah Inda Nuqtat al-Sifr and Jannat wa Iblis*), she states that she comes from a rural origin and this has a great value for her and in her life. She says: "My family was not from the uneducated Egyptian families. My father had a higher education and a teaching inspector at al-Manufiyya District...and my mother learned at a French school before her father, who was a manager of the military district at that period, married her off."

There are true *sayings* in Nawal Al-Sa'dawi's novels that are related to her childhood and they indicate that she was exposed to severe suppression, which she resisted in order to assert her existence. In fact, her life was nothing but a constant struggle and resistance against various types of suppression that were exerted on her during early childhood.

Childhood has a special position in Nawal Al-Saidawi's novels. For her, it is the face of the perfect existence – the real natural and clean existence in its purity and innocence before the society's education violates the child. She believes that "Before he is one year old, and even before he is born, the child realizes the loftiest thoughts and imagines the most elevated mental images." Society spoils or destroys the child as it did to her. *Children* in Nawal Al-Sa'dawi's works think like her and feel her.

Al-Sa'dawi reflects the effect of the *absence of her mother* on her life in her *Awraq Hayati* book. She says: "My mother Zainab Hanim, lived and died without embracing me or kissing one single kiss." She looked for the "kiss" everywhere as her heroines did in her novels. For example, Fardous's mother is absent and does not do her duty. The mother in *Jannat wa Iblis* does not look out of her home except through the window. The mother in *Bint Allah* does not exist. The mother in *Zenah* leaves *Zenah* on the street side.

On the other side, al-Sa'dawi's *father* is present at a large scale in her autobiography *Awraq Hayati*. He is the one who converses with her, speaks with her and his other children. The mother does not utter a word or debate with them:" I feel

happy when I listen to my father. This father had a great influence on her character: "My father used to encourage me to read and think. He made me love literature from my childhood.

Al-Sa'dawi talked about her good relationship with her father despite the distance between them. However, her novels introduce a contrasted condition. The character of the Father is negative, emotionless and selfish. He is sadistic in *Imra'ah Inda Nuqtat al-Sifr/ A Woman at Zero Point*, and abandoned his daughter in *Suqut al-Imam / Fall of the Imam* and is absent in *Jannat wa Iblis/ Jannat and the Devil*, unfaithful, opportunist and fake in *Zenah*.

Nawal Al-Sa'dawi described the *female body* in her childhood as a 'disaster' that was created through a conspiracy between society and nature. Society is represented by the family, especially the mother, and nature is represented in the traits of the female body and its anatomical and biological features. Her mother did not prepare her to accept the changes that took place on her body in a natural sound way; she prepared her in a way that loads the signs of femaleness with the thoughts of the sexual system that prevails in society.

The mother scared her of everything that is related to her body, especially her sexual organs by wrapping them with ambiguity and a lot of obscurity in order to cover the truth or violate and disturb the truth and keep her daughter silent and cover up everything that is related to sex.

She says: "I remember that when I was a little girl, I felt terrified and my hands and fingers would tremble if my hand touched my external organs by mistake.... When I grew up a little more in age, ... I started fearing strangers and fear to go out from home alone; I realized that a certain danger was lurking for me in that external world.

Al-Sa'dawi also describes how the mother violated the girl's mind with the answers that she gave to certain questions: "One day, I asked my mother after she gave birth to my younger brother. Why do mothers give birth? She answered in such a way that made her imagine with the child's mind that some air accumulates in the mother's abdomen and that creates the embryo, which makes her abdomen get larger.

Scaring the girl of her body and filling her heart with horror because the family's over-caution of the family to protect her *virginity* is easier than what happens to her when the signs of menstruation appear on her body. Al-Sa'dawi says: "I still remember the color of my face in the mirror on that gloomy morning. It was white and my lips were covered with some blue, my arms were shaking; my legs were trembling, and I imagined that the disaster that I feared really occurred; I thought that a stranger entered my room during my sleep at night and caused me all that damage."

Al-Sa'dawi dealt with the most sensitive subjects and wrote about them bravely whether in her *novels or autobiography* such as sexual harassment; for example, Fardous lives that experience with her uncle, Al-Azhar Shiekh. In parallel, Nawal Al-Saidawi also had an uncle who taught at Al-Azhar and worked with the other Azhar sheikhs. Bdour, too, is exposed in *Zenah* to sexual harassment.

These facts appear in many of her novels, such as: *Mudhakarāt Tabība/ Memoirs of a Doctor* (1965), after ten years of her graduation from the faculty of medicine. We notice here signs of clear similarity between the heroine's life with al-Sa'dawi and her character in the novel.

However, this does not mean in any way that the heroine's life is identical with al-Sa'dawi's life in every detail, but we can conclude from this that al-Sa'dawi lived the same experience in her real life, when she underwent a failing experience in marriage that led to divorce and remarriage. She says in this concern: "I married an open-minded doctor but he did not accept my writings, and therefore, divorce took place. She remarried a doctor, who also had a progressive political vision, and at present, he lives in Ethiopia and we exchange visits from time to time, and I consider him a friend rather than a husband."

The truth is that all of al-Sa'dawi's the heroines in her novels underwent similar situations to those that Nawal Al-Sa'dawi had undergone and described in her works.

To sum up, Nawal Al-Sa'dawi employed her life experiences in her novels in a daring, coherent and tight structure. In my view, it is possible to connect between Nawal Al-Sa'dawi's literature and her fictional product and the journey of her life and biography. Her personal reality is mixed with the novel discourse in many aspects. Therefore, the central character meets in al-Sa'dawi's novels with the personality of the writer Nawal al-Sa'dawi in many of her real features, which interconnect the real creative Self with the imagined Self that is represented in the heroines of the novels, who are described as rebellious against reality.

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