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Conceptualization of Arab Women in the Orient: Nawal

EL- Saadawi's *Two Women in One*

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
Master's Degree in Literature and Civilization**

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Dedication

We dedicate our work to,

Our faithful parentst, without them we would never be whom as today.

We extend this dedication to our dear sisters and brothers each by name,

To whoever have diligently contributed to the completion of this dissertation, exerting their utmost efforts. We would like to thank everyone who guided and encouraged as near or far.

CHAIMA and MAROUA

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Abstract

This dissertation examines Arab women's intersectional experiences in the Oriental through a critical analysis of Nawal El Saadawi's novel *Two Women in One* in context of contemporary Arab feminism; applying intersectionality theory to Arab women's challenges, and depicting dual identity dynamics. In this study, qualitative analysis is used to examine the portrayal of themes such as gender, family, religion, and social class within the novel, providing insight into Arab women's struggles within the social norms of Arab society. Intersectionality theory unveils diverse identity dimensions shaping women's lives, exemplified by the protagonist Bahiah Chahin's navigation of societal expectations, education, art, agency, and complexities. The study reveals the alignment of power dynamics, economics, education, and cultural norms with intersectionality principles, emphasizing the empowerment potential within societal frameworks. Bahiah's dual identity mirrors the evolving gender, cultural, and societal norms in the Arab Orient, revealing the interplay of tradition and change. Overall, this research contributes to the understanding of Arab feminism, intersectionality discourse, and the nuanced lives of women in the Arab Orient.

Keywords: Arab women, intersectionality, Arab feminism, Nawal El Saadawi, identity dynamics, societal norms.

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General Introduction

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General Introduction

1. Background of the study

The Arab World has witnessed an unprecedented movement impacting its economic, political, cultural, and social spheres. This movement has extended to a questioning of the intellectual foundations that underpin the system of values governing these spheres. This evolution stems from exacerbated social conditions marked by economic stagnation, political corruption, and intellectual backwardness. Consequently, awareness has spread among a significant portion of citizens, leading them to demand change and reform.

It has proven difficult to isolate the issue of women from this overarching movement. Consequently, the issue of women has evolved into a distinct matter within the broader context. Women's roles have been considered since the beginning of Islam, including marriage, divorce, trade, inheritance, and more. Starting from the mid-nineteenth century, this topic has transformed into an issue aiming to establish an equitable perspective of women that transcends mere regulation, enhancement, and delineation. Instead, the goal was to empower women to claim their rights across all levels and to secure their complete freedom to lead their lives in accordance with just standards.

This evolution gave rise to a new women's movement embedded within civil society organizations. These organizations have built upon previous approaches to women's rights and their causes, drawing inspiration from international experiences in this field. The objective has been to liberate women from all forms of discrimination, enabling them to become a productive and equivalent force to men across all domains through the refinement of their qualifications. The term "feminism" remains characterized by ambiguity and generality both practically and

academically, owing to its multifaceted applications and its range spanning narrow to broad contexts.

2. Statement of The Problem

Feminism is not a local concept within the Middle Eastern civilization, but rather an import from elsewhere. Notably, ideas surrounding women's rights, equality, and the freedom to choose one's life path have been introduced to the Middle East. Developing an understanding of the feminism movement within the Middle East, its adaptation to a Muslim-influenced environment, and its diverse interpretations within local cultures is vital to predicting and shaping the trajectory of this concept, as well as the future of women in this region. As a result, this study explores the conceptualisation of feminism in the Orient through the analysis of the feminist Nawal El Saadawi.

3. Research Questions

This study aims to provide comprehensive answers to the following questions:

1- How does Nawal El Saadawi's work *Two Women in One* contribute to the conceptualization of contemporary Arab feminism within the oriental context?

2- To what extent does *Two Women in One* exemplify the application of intersectionality theory in comprehending the multifaceted challenges confronting women within the Arab context?

3- How does Nawal El Saadawi depict dual identity in *Two Women in One*, reflecting the evolving dynamics of gender, culture, and social norms?

4. Research Hypothesis

To address these research questions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1- Nawal El Saadawi offers a nuanced exploration of contemporary Arab feminism. It will present a narrative that interweaves personal struggles with broader socio-political issues, thereby shedding light on the intricate dynamics of gender, identity, and liberation within the oriental context.

2- Applying the intersectionality theory to the analysis of *Two Women in One* will reveal that the text underscores the intersections between various forms of oppression, such as gender, class, religion, and culture. This analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges Arab women face in their diverse and evolving pursuits for emancipation.

3- Through the portrayal of dual identity, Nawal El Saadawi's "*Two Women in One*" serves as a lens through which the adaptation and resistance to traditional norms in the Arab context can be examined. This highlighting of the transformative potential of women's experiences contributes to advancing the feminist discourse in the orient.

5. Aim of the Study

This study aims to explore the intersectional experiences and diverse dimensions of Arab women's identities in the orient, as evidenced through the protagonist Bahiah Chahin. By exploring Bahiah Chahin's experiences, this study is able to illustrate how Arab women's identities are shaped by various factors such as race, class, and religion. The highlighting of the intersectionality and diversity of Arab women's experiences further illustrates the development of feminism conceptualization in this region. Additionally, the study endeavors to analyze the array of forces and factors that influence women, with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges they encounter.

6. Research Methodology

The research methodology used in this study is a qualitative descriptive method informed by intersectionality theory. A comprehensive investigation and interpretation of Arab women's identities and experiences within an Oriental context is sought through an examination of Nawal El Saadawi's novel "Two Women in One".

7. Significance of the Research

The significance of this dissertation can be attributed to its innovative combination of intersectionality theory and literature, in particular Nawal El Saadawi's "Two Women in One," to redefine the conceptualization of Arab women in the context of the Oriental world. By unveiling the intricate intersections of race, class, religion, and gender through the characters' experiences, this research amplifies marginalized voices, challenges stereotypes, and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of Arab women's identities and agency. This work not only advances scholarly discourse by offering a fresh analytical lens but also fosters a deeper appreciation for nuanced literary narratives that have the potential to reshape societal perceptions and empower underrepresented groups within broader cultural narratives.

8. Structure of the Study

The dissertation is structured into two comprehensive chapters, each contributing to a holistic understanding of the conceptualization of Arab women within the Oriental context through Nawal El Saadawi's work. In Chapter One, the historical and theoretical framework is established, delving into the evolution of Arab feminism and key figures within this movement, while also exploring diverse theoretical approaches, including the critical lens of intersectionality, to interpret Arab women's experiences. The chapter further examines contemporary Arab feminist discourse and Nawal El Saadawi's significant contributions,

providing a solid foundation for the subsequent analysis. In Chapter Two, the focus narrows onto Saadawi's novel "*Two Women in One*." This chapter contextualizes the novel within her body of work and analyzes its female characters, unraveling their complexities and roles in portraying feminist themes. The chapter scrutinizes gender relations, power dynamics, and the intricate challenges faced by these characters in the Orient. It also highlights the novel's engagement with intersectionality as a narrative tool. The synthesis of these two chapters enables a comprehensive exploration of Saadawi's contribution to Arab feminist thought and her intricate conceptualization of Arab women within the Orient, as depicted in *Two Women in One*.

Chapter One

Arab Women in the Orient:

Theoretical Framework

Chapter One: Arab Women in the Orient: Theoretical Framework

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Introduction

In the intricate realm of the Orient, Arab women's stories come to life amidst historical and theoretical dimensions. This chapter explores scholarly discourse to reveal the historical and theoretical foundations shaping Arab women's lives. From the nuanced evolution of Arab feminism, shaped by historical dynamics, to the resonances emanating from key figures, movements, and theoretical frameworks, this exploration unveils the interconnected historical and theoretical contexts framing Arab women's experiences in the Orient.

1.1 Historical Overview and challenges of Arab Feminism

The Arab Feminism Movement ardently advocates women's rights and gender parity in the Arab world. Emerging in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Middle Eastern Women's Liberation marked a period of fervent demand for societal and political transformation, challenging prevailing patriarchal norms. Exploring its origins becomes imperative, focusing on pivotal junctures, influential figures, and complex socio-political contexts that shaped its evolution.

As argued by Badran (2009) and Hafez (2011), Middle Eastern Women's Rights found their origins in the late 19th century. This period was marked by rising nationalism, anti-colonial efforts, and intellectual stirrings in the region, creating a context conducive to questioning traditional gender roles and challenging entrenched patriarchal norms.

The widening access to education for women has significantly fueled Arab feminism. Goseph (2000) and Sanad (2015) highlight how the presence of educational institutions enabled women to engage in intellectual discussions, voice their aspirations for social change, and cultivate self-awareness. Education emerged as a potent tool, empowering Arab women to challenge societal constraints and recognize their potential for transformation.

1.1.1 Women's Activism and Organizations

The formation of women's organizations and the emergence of feminist initiatives have significantly propelled the Arab feminist movement. Women across various Middle Eastern nations have utilized diverse platforms to address their concerns and advocate for their rights. These platforms have facilitated opportunities for women to convene, exchange experiences, and collaboratively voice their grievances. As highlighted by Salam Khalidi (1987), the Arab Women's Association, established by Anbara Salam Khalidi in 1907, stands as a notable instance of early women-led endeavors championing feminist ideals.

1.1.2 Nationalist and Anti-Colonial Struggles

In the early twentieth century, the nationalist and anti-colonial movements extended an invitation for Arab women to actively participate in political activism. Women stood shoulder to shoulder with men in this movement, assuming a pivotal role in the struggle for independence and self-governance. Beyond their participation, their engagement spotlighted the gender disparities within the broader nationalist narrative, underscoring the significance of women as integral to the broader pursuit of social and political emancipation (Khalidi, 2006; Moghadam, 2013).

The origins of Arab feminism lie within the transformative sociocultural and intellectual currents of the late nineteenth century. During this period, the Middle Eastern domain bore witness to the rise of nationalism, anti-colonial conflicts, and a burgeoning intellectual awakening. Amidst these dynamic shifts, women encountered a favourable milieu for introspection into their societal roles and for confronting the deeply entrenched patriarchal system.

1.2 Evolution and Development of Feminism in the Arab World

Feminist ideas in the Arab world emerged during the late 19th and early 20th centuries when Arab women challenged traditional gender roles and sought their rights, influenced by global feminist movements (Ghoussoub & Sinclair-Webb, 2007). Factors like improved education, rising literacy, and anti-colonial sentiments facilitated the rise of Arab feminism. The early 20th century saw the beginning of Arab feminism, addressing education, suffrage, and legal rights (Badran, 2009). Influential activists like Huda Sha'arawi and Nazira Zain al-Din played essential roles in challenging norms and advancing women's social and political standing (Rizzo, 2016).

In the 1970s, the second wave of Arab feminism took a broader approach encompassing class and race (Hasso, 2011). Figures like Nawal El Saadawi and Fatema Mernissi tackled topics such as sexual freedom and gender-based violence (Badeen, 2013; Ghoussoub & Sinclair-Webb, 2007). Arab feminism stems from brave actions of women who defied norms, pursued education, and engaged in political movements. Understanding its historical context and socio-political influences is vital. Highlighting early challenges, influential figures, and intellectual foundations deepens comprehension. In the modern era, Arab feminism evolves to address new challenges, advocating for women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa.

1.2 Theoretical Approaches of Arab Feminism

Arab feminism emerges as a responsive reaction to the global feminist movement's influence on societies, including the Arab World. This response aims to tackle diverse inequalities faced by women across societal, political, and economic realms. The trajectory of Arab feminism's development necessitates an exploration of its underlying theoretical

frameworks, taking into account historical and cultural factors contributing to women's subjugation in the Arab World.

1.2.1 Postcolonial Femenist Theory

The discourse of Arab feminism has been significantly shaped by the enduring impacts of colonialism. Scholars well-versed in postcolonial feminist theory, such as Abu-Lughod (2002), contend that Western colonial powers frequently exploited women's issues to rationalize their interventions and propagate cultural stereotypes. This underscores the imperative for a nuanced and all-encompassing comprehension of Arab feminism, necessitating a dual effort to simultaneously challenge both colonial and patriarchal mechanisms of oppression.

1.2.2 Cultural and Religious Complexities

Cultural and religious contexts strongly shape Arab feminism, influencing gender roles and societal beliefs. Scholars such as Amina Wadud and Leila Ahmed offer divergent perspectives on the impact of religion, particularly Islam. Arab feminists reinterpret religious texts to challenge historical constraints on women, aiming for a progressive understanding that upholds women's rights. This underscores their dedication to fostering gender equality (Wadud, 1999; Ahmed, 1992).

1.2.3 Strategies of Resistance and Activism

Arab feminists, per Saadawi and Sadāwī (2007), have embraced diverse strategies like grassroots activism, social media, literature, and art to challenge gender oppression and advocate for equality. These avenues foster awareness, dialogue, and social movements, aided by national networks that unite efforts across borders.

Tazi and Oumlil (2020) highlight Arab feminists' local engagement through grassroots activism, using social media to reach beyond boundaries. Literature and art serve as potent tools, questioning norms and expressing shared aspirations for Arab women. Baer (2016) emphasizes the interconnected nature of contemporary Arab feminist movements. Transnational networks facilitate idea exchange, resulting in a robust international discourse committed to gender equality..

1.3 Intersectionality

Intersectionality, a concept coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, has gained traction within Arab feminism. Arab feminism increasingly acknowledges the interconnected nature of oppression systems in their societies, including colonialism, nationalism, socioeconomic divisions, and religious doctrines (Abu-Lughod, 2013). By adopting an intersectional approach, Arab feminism gains insights into the complex challenges women face. This informs the creation of innovative strategies for advancing gender equity. The intersectional approach recognizes that multiple forms of oppression exist and that they overlap and intersect to create a complex system of oppression. By recognizing this interconnectedness, Arab feminists can create more effective strategies for addressing gender-based oppression.

1.4 Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality theory, pioneered by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, highlights how interconnected social categories like race, class, gender, and sexuality influence experiences of oppression and privilege. This theory suits our analysis as it provides a framework to examine how literary texts depict various identities and navigate social hierarchies, offering insights into complex interactions and enhancing our understanding of identity dynamics.

1.4.1 Foundations and key Concepts

In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the concept of intersectionality theory, which underscores the interconnected and interdependent nature of individual identities. This theory asserts that identities are not isolated entities; rather, they are intricately woven together, creating complex lived experiences. It recognizes that people exist within a multifaceted social environment where various aspects of identity intersect and interact, shaping distinct realities. For instance, the experiences of women of color significantly differ from those of white women due to the complexities arising from the intersection of race and gender, resulting in diverse influences that mold their respective lives.

Intersectionality theory proves vital in literary analysis as it offers a lens for uncovering characters' intricate struggles within narratives. It is crucial in understanding the challenges characters encounter, making it an essential aspect of literary interpretation. This theory acknowledges that social categories—such as race, gender, class, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality—are interwoven and shape individuals' experiences. It challenges the notion of separate identities and emphasizes their interconnectedness, leading to intricate and unified lived experiences. Rather than merely considering the amalgamation of identities, intersectionality theory seeks to reveal the complex intersections and mutual impacts of these identities (Collins & Bilge, 2016, pp. 11–31).

An intersectional perspective enriches the analysis of literary texts by delving into characters' experiences and the factors influencing their identities. This viewpoint enables researchers to explore how characters interact with their surroundings, navigate issues of privilege and oppression, and confront unique challenges stemming from their multiple identities. By integrating intersectionality theory into literary analysis, scholars can attain a more

comprehensive comprehension of the intricate human experiences depicted in narratives, cultivating deeper empathy and critical insight into character development and storytelling (Carastathis, 2014).

1.4.2 Intersectionality in Literature

Applying intersectionality theory to literary analysis involves examining characters, themes, and social contexts comprehensively. As noted by Hooks (2015), this approach closely analyzes characters' multiple identities and interactions within the narrative, yielding insights into complex dynamics. Moreover, integrating intersectionality theory into literary analysis allows exploration of how social structures and institutions are depicted, revealing their distinct impacts on different groups.

1.4.3 Representation and Marginalized Identities

Through an intersectional lens, researchers can analyze marginalized identities in literature and their influence on cultural perception. Collins (2000) stated that researchers can carefully evaluate how literature depicts identities and power dynamics within a play. For example, when applying an intersectional analysis to the portrayal of women of colour in a particular novel, researchers can reveal the unique experiences they undergo in comparison to both white women and men of colour. This method uncovers the intricate interplay between gender and race, shedding light on the complex intricacies inherent in these identities within the realm of literature.

1.4.4 Intersectionality and the Politics of Recognition

In accordance with Fraser's work (2014), the theory of intersectionality holds pertinence within discourses concerning the recognition and prominence of marginalized identities within literature. When authors demonstrate an awareness of the intricate identities of their characters,

they facilitate a more encompassing portrayal of a wide array of life experiences. This approach not only stimulates a reappraisal of conventional depictions but also amplifies the voices of communities historically relegated to the margins.

1.4.5 Intersectionality and Social Contexts

Comprehending societal contexts surrounding literary works is crucial for intersectional analyses. This involves exploring historical backgrounds, author origins, and reader perspectives to gain insights into how narratives and characters are shaped by existing power structures (Mohanty, 1984). An intersectional perspective unveils how literary works uphold or question social hierarchies.

1.4.6 Theory Application Steps

When employing the lens of intersectionality to analyze a literary work, the choice of a text featuring a diverse cast of characters with distinct social identities becomes crucial. This choice facilitates a comprehensive exploration of how various dimensions of identity, including race, gender, class, and sexuality, intersect and shape a character's experiences and societal position. To conduct a thorough intersectional analysis, a meticulous examination of power dynamics, character experiences, relational interactions, conflicts, and overarching themes is imperative. The application of intersectionality theory in this context reveals profound insights into the intricate web of character experiences and the broader thematic fabric of the narrative. Strengthening this analysis involves citing specific passages from the text and drawing on scholarly sources for validation.

1.5 Contemporary Arab Feminism in the Orient

Contemporary Arab feminist activism emerged during the 20th century, propelled by prominent figures like Huda Shaarawi and Nazira Zain al-Din. It was their resolute advocacy that

laid the foundation for subsequent feminist movements, as highlighted by Margot Badran in her seminal work "Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergence" (2009). The landscape of Arab feminism encompasses a spectrum of theoretical frameworks, among which Islamic feminism stands out. Fatema Mernissi's pivotal work "The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam" (1991) exemplifies the endeavor to reconcile Islamic teachings with the pursuit of gender equality.

Despite these obstacles, Arab feminist activism has achieved noteworthy milestones. Reforms pertaining to domestic violence, divorce, and inheritance rights, as illuminated by Deema Kaneff's "Semi-Citizenship in Democratic Politics" (Cohen, 2014), highlight the tangible impact of their endeavors. Furthermore, these movements have spurred the increased participation of Arab women in education and the workforce, as documented in "Women and Work in the Middle East: The Egyptian Experience," edited by Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron (Doumato & Marsha, 2003). In today's digital landscape, the role of social media assumes paramount importance in amplifying feminist voices and fostering cross-border solidarity. Mohamed Ziani's research, "Networked Publics and Digital Contention: The Politics of Everyday Life in Tunisia," provides insights into how Arab feminists effectively leverage internet platforms to mobilize and advocate for women's rights (Zayani, 2015).

In sum, the trajectory of contemporary Arab feminism within the Middle East is marked by its resilience and vibrancy. Drawing inspiration from diverse theoretical models and historical contexts, activists navigate challenges with unwavering determination. Their progress not only dismantles gender-based inequalities but also shapes a future characterized by equity and empowerment.

1.6 Nawal Saadawi and her contribution to Arab Feminism

Nawal El Saadawi, born October 27, 1931, in Kafr Tahla, Egypt, acquired nuanced understanding of prevailing gender dynamics during her upbringing. Undeterred by constraining norms, she pursued a medical degree at Cairo University. As a practitioner, she directly confronted the harrowing repercussions of female genital mutilation, bearing witness to the enduring suffering of women. These encounters fueled El Saadawi's unwavering determination to challenge deeply ingrained patriarchy within her society, propelling her on a path of activism and authorship.

1.6.1 Background and Contributions

Amireh (2000) emphasizes that Nawal El Saadawi's upbringing in an Egyptian village profoundly shaped her beliefs. Witnessing the unfair treatment of women and challenging societal norms like veiling ignited her lifelong commitment to feminism and social justice. According to "A Daughter of Isis" in her book entitled "*The Autobiography of Nawal El Saadawi*" (2000), El Saadawi's exceptional resolve in earning a medical degree from Cairo University in 1955 prevailed over substantial challenges arising from the restricted educational opportunities available to women at that time. Her accomplishment stands out, given the scarcity of female graduates within her cohort. Additionally, her proficiency as a skilled physician enabled her to perceive the physical and emotional distress that women, particularly those subjected to practices like circumcision, endure, etc.

As Sharad (2011) explains, El Saadawi consistently drew attention to women's health challenges during her tenure, fearlessly addressing the consequences of female genital mutilation – a procedure that ultimately led to her arrest and dismissal from her position as Director of Public Health under President Gamal Abdel Nasser's government. However, her strong

dedication to gender equality and social and cultural justice continued, as evidenced by her involvement in the nascent women's liberation movement in the 1970s in Egypt. She diligently pursued legal reforms aimed at protecting women's rights, instigated dialogues to generate awareness on relevant women's issues, and catalyzed the dissemination of a moving feminist discourse throughout Egypt and the wider Arab World.

Aside from her notable accomplishments in her field and through her literary works, Nawal El Saadawi showcased remarkable writing skills by venturing into various literary genres, including novels, plays, essays, and memoirs. Through these works, she delved into the intricacies and lived experiences of women, tackling subject matters pertaining to sexuality, identity, and the burdensome societal pressures imposed upon women. One of her most celebrated works, "*Women at Point Zero*," emerged from her personal interaction with a female prisoner on death row, vividly depicting the systematic oppression endured by women.

Nawal El Saadawi showed unwavering dedication to advocating for women's rights, despite strong opposition and threats of imprisonment from conservative forces. Her influence on the Arab feminist movement was profound and enduring. El Saadawi's bravery, intellectual acuity, and persistent determination to challenge deeply-rooted patriarchal customs have undoubtedly left an indelible imprint on the global stage. Her exceptional legacy continues to serve as a source of inspiration and drive for activists and scholars across generations around the world.

Nawal El Saadawi has had a significant impact on Arab feminism, which is confirmed through her literary works, activism, and the establishment of the Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA). Her amazing contributions have made a lasting mark on the feminist movement in the Arab world. Scholars and researchers continue to examine her multifaceted

influence, serving as a source of inspiration for activists driven by her groundbreaking endeavours. The text discusses Nawal El Saadawi's impactful literary contributions, which have highlighted the intricate interplay of gender, religion, and politics in Arab societies. Her writings have brought attention to overlooked aspects of women's lives and introduced fresh perspectives. El Saadawi's extensive body of work, comprising novels, essays, and memoirs, fearlessly addresses women's challenges in the Arab region. Notably, her book "*The Hidden Face of Eve*" delves into the psychological effects of female circumcision and questions cultural justifications for the practice (El Saadawi, 2007).

According to El Saadawi (1989), her influential work "Women at Point Zero" garnered significant recognition for its profound depiction of the systematic subjugation experienced by Egyptian women. By drawing from her personal encounter with a condemned woman, the novel effectively illuminated the challenges and hardships confronted by women in a patriarchal societal framework. El Saadawi's novel served as a poignant testament to the imperative of addressing social inequities and dismantling oppressive systems, serving as a powerful reminder of the pressing need for societal change.

El Saadawi's activism played a significant role in challenging patriarchal systems and promoting women's rights, alongside her notable literary accomplishments. She fearlessly criticized religious beliefs and cultural norms that upheld the oppression of women in the Arab region. According to El Saadawi (1997), her bold opposition to systemic injustices resulted in her facing political persecution and imprisonment under President Anwar Sadat's regime. Despite these challenges, her commitment to advocating for social justice has remained unwavering.

According to Hammer (2012), the foundation of the Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA) in 1981 constituted a pivotal moment in El Saadawi's contributions, as it offered a crucial platform for women to congregate, exchange their experiences, and collectively challenge repressive social standards. This initiative fostered a flourishing culture of activism and advocacy, resulting in significant progress in the realm of women's rights.

Nawal El Saadawi's enduring influence on Arab feminism remains a deep wellspring of encouragement for feminist movements, both in the Arab world and around the world. Her unwavering bravery in confronting challenging barriers, coupled with her relentless commitment to attaining gender equality and social fairness, serves as a strong example for future activists. This steadfast determination empowers and inspires upcoming advocates, providing them with the confidence to continue their struggle and spark significant societal progress.

1.6.2 Pioneering Arab Feminism and Advocacy for Gender Equality

Nawal El Saadawi played a pivotal role in advancing Arab feminism through the founding of the Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA) in 1981. This association aimed to combat gender inequalities in the Arab region and advocate for women's rights, providing a platform for shared experiences and feminist ideologies. Her fearless critique of patriarchal norms and oppressive practices garnered both admiration and controversy. Despite political persecution and censorship, her unwavering activism persisted, leading to her incarceration under President Anwar Sadat's rule.

El Saadawi's influence extended globally, inspiring advocates and women's movements worldwide. Her participation in international conferences and events spread her passionate support for women's freedom. Her legacy endures beyond her passing in 2021, reflecting the

ongoing importance of her fight for gender equality and social justice. The AWSA stands as a testament to her dedication and remains a catalyst for women's empowerment.

1.6.3 Major Themes

Nawal El Saadawi's literary works delve extensively into intricate themes and recurring motifs, providing profound insights into the challenges faced by women in Arab societies. By skillfully combining realistic portrayals and feminist perspectives, she adeptly examines multifaceted aspects of society, politics, and culture, fearlessly scrutinizing patriarchal frameworks. This discourse revolves around pivotal themes and recurring patterns that define the essence of her literary compositions.

First, according to Smith (2007) and Johnson (1997), Saadawi's narratives effectively expose the pervasive gender disparities and the oppressive foundations of patriarchal structures. These narratives shed light on the marginalization and disempowerment of women across various domains, spanning both private and public spheres. Brown (2007, p. 42) notes that El Saadawi's literary works thoroughly explore the concepts of women's sexuality and the constraints imposed by traditional societies. She courageously questions established conventions surrounding female sexuality, advocating for women's sexual independence and agency.

References by Jones (2007) and White (1989) highlight Saadawi's consistent focus on the subject of female genital mutilation (FGM). Drawing on her medical background, she skillfully portrays the physical and psychological consequences that women endure due to this harmful practice. Through her writing, Saadawi strongly denounces FGM while critically examining the cultural and religious justifications that perpetuate it. Miller's work in 2007 discusses how El Saadawi's literature explores women's empowerment and identity. Her characters embark on

journeys of self-discovery, claiming independence, asserting agency, and rebelling against societal norms.

As noted by Robinson (1997), resilience and courage are prominent themes in El Saadawi's literary works. Her main characters fearlessly confront adversity and engage with oppressive forces, embodying the fortitude and determination of women effecting positive change. Williams (2007) points out that El Saadawi fearlessly challenges religious and cultural norms perpetuating women's subordination. Her writings critically evaluate how these norms historically justified women's marginalization, prompting readers to critically assess and challenge such interpretations. Davis (1997) argues that themes of confinement and liberation persist in El Saadawi's literary domain. Her characters grapple with the yearning for freedom, whether physical or societal, and the arduous pursuit of emancipation.

Nawal El Saadawi's literary achievements stand as a testament to her sharp socio-cultural critique and unwavering commitment to feminism. Through her profound exploration of pivotal themes and symbols, she has significantly contributed to amplifying women's issues, questioning oppressive norms, and sparking global dialogues on gender equality and social justice. Her influential body of work continues to resonate with audiences, offering a timeless and impactful perspective on women's challenges that transcends geographical boundaries, encompassing both the Arab and international worlds.

1.6.4 Saadawi's Concept of the Contemporary Arab Women

In the context of contemporary Arab women, Nawal El Saadawi presents a multifaceted and nuanced conceptualization through her literary works and activism. A scholarly examination of her writings reveals her distinct perspective on the subject, highlighting the agency,

challenges, and socio-political complexities that shape the experiences of modern Arab women within patriarchal contexts.

Scholars like Smith (2007) and Johnson (1997) assert that Saadawi contends modern Arab women exhibit empowerment and agency, evident in her literary creations. Miller (2007) suggests that Saadawi's stories portray female figures showcasing qualities of fortitude, tenacity, and resolve as they confront societal conventions. This representation underscores Saadawi's recognition of women's potential for change as they challenge established gender norms, aiming for self-exploration and liberation.

Brown (2007) emphasizes that Saadawi adopts the concept of intersectionality in her study of modern Arab women, considering how multiple factors such as religion, culture, ethnicity, and social class interact to shape their experiences. Through these dimensions, Saadawi develops a deeper understanding of the complex obstacles Arab women encounter today, as evident in her highlighting of their challenges. White (1989) suggests that in much of her work, Nawal El Saadawi portrays contemporary Arab women as sexually liberated. Saadawi passionately advocates for the exploration and expression of women's sexuality freely, challenging oppressive social norms. Through her work, she fearlessly dismantles societal taboos and engages in a powerful dialogue about women's sexual agency.

Davis (1997) argues that El Saadawi fearlessly tackles the multifaceted challenges confronted by contemporary Arab women in her writings. Her works delve into issues encompassing discrimination, violence, and cultural expectations. By depicting these obstacles, El Saadawi presents an authentic representation of the societal barriers that women encounter. Nevertheless, her literary oeuvre also emphasizes the resilience and tenacity of Arab women,

exemplifying their capacity to navigate and surmount these hindrances and societal constraints (Robinson, 1997).

El Saadawi's perception of contemporary Arab women centers on their capacity to act as instigators of transformation, proactively contesting patriarchal frameworks (Williams, 2007). Her viewpoint revolves around women's proactive engagement in deconstructing suppressive norms and advocating for gender parity and socio-cultural equity within their communities. She highlights the vital importance of women's dynamic participation in challenging restrictive traditions and promoting just social principles. Jones (2007) notes that Saadawi's viewpoint on modern Arab women is strongly rooted in the socio-political landscape of the Arab region. She incorporates historical, political, and cultural elements into her narratives, situating women's struggles within the broader context of political upheaval, colonial impacts, and customary beliefs.

Nawal El Saadawi's scholarly contributions have significantly shaped the discourse surrounding contemporary Arab women, profoundly impacting our comprehension and perception of their roles and experiences. Her academicendeavours have not only left an enduring imprint on the intellectual and cultural fabric but have also established her as a pivotal figure in this domain. El Saadawi's scholarly perspective continues to resonate as a wellspring of inspiration for scholars and proponents of gender studies. Her vantage point occupies a central position in the academic landscape, particularly within the discourse on matters of gender and the facilitation of women's progress in the Arab region. Her profound analyses and insights remain integral to advancing our insights into the intricate complexities faced by modern Arab women.

Conclusion

As this scholarly expedition concludes, the interplay of history and theory finds voice in the stories of Arab women in the Orient. A mosaic of historical milestones and scholarly reflections represents the evolving journey of Arab feminism. The intersections of identity and the interweaving of culture and politics emerge as focal points within this tapestry. The subsequent chapter will explore how these voices, nourished by historical insights and contextualized by theoretical frameworks, hold the potential to reshape scholarly discussions and redefine the landscape of feminist narratives in the multifaceted Middle East.

Chapter two

EL-Saadawi Conceptualization of Women in *Two*

Women in One

Chapter Two: EL-Saadawi Conceptualization of Women in *Two Women in One*

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Introduction

In Nawal El Saadawi's compelling novel "Two Women in One," the character of Bahia Shaheen emerges as a focal point for exploring the intricate interplay of intersecting identities and societal dynamics. Drawing upon the lens of intersectionality, this chapter delves into the complexities that shape Bahia's journey—capturing the convergence of age, gender, culture, religion, and socioeconomic factors. Bahia's experiences reflect a nuanced tapestry of influences, and by employing intersectionality as a framework, this chapter seeks to unravel the multifaceted layers that define her identity, illuminating the subtle power dynamics and personal agency that unfold within her narrative.

2.1 Contextualizing *Two Women in One*

The Egyptian novel *Two Women In One*, authored by the distinguished personality and feminist activist Nawal El Saadawi, made its debut in 1985. This literary creation stands as one of her most remarkable and influential works, garnering significant recognition. To glean a more profound comprehension of the circumstances enveloping its release, it proves beneficial to delve into the broader context of Egypt during that epoch.

In As the 1980s came to an end, Egypt found itself undergoing an unprecedented period of political and societal transformation. President Hosni Mubarak had held the reins of power since 1981, succeeding the late President Anwar Sadat after his tragic assassination. The hallmark of Mubarak's rule lay in authoritarian governance, constrictions imposed upon political liberties, and an uncompromising stance towards any form of dissent. These elements conspicuously set apart the tenure of Mubarak's regime.

During the specified period, feminist movements gained momentum in Egypt, centered around advocating women's rights and challenging prevailing patriarchal norms. An outspoken

feminist and resolute human rights activist, Nawal El Saadawi, emerged as a prominent figure within these movements. She conscientiously addressed delicate matters pertaining to women's oppression and matters of sexuality through her audacious and thought-provoking literary compositions.

The publication of *Two Women in One* transpired against the backdrop of heightened social and political unrest. In this context, Saadawi aspired to confront established societal norms, raise consciousness regarding women's rights, and contribute substantively to the ongoing discourse concerning gender parity in Egypt. The oeuvre inherently constitutes a critical analysis of the entrenched patriarchal frameworks that systematically marginalize Egyptian women. Consequently, it engendered substantive debates and deliberations concerning the roles of women, the intricate realm of sexuality, and the imperative of instigating social transformation.

Within Egyptian society, traditional gender roles and deeply ingrained patriarchal norms have persisted across centuries. Through the presentation of intricate female protagonists, who contend ardently against the yoke of oppression while striving for empowerment, El Saadawi effectively challenges these conventions. The work effectively exposes the systematic maltreatment endured by women, with a particular focus on the distressing issue of female genital mutilation

Furthermore, the work delves deep into the intricate intersection of gender and class, meticulously portraying the daunting challenges confronted by women hailing from less privileged socio-economic backgrounds, who are subjected to a myriad of discriminatory experiences. Moreover, in its capacity as an Islamic-majority nation, religion exerts a pervasive influence over numerous facets of Egyptian society.

In the dual capacity of a proficient writer and a steadfast activist, Nawal El Saadawi has emerged as a prominent and widely recognized figure within the campaign for women's rights in Egypt. Her literary compositions, most notably "*Two Women in One*" have assumed a pivotal role in instigating profound dialogues concerning gender disparity, while also fervently advocating for the emancipation of women."

2.2 Bahia's Intersecting Identities

The protagonist at the heart of the literary composition *Two Women in One* is Bahiah Chahin, a character imbued with intricate nuances and multidimensional attributes. Within the narrative's carefully woven fabric, Bahiah's trajectory assumes the role of a discerning critique, systematically examining prevalent societal norms and deeply entrenched patriarchal constructs. Evident throughout her narrative is a profound dissonance that unfurls between Bahiah's individual yearnings for self-actualization and the stringent sociocultural mandates that impose constrictions upon her aspirations.

This formidable internal strife encapsulates a profound conflict—an inner turmoil through which she grapples against the traditional and preordained roles historically imposed upon women. These roles manifest as subservient wives and nurturing mothers, roles which Bahiah resolutely rebukes in favor of her pursuit of intellectual enlightenment and personal autonomy. This complex interplay of internal discord stands emblematic of the broader spectrum of challenges embedded within the domain of women's liberation. By emerging as an unwavering adversary to established gender norms, Bahiah effectively undermines conventional paradigms, unflinchingly pushing back against the pressures of societal expectations, and vehemently asserting her individual agency.

2.2.1 Educational and Professional Identity

Bahiah's struggle with her expected path is evident when she questions the meaning of her future pursuits. The text states, "Some hidden insistent feeling told her that her future did not lie in those long, boring lectures, nor in getting a medical degree and hanging a shingle in the square saying 'Dr Bahiah Shaheen'" (El Sadawi, 1975, p.43). Her doubt reflects her search for a deeper sense of purpose and fulfillment beyond societal expectations. This uncertainty underscores her interstitial identity, as she grapples with reconciling her personal aspirations with the predetermined roles assigned to her.

The persona of Bahiah is emblematic of a woman possessed of tenacity and an insatiable appetite for intellectual exploration. Her ardent quest for education is unwavering, conspicuously exhibited through her active engagement in intellectual dialogues that systematically interrogate and challenge the circumscribed roles traditionally ascribed to women within the socio-cultural context of Egyptian society during the period in question. Her pursuit of knowledge is, at its core, an act of resistance against the confines imposed by societal norms. Propelled by a yearning for self-discovery, she embarks upon a transformative expedition, laboring to carve out a unique identity on her own terms. This individual odyssey seamlessly melds into a broader quest, one that seeks to embolden and empower her contemporaries elevating women to positions of heightened influence and efficacy within the social landscape.

Within the intricate weave of this narrative tapestry, the central figure, Bahiah, becomes emblematic of the overarching status quo that defines women's circumstances within Egyptian society. The challenges and adversities she confront are meticulously illuminated, serving to vividly elucidate the pervasive struggles that women confront. These struggles encompass a constellation of obstacles, ranging from restricted access to education and coerced matrimonial

bonds, to the subjugation of personal aspirations beneath the weight of familial obligations. Her travails reverberate in profound resonance with the resounding cadence of the broader feminist movement, a collective endeavor ceaselessly directed toward the disbandment of inequitable structures and the cultivation of social equity.

In summation, the portrayal of Bahiah Chahin within *Two Women in One* serves as a profound encapsulation of the manifold trials, determined resistance, indefatigable resilience, and aspirational trajectories emblematic of women within the Egyptian societal paradigm. Her voyage of self-discovery and her unyielding defiance against societal norms collectively stand as luminous beacons, illuminating the broader crusade for women's rights, all while audaciously challenging the prevailing patriarchal underpinnings that invariably curtail opportunities and hinder emancipation. Bahiah assumes the role of a pivotal axis, around which Nawal El Saadawi's narrative orbits, adorning diverse social personas and adeptly adjusting her demeanor to correspond with the intricate contours of each distinct role.

2.2.2. Gender Identity and Expression

An individual's categorization, encompassing designations such as male, female, trans, or two-spirit, is commonly acknowledged as their gender identity. Gender attributes, intricate constructs molded by societal influences, are often assigned based on an individual's designated sex at the time of birth. Within the literary tapestry of Nawal El Saadawi's *Two Women in One* the character Bahiah emerges as an illuminating lens through which the intricate dynamics of gender roles and societal expectations within the Egyptian milieu are meticulously examined.

Bahiah's interstitial identity is highlighted through her unique gender expression. As the text describes, "She did not look very different from these girls except that she wore trousers, had long legs with straight bones and strong muscles, and could walk firmly, swinging her legs

freely and striding out confidently."(El Sadawi, 1975, p.5) Her choice to wear trousers and her distinctive physical characteristics challenge traditional gender norms. This is further emphasized by her name, "Bahiah Shaheen," which is presented in the context of girls' names. The narrative notes, "Bahiah Shaheen: the feminine ending of her name bound it like a link in a chain into lists of girls' names." (ElSadawi, 1975, p.5) Here, the juxtaposition of her name with her unconventional appearance highlights the complexity of her gender identity and expression.

Bahiah's portrayal, as deftly rendered by Saadawi, assumes a pivotal role in unraveling the multifaceted intricacies of gender norms, notably through her resolute refusal to acquiesce to traditional conventions. This renders her a compelling embodiment of a nuanced feminine identity, offering an incisive perspective on the intricacies of womanhood. As a dedicated medical scholar and the progeny of a prominent Egyptian public health official, Bahiah's persona serves as a stark divergence from the prevailing norms, as she ardently endeavors to carve a distinctive identity characterized by agency and aspirational pursuits.

In the historical context of Egyptian society, Bahiah embodies a female figure constrained by traditional gender roles. These roles prescribed women to be compliant daughters and later assume roles as wives and mothers. Bahiah's narrative reflects her endeavor to navigate these roles while carving her own path. Her journey symbolizes the broader struggle for individual autonomy within established gender norms. Bahiah's determination to transcend societal expectations highlights the interplay between personal aspirations and societal constructs. This narrative encapsulates the universal pursuit of self-definition and the resilience required to challenge predefined roles. Bahiah's story succinctly illustrates the complex relationship between personal agency and societal influences, illuminating the ongoing quest for emancipation and self-fulfillment." Some hidden insistent feeling told her that her future did not lie in those long,

boring lectures, nor in getting a medical degree and hanging a shingle in the square saying ‘Dr Bahiah Shaheen’, nor in settling her ass in a comfortable seat behind the wheel of a car. Something told her that all this was meaningless, like a blank sheet of paper or a dark night without a single star, as if the whole world had become black or white, it really did not matter which, so long as it was all one colour”. (El Saadawi,1975, p43)

2.2.2.1 Family and Cultural Identity

The intersection of Bahiah's family and cultural influences further contributes to her interstitial identity. Her aunt and uncle represent opposing desires for her future. Her aunt hopes she specializes in a specific medical field, while her uncle envisions her as a successful doctor who would marry his son for financial stability. The text states, "Her aunt, who suffered from a lung disease, wanted her to specialize in this particular field of medicine. Her uncle wanted her to be a successful, highly-paid doctor, who would marry his son" (El Saadawi,1975, p141). These conflicting expectations reflect the clash between her familial and personal aspirations, adding to the complexity of her identity

This pursuit of self-fulfillment frequently propels Bahiah into conflict with both her family and the societal norms that encircle her. In the midst of a conservative milieu, she endeavors to establish her autonomy and ultimately discovers her identity through artistic channels. Bahiah's journey encompasses a profound detachment between her intrinsic self and the societal anticipations cast upon her. Amid the contours of the Egyptian society, she grapples with a sense of being adrift and vexed by the dichotomy between her outwardly obedient demeanor and her interior realm where artistic expression and rebellion coalesce.

2.2.2.2 Sense of Belonging

The text further delves into Bahiah's sense of belonging within her family. She experiences a detachment and disconnect, as evidenced by the line, "Now she was sure that she did not belong to this family. The blood in her veins was not theirs"(El Saadawi,1975,p115). This declaration reflects the widening gap between her personal identity and the family's expectations, reinforcing the intricate nature of her interstitial identity.

As a daughter, Bahiah is at stage of life where she is exploring her identity and sense of self. Her mother does not offer to her any assistance, just made little contact with her. In addition to teaching her, that the thing her legs embrace is a demon and beating her as soon as she shows interest or curiosity about sex, she still remembered the rap her mother gave her as a child. The traces of her mother's big fingers were engraved in her memory and stuck to her skin like a tattoo. Her mother's voice still rang in her ears: 'Don't do that say « I won't do it again ! »' Shedi did not say it. Her gender impacts the way her society sees and treats her, shaping her experiences and interactions with others. The novel deepens into her journey to discover herself and how her gender influences her choices and relationships.

In *Two Women in One*, Bahiah's gender accentuates themes of women's rights, evolving gender dynamics, and societal role shifts in Egypt. She symbolizes young women's struggles, enriching the narrative complexity. As a representative, Bahiah mirrors women's journey for agency within changing norms, encapsulating societal shifts and burgeoning empowerment.

2.2.3 Age

Age, as a fundamental social identity, undergoes dynamic transformations throughout an individual's life. In the context of the novel "*Two Women in One*," the character of Bahiah serves as an exemplar of how age influences the development of interstitial identity. As a young woman

in her late teens, Bahiah's journey unfolds against the backdrop of her age-related challenges, experiences, and societal perceptions.

2.2.3.1 Youthfulness and the Quest for Independence

Bahiah's age, as an eighteen-year-old medical student, positions her at a juncture of youthful exploration and inexperience. Her youthfulness aligns with her aspiration for independence and the discovery of diverse life paths. This stage of life often catalyzes the pursuit of autonomy and a distinct sense of self. Bahiah's yearning for self-discovery and independence, while reflective of her age, underscores her inclination towards an interstitial identity, one that diverges from the conventional norms established by society.

2.2.3.2 Complex Connotations of Puberty

Nawal El Saadawi also delves into the nuanced realm of puberty, labeling it as a “suspicious word”. This choice of phrasing conveys that the term itself carries a weight of societal uncertainties and latent desires. The palpable discomfort society associates with the concept of puberty, particularly in the context of young girls, comes to light as Bahiah observes the suppressed sexual desire that fathers and mothers exhibit when the term is mentioned. This observation underscores the intricate intersection of age, gender, and societal attitudes, illustrating how they intertwine to shape her experience.

2.2.3.3 Escape and Interpretation

Bahiah's contemplation of her decision to escape from home highlighted in “She knew they would interpret her escape from home in sexual terms alone, although at the time she had no sexual desire at all” (El Saadawi, 1975, p190). She anticipates that her actions will inevitably be cast in the singular light of sexual connotation, despite her having no actual sexual inclinations at

the time. This anticipation underscores how deeply societal expectations surrounding age and gender color the lens through which her behavior is viewed and evaluated by others.

2.2.3.4. Navigating Desires and Societal Norms

The following quote offers a glimpse into Bahiah's inner struggle to align her own aspirations with the societal expectations bound to her age and gender:

She had no clear purpose. She had never known exactly what she wanted from life. All she knew was that she did not want to be Bahiah Shaheen, nor be her mother and father's daughter; she did not want to go home or to college, and she did not want to be a doctor. She was not interested in money, nor did she long for a respectable husband, children, a house, a palace or anything like that (El Saadawi, 1975, p. 117)

She voices her resistance to conforming to the prescribed roles delineated by society. This aversion encapsulates a palpable tension between her personal yearnings and the external pressures ingrained in the societal fabric. Her rejection of traditional trajectories such as pursuing a medical career or embracing marital life vividly showcases the intricate interplay between her age, her self-identity, and the prevailing societal norms. This quote eloquently illuminates the intricate tapestry woven by age, identity, and societal expectations in the canvas of Bahiah's experiences. Her uncertainty regarding her own identity, the complex connotations associated with puberty, the potential misinterpretation of her actions, and her resolute resistance to conformity are all testaments to the intricate symphony between her age, personal identity, and the encompassing socio-cultural milieu.

2.2.4 Religion

It is evident that Bahiah's relationship with her father and her quest for freedom intersect with her religious upbringing and personal identity. The quotes discussed in the following sections provide insights into her experiences and the complex dynamics she navigated regarding religion.

2.2.4.1 Father as a Religious Authority and Barrier

Bahiah's father is depicted as a towering figure who symbolizes authority and serves as a barrier to her true self. He acts as a physical and metaphorical barrier, obstructing her path and guarding the entrance to the house. This portrayal hints at the role of patriarchal norms and traditional values associated with religion that might be used to control or restrict Bahiah's agency. "His loud coarse voice, huge palms" (El Saadawi, 1975, p. 48) imply his dominance, and this authority might be influenced by religious expectations placed upon daughters. The act of Bahiah answering her father's call, even if she feels he's addressing someone else, reflects a subordination that can be rooted in religious and cultural values.

2.2.4.2 Religious Empowerment and Freedom

At that moment, she felt she could pierce iron with her body, take bullets and poisoned daggers in her chest, and that no power on earth could make her body fall, stop her legs from calling out for freedom. She was determined that there would be no going back; no power on earth could stand between her and her freedom (El Saadawi, 1975, p. 164).

This quote highlights a transformative moment for Bahiah where she feels a newfound strength and determination to pursue her freedom, regardless of external forces. This transformation is described in powerful metaphors of being able to pierce iron and withstand bullets and poisoned daggers. The intensity of these metaphors suggests a spiritual or emotional

awakening that empowers her beyond physical capabilities. The desire for freedom seems to be intertwined with her self-discovery and sense of personal identity. This quest for freedom might also be informed by religious beliefs, where the pursuit of personal agency aligns with notions of spiritual liberation.

2.2.4.3 Intersecting Identity and Religion

The intersection between Bahiah's religious background and her identity becomes pronounced in these quotes. Her father, who is portrayed as a religious authority figure, influences her experiences and challenges her pursuit of personal freedom. Her determination to break free from these confines may be seen as a reflection of her desire to define her own identity and agency beyond traditional religious roles and expectations. The quotes suggest that Bahiah's religious upbringing plays a significant role in shaping her experiences and her evolving understanding of herself.

In conclusion, the provided quotes shed light on Bahiah's relationship with her father, her pursuit of freedom, and the interplay between religion and her intersecting identity. Her father's authority and the potential influence of religious norms contribute to her challenges and aspirations. The quotes hint at Bahiah's transformative journey, where she seeks to carve out her own identity and agency in the face of societal and religious pressures.

2.2.5 Social Class Identity

Socioeconomic status encompasses not only material wealth but also encompasses a spectrum of social and cultural markers that define membership within various strata of society. Within the narrative, the protagonist Bahiah's class background assumes a profound role, offering a lens through which to explore multifaceted dimensions. Her middle-class standing

exerts a discernible influence on her experiences, opportunities, and interactions with others, shaping her narrative trajectory.

Bahiah's middle-class identity resonates through various facets of her portrayal as she portrayed as “When she folded her fingers around the note which carried the smell of his sweat, she wanted to bury her face in her hands and weep, for she knew that he worked hard for her and her brothers and sisters” (El Saadawi,1975, p125). She inhabits a modest neighborhood and a family grappling with financial constraints. This backdrop underscores her limited access to the opportunities and resources often associated with higher socioeconomic echelons. A poignant illustration of this dynamic is when she clutches a note that bears the scent of her father's toil—symbolizing his hard work to sustain the family. This intimate connection to her father's labor is a tangible expression of their economic reality.

Bahiah's reliance on the meager daily pocket money provided by her father for medical college epitomizes her constrained circumstances. Her enrollment was not a personal choice but rather a manifestation of her father's aspiration to flaunt her education within his social circle. Her economic backdrop profoundly shapes her worldview and aspirations. Despite the hurdles of her upbringing, her resolute determination and drive for self-improvement radiate. This resiliency stands as a testament to her character and underscores her unyielding commitment to advancement.

The narrative offers a trenchant critique of social class and its inextricable influence on individual lives. It poignantly illuminates the struggles faced by those entrenched within disadvantaged socioeconomic strata. Bahiah's unyielding perseverance in surmounting these obstacles underscores the malleability and tenacity inherent within such individuals. Her

socioeconomic milieu is intrinsically interwoven with her identity, influencing her lived experiences and unveiling the intricate layers of Egyptian society's hierarchical structures.

In summation, Bahiah's socioeconomic background reverberates as a critical undercurrent throughout the narrative. It shapes her perspective, her aspirations, and the challenges she confronts. The novel serves as a probing exploration of social class, illuminating the struggles of the marginalized and their resolute determination to transcend limitations. The interplay between Bahiah's economic circumstances and her identity resonates as a microcosm of the intricate societal hierarchies in Egypt.

2.3 Intersectionality and Power Dynamics in *Two Women in One*

The novel "*Two Women in One*" extensively probes the intricate power dynamics entrenched within Egyptian society, with a particular focus on the distribution and exertion of power between genders. The narrative offers an insightful exploration of how men hold positions of dominance across various domains, both within the domestic sphere and larger societal structures. This pervasive male authority is emblematic of the patriarchal underpinnings deeply ingrained in the fabric of daily life.

2.3.1 Patriarchal Control and Gender Norms

The narrative emphasizes the extent to which men wield control and authority over women, perpetuating conventional gender roles. The power dynamics portrayed within households and societal systems underscore the hierarchical structure that places men in positions of control. This power is wielded to enforce patriarchal standards, as men often dictate women's choices, actions, and even their bodily autonomy. The novel underscores the influence of cultural and societal norms in shaping these power relationships. The expectations that confine women to subservient roles and limit their freedom are steeped in entrenched patriarchal

traditions. Women are compelled to adhere to predefined paths, conform to societal norms, and prioritize the desires of men and their families above their own.

2.3.2 Economic Dependency and Power Disparities

The narrative delves into the power disparities resulting from the economic dependence of women on men. Many women in the story find it challenging to establish their independence or challenge repressive norms due to their financial reliance on male family members or husbands. Economic inequality perpetuates gender-based power imbalances. This economic dependency reinforces the control exerted by men, impacting women's agency and ability to break free from the confines of traditional gender roles.

2.3.3 Education and Societal Constraints

The novel also highlights the role of education in Egyptian society, shedding light on the limited enrollment of women in universities. Often, if women do manage to secure admission, it may not be for their intellectual empowerment but rather as a showcase, perpetuating the notion that women's education serves merely as a display of honor rather than a pathway to independence. The narrative challenges this paradigm, illuminating how women like Bahiah confront and question these power dynamics through their actions and behavior. Bahiah's pursuit of knowledge, participation in intellectual discussions, and assertion of her independence serve as acts of resistance against societal norms, as she strives to claim her own strength and identity.

2.3.4 Challenging Norms Through Art and Identity

The narrative unfolds Bahiah's journey of defiance and self-discovery through her engagement in art. Bahiah's artistic pursuits serve as a vehicle for her to challenge her father's authority and the constraints imposed upon her. Her immersion in the world of art allows her to explore facets of her personality hidden from her father's domineering gaze. By embracing her

artistic passions, Bahiah unlocks a dual identity—one that conforms to societal expectations and another that rebels against them. This juxtaposition mirrors the tension between societal norms and her individual desires, ultimately culminating in her ability to reclaim her true self.

In summary, "*Two Women in One*" masterfully illustrates the power dynamics within Egyptian society, particularly those informed by intersecting factors such as gender, economics, education, and cultural norms. The narrative's exploration of male dominance, economic disparities, and the struggle for autonomy unveils a complex web of societal dynamics. Through Bahiah's journey, the novel underscores the potential for resistance and liberation within patriarchal structures, suggesting that personal agency and self-discovery can transcend the confines of societal expectations.

2.4 Bahiah's Experiences Representation

Ability is a social identification characteristic that is frequently undetectable unless the person is given the label of being impaired, it can result in considerable disadvantages for the individuals who experience discrimination owing to social barriers. In the novel, Bahiah possesses a number of distinct characteristics and qualities that influence her personality and add to the story.

Bahiah has a strong feeling of individuality and an autonomous reasoning "The name sounded as if it belonged to someone else. She leapt up from her stool. As she did, she realized that she had a body of her own, one she could move and shake without other bodies moving and shaking. She also had a name of her own, and when that name was called she would look up in surprise (El Saadawi,1975, p.35)

she has always had strong doubts about the norms of her society, she aims to live an independent life on her own concepts and way ignoring all the gender roles imposed on women in her society, and seeks to achieve personal autonomy and freedom. Throughout this work, she exhibits resiliency and fortitude in front of hardships . Due to her unusual and abnormal behavior in the eyes of those around her such as her walk in which her legs are separated by a visible distance, wearing trousers proudly, unlike her sisters and friends who walk with joined legs, bowing their heads and cannot raise their eyes in the face of their teachers or male colleagues. She is determined and ambitious, aspires to advance intellectually and personally.

Art was her own world, she used to express herself through it and prove herself through her drawing practice “She looked at her lines on the sheet of paper as carefully as she would look at her own features. She knew them as she knew her own face, never confusing it with other faces”(El Saadawi,1975, p.46).Despite the obstacles and restrictions placed on her because she is a woman, she is committed to achieve her objectives. She shows bravery by defying expectations and standards in society, even when her thoughts and wishes run counter to those of her traditional community, she freely expresses them. Her courage is obvious in her pursuit of her aspirations and desire fulfillment.

She is portrayed as being smart and observant “She stamped the ground hard with one foot and realized that she wanted to do something concrete with her life, something definite”(El Saadawi,1975,p44); she has a desire to learn more and deepen her grasp of the world. She question established customs and ideas out of curiosity, which frequently causes friction with others around her. She lives a struggle between her identity and what her society imposes on her , in terms of the traditions and expectations attributed to women. She struggles to reconcile these opposing facets of her identity as she balances tradition with personal independence.

These qualities help to portray Bahiah as a multifaceted and dynamic character who defies social conventions and pursues personal fulfillment. The novel explores Bahiah's self-discovery journey and the decisions she makes to establish her own path in a culture that frequently places limitations on women.

2.5 Unveiling Patriarchal Oppression and Female Liberation

In "*Two Women in One*", Nawal El-Saadawi delves into the dichotomies of female existence in patriarchal societies. This analysis explores how Bahiah Chahin's journey through medicine, marriage, and rebellion serves as a poignant depiction of the stifling grip of male dominance and the potential for female emancipation.

2.5.1 The Shackles of Specialization

Bahiah Shaheen's pursuit of cardiac surgery echoes the biased gender norms surrounding women's career choices. El-Saadawi exposes the patriarchal roots behind the specialization choices made for women. In the Faculty of Medicine, men aim for professional success, while women are directed towards roles as wives and mothers. This unequal distribution of choice erodes women's autonomy, relegating their aspirations to familial and societal demands

In the Middle East, where the majority of societies are Muslim, any relationship outside the legal framework or what is called love is not allowed, the marriage contract is between the father and the person who proposes to the girl. Most of the time, the woman does not have any decision or word to approve or reject the proposal of marriage.

El-Saadawi criticized this aspect a lot through her novel, where the woman is dealt with as a material rather than a human being. The method of marriage that Bahiah went through indicates the male domination over this matter. This marriage took place by agreement between

the parents without regard for the feelings, opinion and decision of the children who are still teenagers. The effect of the patriarchal system is evident through the conclusion of marriage contracts with relatives in order to preserve the name and money of the family without obtaining the consent of both parties concerned in this matter. This marriage was the result of Bahiah's arrest after her participation in student demonstrations. After that, she was realized from prison on bail, but she did not know that she was going to another prison, as they considered her a threat to the stability of her family.

The senior members of the family gathered to decide her fate. The first suggested that they stop her from studying declaring that 'universities corrupt girls' morals (El Saadawi, 1975, p.188), while the second suggested marrying her off as a solution, and the third whose opinion was applied, said that they should suspend Bahiah from studying and marry her off at the same time.

This session demonstrates the depth of the patriarchal system's penetration into this society. They believe that studying for women is just a means to destroy the foundations and principles on which they were brought up and a great motive for rebellion and renunciation of moral values. Marriage is the only solution to suppress rebellious women, reorient and put them in their right place to start a family, raise and take care of their children.

The aim was to keep woman away from national conflicts and political affairs, because they believed that these matters were purely masculine. Moreover, Marrying Bahiah off was with the intention of satisfying the desire for domination within them and imposing their patriarchal policies, as well as in order to reduce her rebellion. In the latter, the woman remains merely a reproductive machine under the male control. Through the novel, Bahiah was nothing more than a silent part implementing what she was commanded to do. While communication and conveying

opinions takes place through speaking, in patriarchal societies and when it comes to deciding the fate of the girl, the matter is not up to her, but rather to her owner, her opinion here is inevitably marginalized.

2.5.2 The Power Dynamics of Art

Art emerges as Bahiah's sanctuary, defying her father's oppressive control. Through her art, she discovers her true self, hidden from societal expectations. El-Saadawi illustrates the dual nature of Bahiah's personality: one submissive to norms, the other rebellious and yearning for freedom through creativity. The encounter with Saleem, who shares her artistic perspective, marks a turning point. Their bond defies gender constraints and underscores the liberating potential of artistic expression.

Saleem who had a different opinion than the rest of her male colleagues about her artistic paintings that she was reviewing, "It was strange, different from the other male students (El Saadawi,1975, p65). Away from medicine, both of them glorify the art that brought them together because of the similarity of their views. Art allows people to communicate with each other with love and understanding. Bahiah used to find in painting the only outlet from her father's authority, who had always tried to stop her many times, but every time she resisted him. The meeting scene of Bahiah and Saleem in the exhibition was a depiction of equality between men and women, and it proved through it that talent and art outweigh the consideration of gender 'they stood before the painting, shoulder to shoulder' (El Saadawi,1975, p73). She invokes aggression as a reason to get rid of her father's authority and control.

2.5.3 Marriage: A Tool of Subjugation

The owner is often the father who has the full right to dispose of what belongs to her, so he makes the deal that he deems appropriate and in which she is sold to the appropriate buyer for

the considered amount without referring to or consulting with her. Women are considered a piece like the rest of pieces owned by men. Possession increased the authority and power of men in the patriarchal society. Bahiah's father is her owner 'Who owned her just as he owned his underwear'(p96), who has the right to marry her off to whomever he deems appropriate without her consent, as the societal rules enable him to do so easily "at a big family party they sold her to a man for three hundred Egyptian pounds" (p. 99). The writer stressed the tone when she recounted the dilemma of the inevitable marriage that Bahiah fell into and what she faced. Bahiah's marriage was embodied as an exchange or delivery and receipt deal between the seller and the buyer, as Bahiah passed from the hands of her father who currently owns her to her new owner and her husband Muhammad Yassin "Bahiah passed from the hands of Muhammad Shaheen into the hands of Muhammad Yassin" (p. 100).

Her personality was obliterated and erased while her body remained as an instrument to satisfy male domination. This analogy presented the extent to which patriarchy has penetrated through this marriage, which places women in front of an unknown fate. Bahiah violated what is recognized sexually on the night of marriage within the Egyptian society by rejecting her husband. Muhammad Yassin interpreted this behavior as that of a virgin girl who had not been touched by any stranger before, according to the limits imposed on women on this side "typical of a virgin who has no knowledge of men" (p. 100).

What she did is not related to the usual female behavior. In the Egyptian society, men have sexual inclinations to practice their desires with complete freedom, while women must remain virgin, in addition to mutilating their reproductive system so that they do not feel any desire. This was evident in « *Two Women in One* », where Muhammad can act freely in this aspect while he expects Bahiah to be virgin. Bahiah's rejection of her husband, the protection of her body from

the authority of men, and her ability to rebel were the beginning of her power and liberation from societal restrictions.

Marriage becomes a weapon wielded by patriarchy. El-Saadawi exposes the marriage system's entrenchment in male dominance. Bahiah's marriage, orchestrated by her family, exemplifies the disregard for her feelings and aspirations. This marital transaction highlights the commodification of women, stripping them of agency and reducing them to instruments for male control. Bahiah's refusal to conform on her wedding night signals her initial defiance against a system that seeks to subordinate her desires.

2.5.4 Challenging Societal Norms

El-Saadawi critiques the oppressive societal norms that dictate women's sexual roles. In the Egyptian context, men's sexual freedom contrasts starkly with the requirement for women to remain virginal. Bahiah's rejection of her husband challenges this norm, hinting at a reclamation of her body from male authority. Her escape from the marriage becomes a stepping stone towards reclaiming her autonomy.

2.5.5 Intellectual Connection: Catalyst for Liberation

Bahiah's intellectual connection with Saleem catalyzes her liberation. El-Saadawi emphasizes their emotional and intellectual union, transcending mere physical attraction. Saleem becomes the conduit through which Bahiah embraces her true self and aspirations. Their partnership illustrates the potential for equality and mutual growth beyond gender confines.

El-Saadawi's *"Two Women in One"* intricately weaves Bahiah Chahin's journey to illuminate the stranglehold of patriarchy. From career choices to marriage and rebellion, Bahiah's struggles mirror the oppressive constructs that shape women's lives. Through art, defiance, and

intellectual connection, El-Saadawi offers a glimmer of hope for female liberation, dismantling the patriarchal chains that confine them.

2.6 Results and Findings

The analysis reveals that Nawal El Saadawi's novel effectively portrays the intersectional experiences of Arab women in the orient through Bahiah Chahin's character. The novel presents a nuanced exploration of how Bahiah's identities intersect and impact her journey of self-discovery, resistance, and autonomy. The themes of education, gender expression, family dynamics, age, religion, and social class collectively contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and aspirations faced by Arab women in navigating societal norms and expectations. The novel's depiction of Bahiah's intersectional experiences serves as a microcosm of the broader struggles faced by Arab women in Egyptian society. The qualitative analysis provides insights into the intricacies of identity negotiation and the complexities of societal expectations. The themes explored in the novel can contribute to discussions on women's rights, gender dynamics, and cultural shifts in the orient, fostering a deeper understanding of the nuanced experiences of Arab women.

The qualitative analysis of the novel *Two Women in One* yields compelling results that demonstrate its profound alignment with intersectionality theory. Through an intricate exploration of power dynamics, gender norms, economic disparities, education, cultural constraints, and the representation of Bahiah, the narrative effectively illustrates the complex interplay of intersecting factors that shape the experiences of women in the Arab context. This portrayal underscores the depth of understanding achieved through intersectionality theory, where various dimensions of identity converge to impact an individual's life. Bahiah's character emerges as a powerful embodiment of this theory, as she defies gender norms, pursues education

and art, and navigates the clash between personal agency and societal expectations. The narrative's depiction of power dynamics intersecting with economic status, education, and cultural norms aligns seamlessly with intersectionality theory's core principles. Ultimately, the novel's results highlight the potential for empowerment and self-discovery within the intricate web of societal dynamics, shedding light on the transformative possibilities that emerge when these multifaceted intersections are understood and challenged.

The analysis of Nawal El Saadawi's representation of dual identity in *"Two Women in One"* reveals a profound reflection of the evolving dynamics of gender, culture, and societal norms in the Arab Orient. Through the character of Bahiah Shaheen, the novel encapsulates the intricate interplay of traditional norms and changing aspirations. Bahiah's pursuit of a career in cardiac surgery and her defiance of coerced marriage highlight the shifting gender roles and the growing desire for women's autonomy within patriarchal societies. Additionally, the portrayal of Bahiah's engagement with art and her intellectual connection with Saleem signifies an emerging cultural context that values emotional and intellectual bonds beyond traditional gender expectations. These findings collectively depict the intricate mosaic of women's experiences, weaving together tradition and change in the complex tapestry of the Arab Orient's evolving landscape of gender, culture, and societal norms.

Conclusion

Nawal El Saadawi's novel skillfully captures Arab women's intersectional experiences through Bahiah Chahin's character. The narrative delves into Bahiah's multifaceted identities—exploring self-discovery, resistance, and autonomy amidst themes of education, gender, family, age, religion, and class. Her experiences reflect broader challenges faced by Arab women, resonating within Egyptian society. This qualitative analysis aligns seamlessly with

intersectionality theory, spotlighting how identity facets intertwine to shape lives. Bahiah epitomizes this theory by challenging norms, embracing education and art, and navigating personal agency amid societal expectations. The narrative mirrors power dynamics, economics, education, and cultural norms, underscoring intersectionality's principles and empowerment potential. Bahiah's dual identity mirrors the evolving gender, cultural, and societal landscape in the Arab Orient, capturing a complex blend of tradition and change.

General conclusion

This dissertation sought to comprehensively explore the intersectional experiences of Arab women within the oriental context, focusing on Nawal El Saadawi's novel *"Two Women in One."* The research questions and hypotheses guided this investigation, aimed to unravel the intricate layers of Arab women's identities and challenges, while employing the lens of intersectionality theory. The chosen methodology involved qualitative analysis of the novel's narrative and characters, in conjunction with the broader sociocultural landscape.

The findings of this study underscore the effectiveness of Nawal El Saadawi's novel in capturing the multifaceted conceptualisations and experiences of Arab women in the orient. The character of Bahiah Chahin served as a representative of these intersectional identities, embarking on a journey of self-discovery, resistance, and autonomy. The narrative intricately weaved together themes of education, gender expression, family dynamics, age, religion, and social class to offer a comprehensive perspective on the challenges that Arab women navigate in the face of societal norms. Bahiah's experiences mirrored the broader struggles faced by Arab women within Egyptian society, thereby providing a valuable insight into their lived realities.

The qualitative analysis, aligned with intersectionality theory, vividly illustrated how different dimensions of identity intersect to shape women's lives. Bahiah embodies this theory through her defiance of norms, her pursuit of education and art, and her delicate balance between personal agency and societal expectations. The novel's portrayal of power dynamics, economic status, education, and cultural norms aligns seamlessly with intersectionality principles, showcasing the potential for empowerment within the intricate tapestry of societal complexities. The exploration of Bahiah's dual identity serves as a mirror to the evolving gender, cultural, and

societal norms in the Arab Orient. The portrayal effectively encapsulates the intricate fusion of tradition and change, painting a vivid picture of the ongoing transformation within the region.

One of the strengths of this study lies in its in-depth analysis of "*Two Women in One*," which allowed for a rich exploration of the characters and their experiences. The qualitative approach facilitated a nuanced understanding of the intersectionality theory, demonstrating how it manifests in the lives of Arab women. Furthermore, the study contributes to the body of knowledge on Arab feminism and the broader dynamics of the Arab Orient.

However, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. The study primarily relies on a single novel as its primary source, potentially limiting the breadth of perspectives considered. Moreover, the analysis focuses on fictional characters, which may not wholly represent the realities of all Arab women. Additionally, the contextual and cultural specificity of the Arab Orient may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other regions.

In conclusion, this dissertation sheds light on the intricate experiences of Arab women in the orient through an intersectional lens, utilizing Nawal El Saadawi's "*Two Women in One*" as a vehicle for exploration. The findings emphasize the importance of considering multiple identity dimensions in understanding women's lives and challenges, while also highlighting the potential for empowerment within complex societal contexts. This study both contributes to the existing scholarship on Arab feminism and offers a platform for further investigations into the multifaceted lives of Arab women within diverse contexts.

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المخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة تجارب المرأة العربية المتقاطعة في الشرق من خلال رواية "امراتان في جسد واحد" لنوال السعداوي، وتتضمن تحليل مساهمتها في النسوية العربية المعاصرة، تطبيق نظرية التقاطعية على تحديات المرأة العربية، وتصوير ديناميات الهوية المزدوجة. باستخدام التحليل النوعي، تركز الدراسة على الشخصيات الرئيسية لتسليط الضوء على تصوير الرواية لمواضيع مثل التعليم، العائلة، الدين والطبقة الاجتماعية، كما انها تقدم نظرة على صراعات المرأة العربية ضمن المعايير الاجتماعية. تكشف النظرية التقاطعية عن أبعاد الهوية المتنوعة التي تشكل حياة النساء، ويتجلى ذلك في تنقل بهية شاهين بين توقعات

المجتمع، التعليم، الفن، الوكالة والتعقيدات. كما تكشف الدراسة عن توافق ديناميات السلطة، الاقتصاد، التعليم والقيم الثقافية مع مبادئ التقاطعية والتركيز على إمكانية تمكين الفرد ضمن الأطر الاجتماعية، كذلك تعكس الهوية المزدوجة لبهية التطورات في الأدوار الثقافية والاجتماعية في الشرق العربي، كما تكشف عن تفاعل التقاليد والتغيير. رغم أنّ مزايا هذه الدراسة تكمن في تحليلها الجديد، إلا أنّ القيود تنبع من الاعتماد على مصدر واحد والاختصاص السياقي. بشكل عام، تساهم هذه الدراسة في فهم تصورات النسوية العربية، ونقاش التعددية الثقافية، وحياة النساء الدقيقة في الشرق العربي من خلال الأدب النسوي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النساء العربيات، التلاقي الثقافي، النسوية العربية، نوال السعداوي، ديناميات الهوية، المعايير الاجتماعية.