
**AUTO-FICTION BETWEEN IMAGINATION AND REALITY: AESTHETICS OF
WRITING OF THE ARAB FEMALE WRITER IN THE EXILE OF HER SOCIETY-
NAWAL AL-SA'DAWI' AS A MODEL**

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ABSTRACT: *Auto-fiction in its modern concept is considered an art that is a product of the modern cultural development that has conquered the world since 19 B.C. This 'culture' carries all the components of innovation and constant growth in human life, including the means of material and technological product, the scientific and medical prosperity, and appearance of new sciences in the arena of application and experimentation, which had not been known before, with new concepts, which helped a lot in understanding the human soul in all its conditions. Among the advantages of this awareness is the popularity of people's interests in what is known today in modern literature by the name of the art of auto-fiction. Thus, the writer's life or any life of any person who likes to write his autobiography are no more surrounded by precautions, prohibitions or taboos. Previously, it was forbidden to approach certain issues or even thinking about them because they were considered taboos.¹ It is possible to consider rebellion against norms, breaking social shackles, overcoming all the difficulties of reality and aspiration for emancipation as the most important motives that characterize the woman's autobiography in the modern era. These motives characterize the modern woman's discourse, which is actually achieved in her autobiography at all levels.*

KEY WORDS: auto-fiction, aesthetics, feminism, Auto-fiction, society, male, female

INTRODUCTION

The things that define the woman's writing are her experience in life, her available epistemological authority, and her intellectual affinity. These are the elements that make the woman's writing contain special signs that are related to life experiences and themes that are characterized by the attribute of 'feminism'. Principally, the woman-writer expresses in her writing her personal female concerns, and this feature characterizes her works with a kind of female or womanly sensitivity through the issues that she introduces, which are closely connected to her female self and existence, individually and collectively.

All these issues melt in the issue of the woman's social emancipation through her description of the essential obstacles that stand in her way in "in her search of her identity, which is exposed to disruption, violation and obliteration."²

¹ Ba'albaki, Munir (1990). *Mawsu'at al-Mawrid al-'Arabiyya* (Vol.1; 1st printing. Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm li al-Malayn), p. 97.

² Ibrahim, Fathi (1995). al-Ibda' al-Riwa'i li al-Mar'ah al-Missriyya. *Majallat al-Hilal*. March, NO, 81

This feature characterizes the woman's writing by self-centeredness through her focalization of on the act of fictional writing, which she practices on the Self and is revealed in the strong presence of the creative "I" (Ego) in her texts, which contain questions in the main body of the text, forms of discourse, language of narration and special style of writing, which accounts for the domination of the Romantic and lyric imprint on her type of writing".³

Sayyid Hamid al-Nassaj says about the woman's writer: "She is careful to be the 'narrator' and the 'focal character', and probably the 'only character'. She is not satisfied with neutrality, and her guiding, directing and advising voice does not calm down. This is what accounts for the density of writer's employment of the first person singular pronoun "I" in formulating the literary discourse in general and the fictional discourse in particular. al-Nassaj explains this characteristic by saying that "the maternal womb-relationship between the women writers does not stop. The element of autobiography is clearly present; Romantic emotional singing is always flowing; the spotlight is focused on the writer's character, the heroine, and this is what approximates the woman's literary writings from the genre of auto-fiction to an extent at which it becomes impossible to distinguish between the autobiographical elements and the imagined ones, though those women writers continuously tend to deny this relationship between what they write and what they experience in their private life. In addition, this subjective tendency that characterizes the woman's writing reveals the pertinent relationship that exists between the act of writing and the feminist identity.

This accounts for the phenomenon of magnification of the 'Ego" (I) in the woman's literature. Through this magnification, the woman writer seeks to assert the independence of her entity and to prove that she possesses intellectual and aesthetic abilities and gifts that are not lower than the gifts of the man, who has always been doubtful about anything that is related to her existence.⁴

The woman's writings are based on the explosion of the suppressed, the hidden and the accumulated throughout time so strongly that she declares it in her direct dialogue through which she shouts out her being a woman. She intends in her writing to blow up all the cracks of her body and its fluctuations. Yet, her writings remain far from her overwhelming desire to master the necessary language to formulate her desire in writing and her attempt to act against the general existential oppression, which are exerted on her by the social, moral and psychological relations.

Therefore, the woman's novel becomes a focus of feelings that derive their aesthetics in the first place from the richness and momentum of feelings, and the focus of the woman's novel becomes the Self, while the focus of the man's novel is mostly the whole world. Probably, this explains the repetition of the use of the pronoun "I" in the woman's novel, which might be a kind of self-

³ Benmas'oud, Rashida (1994). *al-Mar'ah wa al-Kitaba: Su'al al-Khusousiya/ Balaghat al-Ikhtilaf*. 1st ed. Al-Dar al-Baydha'. Manshurat Ifriqiya al-Sharq. p.94.

⁴ al-Nassaj, Sayyid Hamid (1977). *al-Adab al-'Arabi al-Mu'asser fi al-Maghreb al-'Aqssa* (1963-1973). 1st edition: Cairo: Dar al-Turath al-'Arabi li al-Tiba'ah. P. 349. Farraj, Afif (1985). *Surat al-Batal fi Adab al-Mar'ah*. Jadaliyyat al-Jasad al-Tabi'i wa al-'Aql al-Ijtima'i. *Majallat al-Fikr al-'Arabi al-Mu'asser*. Issue, 34, p.147.

assertion and its achievement in writing, or because the woman sees the whole world centered in her, or maybe because she is not satisfied with anything in this world except herself - the "I".⁵

Mohammad Nur al-Din Affaya deliberately approached some specific features of this feminist writing taking into consideration that the woman formulates her writing in a completely different way from the man's writing, whether it is connected to written manuscripts or forms of writing that the woman does not stop practicing in her relationship with her body. As the woman is a different being in her biological formation and body from the man, and as she works in a patriarchal male society, she always works on showing her body in a different form⁶. Carmen al-Bustani admits that saying: "We and the man do not have the same past nor the same education, so how can we think in the same way in the same style?"⁷.

Aesthetics of Writing: Nawal al-Sa'dawi As a Model

Reflection of reality in literature helps the writer to coordinate his/her thoughts, ideas and approaches towards his society and his era. This is known by the term of *studying the genealogy of thoughts*. Thus, Nawal al-Sa'dawi's fiction reflects an important period in the process of the woman's movement from the village to the university. Probably her fiction will reserve a special place in the space of the woman's literature because it represents a certain type of literature whose contents reflect her.

Thus, if certain amount of truth is available, the woman's novel will be written from a certain direct point in herself, and her awareness becomes the main theme in the novel. With this characteristic, the novel approaches the psychological story, and the new novel in which the narrator starts seeing things through the eyes of the character, performs the operation of narration and conveys the narrative material. Thus, self-narration grows, and while the narrator's voice becomes faint, the character's voice rises.

This feature is noticed in the woman's novel which emerged in the post-pioneering period of Arabic literature when the modernist instruments became varied and different from one writer to another. The woman's writings have become either open to the language of the unconsciousness or to submission to the authority of compulsion.

This depends on the degree of the woman's truthfulness, first to herself, and second, to her art. The literature of the woman-writer should stem from her point of view, and in this case she has to be true to herself as a female. If she is true, her literature will have a great value, and its value lies in its being a true mirror that reflects the woman.⁸

⁵ Tarabishi, George (1978). *al-Adab Min al-Dakhil*. Beirut: Dar al-Ta'ah, p. 10-11, 69. al-Bustani, Carmen (1985). *al-Riwaya al-Niswiyyah al-Faransiyya. Majallat al-Fikr al-'Arabi al-Mu'asser*, NO. 34. p. 122.

⁶ Affaya, Muhammad Nur al-Din (1985). *Al-Mar'ah wa al-Kitaba. Majallat al-Wihda*. First year. NO. 70.

⁷ al-Bustani, Carmen (1985). *al-Riwaya al-Niswiya al-Faranciya. Majallat al-Fikr al-'Arabi al-Muasser*. Issue 34, p. 122.

⁸ Naji, Sawsan (2002). *al-Mar'ah al-Missriyya wa al-Thawrah. Dirasa Tatbiqiyya fi Adab al-Mar'ah*. 1st ed. Cairo. Al-Majlis al-A'la li al-Thaqafa, p. 254-255.

The woman's writing is a medium to get rid of domination of all its types: domination of society and domination of the man. It is a form of resistance to all types of authority, introduction to the problems of daily life, and exposition to all types of social suppression. Thus, the woman's writing is a step towards self-assertion far from half-solutions, and a revolution against injustice, oppression, and tyranny. The blog of the woman's narrative texts shows us that the feminist discourse has a specialty that is formed through the woman's occupation of the center of the narrative, and its subject is nearly constant endorsement to the reality of the woman's confrontation of an environment that puts her on the margin. Therefore, the writers' reaction to this reality is focused on the disappointed woman's fulfilment of herself. This is what explains why the hero in most Arab women narratives is a woman.⁹

In his book *al-Sira al-Dhatiyya al-Mithaq wa al-Tarikh al-Adabi*, Philippe Lejeune (1994) put down a charter between the writer and the reader on the basis of telling the truth in the literary work. Through this contract, criticism reads several literary works. Consequently, conformity denies the world of imagination. Treatment of the literary work considers it to be the truth of the writer. However, the criterion of 'conformity' started to change, too, because the literary works themselves started to keep away from the written lives to enter the space of innovation and imagination. To deal with this shift, critics had no choice but to consider imagination another 'truth' of the autobiographical work. Philippe Lejeune noticed that several autobiographies are similar and the result was that the spoken descriptions resemble one another despite their uniqueness, which characterizes each autobiography"¹⁰.

The woman writer of her autobiography in general is not necessarily the narrator, and therefore, I decided to read the woman Nawal al-Sa'dawi as she is at a distance from the writer Nawal al-Sadawi. On reading Nawal al-Sadawi's texts, we notice that Nawal a-Sadawi's autobiography is one of the closest autobiographies to these emotional motives.

In my view, Nawal al-Sa'dawi's writing is derived from a certain "existence". It is a text where the narrator and the writer have more than a close tie and a sign of meeting. There are certain situations and events that are related to her personal life and reveal her ideology, which is not a system of abstract thoughts without soul, whose owner deals with them in a neutral and cold way. On the contrary, they are emotionally charged thoughts, each of which includes a specific emotional value, which constitutes has an inseparable relationship with ideology. In my view, it is impossible to imagine a certain type of ideology that can be established on a cold intellectual basis such as science and philosophy.

⁹ al-Marini, Najat (2006). *'Alamat Nisa'iyya fi Nubugh al-Mar'ah al-Maghribiyya*. (1st. ed.) al-Dar al-Baydha': Matba'at al-Najah al-Jadidah, p. 18, 27. See also: Ibrahim, Taha (2008) "Swimming Against the Current: Towards an Arab Feminist Poetic Strategy", *Orientalia Suecana* LVI, p. 193-222.

¹⁰ Lejeune, Philippe (1994). *Biography –Charter and Eternal History*. Translated and introduced by: Omar Hilli. 1st ed. Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-'Arabi, p. 67-69.

What we mean by 'emotion' is the liberation of a certain feeling that is prisoned because of alienation and is freed as a result of occurrence of a gap in the wall of alienation.¹¹ Autobiography talks about the origins of one's Self¹² and its past.¹³

This concept of one's autobiography is considered the first component of the Self, and when it is defined and is established in one's memory, recollection of the past starts, from the moment of birth, to "the results of the moment of death"¹⁴

In her preface to the novel of *Suqut al-Imam*, Nawal a-Sadawi says: "I tried to write this novel while I was a pupil at school but I did not know how to write it. The idea was in my head, the feelings and the characters... this novel has been chasing me, since I met the Iranian Shahrabanu Siraz, who told me about her daughter's rape at prison, and since I met the Sudanese Fatima al-Sirr and saw her teenage son and his companions in the hand-cut association after the Shari'a was applied, and after I lived three months in prison in Egypt with I'tidal Mahmoud, and other girls.¹⁵ In fact, in her diving into the depth of herself through the act of writing in search of her identity that is exposed to alienation, the woman does not represent an exceptional phenomenon, because "the characteristic of focalization on the Self is not exclusive to the women, because it is considered one of the characteristics of romantic tendency in literature. However, in spite of that, it remains a dominating characteristic, mainly in women's writing.¹⁶

This focalization on the Self turns the writings of the woman novelist into a kind of literature of confessions that is established on recollections and associations in retrieving the components of her life and formulating them into the act of writing through forms of expressions that range between reality and symbols, statement and hinting, declaration and secrecy. All the themes of the fictional texts in Nawal al-Sa'dawi's works revolve on the woman, and the narration is introduced through her voice and from her point of view, which turns her and her versions into the focus of the story, as if she were borrowing Shahrazade's role when she told her tale to Shahrayar.

When we read Nawal al-Sa'dawi's texts, we notice that her autobiography is one of the most attached works to these emotional motives. It is possible to notice here several motives for her autobiography such as 'competition and race time', the human being's attempt to find meaning to his existence. The idea of the motive of race and competition with time is based on taking pleasure in recollecting the past or worrying about the future. This motive might appear in most autobiographies, which are based on the foundation of recalling and recollections. However, in

¹¹ The written text is an existential extension to the writing Self and intensification of the cultural, educational, social, ideological and psychological dimensions. Therefore, we think we have to deal with the details that characterize this written text by the woman who is living a special exile. When she expresses her exiled existence through symbols and writing, she produces original fundamental writing. It is known that the writing of exile and exclusion, danger and imprisonment are the most violent and intense types of writing. See: Affaya, Muhammad Nur al-Din (1985). *Al-Mar'ah wa al-Kitaba. Majallat al-Wihda*. First year. NO. 70.

¹² Jaber Asfour divided the Self into three parts: Active Self for Meditation; Excited Self and Objective Self. See: Asfour, Jaber (1999). *Zaman al-Riwaya*. 1st ed. Damascus: Dar al-Mada li al-Thaqafa wa al-Nashr. p. 168.

¹³ al-Kakly, 'Abd al-Salam (1992). *al-Zaman al-Riwa'i*. Cairo: Maktabat Maddbouli, p. 145.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 145.

¹⁵ al-Sa'dawi, Nawal (1987). *Suqut al-Imam*. Cairo. Dar al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabi, p. 9-10.

¹⁶ Benmas'ud. *al-Mar'ah wa al-Kitabah*, p. 94.

some autobiographies, the writer's recalling aims to give justification or evidence, while in others the autobiographer's aim is to take pleasure in retrieving past memories.

Women autobiographies move through a thorny undermined road. Its *first* feature is the woman's alteration of her passage from her privacy to her collective position on the cultural level. The *second* feature of alteration is the woman's return to her Self, which turns into the subject of self-narration, which is the easiest part of her autobiography. Her *third* alteration is her expression and representation of the whole gender of women through her participation with them in most aspects of suffering and hindrances even if that happens at varied degrees sometimes. Probably the greater alteration is the *fourth* one, which sounds to be a kind of contradiction. As the writer starts registering her autobiography, she resorts to a male discourse and a language that is mastered by the man's words and sentences. Therefore, invents another language, probably the '*absent language*' as Zelicha Abu Rishah (1996)¹⁷ calls it. It is the language that is mastered by the woman-writer's Ego (I) in a central manner that draws the attention and directs the track of reading from afar. It is a language that keeps away or comes closer in a cautious way from her life constraints and turns into linguistic and textual constraints. For example, the 'body' becomes a 'subject' that is omitted or disregarded in many autobiographical experiences that were written by women in varied fields of cultural work.

Nawal al-Sa'dawi deals with this issue, condemning the man and considering him responsible for choosing the easy and weak works to publish by a beautiful woman, and leaves the good and high quality ones by a less beautiful one. She says: "More than two months ago, I sent a copy of my last book called *Awraq Hayati* but this type of work has no space in any literary or non-literary journal. The whole space is occupied by men over sixty and young ladies below thirty... and I asked people about the reason for this phenomenon, and they answered: Most chief editors of journals, magazines, and newspapers are over sixty, and most of them are naturally drawn to young women as a result of their fear of mortality. Therefore, they ignore women writers and female thinkers if they are over forty or fifty. What would a woman, who is over sixty, say?"¹⁸

Women's writing in general and women's writing autobiographies in particular is a hard mission, and it is nearly like walking on thorns with wounded feet, which are originally barefooted, because women writing suffers from social obstacles that considers looking at the woman as a materialistic (bodily) entity as a taboo act. The situation regarding women autobiography in particular is even more difficult because it is an act of linguistic exposure of the writer's body, her history, her emotions, her ambitions and her instincts. Woman's writing is considered an achievement of a double breakthrough, being an abstract individual. The actual condition is that she is in reality an object of taboos. She is the creature that should not be talked about, or seen or known. She is an invisible creature.

To sum up, women's autobiographical fiction in particular performs basic functions such as:

¹⁷ Abu Rishah, Zelicha (1996). *al-Lugha al-Gha'ib Nahwa Lugha Ghayr Jinsawiyya*. Markaz Dirasat al-Mar'ah. Amman.

¹⁸ al-Sa'dawi, Nawal: Quoted from Ashraf Tawfiq. *Min al-Adab al-Nisa'i: I'tirafat Nisa' Adibat*, p. 12.

The function of confession and questioning: Most women write their autobiographies in an aim to discover their female Self, to reveal its shortcomings and drawbacks, and to reveal her weaknesses. Consequently, they reveal the desire of questioning the female Self for the suffering to which she is exposed, and why she puts the blame on herself for the crisis that she suffers from.

The function of justification: Most of the women's autobiographical writings are ultimately attempts to get acquittal and justification for the marginal reality that the woman lives. Generally, that is done by describing or creating an environment of many guilty people and entities: the family, society, traditional norms, standards, religion and education.

The function of compensation, where the process of Self-narrating and its experience and endorsing its role, looks like a compensation for the fragility of the actual and real presence of the Self in the public life and shrinkage of its role as a human being before any biological classification. As a creature of complete humanity and citizenship, struggle for freedom is a right and a duty. This is what we find in Nawal al-Sa'dawi's autobiography when she says: "I was receiving threats of murder. Unknown voices came to me through the telephone wires; curses in standard and spoken Egyptian that is mixed with a Gulf, Saudi, Kuwaiti and Algerian dialect. You are atheist! You are the enemy of Islam. You are the ally of the Satan who drove Adam from Garden of Eden and caused death and ruin". This leads us to refer to the strong connection between women autobiographies between the *general* and the *specific* in an exaggerated way that results from the female writers to push back the charges against them that they are exclusively interested in women's issues that are specific to the woman. This attitude by men pushes most women writers to constantly introduce the political and historical background of their environments for some reason or no reason at all and point out their political and patriotic role through a narrative that reveals her attitudes and political views, even if there was no objective or artistic justification that requires showing this general background or the role that they play.

The function of avenge and revenge: this function does not need a lot of effort to prove its strong presence in the woman's writing in general as the majority of these works describe male characters who are characterized by falsity, backwardness and cruelty. Nearly every woman's autobiography has an image of a man or a man's attitude that turns into a symbol rather than a human being or Self. The text uncovers him in an aim to take revenge on him (as a representative of the authority, the watchman, and beneficiary) and on the culture of society and its male traditions. By doing so, the features of man/ the male mostly disappear to the advantage of the presence of the male/ the authority. These features are introduced from the woman's perspective, which sees this deed as a vengeful action on the thought, behavior, practices and falsity of this society and its authorities in general and the social ones in particular.

The function of establishing the future: The female writer has always been occupied with a fundamental concern that is reflected in her defense of her worthiness and establishment of her special female identity in a context of the Other who not only denies her identity but seeks to marginalize it or even abolish it. Therefore, we find in her autobiography stories that express her refusal to the context of the Other that makes her biography a suppressed marginalized one. This refusal appears in the form of dreamy stories that employ her visualization as a narrative carrier. It

appears as an action of achievement that was established or will establish a future that is different from the reality that she refuses.¹⁹

While we are reading Nawal al-Sa'dawi's autobiography, we find ourselves in front of a repetition of double discourse. The narration does not inform and it does not intend to inform, but it adds creation and visualization. For example, the moment of birth is visualized in Nawal al-Sa'dawi's autobiography.

In my view of this, it can be argued that the real events are told through Grandmother, while the metaphors are innovated through the narrator's speech, and they serve as a kind of addition that comes from the present world, present time. Through her speech, the narrator summons her refusing relationship to the whole context of the other, who founded her biography. Therefore, she deliberately invokes the biographies of others as a lighting and illumination of the defined role of the dynasty that left its imprint on the specific logic of behavior. We find this prevailing in Nawal al-Sa'dawi's trilogy: *Awraq Hayati*, (vol.1, vol.2, vol.3.)

The making of this family version and its relationship with autobiography has its justification by the narrator, and therefore, she renews her communication with this world or formulates it in order to create a kind of guilty ones, who are our predecessors. Therefore, she is forming a kind of biographies for the people who prepared the present that the narrator is living. According to this perspective, she adopts a kind of interpretive visualization that builds up sentences that aim to establish special associations within her writing, which allows the employment of the structures of monologue recollection that builds another world, which comes out of non-compromise of the Self with reality. Consequently, the narrator varies her narratives between a narrator who *recalls* and a narrator who *constructs* detailed associations and memories that occasionally be away from reality. Recalling here is built up through the things that had echo in creating this individual self.

al-Sa'dawi also says about her writing: "Writing in my life is like Mom's lap, like love that occurs without any reason, and despite that, I have not stopped looking for the reason...probably I have been looking for something... to draw to the world around me my true image, that image which they effaced with another one... to make the silent baby girl in my depth speak." ²⁰

al-Sa'dawi believes that writing has been her only resort and refuge since her childhood: "I escape to it from the Mom the Dad and the Groom."²¹ Writing remained even in her middle-age her only and last refuge and shelter at the same time. It is the only possible reconciliation between the past and the present "despite all the wounds that I have had in my homeland." ²²

¹⁹ May, George (1992), *al-Sira al-Dhatiyya*. Translated by Muhammad al-Qadhi and Abd Allah Sowla. Qartage: Beit al-Hikma, p. 76-77; al-Sa'dawi, Nawal (2000). *Awraq Hayati*. 1st ed. Vol. 2. Beirut: Dar al-'Adab li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi', p. 22; See: Touqan Fadwa (1988). *Rihla Jabaliya Rihla Sa'ba: Sira Jabaliya*. Amman: dar al-Shuruq li al-Nash, p. 56,66, 69.

²⁰ al-Sa'dawi, Nawal (2000). *Awraq Hayati*. vol. 1, 1st ed. Beirut: Dar al-'Adab li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi', p. 47.

²¹ Ibid., p. 366.

²² Ibid., p. 366.

Writing is an individual act but it is an existential condition, too. al-Sa'dawi moves her pen in her hand and writes:

"Writing in my life was taking me into a deep well in the Earth... to a place that is empty of people...I was holding my pen and sheets of paper and leave my home. I walk and walk without stopping. I looked around me as if I were looking for something? ... I looked for a cleft to escape into it. I disappear within it and shut seven doors behind me. It was not enough to shut one door to dismiss the voices."²³

Nawal al-Sa'dawi writes about the passage of sixty three years from her life without taking them into account: "Parts from this age fell into oblivion; minutes that want to flee and disappear far away from memory and the eyes of people; minutes of pain and despair and weakness and decline; today I am not a young lady; I have become and elderly one; I have passed the age of sixty."²⁴

We find writing in this sense a path towards realization of one's fault' the fault of 'thinking', merely 'thinking' or even 'feeling', but in all cases, it sounds necessary. Therefore, and from this angle, her autobiography has come like a series of recalling and recollections that are retrieved from a series of all the episodes of realized past life. The writing shows all the periods that she lived, everything that she thought about, and everything that she dreamt of in two circles: the family and society including all their levels, positions and sufferings. However, the element that draws attention in these recollections is what is related to the transfer of the Self from exceptional sufferings that are connected to the position of the woman in the field of the traditional conservative relations and the exploitation, suffering and humiliation that they cause to the woman. Probably, the experience of the 'female circumcision' in this context was one of the most violent private experiences that Nawal al-Sa'dawi underwent.

In her autobiography, Nawal al-Sa'dawi reproduces her social reality putting ideological theoretical standards for the woman's nature on the one hand, and the man's nature on the other, on grounds of biological difference, and explaining certain social and behavioral rules that differ from one period to the other and one place to the other through natural biological rules.

The biological difference according to Nawal al-Sadawi devotes to the woman an eternal behavioral nature that differs from the man's eternal behavioral nature, too. As a result of the woman's biological nature, she is a complete unit, and consequently, if one side of the woman is imbalanced her whole collapses and imbalances.

The family in the real world that Nawal al-Sa'dawi reproduces does not form a safety valve for her in the new reality as it is mostly a unit of consuming commodities. At the same time, it is a producer of the same relations of possession that prevail in modern society and the violence that rules it. In the shadow of this destitute or semi-destitute family, the possessed individual is robbed of his awareness, his will and his ability to act. He is the ideal type of the ideal citizen.

²³ Ibid., vol. 3., p. 11.

²⁴ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 366.

The oppressing head of the family is originally oppressed and the oppression that he exerts at the level of his family is the tool through which he lets out his anger without constituting a challenge to the regime that oppresses him. The role that this man plays within his family supports the class system by practicing exaggerated individualism, total authority. Actually, he consolidates the hierarchy of this authority within the scope of the values and social relations.

There are frank sayings in Nawal al-Sa'dawi's autobiography that are related to her childhood and they indicate that she was exposed to severe suppression, which she resisted in order to impose her existence. In fact, her life was nothing but a constant struggle for forbearance and resistance against various types of suppression that had been exerted on her since the era of early childhood till the era of work and writing, tiredness and exhaustion. This is what she tries to show whenever she talks about herself.

al-Sadawi's novels work by means of the imagined that works on transforming reality and contributes to its recreation instead of its exposition and cloning, through the technique of telling/narrating, which employ the popular legacy and moves with the major narrative structure in the form of minor stories that resemble mosaic that fill in the track of the general narrative within the novel. It is noticed that al-Sadawi's texts are structured mainly by depending on a group of stories that reflect the visions of their creators and perceptions. Besides, their technical function is limited to the work on crystallizing and growth of the narrative project in the fictional text in general, through a gradual level of the narrative that is connected to what is human, universal and is melted in the Self.

al-Sa'dawi's production interprets itself by itself but al-Sa'dawi's character is the authority and resource that explains all her works. This is due to the common vision between the fictional products and the studies that result from a private suffering that she actually lived in reality. The writers' talk about themselves is problematic by nature. The problem is not only in the writer's taking of his life as a subject of discussion, which lends his speech with some or a lot of narcissism, and no autobiography is void of narcissism, but it lies in the fact that the writer looks at his past through his present eye.

He looks through his viewpoint that has become complete in a certain form, and through his thought that has settled in a known direction to himself, to his thought and to his Self, which is still in the course of evolution and development and does not know at what shape or direction it will settle. That is the problem that makes the truth in autobiography dubious.

However, the manner of talking and indications belongs to al-Sa'dawi herself. The way of al-Sa'dawi's thinking and her vision about man and life stem from her experience and suffering. She talked in her writings about women and introduced her measurements and evidence to stress the truth of her ideas towards the events in her life. The examples that demonstrate that are countless. al-Sa'dawi became the spokeswoman of women and turned her personal life and sufferings and plights into representative examples of the woman and her suppressions and disasters in general. On the other hand, she turned her refusal, resistance and relentless will into an example of what the woman should do in order to know how to deal with the patriarchal system. In fact, she turned herself into a symbol of the resisting woman. In fact, she is an ambivalent symbol. On the one

hand, she is a representative of the suppressed woman but on the other, she is a representative of the woman who managed to resist oppression and survive that suppression. Therefore, she allowed herself to speak in the name of all women and bear the responsibility for their emancipation. She says in her book *al-Mar'ah wa al-Jins*:

"All the tragedies of the woman entered my clinic and all the results of deceit and backwardness lay in front of me on the diagnosis table...when the psychological and physical patient enter my clinic, they undress and uncover their secrets in front of me. On the bed in my psychological clinic, men and women opened their hearts to me, and when the doctor is a writer, he/she undresses the whole society. The doctor's lancet is like the pen that undresses and reveals society"²⁵.

al-Sa'dawi's novels reconstruct reality using the style of direct antithetical discourse in an aware intentionality to turn the measurements upside down. She scolds reality and shows hostility to it and even looks at it condescendingly. Sometimes, she exaggerates in debasing it. She denudes it by revealing its male bias and judges it in a severe unprecedented shocking manner, instigating the female/woman against it and against suppressing her image. In fact, she supports herself in an attempt to return an authoritative glory that was taken from her by force.

Discourse in Nawal al-Sa'dawi's novels carries values and statements about the man's nature and the woman's nature. She is not satisfied with less than dealing with the essence of reality, which she reformulates narratively and fictionally.

al-Sa'dawi's reality is a reality of class-conflict in which each class subjugates the one below. Oppression is centered in the poor or semi-poor classes. It is a class-reality in which the man oppresses the woman despite the woman's hopeless attempts to get out of the circle of oppression. Therefore, we notice that the ladder of oppression ends with the step in which the oppressed men transfer onto their wives oppression of the man of the dominating class, who represents the domination of male Self. The tool of oppression is represented in every single item that Nawal Sa'dawi introduces. The tool can be the family or the street, which carries the entire historical and social characteristics that it represents.

No matter how far we go in our arguments regarding the indication of the artistic narrative work about itself, a no matter how far we try to distinguish between the life of the heroes of the work and the life of the writer, we cannot ignore the warm relationships between Nawal al-Sa'dwai and the characters of her novels. In fact, we cannot give up taking that into consideration in our attempt to understand these works in the right way.

In fact, we don't need a lot of effort to find these connections as there is a lot of indicative evidence. Besides, al-Sa'dawi has made a lot of statements about that connection in her studies that supports this argument. In addition, the artistic work includes the writer's vision and her guiding directions regarding the characters' behavior and the narrative structure.

²⁵ al-Sadawi, Nawal (1972). *al-Mar'ah wa al-Jins*. Beirut: al-Mu'asasa al-'Arabiya li al-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, p. 56.

al-Sa'dawi's production interprets itself by itself but al-Sa'dawi's character is the authority and resource that explains all her works. This is due to the common vision between the fictional products and the studies that result from a private suffering that she actually lived in reality. The writer's talk about himself is problematic by nature. The problem is not only in the writer's taking of his life as a subject of discussion, which lends his speech with some or a lot of narcissism, and no autobiography is void of narcissism, but it lies in the fact that the writer looks at his past through his present eye.

He looks through his viewpoint that has become complete in a certain form, and through his thought that has settled in a known direction to himself, to his thought and to his Self, which is still in the course of evolution and development and does not know at what shape or direction it will settle. That is the problem that makes the truth in autobiography dubious. If this is a stable fact in all autobiographies, it is even more stable and correct in al-Sa'dawi's talk about herself. This is due to her reticence and reservation in talking about herself. It is noticed that each time she talked about herself and specifically about her childhood, she intended to show herself as a brave and clever girl and she rarely accepts things as for granted facts. Nawal al-Sa'dawi attributes her open-mindedness to her father. She said that her apparent cleverness and early intellectual alertness in her childhood is attributed to her father who used to allow her and her brothers to think and to debate freely and that they should not believe in anything unless they are persuaded.

The information that al-Sa'dawi gives about herself and life does not contradict the events and facts in her real life. There is no doubt that there are some data in her life that overlapped her life but there are events that actually took place in her life and she mentioned them frankly, and this is what concerns us.

However, the manner of talking and indications belongs to al-Sa'dawi herself. The way of al-Sa'dawi's thinking and her vision about man and life stem from her experience and suffering. She talked in her writings about women and introduced her measurements and evidence to stress the truth of her ideas towards the events in her life. The examples that demonstrate that are countless. al-Sa'dawi became the spokeswoman of women and turned her personal life and sufferings and plights into representative examples of the woman and her suppressions and disasters in general. On the other hand, she turned her refusal, resistance and relentless will into an example of what the woman should do in order to know how to deal with the patriarchal system. In fact, she turned herself into a symbol of the resisting woman. In fact, she is an ambivalent symbol. On the one hand, she is a representative of the suppressed woman but on the other, she is a representative of the woman who managed to resist oppression and survive that suppression. Therefore, she allowed herself to speak in the name of all women and bear the responsibility for their emancipation. She says in her book *al-Mar'ah wa al-Jins*:

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men and women opened their hearts to me, and when the doctor is a writer, he/she undresses the whole society. The doctor's lancet is like the pen that undresses and reveals society." ²⁶

al-Sa'dawi commits to tell the truth in mentioning the reality and events that happened to her. Her truthfulness is connected to her daring in criticizing various political conditions, the various theories of government and the conditions of the people. She resorts to the artistic elements to tell the truth, objectivity and frankness. She does not hide the landmarks of the characters and places. On the contrary, she resorts to borrowing different names for the characters and places. This is one of the most important characteristics of the art of autobiography in its modern meaning. By doing so, it seems to us that the artistic novel is likely to resort in its events and conditions to the real private life of the writer but in this case, it might not be considered a completely pure and perfect autobiography.

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

The mother scared her of everything that is related to her body, especially her sexual organs by wrapping them with ambiguity and a lot of obscurity in order to cover the truth or violate and disturb the truth and keep her daughter silent and cover up everything that is related to sex. In this way, al-Sa'dawi's feeling of fear increased about her body. She says:

"I remember that when I was a little girl, I felt terrified and my hands and fingers would tremble if my hand touched my external organs by mistake. Sometimes, I felt afraid when my dresses touched my organs and thought that that contact would cause some severe damage or affect all my whole life. That fear was increasing in me till it reached its climax on the day when I realized that there is a fine layer that exists somewhere close to the surface between my legs, and that I should not jump high over the ladder, otherwise it would be torn and a great disaster would hit me and all my family. When I grew up a little more in age, the type of fear changed... and I started fearing strangers and fear to go out from home alone; I realized that a certain danger was lurking for me in that external world." ²⁷

Then al-Sa'dawi adds how the mother violated the girl's mind with the answers that she gave to certain questions: "One day, I asked my mother after she gave birth to my younger brother. Why do mothers give birth? She answered in such a way that made her imagine with the child's mind that some air accumulates in the mother's abdomen and that creates the uterus, which makes her abdomen get larger." ²⁸

²⁶ Ibid., p. 56.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 31.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

Scaring the girl of her body and filling her heart with horror because the family's over-caution of the family to protect her virginity is easier than what happens to her when the signs of menstruation appear on her body. al-Sa'dawi says:

"I still remember the color of my face in the mirror on that gloomy morning. It was white and my lips were covered with some blue, my arms were shaking; my legs were trembling, and I imagined that the disaster that I feared really occurred; I thought that a stranger entered my room during my sleep at night and caused me all that damage." ²⁹

However, she soon cancelled that possibility and thought that she was probably sick; she went to her mother and asked her to take her to the doctor:

"I wondered why my mother remained calm on that day and was not frightened by that serious illness. Then I came to know the truth from her when she told me that this illness hits all the girls and women and it will be repeated once a month for a few days and on the last day I will have to clean myself of this bad blood by getting a good bath. In the imagination of the little girl, I imagined that this blood means 'impurity' and uncleanness, which is a shameful matter and I have to conceal the symptoms of that illness from the eyes of others...when I go to the bathroom, I look around, and when I go out of the bath, I would wash its tiles in a very good way, as if I were wiping the traces of a shameful crime." ³⁰

Nawal al-Sa'dawi noticed the phenomena of making differences between the two sexes and their indications of superiority of the male and inferiority of the woman, which led to treating her unjustly in the family, in the street and at school. Society and its various institutes work on establishing in the female consciousness the belief that she is 'defective' and her body is blemished by impurity and uncleanness and that is her fate that the nature of her female entity imposed on her. al-Sa'dawi, however, stated that since an early age she has faced this game and refused to yield or surrender. She declared her resistance and committed not to accept any of these rulings that were imposed on her in the family ³¹ at school³² and in the street.³³

Resistance of the world necessarily passes through resistance to the body and resistance to the man. al-Sa'dawi says regarding this statement: "It is natural that the girl would feel hostility towards her body and her sexual organs and sex. She connects between these things and the man, and consequently, she feels hatred towards him." ³⁴ In another place, she says: "In reality, I did not like young men; I hated them."³⁵ Nawal al-Sa'dawi repeatedly speaks about the girls' attitudes about this fate; her statements mixed with subjective meanings with general facts: "and here, many girls struggle against this slow murder. In my childhood, I was one of these girls who were struggling

²⁹ al-Sa'dawi, Nawal. *al-Wajh al-'Ari li al-Mar'ah al-'Arabiyya*, p. 12.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

³¹ al-Sa'dawi, Nawal (1974). *al-Untha Hiya al-Asl*. Beirut: al-Muasasa al-'Arabiyya li al-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, p. 35-36.

³² Ibid., p. 34-36.

³³ al-Sa'dawi, Nawal. *al-Rajul wa al-Jins*, p. 15.

³⁴ al-Sa'dawi, Nawal. *al-Mar'ah wa al-Jins*, p. 35

³⁵ Ibid., p. 46.

and resisting... the girls differ from the boys in their struggle against the artificial invented differences between them and the boys according to their conditions and characters. One girl struggles till the period of maturity but suddenly the event of menstruation hits her with a knockout, and she gives in to her fate... Another girl, who is more ambitious and more confident in herself, insists on continuing her conflict to the extent that she denies her body and cancels her desires and seeks excellence in life defying men." ³⁶

Nawal al-Sa'dawi belongs to the second group. However, the breakdown of the body leads to indulgence into abstraction and inclination to idealistic images that compensate for deprivation in reality. This is what happened to Nawal al-Sa'dawi as her statement indicates:

"When I became sixteen years old, I found myself at a boarding school... I had understood by education, reading extensive books, ethics, and everything around me that contact with young men is the biggest shame and danger... but inside me I feel that a great energy attracts me towards the other sex... I felt guilty and had remorse when I had a dream in my sleep and find myself between the arms of an unknown man... I was extremely contradictory in my behavior; when I felt that I was burning inside, my appearance looked very cold. I was pretending to be cold. In reality I did not like young men; I hated them; but this young man who came to me in my dreams was different." ³⁷

al-Sa'dawi's rally of resistance started from the point of denial of the body: "Another girl who is more ambitious and more self-confident insists on continuing the dispute to the extent in which she denies her body and nullifies her desires and seeks excellence." ³⁸

This is not connected to the writer's authority, through language, over the field of her writing, which is only her private life, but also through the impact that the distant recall causes in a different temporal horizon that is at a certain distance from all the lived memories in such a way in which writing rises here to a high degree of possible awareness in the past existence through the present. It is commonly accepted to say that though autobiography-writing reveals the private pain and the suffering of one's personal life, it also emancipates the Self from its guilty feeling of inferiority and enslavement. This is not connected to the writer's authority, through language, over the field of her writing, which is only her private life, but also through the impact that the distant recall causes in a different temporal horizon that is at a certain distance from all the lived memories in such a way in which writing rises here to a high degree of possible awareness in the past existence through the present.

With regard to the issue of the female circumcision and the spiritual and physical pain that Nawal al-Sadawi experienced in her childhood in Summer 1937, her autobiography tells that Nawal al-Sa'dawi describes it as an injurious experience that occurs to the Self at a specific time and place according to specific customs and traditions that are extremely cruel. However, she recalls this

³⁶ Ibid., p. 43-44.

³⁷ Ibid. p. 45-46.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 44

painful event after she emancipated herself from it and formulated it in a critical mold that condemns it as a humiliating social practice.

She speaks about female circumcision (khitan) after time has passed beyond her and she realized the difference between male circumcision and female circumcision. She studied the phenomenon and realized its dangerous indication. She speaks about her childhood as she was fifty years old and after she devoted herself to define the woman's case and support it. It became clear to her that the operation of circumcision is one of the ugliest aspects of sexual suppression that are exerted on women. She moved from the rosy dreams of childhood to the knife, slaughtering and blood.

As the knife falls between her hips, the clitoris is cut and she is deprived of two dignified values: *first*, innocence of childhood and its rosy dreams, and *second*, her feminine nature. Cutting of the clitoris is an expression of depriving the female of the components of her natural femaleness in return for the aspects of social femaleness. This is the deep indication of the event of circumcision as al-Sa'dawi expressed it in her different works. In fact, a great deal of her intellectual and social suffering alike falls within this scope, which resulted from this event and constituted an expression of a critical search of lost values of rosy dreams and natural femaleness.

The circumcision event continued to have its established effect on her soul and thoughts all her life long. It was one of the elements that directed her thoughts into the direction in which she described in her works. The question continued to urge her till she started studying and working in medicine. Then she taught anthropology and discovered that: "The iron chastity belt, the circumcision rite and their counterparts are among the brutal operations against the woman's sexual desire, and they appeared just for economic causes." ³⁹ She says in a chapter under the title of "The unanswered puzzled question" in her book of *al-Wajh al-A'ri li al-Mar'ah al-A'arabiyya*:

"After I grew up and became a doctor in 1955, my memory did not forget that painful event that spoiled my childhood and which deprived me in my youth and conjugal life from a complete sexual and psychological life. This kind of nightmare continued to haunt me in my dreams especially when I was a grown-up doctor that works in the countryside, where people were carrying to me a little girl for treatment as she was bleeding because of her circumcision/ *khitan* and despite the fact that I was a doctor and looked at myself as an educated lady, I could not understand at that time why people were doing those ugly things to the girls. I asked myself lots of times: "why?" but I could not have an answer. When I was a little girl, I also asked myself many time: 'Why' did they do that to me and to my sisters! ⁴⁰

al-Sa'dawi's journey of research and resistance started from this point – resistance and refusal of this predestined fate for her and continued her search of the cause of forcing it upon her and the other girls in her society.

³⁹ al-Sa'dawi, Nawal (1977). *al-Mar'ah wa al-Sira' al-Nafsi*. Beirut: al-Mu'asasa al-'Arabiyya li al-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, p. 72-73.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12-13.

al-Sa'dawi went through three major experiences in her life that had prominent effect on her works and writings. These stages are: a) her experience of studying medicine and practicing it, b) her experience in literary writing, and c) the experience of her scientific studies that started in her book *al-Mar'ah wa al-Jins/ The Woman and Sex*.

In her writing about the Self, Nawal al-Sa'dawi seems to be at a high degree of critical awareness regarding her position within the frame of the relationships and society that surround her. Her acquisitions of the writing language is an essential possession of the tool that enables her to express her personal life in its general and individual course in a female form as an apparent lexical sign (in her relation with a supposed reader), which cannot be achieved by a male form.

Nawal al-Sa'dawi is considered one of the writers who wrote her autobiography in a fictional form that revealed her goal. She is committed to a large amount of truth, approaching in that the subjective autobiographical art or the art of memoirs in *Mudhakkarat Tabiba* (1965), *Mudhakkarat fi Sijn al-Nisaa'* (1984), *Awraqi fi Hayati* in three parts (2000) and *Rihlati fi al-'Alam* (2005).

Through this style, she introduced this autobiography in a way or another into her novels. We can say that despite all the obstacles that constituted a barrier between the woman and her Self, between the woman and her psychological and artistic truthfulness, Nawal al-Sa'dawi managed to reflect to us somewhat of her general and individual truthfulness in her novels that we can consider her autobiography as successful work in the modern artistic meaning.

Summary

Nawal al-Sadawi's model does not reveal the writer's fear of writing her autobiography. She does not seem to fear revealing her hidden life and knows the price of that revelation. Therefore, she does not employ the language of male discourse in her writings. When talking about the female and her suffering forbidden, Nawal al-Sadawi talked, and when talking about society's transgressions and its persecution of the woman forbidden, she spoke and her painful stories appeared successively. They revealed the hidden things, bared the invisible and the concealed things from the minds. al-Sadawi dug deep in the female's issues and touched the painful wounds in the woman's physical and spiritual entity.

al-Sadawi continues her social criticism by the sense of the oppressed female in registering those attitudes, which appeared in a way or the other from behind the prison bars. She expressed the social and even the political suffering of the woman through the read word, the heard story and the free pen.

Nawal al-Sadawi goes beyond that and deals with the female's feelings neutrally. She speaks about love and the position of the woman and her feelings and concepts. She embodies the prevailing condition and its cries declaring her detachment from captivity and revolution against masculine domination.

When we talk about the particularity of the woman's suffering in Nawal al-Sadawi's novels, and the resulting disruptions, we talk about a language of oppression, and a language of joy that is reflected by love relationships. We also discover that language about joy is rare in her texts, which

are overwhelmed by sad and broken and besieged emotionality, in the woman's soul, body and expectations, as if joy appears only in her motherhood.

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