

Misogynistic Practices in Prison Discourses: A Reading of El Sadawi's *Memoirs from Women's Prison*

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Abstract

There is a significant growth in gender and feminist scholarship in Africa however, misogynistic practices such as sexism are prevalent within prison discourses especially in Africa. This paper therefore, examines the various demeaning and stereotypical expressions that are used on female prisoners in El Sadawi's *Memoirs from Women's Prison*, which propagates and normalizes gender asymmetry and gender inequality. This paper adopts Anglo-American concept of close reading which prioritizes the analytical method of scrutinising words on the page. Accordingly, this methodology segues seamlessly with Michel Lazar's feminist Critical Discourse Analysis. The findings from the analysis show the prevalence of misogynistic practices in *Memoirs from the Women's Prison* that includes addressing women with the crimes ascribed to them such as "prostitute," "murderer," rather than the usual use of numbers within the prison environment. Also, prison warders employ misogynistic and derogatory terms like "girls" to address women within the carceral space likewise the denial of visibility for the woman within the prison walls. These misogynistic practices echo and re-echo "the systemic gendering of privileges and inequality" (Lazar 81). Thus, the paper concludes that prison discourses reflect misogynistic tendencies that echo strongly the subalternity of women within the patriarchal African context.

Keywords: Misogyny, Prison Discourse, Gender, Women, Practices.

Introduction

Language is an innate ability given to human beings to express themselves on their cultural, social, political and economic conditions as well as a means of interaction between individuals. Our use of words stems largely from cultural

beliefs, unconscious attitudes and gender characteristics over time. Significantly, language is not neutral in the expression and representation of reality largely because men have been given the power of naming. Casey Miller and Kate Swift have rightly argued that the society is androcentric in nature therefore language itself is androcentric because “men have shaped the course of history and were the subject of history” (251). Rummaging through the history of creation, “the act of naming confers power over the thing named, In the Book of Genesis, Adam named all the animals and even the woman Eve” (Miller, Swift 251). Significantly, those who have the power of naming can make decisions on all things. Adam (man) has therefore been vested with power and it is natural that language expressed is male centered since “Men are the norm (generic use of masculine terms), women as a deviation from this male norm” (Pauwels 32), therefore, making the female “the other” or “the object”. Thus, masculine hegemony is maintained through discursive strategies that perpetuate sexist ideologies. This paper examines the experiences of women in prison as reflected in their writings; this is because the imbrications of gender and misogynistic practices continue to be a lacuna in the studies on prison literatures produced in Africa.

Pertinently, prison literatures written by women adumbrates the “phallic” nature of the African society whereby any attempt to critique institutions of power especially by women is seen as an aberrant of societies established moral standards for a woman. This socially and culturally constructed notion of proper conduct for a woman graphically reveals the masculine notions of female propriety. It is in this light, that this paper interrogates Nawal El Sadawi’s *Memoirs from the Women’s Prison*, anchoring on Michel Lazar’s Feminist Critical

Discourse Analysis to limn the nuances of sexism embedded in the text.

Conceptualising Sexism

The concept of sexism has been defined by different feminist scholars and from different theoretical perspectives. For example, Deborah Rhode defines sexism as “conveying discrimination based on sex and it seems to require some conscious effort”. She states further that sexism “re-enforce sex based inequality, gender stereotypes and unconscious bias concerning female competence and appropriately feminine behavior constitute significant barriers”(1). Sara Mills on the other hand, argues that “sexism just like racism and other discriminatory forms of language stems from larger societal forces, wider institutionalized inequalities of power and ultimately, therefore, conflict over who has rights to certain positions or resources”(15). Deborah Cameron sees sexism as an index of ongoing conflict between men and women, particularly within the public sphere”(25). Frye defines sexism as “that which creates, constitutes, promotes, sustains, or explains an unjustifiable distinction between men and women. (35). Sexism is better understood as a set of discursive practices and stereotypical knowledge which changes over time and which can be challenged, rather than as the reflection of a fixed and unchanging patriarchy (Mills 33). In the 1970s and 1980s, it seemed very clear to many feminists what sexism was, it was defined as language which discriminated against women by representing them negatively or which seemed to implicitly assume that activities primarily associated with women were necessarily trivial (Braggin 60).

The aim of feminist scholars therefore was to call attention to the way in which the use of certain language items seemed to systematically discriminate against and cause offence to

women (Mills 55). The manifestation of sexism has been changing over the decades especially in the West where blatant gender discrimination is not as “widespread in some educational settings, workplaces and the media” (Lazar and Kramarae 31). Sexism is “also taking a complex, covert and form, so that at a first glance at something may not seem sexist, and may in fact appear to subscribe to progressive egalitarian values, Only upon closer scrutiny does the gender asymmetry become apparent” (Lazar 187). According to Sarah Mills ‘sexism as a concept is based on the idea that discrimination against women is systematic and sexism is imposed on women by those in positions of power, it is ingrained in social structures and works to the benefit of all men, patriarchy’ (42).

Sexism is realised when women become the “other” in the use of language, it is concerned with language that discriminates against women, belittle and trivialise women’s activities. Scholars like Vetterling-Braggin describe Sexism as “statements which create, constitutes, promote or exploit an unfair or irrelevant distinction between the sexes” (3). Women have been marginalized in the form of sexism which involves mechanisms of oppression that are encoded in language. Again, language as a complex system of representation is used to maintain female subordination as well as upholding patriarchal supremacy.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis emerged in the twentieth Century as a response to the limitations of CDA. Critical Discourse Analysts relegated issues that had to do with feminism and gender. It is a “nexus of Critical Discourse Analysis and Feminist Studies, with the aim of advancing rich

and nuanced analysis of the complex workings of power and ideology in discourse (Lazar 142). Feminist Critical Discourse analysis is concerned with excavating the complex ways in which power and ideology are used to sustain and maintain a hierarchical structure, At this receiving end of this hierarchical structure is women, this dominance is largely achieved through discourse, The interdisciplinary nature of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis “aims to advance a nuanced understanding of the complex workings of power and ideology in discourse in sustaining (hierarchically) gendered social order” (Lazar 1). A pivotal concern of FCDA is its emancipator agenda so as to promote social justice. To fulfill its emancipator agenda, Michel Lazar’s strand of FCDA critiques discourses that tend to privilege men and silence or subalternise women in the society.

Feminist Critical theory has its agenda, the aim to identify constructed and constricting structures that tend to limit the potential of women, or that tend to favour and disfavour women within a patriarchal space. FCDA also takes cognisance of differences among women in various societies and recognises that sexist attitudes will manifest differently in different contexts (Lazar,72). This is because gender relations have undergone a mutation due to the dynamic nature of societies, yet patriarchy and sexism are still prevalent and they take varying forms in the African societies and in different contexts such as through written literatures, media and video games. Sexism is now presented through more subtle ways, in indirect and complex forms which tend to promote gender asymmetries and geared towards sustaining a hegemonic structure, where women become disadvantaged.

Hence, this study employs Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis to excavate discursive strategies that explicate gender

asymmetry and hegemony within prison discourses. Worthy of note is that, "Feminism and CDA both have a clearly articulated political position and a motivation for analysis, in that they wish to bring about change(Mills,44).Hence, this study is heavily centred on interrogating how power, ideology and discourse are used to create gender asymmetry and legitimise sexism especially within the prison edifice.

Methodology

This paper adopts the Anglo-American qualitative research tradition which employs the concept of close reading that prioritizes the analytical method of scrutinizing words on a page to uncover different layers of meaning and the interplay of language, rhetoric and structure. Close reading in qualitative research involves focusing on the text closely, often line by line or word by word to uncover underlying themes, motifs and symbols, contradictions and discursive patterns. Close reading is employed with the aim to identify appropriate excerpts in order to analyse sexism and misogyny in Saadawi's *Memoirs from Women's Prison*.

Literature Review

Margot Badran in the article "Gender Activism: Feminists and Islamists in Egypt" explore the oppressive conditions faced by women in Egypt in Saadawi's *Memoirs from Women's Prison*. Again, Miriam Cooke in "Outside, Inside. Translation: An Interview with Nawal El Saadawi" comments on the broader historical and social dynamics at play in the text and the reflection of a collective consciousness through a personal narrative. These critics did not acknowledge how sexism is reverberated within the prison walls.

Nahlo Abdo in the article "Woman to Women: Opression in Saadawi's *Memoirs from Women's Prison's* interrogates how the perturbing condition of inmates in the Barrages Prison in *Memoirs from Women's Prison* is a larger reflection of the decayed Egyptian society. Abdo fails to interrogate how gender ideologies are employed to legitimise hegemony as presented in the text. Furthermore, Abu-Lughod, offers a cultural analysis of text, this scholar highlights the intersection of gender, religion, power, and how gender based discrimination operates within the Egyptian society. Abu-Lughod does not take into cognisance that Saadawi's *Memoirs from the Women's Prison* is a lamp held up to illuminate a society that traumatizes women through discursive strategies that limn sexism. This study explores the unique punitive experiences of women.

Judith Tucker in "A Life in Words" interrogates how the text provides a window into Saadawi's personal experience and a medium to champion her feminist ideologies. Similarly, Ann Beckan in *The Politics of the Body: Rape, Language, Identity* in Nawal El Saadawi's *Memoirs from the women's Prisons*, comments on the issues of sexual assault, language and identity. Horsey Ann in *An Introduction to the Written Works of Sa'adawi* observes that the recurrent theme that runs through the text is the ability of human beings to adapt and overcome the worst of circumstances. More so, the scholar comments on the division of the prisoners into the fundamentalists (Boduur) and the Socialists (Fauqiyya). Horsey does not interrogate how Boduur's fundamentalist ideology is centred on making her subservient. Rachel Knighton in *Writing the Prison in African Literature* explores how Saadawi's imprisoned female body in *Memoirs from the Women's Prison* could be interpreted as a site of liberation which is at par with Foucault's "punishment

regime”, therefore challenging the theories of docility. The scholar does not examine sexist ideologues within the prison walls, this is a lacuna, this study will fill.

Marilyn Booth in her article “Female Prison Memoirs in Egypt and Elsewhere: Prison, Gender, Praxis” (1987) interrogates how men who are political prisoners are described as ‘criminal deviants’ (35) while a woman who is a political prisoner is not only considered as a ‘criminal deviant but also a ‘social deviant’. This is because women have been confined within the Egyptian society due to the society’s definition of the “woman’s place” (35). Booth anchoring on Nawal El Sadawi’s *Memoirs from the Women’s Prison* (1976) and Farida Al-Naqqash’s *Prison, two years, and a flower* (1985) examines how “women who fought against the authorities especially in places like Egypt were seen as troublemakers or ‘mushaghibat.’ (35). According to Booth, the imprisonment of women differs from that of men because in the case of women, firstly, women are imprisoned by the “customs, traditions, outlooks, societal laws” (37), Secondly, they are also held in “the political prison” (37) of military regimes.

However, even with Marilyn Booth’s arguments, she does not interrogate nuances of sexism embedded in the text, then, there is paucity of research in this context and it is the object of this study to fill this lacuna. Ramzi Santi in a review on Nawal El Sadawi’s *Memoirs from Women’s Prison* in *Searching* observes how Saadawi exposes the plight of women in the Egyptian society. Women who are educated have to struggle against the hegemonic social surroundings for respect and basic rights. This study becomes pivotal as it unearths how gendered ideologies and power dynamics are played out in punitive settings. Based on the foregoing, this study explores how

subtle sexist ideologies are reverberated within prison discourses.

Wounding Words in *Memoirs from Women's Prison*

Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma Narrative and History* stresses on the need to understand the voice generated from a wound inflicted on the victim, in essence women, through sexism. This voice represents the silences, the "othering," the voice of the oppressed, the muted voices of women, the silenced subalterns. Then, to understand trauma we must take into cognisance "the language of trauma, the silence of its mute repetition of suffering, the voice of the other," (Caruth 32). Thus, discourses that propagate hegemony and dominance are wounding words that present a gendered social other. This section examines how women are punished not because they have at a point committed a crime but they are punished because they are women within a patriarchal society.

From time immemorial, women have been victims of the discursive strategies of (de) legitimation which have produced various stereotypes and othering thereby making women seem invisible. In the text, after the traumatic process of mystifying ritualism, El Saadawi is arrested by the security operatives and then, taken to a police station. Nawal El Sadawi's makes a request to use the washroom and the old man at the police station replies: There's only one toilet here; the man replied immediately, and it's on the first floor next to the Director's office, No one uses it except the two directors, at least no one who isn't male. So what is a woman like you (14)

From the excerpt above, there is a systematic oppression and discrimination because of the patriarchal structure which has streamlined moral roles for women and thus, making women to

seem inhuman or even invisible. This aligns with Michelle Lazar's argument that "patriarchal gender ideology is structural", which then creates 'an asymmetrical gender relation' (8) and all these are sustained through discursive mediums. El Sadawi then suffers from insidious trauma even within the police structures which is as a result of the gendered nature of the police facilities. A woman is denied visibility and even to the extent of a toilet facility, she is alienated based on her gender thereby making women feel inferior. The old man bluntly tells Saadawi that "No one uses it except the two directors, at least no one who isn't male", this explicates the strategies of scapegoating, pejoration or discursive nuances that tend to create an "absence" for a woman. Pertinently, the fact that El-Sadawi has muzzled herself into politics, a realm that is structured to be masculine has made Sadawi become a social and moral deviant.

Literature is a cultural representation of lived experiences, in so doing, literary works also present the virtual erasure of female agency from social life. The refusal of the police officers to take cognisance of the fact that a woman exist and not making provisions for a toilet facility for women implies a collective embargo on female existence thus propagating an obnoxious regime of invisibility of the female persona. The refusal to provide toilet for women within the police facility goes beyond just muzzling or stifling of the female voice but it deeply highlights a rigid refusal to recognize the right to life, right to personal liberty and the right to the pursuit of happiness for the female. The police officers response to El Saadawi "No one uses it except the two directors, at least no one who isn't male. So what is a woman like you"(14) deeply suggests a panoptic existence in the most comprehensive state of the term, defecation and urination are given a masculine

attribute. Every living being must answer the call of nature which is a natural act regardless of status, gender, sex and class, educational advancement or the lack of it. Women bring life, all humans come through her, yet, she is denied the necessity of using a toilet.

“So what is a woman like you” this sexist comment suggests that the woman is not to be found in the social or political milieu, a woman should know her boundaries and continue to remain invisible. This is in line with Deborah Tannen’s argument “it is women who are different from the standard, the male is seen as normative, the female as departing from the norm” (6). Indeed, El Saadawi finding herself in the police station because she had meddled in politics, a space reserved for men, an institution that maintains and sustains male hierarchy and by writing to speak out against oppression of women and revolting against a dictatorial regime. She has indeed departed from the norm, a norm that expects the woman to be passive, docile, submissive, gentle and dull. Marilyn Booth re-inforces this particular argument that women have been given a particular identity and they have been kept “in the women’s place, women who fought against the authorities were seen as troublemakers *mushaghubat*”(35).

It is then not surprising, why the old man at the police station begins to question her “what is she doing in a police station” dominated by men. The police officers response is a reproduction of constructed social practices, his ideology or perception is perhaps informed by ideology that goes beyond phallocracy or even patriarchy but rather it is a collective enslavement of a sub-group, this sub-group comprises women. This is why Michel Lazar states that these gender ideologies are reproduced “in social relationships between people and in peoples’ social and personal identities in texts and talk” (11).

By not recognising the importance of women using the toilet, it reveals an uncritical refusal to recognise the existence of women.

This refusal of inclusivity is reverberated through discourses, since language is the carousel of culture, a conveyer of verbal and para-verbal codes or gestures. Then, the old man's response at the station implies that discourse is not neutral but it is embedded within power relations. Language here is used by the old man at the police station in *Memoirs from the Women's Prisons* to reproduce and maintain power imbalances thereby propagating male dominance and making women become subordinate thereby sustaining and maintaining a hegemonic structure. The old man's response at the police station is sexist and it presents "the systemic gendering of privilege and inequality" (Lazar, 187). But in the case of Saadawi, the old man does not even recognise her place within the patriarchal society. El Saadawi is therefore trying to claim the social, discursive and political space which is dominated by men.

More so, subtle sexism can be discerned when the police officer responds to Saadawi when he tells her that he has read her work. The police officer says: "We are like all human beings and our profession is just like that of everyman, the professions of men. Aren't there any women in the police force? "No, none in the police, nor in the army, nor among the judges or legal guardians or religious officials. These are all areas closed to women" (21).

From the above excerpt, this implies an exclusionary protocol, the issue of exclusion of women from the societal realm of activities. The police and army are charged with the responsibility of providing security and maintaining peace. The judges, legal guardians and religious officers are vested with

the power to enact laws, ensure conformity to the law and penalize deviants as the case may be. Sadly, the security, legal and religious institutions are the backbone of every society. One may argue that women have been rendered invisible, since the most important institutions are herded by men and decision makers are also men. This suggests a discrimination against women by the oppressive patriarchal structure that oppresses women within the social system suggests an enclosure, a space that women cannot and should not occupy. These jobs are primarily male jobs and they are seen to be devalued when women take them. This may explain the hostility to women which is expressed in stereotypically sexist comments about women drivers (Mills 55). This implies how discourses on gender is “a site of struggle over word-meaning, which is also often a struggle over who has the right to be in certain environments, speak in certain ways and hold certain jobs”(Mills, 14). Furthermore, oppression of women and sexism could also be in the form of what Lazar calls ‘gender relationality’, which is “the discursive co-constructions of ways of doing and being a woman and a man in particular communities of practice” (11).

Gender relationality is played out when the old man tells Saadawi, that she is in a place not meant for a woman. This notion of gender relationality could be seen as a form of insidious trauma, where by women are expected to perform the role of child bearing and child rearing. Women are mostly expected to be submissive, show no form of resistance whatsoever, by resisting the Islamic postulations about women or rather its misinterpretation, women within the Egyptian society are seen as nonentities, who are expected to be invisible. This brings to light the harm done to marginalised groups by continuous exposure to “a galaxy of erosive

stereotypes” (Fanon 129) which may lead women to develop feelings of inferiority, inadequacy and self-hatred. Pertinently, vulnerability is a common experience of all human beings, yet vulnerability is often attached to women. Women such as Saadawi have been categorised by the patriarchal society as weak and thus cannot survive in areas or fields or jobs that have to do with agility, strength and intelligentsia. Therefore, reinforcing the stereotypical belief that women lack intelligence and are incompetent thereby buttressing Casey Miller and Kate Swifts submission in “Who’s in Charge of the English Language” that Language is androcentric evolving in a society where men have been dominant, men in charge of social institutions, government, law, commerce, education and religion(251).

The police officer’s statement “we are like all human beings and our profession is just like that of everyman, the professions of men” suggests an enclosure, a space that women should not occupy. Thus, reverberating cultural biases and upholding Sigmund Freud’s argument on the supremacy of the male genitalia. Freud applies the concept of presence to show the natural hegemony of the male over the female. Thereby, implying “an absence” or rather inferiority of women due to the absence of a visible genitalia. Freud in this regard, sees women as being castrated, and this castration could be interrogated to mean the castration of women into abjection through discourses that has been constructed and upheld by the patriarchal society. On another level however, this absence of the “phallus” in the biological structure of a women, suggests how women are castrated from fields or jobs that have to do with agility, intelligentsia and security. The removal of women from the security paraphernalia implies that women have no place in the issues of “presence” but rather women occupy the

realm of “absence” and abjection”. Women have already become castrated from the security outfit and men take control because their genitalia’s are visible. By implication women become disadvantaged and disempowered by the chains of bureaucracy controlled by men.

Indeed, to Freud the “phallus” symbolises completeness and suggests that women are deficient in intellect, perseverance and mental capacity. Men because they possess the phallus become the centre and everything outside the phallus signifies a binary, a lack. The policeman limns on the binary structure and how discursive strategies are enacted to create biologically dimorphic bodies thereby maintaining and sustaining binary structures, this is why Michel Lazar observes that “asymmetric meanings of male and female, the consequences of being assigned to one or the other within concrete social practices (5). Such binary structures tend to value women less and men more. Then, the task of FCDA is to deconstruct constructed binaries within the Egyptian society that tend to propagate “otherness” “absence” or “lack of presence” for women within the police or other security outfits.

Discourse has been used through time to create binaries, misconception about religious doctrines especially in secular states are means through which gender asymmetry is created. Pertinently, gender asymmetry is also sustained through the the Lacanian postulation about ‘gaze’ and the way gaze perhaps signifies an absence of the other, an invisibility. This gaze is evident when the Old man tells Saadawi “We are an Islamic nation. According to Islam, women are lacking in mental power and faith, or, are you against Islam? (*Memoirs*,21). This is indeed a cultural construct that has subsumed the women into the space of “nothingness”, the gaze is phallogocentric, the gaze becomes that which creates the superior and the inferior.

Women become objectified, visualised as objects rather than subject. The derogatory representation of women as lacking in 'mental power' promotes sexual dimorphism.

Attributing women to docility reflects how religion is taken into different contexts to serve patriarchal views presenting a negative colouration. It is not surprising when the police man tells Saadawi that "there is more than one Islam. Every state interprets Islam as it wishes" (*Memoirs*, 21). In essence, every state is at leverage to practice Islam, so, they are different Islams. Islam for men that have dominant doctrines that legitimise masculine hegemony and Islam for women which entails specific doctrines that make women subservient to men. Thus, the relations of dominance are largely accomplished through discursive means especially in the ways ideological assumptions are "constantly re-enacted and circulated", till such religious discourses that devalue women become "commonsensical and natural, the taken for grantedness" (Lazar 7) which legitimise these differentials in gender within the Islamic religion. The police man on another level is propagating the dominant ideology of a social organisation heralded by men and the doctrines of the Islamic religion also interpreted by men. He is a product of a gendered system heralded by men. So, men like the police officer have been interpellated with a particular ideology, a religious theology that sees women lacking in intellectual capabilities.

In *Memoir from the Women's Prison*, demeaning terms are used to address women. The female inmates are addressed by their crimes, thus "Girl. Call Fathiyya, which one? Fathiyya the thief or Fathiyya the Murderess?" (*Memoirs*, 34). The derogatory representation of women within the carceral setting serves as a powerful lens through which the oppressive language and attitudes prevalent in the Egyptian society are presented. Men

within the prison walls are rarely addressed with their crimes, perhaps, there is a “consciousness that crime is and always has been a male phenomenon”(Feeley and Little 723) and women have been stereotyped into particular gender roles, submissiveness to the patriarchal structure for the woman becomes the ultimate. However, women within the prison edifice are mostly addressed by prison authorities using derogatory terms mostly by the nature of crime they commit but this is not so with male prisoners, this largely portray the manifestations of society’s deep-seated prejudices and discrimination against women.

Exploring Gender Asymmetry

The officer who came to arrest El Saadawi from the comfort of her house and Saadawi is obstinate and refuses to be sandwiched between two officers says :”She’s a woman and won’t jump out of the door while the van is moving”(Memoirs, 14). Saadawi is stereotyped, presented as weak and the other end it is only men that have the intellect or agility to think of an escape. By implication, a man is most likely to be intelligent and thus, think of an escape. It is an androcentric view that see men as agile, focused, disciplined, responsible and capable (Lazar, 8).The establishment of stereotypes that classify a group, women as weak is a geared towards fashioning the sensibilities of the whole society to accept a particular value system or ideology. The normalisation of such commonsensical discourses that see women as weak, indecisive, unintelligent are geared towards sustaining and maintaining patriarchal hegemony. Through such discursive strategies binaries or polarities are created that see men as strong, intelligent, revolutionaries, martyrs while women like Saadawi are stereotyped as weak, emotional and dull.

Stereotyping of women involves “simplification, reduction and naturalization”(Talbot,468). Women through acts of stereotyping become reduced to caricatures, and these stereotypes become normalised through discursive strategies and in which hegemonic male dominance and female subordination are sustained. In the Barrages prison, there is “a separate cell designed for prostitutes”(45). The Prostitute’s Cell in *Memoir from the Women’s Prison* speaks volume about gender imbalance. The fact that women have been segregated to a specific prison because of their choice and sexuality while on the other hand, men do not have a prostitute cell. Saadawi provides a poignant and insightful analysis of gender asymmetry. The prostitutes’ cell represents an isolated and dehumanising space largely because these prostitutes do not engage in lewd activities alone but usually have accomplices. But the role played by men has been silenced; the stigmatisation associated with lewd habits is stamped on women. Women become commodities who are bought and sold, the women in the prostitute cell are constantly subjected to harassment, blatant sexual abuse and strip searches from the prison administrators and fellow inmates.

Saadawi becomes a victim of pariah femininity, a situation which involves the demonization that generally follows a woman who questions patriarchy or even embodies qualities of current hegemonic masculinity. The display of pariah femininity is evident when Saadawi is taken to the Ministry of Justice to meet the prosecutor. The guards take Saadawi to the corridor to wait while all the men were kept in the waiting room. Saadawi challenges the guards, when she stubbornly asks, why she was left in the corridor? While the men were kept in an office, the guard replies:

There is no empty room. Then I'll go back to the room I was in, I 'll sit there, That's for the men. Why don't you designate a room specifically for women? If it's absolutely necessary to separate the sexes(*Memoir* 154).

This excerpt reinforces the patriarchal agenda which is "the systematic gendering of privilege and inequality" (Lazar181). Besides, the removal of Saadawi from the waiting room and into a secluded corridor explicates gender bias towards women. This explicates the oppressive power dynamics operating in a patriarchy social system. All the people waiting for the prosecutors are all political prisoners, yet we see gender asymmetry when Saadawi is first of all, classified as a woman, then a political prisoner who is not fit to sit in the circle of men. Saadawi is kept in the corridor while men are left in a room depicts the marginalisation and erstwhile subordination of women. The guard says "that is a room for men" highlights the denial of voice and representation within the oppressive patriarchal society. In this regard, women are disadvantaged due to "the binary relation between culture and nature which promotes a relationship of hierarchy in which culture freely "imposes" meaning on nature, and hence renders it into an 'other" (Butler 50). Saadawi becomes a victim of the gendered social order as observed by Lazar " people by virtue of being " men" are accorded privileges systematically, and others by virtue of being " women" are routinely disadvantaged, excluded and not taken seriously" (192). This suggests that even though certain culture and practices help in normalizing the oppression and exploitation of women, however, certain discourses have been streamlined into our thinking on what it means to be a man or woman.

Conclusion

The study revealed that problems of sexism and other misogynistic practices abound especially within the prison edifice. This is because prison mirrors “the gendered structure of the wider society” (Davies 61), thus, women’s agency is regulated during incarceration, as well as in the larger rubrics of the society. Hence, the “panopticon” becomes an extension of the gendered structure of the African society. Again, in Saadawi’s text, the female prisoners had to negotiate and manage the power imbalances associated with incarceration.

The analysis embarked in this study reveals instances of, dehumanisation and derogatory statements perpetrated by male guards and fellow inmates, contributing to the psychological and emotional wounds suffered by female writers in prison. This paper argued that El Saadawi’s prison narrative is set in an Egyptian prison in the 1980’s and in a predominantly Islamic State, characterised by phallocratic social structures. Saadawi’s powerful narrative revealed the interplay between gender, class and power dynamics as she challenges societal norms and pervasive misogyny that discriminate against women.

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