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**What are they Jailed for? Unromantic Depictions of Women's "Criminal" Resistance in
Egypt**

Researcher : Alaa Abu Naji

Professor in Utrecht : Anne- Marie Korte

Professor in York: Evangeline Tsao

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Forward:

I begin to write this thesis amidst the time of the epidemic of COVID-19. The circumstances I find myself writing this thesis are exceptional, therefore, I find mentioning them in this introduction integral for reflexivity purposes. Given the central theme of my research, that is, finding a place of agency in the darkest of times and the most confined of all spaces, prison. I am in no way comparing social distancing and isolation in the comfort of my own home, which is a modernly equipped studio in the First World Netherlands to that of prison in Third World Egypt. I am in no way suggesting that the situation is homologous. I am only proposing the idea of a possible sharing of the feelings of confinement. While the prison holds many people physically in one space, which may create a collective feeling of common suffering which fosters a dynamic of cooperation, and/or collective resistance. I find that our situation now in COVID-19, calls for cooperation but in a different manner, where we must dig deeper into ourselves through the calling for the virtue of this epidemic that is isolation. Though the loud voice of academic objectivity calls for a thesis written with popular gender studies theories of postmodernism, poststructuralist, queer theory, and the likes, I find myself inclined to a more romantic approach, for I cannot deny the emotionally charged situation and an emotionally charged situation calls for an exploration of an emotional ideal, which shall bring comfort and hope and most importantly, reflect the reality of the researcher's world, that is their positionality.

I write this thesis for Patrick George Zaki, who is a fellow GEMMA (Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies in Europe) who I never met, but whom I wish my best for. He was imprisoned in Egypt on February 7th while visiting his family and this is

about the time where COVID-19 appeared worldwide. This is for Patrick who is bravely enduring the two indescribable horrors of confirmed space and surrounding disease.

I update this forward upon the passing of Shady Habash, who was imprisoned without trial for making a music video mocking the policies of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El Sissi and who died on May 3, 2020 in his cell.

To Nawal El Saadawi, who opened my eyes and the eyes of generations, on what is and what can be.

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

This thesis's quotes are translated from Arabic to English by myself. Any variation/disparity found by English translations and publications is due to this factor. I chose to rely mostly on my own translation to demonstrate that literary readings are always personalized readings, and any attempt to read literature/media "objectively" is in fact subjective. The names, titles, places, and expressions spelling are based on how it is popularly written in Wikipedia. For example I write Fathia Al Assal and Nawal El Saadawi using "Al" in the first case which is closer to Fusha classical pronunciation and "El" in the second case which is closer to the Egyptian dialect pronunciation. This slight difference of spelling preference found in many Arabic names is solved by choosing the spelling which is widely circulated in English sources especially Wikipedia.

This thesis uses American Psychological Association as its guide.

Introduction

The most dangerous shackles are the invisible ones because they deceive people into believing they are free. This delusion is the new prison that people inhabit today, north and south, east and west...We inhabit the age of the technology of false consciousness, the technology of hiding truths behind amiable humanistic slogans that may change from one era to another...Democracy is not just the freedom to criticize the government or head of state or to hold parliamentary elections. True democracy obtains only when the people - women, men, young people, children - can change the system of industrial capitalism that has oppressed them since the earliest days of slavery: a system based on class division, patriarchy, and military might, a hierarchical system that subjugates people merely because they are born poor, or female, or dark-skinned."

— **Nawal El Saadawi, *Memoirs from the Women's Prison***

In this paper I aim to analyze two mediums, one is a literary non-fiction text by Nawal El Saadawi titled *Memoirs of Women's Prison* and the other is a television series *Segn El Nessa* (Women's Prison) by the screen-writer Mariam Naom. The rationale behind my thesis is to provide literary evidence, written/presented decades apart, of a violent pattern of oppression which I name "invisible shackles". The term "invisible shackles" is inspired by El Saadawi's former quote. The difficulty of defining the invisible shackles inspires me to present stories and

interpretations of literature to articulate an understanding of how invisible shackles might take form in Egyptian society. To be more specific, invisible shackles are the unfavorable socio-economic patriarchal circumstances which lead women to imprisonment. I want to avoid reading these shackles as a specific quantifiable set of factors or circumstances that would seek to explain why such women go to prison, for fear that such a reading would be reductive. Rather, I aim to use literature and media to explore the lived experience of these shackles: how individuals register and respond to the force of gendered power relations that seem to lead them inevitably towards prison.

The television series is claimed to be adapted/inspired by a play titled *Segn al-Nessa'* (Women's Prison), by Fathia Al Assal who herself was imprisoned three times, and who was a contemporary to El Saadawi and was imprisoned under similar circumstances. I will not close read to the latter play, and will only attempt to draw relevant points from its relation to the TV series. This is because the play is heavily dialectical with little plot. The TV series relies on both plot and dialogue which better serves the purposes of this thesis. Also, because the television series is much more comprehensive and detailed in terms of cause and effect, pre-crime and crime, and the events in between aka the invisible shackles. I chose Nawal El Saadawi's memoirs and *Segn El Nessa* TV series because these two mediums complement each other. The autobiographical text spells out and defines the shackles with the tongue of radical subjectivity, the TV series, over the course of 30 episodes, shows visually the invisible shackles in an attempt to an objectivity rehearsed by collecting various subjective and personal stories. The lens of Nawal El Saadawi is held by her towards the external world to magnify it through her own experience and observations; it is deduced. The lens of Mariam Naom's series is inductive; it moves from specific particularities/stories to leave to the observer the space to notice a pattern to

form their own theory. Egyptian prisons are divided into criminal and political sections and these two case studies complement each other in the sense that El Saadawi was herself as a political prisoner and Naoum presents prisoners of socio-economic 'crimes'. Through methods of literary comparisons and close readings a question of intersectionalities arises. This thesis attempts to examine what dynamics of power relationship makes some women more susceptible to imprisonment from 1970s Egypt until the modern day. I will present criminal charges as a de facto element, but I will be more keen to examine the invisible shackles which lead to being caught by these charges, for a crime does not happen until a crime is caught, charged, and defined to be a crime. I am not discussing the fairness of the laws nor the corruption where it is not applied with equity on all citizens, rather I am discussing why some women become visible to the eyes of executives of law. In order to do so, the chosen texts will be analyzed to provide context for the gendered nature of the prison system and how these texts showcase specifics about female imprisonment reasons/shackles.

In defense of my approach in which I choose to analyze stories, I appeal to Alejandro A. Vagella's argument in which he discusses the concept of aesthetics in Maria Lagoneses's work. In my understanding, the storytelling approach accomplishes what aesthetics does and shares its nature. Vagella explains aesthetics to be

"affective, emotional, memorial, and concrete aspects of exist-ing in light of which identities, ideologies, and conceptual/logical and discursive meanings arise. This approach exposes one to liberatory and decolonial thought. In this definition of the aesthetic, it is not to be paralleled to that of the theory of art, the senses, or the beautiful with the capital "B", for rather it would be more aligned with "intelligent sensibility that never separates reason and sensibility." (Vagella 2020, 65)

Under this light, reason and sensibility possess no distinction. This turn towards aesthetics is a requirement when one considers the polarizing spacing movement of the colonality of time which hides attempts of creating alternative narratives, liberatory theories, concepts, and institutions. In short, the lack of practicing aesthetics is against decolonial thought and serves exactly what decolonial thought critiques (Vagella 2020, 65). For these reasons, I consider my approach of analyzing stories for the purposes of given meaning to reality a form of aesthetics.

Chapter One: One's Eyes Determining methods of research: A starting point about context

When we talk about prisoners we are discussing living bodies. Bodies, in this discussion, should not be understood in the westernizing utilitarian sense and must seek the embodiment of principles or refer to bodies, and experience whether natural or cultural to give substance meaning, reason, and fact. The twist is to conceptualize bodies in their be-ing, passing identities, experience, sense. Lugones describes her thought to be always concrete (Vagella 2020, 68). The concrete here is central to Lugones's decolonial thought. Concrete means in a literal sense to grow-ing-with. Concrete does not mean material things, facts, nature, and phenomena. Concrete means a non-static being/thing, dynamism. In this understanding, emotions, memory, and rhythms emerge in the frontier as aesthetic dimensions of the process we identify as things, ideas, and subjects. Concrete indicates movements amongst the hierarchy of modern racist, sexist, and capitalist negotiations, discussions, and transformation. All spaces of hierarchy as in body, sex, gender, class, and race are not to be considered ontological entities, albeit sites of struggles, sufferings, and "originary transformation and letting go."(Ibid 2020) For this reason, It is important in discussing the agency of prisoners to remember that power is never autonomous. For Lagones, given the dynamics of the concrete, the "body" is better understood through the

active process of happening though where bodies comply with identities/determinations in their movements. To demonstrate, one may not speak of life as a force which functions against the determinacy of inevitable death, but rather speak and understand life as li-ving. This understanding of living resonates with the cosmological movement in opposition to the westernizing ways of being in the world that controls meaning with its particular ways of holding into superiority and defining the "other". This rejects binary thinking of inside-outside, space-time dichotomies, and linear development. As Omar Rivera discusses in his work, bodies can be best described as dynamic portals (Vallega 2020, 70). In the following section, I will be discussing body dynamics in which bodies start out as sites of violence, which in turn produce violence.

Violent Society = Violent Women?

The prominent author, activist, physician, psychiatrist, and most famous Arab feminist Nawal El Saadawi whose autobiography is to be discussed later talks about a central theme of this thesis, which is the invisible shackles that lead to prison. I read these shackles to be causes, factors, and build-ups of ill norms, in which any attempt to resist these norms/laws by females, can lead to their imprisonment. In examining the narratives of women prisoners in the selected literature, one can notice a pattern of a violent society caused by all that El Saadawi suggested in addition to religion which makes Egypt's case more complicated than that of Western secularism. In a thesis of this size some selectivity of materials is inevitable. In this first chapter where I provide context, I will discuss the context of both the works of El Saadawi's *Memoirs from Women's Prison* and Mariam Naom's script which was used in the making of the series "Segn El Nessa" (Women's Prison) and place them among similar works. I will also give specific

examples from both mediums without going into details of the stories because I will do that in detailed length later on this research. The examples may seem out of the blue, but they are central in understanding the feminist perspectives in which their authors/writers operate through.

I chose Nawal El Saadawi's 1984 *Memoirs from Women's Prison* for it is considered a modern autobiography and the most famous of all Women's Prison's autobiographies, which are characterized by their extreme rarity. El Saadawi spent almost three months in Barrages prison as a result of Sadat's infamous 1981 arrests of outspoken activists, leaders, and writers who were from varying political and religious backgrounds, but shared their opposition to his 1979 Peace Treaty with Israel. Another, Farida Al Naqash, a leading member of the left wing party Al Tagammou', imprisoned in 1979 and later in 1981-1982 for her activities related to the communist party, wrote the book *Prison, Two Tears, and a Flower* which was published in 1985. The first half had appeared five years earlier as *Al-Sijn... a/- Watan (Prison ... the Nation)* (Booth 1987).

The following examples of various women writers centre around the idea of prison as a patriarchal site which encompasses various social injustices. For example, before El Saadawi's imprisonment and from rather different thinking, Zaynab al-Ghazali, a founding member and president of the Muslim Brotherhood and active in the organization for thirteen years, was jailed along with many other females and male members by the Egyptian military for her political activism and association to the Brotherhood from 1965-1971. She released a chronicle by the name of *Days of My Life*, documenting her activities and president Nasir's hostility towards the Brotherhood, as well as the time she spent in prison, where she emphasized not only how women are punished for their crimes, but particularly for being women. Safinaz Kazim, a

journalist who traveled across the political spectrum in Egypt, that is from the secular left to the Islamist right, has been jailed three times in a parallel time similar to El Saadawi's. She released her book *On Prison and Freedom* in which she describes prison experiences as a central theme. Kazim's book is best described as figurative with only two chapters dealing directly with her prison experience (Booth 1987).

The aims of these writers extend beyond the portrayal of conditions within the prison. and the "special treatment" of women within. One can say that the Egyptian criminal justice system replicates the patriarchal organization of the wider social system. For these writers prison becomes a metaphor for the realities of the social structure. One can conclude that from the title of al-Naqqash's earlier edition, *Prison ... The Nation*. Al Naqash describes prison as follows: "Prison is praxis; it is also self-education. By its nature, the prison system loudly represents the limitations and issues which one must struggle to overcome. It exemplifies the structures which appear fortified" (Booth 1987, 36). Prison becomes an immediate experience of life outside of it (Ibid, 36). This is expressed in Kazim's metaphor "For me, prison is no longer the beggar's cell full of scabies and lice ... nor is it the punishment cell... nor the solitary detention cell ... rather, it is all the sorts of tyrannical oppression and the violation of the citizen's rights which are guaranteed by the constitution" (Ibid, 36). For al-Ghazali, the Women's Prison represents "the moral decadence [of the society]... the swamps, brackish with depravities ... [where] humankind sinks to the bottomless dimensions in which the individual's humanity disappears-" (Ibid 198, 36).

A Background About Socio-economic Intersections and their Consequences:

Conditions of prison represent themselves as the political and economic structure of the entirety of society. Crowdedness leads to hunger and only prison officials are the ones controlling access to medical health and medicine. Money provides prestige and power. The top-notch of drug dealers are usually wealthy, and thus possess power over the prison guards. Al-Naqqash meets several jailed procuresses who regard themselves as "clean" and of a different class than the prostitutes they control (Booth 1987). In Fathia's Assal play *Segn El Nessa* (Women's Prison) where several characters call themselves *shareefat* (honorables) which means that they have not been charged with prostitution. In a dialogue of this play, a character nicknamed "Cockroach" is talking to Senneya who insists that all that she did was dance naked to old men who are willing to pay, but she is still "a girl, and with God's seal" (Segn el Nissa, 38) about her virginity being intact. In the Arab World there the factor which distinguishes a girl from a woman is her virginity, no matter what her age is, " she is still a girl" is a phrase used to describe a virgin female. Coming back to the class argument, it is the poorer economic classes of society who are imprisoned as prostitutes and these prisoners who are treated badly by the jailors. This is not to say that prostitutes are the only poor segment of the prison, but to say that a generalization can be made about the poverty of all jailed prostitutes. Poor prisoners are the ones who do not know their rights as prisoners. It is poor women who are most likely to be denied education or participation in public life which contributes to their lack of knowledge and experience of conscious resistance. Booth describes the situation in prison as a microcosm of broader gender relations and inequalities, for the reasons non-political women are in prison often articulate their situations outside (Booth 1987). Exempt to this discussion, Mariam Naoum's *Segn El Nessa* (Women's prison) series, portrays one of the main protagonist of the story, Dalal, played by Tunisian actress Dorra Zarrouq who starts as a working-class shop girl, who is pushed

to better her situation by joining her aunts' business where she prepares her daughters (Dalal's cousins) to entertain men in what Egyptians call a *Cabarets* which is a word borrowed from the French word meaning nightclubs. In the Egyptian context, Cabarets are usually attended by lower and working-class men from the Gulf states seeking forbidden entertainment they do not usually find in their conservative countries. What Dalal did not know is that she would be forced to do what her cousins did for an additional paid charge: prostitute. The series does not only show Dalal's "decline" to lower-end prostitution but her rise as " manager of an International Prostitution Network." Dalal goes to prison twice, first charged for regular prostitution (in which she was innocent of charge) where her character was ashamed, troubled, and self-conscious. The second time she was charged for managing an international prostitution network (guilty as charged), she was proud, confident, and "a queen by merit of her money" as she described herself to fellow imprisoned women who commented in her character complete change. This example shows how money divides women prisoners both in terms of privilege access in prison and their sense of worth inside prison (Booth 1987). It also showcases that shackles of being born of a lower class paves the way to imprisonment.

The situation outside the prison is read to be the reason for the women's eventual placement in prison in the examined literature. Some women are here because they are the sole supporters of their families, as in Dalal's case where she was the eldest sister with an ill mother. According to literature, their lack of education and their placement in the labor force is what forces them into prostitution and drug dealing. Al Naqash states that this pattern keeps recurring amongst murderers, prostitutes, and female drug dealers not because of greed. The story that had been transferred to us captured the fateful situation that they had been situated in is necessary and compulsory (Booth 1987). Reda, a character in the series, is the perfect example of this

case. She is the eldest sister and was beheld responsible by her father to provide for her brothers so they can go to school. It is not greed that led her to her crime, which will be tackled in the third chapter, but because she was required to sacrifice her time as a young 20-year-old girl to provide, not for herself, but for her entire family.

Another major reason why "many" women are in prison, I am saying many with caution because there is no fixed amount of women prisoners who are considered an anchor of comparison, is because of restrictions on expressions of sexuality. Even though I am aware of this use, it is realistic to assume that the numbers would decrease greatly, if there was no such criminal charge of "Adaab", that is the Egyptian way of expressing prostitution indirectly. The charge is called " Adaab" which when translated means "decencies" or "manners", therefore an implication lies that prostitution is a matter that touches upon "decencies" or rather a lack of/violations of. Therefore, there the charge title is the direct opposite of what the legal mind has of what is "descent". This is an interesting verbal detail because in most Arab countries, and countries where prostitution is not legal the criminal charge is simply called " Deaa'rah" prostitution; which is direct description of the act or another word "Bagha" which has more interesting layered meanings such as transgression. It is important to note that the non-secret (announced/reported) to the government prostitution in neighboring Lebanon (Lebanon Army Government 2016) and Tunisia is legal. The degrees of punishment and law enforcement regarding it vary greatly across the Arab world depending on how strongly the secular or Sharia law is implemented.

Sex-related/oriented charges seem to be an important element in El Saadawi's work and even more so in the Naom's series. To dive deeply into the charge most directly related to sex

work, prostitution, we must examine the dominant words relating to this charge and try to define the concept of acting out/ carrying out prostitution. It is a fact that defining concepts in detail is central for ensuring legal rulings that are equitable and fair. This importance rises due to semantic overlap and the consequential presuppositions could allow a person to be punished, avoid being punished, or suffer injustice for something they did not commit. "Legislation in Arab countries, however, has largely ignored this fact; thus we find varying terms such as debauchery, prostitution, perversion or obscenity, used interchangeably without description or distinction"(Riahi 2011, 2).

The first thought for researchers who are involved in the study of prostitution is the absence of an accurate definition of prostitution in Arab legislation. It is interesting to notice that the usual severity of punishment in most prostitution cases did not demand an accurate definition. The linguistic root for the word " Bagha" which is derived from the noun Beghaa' (prostitution) means to commit injustice, wrong someone or treat them unfairly, and a "Baghi" is a description which means a suppressor, the plural word is " Bughah" (suppressors)- meaning people who transgress and commit injustice. To use the verb " Bagha" to describe a wound means that the wound is contaminated. However, idiomatically, it is used to describe all sexual encounters condemned by legislation or Sharia Law (Ibid 2011 , 3).

Sharia Law applicant countries who mainly use it as their constitution like Saudia Arabia and Sudan have continued to use flogging as a punishment for many crimes (a few days after writing this information Saudi Arabia ended this method of punishment), including prostitution, refusing to replace it with alternative sanctions. Other Arab countries, including Egypt, that have inherited legislative systems from the Colonial heritage of the English and the French have

prison and financial fines as their punishments. "An example is Article number 417 bis A of the Libyan penal code that inflicts a minimum of a year in prison for women who have taken to prostitution as a means of livelihood. Also, Article 622 bis of the Omani penal code rules a sentence between three months and two years for prostitution and lewdness in exchange for money, without discrimination." Moreover and most importantly in the discussion of this literature, the stigma and discrimination against women put them under social pressure even after being punished as we will see with Dalal. Most judicial applications in the majority of Arab world laws ignore the man and overlook pursuing him in any legal or social sense. This happens while exposing the sex worker and abusing them to imprisonment or Sharia's *hudud* (sanctions/boundaries) (Ibid 2011, 18).

An article by Ghadeer Ahmed, writer, and an Egyptian feminist activist, states that the approach that was taken by the Egyptian government in its legislative, judiciary, and executive orders is a security approach with a societal cover. It aims to attract and assemble the conservative majority to secure its political presence. The structure presents itself as the gatekeepers towards morality and virtue. Article 10 in the Egyptian constitution which was passed in 2014 states " Family is the basis of society and is based on religion, morality, and patriotism. The state protects its cohesion and stability, and the consolidation of its values." The stated family refers to a heterosexual family which includes a man and a woman who are bound by marriage, which is the only legal framework for having sex, every other form of relationship is illegal and can fall subject to the law (Art. 10) of combating prostitution of the year 1961. Mustafa Mahmoud, an Egyptian lawyer, points out that the terms of this article are also used in the causes of Queer groups, especially when it comes to homosexuals for there is no specific direct law that criminalizes homosexuality. He continues to say that the legal language in

general, and laws regarding "General decencies/manners" is a language that is "float, vague, and extensible", a language that does not identify what it criminalizes. It places all acts under different types of interpretations, it may use words such as "immorality, whoredom, and vice" in different cases of general manners and specifically queer society cases. Then it leaves it to the judge to decide if it is criminal or not, which means it ties the case with the judge's personal standards and measurements (Ahmed 2020, 3). Making definitions loose and criminal terms and charges such as prostitution undefined, places women in contact again with invisible shackles which they can not avoid for their literal invisibility/non-existence. In consciously not defining crimes, the patriarchal state and society are given more power to choose those who are **made** criminals. In other words, I would say that the unmaking of the specific (definitions) allows more of the making of the general (criminals). In this light of the failure to define, the state and society resorts to common sentimental phrases such as "protecting family values".

But what is the base of "family" in this context? It is a bundle of elastic concepts such as religion, morals, and nationalism which responsibility is held by the institutions of the state. Therefore, this article relies on connecting the concept of family to the concept of morality. This tie is as old as the 1923 constitution. Researcher Hanan Kholoussy, a researcher of History, states this in a 2014 paper titled *The Marriage Crisis That Made Modern Egypt, 1898-1936*. The general sense of the interchangeable relationship between the heterosexual family and the concept of morals and general manners happened in the early decades of the twentieth century. In that time middle-class men preferred pursuing their education to getting married. This started what is known as the middle-class marriage crisis which led to a state of panic in society for the fate of the arrangements of family. Some public figures of that time have called it a "moral crisis". This state of societal panic continued up to the middle of the twentieth century which

consequently led to the ban of commercial prostitution and the law against prostitution was issued accordingly in 1961. Laura Bair states in her book *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser's Egypt* that when the era of open economic policies emerged, the security role which the state performed has expanded where the state imposes its hegemony on groups and individuals, including taking security measures against people who do not follow the established social rules laid out by the state. This includes commercial sex, people with non-dominant gender identities, and sexual orientations, which is done under the name of securing the social order and maintaining general manners (Ahmed 2020, 4).

Can Prison Literature be seen in Light of Resistance Literature?

The question as to where to locate prison literature amongst other genres of literature as a genre of its own, or locating it as a sub-genre within a thematic genre, is interesting to think about for the following explanation. The importance of this interest is to tease the idea of an isolated literature which functions away from the political. In other words, I am asking the following : is prison literature a genre of its own, while resistance is only an aspect of it, or should it be under the general umbrella of a main resistance literature? These questions are of use to separate literature from notions of political innocence. I explore these questions because I find that answering the question greatly reveals underlying ideologies. It may greatly indicate the position of the assessor's stand towards prison as a disciplinary tool of laws and order. This positionality towards prison is, in turn, a measurement of how the general society views prisoners themselves, which speaks of what one deems as crime/evil and how one should react to

those who commit/perform the acts. In these entangled dynamics, definitions become a starting point for all consequential events.

Legal scholar Robert Cover (1992) notes in regards to legal decisions, "[T]he function of ideology is much more significant in justifying an order to those who principally benefit from it and who must defend it than it is in hiding the nature of the order from those who are its victims" (Larson 2019 ,212, 161). This explanation is insightful in seeing the gap in which many patriarchal structures are formed and are let to slide through without visible large-scale resistance. I chose Nawal El Saadawi's memoirs because she is a political prisoner, she exposes these ideologies held by the makers of the law and the head of state, whom in Egypt, is not only an executive body but also both legislative and judiciary. In El Saadawi's book she described a dialogue between her and an employee in a state institution where she is checked before going to prison, she writes:

He looked at me and said: "You've made our job hard, doctor, why didn't you open your door for them (the police officers)."

I answered: "They did not have a written order for arrest."

He looked at me surprised And he answered " What order... haven't you listened to the speech?"

- " What Speech?"
- " Yesterday's speech."
- " Are legal orders now made through speeches? Or do speeches now cancel laws?"(El Saadawi, 34)

The entanglement between what is legal and what is not is blurred in the former excerpt. It seems that legality is no longer a function of the Sadat's state. Doran Larson, a literature professor and director of The American Prison Writing Archive, states in his paper *Writing Resistance, Writing the Self: Literary Reconstruction in the United States Prison Witness*, that the "testimony of political prisoners measure the distance between law's beneficiaries and victims, between democratic claims and police tactics, or name the concentricity of claims and tactics inside unabashed police states"(Larson 2019, 161). Within the prison, political prisoners are the exception amongst a population plagued by poverty and illiteracy where they enter prison with fully formed, political viewpoints (Western, 2006; Wacquant, 2009). For others, political awareness is usually a byproduct of imprisonment itself. Incarcerated people who write about their experience perform a tactic of resistance towards a regime whose beneficiary benefits from the status quo and thrive in the darkness of unawareness/ignorance (Larson 2019).

It is interesting to notice that the TV series which we are about to discuss has no political element. There are no political prisoners in this series even though it was keen to portray different spheres of injustice suffered by different ages, backgrounds, and classes of women. This fact is noteworthy because the series is claimed to be adapted from a political play *Women's Prison* by Fathia Al Assal in which the main character is a political prisoner. This adaptation of the play is referenced in the theme song of the series. There is a dedication at the beginning of the first episode that translates as follows:

To the writer and fighter Fathia Al-Assal...

You lived and struggled to make women's dreams of liberation true...

So they can break free from " Segn El Nessa" (Women's Prison)

To the wide embrace of free life.. (opening scene of Segn El Nessa self- translated)

Although this direct dedication and intent are shown, it is interesting that there is also a seemingly conflicting message dedicated to the security forces of Egypt and the police:

The entirety of this work is the result of its author's imagination in which drama requires them to present good and bad examples for each occupation, of course, it means not to offend any group and we greatly respect and pay tribute to the Ministry of Interior for what its employees give in this time filled with hardships in the nation's time, sacrificing all they can for Egypt" (opening scene of Segn El Nessa translated by myself).

One can notice a couple of elements from both this disclaimer and the previous dedication. One is the dominance of nationalistic discourse in the languages of artistic representation, even if they are characterized by women's liberation/ feminist notions. Second, we see a need to be apologetic about displays of reality. Third, and most importantly we see the possible contrast with emitting the core of Al Assal's message which is the political prisoners who expose and are a central character to expose all other types of socio-economic injustices. Questions arise for why the series, written by screenwriter Mariam Naom, have chosen not to incorporate any political elements. A possible answer to this is a trade-off made, of emitting political notions in favor of being able to bring this work out to light. This assumption comes out of the nature of giving and take that characterizes Egypt's government monitoring institutions and artists.

The nationalistic discourse is discussed in Laila Abu Lughod's *Drama's of nationhood*. The central argument of her book is that for an amounting cause, television is a " key institution for the production of national culture in Egypt, it is certainly an institution whose careful exploration allows us to write an ethnography of the Egyptian nation" (Abu Lughod 2004, 7). Mark Allen Peterson, in a review of Laila Abu Lughod's book, argues that what she is emphasizing is that the 1990s were essential years in building a "national pedagogy" through "which people imagine themselves as part of the nation (Peterson 2008, 183).

Television is prominent in the "national process" because it holds a special place in locating Egypt as the cultural center of the Arab World, as the main producer of film and television in the Arab world. Other countries such as Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and some Gulf countries produce quality films. But, "in terms of scale and seniority, Egypt is unrivaled" (Laila Abu Lughod 2004, 7) The first reason to look at Egyptian TV and its series as a salient national institution is its excellence in serial programming.

Despite yet thanks to state support the best television serials are gripping spectacles with moral truths that move their audience to tears, tensions and plots that keep them interested, loveable characters who make them laugh, brilliant lines that are worth repeating, music that embeds the shows in the memory, and characters who forge with viewers long-lasting attachments (Abu Lughod 2004, 7).

A second reason according to preview TV as salient in Egypt and the Arab world according to Abu Lughod is based upon Benedict Anderson's suggestion when considering nations as " imagined communities." Novels, newspapers, and television broadcasts analyzed may have a role to perform into producing nations and national feelings which in turn might

shape national imaginaries. Abu Lughod continues to give an example of how scholars have looked at the power of romantic fiction in "Latin America, mass advertised consumer goods in Papua New Guinea, and displays of cultural patrimony in museums and architectural preservation in Quebec in forging national sensibilities, so, too, they might well look at television serials (Abu Lughod 2005, 8). Egyptian television is directly linked to the projects of nationalism, development, and modernity through the idea of education; this idea, in turn, shapes the way Abu-Lughod understands the ways people encounter, resist, and make use of television's stories (Peterson 2008).

This last observation of Peterson best describes the seeming contradiction in *Segn El Nessa* TV series which both complies with a nationalistic narrative but seeks out a type of resistance in the dynamic portrayal of women's prison narratives. In this, the producers of the series were aware of their limitations in bringing about the complete ideas expressed in Al Assal's play in which the series was inspired by and keeping stories that are still characterized by an element of courage and rebellion against the system. The delicate care of ensuring this balance is quite uncommon in the Egyptian context and more and less so in other countries, in which lines of freedom are drawn and redrawn constantly, more or less on a daily basis, depending on the opposing stream of resistance. This "give and take" relationship is greatly determined by factors such as how "close" or "dominant" the producers and cast are to the government system which takes years of trust and reputation. This also depends on the political regime, mainly heads of state, who are in place, and what is required for them to seem open/democratic. But most importantly, social and economic issues voiced in artistic expressions should not directly critique the government.

The use of pedagogy as a tool for understanding producers' and audiences' encounters with media provides a consistent theme for the text. It is not a trope Abu-Lughod imagines or invents for interpretive purposes but, as she painstakingly demonstrates, arises out of her analysis of the discourses of television articulated by producers, by viewers and in public commentaries printed in magazines and newspapers. Education has played a crucial role in colonial, Nasserist, Sadatist, and contemporary national narratives in Egypt. In a country marked by deep class differences, education holds out the only hope most families have of social mobility. Education is equally crucial to paternalistic nationalist discourses of modernization which require "backward" peoples to be remade. Television in Egypt is explicitly linked to the projects of nationalism, development, and modernity through the trope of education; this trope, in turn, shapes the way Abu-Lughod understands the ways people encounter, resist, and make use of television's stories.

Chapter 2: Resistance's Depictions in Nawal El Saadawi's *Memoirs from Women's Prison*

In this chapter I talk about three aspects of Nawal El Saadawi's memoir: Waiting, the unity of crimes, and conflict, that despite differences, manifests as solidarity. I investigate waiting as the underlying theme of all pre-crime situations where socioeconomic situations lead to emotional attrition. Then I discuss Fathieya, a real woman and a symbol of Qanatir crimes, and finally I give examples of the dynamics of interactions between prisoners to give a substantive example of solidarity despite conflict. But first, let me discuss Saadawi's literary style of this book in which resistance is the underlying undertone.

El Saadawi weaves her experience to memories of childhood and young adulthood and her character/traits as she describes in the introduction of her book *Memoir's from Women's Prison*:

Because I was born in a strange time when a human being is driven to prison because one has got a brain that thinks because one has a heart that palpitates to truth and justice; because one writes poetry or fiction....., or because one has philosophical inclinations Because I was born in such a time, it was not strange that I was taken to prison. I have committed all the crimes together.... I have written stories, novels, and poetry; and published scientific and literary research, and articles that call for freedom. And I have philosophical inclinations But the greater crime is that I am a free woman at a time when they want nothing but woman servants and slaves, and I was born with a thoughtful brain when they are trying to deform minds (El Saadawi, 11).

Unfortunately, this opening sentence was omitted from the English version, for it functions as a literary event. What unfolds is a sophisticated account that is characteristic of both the memoiristic and the autobiographical. Memoiristic because the text is a memoir, autobiographical because this first line beholds the birth of a protagonist. In many instances, the memoirs depart to depict descriptions of an unwritten autobiography, which is a common theme noticed in other genres of El Saadawi's books. In this book, the text operates exactly as Philip Lejuine suggests of what makes an autobiography: "identity between author, narrator, and central character" (Malti Douglas 2018, 162). Nevertheless, the work has a fictional element where El Saadawi uses pseudonyms for other prisoners. Fedawa Malti Douglas has discussed the identities of those characters with Dr. El Saadawi who asked for the true identities of those characters to be confidential. Malti Douglas (2018) noted that the real-life character who is depicted to be the religious inmate does not wear the niqab, in which El Saadawi replied: "It is alright. I have changed a lot of things in the text" (Ibid, 162).

In an earlier article by Malti- Douglas, she discusses frequent narrative strategy in several of El Saadawi's books that she calls "enframing". This strategy of enframing is common in Saadawi's writing where it enables the voices of lower-class women, often silenced, to speak through a female protagonist, like the doctor narrator in *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*. Malti Douglas explains how El Saadawi's position as a physician widened her scope for not only understanding the dynamics of male-female relations in society but also widens her political and literary choices. El Saadawi makes her ground in Arabic literature by the merit of her resistance to male affiliated genres and traditional modes of discourse utilizing her exposure and familiarity with the seemingly binary world of medicine and writing. Malti Douglas confirms that these professions go together for both are controlled by male elite discourse, and how El Saadawi

managed to use her unique position to turn the table and claim the genres to her gender (Karim & Malti Douglas 1997, 46).

In the prison memoirs, El Saadawi invites further investigation into the nature of imprisonment and writing " Paper and pen are more dangerous than a gun" exclaimed one of the female prisoners when describing forbidden items to be found in cells. I find this phrase outstanding for it reveals what threatens the Egyptian state; the written word. Pen and paper exposes and describes the invisible shackles, which's invisibility they use to control and subjugate. The memoirs touch on historically significant events that affected her reception in contemporary Egyptian politics and literary publication in times of the book's release and up until this current day. Her imprisonment under Sadat's era, for example, sparked several death threats and caused her to flee Egypt several times. Naturally, the publication of her texts internationally is influenced to a degree by political occasions in Egypt, albeit this showcases the fact that El Saadawi's writing has been appropriated by wider geopolitical discourses in the tense encounters between the West and the Middle East, including anti-Islamic and anti-Arab discourses. On one hand, the common reference and study of her work in US universities have had an impact on the cultural diversity of the institutions. On the other hand, the work has been narrowly framed as a generalization of all Arab and Muslim women's both writing and reality. Her work has been used to confirm already imprinted images of oppressed, veiled women which the Western media fixates on. To emphasize, Malti-Douglas deters from suggesting that El Saadawi's work is either pro-Western or anti-Muslim. She describes El Saadawi's work as work which "demonstrates that it is possible to denounce women's oppression without taking a pro-Western stance and without forgetting the reality that class differences make in the varying patterns of that oppression" (Karim & Malti Douglass 1997, 46).

I find it useful to discuss the physical attributes of Al Qanatir prison before delving into the dynamics of resistance, solidarity, and most importantly to the question of this research: invisible shackles that lead women into prison. The physical divisions of wards summarize all types of crimes which women can fall into in this system. The reader must think: how might the themes of resistance and solidarity relate to the main topic which is analysing factors contributing to women's imprisonment in Egypt? The simple answer lies in the Arabic proverb which I am going to attempt to roughly translate " Things/matters are known/recognized by their very opposites." By showing resistance and solidarity as a manifestation of resistance, one can glimpse the oppressions which made the resistance possible. Why would resistance exist in a vacuum that does not require it? In this chapter, the reader will examine resistance and oppression as incorporated themes. This choice of examining this chapter can be attributed to modern dialectics. In *Re/structuring Science Education*, Wolff-Michael Roth explains what Stetsenko thinks of dialectics: " Dialectics is a method of reasoning which aims to understand things concretely in all their movement, change, and interconnection, with their opposite and contradictory sides of unity." The Marxist dialectic world-stand is based on the notion of infinite movement and interpretations of all aspects of reality which includes the activities of knowing and attempts of theorizing. As a materialist philosophy, it also assumes the unity of reality. For Marx, that reality translates as social relations, especially class relations, constituting the material world (Roth 2009, 90). In this chapter I translate excerpts from an Arabic edition of the memoir's, therefore, any difference in translation is due to my influence in the process. I chose to read the Arabic edition, since it is the language which the author used primarily, and I wished to be closer to her soul as much as I can. After all it is a memoir, thus a personal experience.

I searched online to find descriptions of the Qanatir Prison's building and its history. I expected to see a Wikipedia page pop up first, there was not anything which is strange since this prison is known to be the "biggest prison for women" in Egypt according to an Al Jazeera article, which the writer pleads to be anonymous (2020). It seems that any research about this prison leads only to newspaper articles reporting torture and harsh living realities in it. Academic sources tend to redirect it to Nawal El Saadawi's other fictional novel *Woman in Point Zero*, in which the character is imprisoned there. Another academic source titled *Prison and Marginalization in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* mentioned "Al Qanatir al- Khayyria" which is a whole area on the Nile used for cultivation. A suspect was sentenced there for life long-labor. In another passage, it was mentioned that there is a national labor prison near al Qanatir al Khayriya also (called al-Qal' an as-Sa'idiyyah), which in 1857 was transferred from the Ministry of War (Diwan al-Jihadiyya) to the Department of Industry. This later date might have marked the official time in which it became a prison (Peters 2002, 34). According to WordPress quoting Human Watch the women's section of the prison was built by the British in the early twentieth-century (Woman at Point Zero Word Press). I find this information interesting since the invisibility of the shackles corresponds to the invisibility of the prison online.

In what is suggested to be linked as the official website of the prison, which later turned out to be a part of an article of an online website called Al-Ma'arifa knowledge. We find the description of the building and sections of the prison. Which when contrasted with depictions of Both El Saadawi and Naoum seems to hold a high degree of credibility. The prison is located in the city of Al Qanatir Al Khayriyah which is in the province of Qalyubia twenty-five kilometers away from Cairo. The structure begins with a divide between political prisoners and criminal prisoners. There are ten large wards and are divided as follows. The admission ward (new

prisoners arrival first station), the prisoners live in it for eleven days until transformed to the investigations wards. Conditions are not favorable where approximately one hundred and thirty prisoners stay in there without beds. There is also a mothers and pregnant women ward, which is a separate ward from all others. The investigation ward is a building containing one-floor wards containing ward two and ward nine. In the investigation wards, all women prisoners are gathered. Then there is ward three which is solely for Adab "manners" (prostitution) prisoners. The larger ward of crimes contains two smaller wards ward six and seven which holds prisoners who are charged with murder, wards numbers four and five are both designated for charges related to drugs. There is also the hospital building which is rarely accessed by the prisoners, for deprivation of health services is considered a type of punishment (Merafa.org).

Prisoner in Custody No 1536 Must Wait : Close Reading of El Saadawi's Memoirs

We all wait! Who amongst us who does not! I, like you, wait to return to my wife and children, they do not know when I am coming back like I do not. Patience is good, and those who are patient shall gain! Listen to the wisdom of an old man who worked here for thirty years. There is no benefit in thinking, abandon your mind and think of nothing, and since you arrived here, you shall know that there is someone thinking on your behalf....(El Saadawi, 39).

This excerpt is part of a speech given by the first employee encountered by El Saadawi as she arrives in a dirty waiting room just before entering the prison. I begin this part of the section by it to introduce an important dynamic of shackles which lead imprisonment ; waiting/attrition. In a scene that seems surreal, the old prison employee, described as emerging from "under the ground". He has a poor appearance, wearing plastic slippers instead of shoes, holding a yellow rosary, and offering her a drink of Zamzam water (acclaimed holy water from a well in Mecca)

from his traditional clay made container. Her description of this man, his outdated look/utensils, and speech that urges for tolerance provokes a feeling for the oppression of peasants and their coping mechanism in religious-based patience. El Saadawi asks him many questions in this scene about what is going to happen to her and how long she should be waiting in this room. His answers seem to revolve around his ignorance of everything which he attributes to higher powers knowing more than him and he seems to make peace with his lack of knowing. When she asks him what the officers are not saying to her and if they are plotting something by keeping her in that unexplained room/office, he answers: "They do not hide things they do not know about, they know nothing... daughter, they wait exactly like you. Everyone waits for the orders of God, everyone has a specific mission. In old times the orders came written...", following this El Saadawi mentally exclaims: "The order of God comes in writing form?" This man's presence in the memoirs and his submission to what is interpreted as a divine rule of kings to the authorities of president El Sadat is a salient part of why this man is placed just outside of prison. Even though realistically, he is outside of prison and working for the authorities who imprison, his emotion, spirit, and self are inside of prison "there is no benefit in thinking." The theme of waiting, harsh endurance, and uncertainty are widely discussed by this person who also dismisses emotions because the officers do not like to see sadness or happiness expressed by anyone around them. He explains this dislike by saying it makes them uncomfortable. Waiting, while suppressing emotions, functions as an invisible shackle to this man, in this man's case it leads to submission and the preaching of submission towards the pressing questioning of El Saadawi, which does not fit the authorities' likings. Waiting leads to attrition, which leads to crime as will be exemplified in this thesis. Waiting, and enduring harsh circumstances for women prisoners as depicted in the selected literature leads to emotional/psychological attrition

which in itself is an invisible shackle and a subtle theme in the stories of most if not all lower-class prisoner women. This man asks "who amongst us does not wait?", I refine this question to: who always waits? The answer can be found in the inhabitants of the prison who waited long enough to be exhausted and dragged by shackles.

Fathiya: the Murderess, the Thief, the Prostitute

The political ward is full of respectable people... but other wards... full of thieves, beggars, drug dealers, prostitutes, they are all mischievous... except for the murderers. The best women here are the murderers. They come directly from their houses to prison not spinning all around like the others. Also, murder is very different from other crimes... it is not a crime; rather a moment of passing rage. The murderer woman kills for her children and her honor, but the thief, prostitute, and drug dealer come and leave prison twenty times, never repenting. They will never admit to committing a crime. (Translated 117)

I use this expert to highlight a mentality of an insider/outsider dichotomy with a (prison guard) who seems to hold an interpretation different from what is considered a crime compared to the outside world, and different from the narratives of women inside prison who primarily see themselves as victims. This excerpt is part of a dialogue between Nawal El Saadawi and a prison guard. Reading it, one can see that the prison guard decided on a system of moral ranking between different prisoners and clearly wants to demonstrate that she regards El Saadawi as respectable and different from other prisoners and then marks female murderers as different from others. Saadawi seems to have a particular admiration for Fathiya too where she compares her to her strong-willed smart cousin who would have turned out to be an individual successful woman if she was not married to a peasant. Saadawi, herself professes that she would have faced

exactly the same marginalized status if her grandmother was successful in marrying her early on. Abdo states in her review of the book *Female prisoners* are divided into two categories: political prisoners and "criminal" prisoners. The life stories of criminal prisoners are full of insights that reflect the reality of poor women in Egypt. "Fathiya-the-Murderess" was derived from murder by a male member of her family, like all other "criminals"; becoming victims of Egyptian patriarchal power structure (Abdo 1996, 287).

The story of Fathia is essential in crystallizing invisible shackles which lead to a "crime", which its self-defence nature and the involvement of a child demands it not to be a crime. In other words the reason for the crime, which is a man molesting a child, is the primary crime/shackle to begin with, not Fathia's response. The detailed story of Fathiya as told by the prison guard in explaining why she thinks of murderers as best goes as follows. Fathiya is a practicing peasant who does all the work while her husband lives like a sultan smoking hookah all day long (a display of slothfulness). She returns from the field after a long day of work to find her husband laying on top of her nine-year-old daughter. She immediately kills him with his ax which results in a life sentence charge. The prison guard says that Fathiya has been in prison for ten years now and has only shown everyone great compassion and kindness: "no one believes she can kill a fly". She then proceeds to explain Fathiya's end as a matter of bad luck; she had a bad man and if "God had sent her a good one" she would have been happy in her life.

Fathiya's character is depicted as raw, honest, grounded, and proud. This is shown as a reflection of her peasant character and her attachment to the land and is contrasted with other prisoners, especially the religious ones who display guilt in various aspects of life except for their opposition to the ruler, the only act of defiance that led them to prison. Fathiya says when El Saadawi tells her that her fate would have been different if she got married "how lovely it is

to work in the fields with your axe. I cannot live without an axe, the axe has been my life since I was born." The ax here works as a layered symbol of life in all its forms: growing crops, giving meaning to Fathyia's life on one side and a tool of death of Fathyia's husband on the other hand. She shows no remorse for her husband's death when the prison guard jokes about how Fathyia loves the axe because she is a murderer at heart by responding " so what if I cut him into pieces and threw them into the sea for fish to eat? At least he will be of benefit and that might erase his sins before judgment day". While one interpretation can see such a reply as optimum cruelty disguised as apathy, one can also view it as an extension of Fathyia's "peasant nature" where she sees benefit, vitality, and use even from her dead husband which reflects a general yearning for life.

Fathyia in another dialogue with other prisoners and a guard declares that she admits to murder and would do it again. She states that she did it to save herself from living with an unjust man. She says that she served him as a slave, and never got even a compliment in return. She has been thinking of killing him every day until she saw him with her daughter. She states " one can not easily murder someone on a whim, I lived with him every day thinking of killing him!". In this scene, one can see that Fathyia the "criminal" is born out of continual and cumulative abuse of a man by her husband. She wanted to free herself from him all her life, but could do so, achieving freedom only through killing him when he gave her a concrete reason to do so. One can infer that she could have gotten divorced instead of reaching this boiling point, however, the question of the difficulty of obtaining is up for discussion. Divorce is a stigma in the Egyptian and Arab society as a whole. An invisible shackle of fear of stigma can be a catalyst to murder when coupled with the theme of endurance and waiting such as in this case. It is important to investigate the complications of divorce as a shackle to many women in Egypt.

Compared to women in the developed world, Egyptian women have fewer available options. The extended family provides little or no support because of the accepted norm that a man has a right to discipline his wife. The community also condones a Muslim husband's right to have more than one wife. In addition, obtaining a divorce is difficult (for both Muslims and Copts) in Egypt. In extreme cases, some women feel they have no other alternative and take it upon themselves to kill their abusing partners. Abd el Wahahab (1994) conducted in-depth-interviews with ten women upheld in Qanater's Women's prison in Cairo who were all subjected to physical and mental abuse for an extended period of time. The statistics of this study indicated that 60% of the sample of women were married at a young age of which 90% of these marriages were arranged. Most lived in economically disadvantaged houses with partners often abusing their children. The majority, 60%, in fact, requested divorce (it should be noted that requesting divorce does not in many cases mean it will be granted). Seven out of ten women confessed to the murder of their husbands. The profiles of husbands/victims also revealed a pattern. 60% of the men were twenty or older than their wives. 40% of them were away working for oil rich countries in the gulf, while 70% were addicted to either alcohol or illicit drugs. These cases reflect the inadequacy of the criminal justice system to protect or offer upfront assistance service to the women living in such impossible circumstances. The system,however, successfully, worked ruthlessly to put these women in prison. In such light,these Egyptian women's pattern of murdering their husbands can and should be understood as a radical act for it opposes the stereotype of women as naturally "passive" and should refute the theory of their victimization, (Nawal Ammar 2000), a researcher of immigrant women, Muslims in Prisons and Islam and ecological Justice, comments "Such extraordinary behavior by women is better theorized as a form of resistance rather than as victimhood "(Ammar 2000, 31). These cases also demonstrate

the inadequacy of the criminal justice system to protect or assist women living in such impossible circumstances. The system did, however, work ruthlessly and efficiently to prosecute such women.

The "fellaheen" (peasants) of Egypt, perhaps the oldest peasantry in the world, are the " salt of the Earth" working class of Egypt. Their morals, values, lifestyle is a continuation of their ancestor's methods which have been practiced for over five thousand years (Douglass & Douglass 1954) This seven decades-old article contrasts the marital relationships of the peasants and how different it is from patterns of marital relationships in the west. In a paper titled *Khul' divorce in Egypt: Public Debates, Judicial Practices, and Everyday Life*, Sonneveld discusses how different classes react to divorce. She observes an article in an Egyptian proverb that discusses two seemingly opposite proverbs. The first proverb " *dhill ragil wala dhill heta* (The shadow of a man is better than the shadow of a wall) is used to promote that being married, under all circumstances even spiteful, is better than being single. However, changing socio-cultural dynamics may lead many women to resonate with the proverb *al-wihda khayrun min galis al-sou'* (Better alone than in bad company)" (al-Ahram Weekly 4-10 January 2001). Another article in an Egyptian newspaper titled " A woman alone", presents the stories of four financially independent, educated, professional young women who experienced divorce contrary to the common idea of divorced women as miserable and weak without a man. The article tells the story of how they established an independent home and declared themselves to be happily divorced (Sonneveld 2009, 234). The complications of divorce and khul' (when the wife demands separation without the consent of the husband) make the process disliked by women of different classes in general. The particularity of Fathiya's situation and class may indicate that a

peasant like Fathiya may not possess access to socio-economic tools that bring about divorce as an option.

It is important to note that prisoners do not view the actions which lead to their imprisonment as crimes, rather than an opposition to shackles of life; a mechanism of survival. A noteworthy scene is when a black prisoner called D'oba charged with prostitution yells at other prisoners charged with the same "crime" because they surround any male prisoner passing by the women's prison in flirtatious ways. Name-calling starts where they dismiss her, saying that she could not be a prostitute because she is only a beggar, indicating the superiority of being charged with prostitution. D'oba throws a rock back and yells that she does not beg, but works hard as a cleaner for the political prisoner's ward, who are " more respectable, you thief, who is mistakenly charged by prostitution." The woman answers that she is a prostitute of excellence, and no one can call her a thief. Another thin woman rose, with scars on her face, rose up " and what is wrong with being a thief? At least, I work for my bread, and I don't simply sell my honor, you pot-head drug dealer" This, in turn, angers the drug dealer who responds that she sells and buys drugs with her own money, not stolen money like the low life thief. Then these women start a physical fight that only the prison guard ends.

The aim of the previous description of a scene in the memoirs is to illustrate that these women display a certain pride which in turn creates a lack of remorse. I interpret this lack of remorse as existing because they see their "crimes" as essential to their survival; it is hard to imagine that one will apologize for trying to survive, and it is usually those at the bottom of Kimberley Crenshaw's basement who are trying to survive. In the intersectional feminist theory, Crenshaw (1989) describes those who are multi-burdened/disadvantaged; she states "those who are multiply-burdened are generally left below unless they can somehow pull themselves into the

groups that are permitted to squeeze through the hatch. In this book, all these women with their criminal charges which they use to climb up the basement are punished by imprisonment. Fathiya, different than other "criminals" for her detrimental un-reversible murder "crime", becomes the optimum symbol of what the patriarchal reality has to prevent in order for it to keep the structure. " In prison, names of women repeat, they only differentiate them by their charges, they say: Fathiya the murderess, Fathiya the prostitute, Fathiya the thief, or Fathiya the politician." Fathiya, here is the symbol in which all other stories spring from in their own different ways.

It's God's Fault... it is your fault... No, it is the President's

Every woman had at least one child, women's bodies are crammed next to children... bugs are nibbling children's bodies... children yell... mothers are fighting over water buckets...over little sugar to be melted for the child's nutrition... everyone is holding the other's hair... bare feet step on children's naked stomachs and buttocks...swears start... the woman curses the woman, the woman's mother, and female genitals. She curses herself and the day her mother had her and the day she had her own child. Poor illiterate women who ended in prison because of poverty, ignorance, or male suppression. Each prisoner had a man in her story.... A father ironing his daughter to steal... a husband beating his wife into prostitution... a brother pressing his sister to smuggle drugs... a gang head kidnapping a child to train her to beg in the streets... the bottom of society...the bottom of the bottom... the tortured of the Earth... The other face of the system...(El Saadawi, 79).

In this passage, El Saadawi describes the shackles which I dare to say are not so invisible at this point. This passage's dominant theme is overwhelming poverty. El Saadawi describes how this ward is crammed with bodies. Motherhood is propelled towards primitive behaviors in order to sustain its offspring. Bodies occupy all the space nevertheless (or rather, therefore) they are invisible and stepped on. Poverty and males are blamed interchangeably. The causality of current incarceration is complicated with families' poverty in which the male then becomes responsible for the female's relative's crime. It is concluded that poverty facilitates the manifestation of misogynistic acts, or whether misogyny is always there and is awaiting the circumstance for its manifestation. In many ways it resembles the egg and chicken dilemma. For there are no figures in Egypt indicating the effect of class in disparities of sentences/punishments let us look at an example of a developed country. In the U.S, poor urban residents who use crack receive sentences one hundred times more retaliatory than wealthier consumers of powder cocaine. In point of fact "powder cocaine users caught with exactly the same amount of cocaine as crack users will usually receive probation, while crack users receive five-year prison sentences (Golden 2013, 53).

The prison guard was talking to El Saadawi while D'oba, the prisoner who works as a servant, was brushing the guard's hair. She tells El Saadawi about a wealthy prisoner named Badea'a. Badeaa is sentenced for a drug-related charge. She describes her as being able to live a fully luxurious life in prison, owning a " color television" which was exceptional for prisoners in the early 1980s. Badea'a is also able to earn money, much more than she makes outside prison. The guard expresses that Badea'a "deserves" her comfortable status because God in his wisdom decided she was worthy of happiness. God saw that Badea'a deserves all that is good because she is generous and kind. She gives away from her money and feeds all of the prison's inmates fancy

feasts on religious holidays. "This is all from God's grace on her.. And, at the end of the day, everything is "Naseeb"."

Naseeb (Arabic: نصيب) is an Arabic term used in many languages including Indonesian, Malay, Persian, Turkish, Pashto, Sindhi, Somali, Urdu, Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali and Punjabi it means destiny or fate. The Arabic term frequently used "Kisma wa Nassib" literally means "share and destiny". Linguists Dr. Jamshid Ibrahim. "Kisma" is an Arabic word which indicates the faith of a human. This word is introduced to many Eastern languages such as Kurdish, Persian, and Turkish in the form of "Kismet". It became a popular word and its philosophy became an underlying theme to songs, movies, and stories because it connotes luck and human destiny in integral elements of human life such as love, marriage, sickness, and death. The words are integrated into most European languages through its Turkish form. The European might use it in a mocking form likewise imitating the Eastern person "What can be done? Kismet" (Ibrahim ahewar.org). According to Merriam Webster Kismet was borrowed from Turkish in the 1800s and means "a power that is believed to control what happens. (Merriam-Webster)."

This introduction is necessary to lay the foundation of the centrality of the idea of fate and destiny in the minds of the depicted characters in El Saadawi's text. This concept plays a role in the formation of the structure and hierarchy in Arab societies. There is a theme in play in El Saadawi's encounter with the prisoners which is demonstrated in recurring dialogue about locating blame, or responsibility to a certain authority for ending up in prison. A prison guard displays this push and pulls tension in her dialogue with El Saadawi. She wonders why the police forces arrest a woman out of many people if that woman has not done anything; "She must have done something." Nevertheless, she admits that the prisoner is full of people who were admitted there unjustly/unrightly. She states that powerless people enter prison by the merit of being

powerless. She gives an example of an innocent ignorant girl and another who is shrewd. The shrewd one escaped before being caught while the innocent one was caught for nothing. It was a name mistake. This shows a bureaucratic inefficiency. alongside the victim being unprivileged and innocent increases the chances of being in prison as weak prey. The prison guard then states that the murderers' ward is full of women who were unjustly convicted. She continues to say that the murderers' ward is full of wronged prisoners. The women there enter on behalf of men. The man commits murder and escapes then his mother, sister, or wife enter prison. The mother redeems herself for her son. A husband forces his wife into prostitution or drug dealing, only she enters prison. " Women are poor creatures, they go in prison for others' ". She gives an amplified example that translates the situation on a political level of Sabah the beggar (El Saadawi, 119). She goes to prison because an important guest of president Sadat arrives in Egypt. The police, upon this grand occasion made important, collected people of Sabah's sorts so the guest can only see "clean" and happy sights in Egypt. Women like Sabah enter prison frequently and are in a constant process of checking in and out. Even political prisoners are dealt with in the same kind of arbitrary way. The innocent mentioned formerly who entered prison because a name mistype, is constantly arrested whenever there is a political uprising in the country of any sort, and from any group; whether it was a communist protest or Islamic one (these two sides being polar opposites in Egypt). She ironically is not communist, Muslim, Christian, or Jewish. Her father is Christian and her mom is a Muslim. Her name is generic and can be of any religion. The prison guard then goes on to conclude that it is all a result of mere bad luck " it is all about luck". No one that has a "backbone" can be subjected to atrocities of this sort or be treated unjustly (Ibid 119). What the prison guard means here by a backbone which she explains later is to have a man who protects, loads of assets, and money. It all revolves around material wealth which

determines if: one will enter prison or not, and if she does money will determine the quality of living and the quantity of time which she will spend in prison.

This dialogue which happened privately between El Saadawi and the prison guard is contrasted by another dialogue when D'oba, the lowest of all prisoners in status as a servant, is involved. While D'oba is combing a prison's guard hair (not indicating if it is the same prison guard from the earlier conversation) she gives her opinion of who and what is to blame. She elaborated on what was said to be the faith of Fathiya of whether she had a good husband or not. D'oba reverses the facts of which happened to herself and her fellow prisoners: if only she married a good man who didn't push her into prostitution, she would have been in her apartment safe and sound with her daughter between her arms, the same goes for Sabah the beggar if she was married to a respectable man, and so for Souad the thief, for who if she wasn't destined with a father who burns her with an iron, she would have been a "respectable" woman. D'oba concludes that "behind" every woman in prison is a "son of a bitch", a man who is a relative. In a submission to a destiny, she says it's all that God decides and everything is "Naseeb".

The prison guard, who adopts a rational-based patriarchal discourse of pure free will, answers back in its terms, not dismissing the religious/pious affinity of it, in a popular discourse characterized by the manipulation of science vs. religion. That God even though he decides fate, does not order anyone to steal, prostitute, or sell drugs for he has given each woman a mind to think for herself. She gives an example of herself, born for a poor father, illiterate, therefore, was never educated, but she has the common sense to know what is right and what is wrong. Therefore, she became a prison guard. She directs her question to D'oba and rhetorically asks her why she didn't end up like a prostitute: " the woman of your prisoners commits the wrong and then blames God! God has no-fault!" D'oba answers back that yes everything is a result of God's

doings and that he wanted her to be a prostitute. If he wanted her to be a doctor like El Saadawi she would have been, and then she asks El Saadawi to confirm to her that this is true. El Saadawi, listening to that whole dialogue, considering both options, answers laughingly that it is the president Sadat's fault.

While socio-political circumstances are self-explanatory, it can be illuminating to understand the accumulation of El Saadawi's epistemology through her structure to fully understand the scope of her answer and the way she documents dialogues. As Spivak articulates it "subjective structures can, in fact, give objective truth." where Françoise Lionnet explains that Saadawi in *Woman at Point Zero* tells the story of Firdaus "the real woman", and elevates the case study's exemplary narrative of female oppression and emancipation in other words of a woman who killed her pimp. El Saadawi emphasizes in her preface for the former novel that she tells the story of Firdaus because she is a woman driven by despair to the darkest of ends.

This woman, despite her misery and despair, evoked in all those who, like me, witnessed the final moments of [her] life, a need to challenge and to overcome those forces that deprive human beings of their right to live, to love and to real freedom" In Anwar El Sadat's Egypt, these values are not taken by granted. What makes the story hypnotic is the use of a highly personal tone, where the distance between the dominant self and the narrating "I" of Firdaus is dissolved. The focus, promptly, is shifted to their shared experience of oppression in a patriarchal location. What the text puts in motions is a representation of displacement between two women who are "objectively" very different according to their place in social class, education, and profession, however, their intimate female experiences are extensively similar. An ironic parallel emerges as six years following the publication of *Woman at Point Zero*, Saadawi herself is arrested, along with others alleged to have committed crimes against the state, whom Sadat announces as threats

to the stability of his rule. Linnet expresses that the telling of the story of Firdaus is a rehearsal of Saadawi's "descent into the hell of an Egyptian prison." To tell Firdaus's story is to see herself in the mirror of a prostitute's narrative, to establish the common thread to her own experience as an excised woman (Linnet 1994). This description applied and is confirmed by Saadawi's inclination to draw similarities between her and Fathiya the murderer. Her admiration for Fathiya is comparable to that of Firdaus. She elaborates on her father's will power to determine her own fate, similar to that of Firdaus when she killed her own pimp. Looking at this extended accumulation of events, it appears that socio-economic factors are not enough reasons to be imprisoned, because El Saadawi is well educated and is not a member of the working class. In this case the circumstances of Saadawi's imprisonment are political. This is an inclusive answer to this chapter of who to appoint at fault for women's imprisonment. According to subjective epistemology, which leads to a representation of objectivity by merit of extension and motion, The conclusion is that it is the fault of Sadat, who created/ maintained an atmosphere of general oppression.

Notwithstanding and precisely because of: Conflict Shaping Solidarity

She (the prison guard) looked at me and said: my niece always says that she wants to grow up to be a doctor like you, she wants to imitate you in everything.

I laughed and said: except she doesn't want to go to prison.

The guard smiled and said: what's wrong with going to prison, doctor, prison is a badge of honor in these times! I swear it is! And What a blessing it is! Thank you, Lord! (El Saadawi, 131)

This exclamatory sentiment expressed by a prison guard in the early 1980s, a time characterized by oppressive measures from the Sadat regime, is considered in this context as

rebellious. In this section, I aim to discuss how a sense of heightened solidarity manages to penetrate apparent differences/conflict between prisoners and prevails itself in solid, overt, and visible resistance. In this section, I am to discuss the text's depictions of conflict, resistance/agency, and solidarity. I will use the word agency when discussing its theory and resistance to refer to its execution/act. Resistance, as discussed earlier can be thought of as an elongated thread with hooks/shackles at either end. Being born in a certain class naturally hooks one into these shackles and any attempt to resist being in that class by improving conditions of living through climbing up the social ladder (whether this means a divorce, getting basic money, expressing an opinion for the well-being of the collective) will lead into that thread being pulled towards the prison. Saadawi, in this text expresses that female prison guards although outside of prison are treated the worst by the hierarchy of the prison systems, one of them wearing plastic flip flops indicating her poverty. If we recall what is mentioned earlier in this chapter of a prison guard boasting about herself of being rational therefore she ended up a prison guard instead of a prisoner.

According to Kaplana Wilson, socialist feminists attempted to understand agency in relation to power/ideology. They aim to understand the material structure of patriarchy, which includes normative notions of femininity and masculinity, in order to establish a basis for social transformation. They aimed to bypass the dichotomy of structure/agency which dominated the social theory field. The socialist feminists argue that 'to assume that the multiple voices of women are not shaped by domination is to ignore social context and legitimate the status quo. On the other hand, to assume that women have no voice other than an echo of prevailing discourses is to deny them agency and simultaneously, to repudiate the possibility of social change' (Kaplana 2008, 2). I conclude that this contradiction might be weaved together by thinking that

resistance is a necessary condition of change and altering of status quo. It admits agency and at the same time, its necessity prevails over the existence of injustice. The following literary examples in Saadawi's text will further illuminate this stand and other expressions/manifestations of resistance.

Laughter inside the prison, creating an atmosphere of light-heartedness and joy is present in the darkest of times where moments of despair weigh heavy between the prisoners. Saadawi wonders about the mechanisms of irrational optimism that arises in the heights of fear. She described moments where an atmosphere of uncertainty and stress arises between the prisoners in her politics ward. Anger gradually grows with her resisting this stillness and stagnation. She declares " We shall not die, and if we do not die in silence, we will not die without a revolution!" This command of spirit encourages other women not only to feel the urge to execute a revolution but to laugh too. Laughter is a common political tool often deployed in Egyptian politics. In a paper titled *The politics of laughter: Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarek in Egyptian political jokes*, Samer Shehata considers the power of laughter as a "rebellion against authority, a liberation from its pressures" Laughter resulting from the political gives space for people to temporarily overcome their oppressors, it is cathartic. The political joke, serving as a "safety-valve", might not be able to overturn political regimes alone but it relieves pressures and anxiety, at least temporarily. Unfortunately, Arab political jokes in general, and Egyptian political jokes, in particular, have not obtained enough scholarly attention. For the Egyptians, laughter and political jokes are of great importance, as too must it should be for those concerned with the social aspect of Egypt. The intimidation of a political joke has led to a rumor that the first president of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser, tried to collect the jokes articulated about himself through the secret police, even there is a joke about this rumor. The second president, Al Sadat, was highly aware of the

power of the political joke and thus conducted a joke about the former president in a public speech. The love of jokes is made popular about Egyptians which gained them the referral of a common phrase, *ibn nukta* which literally means "son of a joke" a phrase commonly used by other Arabs to describe the Egyptians. Shehata concludes this part by saying that the "seriousness of Egyptian political jokes makes them, in one sense, no laughing matter (Shehata 1992 76.)."

In a dialogue where women in Saadawi's prison ward discuss what to say to the detective who is officially named the socialist prosecutor. The women discover that the only person they see and engage with is him. One says " Every night I dream of the social prosecutor, he became the man of my dreams... I eyeliner my eyes every morning in preparation for meeting him, he became the only man in my life." Another woman answers " How do they accuse us of attacking the state while we are all in love with the socialist prosecutor, we dream of him every night?" Saadawi reflects that everything around her in prison is a comedy-drama as an ignorant sixteen-year-old prisoner is charged with attempting to topple the regime. Nawar Golley states, that Saadawi depicts her encounters with "authorities" in the form with the chief/socialist prosecutor, which is narrated in its own chapter of the six-chapter book, is written in a humorous tone to underline the ridiculous nature of the charges she is faced with, the inefficient laws, and the deficiency of the jurisdiction under Sadat's regime (Grace 2007, 196). Laughing through detecting ridiculousness and arbitral procedures in prison fosters a common feeling of bonding, which enhances a collective sense of solidarity.

In the political ward cooperation despite differences is examined. According to Grace, there is a kafkaesque quality of El Saadawi's text in relation to the development of relationships with her fellow incarnated women prisoners. Despite the ideological differences between the

prisoners, they managed to form a solid community in this confined space. El Saadawi's text emphasizes an interpersonal exchange between women. This spirit is illustrated in several minor and major incidents. For example, killing the bathroom's cockroach for an uptight religious woman named Budoor who hardly gets along with anyone to hunger strikes for the sake of another prisoner. Grace describes Saadawi's experience as revealing her egotism yet that experience forces her to be introspective (Ibid 2007, 196). She does not elaborate further on what the nature of egotism is except for putting it against introspection. I speculate the meaning of this observation as El Saadawi placing herself as the catalyst of action, in which she later articulates its reason and justifications in an introspective manner. For example, Saadawi starts a speech when there is a shared feeling of despair initiated by Budoor who reacted to the former atmosphere of laughter by saying that laughing loudly is haram (forbidden), and Faukeya who is a socialist who is expected to be always pessimistic and lazy and declares that they should not speak about politics because the authorities might be listening. She states " Do we strangle our own selves? What the worst that could happen other than being in this place, the only thing left is death!". A feeling of solidarity through political crises and politically charged cheers starts in the ward bringing together the prisoners in a unifying sense. The text is followed by a thorough description of the fear which the police state incites similar to the implanted internal fear of George Orwell's 1984 dystopian Big Brother's state.

Sentiments of solidarity amongst prisoners are also demonstrated with the encounters with the officials. A male police officer of higher rank while visiting the Qanatir women's prison remarks that the women are in a "bless" for they have a bathroom, and they (the officials) always keep women's comfort in mind for they can never " treat women as they treat men". He turns into Saadawi and mockingly asks her " Isn't that right Dr. Nawal, or do you prefer that we prefer

equality with men who are imprisoned in Tora” (male prison)? (El Saadawi,88).This manipulative machiavellian nature of a question was responded by Saadawi who states: "I have to see myself how the prisoners in Tora live, then I will judge for that." He insisted that prisoners in Qanatir " Live in heaven." After which Saadawi responded by inviting this policeman to live with them in this heaven. Saadawi's fearlessness with her responses and encounters with the official is derived from her strong stance of what she considers right from wrong. To come back to the point of Saadawi's "egotism" vs. introspection. Grace describes Saadawi's constant evaluation of herself being right in the face of wrong. She writes that the worst of prisons is not to be deprived of freedom and liberty but self-doubt (Ibid 2007, 197).

It must be declared here that conflict exists between prisoners and a state of pure harmony and cooperation is a false assumption that is far from reality. El Saadawi makes sure that she presents these conflicts and makes antagonists not only of the officials but those in her same ward. The two characters mentioned earlier Fawkeya, the communist, and Budour, the Nikabi Islamist are always presented as in opposition to the collective good. They both hold themselves as superior when they refuse to do their own chores. They rely on D'oba the black servant from the prostitution ward to make their beds, bring them hot water, and wash their dishes. Not only are these two insufficient and dependent but they refuse to engage in the collective good and are hypocrites to their own causes. There has been a scene where Fawkeya accuses a fellow inmate of spying on them on the merit of this prisoner named Itidal being poor. Another prisoner immediately reminds her of the hypocrisy of being a communist and accusing Itidal by the merit of being poor. This scene ends with name-calling and the women fighting.

It is important to mention that despite conflict solidarity happens, and maybe because of conflict and difference, the practical importance of solidarity clarifies and flourishes. "The

human stimulation before human elimination” Saadawi’s conclusion statement is said as a result of the exhaustion of the prisoners. Upon the assassination of Sadat, the women expected to be released immediately since he is the one that ordered their imprisonment, and political prisoners are usually released in these cases. She described that a fellow pregnant prisoner was showing signs of weakness that needed immediate care, many others are getting sick because of the cold weather and suffocating chimney air, D’oba got sick and could no longer come to serve, the female prison guard was also showing signs of heaviness and weakness in her steps, the word death became commonly circulated by all in prison. This atmosphere was crystallized by the news of the death of a fellow male prisoner in the male prison. This incident is described to awaken the instinct of survival “ the last awakening before the last breath.” Everyone rose to break the prison’s door. Everyone held a tool: stools, an iron steel bar of a bed, an iron cooking pot and started to hit the door’s bar yelling out " We will break this prison, We will not die without noise." This sense of solidarity is described by Saadawi from whom it sprang from "a hidden potential stored from the distant past, from childhood, from birth, even before birth, since a human was a fetus in his mother's womb." This collective uprising, coupled with other official procedures, resulted in the release of Saadawi and the political prisoners subsequently.

According to Muhammad Youssef Suwaed, the government has appointed guards to Saadawi's house, because of the constant death threats she receives, regardless of their own resentments to her opinions and activism against them (Suwaed 2017, 239). This fact, isolated, demonstrate the recurrence of resistance in/out of prison against authoritative/societal antagonists and the shackles of law are only more tangible in the form of prison, but the shadows of death/imprisonments is a theme of life, a life of oppressed women whither they fall into the intersections of oppression or not so much like Saadawi an intellectual middle-class woman.

Chapter 3 Mariam Naoum's Feminist representations in Segn El Nessa

Segn el Nessa or Women's Prison (2014) is a Ramadan TV series directed by Kamla Abou Zekry in cooperation with screenwriter Mariam Naoum and was shot in Qanatir Prison. It claims to be based on Fathia Al Assal's play which holds the same title. I will only speak briefly about Al Assal's play and focus more on the popular TV series. In the first chapter I demonstrated how there is a dissonance between the original play and the TV series when it comes to political representation where there is a lack of any form of politics in the popular series. Choosing Saadawi's autobiography, who was imprisoned as a political activist, was an attempt to fill the gap that is created by concealing/under-representing political prisoners. Another major reason why I chose this TV series is because of the high importance of popular culture in the Egyptian society. According to Saleh one factor which plays a role in this pop-culture significance is the relatively high illiteracy rate in Egypt. Second, in a culture where

political activism is oppressed, Egyptians use fun as a “as a safe way to express rejection, opposition and anger, and to break tension”(Sonneveld 2009, 5). Third, not only does popular culture break existing tensions, but the general Egyptian person is fond of their film stars. Abu-Lughod describes “star magic” and the sense of national belonging it creates as “to be involved with the stars is to be part of a national romance”(Sonneveld 2009, 5).

But Ramadan TV serieses hold even greater significance than those from other times during the year. TV series even more so as people, younger generations in particular, have alternative online methods to watch programs, soaps, and films. A great part of the difference is that in Ramadan a sense of family is fostered where the importance of gathering is heightened, which makes TV series producers aware that their programs must appeal to all family members. According to Faedah M. Totah, Egyptian series have continued to flourish, even with the increase of censorship restrictions post 2011’s revolution (Totah 2017, 1). Gianluca P. Parolin states that private media outlets are commonly owned by agents who are tied to the regime by unbreakable interlocking interests that intersect in other economic spheres. The interest of the private and public media outlets guides the industry away from producing media that would threaten their socioeconomic and political consensus. Parolin refers to this as ‘Maspero consensus’ (from the name of the Cairo neighborhood in which the former Ministry of Information, now the Supreme Council for the Organization of Information, and the industry orbiting around it are headquartered).The Maspero consensus indicates a historical bloc whose socially conservative, politically inactive, and religiously compliant vision of society is encoded in its television drama production.” This official narrative was threatened by the revolution of 2011, thus any element of revolutionary thought was looked at with hostility (Parolin 2019). The deceased Shady Habash who is mentioned in this forward as the director of a video clip was one

of thousands of youths who were at the receiving end of this hostility. This consensus guaranteed that even with over 200 serial productions since 2011, no central revolutionary character has appeared on screen. This forces intellectuals (mostly screenwriters, and in part directors) into becoming organic intellectuals. When Parolin speaks of the “organic” he is describing central authorities/ideologies who hold an agenda of crafting a “hegemonic consensus able to absorb the subaltern discourses” (Parolin 2019, 159) In Gramscian marxist terms, intellectuals who are deeply integrated into social and political dynamics function to extend the ‘organic’ ideology of authoritative groups (Parolin 2019, 145).

This series breaks the mold of what is perceived as a Ramadan family TV drama. The feminist undertone of this show was gradually introduced in 2013 Ramadan. (the previous year before Women’s prison). *Zaat* is a TV series that became popular, starring the same actress ,Nelly Karim, also written by Mariam Naoum and directed by Kamla Abou Zekry and Khairy Bishara. It was an attempt to bring to life Sonallah Ibrahim’s popular novel *Zaat* (1992). Ibrahim is a leftist writer who is known as an opposition to the state where he was imprisoned for his political stands since the days of president Abdel Nasser. Sara Salim, whose work explores the connections between postcolonial theory and Marxism, with special focus to the context of Egypt and the period of decolonization in the mid-twentieth century, explores these themes in *Zaat*, and I argue that similar themes are recure in *Segn El Nessa*. The participation of Abou Zekry in both series stands out as she became associated with series with a feminist undertones. *Zaat* traces the life of a family for decades and its response to life events. The family is portrayed as being apolitical and merely trying to get by without any trouble.Despite this neutrality, they find themselves directly affected by various political issues that faced Egypt over the past several decades. Salem (2019) argues that both the show and novel “weave together a narrative of

modern Egyptian history through the intimate details of a family thereby making use of the domestic sphere as a trope to make broader political claims about the problems facing Egypt "

(1). I think that *Segn El Nessa* as well make broader political claims about issues of Egypt, in the same subtle manner of *Zaat* by using a medium of sorts. The medium/location in *Segn El Nessa* is prison rather than family. I argue that the difference of location has different consequences in terms of response and measures of representations, where in *Zaat* there was no need for a disclaimer like the one quoted previously which strictly assured that this work did not mean to offend anyone. The prison therefore presents itself as a more dangerous representation of reality than the sphere of an "apolitical" family, even though *Zaat* is highly political in its implications. In *Zaat*, the main character is a woman who seems to live her life passively accepting any catastrophe to raise her family in a "quiet" matter, however in the end scene she is fed up from her passivity when her politically active female child gets arrested and joins a protest which is generally understood as the January 2011 revolution. This fact that this scene was aired in 2013 and *Segn El Nessa* have to disclaim their intentions in 2014 tells a story of a quick shift in freedom of speech in one year. Muhammed Morsi, elected after the revolution was deposed in July 3, 2013 by the military in which the current president, Abdel Fattah El Sisi, is part of. According to Mohamed Elmeshad (2015) who writes for Committee to Protect Journalists, El Sisi shut down two newspapers and all privately pro-Morsi television stations. It was made apparent that the relationship between the regime and the media was going to be of importance since the early days of him settling in power. A new discourse arised in May 3, 2014, where he met with Egyptian media and lectured them on the media's role in "unifying the nation"(7).

Despite refraining from the politics of the original play by Assal, there are certain literary elements, styles, and structure which are kept, enforced, and enhanced. In the introduction of the

play's published script, Nehad Sulayhah, a professor and drama critic whose focus is on criticism, interpretation, and history, states that the core of the play is described to follow a cycle-like flow of story building. In its dramatic formation, the story of the series is in constant connecting and disconnecting in perpetual motion intertwining the women's stories to intersect at points and take their own form at others. The perpetual motion is also time-defined free where the past, present, and future is not rigid. The basis of this dramatic formation is different from the Aristolian one where the dramatic formation takes on a linear course which builds up to a plot. Aristolian drama does not accept multiplicity of perspective, intersections, or pluralism. Sulayhah argues that the Aristolian theory of drama was a reflection of the historical discourse of his time, where the white man made and attended drama alone, therefore the drama reflected the male perception of life which is linear.

In a book titled *An Introduction to Feminism and Theater*, Elaine Aston (2003) speaks of the same idea where "linear time" is linked to alienating ideas of women's "speaking" experiences. Feminist criticism here tries to understand women's experiences "left mute by the cultures of the past" and has highlighted the concept of the "cyclical". Aston then references Gillian Hannah, an Irish author, stage, film, TV and voice actor, describes Monstrous Regiment early work as refusing of linear structure which does not include women's experiences (Aston 2003,51). She reviews the work by stating

"It's precisely a refusal to accept that life is linear...that it has a comprehensible beginning, middle and end, which has to do with male experience. I think men experience the world like that. They are born into a world where they can map out life...It has a form, a shape. It has to do with a career. It has to do with your work... Now for a woman,

life is not like that. It does not have that pattern. For a woman life and experience is broken backed” (Hannash 1978:8).

Charlotte El Shabrawy writes in a review in Mada Masr, an independent liberal online newspaper, how this story which highlights Ghalia, includes various subplots, characterized by “very detailed reminiscent of naturalism, a style of writing in which the role of society, family and even heredity determine a character's behaviour and ultimately his or her outcome in life (The novels of 19th century French writer Emile Zola and his later American counterpart Theodore Dreiser are good examples (El Shabrawy 2014, 7).

The Invisible Shackles Visible on Screen : Societal ills as Characters

Prison, Saber, is not a high fence nor it is a locked door... prison can be in a piece of clothes you do not want to wear... in people you wish not to encounter... in a profession that you do not like... prison is feeling shattered and self-defeated, and I want to be free, like this waterfall (self translated from the series).

This is a line said by Nelly Karim (who plays the protagonist, Ghalia) talking to her lover Ahmed Dawoud (who plays the villain, Saber) when she was telling him how even though a prison guard in her first day in duty actually feels that she is imprisoned. This line in the second episode is important to mention because it brings one of the themes of this series into light: no matter how far one may think they are from being imprisoned, even if one is in the opposite position aka being a prison guard, the foundation and shackles that lead one into imprisonment are already put on one's arms and are inevitably going to be pulled towards prison. Invisible

shackles, as unfortunate circumstances, infiltrate into certain women's lives gradually but surely to lead them to prison. Ghalia takes this stance and perspective, years before she actually gets imprisoned. There is a lot of foreshadowing, for in this same episode the director highlights how, in her first day in duty, Ghalia is terrified of encountering or even walking past prisoners with murder charges, the very same charge she will be given, twice. In an echo of what is mentioned about a murderer in Saadawi's memoirs, a prison guard in this series who plays the role of Ghalia's substitute for a mother since the prison guard community is depicted to be a close community who live in the same neighborhood, remarks to Ghalia while introducing her to the murderess ward that the murderers are the best of people and are "chivalrous" in comparison to women charged with other "crimes", but their "bad luck" leads them to "encounter men who deserve to be killed". The importance of this scene for my analysis is not only seen in the use of a repeated theme of asserting that the murderers "are the best of people", but because of the physical space Abou Zekry captures in this scene. May Nizar Serhan in her paper *From Text to Screenplay Gendering the Nation in Mariam Naoum's Literary Adaptations*, states that the cinematography of this series walk the viewer through the prison's bakery where "a better quality bread is made than outside", the nurseries, its laundromats where women get paid for laundry work, literacy classes, and library. This presents a space that is able to interact with prisoners and "inform their relations to one another". This journey in its depth reflects a bond and a sense of belonging to the space, but also emphasizes these women's essential differences as they experience and interact with this space in new personalized ways. The next aim in this is "to construct various "prisons" outside the prison walls, from the economic destitution of Egypt's remote villages, to the social bubble of Cairo's uber-rich, and from the oppressive slum walls, to the stifled aspirations of men, and naïve romantic ideals of women (Serhan 2017, 96).

Ghalia is a hopeless romantic, for her driving force in life is love. She loved a man named Saber, a bus driver for years who keeps delaying their marriage and blames that on bad economic circumstances. Ghalia keeps naively believing Sabir and supporting him financially with the little money she gets from her work, even though she herself needs it to prepare their house to get married. Sabir takes her money and uses it to marry a woman of higher class, to grant himself a luxurious life-style. The circumstances in which Saber married are peculiar, and reflect society's attachment to traditional ideas of honor and methods of restoring it. Honor is depicted to be defined in terms of its relation to women's sexual innocence. Saber seduces this second woman Mona before marriage and in an attempt to save face and rescue his daughter from possible shame, convinces saber to marry her in exchange for giving him a microbus to be paid in instalments. When the girl, who is innocent and unaware of Saber's intentions, understands that Saber does not really love her, her feelings of guilt and rumination for falling prey to him, drives her to stop eating and ultimately she dies giving birth.

Radi, Mona's father, even though he is affected by ideas of sexual innocence, is not the traditional misogynist father who despises his daughter for having sex, for this situation is complicated by the daughter's willingness and love for Saber. He is depicted to have been pressured to marry off his daughter to Saber, for the daughter loves Saber and it is the only way to having an "honorable" heterosexual relation in the Egyptian society. Radi, loving his daughter, takes financial responsibility for her, even though she is married, for he does not want his daughter to live a life of poverty with Sabir and continues to take care of her until her death. Shortly, Saber repents to Ghalia, whose naivety and eternal love to Sabir makes her forgive him for his marriage. Radi visits Sabir in his new martial house to collect unpaid installments which Sabir stalls to pay. In a scene where Sabir tries to injure Ghalia because Ghalia found out that

Sabir was not paying the installments, Radi tries to save Ghalia and gets killed by Saber's knife accidentally. The importance of Radi's character is that even though misogyny is portrayed as the core reason for women's imprisonment, there are men who fall victims to the traditionally granted patriarchal structure and who are there to reflect the existence of the occasional sympathetic male character.

Sabir immediately escapes from the crime scene, leaving Ghalia to take the blame for his crime which leads her to be unjustly prisoned. In prison, Ghalia, has her child who dies at the age of two, leaving bitterness and a wish for revenge in her heart. Her sole mission is to avenge her son's death which she blames on Saber. Her daily life in prison shows the transformation from her initial sweetness and innocence to vengeful apathy. She went from a simple woman who dreams to be married to a man she loves and having her own house and children to a woman who's full of anger and resentment, waiting anxiously to get her chance for revenge. I think there might be an intentional symbolism in the director's depictions of Ghalia's house, which is very central to Ghalia's life events. Ghalia inherits this house from her deceased mother who worked as a prison guard. If she wishes to continue living in this house she is forced to leave her work as a tailor and work as a prison guard as well. She decides to do so even if it's against her wishes for the sake of living in the house. These houses are designated next to prison and are owned by the ministry of interior. Ghalia, even though given an occupation characterized by toughness which is contrary to her innocent nature, wants to paint this government inherited tough looking house in pink and saves money for that purpose. Pink, in nature a neutral color like all colors, has a gendered symbolism and societally/traditionally/ stereotypically recognized to depict innocence, and especially feminine innocence. Ghalia's insistence to use her hard earned money on painting her house's walls in pink is an indication of how much she desires to pursue a wife-

house-children life model. She is pressured by Saber to give him money which interrupts the process of painting her house, leaving more than half of it still unpainted in pink. I read this as reflecting life's unfortunate circumstances, crystalized by Saber, as constant disruption of Ghalia's innocent dreams and the impossibility of realizing it despite her greatest of efforts.

In an interview done by CairoScene with Naoum, she says that she is against judging her characters and she even loves the most despicable of them. She describes Aziza (played by Salwa Khattab) ,the drug dealer, as “ tough and practically a drug dealer, but on the other hand she is loyal to a fault, and stands up for those around her.” This fault is manifested in her immense love towards her husband. While she and her husband are founders of a drug empire, she is the one who willingly gives herself up almost every time they are caught. Whenever she enters prison she is well-received by all the prisoners and prison guards who look up to her as a mother, like the figure Badeaa' in Saadawi's memoir, Aziza is generous both with her money and time to all prisoners who call her “ Mama Aziza”. Aziza, in her toughness and control over all, is considered to represent a matriarchal powerful woman whose only point of weakness is her love for her husband. A girl Aziza “adopts” in prison betrays her trust when leaving prison and marries Aziza's husband. Aziza, with all her connections and power, including the drug dealing workers who she calls her “boys”, take her side against her husband, and set up the girl to bring her back to prison where Aziza takes revenge from her. She gets revenge on her husband's second wife by shoving pepper flakes in her vagina with the assistant of her other “daughters”. This act brings her two years of imprisonment but she expresses no care when she say “ I had to take my right to cool my fire.” The importance of Aziza's character is to show that despite overwhelming patriarchy, women of matriarchal nature or “alpha” women still exist in Egypt. Aziza's character was and still is widely popular to the extent that one of her scenes where she

was posed in a determined posture holding a cigarette in her hand became a popular meme that still lives today even though six years has passed since the airing of the series. Another reading can be detected in Aziza's story, which is despite Aziza's strength virtues, a single weakness, her love to her husband, is enough reason to end up in prison, but still she is not submissive as she "cooled her fire" with revenge.

Resisting by taking revenge (committing a crime) is not only the theme of the matriarch Aziza. Ashgan, a sorrowful mother who kills for her daughter's owner when her husband attempted to rape the child, also demonstrates resistance through "crime", a crime that is not followed by remorse. Asghan expresses to her daughter while she visits her in prison, that her being sentenced does not matter as long as the daughter can live "with her head up high". This story echoes El Saadawi's story of Fatheya the murderer which dimensions and attitude were discussed previously. The story in Al Assal's play has one different factor: that the raped victim was the man's daughter in law instead of being a step daughter. However the attitudes of the three (Fathiya, Asghan, Shafiqqa) and their telling of their stories all express pride and lack of remorse. In Assal's play, Shafiqqa , appears in the play as a wandering mad woman who repeats "Loved, got deceived, killed, relieved." Assal restrains from telling Shafiqqa's story up until the end of the play and in doing so leaves the reader to dismiss this character as mad. At a later point, one realizes that Shafiqqa acts on her own initiative. Manisty writes "The monster woman is the woman who refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative, who has a story to tell- in short a woman who rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her." In Michel Foucault's *On Madness*, he describes psychiatry as a monologue by reason about madness (Serhan 2017, 104). When finally Shafiqqa delivers her story in a form of a monologue she is asked if she is relieved now as she killed her husband, she answers "When you release the worry

from your heart, when you wash away your disgrace with your own hands, when you take your revenge, then you can be happy anywhere, inside prison or outside it”.

Another character Hayat, brings “female madness” to a level which is not only social but political. Hayat seems to suffer from a form of non diagnosed OCD or paranoia. The series shows the gradual attrition of Hayat who is devastated by wider state failed economic and social policies, to the point of wanting to end her life and her family. Hayat, an Arabic name which means life, slowly retreats from life as she becomes obsessed with collecting newspaper articles and pinning them on the wall. These pieces of news remind her of the constant dangers she is facing: issues of the pollution of the water, cancerous vegetables spread by toxic chemicals, news about teachers sexually harassing students, the destruction of an entire neighborhood as a result of sewage pipe explosion, and dehumanizing conditions of Egyptian life, all take a toll on her psyche. In a prolonged scene, Hayat is taking a bus home where a man sticks himself close to her and starts touching her, her face is shown to have a mix of both detachment and horror as she does nothing in response. In fear of her children getting harmed, she bans them from going to school and restricts them and her husband from normal life activities, in which her husband soon explodes and states “you are not Hayat (life), you are death.” This observation is accurate both in its symbolic sense and later in its literal sense, when Hayat poisons herself and her family which results in their death and a failed self-suicide attempt. Hayat, even though clearly affected by mental health, is still sent to prison.

Serhan quotes Chesler who addresses the critical question of women and mental health. “Madness”, “a peculiar disease of our civilization in which others are elected to live out the chaos that we refuse to confront in ourselves” (Chesler qtd. In Serhan 2017, 106)” This same

quote echoes the idea behind Mamdouh Edwan's book *In Defense of Madness*. Edwan, a Syrian poet and playwright, describes what I think Hayat's reaction to life by stating:

There is something maddening about our lives. When no one goes mad it means that our senses are indolent... madness in some of us is a healthy indication to a nation which does not endure insult, it is also a proof that the healthy have not kept their minds because they are dull but rather kept sane for they are working or will work on washing the insults (Edwan 2018,16).

Edwan stresses the importance of madness as a cry for change as it exposes the suffocating world and exposes how submissive people are accepting of dreadful realities (Edwan 2018, 16). Hayat story might be taken as what Jason Manning defines as "moralistic suicide" in *Suicide as Social Control* where he states "any suicidal behavior that expresses or handles a grievance, whether the act is one of protest, punishment, appeal, atonement or avoidance. Hayat, protesting the inhuman conditions surrounding her, commits the one act of resistance/protest available to her (Serhan 2017, 106). Nevertheless, this attempt of control over her fate and surrounding leads her to prison. Therefore, even attempting to escape the shackles of a difficult life, is a crime in the eyes of the law.

Honor has more than one Face:

"In this dirty-minded world you are either somebody's wife or somebody's whore, or fast on your way to becoming one or the other." This quote by John Irving in his novel *The world according to Garp*, describes the life of the character Dalal (played by Tunisian Dorra). Dalal, finds herself in a socioeconomic position which pressures her to take one of these

Madonna/whore roles in her society. Dalal's attrition, point of collapse, and optimum plot was when she was forced to choose the "whore" road for reasons of practical survival. She is torn between her moderately religious mom, and her aunt who is a pimp. Her point of no return was when her mother refused to forgive her for being caught in a "private party" even though her sexual innocence was proven. In complicating a widely viewed black and white dichotomy of good vs. evil, her pimp aunt seems to lovingly take care of her all the way even when Dalal keeps blaming her for her fate in prison. The mother, even though she represents what the wider Egyptian society considers morals social norms, has gained criticism according to comments in the popular medium of youtube where the series can be found online. The mother is seen as to be "heartless and brutal" for disowning her daughter which is made worse by the mother's apparent hypocrisy when she accepts *Haram* money (money obtained from religiously condemned acts) in this case of Dalal's later work in prostitution. The comments, even though condemning Dalal's decision to work in realms which are considered prostitution (working in a club regardless of sex work is considered to fall under prostitution), condemn the mother greatly for neglecting her daughter which could have been prevented if the mother was more forgiving to Dalal's first "mistake." The importance of Dalal's character is inferred in that her low economic status, where she was born as the eldest daughter of a single mother, coupled with her desire to better herself and her family's living conditions, were the invisible shackles which led her to work as a prostitute. Her work as a sales person in a female clothing shop gained her next to nothing, while working as a prostitute improved up her family's living conditions, allowing her to pay for her two sister's education. Years later, in a heart breaking scene, her sisters who managed to graduate from private universities due to Dalal's paying for it, refuse to take Dalal back into their household and calls her money "haram", and say that Dalal "failed" in life and became a

prostitute because she was not “smart enough to finish her schooling.” This prejudiced attitude further imprints on Dalal to continue in prostitution. Dalal’s story, like all others, highlights a transformation in a core personality character. Dalal turns from shy, timid, and innocent, to become an “international trafficking pimp” which leads her to enter prison multiple times later. Dalal’s stories also show examples of women who absorbed patriarchy’s values and used it against family members, which leads to imprisonment.

Naoum, breaks away from uni-dimensional notions of the theme of honor which is usually represented in media and literature to present a reality rarely spoken of. Naoum depicts the world, including Egyptians who many do not know of, the Hangaraniyyah gypsy tribe, whose whole livelihood depends on stealing. Newspaper stealing sections sometimes write headlines of a Hangaraniyyah women being caught for pickpocketing, or “an arrest of a Hangaraniyyah gang” The Hangaraniyyah have women on top of the power hierarchy for they are the sole providers of the family. Women are the ones who go out and steal daily, while men care for the children and prepare meals and receive pocket money from their wives at the end of the day. How honor plays through the Hangaraniyyah is in the story of a wife who fails to provide for her family. While the idea of honor is still weighed on women, they are held in higher regard where the tribe mourns the birth of a boy, and celebrates that of a girl. Naoum depicts a scene where the police invades the tribe’s neighborhood, in what seems to be an annual happening before Eid (a Muslim religious festival), to arrest the tribe’s women for their stealing activities. In what feels like a comedic scene, the police drag all the women of the neighborhood to the police cars while the men follow, wailing and complaining “ how are we going to eat, now?” This scene which reverses what is stereotypically known of what constitutes men’s and women’s honor, where

women's ability to provide is absolute honor to her, and in doing so she is the one to be led to prison for keeping her family's honor (stealing).

From the Simplicity of the Rural to the Roaring Noises of the City:

Two stories in *Segn El Nessa* play on the common literary theme of the transition from village/rural living to the city. Their significance is that this transition when occurring during patriarchal socio-economic conditions leads both characters to prison. According to Anthony D. Cavaluzzi's paper *Migration and Maturation*, African writers have often explored the disastrous consequences of urbanization for the peasantry. The economic horror of most Third World countries is evident in the significant disparities between rural areas and cities. This theme is common to contemporary Egyptian writers and two notable writers who have been widely recognized are Naguib Mahfouz's *Zuqaq Al-Midaqq* (Midaqq Ally) and Yusuf Idris's *Al-Naddaha* (The Siren) (Cavaluzzi 1993, 27). Both novels have been made into popular movies in the sixties and seventies of the past century. The difference of what *Segn El Nessa* presents is that this popular theme is finally written, directed, and presented from the female point of view, which brings about many factors, and refrains from a linear storytelling/presenting frame. It represents the shackles which rural women encounter during their lives.

A lot can be inferred from the story of Zeinat (played by Nesreen Amin), nicknamed "Zeinat elly bitzawa' el Banat" (the one who beautifies the girls), who in the words of the author of an online, Nesma Nafea, "enters prison looking like a doll and eventually turns into a living corpse." Zeinat appears to be a prostitute who is a bubble of joy, contrary to the many depictions of the sad prostitute, and she happily befriends and applies her beautifying skills on everyone in

prison. Her poverty profession seems to have no negative effect on her while she spreads happiness in prison. Her high spirits start to be knocked down only after she is hit ill by kidney stones, in which she is told by doctors that she needs surgery she cannot afford. She stalls for a year while she slowly loses her vibrance and withers away until she is offered a “free” surgery, which at the end took her healthy kidney and left her with the ill one. Her story highlights the organ trafficking in Egypt and how it preys on the poor, Zeinat expresses “ they (the rich) tear our flesh apart, even when we are still alive!” The character Zeinat, in her willingness to go to Cairo and leave her village years ago, highlights a common theme of where village girls in literature such as Mahfouz's and Idrisi's character long for a full-sized life away from the stagnancy of their simple rural lives. Zeinat expresses to her cousin Rida in the same scene “ I love life, I really do”, in which her cousin comments “ But it does not love us back.”

Another interesting perspective which Naoum presents in the story of Zeinat, is that Zeinat is a character that actually pursues getting arrested and being in prison, especially after her illness. Because she finds only cruelty and dehumanization outside prisons seen in how her kidney was stolen, she purposely gets herself arrested to find comfort and care between her fellow prisoners, prison guards, and prison's hospital staff. Naoum indicates in this scene, that for women of Zeinat's sort, the actual prison is not in the physical prison, but in the real wider world. Indicating that physical chains and visible shackles can be more humane than the real world's invisible factors/shackles. Rida (played by Ruby) reveals to the viewers later in the episodes a detail of symbolic importance: she calls her cousin “ Shafiqah”. It appears that it is Zeinat's real name, a name which is a derivative of the word “pity”. The significance of this is implied in the fact of the two layers of Zeinat which depends on location. While she is known in the Qanatir prison of Cairo as Zeinat which is a colloquial Arabic for “ beauty, niceness, and

decorations" indicating a superficial layer over the real original name of " Shafiqa" which she was born with in her village and which have shaped her life with its tragedies. Finally, a significance which the character Zeinat serves is the presence of light-heartedness, laughter, and humor even in the midst of a harsh socio-economic and humanitarian crisis.

Rida appears later in the episode to serve an extension of Zeinat's story, an extension that is both a distinguished parallel, but complimentary to the narrative of the village to city migration and transformation. Rida's core tragedy stems from the obstinance of her father who sends her to work as a house servant in Cairo for the sole purpose of getting money to fund her male siblings education. An intersect can be observed here between Dalal's story whose main purpose was to educate her female sisters and Rida's father who forced his daughter to extend herself outside of the village for her male brothers. differences also arise between how a "city" person thinks and a "rural" person does, where for Rida's father male education is prioritized, while Dalal did not consider the gender of her siblings in her attempts to provide them with education. A question of agency also rises and degrees of agencies are presented. Socio-economic factors of both women are detrimental for their choices, however Dalal is given more agency in choosing her path as a prostitute, than Rida who totally crashed into an even harsher reality because of the extra shackle of being from the rural side of the country, where traditions hold a stronger grip.

A point of tension comes from Rida's relationship with her father which is related to roles and social identities where she is the main provider for the family, but he still attempts to control her. Ghadeer Ahmed says that as much as men's social identities are tied to notions of control and violence, it is also related to the notions of providing. In patriarchal systems, the male is considered to be the sole breadwinner of the family. However, the economic changes

which Egypt witnessed during the past few decades changed this dynamic where both men and women share this responsibility. This narrowing of the social role of a man was consequenced also by a narrowing of their scope of influence on women. In Farha Ghannam's book *Live and Die Like a Man: Gender Dynamics in Urban Egypt*, Ghannam, an anthropology researcher, observes that there is a decrease in the scope of control on young women who work outside of home and who provide for their families. This is due to their contribution in decreasing the burden of providing on the man of the family. This changes the power relations within the family (Ghadeer Ahmed 2020). However, when Rida tries to break from the shackles of this control from her dad by marrying a young man she meets, but he refuses in fear that she would quit her job and stop providing him and her siblings with money. Rida's story also dives deep into the dynamics of an upper-middle class family, where she witnesses the increased freedom allowed for the daughter who is in the same age range of Rida. The family is portrayed to be treating her well, but Rida seems to take advantage of the kindness of the daughter who later insults her for using her clothes without permission. This insult seems to trigger a deeper sense of inferiority in Rida who sets the daughter on fire which kills her, leading Rida to jail. In a later scene Rida's mom blames the father for sending Rida by force to the city, saying she should have stayed safe around them.

According to an interview with Mariam Naoum, the plotline that was most controversial in the whole series was Rida's story. She says that the upper class have had a worried reaction as they told Naoum "you made us fear the domestic workers in our home." She explains in the interview that this was not her point, her point was to portray a reality. I mention this fact to point out that this reaction of the upper class reproduces the narrative of the "savageness of the poor", and it is an elitist reaction by itself that feeds into the construction of the capitalist

misogynist classist structure of the patriarchy. The *Segn el Nissa* series aimed at exposing realities that “are actually worse than the fiction presented” according to Naoum (Cairoscene online). However, on the other hand it might actually also expose privilege inherited in the collective consciousness. In Amin Malouf’s words there is a sure way to combat that “For it is often the way we look at other people that imprisons them within their own narrowest allegiances. And it is also the way we look at them that may set them free.” “Free” in this context can have literal implications.

Conclusion:

In this thesis, I aimed to answer the question of what constitutes “invisible shackles” that affect women in the Egyptian society through using selected mediums. I attempted to give a view of a specific context which starts approximately in the 1960’s with President Gamal Abdel Nasser’s arrests to female activists through the 1970’s with Sadat imprisoning El Saadawi and Al Assal, through modern representations of socio-economic imprisonments in the series *Segn El Nessa*.

I started by stating that my “eyes” as a place of determining context and methodology, and ended by also paying importance to the “eyes” as detrimental for a conclusion of specific events. I highlight this because I want to stress how any research is based upon “choices” the researcher actively makes at every point. Then I spoke about the context of a violent society characterized by classism and why it is detrimental to take the classist nature of Egypt as a central point of embedded violence. Then I moved on to discuss a possible relation between a “violence/criminal” resistance as a natural response to a violent society and how this type of resistance is combated by placing its subjects in the site of a prison. Then, for the purposes of giving evidence to the suggested notion, I delved into a close reading to different outlets *Memoirs from Women’s Prison* and *Segn El Nessa*, which both take place in Qanatir Prison though at different times. The aim was to trace the thread of common intersectional injustices which leads to women ending in prison. Storytelling becomes a crucial tool because it does not only provide context, but also is wary of specific circumstances. Patterns be found in the personal which results in findings of problematic nature. In my second chapter, I discussed how political prisoners find ways of solidarity despite their great apparent ideological inclinations. How, for “criminal” prisoners, appointing an accountability to God or a man is discussed as separate sites of blame, and how both interpretations can occur simultaneously. The chapter discusses Fathiya as a symbol of all crimes, unregrettable and as a site of pure injustice where invisible shackles become visible, but still denied and imprisoned. The third chapter gives a more in-depth look into the private and public lives of women who constitute the bottom of society, and how their lives weave through forms of systematic oppression to end up in prison. *Segn El Nessa* exposes multiple injustices which manifest in different “crimes”. It also gives unromantic depictions of women’s life as they resist to passively accept a life of injustice, even if it means

losing their own freedom, against their will. This paper makes use of academic tools, to represent, as best as I can, a reality of the bottom of the bottom, whose voices are silenced in Egypt's darkest places to this day. Through these heavily detailed and localized descriptions, I argue that shackles exist within society disguised as laws and norms intersecting with each other, which increases the possibility of the marginalized to end up imprisoned.

The theoretical approach has succeeded for the purposes of this paper. Choosing to read crime/imprisonment through resistance in both chosen mediums and determining the causes through them worked well for the reasons of resonance and repetition. Repetition is exemplified in terms of what is normalized, the story of a working class woman killing her husband has reached a pattern of unshocked reception, which marks this type of crime in the context of Egypt. The analysis of it through the story of Fathiya in El Saadwi's memoirs and Ashgan in *Segn El Nessa and* through the medium of Al Assal's play, briefly discussed, asserts this fact. Taking a non-fiction memoir (El Saadawi), a fictional play inspired by her own imprisonment (Assal), and a TV series (Naoum), confirms the idea of women showing ultimate resistance through this crime, and shows that attrition of working class Egyptian women, though it take different modernized form, exists in the Egyptian society both urban and rural. The theoretical approach of aiming to understand the reasons which lead to crime worked in a sense that it showed the individuality of many cases/stories, which puts its subjects as their own narrators. In El Saadawi's memoir, she was the speaker of her own political imprisonment, Saadawi tried to portray the voices of other prisoners using her own voice which raises a limitation where Saadawi's memory and own perspective influences the representation of other characters in her own memoir. Therefore, Naoum's series fills the gap which Saadawi's misses, that is giving a multi-dimensional perspective of over seven women, each having their own non-linear life

representations. On the other hand, Saadawi compliments Naoum's lack of political perspectives, which any series aired on TV cannot represent due to the Egyptian media restrictions.

The term "invisible shackles" used in this thesis as a centre theme is extracted from El Saadawi as an introduction to the tackled *Memoir's from Women's Prison*. What she meant by this, as demonstrated in this thesis, is that invisible shackles lead one into the illusion of being free. In this paper, I aimed to show that it is the "president's fault" as El Saadawi said, which leads people into imprisonment through the invisible shackles of poverty, ignorance, and patriarchy's ideas of sexuality and honor. In presenting the stories of many women in prison, the invisible shackles reappear in these repeated categories and themes. Also, in this research I aimed to widen the range of what "resistance" is and can be by breaking down static/disabling labels attached to gender, in this case women.

In a paper by Michael Huspek and Lynn Comerford, titled *How Science is Subverted: Penology and Prison Inmates' Resistance*, the researchers discuss how Foucault was focused on the discursiveness of work of scientific knowledge, how it silences "nonscientific truth value that subjects had previously drawn on for their own self-identity". Foucault states that having people being transgressed and confined in place markers for knowledge are urged to resist the conditions of their internment, in this he refers to subjugated knowledge. "Belonging to the psychiatric patient, the prison inmate, the delinquent, and "located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity". I am referring to Foucault ideas of knowledge, to emphasize my approach which relied on subjects as "sites" who make and constitute structures. How I established the existence of resistance is reflected in what Foucault's summarizes as such "Resistance and power are reciprocally constituted: resistance is only possible where there is an exercise of power, and vice versa. (Foucault qtd.in Comerford &

Huspek 1996, 340).” The women’s crimes are considered as acts of resistance since power/force is exercised upon them.

This research would have been more comprehensive if academic materials were available that analyze the 2014 TV series. While there is an excessive amount of Egyptian and African academic materials of what is considered “classic”, a clear distinction of materials related to pop-culture is noticed. Therefore, the third chapter relied heavily on my own interpretations. Unfortunately, since Mariam Naoum only came out to the light during the past decade, there are few sources which discuss her as a prominent screenplay writer focusing on gender. Also, I have not found resources discussing crime as resistance as a theoretical framework in the context of the Middle East, however I must note that there might be papers in which my resources were not successful to reach, mostly because of research algorithms limits, and because of my location in the Netherlands away from Arabic resources.

By writing this paper, I aimed to open doors to questions of penological natures. By exploring the factors/causes/invisible shackles of what leads Egyptian women into prisons. Questions of penology and nature of punishment rise up. There is a dire need of “ re-defining” what crime means in this specific context, with specific pressures which contributes to the psyche of women in general and women who commit “crime” in specific. A thorough research is needed to revisit notions of “violent” women with their new identity statuses as a result of imprisonment and being a part of a violent society. This opens the door to a completely different approach which questions penology’s claim to knowledge.

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