

Original Research Article

**A Gender-Sex System that afrocentralizes the Issue of a Traditional Female identity. The Case in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* and Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib***

Abib SÈNE

Laboratory of African and Postcolonial Studies, Department of Anglophone Studies, Cheikh Anta Diop University, Senegal

Corresponding Author: Abib SÈNE, E-mail: senabb2@yahoo.fr

**ARTICLE INFO**

Article History

Received: April 14, 2020

Accepted: May 21, 2020

Volume: 3

Issue: 5

DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2020.3.5.9

**KEYWORDS**

Gender, Stratification,  
Exploitation, Woman, Sex,  
Rebellion

**ABSTRACT**

This paper aims at spotlighting the process of dehumanization women are victim of in many African traditional societies. From Cairo to Mogadiscio, women are all by themselves and go through the after-effects of the social and sexual brutalities they are daily subjected to. Nawal El Saadawi and Nuruddin Farah, in *Woman at Point Zero* and *From a Crooked Rib*, have brought on surface the stark stratification organized in age-old societies to the detriment of women. Thus being, the paper analyses the physical mutilation, the sexual exploitation women suffer from both in Egypt and Somalia and the whacks they take to liberate themselves from the enslaving social cages in which they are confined. Its findings contribute in showing up the mute but decisive changes that operate among the female gentry in religions-oriented countries in Africa. It underlines as well the de-phallocratization of traditional systems that stiffen women's strong aspirations to freedom.

**Introduction**

Said to be born out of man's crooked rib, the woman is defined as a particular being in many African societies. In their reflexions, Nawal El Saadawi and Nuruddin Farah have, respectively, in *Woman at Point Zero* and *From a Crooked Rib* desacralized the sacrosanct silence on women's living conditions in Egypt and Somalia. Known as Islamic Republics, the two countries, through patriarchal stratification systems, offer a congruent shake, if ever it exists, to the female blooming.

In their target to revise the place of women in their societies, the two authors put on surface the whys and wherefores of a feminized destitution, exploitation and browbeating. That being so, it becomes fair to flesh out an interrogative scene that rings as follow: is excision a form of mutilation or a bayonet coupling of the female body? Is women's body a value to merchandize and reify for the sake of man's enjoyment? Should the triggered 'violence' or 'deviant attitude' be condemned to the altar of male exclusive control of female rights and mandates? To shed light on such an interrogation corpus, we drive at putting forward the theory on the feminism of scapegoat. Defined by Jennifer L. Rike as being a gender-based system that "gives men advantages in ways which cause women immeasurable sufferings" (Rike 1996: 21), the scapegoat feminism places men's responsibility at the ground of the victimization of women. They are willy-nilly accused of being at the base of all the forms of mistreatments they go through.

To provide appropriate answers to the underlined problematic points, we plan to focus our reflexion on the trial of the female body and the germ of revolution in both Egyptian and Somalian societies in our selected corpus.

**A Mutilated Body: The Debunking Process of Femininity**

In Egypt, Eritrea, and Guinea, FGM prevalence is 75% or more in every region of the country. In other countries, the extent of the practice varies widely among regions. For example, in Mali,

nearly 90% or more of women in five regions [...]. In Tanzania, a high prevalence of FGM can be found in Arusha (81%), Dodoma (67%) and Mara (43%), while prevalence levels under 2% can be found in ten other regions. (Measure DHS CD-ROM 2005).

This assertion is informative enough to show how widespread Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is. Africa is one of the regions where it is mostly topical. Believed to originate from ancient Egypt, female cutting has imprinted its cultural marks on women's identity in the continent. In spite of sounding as a disparaging and value-laden term, Female circumcision finds its root in some traditions and religious inspired-civilizations in which it is regarded as a *sine qua non* condition to gain one's identity as a full woman. Indeed, to be circumcised in many hoary societies would mean to be a purified female, apt to be married, to bear children and offer to men full libidinal enjoyment. As such, any woman who fails or rejects the procedure of genital mutilation is marginalized and labelled unmarriageable.

The infibulation is considered to be a means of preserving female virginity. In *Woman at Point Zero*, Nawal El Saadawi comes back to that social phenomenon to unbosom the limits of a societal practice that justifies men's blueprint to orient, rhythm and measure out women's sexuality. Through the character of Firdaus the irony of the run-through is denounced and satirized in an attempt to laugh female genital mutilation out of the Egyptian society.

As an orphan child, Firdaus experiences sexual touching and skirting with her mate, Mohammadian. With an intact sexual anatomy, the child-girl feels some sensations that bodes a future of great physical harmony in her private life. Despite her young age, Firdaus discovers her femininity and likes the goose bumps she describes in finicky details:

I could play with the goats, climb the water-wheel, and swim with the boys in the stream. A little boy called Mohammadian used to pinch me under water and follow me into the small shelter and made of maize stalks. He would make me lie down beneath a pile of straw, and lift up my *galabeya*. We played at 'bride and bridegroom'. From some part in my body, where exactly I did not know, would come a sensation of sharp pleasure. Later I would close my eyes and feel with my hands for the exact spot. The moment I touched it, I would realize that I had felt the sensation before. Then we would start to play again until the sun went down, and we could hear his father's voice calling to him from the neighbouring field. I would try to hold him back, but he would run off, promising to come the next day (El Saadawi 2008: 12).

This descriptive survey of a young girl's body unkinks a self-discovery that will lead the child to be aware of the movements of her body before and after her genital mutilation. Deprived of sensitive handlebar, Firdaus is handed to a kinky uncle who willingly takes advantage of her niece's innocence to delve in sexual fondling with the one he is supposed to protect.

Indeed, the uncle's fingers, on Firdaus sexual organ, do not have the same dexterity as Mohammadian's touching. The body exposed to the uncle's ghoulish temptations is a mutilated corps disarmed of any kind of strong responsiveness. It is, undeniably, offered to amusement and incest like gestures. The victim informs in this way:

My *galabeya* often slipped up my thighs, but I paid no attention until the moment when I would glimpse my uncle's hand moving slowly from behind the book he was reading to touch my leg. The next moment I could feel it travelling up my thigh with a cautious, stealthy, trembling movement. Every time there was a sound of a footstep at the entrance to our house, his hand would withdraw quickly. [...] his hand would continue to press against my thigh with a grasping, almost brutal insistence (El Saadawi 2008: 13).

The little girl enters adulthood at an early age and misses to recover from her loss to enjoy womanhood. She is handicapped in her inner sexual being. She enlightens the following information:

He was doing to me what Mohammadian had done to me before. In fact, he was doing even more, but I no longer felt the strong sensation of pleasure that radiated from an unknown and yet familiar part of my body. I closed my eyes and tried to reach the pleasure I had known before but in vain. It was as if I could no longer recall the exact spot from which it used to arise or as though a part of me, of my being, was gone and would never return (El Saadawi 2008: 13).

Firdaus' loss mirrors the Egyptian woman's loss and therefore pinpoints the social drama the female gentry suffer from. They are mutilated, as it is said, to uphold their virginity up to their marital engagement. Dione puts it this way: "Female circumcision was instituted because of the value given to virginity and abstention since sexual intercourse was not allowed before marriage" (Dione 2016: 160).

Mostly organized into tribes, many Arabic countries emphasize kin group belongings and family ties. Honour being the common value cherished by social entities, female virginity is raised to a matter of life or death. "Female virginity and chastity are deemed significant in all societies to varying degrees, yet as cultural ideals they have been conflated with Arab and Muslim cultures through popular depictions" (Suad 2006: 457).

To experience extramarital sexual intercourses is quite intolerable in the old-age Egyptian society. Thus, to protect women from any temptation, their most sensitive organ, their genital anatomy has to be cut off. That masculine perception is as well shaped by the Somalian population where female mutilation is a common practice. In *From a Crooked Rib*, Farah, by the same token, italicizes the cultural meaning of genital ablation. For the sake of religion, women are expected to put the veil to cover up the whole body which, in fact, is said to be a space of enticements through which evil forces can lean on to mislead and misguide mankind. With such a stand, women are considered the Adam's Apple in men's garden. They are meant to be consumed with all of their savour of virginity. In his novel, Farah, like El Saadawi, takes on himself the sharp devoir to put a critical eye on a cultural feature that condemns the female subjects in a shape of "congenital inferiority" (G. Moktar 1981: 31).

While El Saadawi ironizes on the female cutting, Farah playacts the direct and indirect inconveniences related to it. A woman is to keep her chastity, otherwise, "if a woman slept with a man, her relations either shot her or knifed her to death" (Farah 1970: 87). Farah goes beyond the surgical operation to punctuate and call attention to the complications that go hand in gloves with sexual practices of the victims.

Circumcised at early age, Ebla is much more traumatized by her own virginity than by Awill's nuptial brutality. The narrator describes:

Ebla was frightened, not of Awill, but because she was a virgin. She had heard lots of women talking about the pain one undergoes when one has one's first sexual intercourse. She had been circumcised when she was eight: the clitoris had been cut and stitched (Farah 1970: 87).

Elba will continue her sexual experiences then, moving from one man to another without really valuing her sexuality as an enjoyable process. Parallel to her experiences, one can underline Firdaus' involvements. The latter, in spite of being excised, turns herself into a machine of sex that just helps her holder to cash out money and make the best of it.

Through the two protagonists' genital mutilations, both El Saadawi and Farah show the insufficiency and the inefficaciousness of clitoridectomy on women's wills to safeguard their virginity up to marital engagement, and therefore show up their incapacity to be not much of coupling at early age.

FGM does not imperatively go with respectable lives before and after marriages. The different results that derive from the traditional practice are the opposite of the targeted expectations. The practice seems to be much more an expression of gagging women's voice to give a free hand to men's masculinity than a means of purifying or protecting women.

### **The Trial of a Moored Body**

"The themes of body, sexuality and gender, as closely related entities, have become a major concern on the African continent" (Dione 2018: 416). This assertion from S. Dione, if necessary, highlights enough the centrality of the female body in the interactions and transactions among African communities. El Saadawi and Farah, in the same line of thoughts, have successfully voiced out the parody of existence women suffer from both in Egypt and Somalia. In *Woman at Point Zero*, the narrator follows the protagonist, who bears the brunt of her existence, to best exemplify the chief obstacles women come across in their daily lives.

Firdaus, a little girl, is at the end of her rope. Her uncle's wife is stomached by her presence in her husband's house and proposes to marry her with Sheikh Mahmoud, an old man who lives alone with a big pension. According to her, the young girl is not that beautiful lass with a big nose. Another significant aspect of the orphan's life she puts forward is her social status. She remains convinced that Firdaus is a poor lassie without any inherited fortune. As such, she has no choice to make, and she would be happy to get married to a deformed-faced old man:

This is her best chance to get married. Do not forget what a nose she has. It's big and ugly like a tin mug. Besides, she has inherited nothing, and has no income of her own. We will never find a better husband for her than Sheikh Mahmoud (El Saadawi 2008: 38).

Both Firdaus' uncle and aunt merchandise her body and jut out a plan to bargain and make profit by the former's marriage with the old man: "I will be able to pay my debts and buy some underwear, as well as dress" (El Saadawi 2008: 38). Being aware of her relatives' schedule, Firdaus sneaks out of her uncle's house to walk the night of despair and uncertainty in the streets. However, in spite of her attempt to unleash herself, Firdaus' relatives sold her to enrich themselves with a "big dowry" (El Saadawi 2008: 38).

Like Firdaus, Ebla is confronted with the issue of marriage. As an orphan, she is in charge of her grandfather. Old and weak, the latter, without consulting her grand-daughter's point of view, arranges a marriage between Ebla and Giumaleh. The man who "fit to be her [Ebla] father" (Farah 2006: 8), is rejected by the young girl who, indeed, wants her action to correspond with "the meaning of her name that stands for "Graceful" (Farah 2006: 7).

Firdaus is sold to an old pensioner by her relatives. Ebla, as well, is handed to an old man in exchange of camels. Her grandfather offers her for sale to better his days with cattle fortune. That form of barter informs much on the "animal" dimension women are believed to hold in the Somalian and Egyptian traditional societies.

In *From a Crooked Rib*, regardless of her disapproval, Ebla has nobody to find refuge in. The patriarchal system shuts all the exit doors for women's social rescue or bailing out. Females are interchangeable with camels and their bodies are submitted to men's will in all circumstances. Their sexuality is defined by men and their sexual partnership is arranged without any possible amendment. Ebla is then imprisoned in a social cloister from where her revolting voice cannot be heard. The narrator reports:

She was not a weak-minded girl, not once in her life had she stopped doing anything because it would harm others. But this time, it was different. It was too much for her, far too much. She could not bear to think of waiting to get married to Giumaleh (Farah 2006: 9).

Not being able to accept the idea of sharing her life with an old man she does not love, Ebla runs away from her home village. She joins Benet Wane town to live with a cousin. Having fled of her village to escape from early marriage, the young girl finds herself in another male abyssal handment. She is sold by Gheddi, her cousin who evolves in Benet Wene, to a sick man for one hundred shillings. A victim of the T.B disease, Dirir is a broker who wants to ease his days with a nineteen years old woman. He hands the girl's cousin a lot of money and sends a bundle of cloth to Ebla so as to afford the latter's hand. This transaction depicts the female protagonist as an actress victim of her belittlement as a woman and a girl Friday. From the height of her social misery, Ebla articulates an admission of powerlessness in voicing out a self-revelation that is both descriptive and evaluative. The narrator reports:

From experience she knew that girls were materials, just like objects, or items on the shelf of a shop. They were sold and bought as shepherds sold their goats at market-places, or shop-owners sold goods to their customers. To a shopkeeper what was the difference between a girl and his goods? Nothing, absolutely nothing (Farah 2006 :75).

The narrator provides an argument that elucidates the reasons that give ground to women's helpless situation. From an angle of a commentator, Ebla languishes in self-pity and takes on her individuality to represent a collectivity. She pleads: "we [women] are human beings" (Farah 2006: 71). She depicts and judges herself in her society as a 'hole' that just satisfies masculine worries to gain a place of existence. The Somalian society is then painted as a male high-handed nation where women articulate a Cartesian-inspired assertion: *I offer venal pleasures, so I exist*. In so being, Ebla informs the reader not about the how, but the why of her peregrinations. She identifies herself with a social category enclosed in a societal particularism that is only expressed in a place where the principle of the good is masculinized.

Furthermore, being exploited and daily harassed, the protagonist in *Woman at Point Zero*, leaves her hosted family to walk through the streets towards a non-defined destination. Her presence on the thoroughfares does not raise the passers-by's concerns. Nobody seems to be sensitive to the state of a brutalized and abandoned young girl, who feels a *nobodization* of her being. She comes in contact with ruthless men who benefit from the social "nomenklatura" (Touraine 1992: 237). Upset and disenchanted, Firdaus, surges into a self-interrogation that targets a sense of renaissance. The demons of "doxological ostracism" (Mohamed El Bouazzaoui 2016: 206) that befall on her life, have to be curbed and dammed to dislodge a happier destiny for her.

However, confronted with a world of brutality and pitilessness, Firdaus steps back home, preferring the daily harassment she goes through at her uncle's to the barbarity of the world outside. Her relatives profit by the occasional context to force her into a conjugal life with an old man. The narrator brings out the issue of early marriage in the Maghreb area. Indeed, shaped out by Islamic values, the Egyptian long-established society is a male-dominated community in which women are dispossessed of their voices and condemned to abide by men's likes and dislikes. Their bodies are considered to be so tantalizing that they have to be covered up. Their fine and exiting voices have to be silenced or up-down in behalf of morality and decency. In fact, by the name of their husbands, women, though, have lives worth to be lived. Otherwise, they remain non-entities, useless *junks* in a society ruled by principles that hush women's aptitude to epitomize a male-definition of the wrong and the right.

The female body is deadlocked to serve the desires of its processors; the one for whom femininity is an open book in which a man, in accordance with Islamic precepts, can offer to have access to it the way he likes. Sex appears then as a widget in men's hands and the latter are endowed with power to give it a social meaning and stand in their humanity.

In some Islamic societies, one does not become a woman; one is born a yes-woman. In *Woman at Point Zero*, the narrator underestimates suchlike realities and portrays Firdaus in a way she embodies the all-misfortune female figures in Arabic civilizations. Left for herself, she is denied access to the sphere of humanity and, as such, she is not welcome in the social interactions, networks of rights and duties. Any verbal public release is viewed as a defiant attitude and the correction is often brutal:

*Woman at Point Zero* issues of suppression of women, female self-alienation, struggle between masculinity and femininity and regaining of Saadawi depicts oppression of women through the leading protagonist Firdaus and her struggle in out shadowing the masculine domination. (Thinley Wangmo & Priyanka Dharma 2018: 2414).

Punishment related to female aloofness toward the dogmatic values can be physical, moral and cruel. Not being able to stomach her joblessness and total dependence to a man who takes care of her, Firdaus voices her ambition to stop her lockdown for a money-generative activity. Far without forgery! That noble purpose is understood by her 'Samaritan' as an act of rebellion, a lack of gratitude and a way of questioning the male domination status. As a consequence, the man shakes off his restraint and springs on Firdaus. The following is narrated in this way:

How dare you raise your voice when you're speaking to me, you street walker, you low woman? His hand was big and strong, and it was the heaviest slap I had ever received on my face. [...] he hit me with his fist in the belly so hard that I lost consciousness immediately (El Saadawi 2008: 52-53).

The unnamed man turns Firdaus into a prostitute. He sends some clients to her without her agreement. As long as she lives indoors in the man's house and fed by the latter, her body belongs to him. Her *raison d'être* is to get men released from their libidinal desires and stay submissive and faithful to her 'master's' commandments. Sex appears for men, in this Arabic shape-civilization, as a power relationship which encodes a face-to-face position grounded on a dominant male status against a dominee's position. Sexuality then goes by the philosophy of the strongest, which highlights a social stratification that debases women to boss men.

A dichotomized society rings the bell of patriarchy to denude the weakness and dehumanization of women. Through the peregrination of Firdaus, the narrator portrays a stark painting of the Egyptian society with a flighty-centred image of men

who, in fact, at the worst, promote and sustain a love-hate relation with women. The latter, in the interest of incarnating the *weak sex*, women are disempowered through short-term tactics that consist in objectifying them.

Trapped into the 'big finger' of her uncle and the 'big hands of Ayoumin', Firdaus falls down in the cruel heart of Sharifa who introduces her into the craft of prostitution. With her capitalist vision, Sharifa puts the price on the female sex and gives it a market-value. She talks to Firdaus: "nobody can touch me without paying a very high price. You are younger than I am and more cultured, and nobody should be able to come near you without paying twice as much as what is paid to me" (El Saadawi 2008: 59), Sharifa accommodates herself to the social system that does not give any room for manoeuvre to women. She vies for a margin and manages to survive *by all means necessary*. Her body is then a playground where she hooks men to suck money out of them. Her freedom of tone and her stand on citizenship are stiffened in her sexuality which *in fine* hunks down its 'executioner' to help Sharifa escape from a dog's life. Given that a man "does not know a woman's value" (El Saadawi 2008: 58), it is up to women to customize their libidinal activities out of prostitution. They feminize pain and *nobodiness* to inform about the gangrening yoke they put up with in the midst of masculinized communities. Firdaus is warned as follow: "we work, Firdaus, we just work. Don't mix feeling with work" (El Saadawi 2008: 60).

In a society where men play the first fiddle role, women lag behind and flat their being on the authoritative male power. Their presence is an absence that speaks the language of enjoyment. They are viewed as "the negative side of the masculine personae. The female sex is thus described as a lack, a 'whole'" (Cameron 1990: 81). El Saadawi's protagonist values that role, her only means for survival, to highlight her existence as a human being.

Firdaus is reified, Ebla is merchandised. Both are in men's sharp edges of domination and exploitation. The sordid business they are victim of finds its ground in an unbalanced society where social norms bear the hallmarks of patriar

### **A Rebellious Shuck and Jive Process**

In symmetry with Egypt, Somalia is a state where religion plays a major role. Language and business are coloured with Arabic traditions and install women in the tailed-position. The power of the word is by men and for men only. Women are generally portrayed as passive hearers and bystanders who just have a right and a duty to say 'yea'. In addition of being preys to domestic violence, Somali women find themselves having to take full responsibility for the well-being of their families and the carnal fulfilment of their husbands. Such a social stain seems to be superhuman in a context of extreme poverty. Lustrous should be her body. Thus, the necessity of beautification for man's private visual comfort. Her external being is a space of delectation, a dedicated ground of ludic and erotic games.

While Firdaus surges into venal business, Ebla ventures in a bigamy enterprise. "Why is a woman, a woman? (Farah 2006: 10) is the question for which Ebla searches an answer in her deep revolution to break through the taboos and prohibitions of her society. "Sold like cattle (Farah 2006:71), women in Mogadiscio value themselves in the bodily offering they daily pay off.

Having experienced a lot of successful marriages, Ebla outbraves the *masculinocracy* that celebrates men to silence women. She parallels her revolutionary idea of bigamy to that of polygamy to restore the female destiny out of conformity. The social system, through which the Somali creation is organized, is done without and against women. Like Firdaus who points an accusing finger at the male monocracy in the Egyptian society, Ebla acts in discordance with an excluding gender-based Somalian society and lepers "the culture of silence and fear" (Wa Thiong'o 2018: 77).

Both narrators-characters, in the two authors' novels, adopt the pedagogy of the teaching by example. The two women use their bodies to express a form of sexuality that foregrounds the contradictions in their religious oriented societies. In *Woman at Point Zero*, the main character lures men from all social categories. Her fashionable look and seductive shapes, *de facto*, give her the power to be an untiring heartbreaker. Policemen, pimps, trade unionists, princes, teachers, pensioners, men and women, all and sundry, bring out the unbearable lightness of their being in front of the irresistible charm regularly unfolded by the divorcee young lady. Firdaus' body becomes the epicentre of male sexuality. She then balances powers, overturns the sexist and masochist social system in which she evolves. She states: "The word impossible dos not exist for me" (El Saadawi 2008: 104).

Ebla, in *From a Crooked Rib*, stands for an actress conscious of her marginalization as a woman and an easygoing girl. From the height of her social experience, Ebla articulates an indirect denunciation in voicing out a self-revelation that is both *descriptive and evaluative*. She provides an argument that elucidates the reasons that give ground to her bi-conjugal life. Her

"Self" is placed in a position of a commentator who, by talking about her venal partners, addresses to the reader at the same time and thus takes on her individuality to represent a female mainstream.

Furthermore, Firdaus' option to become a prostitute is a concrete refusal to live under a man's directive in a marital institution. "My body at least is mine [...]. My capital is women's bodies, and I don't mix work and love together [...]. I don't want to be any body's slave" (El Saadawi 2008:103-104). The protagonist moves away from feminized and conventional submissiveness to the patriarchal system to privatize her sex and controls and orients her sexuality. She dodges the social predicaments dressed up to her way of emancipation to climb the social ladder and atop her pipe dreams to the sheer ranks of the privileged-few. As a prostitute, she propels her social status to the honourable dignitaries. She explains how she proceeds:

I preferred to be a free prostitute, rather than an enslaved wife. Every time I gave my body I charged the highest price. I could employ any number of servants to wash my clothes, hire a lawyer no matter how expensive to defend my honour, pay a doctor for an abortion, buy a journalist to publish my picture and write something about me in the newspaper. Everybody has a price, and every profession is paid a salary. The more respectable the profession, the higher the salary, and a person's price goes up as he climb the social ladder. One day, when I donated some money to a charitable association, the newspaper published pictures of me and sang my praises as the model of citizen with a sense of civic responsibility. And so from then on, whenever I needed a dose of honour or fame, I had only to draw some money from the bank (El Saadawi 2008: 99-100).

Thanks to her 'immoral' goings-on, officially condemned by the state religion, Firdaus officialises *urbi* and *orbi* her sexual orientation and gets herself accepted as such.

In a similar country where Islam rises as a dominating religion, Ebla smoothly slides through the rough social organization to impose her body and give voice to a non-conformist sexuality. She turns marriage into a catch-all term then multiplies and diversifies her experience of its meaning. Her "repressed memories" (Bon 27: 2017) of traumatic events related to her sexual activities are valued in a spirit of rakishness, diffidence and rule-breaking. From a man to another, Ebla, at the image of Firdaus, sharpens her taste and becomes choicest as for men she shares venal adventures. In a town in which "devils lived along with saints and whores face to face with their relations" (Farah 2006: 25), Ebla shares Firdaus spirit of revolution to face the male 'demon' that crosses out any form of female liberty and freedom of sexual option.

With a common belief that women dare not say "no" to any male marital proposal, Ebla brushes through set norms to reject lovers, suitors to her hand for a conjugal life. In so doing, she lets emerge a new type of woman in a patriarchal society in which women do not say no to [marriages] because it would mean more years to languish through an hundred agony to pass through and more "scratching" for them also" (Farah 2006: 45).

Even if the *mirror of her existence* is shattered (Farah 2006: 64), Ebla *refuses* to give up. She solemnizes her being as a woman, asserts and unwraps her true understanding of life. The narrator reports: "one should do whatever one wants to – that is life. That is what I love. Freedom: that was she worshipped (Farah 2006: 114).

If Firdaus moves from one quarter to another through Cairo in search of better living condition, Ebla, due to her sense of proneness to freedom, flees to Mogadiscio with Awill, a young man she meets at Benet Wene, a teacher she loves. Thus being, she liberates herself from the manacles of her cousin's authority and claims to assume a private ownership of venality.

As a married woman, Ebla contracts another marital life with a businessman, Tiffo. She adjures her body to demand a high *waji fur* fee to let the old man, Tiffo see her face and have sex with her:

- Uncover yourself [...]
- The Wadji fur fee.
- How much? He asked.
- A hundred Somali shillings [...]
- but this too much [...]. Here is the money (Farah 2006: 25).

A price is fixed, a body is offered, and sex is consumed. Ebla, a married female, is free within her own self to legitimate a bigamy act. For her, money remains a quick side through which she realizes and redefines herself as a human being. Venal pleasure appears to her as another auxiliary that allows her to connect with the positive value of her society. Her apartment becomes a space of venal commerce where the feminine being prevails over the 'do-masculine'. She pegs her sex to her space, where money prevails over morals and feelings.

The Somalian society is then dyed as a nation of "social conjunction and confrontation", a space of makeovers where the narrator-character seems to articulate a back-scratching philosophy. Venal pleasures traffic becomes an adequate means to gain consideration in a mannish community.

Though Ebla defines herself through a double virilocal life, Firdaus rebaptizes herself into a prostitute's liberalities. Her highly pay rises from ten piasters to two hundred ponds. She then transforms her life into a Firdaus, i.e a paradise in which the flange of silence, chains of oppression and exploitation are broken to let guffaw cunning smiles and barrels of laughs. To secure and protect that paradisiacal existence, Firdaus extends her hand and kills Marzouk, her pimp, who questions her freedom and liberty as a woman, a prostitute. When a "society even insults innocent thing" (Abdullah Al Mhairat & Nayera Al Miniawi. 2016: 24), women are duty bound to make masks fall to let appear the male *personae* and accentuate the relationship between the venality of sex and the dehumanization of women. And El Saadawi's protagonist is resolutely determined to overturn the societal verdict that regards man as "The generic he [that] has evidently seemed adequate to represent the whole of humankind" (Cameron1990: 150).

## Conclusion

Throughout Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* and Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* Firdaus and Ebla have experienced similar destinies and are enclosed in a cage of pain and personification. It becomes therefore necessary for them to face off for a place in the concert of personhood in their own communities. Abused, deceived and objectified by men, the two female figures have rebelled against the male social norms to let sound their desiderata at the top of their having been *born women*. The two heroines have turned a deaf ear to the moral likes of their own bodies to charge them with realistic visions. Both of them, in the two novels, stand for sentries of freedom. They are forerunners of gender-balanced societies. Their stands sound as a breeding ground for any revolutionary attitude that targets to voice women into traditional and patriarchal societies. The two girls' sexual orientations seem to correct the idea on the "second sex" (de Beauvoir 1949:2) to move the female gentry from the zilch point to a Firdaus world in which women play equal with men for the sake of mutual acceptance and reciprocal respect. Born out of a crooked rib in Somalia, the woman is reduced to a point zero in Egypt. Between the two extremities, a combat is announced to pave the way to a long and lasting walk towards an empowerment of recourse to the principles of feminism of scapegoat to spotlight the unfair practices women are victims of in Africa in general and Egypt and Somalia in particular. Their discourses are alarming calls they perform to set bells ring the sound of alertness and awareness for the greater good of African women. Thus being, it appears necessary to ask a perspective question that rings as follows: should African women's emancipation in dogmatic and phallocratic societies be synonym of libertinism?

## References

- [1] Al Mhairat, A., Al Miniawi, N. (2016). The Feminist and Religious Features in Some of Nawal El Saadawi Literary Works" In *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*, 21.
- [2] Bon, K. ( 2017). *Beyond the Unspeakable: Embodied Approaches to Female Trauma in Margaret Atwood's Alias Grace*. (Master's Thesis). University of Leide.
- [3] Cameron, D. (1990). *Feminist Critique language*. Routledge: New-York.
- [4] De Beauvoir, S. (1949). *The Second Sex*, Paris: Editions Gallimard.
- [5] Dione, S. (2016). (Post)Coloniality, Sex and Scxuality in Africa. In *Language and Literature in the Dis/service of Humanity*, Lagos: Department of European Studies, University of Ibadan. Nigeria.
- [6] Dione, S. (2018). Surveying Sexuality(ies) Representation in African Writings: Version, Subversion, and Conversion" In *Literary and Linguistic Perspectives on Orality, Literacy and Gender Studies*, Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited.
- [7] El Bouazzaoui, M. (2016). Orientation sexuelle et dictat social dans l'œuvre de Abdellah Taia" In *Interculturel*, Lecce : Bari.
- [8] Farah, N. (2006). *From a Crooked Rib*, New York: Penguin Books.
- [9] Rike, J. L. (1996). The Cycle of Violence and Feminist Constructions of Selfhood" In *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture*, 3 (1),21-42.
- [10] Mokhtar, G. (editor). (1981). *General History of Africa. II Ancient Civilizations of*

- [11] Saadawi El, N. (2008). *Woman at Point Zero*, New York: Zed Books.
- [12] Suad, J. (General Editor). (2006). *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures*,
- [13] Touraine, A. (1992). *Critique de la modernité*. Paris : Fayard.
- [14] Wangmo, T. Dharma, P. (2018). Masculinity versus Femininity : an Analysis of *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi” In *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (IJTSRD)*, Volume - 2 | Issue – 3, March- April.
- [15] Wa Thiong'o, N. (2018). *Wrestling With the Devil*, The New Press, New York.