

Resistance and Spatiality: A Study of Nawal El Saadawi's *Two Women in One*

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Abstract

Nawal El Saadawi's novel *Two Women in One* surfaces the dichotomized gendered space between men and women in the backdrop of the Arab world, and in doing so, this paper seeks to argue how the protagonist of the novel Bahia Shaheen resists the compulsive and socio-culturally legitimized spatial subjugation of Arab women. By foregrounding the possibility of ambivalent spatial positions for women, Saadawi's protagonist subverts the patriarchal foundation of the theocratic-political system of governance of the Arab world. Socially produced gendered spaces function as the agency of subjugating Muslim women in Saadawi's novel, and the protagonist dismantles and transcends the stringent boundaries of gendered spatiality. The ambivalent and in-between spatial locationality of Saadawian women in a theocratic state opens the avenue of an alternative feminine subject position in defiance of normalized gendered space. This paper attempts to read Saadawi's novel in light of the above-mentioned position.

Keywords: space, gender, resistance, Islamic feminism, authority

The idea of a homogenous space is not an exception in an authoritarian regime. As represented by Saadawi theocratic states in Arab, having controlled the mass consciousness in the name of God legitimizes monolithic spatial reality to keep the voices of dissent, the 'other' at arm's length. In this scheme of things, by rejecting ambivalent spatiality, subjection and subjugation of an individual are achieved. Society, as a cluster of multiple "appropriate" social spaces, by positioning individuals to specific spatial roles, achieves

complete control and administers all pervasive discipline to manufacture docile bodies. Social spaces, though perceived as appropriate, they are rather appropriated to certain specific ends. The politics of appropriating spaces to individuals in a given society undercut the possibility of ambivalence by implementing a strict stratification among the masses. Social spaces, as manifestations of discursive political formations, take the state of docility as its corollary to circulate a sense of strict spatial allocations among individuals in social relationships. For an individual, his/her subject position is essentially determined by his/her locationality and relationality in a social space. Within the ambit of such a scheme of things, the 'undefined', the 'in-between', and the 'open-ended' are demonised as others to vindicate the dominance of governance—governance may be realized in the form of patriarchy. Since social spaces are produced and individuals are attributed with specific spatial roles, hence overlapping, evasion or dissenting such roles lead to censorship or persecution or ostracisation. Production of social space based on Islamic fundamental principles is a common practice in the theocratic states of the Arab world. The dogmatic systematisation of social spaces in the Arab world in general and Egypt, in particular, resulted in the creation of 'gendered spaces.' Gendered spaces in the Arab world, as perceived by Saadawi, relegate Muslim women to the position of invisible and anonymous others in society. The creation of an exclusive category of space for women, a design to incur unquestioning allegiance from women, transmutes Muslim women into commodities.