

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

**Deconstruction and Pluralist Discourse: An
Analysis of Nawal El Saadawi's Novels: *Woman
at Point Zero* and *God Dies by the Nile***

By
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Abstract

The production and the interpretation or evaluation of literary works have been going on hand in hand for a long time. As literary texts are commonly believed to reflect the realities of life and endorse a belief or some ultimate truth which pertain to man's language, thoughts and experiences, critics are also widely accepted as people whose goal is to explain the meanings embodied in literary works through employing different approaches or theories. But meaning has become a very controversial issue. Recent approaches, like deconstructive criticism claim that all texts of all ages are aphoristic, undecidable, unreadable and deconstruct themselves. Accordingly, deconstructionists aim to show that any literary piece unavoidably undermines its own claim to have a single and definite meaning. This mode of criticism argues that literary texts which are established as feminist ones also undermine and contradict their own views and projects. It states that since such texts cannot be out of word play, there is no fixed center and constant man over woman binary opposition.

This research, therefore, intends to examine the relationship between the underlying principles of deconstructive criticism and feminist thought of literary products with reference to the texts in focus. It mainly aims at exploring the plurality of discourse and the tentativeness, contradiction and plurality of meanings of the texts. However, in doing this, the study will not try to deconstruct the texts, it rather attempts to show how the texts deconstruct themselves.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The introductory chapter justifies the necessity of conducting the research and articulates the overall content of the thesis. Chapter two is literature review in which the

general theoretical framework of the study is established. Mainly, it discusses how developments of critical theories have contributed to the birth of deconstructive criticism. In addition, issues related to deconstruction, feminism, pluralism and discourse are discussed.

Following the literature review, interpretation and analysis of *Woman at Point Zero* and *God Dies by the Nile* has been made in line with the major arguments of deconstructive criticism. To be sure that the novels' ideological projects have been identified and not just set up an easy target, it has been attempted to provide all the evidences the novels offer in support of the themes identified. Then, a close examination has been made to find out the competing nature of the overt major ideologies or themes of the texts. This has been done through discourse analysis. As the explication has been undertaken based on textual evidences, this part sets the ground to the concluding remarks of the research. The last chapter sums up the whole argument and draws conclusions based on the major issues discussed. The findings of the research are also briefly pointed out in this section.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

It is obvious that we are now living in a world of change and pluralism. There is no fixed, single concept or meaning of human life in general, and of the human output of literary texts in particular. This is the main claim of poststructuralism. According to Crasnow (1989: 190) poststructuralism, as a general term for recent development in literary theory and criticism, became common in the 1970s. Derrida's influential lecture on 'structure, sign and play in the discourse of the human sciences' stated a disruption in the very concept of structure as a stable system. Since then the structurality of structure has been under question.

As the term 'poststructuralism' covers so many approaches and practices, it is difficult to define with precision. But most scholars in the area agree that poststructuralism denies the totality of the universe that is guided by a single ideology. Regarding this, Machin and Norris (1987: 2) have the following to say: "Poststructuralism rejects the whole system of assumptions-the implied metaphysics of anthology of form-that lay behind (new criticism)." Thus, the theory challenges the universality of truth, the idea of final truths.

The name poststructuralism is related to structuralism. In relation to this Machin and Norris (ibid), write that poststructuralism provides a post to which structuralism hitched, confining it by means of the shortest tether the language has to offer. Let's briefly see how structuralism has given birth to poststructuralism, and how it has contributed to the making and understanding of literature.

According to Tyson (1999: 201), structuralism first came to prominence as a specific discourse with the work of the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, who developed a branch of linguistics called "Structural Linguistics" between 1913 and 1915.

According to Jim in [Http: www/colorado/edu/English courses/ Eng. 201/ages/ derida/htm](http://www.colorado.edu/English_courses/Eng.201/ages/derida/htm) (6/13/2005), in structuralism the individuality of the text disappears in favour of looking at patterns, systems, and structures. And with this background information we come to the issues of deconstructive criticism, which aims to show that any text inevitably undermines its own claim to have a determinate meaning, and licenses the reader to produce his own meanings out of it by an activity of semantic free play. In sum, structuralism differs from traditional criticism by not pretending to retrieve a single, definitive meaning from a literary text.

Deconstruction, which is an approach of post structuralism, is also not a single entity; it is multiple in its meaning and in its applicability. It has been applied to many disciplines beyond language and literature. It is a serious academic issue in the areas of philosophy, psychology, sociology, political science, communications and the like. Hence, deconstruction is no longer a new phenomenon in the academic scene. According to Tyson (1999:6), the theory was inaugurated by Jacques Derrida in the late 1960s and became a major influence in literary studies during the late 1970s.

It is very difficult to get a generally accepted definition of the term deconstruction. Derrida, as cited in Zima (2002:1), defines deconstructions as "a systematic subversion of European metaphysics." This broad definition means that the theory is in a way against the European conception of a definite center or origin, like truth and God. It is a methodological shift, a move away from explanation by origin, order

by opposition, fixed signification and the person as a unified subject. In the context of literature, Abrams (1981:38) explains the term 'deconstruction' as follows: 'Deconstruction is applied to a mode of reading texts which subverts the implicit claim of a text to possess adequate grounds, in the system of language that it deploys, to establish its own structure, unity, and determine meanings.' This implies that there is a sense of incohesiveness and looseness as far as structure, unity and determinate meanings are concerned

A deconstructive approach to literature has a relatively long tradition. Literary critics at various stages of historical development have been engaged in the literary appreciation of different genres by employing deconstructive analysis. Deconstructing literature, hence, deals with the issues of absence of a definite center, and the "play" of language. In relation to deconstructing language, Tyson (1999:252) has to say the following:

1. Language is dynamic, ambiguous, and unstable, continually disseminating possible meanings.
2. Existence has no center, no stable meaning, no fixed ground.
3. Human beings are fragmented battle fields for competing ideologies whose only "identity" is the one we invent and choose to believe.

What these mean is that for deconstruction literature is as "dynamic", "ambiguous", and "unstable" as the language of which it is composed. Therefore, in literature meaning is not a stable element residing in the text for us to uncover or passively consume. It is rather created by the reader in the act of reading. Eagleton (1983: 133) explains that: "Deconstructive criticism is to show how texts come to embarrass their own ruling systems of logic." So, this school of criticism tries to reveal how literary texts contradict themselves.

Tyson (1999: 252) further states that the two main purposes in deconstructing a literary text are uncovering the text's "undecidability" and/or revealing the "complex operations of the ideologies" of which the texts are made.

Deconstruction has a lot to do with the making and understanding of literature. It has become one of the greatest academic issues among literary critics. The main proponent of deconstruction, Derrida, is highly concerned with literary criticism. Norris (1999:19) writes that "Derrida's writings seem more akin to literary criticism than philosophy. They rest on the assumption that modes of rhetorical analysis hitherto applied mainly to literary texts, are in fact indispensable for reading any kind of discourse." Moreover, deconstructive strategies are useful tools for Marxist, feminist, and other literary theories that attempt to provide us awareness on the role ideology can play in our lives.

From the preceding discussions, we can deduce that deconstruction has a good deal to offer us. According to Tyson (1999:44) deconstruction can improve our ability to think critically and to see more readily the ways in which our experience is determined by ideologies of which we are unaware because they are "built into" our language.

As the texts of this research are commonly believed to be feminist in aim, let's briefly discuss deconstruction in relation to feminism. Cohen (2001:409) writes that a deconstructive analysis involves reversing and reinscribing the terms male and female so that the female or "arch - woman," is made primary, and then the second term is inserted "reinscribed" within the class of the first. This suggests that there is no clear demarcation between male and female. It also implies that the binary opposition male/female is decentered. Derrida, as cited in Cohen (ibid), also sees maleness as a species of special instance of arch-woman.

The above quotations clearly imply that in deconstructive analysis the old terms of "male" and "female" actually disappear.

Coming to the subject of this research, it is thought that through analysis of pluralist discourse, deconstructive approach helps us reveal the hidden ideology assumed to be conveyed in the literary texts. Through a deconstructive approach we can also recognize how ideas in texts program us without our being aware of them. So, this study attempts to see if meanings are plural or if there is a grey area in the literary texts in focus.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The Egyptian novelist, essayist, physician and psychiatrist, Nawal El Saadawi is one of the world's prominent African female writers whose literary texts focus on the plight of women not only in North Africa but also in other Arab countries and Islamic societies. However, her writings have not received the attention they deserve from African critics. What is worse, as her novels and other writings mainly deal with sex, religion, and female circumcision-- all taboo subjects in the country--she has received threats from fundamentalist religious groups in Egypt and elsewhere. As a result, she has been forced to live in exile, which has partially been responsible for her not to gain popularity among African readers and critics. Stephanie, *www.kirija stosci.fi/ Saadawi.htm*, (8/10/2005) confirms that Saadawi has not got her proper place in African literature; her books have also once been banned in Egypt and in some other Arab countries.

Saadawi's novels, which are said to be preoccupied with women oppression, are relevant to Ethiopia not only because Ethiopia is nearer to Egypt but also because it houses a large number of Islamic society. In addition, feminist themes are universal themes.

El Saadawi is believed to be one of the prominent African feminist writers. Alembanchi (2005:35) writes that "Saadawi is known as the most outspoken critic of the oppression of women..."

Her novels lend themselves to feminist criticism. However, except for some general treatments on the themes of her novels, there is not enough explication, especially on the plurality of discourse and meanings. Besides, the thematic comments tend to deduce definite meanings / themes from the texts which are inappropriate according to deconstructive criticism.

There are a number of prejudices against making use of deconstruction for the analysis of literature. Tyson (1999:241) points out that many students and faculty alike continue to misperceive deconstruction as a superficial analysis of word play that affects our appreciation of literature and our ability to interpret it meaningfully. This bias needs to be tackled, and, approaching literary texts through this method is one way of justifying and raising awareness on its importance in the field of literature.

On top of that, the culture of the society portrayed by the novels is believed to affirm male domination, which seems to be the motif behind the problems of women. Binary opposition which gives priority to the male violates the rights of female and denies the multiplicity of truth. The plurality of reality can be uncovered through deconstruction. The approach is, therefore, of vital importance in literary studies.

As discussed earlier, deconstructive criticism gives the readers the opportunity to critically and creatively read literary texts so as to find out what lies under the surface of the texts. However, the researcher has not been able to come across any literary research conducted using deconstructive criticism of novels in general and of Saadawi's novels in

particular both at the undergraduate and graduate levels in Addis Ababa University. Most literary studies done at the university usually attempt to deduce definite meanings from texts. So, deconstructive criticism has hardly been given the attention it deserves. This research is, therefore, designed to fill the gap by investigating pluralist discourse and multiplicity of meanings of literary texts through a deconstructive approach. The texts' representation of societal-realities will be investigated, and this will be done by using evidences from the texts in focus.

1.3. Objectives

1.3.1. General Objectives

The research aims to examine whether there is pluralist meaning, reality and discourse in the texts. It also tries to explore the texts from a feminist perspective. To this end, it will attempt to see relations existing between the theory of deconstruction and the textual realities. In other words, it will try to examine the deconstructive nature of the texts. In addition, it will investigate the relation of discourse to meaning structure, and examine how language is used to uncover the writer's agenda or intentions. In sum, the researcher will endeavor to elucidate the existence of binary oppositions, and to find out if any member of the pair is really dominant over the other.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

This research tries to address the following questions which are pertinent to the research subjects:

1. What relations are there between deconstructive theoretical features and the plurality of the texts under discussion?
2. Is each text cohesively constructed, or is there disruption of center and binary oppositions?

3. Are there instances of contradicting meanings with regard to the themes raised in the novels, like gender, religion, sex, oppression? Are conflicting meanings resolved at the end of the stories or left undetermined?
4. What are the implications of the meanings of the texts to the life of the society in focus?
5. What beliefs and norms are taken to be acceptable and dominant in the texts?
6. What is the place of feminism from a deconstructive view, as reflected in the texts?
7. Is there pluralist discourse in the texts to support the plurality of meaning and help us uncover the writer's hidden intentions or ideologies? In other words, do the texts have more than one voice?

1.4. Significance of the Study

There are a number of reasons that justify this study. Among other things, the study will have the following results:

1. The study will motivate readers and critics to give Saadawi her appropriate place, the place she deserves in African literature.
2. Saadawi's novels are usually seen from a feminist angle. This research, however, will establish the possibility of approaching her texts from a deconstructive perspective.
3. The study of plurality of meaning and discourse of prose fiction can broaden readers' and critics' understanding of literature, the process of artistic composition and transmission. In addition to this, the research will also draw the attention of other social science researchers towards the use of deconstructive approach.
4. The study will contribute to familiarizing Ethiopian readers and critics with Saadawi's novels.

5. Finally, it will raise the awareness of Ethiopian writers on the fact that the meanings of their texts can be different from what they intend them to mean.

1.5. Scope of the Study

The research confines itself to the analysis of pluralist discourse through a deconstructive approach. There will obviously be a discussion of the general features of deconstruction and a brief survey on the major schools of criticism in relation to their contribution to the development of deconstruction. The study mainly focuses on the plurality of meaning and discourse in Saadawi's two novels with a view to showing contradictions or multiplicity of meanings.

1.6 Methods and Organization of the Study

Since the aim of the study is to interpret Saadawi's two novels through employing a deconstructive approach, it will pay a great deal of attention to textual details, that is, a careful analysis of the language of the two texts will be made in order to identify difference, structure of constituent opposition or any other significant system and thereby show how these contribute to create plural meanings. As a result, the main method employed in carrying out this research is a systematic analysis of the language of the texts. The research has made use of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources constitute the novels while the secondary sources include some critical comments on the texts and other necessary information regarding the issues in focus. As the study depends on a theoretical framework on which it bases its analysis, theoretical sources that are relevant to the study have been consulted and examined to form an organized data for the literature review, which deals with what literary critics and scholars have commented on

deconstructive approach in general and on the writer's novels in particular. In chapter three, the major aspects of the thesis are analyzed and interpreted.

The major procedures followed in the analysis of the texts in focus include: understanding the major subjects of the texts, sorting out the multiplicity of meanings employed in the texts, and interpreting them. Tyson (1999: 255) writes that a new critical reading of the text (which shows the central tension at work in the novels and how it is resolved in the novels' unified advancement of its main theme) is taken as a useful first step in deconstructing literary texts. This is because such readings usually rest on a binary opposition in which one member of the pair is privileged over the other. Once the new critical reading is formulated, the binary opposition upon which it rests will be deconstructed. In other words, it is examined to find the ways in which the opposing elements in the text overlap or are not really opposed.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Developments in Literary Criticism

Literary theories beginning from classical theoreticians, like Aristotle, to the most recent ones have attempted to guide the direction of understanding and making of literature, that is, to guide the direction of reading and writing literary works. According to Farrell (1992: 208) in the literary process:

Criticism should become the agent that makes for the understanding and evaluation of works of literature. It should create the atmosphere through which a maximum of value and effect, rather than throwing a minimum, is produced by our living literature. It should strive to make the meanings of books clear, to draw out these essential meanings and refer and assimilate them in a wider social area.

Literary criticism is, therefore, fundamentally concerned with the evaluation of the value of a particular work or body of works on such grounds as the themes and the uses of language of a text.

According to Lodge (1988: 403) the aims and conventions of literary criticism, like literature itself, have changed constantly through the ages, and there are many different types of critical approaches. It is obvious that each theory tends to emphasize different aspects of a literary piece. This section attempts to trace developments of critical theories that have directly or indirectly contributed to the birth of deconstructive literary criticism.

As a matter of fact, deconstruction is a further development of other critical approaches, especially structuralism. Structuralism is where deconstruction starts as a result of which both have similarities. Philips (2000: 113) argues that poststructuralists' multiplicity of meaning is the

continuation of structuralists' decentering of subject. He adds that like deconstructive criticism, structuralism does not pretend to retrieve a single, definitive meaning from literary texts. Deconstruction has brought substantial changes with regard to the analysis of a text's language to construct meaning. For instance, during the age of deconstruction, the assumption that words have meaning because they directly symbolize the things contained in the world outside (the universe) has been attacked.

It is common knowledge that there have been differences between the major theories beginning from the earliest ones; however, critical theories are not isolated entities. They are not completely different from one another; they are rather highly interrelated. Tyson (1999:7) gives the following remarks on this point:

Critical theories are not separable into tidy bins, like the tubs of tulips, daffodils, and carnations we see at the florist. It would be more useful to think of theories, to continue the metaphor, as mixed bouquets, each of which can contain a few of the flowers that predominate in or that serve different purposes in other bouquets.

The above quotation suggests that theories are overlapping, competing, and quarreling visions of the world. They are not tidy categories. As a result, tracing historical developments of theories enables us to see one in relation to the other which in turn can help us see how one contributes to the emergence of the other. To this effect, Tyson (ibid: 10) writes that historical relationships among theories (for example, how new criticism was a reaction against "traditional historicism" or how deconstruction was a reaction against structuralism) are explained because such relationships can clarify some of the theoretical concepts we are using. Following is a brief account of the underlying assumptions

of some of the major theoretical approaches which have to do with deconstructive criticism.

Obviously, we live in the age of poststructuralism, which is understood in relation to the earlier theories. In relation to this, Lodge (1988: x) asserts that to understand the essences of poststructuralism we must “know what came before”. Hence, we will first briefly touch upon classical approaches to literature.

2.1.1. Classical, Conventional Approaches

Shipley as cited in Melakneh (2003: 1995) defines the term classicism as “the styles, rules, modes, conventions, themes and sensibilities of classical authors, and their influence on and their presence in the works of later authors.” This means that classical literary theories have laid the ground for the birth of modern literary criticisms including deconstructive criticism. Similarly, Attridge (1992:3) asserts that:

Literary criticism has operated for the most part within the bounds established by classical Greek thought, taking for granted rules of syllogistic reason, the ultimate priority of meaning over its mode of articulation, and such fundamental and absolute oppositions as the intelligible and the sensible, form and matter, subject and object, nature and culture, presence and absence.”

Accordingly, the classical approach to literature has still strong influence on literary criticism. During classicism it had been believed that there is fixed center, stable meaning and fixed ground for a literary text. On top of that, it had been assumed that there was one “absolute” binary opposition.

2.1.1.1. Platonic Criticism

At an earlier stage in civilization, the distinction between poetic and literal truth was often blurred. Daiches (1956: 6-7) states that Plato presented the poet as the inspired "rhapsodist" through whom God speaks, a man lacking art and volition of his own, a passive vehicle. In other words, Plato believed that poets and writers compose their beautiful literary pieces because they are inspired and possessed. Plato's primary objection to poetry is related to the notion of epistemology, truth. To him, poets deal more with emotion than truth, reality.

Plato's notion of literature is highly tied with *logocentrism*, with fixed meaning. Plato's theory of imitation (*mimesis*) is against what he believes as the falsity of literature and deals with how it affects the soul of the readers by inflaming their emotion. This is well understood by Derrida as he has studied the theory of *mimesis*. According to Attridge (1992:127), Derrida shows how *mimesis* has always been closely tied to a notion of truth, whether truth as nature unveiling itself or as nature represented by an accurate imitation. Attridge (*Ibid*) adds that by placing together an extract from Plato's text *Philebus*, in which the internal contradiction of the notion of *mimesis* is already evident, Derrida is dramatizing the hold which this essentially philosophical notion: which he terms as *mimetologism* - has had over literature since its beginnings. And Derrida questions the issue of *logocentrism* beginning from Plato's *mimesis*.

2.1.1.2. Aristotelian Criticism

Aristotle has examined the nature and differentiating qualities of imaginative literature. His *Poetics* is one of the most fruitful of critical discussions devoted to inquire into the nature and value of imaginative literature and literary criticism.

Daiches (1956:24) explains that Aristotle's method is essentially one of examining observed phenomena with a view to noting the qualities and characteristics of literature. Unlike Plato, Aristotle holds that literature is true, serious and useful. Evans in *faculty. goucher. edu. eng. 215/literary. theories. htm* (3/22/2006), writes the following about Aristotelian criticism:

Because Aristotle values the text as a highly crafted complex unity, he tends to see the author as a craftsman, the audience as capable of appreciating such craftsmanship, the text as potentially valuable means of understanding the complexity of "reality", and the critic as a specialist conversant with all aspects of the poetic craft.

Aristotle tried to explain the nature, function and value of imaginative literature. His classification is naturally based on the varieties of literature with which he was familiar. He admits that reality is complex, not fixed. According to Melakneh (2003:96) among other things Aristotle: "distinguished between content and form according to which content is not the be-all and the end-all of poetry as its effect is mediated by the manner of imitation or by the representation of its form". The quotation implies that language is not only a means to an end, it is also an end by itself. This in turn means that literary language functions to communicate effect.

During the classical period people have tended to believe that things in literature are homogenous. And Derrida's starting point as a theorist of deconstruction is invariably the theories of Plato and Aristotle, and the classical tradition of rhetoric. Concerning this, Lodge (1988: 268) has to say the following:

By his rhetoric mastery Derrida solicits us to follow him in his move from what he calls the closed, 'logocentric' model of all traditional or 'classical' views of language

(which, he maintains, is based on the illusion of a Platonic or Christian transcendent being or presence, serving as the origin and guarantor of meanings) to what I shall call his own grapho-centric model, in which the sole presences are marks-on-blanks.

In simple terms, Derrida considers that the classical (philosophically derived) categories have dominated literature. The then critical theories tend to over emphasize the values of meaning or content, of truth or signifier, of metaphor, and of representation.

Derrida as cited in Attridge (1992:3) refers to such reductions and mis-constructing of literature by classical critics as “thematism, socialism historicism, and psychologism.” Derrida believes that even during the classical period there were disruptions of meanings. Derrida as cited in Attridge (Ibid: 53) points out that “Even among the philosophers associated with the most canonical tradition, the possibilities of rupture are always waiting to be effected”. He further says that it can always be shown that the most radically deconstructive motifs are at work in “what is called the Platonic, Cartesian, Kantian texts. What it all means is that a literary text is never totally governed by ‘metaphysical assumptions.’”

In sum, the classical or traditional criticism mostly claims that a work is always singular and is of interest only from this point of view. And the traditional claim of literary criticism is that it heightens or reveals the uniqueness, the singularity of the text upon which it comments. It is, hence, against this stand of classical and other literary theories that deconstruction has emerged

2.2. Modern Schools of Criticism

This section aims to provide the important and selective features of the major theoretical schools in contemporary criticism, and to briefly

trace their historical evolution. It also attempts to show how they contributed to the development of deconstructive criticism.

Generally speaking, modern schools of criticism have developed as reactions to the traditional approaches to literature. But this does not mean that modern critical theories completely ignore the contributions of classical, conventional approaches. As Lodge (1988: x) observes, "by no means all of modern critical theory is hostile to traditional humanist principles, but most of it certainly is ...". This indicates that critical theories have common features. Let's then move on to the formalist school of criticism.

2.2.1 Formalism

Hawkes (1977:59) States that the "name Russian Formalism was originally applied to a school of literary criticism that followed in Russia just before and during 1920's and which was suppressed for political reasons in 1930." The dream of making the study of literature an exact science inspired the tradition that ran from the Russian formalist to the rest of the world.

Abrams (1981: 165) points out that Russian formalism emerged in reaction against the preoccupation of the Russian schools of criticism on the message, and social significance of literature. Thus, the very name formalism and its opposition of great emphasis given to message shows us that for formalism literature is a special class of language.

For formalists what matters is the form. Form is self sufficient. Abrams (1981: 166) backs this point saying that formalism views literature as a unique class of language, and assumes that there is a basic opposition between literary language and common, ordinary language whose main function is to communicate a message or information by references to

the world existing outside of language. In simple terms, formalists have tried to free literary criticism from subjective-judgment and proposed “experimental” and “objective” way of study.

Roman Jakobson as cited in Abrams (1981:166) wrote that “the object of study in literary science is not literature but ‘literariness’, that is, what makes a given work a literary work.” Therefore, according to the pioneers of this literary trend, the primary aim of literature is foregrounding its medium. In other words, to formalists the main aim of literature is estranging or defamiliarizing the commonly known modes of language.

The more recent literary theories, however, opposed formalism for various reasons and the reaction has resulted in the decline of this trend of criticism. Abrams (ibid: 167) explains:

Strong opposition to formalism, both in its European and American varieties, has been voiced by Marxist critics (who view it as the product of a reactionary ideology), and in recent decades, by proponents of Reader- Response’ criticism and of speech Act theory; both these critical modes reject the view of a sharp division between ordinary language and literary language.

The quotation means that formalism is replaced by approaches of post structuralism, like Marxist and Reader – Response criticisms. In spite of this, formalism had a profound effect on making literary criticism a more precise and objective discipline. The issues of defamiliarizing and foregrounding must have contributed to issues of deconstruction such as subjectivity and multiplicity of meaning and discourse. Besides, both formalism and deconstruction are similar as they argue that a literary piece is a self-sufficient object, independent of any reference to the external world or to social and literary history. In addition, the focusing upon the medium rather than the message is the concern of both formalism and deconstructive criticism.

2.2.2 Structuralism

Tyson (1999: 209) writes that “structuralist analyses of narrative examines in minute detail the inner ‘workings’ of literary texts in order to discover the fundamental structural units. ... structuralism is not interested in what a text means, but in how a text means what it means” Therefore, in structuralism one tries to find out structural functions (such as character functions) that govern texts’ narrative operations. Structuralism seeks the langue of literary texts, the structure that allows texts to make meaning, often referred to as a grammar because it governs the rules by which fundamental literary elements are identified and combined.

According to structuralism, the structure of language itself produces “reality”, the source of meaning is not an individual’s experience or being, but the sets of oppositions and operations, the signs and grammars that govern language. In relation to this,, Philips (2000:115) States:

Structuralism is the name given to a wide range of discourses that study underlying structures of signification. Signification occurs wherever there is a meaningful event or in the practice of some meaningful action. From the point of view of structuralism all texts, all meaningful events and all signifying practices can be analyzed for their underlying structures.

This clearly explains that structuralism does not look for the causes or origins of language. It rather looks for the rules that underlie language and govern how it functions. In structuralism, the individuality of the text disappears in favour of patterns, systems, –and structures. Structuralists argue that any piece of writing, or any signifying system, has no origin and that authors merely inhabit pre-existing structures (langue) that enable them to make any particular sentence (or story) –

any parole. In other words, by focusing on the system itself, in a synchronic analysis, structuralists cancel out history. According to Jefferson and Robey (1986: 98-133) in Structuralism:

Meaning is the product of the rules and conventions of different signifying systems, there is no rule given to private meanings or intentions on the part of individuals. This is what is meant by the 'decentering of the subject' in structuralist theory. The consequences of this decentering of the subject are most fully and interestingly developed in post-structuralist work of Lacan and Derrida. ... Structuralism was generally satisfied if it could carve up a text into binary oppositions (high / low, light/ dark, nature/ culture, Man/Woman and so on) and expose the logic and their working.

This implies that in structuralism, it is believed that we can think only through language and therefore our perception of reality is all framed by and determined by the structure of language. In other words, meaning does not come from individual words, but from the system that governs the language in focus. Instead of seeing the individual as the center of meaning, structuralism places the structure at the center. And that is why it is argued that poststructuralists' multiplicity of meaning is the continuation of structuralists' "decentering of subject".

As we have seen in the first chapter of this paper, poststructuralism in general and deconstruction in particular try to show how the centrality of meaning and how oppositions in order to hold themselves in place, are sometimes betrayed into inverting or collapsing themselves. Therefore, structuralism, poststructuralism and deconstruction are related. Post structuralism is not totally against structuralism. As Sturrock (1986 :137) points out " poststructuralism is not 'post' in the sense of having killed structuralism off, it is 'post' only in the sense of coming after and of seeking to extend structuralism in its rightful direction". All it means is that the name post structuralism is useful in so far as it is an

umbrella word, significantly defining itself only in terms of a temporal, spatial relationship to structuralism. So, poststructuralism traces the development of structuralism and traces the trace of structuralism's difference from itself. To this effect, Eagleton, (1983: 128) writes the following:

Signifiers keep transforming into signified and vice versa, and you will never arrive at a final signified which is not a signifier in itself. If structuralism divided the sign from the referent, this kind of thinking – often known as 'post – structuralism – goes a step further: it divides the signifier from the signified.

The above quotation implicitly states that in structuralist theory, there is no specific language rule for individual meanings which is meant by “decentering of the subject”, and poststructuralists questioned the existence of a center which holds the structure together, a center which is itself outside structurality. This means that structuralism is where poststructuralism starts. It also means that poststructuralism is a critique of structuralism. Hence, structuralism and poststructuralism are not mutually exclusive. Derrida as cited in Jefferson and Robbey (1986: 112) supports this saying, “we are still inside structuralism in so far as structuralism constitutes ‘an adventure of vision, a conversation in the way of putting questions to any object.’” This shows that not only poststructuralism but all other critiques are made from inside the structuralist system. To this effect, Zima (2002:42) writes that “The differences and oppositions which Derrida attempts to deconstruct are treated as the bases of language and linguistics by Saussure”

To sum up, Derridean deconstruction emerged out of a critique of structuralism. And the poststructuralist attitude is therefore literally unthinkable without structuralism. In simple terms, Derrida continues where structuralists like Saussure have stopped.

2.2.3 New Criticism

Abrams (1981: 117) writes that “New criticism is against literary critics’ prevailing concern with the lives and psychology of authors and with literary history.” It was common practice to interpret a literary text by studying the author’s life and times to determine the meaning the author intended the text to have. But with the advent of new criticism, the interpretation of, literary works came to be free from history and personalities of writers.

According to Tyson (1999: 117) new criticism was superior to other literary studies from the 1940s through the 1960s and it has left a lasting effect on the way literature is read and written. New criticism mainly deals with the nature and importance of textual evidence. It focuses on the use of concrete, specific examples from the text itself. In connection to the concern of new criticism, Abrams (1981:117) explains:

1. A poem should be regarded as an independent and self – sufficient object...
2. The distinctive procedure of the new critic is explication or close reading ... of the component elements within a work.
3. The principles of the new criticism are basically verbal.

That is, literature is conceived to be a special kind of language whose attributes are defined by systematic opposition to the language of science and of logical discourse; the key concepts of this criticism deal with the meanings and interactions of words, figures of speech, and symbols. To new critics the literary piece itself was all that mattered. “The text itself”

was their motto. They took the text as the sole source of evidence for interpreting it.

Deconstruction and new criticism have differences and similarities. It is obvious that deconstruction came after new criticism. Zima (2002: 84) states that "it is no coincidence that the dominance of the new critics was replaced by an hegemony of the deconstruction." This replacement implies that they substantially differ from each other. They, for instance have different views on the issues of language of literature and language of other disciplines. To this effect, Norris (1999:21) writes that unlike the new critics Derrida does not want to establish a clear demarcation between the language of literature and "critical discourse". Therefore, to deconstructionists, there is almost no difference between literary language and other language types. Norris (ibid) adds that: "Contrary to new critics, Derrida sets out to show that certain kinds of paradox are produced across all the varieties of discourse by a motivating impulse which runs so deep in western thought that it respects none of the conventional boundaries."

This explains that there is almost nothing special to literary language and in all language usages people tend to violate norms of the language. In relation to their difference, Wheeler (2000: 148) also points out that new critics believe in coherent and complete meanings of components of texts (words and sentences), whereas deconstructionists believe that texts are contradictory and incoherent

Deconstruction and new criticism are, nevertheless, similar in the emphasis both have given to treat literary texts on the basis of the 'text' and the 'text alone'. According to Wheeler (ibid: 148) deconstruction is the continuation of the 'text-as- text' work of the new critics. That is, both the new critics and the deconstructionist critics examine "systems" implicit in literary works. In short, their concern for the text is their

commonest characteristic. Wheeler (ibid) also argues that “Deconstructive criticism is more closely allied to new criticism than to any other style of literary criticism.” In sum, it can be said that new criticism can be regarded in some respects as the precursor of deconstruction. And new criticism has contributed to the development of deconstructionist criticism more than any other school of criticism.

2.2.4. Poststructuralism

We have already seen that the classical notions of structure assume that any organized thing must have a point that can be regarded as its center, and which limits the play that structures may be subject to. It is the French philosopher, Derrida who challenged such assumptions. Eagleton (1983: 143) explains that Derrida “had cast grave doubt upon the classical notions of truth, reality, meaning and knowledge, all of which could be exposed as resting on a naively representational theory of language”. So, the pioneer of poststructuralism, Derrida, strongly challenged the classical notion that structure has a point of presence, a center.

Poststructuralism is a term covering the bundle of different approaches to language and literature. Gnanamony (2006: 153) writes that Derrida’s theoretical formulations are a group of western metaphysics, Marxism, psychoanalysis, structural anthropology, linguistics, feminism deconstruction and phenomenology. So, poststructuralism is not a school, but a group of approaches motivated by some common understandings.

Lye in his material taken from internet [www.procku.ca/english.course.4f/170/poststruct.html](http://www.procku.ca/english/course.4f/170/poststruct.html).(11/26/2004) gives the following summary of some of the assumptions of poststructuralist thought:

1. Poststructuralism is marked by rejection of totalizing (putting all phenomena under one explanatory concept), essentialist (existence of reality independent of language and ideology) and foundationalist (signifying systems are unproblematic representations of a world of fact)
2. Poststructuralism sees 'reality' as being much more fragmented, diverstenuous and culture specific.
3. We live in a world of language, discourse and ideology all of which structure our sense of being and meaning.
4. Discourse is a material practice; the human life is rooted in historicity and lives through the body.
5. Texts are marked by a surplus of meaning; the result of this is that differing readings are inevitable.

All it means is that since language is simply an incessant play of difference, there are no grounds for attributing a determinate meaning to any text.

According to Lodge (1988:107) Derrida's article "structure, sign and play" marks the beginning of poststructuralism which basically opposes classical structuralism, traditional humanism and empiricism when, according to Derrida, "the structurality of structure had to begin to be thought." Poststructuralist theory claims that the concept of structure is coherent only while it is suppressing a contradiction on which it is based. Derrida as cited in Philips (2000: 149) calls the coherence of classical structure as a "contradictory coherence." The above discussions imply that in poststructuralism there is no definite center to define things.

In relation to issues raised by Derrida, Abrams (1981:39) has the following to add: "Derrida shows that each text inevitably involves an aporia (contradiction, or irreconcilable paradox) which subverts its own

grounds and coherence and disperses its seeming meanings into indeterminacy." Derrida's claim is that there is no possible way to escape the logocentric system of language and its internal self-contradiction; all texts, thus, in fact deconstruct themselves, in a way that a deconstructive reading merely exposes.

It is through deconstruction that Derrida asserts the incorrectness of all truth arrived at through language. And Derrida as cited in Gnanamony (2006: 153) asserts that truth claims are "civilization fantasies", or in Derrida's own words they are "philosophical fiction."

Derrida has done a lot for literature through deconstruction. Gray (1992: 229) states that the single most significant influence poststructuralism development has on linguistic philosophy in the 1970s and 1980s is deconstruction, which is chiefly developed by Jacques Derrida and which has had a strong influence on literature and contemporary literary theories. What follows is the discussion of deconstruction and its place in literary criticism.

2.3 Deconstructive Criticism

In the late 1990s and thereafter, Derrida's deconstructive method has been widely accepted and adopted. The other critical theories have been highly influenced by Derrida's thinking towards literature. He has also had great interest in literature. Derrida as cited in Zima (2002: vii) confirms that he has more interest in literature than philosophy. So, though deconstruction is a philosophical and literary movement, Derrida applies it as a critical method in the study of literature. Derrida as quoted in Cohen (2001: 59) asserts that "deconstruction... is a coming-to-terms with literature." This means literature is common in Derrida's

writing. Derrida as cited in (ibid) explains about his method of deconstructive literary criticism as follows:

I multiply statements, discursive gestures, forms of writing, the structure of which reinforces my demonstration in something like a practical manner, that is, by providing instances of 'Speech acts' which by themselves render impracticable and theoretically insufficient for the conceptual oppositions upon which speech act theory in general relies.

So, Derrida's literary criticism deals with the plurality of meaning and it is done through the analysis of discourse features or language elements in a given text. This is what deconstruction is all about. Let's first see the definition of the term 'deconstruction'. According to Gnanamony (2006: 152) Derrida's deconstruction is a critical and philosophical practice in which the discursual features of a text, the precise terms and figures of speech used, are scrutinized "in detail and shown very often by rhetorical techniques." Hence, among other things, deconstruction allows a detailed examination of a text.

According to Abrams (1981:38) deconstruction "is applied to a mode of reading texts which subverts the implicit claim of a text to possess adequate grounds in the system of language that it deploys, to establish its own structure, unity, and determinate meanings." In this light, deconstruction is a way of reading texts in which indeterminacy of meanings is uncovered.

Derrida on his behalf does not think that we can reach an end point of interpretation, a truth. Derrida as cited in Gnanamony (2006: 152), defines deconstruction as a "discourse on the concept of method." What he means is that deconstruction is an enquiry into the way a particular method works against itself. For Derrida all texts exhibit 'difference': they allow multiple interpretations.

According to Wheeler (2000:73) deconstruction supposes that “a text can mean something other than what its author intends.” This means the meaning of a text can be different from what the author intends to convey. The quotation also suggests that through critical reading one can find author’s hidden agenda, and implications.

Generally speaking, as deconstruction deals with indeterminacy and inadequacy of meaning, it is a turning point in the history of literary theories. It can be said that with the emergence of deconstruction the balance of power shifted from the conventional way of making and reading of literature to pluralist modes of reading. Jones in *www.brocku.ca.post_structuralism.English_courses.html* (7/17/2006) explains that rather than basing our philosophical understanding on undeniable truths, the deconstructionist “turns the settled bed rock of rationalism in to the shifting sands” of a multiplication of interpretation. From the above discussions we can conclude that there is always some secret lying beneath the surface of the text, and the reader has to passionately engage himself/ herself to bring out what lies under the surface of the text (textual manifestation). And it is deconstruction that can do this satisfactorily. Through deconstruction Jacques Derrida could show the impossibility of establishing what is internally destabilized.

Deconstructive criticism is used to uncover the indeterminate meanings of literary texts. Concerning the method of deconstructive criticism, Miller as cited in Abrams (1981: 40) writes the following:

The deconstructive critic seeks to find by the process of retracting the element in the system studied which is logical [i.e; the aporial], the thread in the text in question which will unravel it at all, or the loose stone which will pull down the whole building ... Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself... Hence, all reading is misreading.

This explains that deconstructive criticism tries to show the already existing contradictions in a given text rather than trying to resolve those contradictions into some overarching theme. Lee in *www.colorado.edu/English courses/derrida htm (10/5/2006)* explains the basic method of deconstruction as follows:

First, find a binary opposition. Show how each term rather than being polar opposite of its paired term, is actually part of it. Then the structure or opposition which kept them apart collapses... ultimately you can not tell which is which and the idea of binary opposites loses meaning, or is put into 'play'.

In simple terms, deconstructive criticism shows how the making of literature is done in an incohesive way, in a loose way. Evans in a website faculty. *goucher. edu. eng.215.literary.theories.html. (3/22/2006)* states that deconstructive criticism undercuts the hierarchical assumptions of any other critical system (such as structuralism, formalism, Marxism, etc.) that claims to offer an “objective,” “neutral,” “scientific” perspective on literature.

In sum, deconstructive critics assume that ‘reality’ can not be experienced except through language, and they believe that language is inevitably full of contradictions, gaps, and dead-ends. And they claim also that no writer, text, audience, or critic can ever escape from the unsolvable paradoxes that language embodies. All in all, deconstructive criticism is of paramount importance in modern literary criticism. Most current literary theories like Marxism, feminism, reader-response, psychoanalysis and the like are highly influenced by this trend of criticism.

2.3.1. Deconstruction and Feminism

The central issue of this thesis is to explore the feminist thought of the texts under discussion through using deconstructive approach. So, it is worth discussing the differences and similarities existing between deconstruction and feminism.

A lot of people, especially feminists, believe that the oppression of women, the exploitation and social pressure to which they are exposed are integral parts of the political, economic and cultural systems of most of the world. It is also thought that in most literary products patriarchal discourse, vision and ideologies are dominant. To this effect, Helen Cixous as cited in Wolfreys and Baker (1996:5) writes the following:

If you examine literary history, it is the same story. It all refers back to man, to his torment, his desire to be (at) the origin. Back to the father. There is an intrinsic bond between the philosophical and the literary and phallogentrism. The philosophical constructs itself starting with the absent of women, subordination of the feminine to the masculine order which appears to be the condition for the functioning of the masculine.

This means considering women as inferior is common in nearly all human societies' literary products of all times. The quotation implies that literary products have not done justice to women as women have been depicted in literature by authors for centuries as irrational, emotional, sex objects, etc.

Many feminist critics believe that women are oppressed because of the prevalence of culture over nature. They think that women inferiority is largely a cultural construct. Simone de Beauvoir as cited in Wolfreys and Baker (1996:118) writes that "one is not born woman one becomes one." She means 'woman' is not a biological construction, it is a cultural one.

But, nowadays, it is believed that a woman is part and parcel of 'man'. She is not the 'other' of man-- the 'other' with negative connotation. In simple terms, one can not live without the other. Eagleton (1983: 132 – 150) argues:

It is not that the world will be better of with more female participation in it, it is that without 'feminization' of human history, the world is unlikely to survive. Woman is not just another in the sense of some thing beyond man's ken, but another intimately related to him as the image of what he is not and therefore as an essential reminder of what he is ... Man is what he is only by virtue of ceaselessly shutting out this other or opposite, defining himself in anti-thesis to it, and his whole identity is therefore caught up and put at risk in the very gesture by which he seeks to assert his unique, autonomous existence.

So, according to Eagleton, there is a mutually beneficial or supportive relationship between the two sexes. In fact, there are writers who take feminism as a self negating movement. Elam (1994: 20) backs up this by arguing that "Feminism is the struggle for women's rights to be men." It means that feminism dismantles itself. So, similarly deconstructive approach attempts to show the self contradictory nature of texts, including literary products of feminist writers.

Deconstructionists also argue that there is no fixed man/ woman binary opposition and it is an attempt to decentre male identity by showing to what extent it depends on its 'negative other - female'. They believe that the male identity would disappear if this 'other' ceased to exist. In this light deconstruction and feminism have got a lot to share. Deutscher as cited in Zima (2002:194), explains that deconstruction has been crucial to the formulation of feminism, which has been seen as a methodology for "destablising dichotomous oppositions, for decentring masculinity and relation to an "othered" femininity, decentring heterosexuality in relation to an "othered" homosexuality and decentering natural,

normalized gender in relation to an “othered” artificiality. Here, Deutscher tries to show the difference and interdependence of the sexes along with the impossibility of separating the one from the other.

The above discussion explicitly states that by applying deconstructive procedures to the dominant gender structures, feminists set out to show that dichotomies such as male/ female or masculine/ feminine are part and parcel of the male – dominated social order which can be subverted by notions such as indeterminacy and decentering.

Derrida as quoted in Elam (1994: 17) concedes that there is a close relation between... deconstruction and feminist studies, women’s studies. Hence, he believes that deconstruction and feminism have a lot in common. Poovey as cited in Elam (ibid: 20) more specifically states that the tool of deconstructive criticism can perform three tasks for feminism:

1. *Deconstructive strategies could enable feminists to write a history of the various contradictions within institutional definitions of women that would show how these contradictions have opened the possibility for change;*
2. *Deconstructive criticism can challenge hierarchical and (binary) oppositional logic;*
3. *Deconstruction offers the idea of the “in-between” which constitutes “one tool for dismantling binary thinking”.*

Nevertheless, Derrida deconstructs the role feminism seems to play. In a particular strong assertion of his position Derrida as cited in Elam (ibid 15 – 16), has the following to write:

In truth the women feminists against whom Nietzsche multiplies his sarcasms are men. Feminism: it is the operation through which a woman desires to be like a man, like a dogmatic philosopher, demanding truth, science, objectivity; that is to say, with all masculine illusions with the effects of castration which is

attached to them. Feminism desires castration that of women....

From the above quotation we understand that feminism falls into the illusion of castration, which Derrida as quoted in (ibid) defines as “the operation of woman contra woman, no less than of each sex against itself and against the other.” Accordingly for Derrida feminism elides differences, by trying to make every one into a castrated man.

According to Eagleton (1983: 132) deconstruction is the name given to the trend of criticism by which binary oppositions (*like male/female*) could be partly undercut, or by which they could be demonstrated partly to “undermine” each other in the course of textual meaning (explanation mine). We can gather from the above discussions that deconstruction and feminism resemble in their common rejection of social domination, logocentrism and metaphysical notions of subjectivity.

In short, if we analyze literary texts, like Saadawi’s novels which seem feminist, through a deconstructive approach, they can show the relative importance, for example, of male-centered and female centered reality side by side without giving objectivity to the “dominant” group.

2.3.2. Deconstruction and Pluralist Meanings

As we have seen earlier poststructuralism in general and deconstruction in particular claim that truth is always relative since there are pluralities, multiplicity and contradictions of meaning. Hence, to Derrida meaning is elusive and not easy to pin down. In relation to this Derrida as cited in Abrams (1981:39) says, “ meaning can never come to rest on an absolute presence, its determinate specification is differed, from one substitutive linguistic interpretation to another, in a movement without end”. Therefore, we can not reach an end point of interpretation, a truth.

This implies that all texts including literary texts allow multiple interpretation.

This indeterminacy of meaning has been upheld especially during the poststructuralist era. And in recent times meaning is believed to be scattered or dispersed along the whole chain of signifiers. In literary language too, meaning is never wholly present in any one sign alone. Concerning this, Eagleton (1983: 134), gives the following explanation:

There is a continual flickering, spilling and defusing of meaning-what Derrida calls 'dissemination' – what can not be easily contained with the categories of the text's structure, or within the categories of a conventional critical approach to it. The movement from structuralism to poststructuralism is a shift from seeing the poem or novel as a closed entity, equipped with definite meanings....

Thus, if meaning can never be present and if it develops in a continually open context of reference, it is subject to plurality. Pluralism is a term usually defined in relation to poststructuralism. Among others, Gray (1992:222) defines pluralism as a term “much used in poststructuralist criticism to indicate the desirable openness of texts to many different interpretations which the insights of deconstruction allow. As language has no verifiable and absolute meaning, there is no transcendental signified, all texts are open to the play of innumerable meanings...” This clearly shows that pluralism does not attempt to harmonize competing ways of thinking. And the plurality of meaning is a matter of infinite ‘play’. Meaning, therefore, becomes subject to a change which is labeled by Derrida as ‘differance’. The plurality of meaning is particularly true to literary texts. As a result, pluralism allows the application of different approaches to the study and interpretation of literary texts. Evans in *faculty. goucher. edu. Eng. 215. literary theories.* (3/22/2006) states that pluralism presupposes that each school of criticism, by asking dissimilar

questions, will give us different kinds of answers and that each kind of answer is at least potentially valuable in its own right. In other words, pluralism emphasizes the potential value of a variety of approaches to literary texts.

Similarly, deconstruction holds that since meaning can not possibly be determined by rules of language or conventions, the meaning of a text is indeterminate, subject to essential drift. Apparently, deconstruction employs a pluralist approach to the making and reading of literature. Deconstruction is a means for pluralism in literature. Wheeler (2000: 73) writes that "...deconstruction says meaning is indeterminate and beyond authorial control." This implies that deconstruction is a means to 'voice' the 'unvoiced'. In short, deconstructive criticism allows pluralist interpretation.

It is, therefore, upto the deconstructionist critic to show that there are no hierarchy of textual 'levels' to tell what is more or less significant. Eagleton (1983: 138) stresses this situation saying, "... it is the critic's task to decipher, to seeing it as irreducibly plural, an endless play of signifiers which can never be finally nailed down to a single centre, essence or meaning." Literary texts are, therefore, characterized by a richness and variety of meaning that can not be reduced to any attempts at totalization. What goes above does not only emphasize the instability or indeterminacy of a text's meaning but also the shift in the role of the literary critic from a consumer to that of a producer.

2.3.3. Deconstruction and Discourse

'Discourse', which has acquired much wider meanings and much wider implications, is multiple in its function as well as in its forms. Cuddon (1979: 249) differentiates 'discourse' by its intentions and provides us with the following discourse types: "Discourse may be poetry or prose. It

may be a poem, a philosophical essay, a political tract, a Biblical commentary, a speech on the hustings, a funeral address, a polemic, a dialogue or exercise in deconstructive criticism. It may be any number of things." It is clear here that 'discourse' is an umbrella term, a multidisciplinary concept that encompasses a lot of genres.

Other critics give more specific definitions for the term. For example, Genette as cited in Marthin (1986: 109), defines 'discourse' as follows: "Discourse contains all the features that the writer adds to the story, especially changes of time sequence, the presentation of the consciousness of the characters, and the narrator's relation to the story and the audience".

According to his definition 'discourse' contains those remarks that are especially addressed to the reader (hidden intentions, commentary, interpretation, judgment) concerning the issue in focus. In this light, a literary prose is not one discourse, but a complex of many discourses.

Most definitions of discourse share the concept of discourse as language manipulation for the particular effect it produces. However, for the purpose of this paper, discourse is used in the notion of Widdowson's (1975: 33) definition of the term as "the manner in which linguistic elements function to *communicate effect*" (emphasis mine). This definition suggests that an interpretation of a literary work as a piece of discourse involves correlating the meaning of a linguistic item as an element in the language code with the meaning it takes on in the context it occurs.

This thesis will unravel how deconstruction and pluralist discourse render service to feminists. As Wheeler (2000: 227) puts it: "deconstruction realizes that the metalanguage is part of the account being deconstructed. That is, if we are deconstructing a notion that is central to our system, we are deconstructing from within the discourse." So, discourse and discourse analysis are features of deconstruction. As a

result, deconstructive criticism is in a way an analysis by some one who uses the distinctions and discourse that are found in a literary piece.

According to Gnanamony (2006: 157), "Derrida, by making recourse to the history of metaphysics, demonstrates how the structurality of structure is not in the centre. In the absence of a centre or origin, every thing becomes a discourse." Hence, it is language which is manipulated in literature. Reality in a literary piece is constructed by our discourse; it is not reflected by it. Hence, literary language constantly undermines its own meaning. In support to the preceding point, Eagleton (1983: 138) states that it is language which speaks in literature, "in all its swarming, 'polysemic' plurality not the author himself."

In summary, in a literary text, any kind of social discourse must not be taken as a single ideological form as it constitutes differences. It should not be given loyalty to "absolute truth" and "objectivity". Any discourse that is done in novels shows relative importance instead of confirming the existence of an absolute truth.

2.3.4. Center, Binary Opposition and Deconstruction

According to Jim, *www.colorado.edu.english.courses.eng.201.ages.derrida* (6/13/2005) centre and binary opposition are the two key points to the idea of deconstruction: the first is that we are still going to look at systems or structures, rather than at individual concrete practices, and that all systems or structures have a center, the point of origin, the thing that created the system in the first place. The second is that all systems or structures are created of binary pairs or oppositions, of two terms placed in some sort of relation to each other.

With a text any number of possible readings based upon the substitution that the language of literature particularly suggests can be limited and

qualified by the notion of its centre. Philips (2000: 149) writes that all notions of structure have a centre --a point of presence, as Derrida puts it--a place where the structure originates. He adds that typical concepts of center in literary criticism, for instance, would include the 'author' the 'historical' context', the 'reader', the 'ideology' of a 'political economy' each of which provides a ground outside the text for limiting interpretations.

The center is a place where substitutions are no longer possible and in fact it escapes structurality (that is, the author of the text is outside the structure of the text itself). In other words, the centre is not in the centre. The position of the centre is rather ever shifting. This is why the coherence of the concept of structure is contradictory. Philips (ibid) stresses the preceding point saying that all the names provided for the centre (like God, Truth, Man, History, Mind) are themselves exposed to free 'play'. So, the center is not absolutely unique, instead it is historically substituted for another. Regarding the absence of centre, Derrida as cited in Philips (ibid: 153), writes the following:

If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infiniteness of a field can't be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field-that is language, and a finite language excludes totalization. This field is in effect that of play, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a centre which arrests and grounds the play of substitution.

In simple terms, Derrida claims that as there is a finite field of infinite substitutions, the centre is missing. The point is that the meaning of any text should be seen in relation to other things where the centre is

decentered. Both poststructuralist theory in general and deconstruction in particular assume that there is no definite center to define things.

As shown earlier, binary oppositions are crucial to grasp what Derrida's deconstruction is all about. Roty in *www.encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com*. (5/18/1995) points out that deconstruction can perhaps best be discussed as a theory of reading which aims to undermine the logic of opposition within texts. Gray (1992: 43) on his behalf defines binary opposition as the fundamental contrasts (such as in /out, off/on, good/bad) used in structuralism methods of linguistic analysis, and in literary criticism.

Deconstruction attempts to erase the boundaries (the slash) between oppositions, and to show that the values and order implied by the opposition are also not rigid. Derrida does not seek to reverse the hierarchies implied in binary pairs, to make evil favored over good, unconscious over conscious, feminine over masculine. Wheeler (2000: 220) writes that deconstruction shows "how the favored term of the binary opposition really depends on its other..." Therefore, Derrida's assertion that two terms can not exist without reference to each other is acceptable.

2.4. The Social Background of El Saadawi and the Critique on Her Works

2.4.1. El Saadawi's Social Background

Stephanie in *www.nawal.saadawi.net.articles.sherifarem*. (8/18/9999) writes that the Egyptian novelist, essayist, physician, feminist, and psychiatrist, Nawal El Saddawi was born in kafr Tahla in the rural lower Egypt's Delta in 1931. She was educated at the University of Cairo, receiving her M.D. in 1955. Later, she studied at Columbia University, New York, and received her Master of Science in Public Health in 1966.

Her son and daughter also became creative writers. Her life was traumatic and she drew heavily up on her experiences in her novels. When she was ten years old, she challenged male domination. For instance, on one occasion, she deliberately spilled hot tea on a 32 years old man her father had arranged for her to marry. So the marriage has not gone through.

After graduation she worked as a physician at the University of Cairo and at rural health centers. From 1958 to 1972, she was the General Director of Public Health Education in the Ministry of Health. In 1972 El Saadawi was dismissed from her post in the ministry for publishing *A1- Mara'a Wa-al- Jins*, which dealt with sex, religion, female circumcision--all taboo subjects in the country. Nawal El Saadawi is also claimed to refuse to accept the limitation that both religious and patriarchal oppression imposed on most rural women. Undeterred by this experience, the banning of her books, and even a period in detention under Sadat, she has continued to write about Arab Women's problems and their struggles for liberation.

The internet source (ibid) adds that she also worked for the United Nations, as the director of African affairs and Research Center for Women in Ethiopia (1978 - 1980). While in Addis Ababa she wrote her short story *The Veil* (1978). She now lives in the USA and teaches at various universities. It is when her name appeared on a fundamentalist death list that she fled with her husband to the United States.

All in all, El Saadawi has paid a heavy price because of her critical writings. She was imprisoned for a long period of time and was finally exiled. Now she is internationally acclaimed. She has received several awards including High Council of Literature Award (1974), Literary Franco- Arab Friendship Award (1982), Literary Award of Gurban (1988), First Degree Decoration of the Republic of Libya (1989).

El Saadawi's Principal works include *Woman at Point Zero* (1983), *Memoirs of a Lady Doctor* (1987), *The Song of the Children's Circle* (1989), *God Dies by the Nile* (1985), and *The Absentee* (1980) all of which are novels. She also published her non-fiction like, *The Hidden Face of Eve* (1980), and *Woman and Sex* (1990). In addition, she has produced a number of short stories and articles.

2.4.2. Critique on Saadawi's Works

It is commonly accepted that her books focus on the plight of women not only in North Africa but also in other Arab countries. She is, therefore, claimed to be a feminist writer, who is against the oppressive nature of political and religious leaders. Stephanie in *www. nawal. saadawi. Net.articles.shorifrem* (8/18/1999) summarizes the themes of El Saadawi's writings as follows:

Her feminist works have widened the boundaries of the Arab novel. Her central theme is the oppression of women and women's desire for self-expression. In her works, she attacks the hypocrisy of religious and political leaders. She is critical of all religions: Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. She is in short the mouth piece of oppressed women (emphasis mine).

Her works are claimed to fight sexual and social oppressions associated with religious doctrines and patriarchal traditions. El Saadaw is, thus, considered as one of the prominent Arabic feminist writers. Tarabishi (1988:9) asserts that she is the principal exponent of the Arabic feminist novel, and has a great place in the history of Arab literature in general and Arab female writers in particular. Hence, Her literary texts have been taken as sympathetic portrayal of women in the Arab world. As quoted on the cover of the novel *Woman at Point Zero*, the journal, *Middle East Report*, gives the following remark on the novel: "Saadawi's novels cry out

loudly against the prevalent gender and class oppression of contemporary Egypt at a time when few others have had the courage to raise their voices.”

El Saadawi has strongly argued that the plight of Arab women is mainly because of the patriarchal domination. With regard to Arab women's oppression, El Saadawi (1980: XV) writes the following: “we the women in Arab countries realize that we are still slaves, still oppressed, not because we belong to the East, not because we are Arab, or members of Islamic societies, but mainly as a result of the patriarchal class system.”

On the other hand, some literary critics assume that El Saadawi knowingly or unknowingly selfcontradicts in her literary products. They argue that the discourse in her novels disclose the fact that the rebellious heroines of her novel sometimes tend to be against the principles of feminism. For example, Tarabishi (1988:9) writes that in Saadawi's literary products, we are faced with what was a consciously pro-feminist ideology, interwoven with one that was sub-consciously anti-feminist.

Woman at Point Zero is one of Saadawi's highly acclaimed novels. In support of the preceding point, Stephanie, in a website, *www.nawal saadawi net. articles. sherifarem* (8/18/1999) writes that *Woman at Point Zero* is a powerful Egyptian novel relaying the life story of a woman awaiting death row in a Cairo prison for murdering a pimp. *New York Times Book Review* cited in the website (ibid) also gives the following witness on the book: “*Woman at Point Zero* is Nawal ElSaadawi's most powerful novel. Nawal El Saadawi writes with directness and passion, transforming the systemic brutalization of peasants and of women into powerful allegory”. In the preface section of the novel (1983:I) El Saadawi

asserts that she “had chosen as a feminist author and novelist whose views were viewed unfavourably by the authorities.”

In short, the novel is claimed to be concerned with marginalized citizens, especially women in Egypt. In the analysis section, therefore, it is going to be seen if it is possible to give such a definite meaning to the text.

CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

We have seen that Saadaw's novels are said to be feminist texts. The author herself admits that she intends the novels to highly reflect feminist views. However, according to deconstructive criticism there are always other view points, other voices and even contradictory ideas in texts. Accordingly, a literary work consciously designed to be pro-feminist can be found interwoven with ideas that are subconsciously anti-feminist. This section, therefore, makes discourse analyses to discover the presence of the plural and contradictory views. This is done by first dealing with the new critical reading of the texts.

3.1. Woman at Point Zero

3.1.1. A New Critical Reading of the Novel

3.1.1.1. Synopsis of the Novel

Woman at Point Zero (1983) is a novel about a prostitute jailed for murder. In the preface of the novel, Saadawi states that she wrote the novel after her encounter with a woman awaiting her death in Qanatir prison. The woman is sentenced to death for killing a pimp, Marzuk. The story portrays the fate of the main character, Firdaus, whose abuse from childhood prompts a search for freedom which eventually ends in revenge with the murder of her pimp, who exploits her both psychologically and financially. He forces her regularly pay him. In addition, he threatens her not to stop prostitution. And a psychiatrist interviews her on the eve of her execution. She tells her life story from her childhood to city prostitute. In short, the novel is claimed to be mainly about the desperate plight of women in Egypt.

The main theme from a new critical perspective or the novels overt ideological project in deconstructive terms can be stated as follows: The

novel criticizes the oppression and humiliation of women. *Woman at Point Zero* opens with a confident concerned female psychologist and author trying to learn the story behind the quiet, patient Firdaus, who is portrayed as a mysterious, ex-prostitute who refuses to speak with any one in or out of the prison. However, she at last agrees to speak to the narrator, who is a psychologist/author, and slowly unravels her tragic story. She tells (the narrator) that all the male members of the society including religious leaders, the educated, and authorities contribute to the oppression of women. Generally, Firdaus's misery and despair, is portrayed to evoke the need to challenge the forces that deprive women of their right to live, to love and to real freedom.

3.1.1.2. Oppression of Women

From her childhood on Firdaus has suffered from a life rife with abuse, oppression, abandonment. She has been taken advantage of at all levels, and consistently rejected by nearly every man she comes across. She says: "I have discovered in my experience that no one either the culture or the law is in a position to defend women: the law always punishes women, but turns a blind eye to what men always do." (*Woman at Point Zero*, p. 9). Thus, both the legal bodies and the society at large are against women. Even the constitution does not defend their rights.

Firdaus has repeatedly suffered from physical and sexual oppression by men, a fact that makes her develop a belief that men are untrustworthy. A number of evidences can be cited for her humiliation. At one time she goes to an office to seek employment. However, the officer, Bayoum, "Slapped her on the face, repeatedly beat her and finally did what he wanted to do. He then insults her saying, "How dare you raise your voice to me, you bitch, you street walker, you low woman." (P. 75). The whole story reveals how Firdaus is repeatedly humiliated even by men, like Ibrahim.

Believing that he was a noble advocate for the common people, she falls in love with Ibrahim, who she later discovers to be deceptive. Firdaus is both ethically and politically violated, and then literally prostituted by him through the veil of "revolutionary struggle" (p. 76). The following extract clearly illustrates her frustrations on men:

All we (women) are subject to men's oppression. And all men are the same. Even the so-called revolutionary leaders like Ibrahim desire me merely for a sexual or political tool. I know that Ibrahim uses the notion of revolution only as a trick to get me to bed-for free. I will not trust any man from now on wards. (P. 130).

Hence, she, develops negative attitudes towards men in general. Firdaus who is raped and humiliated by many men in her life and sees no way out from such evils, resolves in desperation that death is her ultimate passage to freedom. She then decides to kill the pimp and enter a spiritual journey which she considers no one else can take away from her. She claims that she gets this spiritual freedom after killing the pimp who has exploited her both psychologically and financially (p.95). After the murder, she grows increasingly desperate. Here are her concluding remarks after killing him with a dagger.

I have triumphed over both life and death because I no longer desire to live, nor do I any longer fear to die. I want nothing. I hope for nothing. I fear nothing. Therefore, I am free. For during our life it is our wants, our hopes, our fears, our desires that enslave us. (P. 100).

In the novel we also come across female characters who are against their own sex. On one occasion, Firdaus's husband severely hit her, and her face and body became swollen and bruised (p.44). Therefore, she leaves the house and goes to her uncle. However, her uncle and his wife tell her

that husbands normally beat their wives (p.44). Her uncle's wife, who does not want Firdaus to stay at her home, says:

Even my husband often beats me ... it was precisely men well versed in their religion who beat their wives. The precepts of religion permitted such punishment. A virtuous woman was not supposed to complain about her husband. Her duty was perfect obedience. (p.44).

This depicts that there are women who collaborate in the humiliation of other women. The argument about a wife's "perfect obedience" is simply a pretext to get rid of Firdaus. It is she who initially forced her husband to give Firdaus to a husband saying: "the house is small and life is expensive. She eats twice as much as any of our children" (p. 35). Thus, this female character represents women who are unsympathetic to and instrumental in the oppression of their own kinds.

Moreover, the story points out that women are victims of the law. "I found out that the law punishes women like me, but turns a blind eye to what men do." (p. 9). These are some of the reasons why the text is claimed to be feminist. To sum up, the author focuses on the marginalization of Egyptian women and attacks the gender oppression which stems from cultural, religious and patriarchal beliefs.

3.1.1.3. Center and the Binary Opposition

From a new critical perspective, *Woman at Point Zero* is a gender text, a feminist text. So, man is provided for the center. The domination of patriarchal culture is what the text is preoccupied with. The main character Firdaus is claimed by the author to fight a society which oppresses women. Thus, the man is contrasted sharply with the woman. In short, based on the earlier discussions, we can conclude that the male members of the oppositions are privileged in the novel. Every man is not

only privileged but also is the enemy, whether he be father, brother, uncle, husband, judge, policeman, doctor, journalist or whatever. This is manifested in what Firdaus says about her father's manner of treating his wife and his children:

When one of his female children died, my father would eat his supper, my mother would wash his legs, and then he would go to sleep, just as he did every night. When the child that died was a boy, he would beat my mother, then have his supper and lie down to sleep... My father never went to bed without supper, no matter what happened. Sometimes when there was no food at home we would all go to bed with empty stomachs. But he would never fail to have a meal. My mother would hide his food from us at the bottom of one of the holes in the oven. (p. 18).

The extract explicitly shows that even fathers discriminate against their own children. They let down their daughters and favour their sons, a practice prevalent in the text. And the main character is claimed by the author and critics to fight such patriarchal centered society which oppresses women. Here is a textual evidence to support this claim:

All women are victims of deception. Men impose deception on women and punish them for being deceived, force them down to the lowest level and punish them for failing so low, bind them in marriage and then chastise them with menial service for life, or insults, or blows. (p. 86).

The quotation explicitly shows that in her fight, Firdaus refuses to recognize variety and confines each sex to its own domain. Since it is assumed that all men are enemies and that the society is male centered, the text is an attack on patriarchy.

The binary opposition that structures the novel is man over woman. This contrast is heightened by the description that all men are criminals and all women are innocent. Firdaus says, "No woman can be a criminal, to

be a criminal, one must be a man. I am saying that you are criminals, all of you: the fathers, the uncles, the husbands, the pimps, the lawyers, the doctors, the journalists and all men of all professions." (p. 100). This shows that in the binary opposition men are always favoured over women. Almost all men are portrayed as evil doers and lawbreakers. The two sexes are drawn as fundamentally opposing terms. In sum, the text in general and Firdaus in particular advocate non-conformity with patriarchal culture.

3.1.2. Disruption of the Center and Binary Opposition

Though there have always been aggressive males who consider the relationship between the two sexes as a war, we do not have a stable man over woman binary opposition. The patriarchal culture in the text is not so much dominating. There is an ever shifting of the center and disruption of the binary opposition. In the text, there is no fixed center proving the existence of patriarchal ideology. There are, instead, a number of vantage points from which to view it. There are several scenes in the novel which show the shifting of the center. On one occasion, Firdaus is confronted by the pimp, who threatens her not to stop her work (prostitution), telling her that her fate has only been slavery:

'I don't want to be any body's slave.' says Firdaus. 'And who says there is any one who is not some one's slave? There are only two categories of people'. Firdaus, 'masters and slaves'. 'In that case I want to be one of the masters and not one of the slaves.' She further says, 'I saw from the expression in his (the pimp's) eyes that he feared me as only a master can fear his slave, as only a man can fear a woman'(p. 95). (emphasis and explanation mine).

This is one of the textual evidences that contradicts the evidence we have mentioned in support of our new critical reading of the novel's main theme. The discourse manifests that the main character is portrayed so

as to struggle for the domination of women. This shows that the center is shifted. So, the opposition is deconstructed as the quotation conflicts with or undermines the center and the hierarchy claimed to exist. As a result, we can say that the text is not united. There are rather internal contradictions.

Here is another scene which shows the shifting of the center as Firdaus, in an attempt to be free, kills the pimp, her main rival male character in the story:

I raised my hand even higher than he had done and brought it down violently on his face, the whites of his eyes went red. His hand started to reach for the knife he carried in his pocket, but my hand was quicker than his, I raised the knife and buried it deep in his neck, pulled it out of his neck and then thrust it deep into his chest, pulled it out of his chest and plunged it deep into his belly. I stuck the knife into almost every part of his body. (p. 95).

The extract is a good example to explain how the text deconstructs its own project. Male domination has been taken for granted in the novel. However, there are evidences proving that the text means some thing other than what its author intends. Sometimes, it is a female character playing the role of "a master". This proves that the binary opposition is not stable.

3.1.3. Unveiling of Competing Ideologies through Pluralist Discourse

This section tries to explicitly show the text's undecidability, its plurality, and reveal the complex operations of the ideologies of which the text is constructed. It will mainly focus on discourse analysis to unravel how the novel deconstructs itself.

3.1.3.1. Man-Woman Relations

A deconstructive analysis of *Woman at Point Zero* unmasks how the novel's overt ideological project, the condemnation of patriarchal dominance is undermined by the text's own ambivalence about the binary oppositions upon which that theme rests.

In the previous sections we have seen that language and concepts are unstable and ambiguous force-fields of competing ideologies. Any concept cannot be outside the ambiguities of language. No concept can be outside the dynamic, evolving, ideologically saturated operations of the language that produced it. This is true to the text in focus. In spite of the fact that Firdaus is portrayed as a woman who is in a position to liberate women, textual evidences prove that sometimes when she is in a difficult situation she takes extremist position regarding the relation between woman and man. She says, "they know that as long as I am alive they will not be safe, that I shall kill them. My life means their death. My death means their life," (p. 100). "Them" refers to men.

Firdaus puts all men with noexception into the category of the enemy. Far from accepting the man-woman relationship as natural, she sees it as hostile and belligerent relationship. She believes that "all women are subject to men's oppression. And all men are the same" (p. 130). The quotation explicitly states that men and women can not be united even through the force of love. However, Firdaus had experienced love relation in the past. The discourse in the next extract reveals that Firdaus had a passionate desire for love relations:

A little boy called Mohammadain used to pinch me under water and follow me into the small shelter 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 hand for the exact spot. The moment I touched it, I would realize that I had felt the sensation before (p. 14).

This exposes the competing ideologies or beliefs of the principal character about man-woman relations. On the one hand, she has a generalized hatred for men and, on the other, she still remembers and relishes the memory of her love relation with Mohammadain, an experience which she reminisces time and again. She has been excited and overwhelmed by such intense feelings of pleasure that she nearly trembles. In view of these conflicting attitudes, it is reasonable to conclude that what the author intends to say seems to be incompatible with what the text means. The discourse clearly unveils the existence of opposing views as far as man-woman relation is concerned. The text shows that reality is subjective and fragmented. It all means that what matters in real life is what we invent and choose to believe which is of course different at different times.

Firdaus's positive attitudes towards man woman love relations becomes more explicit when she says that she still longs for sexual gratification or love relation. She could not escape the paradoxes language embodies. Here, for instance, is what she states about her sexual relationship with her uncle:

He was doing to me what Mohammadain 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 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. (p. 73).

The discourse implies that among other things full sexual satisfaction binds the woman to the man. Her fright for the loss of her sexual desire is uncovered in the phrase "as though a part of me, of my being, was gone and would never return."

Firdaus also suffers from a distinct lack of solidarity with her feelings and attitudes towards prostitution. She holds different views on the topic. As far as the issue of prostitution is concerned, her perspective is consciously or unconsciously pluralistic. Ofcourse, one needs to take the situation she is in into account. At times Firdaus condemns prostitution and accuses men for imposing on her. She says, "I am not a prostitute. But right from my early days my father, my uncle my husband, all of them, taught me to grow up as a prostitute." (p. 99). In view of this statement, one would expect her to stand firmly against prostitution but she hardly does so. She rather seems to take it as a means to an end and speaks in favour of it: "a prostitute always says yes, and then names her price. If she says no, she ceases to be a prostitute." (p. 80). In fact, it is claimed that Firdaus's only means of defence against prostitution is offering a lifeless, unresisting body, a body that:

is surrendered passively, without any resistance, without a movement, as though life had been drained out of it, like a piece of dead wood or old neglected furniture left to stand where it is, emptied of all desire, or pleasure or even pain, feeling nothing," (P. 45)

We come across such instances where Firdaus plays the role of a prostitute, where she finds herself actually playing the part. For instance, one night, she thought it was Bayoum, the cafe-owner, who was making love to her. However, his body happens to be heavier than before and his breath also smelt different. Then she opens her eyes and realizes that it was not Bayoum. In spite of this realization, she willfully plays the role of the prostitute:

'Who are you?' I said.

'Bayoum!', 'he answered. I insisted,' you are not Bayoum, who are you?'

'What difference does it make? Bayoum and I are one,' then he asked, 'Do you feel pleasure?'

'What did you say?' I inquired.

'Do you feel pleasure?' he repeated.

I was afraid to say I felt nothing. So I closed my eyes once more and said 'yes,' (P. 50).

The discourse makes it clear that in *Woman at Point Zero* we come across characters' contradictory views. For example, Firdaus sometimes willfully practices prostitution. Accordingly, her belief about prostitution is undecidable. We, therefore, realize that the ideologies of the text conflict with one another. Here is another textual evidence reinforcing this claim. Firdaus explains that:

She (a prostitute) experiences the rare pleasure of having no ties with any one, of having broken with every thing, of having cut all relations with the world around her, of being completely independent and living her independence completely, of enjoying freedom from any subjection to a man, to marriage, or to love of being divorced from all limitations whether rooted in rules and laws in time or in the universe (p. 87)

From this we can gather that Firdaus does not show a firm and stable stand towards prostitution. *Woman at Point Zero* is full of such contradictory and competing themes.

3.1.3.2. Firdaus as a Liberator

There is subjectivity in both the preface and the conclusion of the novel. The author has not only stressed that Firdaus is a "real woman" she met in the Qanatir prison a few years ago and that hers is a true story, but she has coupled this with the conviction that she who is a criminal, a murderess, is "better than all the men and women we normally hear about or see or know." In comparison to Firdaus, the woman psychiatrist (the narrator) claims herself to be "nothing but a small insect crawling upon the land amidst millions of other insects." So, the author demonstrates a great desire to identify with Firdaus.

Saadawi is claimed to portray rebellious female characters who break stereotypes and preconceived ideas about Arab Women as submissive and oppressed ones. In the story, Firdaus refuses and fights authorities who want to humiliate her:

I refused to go to men of this sort (authorities). My body was my property alone, but the land of our country was theirs to own. On one occasion they put me in prison because I turned down one of these important men. So, I hired a very big lawyer, for a very big sum of money. Shortly after, I was released from gaol without charges. The court decided I was an honorable woman (p. 90). (explanation mine).

Firdaus is, therefore, portrayed as a rebellious woman. On top of that, she serves as a mouth piece of the writer in condemning the widespread corruption in the country. In the story corruption and the corrupt authorities are believed to be one of the root causes of women oppression. So, Firdaus bitterly attacks the government and the statesmen. For her "the feats of kings and princes are no more than crimes..." (p. 100). She says this in the presence of a prince. She has,

hence, courageously fought against the corrupt leaders. The following extract vividly depicts this point:

They (rulers and police men) do not fear my knife. It is my truth which frightens them. This fearful truth gives me great strength. It protects me from fearing death, or destruction. It is this fearful truth which prevents me from fearing the brutality of rulers and police men. (P. 102-103) (explanation and emphasis mine).

The above discourse unveils the writer's other agenda that is, exposing and fighting the corrupt system through. Firdaus, who not only fights to liberate women from patriarchal culture but also from authorities who "are not more than criminals" and who are the source of all the problems of the people.

In the literary texts like the one in focus meaning is indeterminate and plural. And discourse is functioning to communicate effect as the literary language is highly manipulated. And this in turn means that the text has more than one voice.

The story also mockingly contradicts the very stereotypical image of women and questions how sexually controlled and oppressed women, like Firdaus, could achieve the victories they won. For instance, Firdaus avenges herself by killing the pimp and tries to justify her act by saying "When I killed I did it with truth not with a knife" (p. 102).

Nevertheless, this figure of liberation fighters herself confesses that throughout her life she was striving to be superior to every body: "All my life I was looking for something that would fill me with pride, something that would make me hold my head high, higher than the heads of every one else especially kings, princes and rulers" (p. 101) (emphasis mine).

The quotation depicts that she was longing for power authority and that the main character is not exempt from committing the same kind of injustice she claims to oppose. The above evidences also show us that there is always will to power, a strong desire to win, control and take advantage of others.

3.1.3.3. Religion

Woman at Point Zero, also embodies competing beliefs or ideologies about religion in general and the relation between religion and issues of women in particular. In the text, Islam is neither completely neglected nor completely accepted. Rather there are rival views about it. In simple terms, there is pluralism in relation to religion. Firdaus sometimes describes herself as a selfless person, even compares her deeds to a saint. "In love I gave all: My capabilities, my efforts, my feelings, my deepest emotions. *Like a Saint, I gave everything I had without ever counting the cost.* I wanted nothing, nothing at all." (P. 86). (emphasis mine).

Even after passing through a lot of ups and downs, after being scared and despaired, she still has positive attitudes towards religion. She compares herself to a Saint, a person who is recognized by certain religions as being very holy and gives everything without expecting any return. We can also cite another instance which indicates her acceptance of the precepts of religion. Firdaus's husband, Sheik Mahamoud, once severely beats her and then she goes to her uncle.

There, both her uncle and his wife tell her that all husbands beat their wives. However, she strongly argues saying, "My uncle was a respected Sheikh, well versed in the teachings of religion, and he, therefore, could not be in the habit of beating his wife" (P. 44). This depicts her strong beliefs that the precepts of religion do not permit punishment and

oppression of women in general. The novel also explicitly states that Islam is for the betterment of women and all human beings:

Was it not verily true that stealing was a sin, and killing was a sin, and defaming the honour of a woman was a sin, and injustice was a sin, and beating another human being was a sin...? Moreover who could deny that to be obedient to Allah was a duty ... (p. 12)

This is not only an approval of Islam's concern for the rights of women in particular and the rights of human kind in general, but also a revelation of Firdaus's strong belief in religion, in the existence of Allah.

On the contrary, there are several instances in the novel where religious precepts and religious men are labeled as oppressive. Firdaus is equally intent upon challenging religious decrees and rules. There are times when she totally denies all values and laws and establishes a new value-prostitution-which is obviously against the precepts of most religions. She even goes to the extent of stating that "a successful prostitute was better than a Saint who is misled" (p. 86). is not innocent or neutral. The discourse unmasks her disrespect for religion. This obviously proves the undecidability, indeterminacy of meanings in the text.

In addition, Heaven is claimed to be controlled by men. This is what she says: "I knew that ... men were in control of our worlds, the one on earth, and the one on Heaven." (p. 91). This suggests a rejection of the existence of any supernatural force as she believes that both earthly and divinely worlds are controlled by men.

The wife of Firdaus's uncle also unveils the existence of multiple voices in the text in relation to religion. As we have seen earlier, she tells Firdaus that "it was precisely men well versed in their religion who beat their wives. The precepts of religion permitted such punishment." (p. 44).

Here, the wife of the respected religious leader speaks against the principles of Islam in the presence of her husband. Besides, through the manipulation of language, the author has severely criticized religious men who act so sinfully against Islamic standards. The quotation also implies that as far as man-woman relation is concerned, religious men are worse than others. In support of this idea, Firdaus states: "I have discovered in my experience that no one either the culture or the law is in a position to defend women..." (p. 9). As religion is an aspect of culture, the extract portrays her belief that religious ideologies work against women.

In sum, the pluralist discourse existing in the text uncovers the fact that characters are portrayed as fragmented battle fields for competing religious ideologies.

3.2. *God Dies by the Nile*

3.2.1. A New Critical Reading of the Novel

3.2.1.1. Synopsis of the Novel

God Dies by the Nile (1985) is also one of El Saadawi's principal texts. The protagonist, Zakeya, hoes the stony fields on the banks of the Nile, each day as relentless and unchanging as she is a poor illiterate peasant woman. Her relatives are highly exploited and victimized by the Mayour and his local men. She has also lost her family members and suffered her whole life time. The Mayour severely exploits the poor both psychologically and economically. He does so with his collaborators who are respected religious leaders, like Has Ismail, Sheik Zaharan and Sheik Hamzawi. But when Zakeya's two pretty young nieces, Nefissa and Zeinab, fall prey to the lust of the local Mayour, his cheating schemes provoke Zakeya into an act of revenge. And as fulfillment of her determination in resisting such oppressive cultural and patriarchal

ideologies, she crushes the Mayor's head with a hoe. In short, the story focuses on showing how the Egyptian petty tyrants are determined to oppress poor women and use them to satisfy their illicit sexual lust.

3.2.1.2. Oppression of Women

The story shows how the Mayor has victimized especially women characters. Around the opening of the novel Zakeya's brother, Kafrawi, is ordered to send his elder daughter, Nefissa, to the Mayor's house. However, Nefissa refuses to go. And Sheikn Zahran orders Kafrawi saying, "Beat her. Don't you know that girls and women never do what they are told unless you beat them?" (p. 21). Then, her father beats her and she is obliged to come down. Saadawi intends to manifest how the ruling class, the religious leaders, and the patriarchal culture work together in making women objects of sex or slaves.

For the Mayor and his local men, women are not more than sex objects. They are meant to be used and thrown:

How exciting these simple girls are and how pleasant it is to take their virgin bodies into one's arms, like plucking a newly opened rose flower. How I hate the false sophistication of Cairo women, like my wife with her brazen eyes. Nothing any longer intimidates or thrills her. Her frigid body no longer quivers when I kiss her or hold her tight , or even bite her. (p.96).

This depicts the moral corruption of the ruling class, represented by the Mayor, who abuses his position and sexually molests innocent women and girls, and condemns those who refuse to be used by him as sex objects. Besides, the fact that he speaks openly about his lewd behaviour reveals that adultery is a socially accepted practice, especially among men- husbands. His wife's sexual harassment is unveiled through his

words "intimidate", and "bite". Through such discourses the writer scathingly attacks high ranking men represented by the Mayour.

Zakeya's husband, Abdel Moneim, is also a typical representative of the domineering and exploitative nature of patriarchal culture and ideologies. In the novel it is stated that "every time a son of Zakeya died her husband would strike out at her blindly, and beat her up with anything he could lay his hands on. And the same thing would happen whenever she gave birth to a daughter" (P. 69). Men can punish their wives for giving birth to a daughter. This is just one example the author uses to present men as mindless creatures. Thus, the writer shows the cruelty of patriarchy which humiliates and rejects the proper role of women in the society.

3.2.1.3. Center and Binary Opposition

The above discussions precisely manifest that the text is intended to portray the patriarchal orientation of the society. In the text, man is the privileged term. It is a man-centered text. The major male characters advocate patriarchally produced stereotypes. It is because of male domination, especially that of the corrupt Mayour and his collaborators, that Zakeya loses her brother, Kafrawi, her son, Galal and her two nieces, Nefissa and Zeinab, as a result of which she is despaired. Man is taken as the center, as the root cause of the plight of women, women's endless physical and psychological abuse. Zakeya's reaction when the fingers of an unknown man sink into her flesh can demonstrate the supremacy of men:

She (Zakeya) opened her mouth wide and started to scream and to wail in a continuous high pitched lament, as though mourning the suffering of a whole lifetime suppressed in her body from the very first moment of her life when her father struck her

*mother on the head because she had not borne him
the son he expected. (P. 75).*

From this, we can gather that the text assumes the existence of the center which holds the structure together, attributing the presence of determinate meaning in the word. Gender discrimination is prevalent. The father punishes his wife as she "had not borne him the son he expected." In short, in the text male beliefs are taken to be dominant.

In many parts of the novel, we are provided with incidents and descriptions that reveal how culture dominates over nature. For example, whenever Fathey, one of the minor characters, had her period, people including her husband would isolate her as if it was a curse. Even her husband "treats her as though she was a leper" (p. 33).

Accordingly, the binary opposition or pairs are presented as structures that fundamentally oppose each other. In the text in focus, the binary opposition structuring the novel is basically man versus woman and the oppositions are defined hierarchically: the second term is seen as a corruption of the first. The terms are not exact opposites, but it is claimed that woman is subordinated to man. In the text a man is created to be a man and a woman a woman. One is not part and parcel of the other.

So far we have located the center and the binary opposition that thematically structure the novel and determine which members of the opposition are privileged in the novel. Let's now move onto disclosing how the existence of the center and the binary opposition are deconstructed.

3.3. Disruption of the Center and Binary Opposition

This section attempts to provide textual evidences that contradict the evidence we have identified in support of our new critical reading of the

novel's main theme, and show how both the center and the binary opposition are disrupted.

Deconstructive criticism accepts that there is always a grey area that can not be explained in literary texts. Contrary to the novel's claims, there are several instances which show the shifting of the center and the binary opposition. *God Dies by the Nile* reveals that neither side of the binary opposition supporting the main theme can be privileged over the other. It is rather an unstable opposition. This is so because in spite of the existence of the center (patriarchal culture), we find Zakeya and Zeinab playing their appropriate roles. Following is an instance showing Zakeya's strong resistance against patriarchal embarrassment and cruelty:

When the Mayor came close, he saw her (Zakeya's) arm rise high up in the air holding the hoe. He did not feel the hoe land on his head and crush it at one blow. For a moment before he had looked into her eyes, just once. And from that moment he was destined never to see, or feel, or know anything more. (p. 137).

Zakeya kills the corrupt Mayor, who is an embodiment of male domination, with a hoe, and the story culminates with her ultimate revenge. The instance uncovers that the center is threatened, disrupted. The center fails. Eventually the binary opposition structuring the novel becomes woman over man. The expression "for a moment before, he had looked into her eyes, just once" implies that her oppressor in the end realizes that the consequence of oppressing women and the poor is grave. The Mayor has embarrassed and enslaved both men and women in the village but it is a woman who has played a great role and won in the fight against their common enemy.

There are also women characters that are portrayed as superior to men both in reasoning and morality. Fatheya, for example, demonstrates courage and determination in fighting the oppressive culture. Her firm stand shows how nature dominates over culture or, at least, how the binary opposition, culture over nature, is constantly shifting. Fatheya adopts an orphan child as a result of which she becomes a social outcast. The villagers call the baby "the son of fornication" (p. 115). The villagers and her husband claim that one misfortune after another happened to them since the child was brought (p. 105). Hence, her husband, though a religious leader, wants to throw the child out of the window. With this a quarrel arises between Fatheya and her husband, Sheikh Hamzawi:

'Shame on you, Sheikh Hamzawi. You are a man of God. He is a Small, innocent child.'

'I don't want a child born in sin to remain in my house.'

'Then I will leave the house with him,' she said.

'You are not his mother, and you shall not leave with him.'
His voice trembled as he spoke.

'I will not abandon him to the care of any one else. People have no mercy in their hearts and he is an innocent child who has done no wrong' (p. 104-105).

As the discourse indicates, Fatheya dismisses her husband's argument as unjustifiable. She reasonably undermines a religious person who is believed to be virtuous. Thus, it is safe to say that the woman is here the privileged term. So, the writer has destroyed patriarchally produced stereotypes and replaces them with women who have rejected imposed patterns of thought and struggle for their own beliefs, desires and moral principles. In sum, patriarchy of the text is not really in the ultimate

sense overpowering and dominating, which means, both the center and the binary opposition are disrupted.

3.4. Unveiling of Competing Ideologies through Pluralist

Discourse

According to deconstructive criticism, literary texts are marked by the surplus of meaning. This section tries to reveal how the writer consciously or unconsciously expresses different outlooks on the same topic, and shows the existence of multiple voices or pluralist discourses.

3.4.1. Man-Woman Relations

With regard to the text in focus pluralism is there in feminism. The text is not totally an attack on patriarchy. It is not entirely hostile and belligerent. It is rather about how feminism is not exclusive of patriarchy. The relation between the two sexes is indispensable for the perpetuation and protection of life. For instance, Sheikh Hamzawi eventually collaborates with Fatheya, in protecting the life of the abandoned child. He prefers adopting the child to getting benefits from the Mayour. There is a normal man-woman relationship which creates and protects life. In the story there are also characters who play a great role in the people's day to day life. One of them is Om Saber, who "was a part of every household, and no household could survive without her" (p. 72).

Om Saber personifies the strong tie between men and women. This is manifested through language manipulation. Let's consider how Om Saber is described: "No one thought badly of what she did. For the villagers of Kafr E1 Teen she was Om Saber, the *daya*, *neither man nor woman*, but an asexual being without a family, or relatives or offspring." (p. 72). (emphasis mine). As the above quotation testifies humanity was

created male and female so that the two sexes can accept and love each other. It depicts the oneness of male and female.

Therefore, a deconstructive reading of the text enables us to see the unity and cooperation of the two sexes, to see how the two sexes complement each other. The relation between the two goes to the extent that one cannot survive without the other. The language of the text constantly overflows with implications, associations, and contradictions that reflect the implications, associations, and contradictions of the ideologies of which it is formed. The discourse also suggests that a human being was created half-male and half-female, with each half eternally protecting the other. So, against the authorial intention, the text retains the biological laws of nature. One more point worth discussing is the relationship between the Mayor and the girls.

It is believed that the Mayor with the help of his local men sexually exploits Nefissa and Zeinab. However, a critical reading of the novel unravels that both girls have partly enjoyed their stay at the Mayor's house. Zeinab has been Galal's lover while the Mayor has a wife. Despite this fact, Zeinab goes to the Mayor's house and enjoys the sex she has with him. The following extract clearly illustrates this point:

Zeinab gave a half-throttled shout, part pain at the hard pressure of his hand around her breast sensitive with youth and inexperience, part fright running through her body with an icy shiver, and part pleasure, a strange new pleasure almost akin to an ecstasy, the ecstasy of salvation, of being free of the heavy load which had been weighing down on her heart (p. 99) (emphasis mine).

The discourse, which reveals the woman character practicing adultery willfully, proves the existence of mutual attraction between male and female. The Mayor is here admitted to be the source of her "strange new pleasure almost akin to an ecstasy". He is instrumental in freeing her

from the “heavy load”. The language manifests that a woman’s life becomes meaningful only with the involvement of a man. Nefissa’s relation with the Mayor is also described as “simple and easy going” (p. 88). She enjoys her sexual relation with the Mayor. In sum, the deconstructive reading of the text has showed that no sex is self sufficient. It rather depicts that the existence of one depends on the other. In simple terms, man cannot live a complete life without a woman.

3.4.2. Zakeya and Fatheya as Liberators

It is believed that Zakeya and Fatheya have been struggling to liberate their female sisters. Of course, in spite of oppression, these characters have been free, revolting and working for self fulfillment. For instance, Fatheya’s fight has not been confined to liberating females. She has fought to bring justice for women, and for men, in the totality of their existence. She has proven this in her struggle to save the orphan child at the expense of her own life:

During the struggle for the child, Fatheya’s clothes were torn away, and her body shone white, and naked. Her face was as white as her body, and her eyes were filled with a strong almost insane determination, and she was a wild animal, ferociously fighting those who surrounded her in the night. She hit out at the men with her legs, and her feet, with her shoulders and her hips all the while holding the child tightly in her arms. Hands moved in on her from every side. The long black nails sank into her breast tearing flesh out of flesh... In a few moments Fatheya’s body had become a mass of thorn flesh and the ground was stained red with her blood (p. 115).

The scene signifies a number of things. Firstly, it shows the heavy price women pay for their principles and stands. Secondly, it depicts women’s strong resistance against cultural humiliation. Fatheya’s struggle to save

the life of the child ends up with her death. Her role as a liberator of humiliated men and women is, therefore, so profound. She has also built her nieces consciousness. Generally, Fatheya can be taken as an example of Arab women who in their own ways question and challenge their environment and become agents of change.

Zakeya is, thus, intentionally portrayed to show how a woman can break the wall of silence in the society where women's voices are not supposed to be heard or their names pronounced. Zakeya kills the Mayor with a hoe. However, by committing murder she can not maintain justice in her approach. She has rather become so radical and militant. In other words, from a humanitarian point of view justice can not be maintained through unjust deeds especially by killing. So, what she has done seems self-contradictory.

According to the pluralist discourse, meaning is undecidable and escapes the control of the author. A careful reading of the text also uncovers that there are voices other than feminism. These voices uncover a meaning somewhat different from what the author intends the text to mean. In the texts in focus the multiple voices show that there is a political agenda in the story though it is not explicitly stated. On one occasion, Kafrawi is accused of murder and the police come to arrest him. And then this is what we are told about the villagers attitudes towards the government:

The villagers hated the police man and his dogs, hated all police men, all officers, all representatives of authority and the government. It was the hidden ancient hatred of peasants for their government. They knew that in some way or another they had always been the victim, always been exploited... (p.60) (emphasis mine).

The extract portrays the text's criticism against the "representatives of authority and the government" who have always been oppressing and

exploiting them. This testifies that since ancient times the different governments of Egypt have severely oppressed the citizens. The novel further discloses this situation through the corrupt nature of the Mayor, the representative of the government. One of the Mayor's collaborators, Sheik Zahran states: "Things are getting worse, and people have started to open their eyes much more than before. Prices are rising all the time and the peasants owe more and more taxes to the government. The Mayor is no longer as popular as he was at one time" (P. 126). So, the representatives of women liberators in the novel are fighting against both the oppressive patriarchal culture and the corrupt officials. The portrayal of the Mayor as a symbol of patriarchal exploitation and the church leaders as his collaborators is not innocent. It strongly suggests that the corrupt government is responsible for the suffering of the people. The analysis shows that there are multiple voices in the text. In sum, literary texts, especially those which are considered to be feminist ones embody multiple themes.

3.4.3. Religion

A deconstructive analysis of the text also unmasks contradicting views of religion. From the previous discussion, we can infer that the text intends to show religion as an oppressive device but it does not succeed to do so. There are scenes which disclose the characters' opposing ideologies about Allah.

Let's consider Zakeya's case here. She is repeatedly deceived and humiliated by religious people in Allah's name. Even though she has become sick and has been on the verge of despair, she believes in Allah. She admits this saying, "verily I do witness that there is no Allah except Allah, and that Mohamed is the prophet of Allah" (p. 87). The passage is used to vividly depict her firm belief in the existence of Allah.

On another occasion, the Mayor's local men try to force Zeinab, who has married Galal, to come back to the Mayor's home and "serve" him. They have already put Galal in prison and warned her that Allah has ordered her to go to the Mayor's house (P. 135). Zeinab argued saying, "Now I am a wife and Allah has forbidden me to go there" (p. 135). Zakeya, who was listening to what was going on, has a dialogue with Zeinab in which we realize Zakeya's denial of the existence of Allah.

*'What is wrong, Aunt?' asks Zeinab,
'I was blind, but now my eyes have been opened. I know
Who it is, I know Zeinab, I know.'
'Who is it?' asked Zeinab,
'It is Allah', Zakeya said in a distant tone as though her mind
had strayed far away,
'Ask Allah to have mercy on you, do your ablutions and pray,
so that Allah may forgive us both and have pity on us,'
'Don't say that, Zeinab, You know nothing,' she cried out in
sudden anger. 'I am the one who knows,' (pp. 135-136).*

The extract helps us understand the Zakeya's rival ideas about religion. It is obvious that Zakeya blames Allah for their sufferings. Not only does she blame Allah but also acts against the will of Allah and kills the Mayor.

CHAPTER FOUR: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The objectives and underlying principles of literary criticism have changed constantly through the ages. However, studies of developments in literary criticism depict that schools of literary criticism are highly related and overlapping. This research has modestly attempted to attest this fact by tracing the developments in literary criticism beginning from the classical approaches up to some of the major modern schools of criticism. The guiding principles of the major critical theories, their similarities with and differences from deconstructive criticism have been touched upon. This has been done in order to examine how the earlier critical approaches have contributed to the birth of deconstructive criticism. Besides, it helps to better understand deconstruction.

Generally speaking, deconstruction, which has seriously attacked the metaphysical presence or the existence of absolute reality, has brought considerable changes in the study of literature. It is also worth mentioning the fact that deconstruction is not a mere academic concern; it has also a social concern. This is because in the present day world the presence of ultimate truth is seriously challenged. Truth has become subjective, culture specific and individualistic. This has been prevalent also in the area of literature, especially after the emergence of deconstructionist criticism, which argues that language is self-contradictory and, thus, looks for ambiguities, ambivalence and contradictions in the language of literary texts, like sentences, even when the sentence, at first glance, seems clear and specific. As there are always hidden operations of ideas in literary texts, one needs to fully and critically read them instead of taking extracts, read superficially and arrive at a determinate meaning which is indeterminate. Hence, a deconstructive critic looks for meanings in the text that conflict with its main theme, focusing on self-contradictions of which the text seems

unaware. And this is done through discourse analysis which uncovers the self-contradictory nature of texts and the under surface intentions or agenda of a writer.

It is with the above theoretical assumptions in mind that El Saadawi's novels *Woman at Point Zero* and *God Dies by the Nile* have been chosen for deconstructive reading and analysis. The dominant issues of the novels, such as exploitation of women, patriarchal culture, man-woman relations, women's fight against oppression, injustice and religion are identified for analysis and interpretation. Issues related to center and binary opposition have also been pointed out and discussed. These have been selected to show how the novels illustrate deconstruction's notion of undecidability.

In her literary works in general and the two novels in particular, El Saadawi is alleged as a feminist writer who attacks the gender bias which is based on cultural, religious and patriarchal ideologies. She is also claimed to have revealed women oppression which was usually hidden beneath the surface of Egyptian society. Besides, the writer and some critics have taken the texts as stable, coherent that have determinate meanings.

It has been established, hence, that many of the male characters the heroines of the novels, such as Firdaus, Zakeya and Fatheya meet lack moral character and contribute to their never ending physical and spiritual down ward. The new critical reading of the novels has also depicted that men in the novels are corrupt and evil who wildly colonize women and gratify their sexual lust. The heroine of *Woman at Point Zero*, Firdaus suffered a lot right from her childhood to city prostitute. As a result she has become desperate and has killed her pimp. She is delineated to symbolize the desperate plight of women in Egypt. The new critical reading of the novel *God Dies by the Nile*, demonstrates that

Zakeya, the heroine of the novel, is an impoverished, illiterate peasant woman whose relatives, especially her two nieces, Nefissa and Zeinab, are severely exploited by patriarchal culture and corrupt authorities. As a result, Zakeya Kills a Mayour with a hoe. In short, condemnation of Women exploitation is the texts' most pervasive and overt theme.

The thesis has also tried to locate the center (patriarchal domination) and the binary oppositions (man over woman) that thematically structure the novels in focus. The new critical reading of the novels shows that the female characters, in the given context, accept the man-woman relationship as the most antagonistic and unpropitious. Most female characters mainly find pain in their relation with men. Therefore, the heroines are forced to be so radical and militant. Especially Firdaus and Zakeya go to the extent of revenging men by killing.

In order to discover the limitations of the overt ideology of the texts, the ways in which they overlap or share some things in common was examined. So, first by using deconstructive approach and discourse analysis the disruption of the center and binary opposition has been disclosed. It is found out that the binary structure man over woman is not a fundamentally opposing idea. Rather the terms have been found to be equal opposites. In short, there are underling decentering implications.

In addition, the analysis and interpretation of the texts has uncovered that the texts' dominant issues or ideologies are competing and contradictory. The critical reading and examination of the texts' theme and language has unveiled that there are occasions when the female characters live their lives as they choose. On top of that, in the novels we come face to face with both the conscious and unconscious murdering which does not go along with humanitarian's views.

Both Firdaus and Zakeya kill the men. Though their action is justified, from a humanitarian point of view, killing is not a solution to any problem. So, the characters should have tamed and humanized those who they consider as oppressors and exploiters.

What we see in the texts is not merely an outcome of women's rebellion against men who are assumed to be their oppressors, but the characters at times accept the man- woman relations as natural and complementary, not as antagonistic and hostile. Generally speaking, people's ideologies about man – woman relations are constantly changing and are determined by contexts.

Based on the analysis and interpretation of the texts, the researcher argues that the heroines sometimes show a distinct lack of solidarity with the principles of justice. The killing and some other unjust deeds make it difficult to whole heartedly sympathize with the women characters. However, on other occasions, the rebellious female characters not only break the preconceived ideas of women as unresisting and weak but also fight for the freedom of men and women in their totality. Though the texts are intended to portray women inferiority, the stories are told from women characters' perspective which implies the great power the female characters are provided with. The study also discloses that in the novels it is impossible to put all men into the category of women's enemy.

Like the female characters, the male characters in the novels manifest both virtue and evil. In addition, the heroines do not totally take religion as patriarchal orientation. There are subjective and plural views in their understanding of religion. They accept certain aspects of religion and refuse others. In simple terms, the texts both promote and undermine religion.

In a nutshell, the texts deconstruct their own project by inadvertently reassuring, at the end of the novels, some of the same stereotypes they have worked to undermine. The texts, also deal with other topics which are, of course, related to feminism. For instance, in both the texts corruption of the authorities is discussed though not explicitly stated. Concerning this, a critical reading of the novels discloses that political corruption is taken as the root cause of the sufferings of the poor.

The presence of many voices, other than feminism, the open-endedness of the dominant issues of the text, the giving of different and disorderly outlooks on the same topic, the existence of ambiguities and contradictions are the major characteristics of the novels. So, the present researcher argues that El Saadawi has intentionally or unintentionally adopted deconstruction in the making of the literary texts in focus. Besides, since neither side of the binary opposition is really privileged over the other, it can be concluded that the novels deconstruct themselves. Hence, final and complete interpretations of other feminist texts in general, and the texts under study in particular is impossible. In relation to the texts in focus, the writer's perspective is pluralistic and there is pluralist discourse. In simple terms, the meanings in the novels in focus are unstable and fragmented.

Therefore, it can generally be concluded that in literary texts, meaning is produced by the play of language through the vehicle of the reader. All in all, in literary texts what we seek to be meaning is really only the mental trace left behind by the play of signifiers.

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my work and that all sources of material used for this thesis have been duly acknowledged.

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This thesis has been submitted for the examination under my approval as research advisor.

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