Beyond Borders: Representations of Gender in Post-Colonial Arab Literature in English

Dissertation submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Dr. phil.)

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at the

Faculty of Humanities
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Date of the oral examination: 25 May 2018
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We have fought our pain, we have taken our strength, we have strived for becoming these new women.

To my mother
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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank all of the Arab writers – of the past and the present – who have continued to write, speak out, publish and influence the global literary discourse. It is because of them that the West is able to appreciate the essence of Arab literature and culture free of prejudice, and the Arab world can artistically represent itself while gaining the world’s attention. Without dispute, literature has developed in the course of centuries into an important global medium of self-representation with the author functioning as the own culture and society’s spokesperson. I am grateful to have had the chance to access a variety of Egyptian and Sudanese literary works, including short stories and novels rarely or never being available, read and discussed in the western world, and to produce a critical piece that shows appreciation for the authors’ artistry, dedication, social engagement and encouragement.

I would very much like to thank Donna Landry and Abdulrazak Gurnah of the School of English, University of Kent, for introducing me to the works of Arab writers in the course of the MA Postcolonial Studies programme and encouraging me to look further into the field of socio- and gender-critical post-colonial Arab literature in English by both female and male authors after receiving my MA degree at Kent. Moreover, I owe great thanks to my long-time friend and intellectual companion met during my studies at Kent – Eugene Nulman. Thank you for introducing me to Nawal El Saadawi’s inspiring novel Woman at Point Zero (1975) that laid – aside from Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North (1966) – the foundation for this doctoral research. I would also like to thank the Department of Anglophone Studies at the University of Duisburg-Essen for giving me the opportunity to teach a seminar on “Post-Colonial Arab Women Writers” in the summer term 2014. I am deeply appreciative of my supervisors Silvia Mergenthal, University of Konstanz, and Christoph Heyl, University of Duisburg-Essen, for their endless support, advice and patience throughout my doctoral studies. Without their encouragement, I would not have been able to eventually weave spirit into words. I am grateful to the University of Manchester, in particular Anastasia Valassopoulos, for spending a research semester in autumn/winter 2016 at the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures. During my stay in Manchester, I was not only able to work intensively on my dissertation’s chapter 4, but also received invaluable feedback and advice. To my supervisor at Manchester, Anastasia Valassopoulos, for her endless
support and encouragement, thank you. I owe many thanks to my dear friend Natasha De Souza for her time and patience of reading an earlier version of this work. To my very precious friend Dominique Jean Midedji, for the many years of friendship, humour, enthusiasm and patience, thank you. Finally, much gratitude goes to my family – my parents Ingeborg Lenz-Nassauer and Konrad Nassauer, my brother Jan-Frederik Nassauer and my aunt Melanie Nassauer – who has always been supportive of my life choices and to whom I could rely on at all times. Especially to my mother, to whom this work is dedicated, I am very grateful for her advice, faith and love.
Note on Transliteration and Citation

Names and places are spelled out as they are found in standard western publications. Nevertheless, existing spellings are preserved in quoted materials.

I have consistently followed the MLA based citation guide from March 2011 of the Department of Literature, British Studies and American Studies, University of Konstanz. For any citation requirements not addressed by the citation guide from March 2011, I have consulted the Purdue OWL’s MLA formatting and style guide from September 2016.
1. Introduction

Women’s oppression is not unique to the Arab/Muslim world – it is a universal phenomenon and it is a consequence of the patriarchal capitalist system.¹

Nawal El Saadawi, secular Egyptian feminist writer², activist and physician³, challenges with her 2006 statement about the universal oppression of women the centuries-long western (male) mythical perceptions⁴ of oriental women as solely affected by patriarchal suppression⁵, and female defencelessness caused, inter alia, by the harem space⁶. Especially, the Arab Spring’s socio-political uprisings in the Muslim Arab world, the growing Arab migration to Europe and the re-examination of Islamic cultures therewith have not only revived but also fuelled in recent years the gender-political discourses on oriental patriarchy and female Arab oppression within western societies and the fields of international gender studies and politics. What El Saadawi critically voices with regard to the 21st-century universal subjugation of women in an interview with Sophie Smith in January 2006 has indeed been debated by both ‘Third World’⁷/post-colonial⁸ and western feminists since the beginning of the 20th century⁹.

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The word ‘harem’ derived from the Arabic word ‘haram’ which means ‘forbidden’ (See Ahmed 1982: 529). The harem constitutes “[...] a space to which general access is forbidden or controlled and in which the presence of certain individuals or certain modes of behaviour are forbidden. [...] The word harem is a term of respect, redolent of religious purity and honor, and evocative of the requisite obeisance. It is gender-specific only in its reference to the women of a family.” However, the word ‘harem’ not only signifies the female private space in a domestic residence but also describes its female inhabitants (See Pierce 1993: 4f.). The harem space’s gender segregation entails a system of hierarchy and authority that is contingent on the extent of the harem. Unlike Eurocentric perceptions of patriarchal suppression and harem women’s deprivation of freedom, the harem space allows female social networking inside and outside of its borders. At large, one differentiates between imperial (with sultan’s presence) or high (upper-class) harems, and household harems (lower social classes) (See Pierce 1993: 5f.).
⁷ According to Cheryl Johnson-Odim, the term ‘Third World’ refers both to “[...] ‘underdeveloped’/overexploited geographical entities, [...]” and “[...] oppressed nationalities [...]”
While western feminism has, though, over the years developed into a ‘white’ hegemonic force\(^1\) that standardises the factor of women’s enslaved status\(^2\), Third World feminism has begun to distinguish between women’s suppression within the western and non-western patriarchal social systems\(^3\). According to El Saadawi, all women around the world are indeed oppressed by factors such as “[...] class and gender, and [...] religion […].”\(^4\) In the Third World, however, women are additionally affected by the effects of (patriarchal) colonialism and neo-colonialism as exemplified by means of Muslim women’s status in the Arab world.\(^5\) In addition to gender-blind

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1. Introduction

(Cheryl Johnson-Odim, “Common Themes, Different Contexts: Third World Women and Feminism,” In Chandra T. Mohanty/Ann Russo/Lourdes Torres (eds.) Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism, Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991: 314-327, here 314) It is Trinh T. Minh-ha who claims, however, that the term ‘Third World’ can be associated not only with negative but also with positive connotations depending on the subject’s geographical and cultural background. In this respect, she makes use of the following two definitions of the term ‘Third World’: a “[…] subversive, ‘nonaligned’ force” or an “[…] – ‘underdeveloped’ […], ‘underprivileged’ […]” territory. In recent years, the Third World has even risen to a competitor of the ‘First World’ due to its westward movement, the inclusion of First World countries and the First World’s decrease of unification and dominance (Trinh T. Minh-ha, “Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism,” In Mary Eagleton (ed.) Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader, 3rd ed., Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011: 402-404, here 403f.).

Just like Evan M. Mwangi, I believe that the term ‘Third World’ has not only been found inaccurate but is also pejorative, in particular when referring to non-western societies (Evan M. Mwangi, “Syllabus: Rationale: Definitions of Terms,” Studies in Postcolonial Literature: Art & Autobiography, 31 March 2010, Northwestern University, Evanston, Lecture).

8 The terms ‘Third World feminism’ and ‘post-colonial feminism’ are often used interchangeably within the field of non-western, non-white feminism from the post-colonial world.


13 See Smith 2007: 68.

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(patriarchal) oppressions on the economic, social, intellectual and military levels\textsuperscript{15}, Muslim Arab women directly

\[\ldots\] suffer from their husbands, from sexual assaults, from very, very unjust marriage laws. They suffer from the oppression of the father and husbands, and men in general. So, the oppression of women is triple. Triple – globally by colonization, locally by the State and personally by the family. The man is oppressed globally by the colonization and locally by the State, but in the family, he is the oppressor of the woman.\textsuperscript{16}

Against the backdrop of El Saadawi’s argument that women’s oppression is not solely a Muslim Arab phenomenon but rather occurring globally in all class-structured and patriarchal societies\textsuperscript{17} and religions\textsuperscript{18}, my doctoral dissertation will counteract the centuries-long dominant western hegemonic discourse on the Orient’s male (Islamic) despotic rule and sexual oppression of women with an analysis of Muslim Arab representations of gender in post-colonial Arab literature. In so doing, a level-headed perspective on the role of Muslim Arab women and their status in the patriarchal societies of the Middle East and North Africa will be presented. In this regard, it will also be pointed out that commonly made generalisations in the West regarding the Islamic faith and the socio-cultural and -political constitutions of the Arab region are highly problematic. The Islamic interpretations and practices, for instance, are not nationally and transnationally homogenous within the Arab world and thus differ even in historically connected nations, such as Egypt and the Sudan\textsuperscript{19}.

Strictly speaking, my doctoral dissertation within the field of Anglophone Postcolonial Studies will focus on representations of Muslim Arab gender relations and roles within the narrative prose of selected Egyptian writings as well as diasporic Egyptian and Sudanese literature in English. In this regard, short stories and novels by Muslim Arab

\textsuperscript{15} See Smith 2007: 66.
female and male authors in the former British colony and the Arab region’s cultural centre Egypt, as well as by Muslim Arab female and male authors having migrated from the former British colonies Egypt and Sudan to Great Britain and the USA will be considered for the literary analysis due to the historical connection between both Middle Eastern and North African countries. This will include writings by female and male ‘younger or second-generation’ (1950s/1960s and 1970s) and ‘present, contemporary or third-generation’ (since the 1970s) writers Ihsan Kamal (“A Mistake in the Knitting”), Nawal El Saadawi (“The Picture”), Salwa Bakr (“That Beautiful Undiscovered Voice”), Samia Serageldin (“The Zawiya”), Ahdaf Soueif (“The Water-Heater”) and Yusuf Idris (“House of Flesh”). Thus, the selection of Muslim Arab women’s and men’s short stories and novels from the 1950s onwards will comprise both texts originally written in English and translations into English. This particular choice is especially due to a limited availability of (critical) post-colonial Arab literature in English over the past century.


era between the 1960s and the 1990s were, among others, of gender-political, socio-political, cultural and educational manner. Strict state regulations of critical socio- and gender-political national voices, the influences of Egyptian nationalism and Pan-Arabism, the resistance to neo-colonial influences by means of a strict employment of the Arabic language and the educational deficit of English in the formerly British colonised Middle East and North Africa were just some of the reasons for the limited production of post-colonial Arab literature in English until the turn-of-the-century. With respect to post-colonial Arab literature from the Sudan, it needs to be added that it lacks — to my knowledge — relevant gender-critical translations into English and thus cannot be considered as part of my dissertation’s literary analysis alongside the selection of short stories from Egypt.

It was the ‘pioneer generation’ of Egyptian female and male feminist activists and authors under British colonial rule, such as Huda Shaarawi, Qasim Amin and Latifa al-Zayyat, who gave direction to the post-colonial socio- and gender-political discourses on women’s rights and the combating of patriarchal oppression in the Middle East and North Africa. Within the context of influential socio- and gender-critical post-colonial Arab literature, it is the Muslim Arab women’s (diasporic) literature of the post-independent era (since the 1950s) which has developed until today — in spite of

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31 See Nash 2007: 12.
33 See Nash 2007: 19f.
36 According to Anastasia Valassopoulos, it is problematic to assume that all women’s writings from the Arab world are or have been of feminist character. Valassopoulos thus questions the general assumption of an undoubted interaction between feminist theory and Arab women’s literature. Nonetheless, “[u]ntil the late 1990s most critical works on Arab women’s writing centred around the feminist/nationalist
literary censurships and persecutions of its authors – into the most important medium for female critique of the socio-political, cultural and religious disdain of Muslim women within the Middle East and North Africa. The group of these so called gender-critical second- and third-generation Muslim Arab women’s (diasporic) writings includes works by authors such as Nawal El Saadawi, Ihsan Kamal, Salwa Bakr, Hanan al-Shaykh, Fadia Faqir, Ahdaf Soueif, Leila Aboulela and Samia Serageldin. Just like Salwa Bakr in the 1970s, Latifa al-Zayyat and Nawal El Saadawi were persecuted and temporarily imprisoned under the post-colonial Egyptian rule of Muhammad Anwar El Sadat in 1981 due to their feminist and literary gender-related criticisms. Chiefly, El Saadawi’s literary works have been banned for years in Egypt and wider parts of the Arab world. Regardless of their persecutions and El Saadawi’s literature’s censorships under Muhammad Anwar El Sadat, al-Zayyat, Bakr and El Saadawi have continued to write – as ‘native informants’ – in favour of the liberation and gender equality of


38 Instead of ‘feminist’, the term ‘gender-critical’ is applied here with regard to the politico-ideological character of Muslim Arab women’s writings in order to avoid conceptual confusion. Hoda El Sadda and Sabry Hafez namely differentiate between three distinct stages of Muslim Arab women’s (diasporic) literature – meaning ‘feminine’, ‘feminist’ and ‘female’ – that have constantly been influenced by the historical development of Arab feminist movements from the late 19th/early 20th century onwards (See Hafez in Allen/Kilpatrick/de Moor 1995: 160-173; See El Sadda in Kandiyoti 1996: 128-132).


Hanan al-Shaykh’s literary works have also been subject to censorship in selected Arab countries by means of religious and sexual-political reasons (Paula W. Sunderman, “An Interview with Hanan Al-Shaykh,” Michigan Quarterly Review 31.4 (Fall 1992): 625-636, here 633f.).

subaltern Muslim women in the Arab world. In recent years, it has in fact been the increasing migration movements to Europe and North America that have specifically enabled many third-generation female Arab authors to flee political corruption and gender suppression in their home countries, and to cross thereby both physical as well as metaphorical borders. In British and US-American exiles, these female Arab authors are able to openly discuss the controversial subjects of Arab gender discrimination and (neo-)colonialism.43 With regard to my dissertation’s analysis, one may claim that Ahdaf Soueif, Samia Serageldin and Leila Aboulela exemplarily embody the critical third generation of diasporic Muslim Arab women writers who publish in English.

Aside from a historical development of and conspicuous interaction between predominantly female Arab feminism and gender-critical women’s literature in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and other social systems of the Middle East and North Africa since the late 19th/early 20th century45, male socio-political and literary approaches to gender justice and female liberty have also evolved in the course of the 20th century.46 They find expression, among others, in literary works by male Muslim Egyptian and Sudanese authors of the first and predominantly second generations, including Naguib context of my dissertation’s analysis, Spivak’s ‘native informant’ speaks for and thus represents the subaltern women of the Middle East and North Africa who are predominantly muted due to both western suppression and national social class subjugation and gender discrimination, respectively (See Spivak in Nelson/Grossberg 1988: 279-283, 287ff.; Donna Landry/Gerald MacLean, “Subaltern Talk: Interview with the Editors (1993-94),” In Donna Landry/Gerald MacLean (eds.) The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, New York/London: Routledge, 1996: 287-308, here 289).


Mahfouz, Yusuf Idris and Tayeb Salih. In 1976, the Sudanese author Tayeb Salih even claims in an interview published in al-Fajr newspaper that “[e]verything beautiful in life is feminine – […] Woman is the object of violence occurring in the novel Season of Migration to the North, and she is also the one against whom violence occurs in Arab society, that is why she still struggles for liberation.” With the emergence of the contemporary generation of Muslim Arab male writers, one may detect, though, a striking decrease of male gender-related criticism within the field of post-colonial Arab literature. Based on the developments of and interactions between Arab gender politics and post-colonial literature, it is therefore inevitable that the work presented here examines the literary representations of Muslim Arab gender relations and roles in selected post-colonial Arab short stories and novels by both Muslim Arab female and male authors. Even though Evelyne Accad glosses in her article “Sexual Politics: Women in Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North” (1985) the representation of women’s status in literature by male and female Arab writers, she does not go into depth on this topic and neglects the aspect of feminism. In the course of my post-colonial literary analysis, however, the aspect of feminism will play a crucial role while looking into the gender-blind representations of Muslim Arab gender relations and roles. In so doing, the post-1980 ‘deconstructionist or French feminist’ approach to gender binary will be applied. Thus, the hitherto existing research on gender-critical Arab women’s writings will be decisively complemented by both a male literary gender discourse and the proof of a male feminism in the Arab context. In this way, western feminist literary theories of the post-1970s by Stephen Heath and Mary Eagleton, in

particular, will serve as the basis for the literary discussion of a provably Arab male feminism by means of the selected second-generation male writings\textsuperscript{53}.  

As briefly discussed before, the dissertation will theoretically and historically draw on the centuries-long western hegemonic discourse on and orientalist image of the Islamic world which have first been critically reflected upon and commentated by Edward W. Said’s book \textit{Orientalism} in 1978\textsuperscript{54}. In this context, it is the western imposed binary opposition between ‘the Self/the West’ and ‘the Other/the East/the Rest’ which has over centuries shaped the public opinion of an apparently cultural superiority of the western world\textsuperscript{55}. The Orient is hereby reduced to a place of arbitrary male authority in which women as victims of their social systems have to smart from male suppression and sexual exploitation. Especially, the European literary discourses of the 18th and 19th centuries – meaning the predominantly male European travel literatures on\textsuperscript{56} and paintings of\textsuperscript{57} the Orient, oriental women and non-western gender relations – have significantly reinforced the societal downgrading of ‘the Other’. By means of an analysis of Muslim Arab literary representations of gender in post-colonial Arab literature by both female and male authors, a level-headed, gender-blind and non-western writing back to the centre’s orientalist perspectives and to the periphery itself will be made possible. In this connection, my dissertation’s theoretical discussion will address Gayatri C. Spivak’s post-colonial approach to gender roles – in particular to the status of the subaltern woman – and her question of the subaltern woman’s ability of articulation, agency and self-representation\textsuperscript{58} in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”

\begin{thebibliography}{99}


\bibitem{kuehn} See Kuehn 2011: 31f., 35.


\end{thebibliography}
(1988). Spivak’s discourse will, however, be complemented by additional approaches to gender roles and relations of the Third World feminism.

At large, it will become apparent that the dissertation’s literary analysis of the representations of gender relations and roles within the selected post-colonial Arab writings in English (chapter 4.) will not only be embedded in but also draw on literary feminist and social feminist discourses from ‘West’ and ‘East’. Especially, the diverse Arab feminist social discourses with their secular, Muslim and Islamist orientations will shape the discussions of contrasting textual themes in the selected writings. On the one hand, these textual themes will include the subjects of patriarchal oppression and violence in general, women’s obedience and (sexual) exploitation, rape/sexual abuse, arranged and forced marriages, as well as polygyny. On the other hand, the textual discussions will concentrate on any form of female agency and resistance to oppression, violence, (sexual) exploitation and abuse, including female education, female (sexual) freedom and pleasure, the belief in love, progress and secularism, as well as female self-confidence and the act of unveiling. By means of these contrasting textual themes, the dissertation’s literary examination will first shed light on both gender relations and Muslim women’s socio-cultural, religious, political and economic standings within the diverse (non-)fictional Muslim Arab communities. However, it will farther reveal that the literary represented gender relations and roles are in fact displayed by means of recurrent but contrasting motifs that are made up of the abovementioned textual themes.


60 This includes concepts by Cheryl Johnson-Odim, Ien Ang and Ania Loomba.


One may speak in this connection of the opposition between traditionalism and religiosity, on the one hand, and modernity and secularism, on the other hand. It will become apparent that the gender-blind usage of these contrasting motifs, especially with regard to the representations of female Muslim Arab characters, both unveils and confronts patriarchal interpretations of socio-cultural and Islamic practices within Arab societies. Whilst the socio-cultural, political, religious and economic conditions, as well as the application of the classical Islamic law (the Shari’a) undoubtedly differ among diverse Arab regions\(^\text{62}\), the reader will yet get the unchanged impression – except for the occasional one – that “[…] a woman’s worth is measured in terms of her role as a wife and mother.”\(^\text{63}\) In a final step, the dissertation aims then to examine the interaction between the contrasting motifs and the discourses on western exertion of influence and (neo-)colonialism respectively, and their underlying binary opposition between ‘the West/the Self/the North’ and ‘the East/the Other/the South’ within the selected post-colonial Anglophone Arab short stories and novels.

In order to focus within the abovementioned text- and context-centred analysis of chapter 4. on Muslim Arab literary (self-)representations of gender, my doctoral dissertation has to clarify first the theoretical and historical backgrounds of the post-colonial Arab writings, their authors and the epoch under discussion. In this connection, chapter 2. will initially elaborate on the historically western dominated relationship between ‘the Self/the West and the Other/the East/the Rest’, in particular on the centuries-long western representations of the (post-)colonial world and its gender relations, by comparing the western ethnic and gendered alterity discourses (chapter 2.1.) with the post-colonial counter-discourses (chapter 2.2.). Emphasising on the West’s definition of the oriental Other in chapter 2.1., my doctoral dissertation will engage in subchapter 2.1.1. with the description of the history of the West’s ethnic otherness conception by referring in particular to Stuart Hall’s and Edward W. Said’s theoretical approaches. Aside from the Eurocentric ethnic otherness conception, it is the gendered otherness construct and perception in both the western and non-western


\(^{63}\) See An-Na’im 2002: 69.

An-Na’im refers here primarily to the examination of Sudanese women’s status. Nevertheless, the account of Egyptian family law and practices, as well as the status of Muslim Egyptian women in the selected post-colonial Arab writings under discussion confirm An-Na’im’s theses on Sudanese women’s status.
worlds that have dominated for centuries patriarchal discourses in society and literature (subchapter 2.1.2.). Thus, the concept of the gendered Other – evolved as part of the socio-culturally constructed two-sex model – has particularly been thematised within the field of western feminist discourse. Subchapter 2.1.2. will not only link the binary opposition between the sexes to the themes of gender, power and freedom but also compare western literary feminist approaches to gender dichotomies with those to gender combinability. The latter approaches will include contemporary elaborations on deconstructionist feminism in general and male feminism in particular which focus on rapprochement and the death of the gendered author as presented by my dissertation’s literary analysis in chapter 4. Subchapter 2.1.3. will then combine the themes of ethnic and gendered otherness discussed in the previous subchapters by describing the historical interaction between racial and gender discriminations in western discourses on the Other. To be precise, subchapter 2.1.3. will examine the centuries-long western perceptions of the Orient and its women, in particular of harem life and the secret of the veil. Since chapter 2.2. will present the post-colonial counter-discourses to the West’s ethnic and gendered alterity discourses, it will concentrate, inter alia, on the colonial and post-colonial literary and linguistic aims and attempts of Third World resistance to colonialism and neo-colonialism (subchapter 2.2.1.). This will involve a discussion of the functions of the English language during Africa’s and the Arab region’s colonial and post-colonial periods. In addition, subchapter 2.2.2. will critically elaborate on both the western racial discrimination against the Other and the issue of Third World woman’s gender-specific double oppression from the perspective of post-colonial feminism. In so doing, the subchapter will not only thematise the question of the subaltern woman’s agency and self-representation but also the post-colonial critique of the West’s feminist discourse.

The historical chapter 3. will take up the discussion of the ethnical and gender-specific oppressions of the subaltern Third World woman in chapter 2. while focusing on the Muslim Arab world. In particular, chapter 3. will canvass the history of the Arab feminist movements (chapter 3.1.) with due regard to their influences on the development of Muslim Arab literature in the MENA region and beyond (chapter 3.2.). Strictly speaking, chapter 3.1. will not only differentiate between three feminist tendencies and historical feminist movements in Egypt and the rest of the Muslim Arab world but also focus hereby on the description of the historical interaction between Arab
feminisms, decolonisation and nationalism. This will include a historical analysis of the symbolic act of (un)veiling which has dominated the Arab discourses on modernism and traditionalism since the early 20th century. A special focus will be laid in this chapter on secular feminist activities and perspectives of Nawal El Saadawi and her contemporaries. Following this, chapter 3.2. will describe in detail the historical developments of Arab (subchapter 3.2.1.) and Anglophone Arab (subchapter 3.2.2.) literary resistances to perceived patriarchal and oppressive socio-cultural moral values and norms, and the experiences of socio-political malpractices and religious misdemeanours. Firstly, subchapter 3.2.1. will concentrate on the historical interaction between three generations of Muslim Arab authors and their writings, three literary stages of Muslim Arab women’s (diasporic) writings and ideologically secular and Muslim Arab feminist tendencies in the MENA region. Secondly, chapter 3.2.2. will define the different generations of socio- and gender-critical Anglophone Arab authors and their writings from Great Britain and the USA by commenting as well on the issue and quality of English translations.

Based on the theoretical and historical background information presented in chapters 2. and 3., my doctoral dissertation will hence examine in chapter 4. the literary representations of gender in writings from Egypt, as well as the Muslim Egyptian and Sudanese diasporas in Great Britain and the USA. Whereas chapter 4.1. will solely concentrate – with due regard to the influences of secular and Muslim feminist tendencies on the Muslim Arab literary scene – on the contrasting motifs of traditionalism, religiosity, modernity and secularism, chapter 4.2. will combine the preceding analysis in chapter 4.1. with an analysis of the themes of western exertion of influence and (neo-)colonialism respectively, as well as their underlying binary opposition between the ‘the West/the Self/the North’ and ‘the East/the Other/the South’.

In summary, it can be stated that my doctoral dissertation will engage with and focus on the following central questions while analysing in chapter 4. the literary representations of Muslim Arab gender relations and roles, and being in dialogue with the Arab (exile) literature in English: 1) To what extent and in which way can gender-blind similarities among the literary representations of Muslim gender relations and roles be detected within the selected (Anglophone) Arab literatures by (exile) authors? a) Do differences exist in the depiction of gender relations and roles within the female and male authors’ Egyptian literatures? If so, what are they? b) Do the writings from Egypt substantially
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differ from the short stories and novels by Muslim Egyptian and Sudanese migrants in Great Britain and the USA? c) Can cross-generational differences be perceived in the Muslim Arab (exile) authors’ literary depictions of gender relations and roles? 2) What role do feminist approaches play with regard to the literary representations of gender and the emancipation of Arab women within the Muslim Arab writings by female and male (exile) authors? 3) How do the discourses on western exertion of influence and (neo-)colonialism respectively, and their underlying binary opposition between ‘the West/the Self/the North’ and ‘the East/the Other/the South’ influence the literary representations of Muslim Arab gender relations and roles?
2. “The Self versus the Other” – Representations of the Post/Colonial World and Its Gender Relations

2.1. The Self Defines the Other

2.1.1. Ethnic Otherness in Western Discourse

It is primary the western idea of a binary opposition between ‘the Self/the West and the Other/the East/the Rest’ which has defined over centuries the relationship between Europe and its former colonies. The so called late 15th-century ethnic otherness concept and discourse of ‘the West and the Rest’, as it is declared by Stuart Hall in his article “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power” (1996), have indeed their roots in mythical perceptions and fantasy but also “[…] place and geography”. The notion of a ‘superior’ West became prevalent in the 16th century with the far-reaching establishment of the European ideal of a “[…] developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalist, secular, and modern” society. This late 15th-/early 16th-century Eurocentric world view and social classification not only shaped decisively 18th-century Enlightenment thinking but also called forth the 18th-century ideals of empire-building and nationalism with their successors of Victorian ‘new imperialism’ and colonialism. Western nationalist ideology was at this based on the imperialist

66 See Hall in Hall et al. 2007: 206.
67 The term ‘ethnicity’ incorporates in this respect the commonly shared attributes of descent, culture, language, history, religion, etc.
69 See Hall in Hall et al. 2007: 185.
70 See Hall in Hall et al. 2007: 186.
distinction between the factors of identity and alterity. In this sense, it can be argued that the West achieved to define itself according to its difference from non-western cultures, while the ‘uncivilised’ cultures of the Rest contrasted with the multitude of ‘civilised’ cultures belonging to the West:

The so-called uniqueness of the West was, in part, produced by Europe’s contact and self-comparison with other, non-western, societies (the Rest), very different in their histories, ecologies, patterns of development, and cultures from the European model. The difference of these other societies and cultures from the West was the standard against which the West’s achievement was measured.

The concept of the West thus evolved into a classificatory system, “[…] a ‘system of representation’” based on a set of images associated with the West, and a “[…] model of comparison”, and an evaluation system. According to Hall, the historically developed Eurocentric binary opposition between the West and the Rest, and its associated idea of civilising the ‘inferior’ Other yet continue to constitute the western hegemonic discourse on the non-western world:

So, far from being a ‘formation’ of the past, and of only historical interest, the discourse of ‘the West and the Rest’ is alive and well in the modern world. And one of the surprising places where its effects can still be seen is in the language, theoretical models, and hidden assumptions of modern sociology itself.

Considering the concept of ‘the West and the Rest’ as its theoretical basis, Edward W. Said critically examines and comments on the western imposed and practised differentiation between ‘the Orient’ and ‘the Occident’ in his book Orientalism from 1978. To be precise, Said claims therein that the binary opposition between the Orient and the Occident has given rise to the 18th-century discourse of ‘Orientalism’. Orientalism has been constructed of “[…] a body of ideas, beliefs, clichés, or learning

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74 See Frank 02 November 2010.
75 See Hall in Hall et al. 2007: 187.
76 See Hall in Hall et al. 2007: 187.
77 See Hall in Hall et al. 2007: 186.
78 See Hall in Hall et al. 2007: 225.
79 See Hall in Hall et al. 2007: 225.
about the East, […]”.

Strictly speaking, its subject matter, namely the Orient, has spanned the region of the Middle East as opposed to the Far East. As a “[...] machinery of cultural domination, [...]”

a power structure and a system of knowledge, it has aimed to subjugate and thereby control the non-western world whilst laying claim to a universal truth value.

At the centre of the orientalist discourse stands to date the racial perception of a backward and inferior Orient, which “[...] has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience”

as well as “[...] a sort of surrogate and even underground self.” In this context, it needs to be pointed out that the relationship between the Orient and the Occident within orientalist discourse has evidently been dominated by the components of knowledge and power/domination/hegemony. As it has solely been the Occident that has possessed all attributes, the Orient has consequently been forced by it into the role of the suppressed Other.

Moreover, due to their social and economic downgrading by the dominant Occident, the Orientals – in particular their subaltern women – have been prevented from speaking for themselves. Accordingly, Europe has articulated the Orient based on its distinction between ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’ and its equation of spatial distance with cultural difference.

Although Edward W. Said argues that “[the Orient] is not merely there, just as the Occident itself is not just there either” and their constructions have been “[...] man-
made” by the West\textsuperscript{95}, he claims at once the geographical existence of countries which are situated in the East\textsuperscript{96}. In this regard, Said refers to a region that

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\text{[…] is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilization and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other.}\textsuperscript{97}
\]

In this context, it is thus the combination of ideas or illusions and reality that has shaped over centuries – by means of classical knowledge production, mythology, religious sources and travellers’ tales – the western imposed ‘realistic’ image of and discourse on the Other.\textsuperscript{98} With respect to its content, Stuart Hall defines in “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power” the basic themes of the western hegemonic discourse on non-western otherness as follows: the paradise, the motifs of innocence, nature and freedom, the absences of developed social governments and civil society, the existence of barbarism and cannibalism, as well as the perception of the noble versus the ignoble savage.\textsuperscript{99} Generally speaking, the concept of ‘the West and the Rest’ has emerged, inter alia, in association with the historical concept of exoticism\textsuperscript{100}. On that score, “[t]he Orient […] ha[s] been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences.”\textsuperscript{101} Hall’s and Said’s analyses of the western discourse on the Other are supported by Urs Bitterli’s description of the non-western native in western travel narratives. In his article “Die exotische Insel” (1987), Bitterli points out that the non-western native has been classified by two contrasting characteristics in Eurocentric travel literature, namely barbarism and positivity.\textsuperscript{102} In contrast, it is Aimé Césaire who defines in Discourse on Colonialism (1955) the relationship between the ‘civilised’ Westerner and the ‘non-civilised’ Other as solely being based on “[…] the dishonest equations Christianity = civilization, paganism = savagery, […]”\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{95} See Said 2003: 4f.
\textsuperscript{96} See Said 2003: 5.
\textsuperscript{97} See Said 2003: 1.
\textsuperscript{98} See Hall in Hall et al. 2007: 206ff.
\textsuperscript{99} See Hall in Hall et al. 2007: 210-217.
\textsuperscript{101} See Said 2003: 1.
\textsuperscript{102} See Bitterli in Koebner/Pickerodt 1987: 19.
2.1.2. Otherness and Gender in Western Feminist Discourse

Apart from the historical establishment of the West’s ethnic otherness conception, a gendered otherness construct and perception have become prevalent in the western and non-western worlds. It is the western feminist ideology that has achieved – as early as Mary Astell’s late 17th-century\(^{104}\) and Mary Wollstonecraft’s 18th-century\(^{105}\) liberal European/English feminist treatises on gender discrimination – to openly confront the inequality between the sexes and to develop into three phases of modern feminism: ‘first-wave feminism’ of the early 20th century, ‘second-wave feminism’ from the late 1960s/early 1970s to the 1980s and ‘third-wave feminism’ since the 1990s\(^{106}\). The much-discussed phenomenon of an unequal two-sex model within society has, strictly speaking, its roots in “[…] the cultural construction of gender differences.”\(^{107}\) On that score, western radical feminists, in particular, claim to date change not within the old socio-cultural structures but aim for a complete re-organisation of the existing order.\(^{108}\) As per Pam Morris in *Literature and Feminism: An Introduction* (1993), this idea of “[…] changing the existing power relations between the sexes would mean a social

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104 Mary Astell is known to be “[…] the first major English feminist […]” of the late 17th/early 18th century who demanded gender equality between men and women. Nevertheless, she supported the conservative ideas that men are the rulers of the family, and women function as their property, housewives and caring marriage partners (Joan K. Kinnaird, “Mary Astell and the Conservative Contribution to English Feminism,” *Journal of British Studies* 19.1 (Autumn 1979): 53-75, here 55, 67, 72).

105 Just like Mary Astell in the late 17th/early 18th century, the English liberal feminist Mary Wollstonecraft claimed in her late 18th-century feminist work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) the sexual equality of men and women. Moreover, she demanded equal educational opportunities for women as well as egalitarian marriages based on mutual affection and respect rather than male sexual satisfaction (Claudia L. Johnson (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002: 141f.). Wollstonecraft particularly produced the image of Mahometanism’s enslaved oriental women in her literature in order to criticise in this manner the patriarchal oppression of Englishwomen. Teresa Heffernan defines this practice as ‘feminist Orientalism’ which was later either adopted or modified on grounds of feminist sympathies for oriental harem lives by English travel writers (Teresa Heffernan, “Feminism against the East/West Divide: Lady Mary’s ‘Turkish Embassy Letters’,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33.2 (Winter 2000): 201-215, here 205f.; Joyce Zonana, “The Sultan and the Slave: Feminist Orientalism and the Structure of *Jane Eyre*,” *Signs* 18.3 (Spring 1993): 592-617, here 595, 599f.). At the same time, though, Wollstonecraft supported – similar to Astell – the spatial gender segregation of the Victorian society and thus the idea of male rule by conferring on women the roles of mothers and housewives in the private sphere (See Johnson 2002: 141f., 156).


revolution; the present world order would necessarily be transfigured.”

Withal, the radical feminists’ transformational idea would indirectly imply the continuance of the oppositional based gender construction – known as ‘gender essentialism’ – in place of the equality of the sexes. Less radical feminists, by contrast, aspire to a change of thinking by means of a reconsideration of the old dichotomous reception of gender identity. Apart from their differing proposals for change, feminists, in general, believe that the conception of gender difference is defined by a society and its “[...] system of meanings and values, [...]” which rests on the modes of “[...] difference and separation rather than identification and community.” In this way, hierarchal, dominating, competitive and confrontational behaviour patterns and ways of thinking between men and women are brought forth. With reference to Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), Pam Morris further states in this connection in 1993 that the interaction between social norms and gender has resulted in a generalisation according to which the term ‘man’ has a positive connotation, while the term ‘woman’ is associated with the gendered Other. This means that the woman, the so called gendered Other, is defined in opposition to the man (the Self). At the same time, the woman – as the negative Other – helps the man to construct himself as the positive Subject: “[...] throughout different cultures ‘femininity’ is found to represent nature, beauty, purity and goodness, but also evil, enchantment, corruption and death.” However, as Mary Eagleton notes in 2003, patriarchal thinking does not solely relate the ‘feminine’ characteristic to the oppressed woman (the gendered Other) but also associates it with any other oppressed population group in the non-western world (the ethnic Other): “The ‘other’ is sometimes female but always feminine.” To sum up, the constant basis that the sexes have to deal with is constituted of the Self versus Other dichotomy which is part of our society and simultaneously entrenched in the historical western ethnic alterity discourse. Since men have a strong impact on culture and thus shape the social system and its norms,

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109 See Morris 1993: 5.
110 See Morris 1993: 1f.
111 See Morris 1993: 5.

In this context, the term ‘sex’ is used instead of ‘gender’ in order to follow the paragraph’s line of reasoning.
male perspectives on women have become prevalent in both society and literature. At some point of time, women have started to accept and inherit male conceptions of the feminine by regarding themselves as the Other.\textsuperscript{116} Within the context of literature, Pam Morris hence calls upon female readers in 1993 “[…] to start rereading men’s readings of women […] so as to learn how to begin reading as a woman.” She refers here to the literary feminist critics Mary Ellmann (\textit{Thinking about Women}, 1968) and Kate Millett (\textit{Sexual Politics}, 1970) who already propagated the idea of rereading in the late 1960s and early 1970s in order to counteract misogyny and male manipulation as well as dominance in literature.\textsuperscript{117}

Like de Beauvoir, Nancy Hirschmann refers to a binary opposition between Self and Other, in particular when she explains the relationship between freedom and gender in \textit{Gender, Class, & Freedom in Modern Political Theory} (2008). According to Hirschmann, it is Isaiah Berlin’s ‘negative liberty’ – a so called freedom based on personal ability and absence of any external barriers – that is associated with men. Men are able to take advantage of this freedom at the cost of their social hierarchy and women’s unfreedom.\textsuperscript{118} This connection was also established by the political theorists Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Immanuel Kant.\textsuperscript{119} Without question, the concept of freedom is hence composed of masculine experiences and interests.\textsuperscript{120} For Jean-Jacques Rousseau, women’s imposed unfreedom was justifiable in so far as women are able to manipulate men by means of their sexual freedom and power which are in turn caused by passion, sexuality and jealousy.\textsuperscript{121} Rousseau feared that any form of passion could affect men’s general will. In addition, emotion and love could manipulate men’s rule. As a consequence, Rousseau propagated women’s positioning within the private sphere

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{117} See Morris 1993: 15.
\item \textsuperscript{119} ‘Positive liberty’, in contrast, is ensured by means of external preconditions. Inner factors are able to block these external preconditions of ability and desire (See Berlin 1971: 122 in Hirschmann 2008: 2; See Hirschmann 2008: 3).
\item \textsuperscript{120} See Hirschmann 2008: 124, 204f.
\item \textsuperscript{121} See Hirschmann 2008: 26, 204f.
\end{itemize}
in order to take control over women’s passion and hereby reduce their power. In this way, Rousseau also assumed to suppress any female political freedom and involvement since “[…] women have powers of biology and sexuality, when coupled with political power they will gain superiority over men.” For his misogynist and patriarchal theories, Rousseau was strongly criticised by western feminists, although his theories were already an integral part of the western and non-western societies, including the Islamic world. Just like Rousseau, Immanuel Kant regarded – as per Hirschmann – women as passive citizens of the private sphere whose natural rationality he feared. In this sense, Kant warned – similar to Rousseau – of women’s ability to dominate men and to limit male freedom by use of their manipulative skills and the exclusive force of love. He therefore demanded women’s (continuous) protection by men and their subservience within the private sphere for the purpose of men’s reason and freedom. In contrast to Kant and Rousseau, John S. Mill claimed equality and freedom for women in accordance with men’s interest. Although he believed in male benefit from women’s self-development and education, he entrusted – similar to Astell and Wollstonecraft – the domestic responsibilities of family, motherhood and household to women.

It is primarily the abovementioned male gender discrimination against the female Other within western society and literature that Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1970) first and radically achieved to challenge. As the pioneer of Anglo-American feminist criticism and thus a representative of the so called second-wave feminism’s non-phallocentric separatism/gender dichotomy and female identity approach of the late 1960s/early

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123 See Hirschmann 2008: 162.
124 See Hirschmann 2008: 139.
125 See Hirschmann 2008: 195f.
127 See Hirschmann 2008: 204f.
1970s, she focused specifically on the literary production of gender difference and representations of women by solely dealing with and critically analysing male authors and their writings. Millett’s radical feminist theory in Sexual Politics was in fact influenced by Mary Ellmann and her 1968 published work Thinking about Women. Both Millett and Ellmann practised the ‘Images of Women’ criticism or – as Elaine Showalter would name it – the ‘feminist critique’, a branch of feminist criticism which focused on “[…] the images and stereotypes of women in [male] literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in [male] criticism, and the fissures in male-constructed literary history.” By analysing the underlying meaning of male writings, the female reader’s approach of “[…] ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’, […]” was practised. In Thinking about Women, Mary Ellmann hence describes – with reference to male writers and critics – eleven stereotypes of femininity representations in English literature which include “[…] Formlessness, Passivity, Instability, Confinement, Piety, Materiality, Spirituality, Irrationality, Compliancy, Two Incorrigible Figures: The Shrew and the Witch.” As per Ellmann, male writing is accordingly assertive and authoritarian, while female writing represents a sensible style of writing. ‘Images of Women’ critics also believed in the reader’s rights to learn about the writer’s life experience and sociological facts which may shape as much his personal criticism as his writings. From the 1970s onwards, the feminist critique’s focus on male texts and their misogynist representations was replaced by the woman-centred approach of

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137 See Moi 1993: 32.


139 See Moi 1993: 75f.


141 See Moi 1993: 34.

142 See Moi 1993: 30, 43, 48.

According to Kate Millett and her contemporary Anglo-American feminist critics, the social and cultural circumstances influence both the author and the author’s literature (See Moi 1993: 24, 30).
Showalter’s ‘gynocriticism’. This focus on female writers and writings was part of the so called “[…] ‘second phase’ of feminist research, […]” of Anglo-American feminist criticism. It did not take long, however, until first phase Anglo-American feminist critic Susan Koppelman Cornillon attacked in turn selected women writers who created — according to her interpretation — fictional female characters and thereby betrayed women. Consequently, Koppelman Cornillon declares in *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives* (1972) that there is no real representation of women in literature, neither by men nor by women. This assumption was then again counteracted by second-wave feminists, including Ellen Moers (*Literary Women*, 1976), Elaine Showalter (*A Literature of Their Own: British Women Writers from Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing*, 1977) and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (*The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 1979). In the 1970s, Elaine Showalter – founder of the terminological differentiation between ‘feminist critique’ and ‘gynocriticism’ – expressed her strong belief in the study of female authors, women’s writings and the transparency of women’s experiences and feelings in female texts as follows:

[...], one of the problems of the feminist critique is that it is male-oriented. If we study stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics, and the limited roles women play in literary history, we are not learning what women have felt and experienced, but only what men have thought women should be.

Showalter believed in women’s capacity to express themselves and in their strength to counteract western male perception of women’s otherness, as already represented by the increasing presence of female writers in the course of the 20th century. In this respect, she defines in *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Writers from Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing* (1977) three stages of women writers’ subculture as

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144 See Moi 1993: 51.
145 See Moi 1993: 50ff.
146 See Moi 1993: 42-45.
147 See Moi 1993: 52.
150 See Showalter in Jacobus 2012: 27.
“[...], Feminine, Feminist, and Female” in accordance with the characteristics of “imitation [...], and internalization [...],” “[...] protest [...], and advocacy [...]” and “[...] self-discovery, [...].”152 Like contemporaries of second-wave feminism153, Showalter criticised in 1989 – with the exception of Neil Hertz’s, Stephen Heath’s and Andrew Ross’ conceptions – any attempt of male feminist participants in the gynocritical discourse as ignorant and patronising: “[...], ‘male feminists’ do not even bother to read the feminist critical texts they are allegedly responding to, since they always already know what women think.”154 It cannot be denied that Showalter’s argument not only introduced the possibility of a male feminism as a whole but also drew attention to the role of the male feminist writer. Similarly, Mary Eagleton uses Toril Moi’s definitions of ‘female’, ‘feminist’ and ‘feminine’ writings in “Literature” (2003) in order to corroborate the interaction between the characteristics of feminist and/or feminine, on the one hand, and female or male, on the other hand155:

[...], we can now define as female, writing by women, bearing in mind that this label does not say anything at all about the nature of that writing; as feminist, writing which takes a discernible anti-patriarchal and anti-sexist position; and as feminine, writing which seems to be marginalised (repressed, silenced) by the ruling social/linguistic order.156

Taking Eagleton’s discussion of Moi into account, her notion of the male feminist writer and Stephen Heath’s and Tania Modleski’s elaborations on male feminism respectively become accessible to the readership157. Stephen Heath, whose main focus is the relationship between men and feminism, argues in his article “Male Feminism” (1984) that feminism is first and foremost women’s domain. Men, however, are called upon to engage with feminism without dominating it as its subject-matter.158 Even though Heath praises men’s initiative “[...] to learn and so to try to write or talk or act in response to feminism and so to try not in any way to be anti-feminist, supportive of

155 See Eagleton in Eagleton 2003: 156.
the old oppressive structures”, he believes that “[…], any notion of writing a feminist book or being a feminist, is a myth, a male imaginary with the reality of appropriation and domination right behind.”

Despite his scepticism towards a successful realisation of social and literary male feminisms, Heath honours any rare exemplary male writings as well as male intellectual manners of feminist character, which he in fact personifies as well. According to Heath, John S. Mill’s “The Subjection of Women” (1869) represents the prototypical male feminist writing since Mill propagates therein freedom for and emancipation of women, and hence gender equality within the Victorian society. Moreover, Heath argues in his article from 1984 – with reference to the arguments made by Anglo-American feminist criticism – that there exists in practice no interaction between the author’s sex and “[…] the sexuality and sexual positioning inscribed in a text.”

Toril Moi agrees in this respect with Heath. She attacks in *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (1993) early Anglo-American feminist criticism’s assumption according to which the female author not only represents the main figure but also influences female representation in literature by giving it its meaning and feminist character. Consequently, her and Heath’s arguments can be read as a proclamation of Roland Barthes’ death of the author in a gendered context. What is more, Heath believes that gendered reading neither corresponds with the reader’s sex nor with the characteristic ‘feminist’. It becomes thus apparent that Heath’s theoretical conception of rapprochement and gender

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162 John S. Mill and his wife Harriet Taylor Mill were part of the Victorian women’s movements in the late 19th to early 20th century which fought for gender equality with respect to equal marriage and women’s rights, including the implementation of women’s suffrage.
166 See Moi 1993: 62.

In this context, the term ‘sex’ is used instead of ‘gender’ in order to follow the paragraph’s line of reasoning.
combinability corresponds with the so called ‘deconstructionist or French feminism’ after 1980. This includes the text-focused approaches of ‘gynesia’ by Alice Jardine and ‘l’écriture feminine’ by Mary Jacobus. Mary Eagleton, author and editor in the fields of feminist literary theory and contemporary women’s writings, reminds us as well that although both female and male writings may be characterised as feminist and/or feminine, one needs to consider likewise that female writings are not inherently feminist in character. In this regard, it is also important to note that one may differentiate between the politico-ideological characterisation ‘feminist writer’ and the actual production of politically feminist writings. All in all, it is the abovementioned deconstructionist approach of feminist literary theory as such – with its conceptions of rapprochement, gender combinability and the death of the gendered author – which essentially provides the basis for chapter 4’s literary analysis of gender representations in writings by both female and male authors.

2.1.3. The Western Discourse on Non-Western Gender Roles and Relations

As addressed at the beginning of chapter 2.1., the late 15th-/early 16th-century European hegemonic discourse on the Other was in the first place constituted of the ethnic otherness conception. The Orient, in particular, represented in the 16th and 17th centuries a place of barbarism, as well as a site of women’s oppression and female helplessness. The oriental man, to be precise, was regarded in the Renaissance era as either a homosexual or “[…] a lusty villain from whom the virile but courteous European could rescue the native (or the European) woman.” Following this,

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170 According to Alice Jardine’s ‘gynesia’ approach, ‘the feminine’ is produced by writings of both sexes (See Eagleton in Eagleton 1991: 9f.; See Eagleton in Eagleton 1991: 227). Similarly, Mary Jacobus claims – with respect to her concept of ‘l’écriture feminine’ – that the feminine characteristic is not inherent in writing. It is rather created through a certain mode of writing. This consequently means that textuality is more important than sexuality (See Eagleton in Eagleton 1991: 10, 13).
172 See Eagleton in Eagleton 2003: 153, 156.
Europe’s ideology of imperialism was misused as a medium of and justification for western counteraction against native male barbarism\textsuperscript{176} and patriarchal oppression\textsuperscript{177}. It is withal during the colonial period that the female body functioned as a symbol of the colonised Other\textsuperscript{178}. From the mid-18th century onwards, the continents of America and Africa were portrayed by the European colonisers as naked female bodies\textsuperscript{179}, in particular as savage women, whereas Asia was represented “[…] as a turbaned potentate”\textsuperscript{180}: “[…], Asia is always sumptuously clothed, usually riding on a camel and carrying an incense burner. On her head she wears either a wreath of flowers and fruit (symbolizing plenty) or a turban.”\textsuperscript{181} These portrayals illustrate that the underlying ethnic alterity concept of the western relationship to the East in fact interacted with the western conception of gendered otherness as discussed in the previous subchapter.

It is Ania Loomba who analyses in her book \textit{Colonialism/Postcolonialism} (2005) the relationship between the West and the (post-)colonial world against the backdrop of both ethnic and gendered otherness – the latter including cross-cultural and native gender relations, the role of the subaltern native women (the gendered Other) and post-colonial feminism. As per English literature professor and post-colonial feminist theorist Loomba, the imperial and colonial European image of non-western gender relations was fundamentally underscored by a belief in immorality and promiscuity\textsuperscript{182}. This is particularly emphasised by Edward W. Said’s study of Orientalism in 1978. Loomba’s analysis further broaches that colonialism not only caused racial discrimination but also created and reinforced any native gender oppression of colonised women in the non-western world\textsuperscript{183}:

Colonialism eroded many matrilineal or woman-friendly cultures and practices, or intensified women’s subordination in colonized lands. […] Colonialism intensified patriarchal oppression, often because native men, increasingly disenfranchised and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{176}See Loomba 2005: 130f.
\item \textsuperscript{177}See Loomba 2005: 144.
\item \textsuperscript{178}See Loomba 2005: 129.
\item \textsuperscript{179}See Loomba 2005: 129.
\item \textsuperscript{181}See Loomba 2005: 129.
\item \textsuperscript{182}See Loomba 2005: 134.
\item \textsuperscript{183}See Loomba 2005: 138.
\end{itemize}
excluded from the public sphere, became more tyrannical at home. They seized upon
the home and the woman as emblems of their culture and nationality.\textsuperscript{184}

Consequently, the Third World female Other – affected by both racial (western) and
gender discrimination (western and native) – made up and still represents the lowest
stratum in the colonial and neo-colonial worlds respectively.\textsuperscript{185}

In Europe’s hegemonic representation of the Orient and its women, it is the veil which
has functioned over the last centuries as a “[...] signifier of radical sexual segregation,
but also as the key marker of the essential inferiority of Islamic societies.”\textsuperscript{186}
To be precise, the veil has stereotypically been used in European depictions of the Orient in
order to call attention to “[...] purdah, the harem, polygamy, a repressive political order
based on the subjugation of women, Oriental despotism, sadism and lasciviousness.”\textsuperscript{187}
First occurrences of veiled Asian women’s images in western orientalist sources can be
dated back to the mid-18th century.\textsuperscript{188} Strictly speaking, though, “[...] ‘classical’
Orientalism [...]” was in fact rooted in the European masculine idea of unveiling
oriental exoticism which lasted until the mid-20th century.\textsuperscript{189} Withal, European (erotic)
fantasies claimed to unveil the secret of the sexual Orient and its women\textsuperscript{190} by means of
a colonisation of the private Arab space, the harem (‘haremlık’).\textsuperscript{191} The harem – the
Orient’s segregated space for women – namely united the predominantly western male
Christian authors’ stereotypes of oriental lasciviousness,\textsuperscript{192} eroticism and homosexuality
(ethnic otherness), as well as male oppression and sexual exploitation (gendered
otherness).\textsuperscript{193} It was in the 19th century that contrasting portrayals of female veiling

\textsuperscript{184} See Loomba 2005: 141f.
\textsuperscript{185} See Loomba 2005: 138, 141f., 145.
\textsuperscript{187} See Macmaster/Lewis in Moghissi 2005: 147.
\textsuperscript{188} The Arabic word ‘purdah’ describes women’s act of veiling (See An-Na‘im 2002: 309).
\textsuperscript{189} See Loomba 2005: 130.
\textsuperscript{190} See Macmaster/Lewis in Moghissi 2005: 147f.
\textsuperscript{192} See Melman 1989: 301f.
\textsuperscript{193} See Macmaster/Lewis in Moghissi 2005: 148.
\textsuperscript{194} See Ahmed 1982: 524f.
(‘hijab’\textsuperscript{195}) and unveiling (‘sufur’\textsuperscript{196}) influenced not only the literary but also the art scene. The latter was represented, inter alia, by odalisque\textsuperscript{197} paintings by the Frenchmen Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863) and Jean-Auguste-Dominque Ingres (1780-1867), as well as the British John Frederick Lewis (1804-1876).\textsuperscript{198} In this regard, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres came to be known for his Turkish harem paintings, their erotised portrayals of the Levant’s odalisques and their revival of the lesbian theme\textsuperscript{199}. His painting “The Turkish Bath”\textsuperscript{200} (1863), for instance, was originally inspired by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s famous travel narrative \textit{The Turkish Embassy Letters} (1763), in particular by her visit to and account of a Turkish bath\textsuperscript{201}. By producing a sexually influenced bath scene in “The Turkish Bath”, Ingres continued – on the basis of Lady Mary’s account, imagination\textsuperscript{202}, own “[…] male voyeuristic pleasure, […]]”\textsuperscript{203} and an earlier constructed western female nude figure in “The Valpinçon Bather”\textsuperscript{204} (1808)\textsuperscript{205} – the western myth of the Orient’s unveiled exotic and erotic secret\textsuperscript{206}. Other orientalist harem paintings of nude odalisques by the French Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item See Badran 1995: 68.
\item The word ‘odalisque’ denotes a female slave or concubine in a harem. According to Billie Melman, one differentiates between different kinds of odalisques within a middle- or high-class harem: the mother of the sultan’s children (‘kadmes’), the favourites (‘ikbals’), the noticed women (‘gözdes’), the unnoticed women, the women housekeepers and the servants (See Melman 1989: 322).
\item See Ahmed 1982: 525f.
\item “The Turkish Bath” (1863) by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres is also known as “Le Bath Turc”.
\item See Ribeiro 1999: 220, 224f.
\item See Ribeiro 1999: 224.
\item “The Valpinçon Bather” (1808) by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres is also known as “La Baigneuse Valpinçon”.
\item See Ribeiro 1999: 219.
\item See Lewis 1996: 129.
\end{thebibliography}
include “Grande Odalisque”207 (1814) and “Odalisque with Slave”208 (1839, 1842).209 In this context, it needs to be pointed out that Ingres – unlike his contemporary and rival Eugène Delacroix210 – never visited the Ottoman Empire211. Delacroix travelled to North Africa in the 1830s where he produced – fascinated by exotic harem women – his “Women of Algiers in their Apartment”212 in 1834213. Inspired by Ingres’ and Delacroix’s French orientalist art, the British painter John Frederick Lewis also travelled to the Near East in 1840/1841.214 Lewis was driven by “[…] a desire for novelty, a need to infuse his art with exotic and colourful subjects that represented a culture other than European.”215 After his return from Cairo in 1851, Lewis spent the following 25 years painting from his own sketches, photographs, experiences and imagination of oriental life for the western world by focusing on the production of accuracy, aesthetics and intimacy.216 This comprised detailed, ‘realistic’ representations of the locals’ individuality as much as of their customs and costumes.217 Just like Delacroix in “Women of Algiers in their Apartment”, Lewis produced in “The Hhareem” (1850), “Hhareem Life, Constantinople” (1857), “Life in the Harem, Cairo” (1858), “An Intercepted Correspondence, Cairo” (1869), “Indoor Gossip, Cairo” (1873) and “The Reception” (1873) distinctive portrayals of oriental scenes by specialising on

207 “Grande Odalisque” (1814) by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres is also known as “La Grande Odalisque”.
208 “Odalisque with Slave” (1839, 1842) by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres is also known as “L’Odalisque à l’esclave”.
211 See Kuehn 2011: 34; See Ribeiro 1999: 231.
212 “Women of Algiers in their Apartment” (1834) by Eugène Delacroix is also known as “Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement”.
213 See Franklin 2015.
the reappearing components of veiled odalisques’ traditional garments and “[…] vibrant colour, […]”\(^{218}\). In addition, Lewis played with light effects, reflections\(^{219}\), artefacts and architecture\(^{220}\) in his art in order to create magical and exotic scenes. Most importantly, he successfully accomplished to produce – in comparison with his French contemporaries – an artistic proximity to the harem space by experimenting with so called “[…] synaesthetic and compositional effects […]”. In this way, the western viewer or voyeur has become part of the paintings’ fictional, intimate oriental scenes.\(^{221}\) Nonetheless, the relationship between the veiled oriental Other and the voyeuristic male Westerner has persisted to exist – in all these years of western orientalist prejudices, curiosity and lustfulness – as a binary opposition between oriental predominance and occidental inferiority. According to Meyda Yeğenoğlu in Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism (1998),

> [i]t is the veil which enables the Oriental other to look without being seen. This not only disturbs the desire of the Western/colonial subject to fix cultural and sexual difference, but also enables the colonial other to turn itself into a surveillant gaze. It is in this space of absent-presence that there emerges the challenges of the ‘invisible’, ‘hidden’ other. To recapitulate, it is through the veil that the colonial Western desire to see emerges and is erased simultaneously, and this is what enables the veiled other to destabilize the identificatory process of the subject. It is this moment of seeing of these eyes that filter through the veil which frustrate the voyeuristic desire of the colonialist and displaces his surveillant eye.\(^{222}\)

It was, though, 18th- and early 19th-century western female travel narrators’ social engagement with the Orient\(^{223}\) that first attempted to challenge the traditional western male mythical perceptions\(^{224}\) of oriental women (gendered otherness), the harem and the Orient’s sexualisation, eroticisation, promiscuity as well as bawdiness in general (ethnic otherness)\(^{225}\). In so doing, a selected group of European female travel writers – in

\(^{218}\) See Llewellyn 2003: 630.
\(^{219}\) See Roberts 2007: 51.
\(^{220}\) See Roberts 2007: 48; See Williams 2001: 229.
\(^{221}\) See Roberts 2007: 40.
\(^{222}\) See Yeğenoğlu 1998: 63.
\(^{224}\) See Ahmed 1982: 527.
particular from Britain – questioned the strict ethnic and gendered binary opposition between the Self/the Occident, and its counterpart, the Orient and its women, by use of authentic and trustworthy accounts of upper-class Turkish women’s lives and visits to the Ottoman Empire’s high harems. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s *The Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763) and Sophia Lane Poole’s *The Englishwoman in Egypt: Letters from Cairo, Written during a Residence There in 1842, 3, & 4, with E. W. Lane, Esq. Author of ‘The Modern Egyptians’* (1844) are exemplary for Augustan and Victorian gendered discourses on Turkish women and their harem lives. Both Lady Mary and Sophia Lane Poole professed to confront, de-eroticise and de-sexualise – by means of authentic descriptions of their experiences among Ottoman women in Turkish and Egyptian high harems – the western male stereotyping of the Orient and its gender relations: “Now that I am a little acquainted with [the Turkish ladies’] ways I cannot forbear admiring either the exemplary discretion or extreme stupidity of all the writers that have given accounts of them.” Lady Mary describes – in her accounts from Adrianople and Constantinople – “[...] Turkish women as the only free people in the empire” who might also be “[...], freer than any ladies in the universe, [...]”. Especially, the descriptions of her Turkish dress’ adoption and the act of Muslim adoption.

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226 See Nussbaum in Batchelor/Kaplan 2005: 123.
229 Sophia Lane Poole substitutes in her travel narrative today’s ‘Egyptian women’ with the term ‘Turkish women’. For this reason, the term ‘Turkish women’ is also used in this account in order to refer to all women of the Ottoman Empire (see also Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, 1763).
235 See Wortley Montagu 1994: 69, 133.
veiling \textsuperscript{236} display Lady Mary’s admiration of female Turkish chastity, charm and social as well as sexual freedom evoked by the oriental ‘masquerade’:

\[ \ldots \text{no woman, of what rank so ever being permitted to go in the streets without two muslins, one that covers her face all but her eyes and another that hides the whole dress of her head, \ldots}. This perpetual masquerade gives them entire liberty of following their inclinations without danger of discovery. \textsuperscript{237} \]

During her first visit to a Turkish bath in Sofia, the English female travel narrator was also pleased by the politeness, civility and grace of the nude Turkish odalisques.\textsuperscript{238} Notwithstanding, it was her refusal to entirely undress herself as well as her male voyeuristic gaze in the Sofia bath \textsuperscript{239} and the Kabya’s high harem in Adrianople \textsuperscript{240} that highlighted at the same time her continuous western superiority belief of her own sex, her cultural difference and thus the ordinary western male perception of the exotic ethnic and gendered Other \textsuperscript{241} “[\ldots] in a country we call barbarous”\textsuperscript{242}.

Just like Lady Mary, Sophia Lane Poole was fascinated by the robed\textsuperscript{243} Turkish women’s extraordinary beauty \textsuperscript{244} and thus aimed at authentically and reliably presenting an enlightened harem’s image to the western reader \textsuperscript{245}: “The ideas entertained by many in Europe of the immorality of the harem are, I believe, erroneous.”\textsuperscript{246} Driven by her curiosity about Turkish women in general and her wish of experiencing their secret lives in the harem, Poole sought to visit the Ottoman harems in Cairo.\textsuperscript{247} In accordance with her visits to the high harems, including the exemplary Cairene high harems of Habeeb Efendee \textsuperscript{248} and Mohammad ’Alee \textsuperscript{249}, Lane Poole not only praised the odalisques’

\textsuperscript{236} See Wortley Montagu 1994: 71, 126ff., 133.
\textsuperscript{237} See Wortley Montagu 1994: 71.
\textsuperscript{238} See Wortley Montagu 1994: 58ff.
\textsuperscript{239} See Wortley Montagu 1994: 59.
\textsuperscript{240} See Wortley Montagu 1994: 89ff.
\textsuperscript{242} See Wortley Montagu 1994: 89.
\textsuperscript{243} See Lane Poole 1845: 1: 212, 2: 31, 40, 61ff.
\textsuperscript{244} See Lane Poole 1845: 1: 19, 2: 44, 61.
\textsuperscript{245} See Lane Poole 1845: 1: 206, 2: 74.
\textsuperscript{246} See Lane Poole 1845: 2: 74.
\textsuperscript{247} See Lane Poole 1845: 1: 206.
\textsuperscript{248} See Lane Poole 1845: 1: 209.
\textsuperscript{249} See Lane Poole 1845: 2: 52.
hospitality, friendliness and politeness\textsuperscript{250} but also emphasised her indirect identification with the Turkish women through her Turkish dress’ adoption\textsuperscript{251}. In this sense, Sophia Lane Poole distanced herself from her brother Edward W. Lane’s\textsuperscript{252} orientalist antipathy towards and critique of oriental women, their licentiousness, lasciviousness and “[…] non-conformity to Victorian rules […].”\textsuperscript{253} The observation of the odalisques’ freedom\textsuperscript{254}, self-assertion\textsuperscript{255} and political education\textsuperscript{256} further reinforced the author’s feminist sympathies for and identification with the female oriental manners, as well as her indirect self-critique of the traditional Victorian social system\textsuperscript{257}. In spite of her discourse in favour of the upper-class Turkish women and their Ottoman harem lives, Sophia maintained yet her brother’s orientalist prejudices and western superiority belief\textsuperscript{258} throughout her Cairene stay\textsuperscript{259}. In this regard, she both disapproved of the

\textsuperscript{250} See Lane Poole 1845: 1: 206, 212, 2: 52, 60, 82, 85.

\textsuperscript{251} See Lane Poole 1845: 1: 211.

\textsuperscript{252} The Arabic scholar and Orientalist Edward W. Lane convinced his sister Sophia in 1842 to accompany him on his third trip to Cairo (Jane Robinson, \textit{Wayward Women: A Guide to Women Travellers}, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990: 305; See Stephan in Brothers/Gergits 1996: 299). By taking her with him on his Cairene excursion, Lane intended to receive an authentic written report of her visits to the Ottoman high harems, as well as of her impressions of the Turkish women and their lives within the segregated spaces. Whilst Edward W. Lane supplied his sister with his notes and supervised the distribution of the material for publishing, he reiterated – similar to his 19th-century contemporary orientalist scholars and writers – the male superiority of his academic research (see Lewis 2005: 48).


\textsuperscript{254} See Lane Poole 1845: 2: 17f.

\textsuperscript{255} See Lane Poole 1845: 2: 23f.

\textsuperscript{256} See Lane Poole 1845: 2: 42.

\textsuperscript{257} Both Lady Mary’s and Sophia Lane Poole’s epistolary travel narratives were influenced, inter alia, by English liberal feminist thoughts (See Johnson 2002: 146) of Mary Astell (see Lady Mary) and Mary Wollstonecraft (see Sophia Lane Poole) (See Kinnaird 1979: 57; See Zonana 1993: 594; See Heffernan 2000: 206). Both Lady Mary and Lane Poole criticise in their gendered discourses Augustan and Victorian females’ social and sexual suppression and segregation (private versus public space among the middle and upper classes) by depicting their fascinations for Turkish women’s freedom within the Ottoman high harems (See Bohls 1995: 37; See Melman 1989: 302, 309-312, 317, 319, 327; See Heffernan 2000: 212; See Lewis 1996: 152; Mary J. Kietzman, “Montagu’s Turkish Embassy Letters and Cultural Dislocation,” \textit{Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900} 38.3 (Summer 1998): 537-551, here 540f.). Especially, Lady Mary was known to be a convinced pro-feminist Whig (See Melman 1989: 310f.), a believer in the Enlightenment’s demand for personal freedom (See Lewis 1996: 152) and a member of the blue-stockings – an 18th-century group of English women fighters for female social and intellectual equality (Bridget Hill, \textit{Eighteenth-Century Women: An Anthology}, London: Unwin Hyman, 1984: 48).


\textsuperscript{259} See Lane Poole 1845: 1: 78f., 209f., 215, 2: 42.
customs of arranged\textsuperscript{260} and polygamous\textsuperscript{261} marriages and uttered – unlike Lady Mary’s sexualised and eroticised descriptions – disgust at the nudity of oriental women in a Cairene bath\textsuperscript{262}:

Persons of all colours, from the black and glossy shade of the negro to the fairest possible hue of complexion, were formed in groups, conversing as though full dressed, with perfect nonchalance, while others were strolling about, or sitting round the fountain. I cannot describe the bath as altogether a beautiful scene; in truth, in some respects it is disgusting; [...]\textsuperscript{263}

Research on Lady Mary and Sophia Lane Poole’s 18th- and 19th-century gendered colonial discourses hence reveal – aside from sympathising and critical self-reflective feminist approaches\textsuperscript{264} – continuous male orientalist attitudes\textsuperscript{265} towards upper-class Ottoman women’s social statuses and lives in the harem\textsuperscript{266}.

Ever since decolonisation, however, the abovementioned centuries-long male European image of the oriental exotic has been replaced by an increasing binary opposition between “[…] ‘West’ and ‘Islam’ […]” caused by the focus on “[…] hyperveiling.” The so called “[…] politicization of the veil” in Euro-American discourses and the media builds up and reinforces respectively fear in the western world which manifests itself as a growing Islamophobia.\textsuperscript{267} In his article “Orientalism Once More”, Edward W. Said claims in 2004 that the concepts of the Orient and the Occident, as they were once constructed as “[…] supreme fictions […]” by western societies, unfortunately

[…] lend themselves easily to manipulation and the organization of collective passion has never been more evident than in our time, when the mobilization of fear, hatred,
disgust, and resurgent self-pride and arrogance – much of it having to do with Islam and the Arabs on one side, ‘we’ Westerners on the other – are very large-scale enterprises.  

Said further argues that the western perception of Arab and Muslim backwardness, “[…] lack of democracy, and abrogation of women’s rights […]” is in actual fact based on the West’s self-imposed superiority and modernity status: “[…] we simply forget that such notions as modernity, enlightenment, and democracy are by no means simple and agreed-upon concepts that one either does or does not find like Easter eggs in the living-room.”


2.2. Voices of the Suppressed

2.2.1. Post/Colonial Resistance to the West’s Ethnic Otherness Discourse

Yet it was the case nearly everywhere in the non-European world that the coming of the white man brought forth some sort of resistance. […] Along with armed resistance in places as diverse as nineteenth-century Algeria, Ireland, and Indonesia, there also went considerable efforts in cultural resistance almost everywhere, the assertions of nationalist identities, and, in the political realm, the creation of associations and parties whose common goal was self-determination and national independence. […] there was always some form of active resistance and, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the resistance finally won out.270

As introduced by Edward W. Said’s quotation from *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), the non-western resistances to the West’s ethnic otherness discourse as well as to the policies of colonialism and neo-colonialism have been diverse since the 19th century. In fact, the colonial and even post-colonial resistances to the West’s hegemonic power271 have all along influenced not only the fields of gender-politics and religion but also politics in general, literature and linguistics. 20th-century political resistance to colonialism, for instance, reached its peak with the nationalist movements which eventually smoothed the way for decolonisation and political independence in the colonies. Frantz Fanon, pioneer of the political liberation movement272, once described the process of decolonisation as “[…] a violent phenomenon” and “[…] a complete calling in question of the colonial situation” which brings forth “[…] the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature, which in fact owe their originality to that sort of substantification which results from and is nourished by the situation in the colonies.”273 In the process, the native colonised have to refocus on their national history, their national consciousness as well as a unity across classes for the purpose of a successful act of decolonisation.274 Despite the fact that the white man is corrupt and


271 While post-colonial critics, such as Edward W. Said, Frantz Fanon and Gayatri C. Spivak, (have) focused on a binary opposition between the coloniser and the colonised, Homi Bhabha underlined their similarities (See Childs/Weber/Williams 2006: 73, 112).


273 See Fanon 1967: 27f.

274 See Fanon 1967: 40, 119-165.
needs the black man around him to produce ethnic alterity and colonial subjugation, the black man has to be proud of his cultural roots and has to practise his civilised culture. This chapter deals specifically with the colonial and post-colonial literary and linguistic acts of resistance which have been paired as well with the gender-political resistance in North Africa, the Middle East and the rest of the formerly colonised world. A detailed approach to socio- and gender-political resistances to the West’s colonial and neo-colonial hegemonies will be presented in chapter 3.1., which focuses in detail on the Arab world.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o writes in Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature (1986) about the effect of the English language in the former African colonies that “[it] was the means of the spiritual subjugation” as well as “[…] the magic formula to colonial elitedom.” Under colonialism, African literature written in European languages “[…] was the literature of the petty-bourgeoisie born of the colonial schools and universities.” It prototypically depicted to what extent the coloniser controlled not only the colonised peoples’ wealth but most importantly their minds by means of the external force of language: “The domination of a people’s language by the languages of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised.” Even though English was in wider parts of colonial Africa forced upon its people by means of foreign education, the native languages were continuously spoken among the peasantry “[…] in the daily speech, in the ceremonies, in political struggles, above all in the rich store of orature – proverbs,


276 See wa Thiong’o 1986: 9.
277 See wa Thiong’o 1986: 12.
278 See wa Thiong’o 1986: 20.
279 See wa Thiong’o 1986: 16.
280 See wa Thiong’o 1986: 17.
stories, poems, and riddles.” Albert Memmi defines this phenomenon in his 1957 published book *The Colonizer and the Colonized* as “[…] colonial bilingualism […]” which also affected the resistant intelligentsia. Aside from the western educated petty-bourgeoisie’s Anglo-African literature, the Anglo-African literature of the nationalistic bourgeoisie in sub-Saharan Africa developed in the course of the mid-20th century as the starting point of anti-imperialist and anti-colonial revolutions in colonised Africa. It was regarded as the intellectual groundwork of decolonisation since the political background of the texts was combined with literary sources from the peasantry, including orature and fables. Wa Thion’o, however, criticises in *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* that the usage of the English language in those nationalistic bourgeoisie’s texts from sub-Saharan Africa has ensured that native claims and criticisms have solely reached – even after decolonisation – to the western educated petty-bourgeoisie and elite, and problems have thus remained unresolved. Moreover, wa Thion’o regards both the influence of neo-colonialism and the continuous application of European languages within African literature in the post-independent era as a lack of native authenticity and strength, as well as self-betrayal:

The question is this: we as African writers have always complained about the neo-colonial economic and political relationship to Euro-America. Right. But by our continuing to write in foreign languages, paying homage to them, are we not on the cultural level continuing that neo-colonial slavish and cringing spirit? What is the difference between a politician who says Africa cannot do without imperialism and the writer who says Africa cannot do without European languages?”

In order to change this state of condition, wa Thion’o demands in his 1986 published book a full colonial resistance which incorporates a decolonisation of one’s mind. On a literary level, this includes the fact that African literature not only needs to be written in African languages but also has to incorporate “[…] anti-imperialist content, meaning

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281 See wa Thion’o 1986: 17, 23.
283 See wa Thion’o 1986: 21.
284 See wa Thion’o 1986: 21f.
286 See wa Thion’o 1986: 28.
nationalistic and socialist claims [...]” in order to fully counteract neo-colonialism.\(^{287}\) Strictly speaking, the African bourgeoisie’s nationalist literature in the pre- and early post-independent eras was initially based on the idea of “[…] national myth-making […]”\(^{288}\); however, this underlying idea was over the years misused at the cost of women’s subjugation. In recent years, African women, in particular, have begun to rebel against patriarchal voices and male productions of nationalist images in African literature by finding their own identity through writing. In doing so, they have regained powerful female voices on two levels.\(^{289}\) First of all, post-colonial women writers in Africa and beyond have transformed male nationalist literature into a medium of their own with “[…] vernacular, non-literary and phatic forms […].” In addition, the male-dominated nationalist themes and conception of nation have been substituted by female worldviews and historical concepts, as well as personal experiences.\(^{290}\)

While it was, unlike in British colonised sub-Saharan Africa, rather uncommon and a socio-cultural taboo in the British colonised MENA region to write in the language of the coloniser during pre- and early post-independent periods, post-colonial Arab writers – especially those of Arab descent living and writing in exile – have increasingly adopted the English language or preferred English translations of their works since the late 20th century\(^{291}\). By using the language of the former coloniser, Arab authors “[…] are no longer seen as traitors opting out of their own culture and into the culture of the (ex-)colonizers, but as cultural ambassadors who are able to voice a previously silenced point of view.”\(^{292}\) In this connection, the act of writing in the language of the former

\(^{287}\) See wa Thiong’o 1986: 29.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s post-colonial claims as to the authenticity of African languages and the recollection of native languages for the purpose of a decolonisation were similarly addressed by Albert Memmi as early as the late 1950s. In *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957), Memmi in fact considers the use of English in the literature of the colonised as an alienation from the natives (See Memmi 1967: 108-111). In contrast to wa Thiong’o and Memmi, the post-colonial African writer and critic Chinua Achebe approves in his essay “The African Writer and the English Language” (1975) the employment of English in African literature as long as it is a new English in an African context (Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, London: Heinemann Educational, 1975: 61).


\(^{289}\) See Boehmer in Eagleton 2011: 434ff.

\(^{290}\) See Boehmer in Eagleton 2011: 436.


\(^{292}\) See Ghazoul 2006: 121f.
coloniser is, however, to date not only conditioned by the aim of direct, untranslated “[…] ‘writing back’ […]” for the purposes of re-orientalising the East and criticising (neo-)colonialism.\textsuperscript{293} It is also the result of migration movements, cultural hybridity within the diaspora, a burdening alienation from the motherland, the avoidance of cultural restrictions and censorship, as well as the feeling of relief through writing.\textsuperscript{294} The latter particularly applies to contemporary women writers for whom it is easier to write about taboo subjects in a foreign language in place of the mother-tongue.\textsuperscript{295} Women writers’ choice of writing about certain topics in English rather than in the mother-tongue depends as well on the audiences’ particular stereotypes of and encounters with the Other.\textsuperscript{296} Contemporary Anglo-Arab author Ahdaf Soueif, for instance, employs English as an integral part of her Arab-Muslim discourse in order to discuss sexual, political, social and gender-political taboo themes on the national level, as well as to utter resistance to colonialism and neo-colonialism on the transnational level:\textsuperscript{297}

\[
\ldots, \text{even though the English language is readily associated in the collective memory of many ‘third-world’ nations with the colonialist and neo-colonialist experiences, Soueif’s adoption of it as a medium of expression dehegemonizes it and transforms it into an instrument of resistance to the discourses of both arrogant colonialism and exclusionist ultra-nationalism.}\textsuperscript{298}
\]

In so doing, Soueif also seizes, similar to Anglo-Arab women writers Fadia Faqir and Leila Aboulela, on the permanent oppositional relationship and conflict between western and eastern elements.\textsuperscript{299} By writing back to the West and to their native socio-political systems, cultures and religion, the third generation of Anglo-Arab women writers thus employs these days English as their native language of expression and medium of free, global criticism. Ahdaf Soueif, whose short story “The Water-Heater”

\textsuperscript{294} See Winckler 2004: X; See Nash 2007: 12, 29; See Suyoufie 2008: 229.
\textsuperscript{295} See Nash 2002: 28.
\textsuperscript{296} See Nash 2002: 28.
\textsuperscript{297} See Malak 2000: 161.
\textsuperscript{298} See Malak 2000: 161.
\textsuperscript{299} See Nash 2002: 28; See Suyoufie 2008: 228.
(1982) will be discussed as part of chapter 4.2.’s literary analysis of writings by Muslim Arab migrants in Great Britain and the USA, writes at the turn of the century that

I have often been asked whether I have a problem with English as the ‘language of my oppressor’. I understand the question but I do not feel it; the British occupation was out of Egypt before I was born. English was the language of my first reading and I love it. 300

2.2.2. Gender Roles and Relations in Post-Colonial Feminist Discourse

According to Ania Loomba, both racial discrimination and the issue of gender oppression have shaped the colonial history and post-independent era of the non-western world. 301 Nonetheless, native patriarchal structures have suppressed not only ‘Third World’ but also ‘western’ women as declared by western anthropologists Mona Etienne and Eleanor Leacock 302, African-American history professor and researcher of Third World women’s studies Cheryl Johnson-Odim 303, Egyptian feminist Nawal El Saadawi 304 as well as post-colonial feminist theorist and English literature professor Ania Loomba 305. In the case of Third World women, though, Loomba and her contemporary post-colonial theorists and feminists have noted and criticised an additional, continuous double oppression of native women by both colonised and white men. 306 Third World women’s oppression has thus been based not only on native gender inequalities but also on “[…] Western patriarchy, racism, and exploitation.” 307 In the course of years, El Saadawi has defined this approach more closely and has even referred here to a paternalistically multilevel oppression of women by colonisation, the state and the family. 308 In this context, it should be pointed out that – “[…] while gender is a potential bond, […]” – females’ oppression has even been practised among women

301 See Loomba 2005: 137f., 141f., 145.
304 See Smith 2007: 68.
themselves all over the world. With reference to the colonial and neo-colonial periods, Gayatri C. Spivak argues in this sense in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988) that the constant double oppression of the marginalised female natives, or “[…] brown women […]” by both ‘the Subject’ (the coloniser) and ‘the subject’ (the colonised) has all along repressed female subalterns’ free expression, right of self-determination, and self-representation. Spivak believes that the subaltern in general – and she is referring here to a definition by Ranajit Guha – is “[…] the space that is cut off from the lines of mobility in a colonized country.” Unlike Michael Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, Spivak therefore does not believe in absolute agency of the subaltern, in particular of the female Other. Strictly speaking, however, she does not claim that the subaltern cannot speak at all – a misunderstanding that construed from her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak rather states that in order for the subaltern to be able to speak out and revolt against oppression, a transaction or speech act between a speaker (the Other/the subaltern) and a receiver (the Self/the S/subject) needs to be successful. With reference to her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, one may argue in this respect that a subaltern who is killing herself is in fact unable to speak out successfully. Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri’s suicide is, so to speak, a hopeless search for attention since there is no transmission of signs between the signifier and the signified.

311 Gayatri C. Spivak introduces in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988) the western conception of ‘S/subject’. The differentiation between ‘Subject’ (the one having power/the West) and ‘subject’ (the one being oppressed/the East) on two different levels enables her to support her argument that the subaltern has difficulties to express agency (See Spivak in Nelson/Grossberg 1988: 271f., 279f.; See Birla in Morris 2010: 90).
313 See Landry/MacLean in Landry/MacLean 1996: 288.
317 See Landry/MacLean in Landry/MacLean 1996: 288f.


and thus no uttering of the subaltern\textsuperscript{318}. “[…] even when the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard, and speaking and hearing complete the speech act.”\textsuperscript{319} Due to epistemic violence\textsuperscript{320}, its construction of the oppositional relationships between the Self/the Subject and the Other and the consequent multilevel oppression based on race, class\textsuperscript{321} and gender, it has especially been difficult for the female suppressed Other – in comparison with the colonised native elite men and the male subalterns – to carry out such a speech act and express agency\textsuperscript{322}: “If, […] the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.”\textsuperscript{323} For reason of their limited subject-agency and difficulty to revolt against oppression attributable to their lowest social status\textsuperscript{324}, the Third World’s subaltern women – as per Spivak – have mostly needed representation\textsuperscript{325}. Spivak has therefore introduced the concept of the ‘native informant’, who speaks out for the colonised\textsuperscript{326} and, in particular, for their subaltern women. Her belief in the so called double meaning of representation is here closely interlinked with Karl Marx’s concept of representation in which he differentiates between “[…] representation as Vertretung: […]” in the political sense and representation as “[…] Darstellung, […]” as in art and staging.\textsuperscript{327} Similar to Spivak\textsuperscript{328}, Marx, in the 19th century, commented differently than Foucault and Deleuze\textsuperscript{329} on the topic of the Other’s ability of agency by proposing that certain powerless social subjects (here peasant proprietors) “[…] ‘cannot represent themselves;
they must be represented. [...]”\(^{330}\) It has consequently been the goal of the female post-colonial authors, in particular, not only to “[...] express their own reality, unsettle male-focused [...] narratives, [...]” but also “[...] to speak for one’s place in the world. [...] to make one’s own place and narrative, to tell the story of oneself, to create identity”\(^{331}\) against the influence of epistemic violence. In so doing, the women writers have withal taken up their voice for a whole generation of Spivak’s female subjects. It is, though, the post-colonial feminist Benita Parry who has questioned Spivak’s belief in subalterns’ silence and need of representation in so far as she interprets anti-colonial nationalism as evidence of natives’ agency per se.\(^{332}\) In comparison, Ania Loomba argues – with reference to Spivak’s theoretical basic assumptions on gender, class and caste differences – that anti-colonial nationalism can only be declared as agent once the definition of “[...] ‘speaking’” is reconsidered and the nationalist movement is initiated by a homogenous group of subalterns.\(^{333}\)

With respect to the post-colonial double oppression of subaltern women, selected feminist post-colonial and western scholars and activists, including Hazel Carby\(^{334}\), Chandra T. Mohanty\(^{335}\), Ann R. Jones\(^{336}\) and Pratibha Parmar and Valerie Amos\(^{337}\), have equally attacked western feminism for its persistent racism and colonial attitudes (imperialism) that interact with the aspect of gender discrimination\(^{338}\). Withal, many


\(^{331}\) See Boehmer in Eagleton 2011: 435.


\(^{333}\) See Loomba 2005: 196.


\(^{338}\) See Loomba 2005: 139f.
western feminists have – with the exception of Judith Butler and her contemporaries\(^{339}\) – been accused of reinforcing the West’s racial alterity discourse\(^{340}\) by forming pejoratively “[…] the category ‘black women’ […]”\(^{341}\). To be precise, the western feminist category of ‘women’ per se ignores any of the factors of social class, religion, sexuality, history and race, and their different forms and intersections.\(^{342}\) The western feminist idea of a unitary group of powerless subjects or female victims is also criticised as to the category of “[…], ‘third world women’ […].”\(^{343}\) Mohanty claims in this connection in “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” (1988) that the term ‘women’ – which labels here all Third World females and reminds the reader of Spivak’s homogenous category of the female Third World subaltern – not only “[…] assumes an ahistorical, universal unity among women based on a generalized notion of their subordination” but also disregards the factors of social class and ethnicity.\(^{344}\) This consequently enhances their subalternity and “[…] robs them of their historical and political agency.”\(^{345}\) According to Anastasia Valassopoulos in *Contemporary Arab Women Writers: Cultural Expression in Context* (2007), western feminist theorists Reina Lewis and Sara Mills have embraced the abovementioned post-colonial feminists theorists’ critique of white hegemonic feminism in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (2003) by challenging in particular the western act of speaking for non-western women.\(^{346}\)

Once more, it is Cheryl Johnson-Odim who remarks in her article “Common Themes, Different Contexts: Third World Women and Feminism” (1991) that Third World women’s oppression is influenced not only by gender differences, race and imperialism

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\(^{341}\) See Loomba 2005: 140.


\(^{343}\) See Mohanty in Mohanty/Russo/Torres 1991: 7; See Mohanty in Lewis/Mills 2003: 54, 60.

\(^{344}\) See Mohanty in Lewis/Mills 2003: 60.

\(^{345}\) See Mohanty in Lewis/Mills 2003: 67.

but also by class issues. As per Johnson-Odim and Mohanty, feminism thus needs to be concerned with this multiplicity of causes of women’s oppression in both the First and the Third Worlds: “If the feminist movement does not address itself also to the issues of race, class, and imperialism, it cannot be relevant to alleviating the oppression of most of the women of the world.” As a matter of fact, Johnson-Odim even goes so far as to claim that “[...] racism and economic exploitation are primary forces in the oppression of most women in the world.” Johnson-Odim’s original post-colonial argument from 1991 draws on selected African-American and Chicana feminists’ thoughts by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, Gloria Hull, Patricia Scott and Barbara Smith, Gloria Joseph and Jill Lewis as well as Barbara Smith which also address issues “[...] of racism, sexism, structural poverty, and economic exploitation” with regard to women’s oppression.

In order for feminism to operate prospectively effective, Third World women have even proposed establishing a separate organisation that would represent their feminist theoretical needs and claims apart from white feminist hegemony. In “Common Themes, Different Contexts: Third World Women and Feminism”, Johnson-Odim claims to this effect that

[W]e must ensure that the issues that Third World feminists raise become a part of serious discussions of feminist theory and that they are not relegated and ghettoized to a subculture of feminism.

Although the women’s movement ostensibly unites all women around the world, Trinh T. Minh-ha also argues in an interview from 1990 that feminism in the Third World is a unique construct as it is construed and carried out differently in the post-colonial world. Thus, Third World feminism is not imported from the First World even though imperialist influences and western notions have fostered for years its development. For this reason, Johnson-Odim demands once more in 1991 that “Third World women must articulate needs through the crucial process of constructing a body of relevant feminist theory, which goes beyond mere critique of First World women.” What African-American scholar Cheryl Johnson-Odim and feminist post-colonial scholars Chandra T. Mohanty, Ien Ang and Trinh T. Minh-ha at bottom aim at depicting is that the dominant western feminist assumption of a homogenisation of women’s identity and sisterhood is as such impossible. As per Mohanty, there exists no actual proof of this female universality and therefore it remains the product of ethnocentric feminist discourse. In addition, Ang supports the so called 1990s concept of ‘difference’ within feminist discourse as she claims in “I’m a Feminist but … ‘Other’ Women and Postnational Feminism” (1995) that

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362 This excludes western feminist theories by Judith Butler (See Butler in Kemp/Squires 1997: 278) and Jane Flex (Jane Flex, “Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory,” In Sandra Kemp/Judith Squires (eds.) Feminisms, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1997: 170-178, here 171).
364 See Mohanty in Lewis/Mills 2003: 52f.
[...], not all women share the same experience of ‘being a woman’, nor is shared gender enough to guarantee a commonality in social positioning. [...] It is now widely acknowledged that differences between women undermine the homogeneity and continuity of ‘women’ as a social category: differences produced by the intersections of class, race, ethnicity, nationality, and so on. [...] The so-called politics of difference recognises the need to go beyond the notion of an encompassing sisterhood and acknowledges that feminism needs to take account of the fact that not all women are white, Western and middle class and take into consideration the experience of ‘other’ women as well.\textsuperscript{365}

However, Ien Ang knows as well that the historically developed ethnocentric division between ‘white/western’ and ‘Other’, and the white/western hegemonic representation of the subaltern will never be stopped.\textsuperscript{366} In this regard, Mohanty even remarks that the Self or “[...] Man/Humanism [...]” versus Other or “[...] ‘Woman/Women’ and ‘the East’ [...]” relationship is based on a constant interaction of its components, as well as mutual characterisations.\textsuperscript{367}

\textsuperscript{365} See Ang in Lewis/Mills 2003: 191.
\textsuperscript{366} See Ang in Lewis/Mills 2003: 194f., 197f.
\textsuperscript{367} See Mohanty in Lewis/Mills 2003: 69.
3. “Writing Back to the Centre and to Itself” – Arab Feminisms and (Anglophone) Arab Literature

3.1. The History of Arab Feminisms – Nawal El Saadawi and Her Contemporaries

Although chapter 2.1.2. defines the text-centred deconstructionist approach of feminist literary theory and thus the conception of the gendered author’s death as the basis for the dissertation’s literary analysis, one also needs to pay attention to Amal Amireh’s demand for the appropriate socio-cultural and historical reception of Arab writings, their readers and after all their authors. Using the example of Nawal El Saadawi and her works, Amireh remarks in “Framing Nawal El Saadawi: Arab Feminism in a Transnational World” (2000) that

[i]t is imperative that we always historicize not only the writer and her work but also the reader. We must take into account both the original context of production and reception and the current moment of consumption. Our roles as critics and teachers and our relationship to the texts and authors we study at a particular historical moment should become objects of inquiry as much as the books themselves.368

Against the backdrop of Amireh’s context-centred theoretical approach, in particular, it is necessary to socio-historically scrutinise Arab writing back to the centre and to itself by focusing on the connection between Arab feminisms and (Anglophone) Arab literature. In this context, it is Raymond Williams’ theoretical assumption of literature (as well as the writer and the reader) in society – in particular the idea of an interaction between both a developing literature and society369 – that mainly functions as the theoretical foundation of chapter 3. Furthermore, Raymond Williams’ approach to literature in society decisively shapes – with the inclusion of a socio-cultural and historical focus on the author and a consideration of the role of the contemporary reader/critic, and together with the text-oriented deconstructionist approach of feminist literary theory – the literary analysis in chapter 4.

As Gayatri C. Spivak demonstrates in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, it is the native elitist colonised man who is more likely to have the opportunity to openly speak out against (neo-)colonial hegemony, as well as native suppression. The subaltern woman, in contrast, mostly needs to be represented since it is more difficult for her to speak out in a non-western society characterised by an unbalanced power structure. All the same, Peter Hitchcock describes in “The Eye and the Other: The Gaze and the Look in Egyptian Feminist Fiction” (1997) that “[…] even when the subaltern subject cannot speak or is not speaking she is always looking.” Using the example of Arab women writers, one may declare that specific women have nonetheless achieved not only to look out but also to take up their voices since the Victorian new imperialism’s scramble for Africa and the Middle East. At this, they have represented as well the Third World’s voiceless. Unfortunately, as Geoffrey Nash argues retrospectively in 2002, Arab women’s voices have commonly been – except for the big names Nawal El Saadawi and Fatima Mernissi – unheard in the western world as they have primarily been directed towards an Arabic-speaking Third World readership. In this sense, it is, in particular, the historical interaction between socio- and gender-critical Muslim Arab women writers, their writings and Arab feminist movements which have provoked and reinforced critical thinking and debates especially within the Egyptian society from the late 19th/early 20th century onwards. As Egypt has always been the cultural and political centre of the Arab world, its development of interactive feminist literary, gender- and socio-political forces has also affected other Muslim societies, such as Lebanon and Iraq. For that reason, one may differentiate – ever since the rises of Egyptian Islamic fundamentalism in the 1930s and 1970s/1980s – in Egypt as well as other Muslim Arab societies between three distinct historically informed feminist

tendencies. According to Azza Karam, these include the revolutionary-oriented secular feminism, the religiously influenced moderate or pragmatic Muslim feminism and the radical Islamist feminism.\textsuperscript{376} To be precise, the revolutionary-oriented secular feminism not only challenges the values and laws of traditional Islam\textsuperscript{377} by demanding withal the establishment of universal rights – meaning female liberation – for all Middle Eastern women\textsuperscript{378}, the separation of religion and state affairs\textsuperscript{379}, as well as the end of oppression by and corruption of Arab governments and social systems. Most importantly, it also criticises persistent western imperialism, neo-colonial dominance and exploitation in the non-western world to this day.\textsuperscript{380} In contrast, the religiously influenced moderate or pragmatic Muslim feminism praises the importance of an Islamic state\textsuperscript{381} and the Qur’an, as well as the preservation of the Shari’a (Islamic law), especially with regard to the latter’s societal and religious guidance of Muslim women. In this respect, Muslim feminists believe that the Islam as such is, in fact, a female “[…] liberating force”\textsuperscript{382} which men, patriarchal politics and societies have continuously corrupted and misused for the purpose of patriarchal practices and power struggles\textsuperscript{383}. Nevertheless, it is agreed upon that the Islam should be geared in the long run to the UN Charter of Human Rights.\textsuperscript{384} Finally, it is the radical Islamist feminism which is characterised by a stricter religious orientation and commitment than Muslim feminism.\textsuperscript{385} With respect to gender relations, Islamist feminists claim difference but/and complementarity of the sexes by stressing at once men’s dominance. Unlike western feminists, Islamist feminists additionally assume that the western conception of gender equality would cause further

\textsuperscript{378} See Barlow/Akbarzadeh 2006: 1481.
\textsuperscript{379} See Treacher 2003: 59.

According to Valentine M. Moghadam, the Middle East is influenced by a considerable interaction between religion and politics (Valentine M. Moghadam, Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East, 2nd ed., Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2003: 11).
\textsuperscript{380} See Treacher 2003: 63.
\textsuperscript{382} See Treacher 2003: 64.
\textsuperscript{385} See Badran 2005: 6; See Ahmed 1992: 217.
suppression of Muslim women if it was applied in the Arab world.\textsuperscript{386} Even though Amal Treacher\textsuperscript{387}, Rebecca Barlow and Shahram Akbarzadeh\textsuperscript{388}, as well as Margot Badran\textsuperscript{389} merely differentiate between secular and Islamic\textsuperscript{390} feminisms, Azza Karam identifies a coexistence of the three abovementioned feminist tendencies – namely secular, Muslim and Islamist feminisms – in the Muslim Middle East and North Africa by citing the example of Egypt.

From a historical viewpoint, it is the secular feminism that first emerged in the Muslim Middle East and North Africa at the close of the 19th century. It was specifically the movement’s development in Egypt that was caused by the country’s cultural renaissance in the form of internal economic, religious and social changes and instabilities, as well as influenced by both the fascination for colonial influences and the aim of decolonisation. On the whole, secular feminism in the Muslim Arab world has hence been shaped all along by native as well as western perceptions and aims.\textsuperscript{391} That is why the secular concept of feminism has always been associated by Middle Eastern conservatives with foreign influence in the form of “[…] another example of the ‘West’ interfering and meddling in the affairs of the ‘East’.”\textsuperscript{392} Considering Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke’s argument in their introduction to \textit{Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing} (1990), one needs to differentiate in this regard between the socio-historical developments of early male and female feminist discourses in Egypt and other Arab countries:

The starting points of the two discourses were different. Men’s pro-feminist stands arose out of contact with European society in which women were generally visible. Women’s feminism was initially an upper class phenomenon and it grew out of expanded learning and observation of their own lives during times of great change. […] The two disparate starting points of women’s and men’s feminism help to explain subsequent developments and challenge the notion of a monolithic discourse.\textsuperscript{393}

\textsuperscript{388} See Barlow/Akbarzadeh 2006: 1481.
\textsuperscript{389} See Badran 2005: 6.
\textsuperscript{390} In this context, the term ‘Islamic’ corresponds to the term ‘Muslim’.
\textsuperscript{392} See Valassopoulos 2007: 13.
One of the Muslim Arab reformers of women’s rights claims, social progress through secular and western influences, and decolonisation was the male Arab feminist founder Qasim Amin. In fact, Amin writes in his 1899 published controversial book *The Liberation of Women: A Document in the History of Egyptian Feminism* that unveiling of Arab women and gender equality open up the space for a nation’s progress. The male Arab pro-feminist was in this sense encouraged by other late 19th-century Arab reformers, liberal nationalists and poets – including Rif’a al-Tahtawi, Murqus Fahmi, Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid and Jamil al-Zahawi – who also regarded Arab women and society as backward, and interpreted unveiling as a positive societal symbol of female emancipation and progress. In line with this, Amin believed that veiling, arranged marriage and polygyny represented un-Islamic acts that needed secular revision following the western example of gender equality, modernity and progress. From a religio- and gender-political perspective, he thereby disagreed not only with Islamic belief in female emancipation through veiling but also with conservative nationalists who regarded veiling as a symbol of nationalist resistance to colonial oppression, of identification with the native culture, of resistance to colonial aims of unveiling, and of the preservation of native women’s identity and agency. Especially, Leila Ahmed presents Qasim Amin in *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (1992) as a henchman of colonialism who used feminism in order to downgrade his own culture and society. Fadwa El Guindi, in turn, interprets in “Veiling Resistance” (1999) Amin’s demand for unveiling as an attempt at implementing Europeanised change and social progress in the Arab world.

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395 See Moore 2008: 42.
400 See Amin 1992: 73.
401 One may refer in this regard to Tal’at Harb’s approach (See Grace 2004: 72; See El Guindi in Lewis/Mills 2003: 595).
Hence, the solidarity with Arab women was, in fact, just of little importance to him. El Guindi further argues in her article from 1999 that veiling was – at the time of Amin’s late 19th-century argument – not solely an Islamic act but was rather practised among all religious groups, especially among those of the upper classes. Despite religious and political criticisms, Amin’s critical gender-related and political discourse indirectly smoothed the way for Nabawiyah Musa’s act of unveiling in 1909, as well as for Huda Shaarawi and Saiza Nabarawi’s agitations and acts of unveiling in the 1920s. One may claim that these three historical acts of women’s public unveiling primarily and solely involved the taking off of the face veil – also known as the upper-class women’s “[…] Turkish style veil […]” – and were in fact not part of the early phase of the feminist movement’s agenda. This included the agenda of Huda Shaarawi’s upper-class Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) of the 1920s which rather specialised in the fight against British colonialism in cooperation with the nationalists, women’s


One of Egypt’s first well-known feminists Bahithat al-Badiyah, also known under the pen-name of Malak Hifni Nasif, promoted women’s unveiling in the early 20th century but never performed the act herself (See Badran 1995: 23; See Badran in Kandiyoti 1991: 205) as she also regarded the debate as western-influenced (Ahdaf Soueif, “The Language of the Veil,” The Guardian, 08 December 2001, Guardian News and Media Limited, 08 April 2014 <http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2001/dec/08/weekend7.weekend3>). She was – unlike Huda Shaarawi – considered as a Muslim feminist (See El Guindi in Lewis/Mills 2003: 597). Nonetheless, she focused – similar to Shaarawi – on the claim of education and women’s public space involvement, as well as social and feminist issues (See Cooke 1986: 212; See Badran in Kandiyoti 1991: 205).


While the 19th- and early 20th-century application of the term veiling, meaning ‘hijab’, involved the covering of the face, the Egyptian reapplication of veiling in the 1970s comprised the covering of the head rather than the face (See Badran 1995: 22). Today, ‘hijab’ is synonymously used for the head cover and the covering of the whole body with a long dress, a head scarf and optionally a face cover (See Abu Lughod in Abu-Lughod 1998: 244; See El Guindi in Lewis/Mills 2003: 590, 596f.). The ‘niqab’ has been used in late 20th-century Egypt in order to hide a woman’s face. The same cloth was defined as ‘bisha’ (face veil for all social classes), ‘burqa’ (face veil of the working and lower middle classes) or ‘yashmak’ (Turkish type of face veil of the aristocracy) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (See Badran 1995: 221.; See Soueif 2001).


410 See Badran 1995: 23.

suppression, polygyny, arranged marriage, an unjust divorce law and educational inequality by simultaneously influencing the social systems and social criticisms in Egypt and other Muslim Arab countries. Nonetheless, it is incontestable that Shaarawi’s act of public unveiling in 1923 – which succeeded her return from “[…] the International Women’s Alliance in Rome” – eventually turned her nationally and internationally into the female pioneer of the secular Arab feminist movement, and in the long run shaped Gamal Abdel Nasser’s regime from the 1950s to the 1970s. Yet, her act of unveiling was – especially among conservative nationalists – considered as a slight against national pride and freedom since the independence fighter Shaarawi lifted the veil in accordance with British claims. Shaarawi’s total alienation from conservative nationalists came about with the failed implementation of the Wafd nationalist government’s promises concerning women’s social equality in marriage and divorce, and female suffrage. It hereby increased Shaarawi’s secular feminist protests and socio-political influences after the Egyptian Revolution of 1922 and the new constitution of 1924. During this period of time, a second feminist movement arose in Egypt’s 1930s, namely the opposing and religiously oriented Muslim Women’s Society (MWS) by Zainab al-Ghazali, which later turned into the radical Muslim Sisters. Al Ghazali was a former mentee of Huda Shaarawi and part of the secular feminist organisation before turning into a radical Muslim feminist and fundamentalist. She disagreed with the EFU’s belief in the western woman as a model for Muslim women. She rather believed that the Islam functions as the giver of women’s rights in the

412 See Moore 2008: 42.
414 See Moore 2008: 42, 44.
415 See Moore 2008: 42.
419 Egyptian women received the right to vote as late as 1956 (See Moore 2008: 44).
420 See Moore 2008: 44; See Philipp in Beck/Keddie 1978: 290f.
422 See Moore 2008: 44.
Muslim Arab world and the Shari’a as its socio-religious framework in an Islamic state. Al-Ghazali was imprisoned under and tortured by the Nasser regime for her ties with the Muslim Brothers, who were themselves accused of having planned the murder of President Gamal Abdel Nasser. It is, inter alia, the veil whose existence and application has all along been a controversial subject between the secular Arab feminists on the one hand, and the Muslim and Islamist Arab feminists on the other hand.

As mentioned above, it was the period from the early to the mid-20th century that combined demands for gender equality, (un)veiling and/or western progress with Arab nationalism and decolonisation. Evelyne Accad describes this particular Egyptian period even more precisely in her article “Sexuality and Sexual Politics: Conflicts and Contradictions for Contemporary Women in the Middle East” (1991) as an interaction between sexuality (sexual relationships) and male domination, as well as political and nationalist upheavals. Deniz Kandiyoti goes one step further in her description of the pre-independent period – in particular of the early 20th-century Egyptian nationalist movement and its concomitants – by ascertaining two oppositional forces, namely modernism and anti-modernism. Especially, the issue of (un)veiling has developed ever since then into an important political and societal theme within the Arab discourses on modernism and anti-modernism.

According to Saba Mahmood, the studies on veiling differ in their analyses of veiling’s causes. On the one hand, analysts claim voluntary choice for the cause of veiling. On the other hand, political and social
1960s and 1970s under Nawal El Saadawi regarded veiling as un-Islamic and oppressive, Muslim and Islamist feminists readopted the veil in the 1970s “[…] Islamic Revival or Islamic Awakening (al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya) […]” for the purpose of social class marker and as a sign of resistance to Muhammad Anwar El Sadat’s policies, including capitalism, high inflation, state corruption, the peace treaty with Israel and western perceptions in general. Especially, college student activists in and from the urban areas began to readopt the veil and represented in this way the so called ‘new Egyptian woman’ of the 1970s. This second veiling movement expanded rapidly in the Arab world and among Muslims in other parts of the world while it developed as well into different phases. While Egypt and other Arab countries at first disapproved of the Islamic veiling movement, they soon accepted the female Islamic dress as part of their societal model. The late 20th-century Islamic revival or return to Islamic beliefs and values – which took part on both political and religious levels – also brought forth the 1970s women’s mosque movement. In Egypt, in particular, this religious movement took the form of a “[…] vast proliferation of neighbourhood mosques and other institutions of Islamic learning and social welfare, [of] a dramatic increase in attendance at mosques by both women and men, and [of] marked displays of religious sociability.” The latter was characterised not only by the veiling movement but also by “[…], a brisk consumption and production of religious media and literature, […]” and religious gatherings at which female intellectuals read Arabic literature, the Qur’an and the Hadith (words and actions of Prophet Mohammed). The women’s mosque movement developed as a consequence of a “[…] ‘secularization’ […] and ‘westernization’ […]” of the Egyptian society and influenced – as part of the Arab resistances are declared as the causes. The latter is a more common explanation among analysts. Despite their crucial roles in the 1970s, personal and religious causes are less considered (See Mahmood 2005: 16).

433 See Grace 2004: 75.
434 See Mahmood 2005: 3.
440 See Mahmood 2005: 3.
piety movement – the Egyptian re-Islamisation.\textsuperscript{442} The Egyptian secular feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s tried to counteract this re-Islamisation but was not able to contain it. Nawal El Saadawi, in particular, was one of the leading figures of secular Arab feminism during this time and has influenced gender-political, social and religious thinking in the Muslim Arab world until today. She has not only been an influential activist and native informant within the Egyptian and international feminist movements but also a physician\textsuperscript{443} and rebellious secular feminist writer\textsuperscript{444}. As a secular feminist fighter for women’s rights, El Saadawi founded the Arab Women’s Solidarity Association (AWSA) in 1982\textsuperscript{445} which was, however, closed down nine years later\textsuperscript{446}. As members of the AWSA, she and her fellow activists demanded the separation of religion and politics/state\textsuperscript{447}, as well as the liberation of women and gender equality\textsuperscript{448}. Furthermore, as a secular feminist writer, El Saadawi has criticised not only the socio-political failures of the Nasser regime\textsuperscript{449} but also the ongoing patriarchy and misogyny in Egypt and the rest of the Arab world\textsuperscript{450}. In \textit{The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World} (1977), Nawal El Saadawi writes in this respect:

\begin{quote}
It will never be possible for an Arab woman to enjoy the same rights in marriage and divorce as the Arab man does, as long as the society remains divided into classes and dominated by the patriarchal system.\textsuperscript{451}
\end{quote}

It is the multilevel patriarchal oppression and exploitation of Arab women in general that El Saadawi already denounces in \textit{The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World} as well as in \textit{Woman at Point Zero} (1975). However, Arab women are not exclusively affected by the multilevel power structure. Similar to Ahdaf Soueif in 2009\textsuperscript{452} and Hamed Abdel-Samad in 2015\textsuperscript{453}, El Saadawi has argued through the years

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item \textsuperscript{442} See Mahmood 2005: 3f.
  \item \textsuperscript{443} See Smith 2007: 59f.; See Cohen-Mor in Cohen-Mor 2005: 302.
  \item \textsuperscript{444} See El Sadda in Kandiyoti 1996: 131; See Smith 2007: 59.
  \item \textsuperscript{446} See Saiti/Salti 1994: 154.
  \item \textsuperscript{448} See Smith 2007: 60, 63f.; See Johnson 1992: 1.
  \item \textsuperscript{449} See Amireh in Majaj/Sunderman/Saliba 2002: 56; See Ahmed 1992: 211.
  \item \textsuperscript{450} See El Sadda in Kandiyoti 1996: 129.
  \item \textsuperscript{451} See El Saadawi 1980: 203.
  \item \textsuperscript{452} Jamal Mahjoub, “A Correspondence with Ahdaf Soueif,” \textit{Wasafiri} 24.3 (September 2009): 56-61, here 57.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
that men are likewise oppressed by state dictatorships and military hierarchies, social inequality, religion and politico-economic systems. In comparison with men, Arab women – regardless of their religious backgrounds – are withal affected by men’s patriarchal value system in the personal and public spheres, as well as by misogyny. This is why El Saadawi still calls upon Arab women to continue their struggle for freedom and to organise in order to have stronger effects on the patriarchal authorities and hierarchical structures of their societies:

The majority of Arab women don’t as yet know how to fight back politically. But if they really organised they could do so much, not only against patriarchy but against the class system too.

At the same time, she warns of the western influence on Muslim Arab women’s fight for liberation as “[…]; this is our duty. […] That kind of help, which they think of as solidarity, is another type of colonialism in disguise.” What is more, western women have to deal with their own problem of oppression by patriarchy, class and religion. In fact, religious patriarchal forces function in all societies of the world. It is exactly these consistent gender-political criticisms as an activist and writer that have turned El Saadawi into a controversial public figure in the whole Arab region. Many of her books, such as Women and Sex (1971) and Woman at Point Zero, were banned under Sadat’s political regime due to her discussion of gender inequality in general, female sexuality, female circumcision (female genital mutilation) and virginity tests, females’ sexual oppression and rape, childhood and dehumanising marriages, oppressive family

453 Hamed Abdel-Samad, “Hamed Abdel-Samad: Mein Abschied vom Himmel,” Deutsch-Israelische Gesellschaft Bodensee-Region, Gesellschaft für Christlich-Jüdische Zusammenarbeit Konstanz e.V., vhs Konstanz-Singen e.V., Augustinum Überlingen, 21 May 2015, vhs Konstanz, Keynote Speech. Hamed Abdel-Samad specifically refers in his speech to the Egyptian example of multilevel dictatorships in the pre- and post-Arab Spring eras which comprises violence on the political, religious and military levels (See Abdel-Samad 2015).


systems, violence against women, prostitution, female revenge, religious critique of the Qur’an’s interpretation, class conflicts, as well as political and elitist corruptions.

[...], Nawal el-Saadawi’s extensive body of writing acts as a border crossing to access and challenge topics and experiences that have previously been held as taboo or as ‘culturally’ acceptable. Generalizing her experience beyond the bounds of gender, class, ethnicity, or nationality and her technique of blurring fiction and reality are el-Saadawi’s means of universalizing the prison – an attempt at crossing the boundaries of racial and cultural experience.

Besides Woman at Point Zero, The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World and Women and Sex, El Saadawi’s books Memoirs of a Woman Doctor (1957), God Dies by the Nile (1974) and Memoirs from the Women’s Prison (1983) have aroused controversial and critical literary debates within Arab societies, and even among contemporary native and Muslim Arab diasporic writers. Iraqi author Alia Mamdouh and British-Egyptian author Ahdaf Soueif have strongly criticised El Saadawi by declaring that her works have not been representative of the high quality of Arab women’s writings. In his article “Intentions and Realisation in the Narratives of Nawal El-Saadawi” (1989), Sabry Hafez not only calls into question her artistic qualification but also criticises El Saadawi’s fame in the West which she has attained on grounds of her affirmation of the traditional orientalist discourse and the western stereotypes about Arab gender relations. In reaction to her critical socio-political, religious and gender-related approaches in her novels and short stories, the secular feminist activist and writer has also been persecuted and openly attacked by religious leaders, politicians, literary critics and readers in the Muslim Arab world, and was imprisoned by Sadat’s regime in 1981. In particular, she has been accused of creating literary productions based on religio- and socio-critical propaganda. In 1993, she was

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463 See Valassopoulos 2007: 23f.


467 See Joseph 1987: 301.
even forced to leave Egypt for the United States due to death threats by Islamic fundamentalists but returned from her exile in 1997. Apart from her socio-political, religious and gender-related criticisms, the feminist activist and physician has also challenged the Arab attitude towards female circumcision (female genital mutilation). As per El Saadawi, who was circumcised at age six, female circumcision is practiced independently from any religious, country-specific, social class or racial backgrounds. Despite Arab activists’ attempts to contain it in the Middle East and North Africa, circumcision continues to be socially legitimated and to spread in the region’s rural areas among both women and men. Its act is of socio-cultural importance mostly in Egypt, the Sudan and Yemen as it represents in these countries the minimisation of female sexual desires, the protection of female virginity, and hence the preservation of male and family honour. Although El Saadawi undoubtedly criticises female circumcision, she points out at once that western feminists need to consider the historical, socio-cultural, political, economic and religious preconditions of female Arab circumcision within their subjective and imperialist analyses. On the whole, El Saadawi’s diverse social criticisms and provocations basically show that she simply denounces the continuous interaction between progress and backlash in the Arab world. In order to end the Arab backlash and its concomitants, she demands first and foremost the unveiling of the female mind – both figuratively and physically.

Focusing on the contemporary phase, it is the late 20th-century Muslim Arab re-adoption of the veil particularly in Egypt that continuously functions as a sign of Islamism and nationalism, as well as a rejection of and protest against western

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influences, modern changes, autocratic governments and increasing socio-economic inequalities. In this context, it needs to be pointed out that veiling and seclusion are evidently not demanded in the Qur’an although certain Muslim intellectuals interpret verses of the Qur’an according to their demands for veiling and gender segregation. Moreover, veiling and avoidance of male contact are not exclusively Muslim phenomena, and it seems clear that the early Muslims adopted these practises from the peoples who lived near them whom they conquered.

Notwithstanding the above, the formerly late 20th-century veiling movement – both religiously influenced and regionally distinct in the Muslim Arab region – has additionally turned over the years into a symbol of female education, high social class (particularly in Egypt) and female protection against male sexual harassment. Today, veiling in Egypt is commonly practiced in the form of a woman’s dress and a headscarf to cover the neck, ears and the hair. Muslim Arab women activists nowadays also appear in hijabs while uttering modern claims through modern media. Especially, Egyptian female university students increasingly tend to fully veil their bodies with women’s dresses, face and head covers, gloves and opaque socks. Fadia Faqir, British-Jordanian author, criticises aforementioned Muslim Arab women activists’ ‘conservative’ appearances as she describes in her lecture “Is the Arab Spring Leaving Women in the Cold?” (2011) at the University of Warwick women’s instigations of and contributions towards the fight for a democratic future in the course of the Arab Spring protests. According to Faqir, Jordanian women, for instance, publicly protest against social and political oppressions but at once wear hijabs and go

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482 See Moore 2008: 46.
484 See Keddie in Moghissi 2005: 55.
487 See Keddie in Moghissi 2005: 55, 74.
489 Fadia Faqir, “Is the Arab Spring Leaving Women in the Cold?” Lecture Series: Gendering the Arab Spring, 28 October 2011, The University of Warwick, 10 April 2014 <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/people/pratt/research/arabspring/>.
490 See El Guindi in Lewis/Mills 2003: 590f.
home to traditional and archaic structures. Fadia Faqir believes that it is the domestic sphere where the actual problems in society lie. This social controversy is present throughout the Arab world – not solely in Jordan or in its neighbouring countries.\textsuperscript{491} Western scholar Nancy Hirschmann, in contrast, openly takes a stand for Arab women’s veiling in \textit{The Subject of Liberty: Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom} (2003). She not only regards veiling as Arab women’s personal choice but also blames the West for its “[…] patriarchal colonization” or ignorance of Arab women’s reasons for veiling, which she interprets as socio-culturally, religiously and politically significant: “[…] many Muslim women not only participate voluntarily in it, but defend it as well, indeed claiming it as a mark of agency, cultural membership, and resistance.”\textsuperscript{492} Since women’s decision to veil may be a free choice, Hirschmann does not regard veiling as an oppressive act as such. Nonetheless, she acknowledges that its cultural significance is caused by a situation of ‘unfreedom’ and thus enables and reinforces patriarchal oppression.\textsuperscript{493} Hirschmann defines the abovementioned precondition of ‘unfreedom’ as a lack of education, and as political suppression and/or ignorance.\textsuperscript{494} In this regard, we need to consider – according to Hirschmann – that freedom is interpreted and demanded differently among the cultures of the world even if it constitutes a universal aim among men and women.\textsuperscript{495} Thus, our western perceptions of the restrictions of women’s freedom, including domestic violence and veiling, may differ from non-western moral values and claims. Accordingly, Hirschmann correctly claims in this respect that a feminist critique of veiling must be made available from both western and non-western points of view in order to give truthful insights into Muslim Arab women’s lives as well as to replace the highly prejudiced imperialist discourses and growing western Islamophobia with respect to this matter\textsuperscript{496}.

\begin{displayquote}
To the west [\textit{sic}], ‘the veil’, like Islam itself, is both sensual and puritanical, is contradictory, is to be feared. It is also concrete, and is to do with women, and since cultural battles are so often fought through the bodies of women, it is seized upon by politicians, columnists, feminists...\textsuperscript{497}
\end{displayquote}

\textsuperscript{491} See Faqir 2011.
\textsuperscript{492} See Hirschmann 2003: 171.
\textsuperscript{493} See Hirschmann 2003: 171, 193.
\textsuperscript{494} See Hirschmann 2003: 193.
\textsuperscript{495} See Hirschmann 2003: 173.
\textsuperscript{496} See Hirschmann 2003: 197f.; See also Macmaster/Lewis in Moghissi 2005: 147.
\textsuperscript{497} See Soueif 2001.
With reference to women’s oppression and patriarchy in general, third-generation Muslim Arab writer and secular feminist Faqir interprets the Arab Spring’s uprisings of the young intellectuals as a start and a dawn of hope for gender equality and female freedom. However, as long as the state continues to strongly interfere in Arab social life, and a ‘cleansing’ remains an unachievable goal, the socio-political problems will not be resolved in the Arab world.\(^{498}\) Anastasia Valassopoulos writes in this respect in *Contemporary Arab Women Writers: Cultural Expression in Context* (2007) that

\[\text{[i]t seems that while certain ‘feminist’ activities have been acknowledged and embraced as necessary, such as the need for the education of women and the benefits of a marriage based on friendship, as well as the integration of women in the workplace in times of economic necessity, other needs such as public freedom are rejected and posited as Western influence.}\(^ {499}\)

Additionally, as per Faqir, a strict separation of the mosque and the state is necessary in order to allow justice, equality and democracy in the Middle East and North Africa. To be precise, this means that a woman’s role in society cannot be defined by religion.\(^ {500}\) Faqir refers in this regard to secular arguments made by contemporaries of the second and third generations, including Nawal El Saadawi\(^ {501}\) and Salwa Baki\(^ {502}\), as well as Islam critic Hamed Abdel-Samad\(^ {503}\). Just like Faqir, they argue against a state interaction between democracy (the secular) and religion (the divine) as these two forces tend to contrast strongly with each other. The reactionary movement of the Arab Spring, the Muslim Brotherhood, is defined in this context by Faqir as a negative example and a representation of a so called ‘establishment Islam’\(^ {504}\) whereby the Islam colludes with state patriarchy and misogyny in order to prevent social and sexual freedom.\(^ {505}\) For this reason, secular feminists – with El Saadawi leading the way\(^ {506}\) –

\(^{498}\) See Faqir 2011.
\(^{499}\) See Valassopoulos 2007: 20.
\(^{500}\) See Faqir 2011.
\(^{503}\) See Abdel-Samad 2015.
\(^{504}\) Fadia Faqir employs the term ‘establishment Islam’ with reference to Leila Ahmed.
\(^{505}\) See Faqir 2011.
agree upon Faqir’s ideal that Arab women’s ‘decolonisation’ and equality are important in order to achieve real democracy in the Arab world that is detached from any religious influence. According to El Saadawi and western journalists, the Egyptian people need to be more critical under the current Egyptian regime of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi for the purpose of regaining civic liberty and state democracy, as well as maintaining Hosni Mubarak’s niches for artistic freedom and dissident voices which have finally been abolished under the current military-ruled machinery of power.

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507 See Faqir 2011.
508 See El Saadawi 22 October 2015.
3.2. The History of Arab Literary Resistance to Patriarchy and Oppression

3.2.1. Arab Literature

To begin with, it was the literary genre of “[…] hakawati […]”, meaning orature, that had shaped African and Arab literatures before the Third World emergence of the novel. The late 19th-/early 20th-century novel on the North African continent and in the Middle East, in particular, emerged hand in hand with the literary genres of the press and the short story, whose establishments were in fact all affected by missionaries and the colonial administration during the period of European colonialism. Especially, “[…] the [short story] became a readily available vehicle through which Arab littérateurs could explore aspects of their daily life during a period of social and political upheaval.” It was this point in time of late 19th-century socio-political, cultural and literary changes, known as “[…] Nahda […]”, that combined both the fascination for secular influences in the course of European colonialism and the revival of the Arabic tradition in the Middle East and North Africa. It was further associated with both Arab nationalism and increasing Arab female voices, including the rise of women’s associations, female literary groups, women’s magazines and women’s literature. The latter, in particular, soon asserted itself extensively in the Arab world’s cultural scene as a social challenge to the patriarchal social structures:

[...], the woman writer is a dissident, crossing out into the traditionally male space of language. Such violations of sacred sexual/textual space impinge on a woman’s honour (sharaf) which is contingent upon her silence and invisibility, and challenge both

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See wa Thiong’o 1986: 64f.


See wa Thiong’o 1986: 69; See Allen in Johnson-Davies 1994: xix-xx.


See Hassan 2002: 57; See also Allen in Johnson-Davies 1994: xix-xx.


See Winckler 2004: IX.
cultural concepts of women and the ‘master narratives’ that always assume the speaker to be male.\(^{522}\)

Considering the socio-political, socio-cultural and literary changes in the Arab world at the turn of the 20th century as well as their effects on the region’s developments of its cultural identities, social systems and political scenes until the 21st century, both Muslim Arab male and female writers, in particular, can be historically and transnationally classified by means of generations.\(^{523}\) In this connection, the historical classifications of Muslim Arab authors are determined by the starting points of the authors’ official literary careers and their first major publications respectively.\(^{524}\) While the ‘pioneer generation’ of Muslim Arab writers and their writings had its beginning in the late 19th/early 20th century and lasted approximately until the 1950s\(^{525}\), the ‘younger or second generation’ comprised the period from the 1950s to the 1970s\(^{526}\). It is, in particular, the pioneer generation’s short story writings that attempted to depict most distinctly the societal themes of its period, including “[…] the status of women within the contexts of the traditional family structure, of new educational opportunities, and of society at large.”\(^{527}\) In this connection, it was the pioneer writer of the early short story and more precisely the father of the Arabic novel, Egyptian Naguib Mahfouz\(^{528}\), who discussed in his works – more directly than his male contemporaries and female counterparts at this time\(^{529}\) – the social injustices, as well as the political and religious misdemeanours, such as gender inequality, patriarchy, nationalism, and radical and oppressive misinterpretations of the Islam\(^{530}\). Roger Allen claims in this sense in his “Introduction: The Short-Story Genre” of Denys Johnson-Davies’ Arabic Short Stories (1994) that

\(^{522}\) See Grace 2004: 104.
\(^{523}\) Barbara Winckler argues in this connection in 2004 that a national classification of authors from the Arab world would be – in spite of their common basic language – very difficult due to a strong mobility in the region (See Winckler 2004: IX).
\(^{524}\) The historical classification of Muslim Arab authors also applies to Coptic writers from the Arab region.
\(^{525}\) See Cohen-Mor in Cohen-Mor 2005: 1; See Allen in Johnson-Davies 1994: xxif., xxvi.
\(^{526}\) See Cohen-Mor in Cohen-Mor 2005: 1; See Allen in Johnson-Davies 1994: xxiv.
\(^{527}\) See Allen in Johnson-Davies 1994: xxii.
\(^{529}\) Nawal El Saadadwi claims, though, in an interview with BBC Radio 3 on 22 October 2015 that Naguib Mahfouz was never radical enough when speaking of gender inequality and women’s oppression (See El Saadawi 22 October 2015).
It was primarily through the genre of the short story that Arab writers were able to use depictions of family life and the role of women within it to reflect the large debate within society. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that family relationships were the predominant theme as the genre continued its development [...].

Thus, the second-generation reform-oriented writers of short stories and novels were not only shaped by gender relations but also thematically influenced by political upheavals, social issues and failed socio-political promises at that time. This is, for instance, demonstrated by the writings of Sudanese writer Tayeb Salih and Egyptian Yusuf Idris whose literary works have also been known for the 1960s “[…] shift to more symbolic and allusive narratives […]” In addition to existing male literary involvements with social and political malpractices and their reforms, including the predominantly unequal gender relations and the patriarchal family structures, Muslim Arab women’s writings increasingly dealt with socio- and gender-critical approaches during that period. For this reason, the post-1940s literature – primarily characterised by the genre of the short story – turned into the critical medium of younger or second-generation writers’ socio-political and -cultural concerns, wishful thinking and calls for change. At the same time, this development resulted in critical, disloyal writers being suppressed by the current regimes, while their loyal counterparts were issued with so-called “[…] publication opportunities […].” Since the 1970s, the ‘present, contemporary or third generation’ of writers and their writings has dominated and continues to do so the Muslim Arab literary world.

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539 See Allen in Johnson-Davies 1994: xxv.
Despite the fact that a transnational and historical classification of Muslim Arab writers and their writings is chosen over a national classification, it is important to take a closer look – in view of Tayeb Salih’s diasporic Sudanese literature in Arabic – at the slightly differing historical development of Sudanese literature during the early 20th century. In general, early literary forms of Sudanese literature were constituted of “[…] oral stories and narrative poems, […]”\textsuperscript{541} Similar to the Egyptian development, the press functioned soon, though, as the force behind “[t]he transition from oral to written literature, […]” in the course of the early 20th century.\textsuperscript{542} Both in Egypt and the Sudan, the suppression of early “[…] scientific activity, […]” – particularly in the wake of the violent protests against the British in the 1920s – gave rise to an increase of Sudanese intellectual activities, including writing. Consequently, the rise of a Sudanese national literature was based – just like its Egyptian counterpart – on the ideals of “[…] modernization and revival […]”, as well as national independence from Britain.\textsuperscript{543} At the same time, the Sudanese literary works reflected as well the society’s disappointment in Egypt’s egoistic efforts for national independence from Britain.\textsuperscript{544} This literary dissociation from Egyptian and western influences did not last long\textsuperscript{545} and was soon replaced by an acknowledgement of English and Egyptian literatures’ indispensable influences on the development of a national Sudanese literature\textsuperscript{546}. In doing so, a more moderate revolutionary group of intellectuals was formed which became known as “[…] ‘The Pioneering Generation.”\textsuperscript{547} This intellectual group continuously opposed British colonialism but appreciated the cultural influence of English and Egyptian literatures.\textsuperscript{548} Through its establishment of literary gatherings and cultural clubs in Omdurman and Wad Madani, the intellectual group not merely supported the prevalence of “[…] reading circles”:

\textsuperscript{541} See El-Nour 1997: 150.
\textsuperscript{542} See El-Nour 1997: 150f.
\textsuperscript{543} See El-Nour 1997: 152.
\textsuperscript{546} See El-Nour 1997: 153.
\textsuperscript{547} See El-Nour 1997: 153.
\textsuperscript{548} See El-Nour 1997: 153f.
Their first criterion was to establish a good educational system in the country. They campaigned for the founding of new, efficiently run schools, the publication of newspapers and magazines, [...].

Due to the intellectual group’s reintroduction of Egyptian and English literatures, they initiated the formation of further literary circles in the Sudan, including the Wad Madani Society, the Hashmab group as well as the Abu Rauf group. Inspired by the readings and discussions of Egyptian and English writings, such as “[...] books, newspapers, and magazines [...]”, Sudanese writers of the 1940s eventually introduced the genres of the national short story and the novel. Especially, post-1950s Sudanese novels have become known until today for their political criticism, as well as western-influenced “[...] social realism [...]”. It was not until the appearance of second-generation authors Abu Bakr Khalid and Tayeb Salih that Sudanese literature – in particular social and gender-related writings – gained increasing popularity outside the Sudan.

Although Anastasia Valassopoulos rightly warns of the widely held belief that all women’s writings from the Arab world are undoubtedly of feminist background, it cannot be denied that the historical development of Arab feminism and its wide range of ideologies from the late 19th/early 20th century onwards have specifically and decisively informed socio- and gender-critical Muslim Arab women’s writing and women writers. For this, one may consider three phases or stages of socio- and gender-critical women’s literature that have emerged in the Muslim Arab world and its diaspora. According to Sabry Hafez and Hoda El Sadda, one may differentiate

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550 The Wad Madani Society was later called ‘Al-Jam’iyya al-adabiyya’ (See El-Nour 1997: 153).
553 See El-Nour 1997: 155f.
554 See El-Nour 1997: 156.
555 See El-Nour 1997: 157, 159ff.
556 See Valassopoulos 2007: 12.
557 It needs to be pointed out that the predominant Muslim Arab feminist movements in the Middle East and North Africa were also supported by Coptic intellectuals, activists and writers. Therefore, the three phases or stages of Muslim Arab women’s literature can also be applied to Coptic women’s writing in the Arab world.
today between ‘feminine’, ‘feminist’ and ‘female’ literary phases within the field of Muslim Arab women’s literature. Hafez and El Sadda hereby refer to Elaine Showalter’s classification of women’s literature in *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Writers from Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing* (1977) in which she depicts three stages – namely ‘feminine’, ‘feminist’ and ‘female’ – of women’s literary subculture within 20th-century Europe. Focusing on the Arab context, it is the ‘feminine’ literature of imitation by primarily “[…] upper-class Turco-Circassian women […]” which dominated Egypt and other parts of the Muslim Arab world before the rise of nationalism in the early 20th century. Due to the fact that it imitated the predominant misogynist masculine discourse with its moral values, Muslim Arab feminine literature depicted a minimum of feminist claims and awareness. Suhair al-Qalamawy and Amina al-Said, for instance, are numbered among those women writers of the feminine phase who accepted their situation as being oppressed by reproducing similar moral values to men’s misogynist literary productions:

[...] [the] women writers reproduce not only the world view inherent in the predominantly masculine discourse, but also adopt its version of the passive, docile, selfless female. In their works the value system encoded in the hierarchical social order which places the female at the bottom is adopted without questioning and is even praised for its concern and protection of the meek, helpless female.

An important social and literary change brought about the Egyptian Revolution from 1919 to 1922 and henceforth Egypt’s independence in 1922 as they gave rise not

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560 According to Hoda El Sadda, contemporary Egyptian literature, for instance, is shaped by the coexistence of all three literary discourses (See El Sadda in Kandiyoti 1996: 132).


Even though Egypt – a British protectorate since 1914 – became formally independent from Britain on 28 February 1922, the British military presence in as well as the political, administrative and governmental influences on Egypt lasted until 1954. One year earlier, the Egyptian kingdom had already evolved into a republic (See Appiah/Gates, Jr. 1999: 664f.; See Philipp in Beck/Keddie 1978: 288).
only to the nationalist, anti-colonial but also to the critical libertarian male and female feminist forces.\(^{568}\) This included, as mentioned in chapter 3.1, the appearance of the unveiling movement which contested – contrary to conservative nationalist beliefs – unveiling as a pro-English action. Despite their ideological differences with respect to unveiling, Egyptian feminists and nationalists indeed cooperated in their aim of their country’s decolonisation process and full independence from Britain\(^{569}\) as demonstrated by the anti-colonial influences on ‘feminist’ literature between the 1930s and the 1970s.\(^ {570}\) To be precise, it was the critical and rising educated female voices of the upper and middle classes’ Muslim societies who decisively shaped the ‘feminist’ literary phase.\(^ {571}\) Besides ‘feminist’ writers and journalists Iqbal Baraka and Sakina Fuad,\(^ {572}\) this included as well the secular liberal founder of the Egyptian Feminist Union (1923) Huda Shaaraawi,\(^ {573}\) the short-story writer\(^ {574}\) and leader of the Egyptian National Committee of Students and Workers Latifa al-Zayyat,\(^ {575}\) the rebellious writer and feminist founder of the Egyptian Arab Women’s Solidarity Association (1982) Nawal El Saadawi, as well as the Egyptian short-story writers\(^ {577}\) Alifa Rifaat and Sufi Abdallah.\(^ {578}\) While Alifa Rifaat, Sufi Abdallah and Latifa al-Zayyat belonged to the generation of moderate revolutionary pioneers among ‘feminist’ writers of the 1940s and 1950s,\(^ {579}\) Nawal El Saadawi represented the more revolutionist\(^ {580}\) and sexual\(^ {581}\) ‘feminist’ generation of the 1960s and 1970s.\(^ {582}\)

\(^ {568}\) See Badran in Kandiyoti 1991: 206-213.
\(^ {570}\) See Hafez in Allen/Kilpatrick/de Moor 1995: 165.
\(^ {571}\) See Cohen-Mor in Cohen-Mor 2005: 4; See Badran in Kandiyoti 1991: 203, 205; See Winckler 2004: IX.
\(^ {574}\) See Cohen-Mor in Cohen-Mor 2005: 304.
\(^ {575}\) See Ashour/Ghazoul/Reda-Mekdashi 2008: 518.
\(^ {576}\) See Smith 2007: 60, 63.
\(^ {577}\) See Cohen-Mor in Cohen-Mor 2005: 297, 302.
\(^ {578}\) See Elsadda in Ashour/Ghazoul/Reda-Mekdashi 2008: 120, 124.
[This] first wave of feminist writing in the Middle East is associated with movements for social reform and modernization during the era of post-colonial state formation [...]583

By contrast, El Saadawi and her second-wave ‘feminist’ generation of women writers were decisively shaped “[…] by the Nasser years with their nationalist, secularist, socialist and pan-Arab ideals […]”584 Nonetheless, Nawal El Saadawi and her contemporary post-1967 female Egyptian writers did not flinch from publicly criticising – by the 1970s – the failures of the Nasser regime, including the Arab/Egyptian defeat in the Six-Day War against Israel585, as well as the broken promises of gender equality and rising female education made in the course of the 1952 Revolution586. Despite women’s suffrage in 1956587, many ‘feminist’ women writers of this era therefore attacked – with an increasing female self-confidence588 – the ongoing dominance of men in society and culture in the aftermath of the Arab nationalist movement and revolution589 by simultaneously experiencing oppression by the Nasser regime’s patriarchal forces from the early 1950s to the early 1970s. Apart from an Egyptian main focus, one also needs to include the texts by Lebanese writers Laila Baalabakki and Emily Nasrallah, as well as by Algerian author Assia Djebar into the category of second-wave ‘feminist’ Arab women’s literature. What is more, Assia Djebar, in particular, represented those women writers who used to publish under a pseudonym for fear of being socially outlawed as a consequence of their social boundary crossings.590

It is within the fields of literary ‘feminist’ and ‘female’ women’s writings that one may, at bottom, have to differentiate withal between ideologically secular and Muslim

582 See Cohen-Mor in Cohen-Mor 2005: 1.
583 See Kandiyoti in Kandiyoti 1996: 8.
585 See Amireh in Majaj/Sunderman/Saliba 2002: 51.
586 See Amireh in Majaj/Sunderman/Saliba 2002: 56; See Ahmed 1992: 211.
588 See Winckler 2004: IX.
589 See El Sadda in Kandiyoti 1996: 129.
590 See Winckler 2004: IX.
feminist tendencies as introduced in *chapter 3.1*. It is important to note that these feminist tendencies may be represented – as stated by Valassopoulos in 2007 – not only by characters but also by other signs of feminism such as behaviour patterns and attitudes. While Nawal El Saadawi produced secular feminist writings in the Nasser and Sadat eras, as demonstrated by her highly controversial novel *Woman at Point Zero*, short-story writers Alifa Rifaat and Sufi Abdallah have been representatives of Muslim feminist women’s writings. El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero*, for instance, depicts secular, socio-cultural, political and socio-economic criticisms in so far as it attacks religio-social fundamental principles and values, including the Shari’a’s code of conduct, political and elitist corruptions and oppressions, socio-economic/class exploitation, sexual oppression and patriarchal hegemony in general. At the same time, the text demonstrates a strong demand for women’s universal rights. Like other secular feminist women’s writings, *Woman at Point Zero* is characterised by a strong and provocative secular feminist voice that peaks at the end of the storyline. Hereby, female revenge – expressed by means of the female character’s gained agency, emancipation and liberty – clashes with male weakness and compromising. In contrast, it is Alifa Rifaat’s short stories “My Wedding Night” and “Distant View of a Minaret” (1983) that illustrate a religious focus with a reference to Islam’s liberating capability, meaning the possibility of a coexistence of gender respect, female agency and Islamic belief. Muslim feminist claims of male misinterpretation and misapplication of the Islamic texts are combined herein with a direct critique of strict socio-religious fundamental values and expectations. Moreover, Rifaat’s feminist writings criticise women’s emotional, psychological and sexual oppressions in the patriarchal Muslim Arab world. Besides Alifa Rifaat’s narratives, one may also find Muslim feminist writings – such as Sufi Abdallah’s “Half a Woman” (1962) – that explicitly reveal a

591 See Valassopoulos 2007: 12.
592 This includes, for example, the Egyptian short stories by Ihsan Assal (“The House of Obedience”, 1962) and Latifa al-Zayyat (“The Picture”, 1989).
596 See Ahmed in Treacher 2003: 64f.
return to traditional values and religio-social expectations at the end of the storyline so as to stress after all the respect for the Islamic moral concept and faith.

Since the 1970s, the third phase of socio- and gender-critical Muslim Arab women’s literature, namely the sophisticated, free and confident ‘female’ discourse of self-reflection and self-reference, has shaped the Muslim Arab women’s literary world.\(^{598}\) By “[…] explor[ing] the specificity of women’s perspectives”\(^{599}\), the ‘female’ Muslim Arab writers – such as the Egyptian Salwa Bakr and the Lebanese Hanan al-Shaykh – “[…] grant[ing] the voiceless female a mature narrative voice that is truly her own. Most of the writers of this new discourse come from a background of voicelessness, such as the poor Shi’ite community in the south of Lebanon or the working and peasant class in Egypt, Tunisia and Iraq.”\(^{600}\)

Especially, Salwa Bakr and her contemporary Egyptian ‘female’ writers not only explored in the early years the failed promises of the socialist Nasser regime but also criticised feministically in the 1970s “[…] the economic iniquities and social problems ushered in by Sadat”, as well as the moral controversies in the Muslim Arab world at large.\(^{601}\) To be precise, the 1970s and 1980s societal responses to the actions of Nasser’s and Sadat’s political regimes were not merely secular feminist and literary. In fact, the Egyptian society was characterised as well by an increase of Islamism and fundamentalism, and by women’s veiling among the upper classes.\(^{602}\) Apart from feminist and socialist activists and writers\(^{603}\), including Bakr, al-Zayyat and El Saadawi, the Sadat regime hence imprisoned – just like Nasser’s regime before – Islamic fundamentalists\(^{604}\), who were released again under the Mubarak regime in the course of the 1980s\(^{605}\). What is more, recent Egyptian literary works have continued to deal with the Arab misogynist structure of society by focusing on the outcomes of the difference between the actual abilities of women and their cultural oppression within the Egyptian patriarchal society, as well as on the reasons for its

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603 See El Saadawi 2013.
604 The Islamic fundamentalists were originally bolstered up by Muhammad Anwar El Sadat’s regime as they supported his fight against Nasserists and leftists. Later, they fought against not only socialism and Nasserism but also Sadat’s own politics and beliefs (See Ahmed 1992: 217).
continued existence.\textsuperscript{606} This also includes the literary engagement with the Islam which defines all along the Arab world’s cultural self-image, gender relations and social coexistence. On account of this, Lindsey Moore differentiates in \textit{Arab, Muslim, Woman: Voices and Vision in Postcolonial Literature and Film} (2008) between Islam’s literary “[…] rejection […], non-practising acceptance […], adherence […], and radicalism […]” in post-colonial Muslim Arab writings by men and women.\textsuperscript{607} In a wider sense, one may speak here of the thematic and stylistic components of ‘secularism’ and ‘religiosity’. Moreover, ‘female’ women’s writing continues to demonstrate the ‘feminist’ phase’s discourse on the binary opposition between traditionalism and Westernism and modernity, respectively. The debate on the two conflicting forces of traditionalism and Westernism first arose in the 19th century with the introduction of the West’s “[…] ideology of modernity […]” in the Arab world.\textsuperscript{608} The western modernity concept in turn constituted the basis for the Nahda at the end of the 19th century and induced the Arab women’s movement. Since its emergence and establishment in the Arab region, the ideology of modernity has always stood in contrast with native traditional ideologies. Thus, the development of Arab modernisation has always been shaped by the confrontation between the two ideologies due to the fact that the modern structures have been inevitably linked to European ideals, including female emancipation, and imperialist beliefs.\textsuperscript{609}

\textbf{3.2.2. Anglophone Arab Literature}

It is the gender-specific suppression, as well as political and literary persecutions of critical Arab writers, both male and female, that have forced many of them during the last decades to leave their homelands in pursuit of finding social, political and intellectual freedoms in the western world.\textsuperscript{610} By crossing physical and metaphorical borders, Arab diasporic authors continually find themselves in a diaspora status in which they can openly discuss both Arab as well as western taboo themes\textsuperscript{611}, including Arab gender discrimination and western (neo-)colonialism. In particular, diasporic Arab

\textsuperscript{606} See Mende 2012.
\textsuperscript{607} See Moore 2008: 47.
\textsuperscript{608} See Makdisi 1992: 805.
\textsuperscript{609} See Makdissi 1992: 805f.; See also Cooke 1999: 102.
\textsuperscript{610} See Al Maleh in Al Maleh 2009: 14.
\textsuperscript{611} See Al Maleh in Al Maleh 2009: 14.
women writers are increasingly taking over the role of transnational spokespersons for Arab women on the literary level. According to Robin Cohen, the diaspora status is generally defined by a “[d]ispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, […], “a collective memory and myth about the homeland, […], “an idealization of the real or imagined ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation”, “the frequent development of a return movement to the homeland that gains collective approbation […], “a strong ethnic group consciousness […], “a troubled relationship with host societies, […]” as well as “the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.” In this connection, writing in English, for instance, has functioned for diasporic writers as an act of freedom and rebellion, and has thereby enabled them to directly criticise their home countries’ governmental corruptions and social injustices. Nonetheless, Anglophone Arab literature is regarded until today as a “[…] ‘minor literature’ […].” Among literary critics, According to Layla Al Maleh in “Anglophone Arab Literature: An Overview” (2009), on may differentiate historically between three different categories of diasporic Arab writers in English: “[…] the Mahjar (early-twentieth-century émigrés in the USA); the Europeanised aspirants of the mid-1950s; and the more recent hybrids, hyphenated, transcultural, exilic/diasporic writers of the past four decades or so who have been scattered all over the world.” The writings by first-generation diasporic Anglophone Arab writers was characterised by […] collective optimism, celebration, and exultation. Indeed, one cannot fail to detect a note of jubilation, a certain delight in being able to negotiate boundaries beyond the spaces of their birth-place, an in-dwelling contentment quite unlike the expressions of pain and agonizing dislocation that characterize postcolonial hybridity of late. Hence, Arab diasporic writings in English revealed a balanced relationship between the western world and the authors’ Arab home countries. The Arab immigrant writers’ appreciation of hybridity was further underlined by their strong attempts to gain literacy

615 See Al Maleh in Al Maleh 2009: 11.
and, by this means, also prosperity in the western world.\textsuperscript{617} Most of these Anglo-Arab writers, particularly those living in North America, were of Christian background.\textsuperscript{618}

In contrast, the second-generation Anglophone Arab writers from the 1950s to the 1970s were not only in large part Muslims\textsuperscript{619} but also once educated under the British colonial rule and raised in an elite surrounding\textsuperscript{620}. After they had adopted the English language back home through missionary and foreign schooling, the former Arab students went to the United Kingdom for university education or employment.\textsuperscript{621} At the same time, the amount of Arab immigration to North America also increased as highly educated Arabs with a political background decided to leave for a better life in freedom.\textsuperscript{622} In doing so, Anglo-Arab authors aimed for more western values and culture.\textsuperscript{623} Unlike their predecessors, the Arab authors in English of this time period, predominantly the Arab British kind, wrote of the western English culture by “[…] seeing themselves and their people through the eyes of Europeans, and presenting mostly a folkloric picture of life in the Arab world.”\textsuperscript{624} In spite of an alienated relationship with and orientalist perspective on their homelands, as well as a fascination for the ‘Other’\textsuperscript{625}, they were never accepted by the centre. Consequently, Arab British writers of the post-1940s had to work with the themes of “[…] psychological and social alienation (at home and abroad) and the ‘return of the exile’ theme, the experiences of hybridity and double consciousness […], and the quest for authentic self-representation […]]” in their works.\textsuperscript{626}

Eventually, the third generation following the 1970s is characterised by the diversity of its Anglo-Arab writers. On the one hand, the group consists of Anglo-Arab writers who were born in the western world and belong to the “[… – second-, third-, even fourth-generation hyphenated Arabs – […].]” On the other hand, the third-generation Anglo-

\textsuperscript{617} See Al Maleh in Al Maleh 2009: 11.
\textsuperscript{619} See Majaj in Hornung/Kohl 2012: 64.
\textsuperscript{620} See Al Maleh in Al Maleh 2009: 6, 11; See Majaj in Hornung/Kohl 2012: 64.
\textsuperscript{621} See Al Maleh in Al Maleh 2009: 6.
\textsuperscript{622} See Majaj in Hornung/Kohl 2012: 64.
\textsuperscript{623} See Al Maleh in Al Maleh 2009: 6.
\textsuperscript{624} See Al Maleh in Al Maleh 2009: 7f.
\textsuperscript{625} See Al Maleh in Al Maleh 2009: 11.
\textsuperscript{626} See Al Maleh in Al Maleh 2009: 8.
Arab writers embrace the new immigration movement to “[…] Canada, USA, Britain, and Australia, […].” It is not only their different origins but also the diversity of their religious commitments, as well as social and political backgrounds that mark this generation of writers. Notwithstanding, this literary group is unified by its common belief in the Arab culture and the emotional bonding with the homeland. Especially, its counter-Orientalism has increasingly flourished during the last twenty years due to political upheavals and historical events occurring in and involving the Middle East, including the Gulf War, 9/11 and the Arab Spring. Generally, one may detect an increase of Anglophone writings by Arabs since the 1990s caused by the adaptation of André Lefevere’s theory of ‘rewriting’ or ‘translation’ in cultural terms which focuses on a broader scope of ‘translation’ and a broader acceptance of culturally diverse writings. At this, the writer, as cultural translator, addresses an Anglo-American or European audience and thereby deals with and overcomes the difficulties of “[…] [presenting] an alien culture to the globally dominant one.” In this regard, Lefevere speaks of the mechanisms of manipulation and power on the side of “[…], the ‘spirited’ translator […].” Moreover, the rise of post-colonial Arab literature in English has been influenced by the market situation’s openness to non-western material in English due to an internationalisation of the literary canon and a wider readership, as well as the recent historical events which reflect the confrontation between the West and the Islamic Arab world. At this, Anglo-Arab writings of the third generation function as what Geoffrey Nash calls “[…] ‘insiders’” narratives […]. Within the group of third-generation Anglo-Arab writers one differentiates once more between those who produce Anglophone Arab literature in Britain and in North America. Post-1970s Anglophone Arab literature in Britain has been characterised as the “[…] most female,

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627 See Al Maleh in Al Maleh 2009: 11.
629 See Nash 2007: 12, 14.
630 See Nash 2007: 12.
634 See Nash 2007: 16.
635 Besides Arab British and Arab American writings, one may also include recent Arab Australian and Arab South African writings into the field of Anglophone Arab literature (See Al Maleh in Al Maleh 2009: 45-55).
feminist, diasporic in awareness, and political in character."\textsuperscript{636} This includes post-colonial Arab writings in English by the female authors Ahdaf Soueif, Fadia Faqir, Leila Aboulela, as well as by their male contemporaries Jamal Mahjoub and Hisham Matar. All of them make use of the diaspora space in order to discuss Arab taboo themes in their writings, including democracy, social reforms, gender inequality and human rights abuses.\textsuperscript{637} Due to their discussions of Arab controversial subjects and their uses of the former coloniser’s language, Arab British writers have often taken the flak in Arab countries.\textsuperscript{638} Nonetheless, authors, such as Fadia Faqir, have continued to incorporate political and gender-related criticisms into their writings.\textsuperscript{639} In \textit{Pillars of Salt} (1996), for instance, Faqir discusses not only Maha’s love-relationship with Harb and Harb’s respect but also her brother’s tyranny, the Jordanian patriarchal society, British imperialism and British colonial oppressions of all sorts. On another level, Faqir also plays with the contrast between West and East, by combining it with the motifs of modernity and traditionalism, as well as secularism and religiosity.\textsuperscript{640} In sum, one may claim that the Muslim Arab diasporic writers Fadia Faqir (\textit{Pillars of Salt, Nisanit}), Ahdaf Soueif (\textit{Aisha, I Think of You, Sandpiper}), Leila Aboulela (\textit{Lyrics Alley}) as well as selected male contemporaries have simultaneously adopted the roles of feminist writers in English and have hereby focused on the portrayal of less fictional than non-fictional gender-related themes.\textsuperscript{641} In contrast to their Arab contemporaries in Britain, Arab American writers of the third generation have found themselves in-between American and Arab cultural influences and backgrounds. On the one hand, they have fought against prejudices against their national background. On the other hand, they have rebuilt a cultural understanding of the Middle East. This has been combined with a critique of both American and Arab social and political inconsistencies, and a discussion of gender and sexuality.\textsuperscript{642} Thematically, this has involved the discussion of the act of veiling and the Arab culture as such which have stood for oppression according to Americans. In order to counteract today’s rising Islamophobia in America, it is therefore necessary that contemporary Arab American writers continue to deal

\textsuperscript{636} See Al Maleh in Al Maleh 2009: 13.
\textsuperscript{637} See Al Maleh in Al Maleh 2009: 18.
\textsuperscript{638} See Al Maleh in Al Maleh 2009: 14.
\textsuperscript{639} See Al Maleh in Al Maleh 2009: 14f.
\textsuperscript{641} See Al Maleh in Al Maleh 2009: 13, 16f.
\textsuperscript{642} See Al Maleh in Al Maleh 2009: 24f.; See Majaj in Hornung/Kohl 2012: 64, 70.
adequately with those stereotypes. Notable women writers include, inter alia, Leila Ahmed, Samia Serageldin and Diana Abu Jaber. To sum up, third-generation Anglo-Arab literature thematically differs from Arab literature in its strict focus on the West versus East conflict which stems from the authors’ statuses of hybrid cultural agents and translators owing to Edward W. Said’s ‘Anglo-Arab encounter’. In this regard, Anglo-Arab authors focus on the opposition between civilisation and backwardness within the context of West versus East, but also among the Arab population. Furthermore, it is the language factor that further reflects the immigrant writers’ cultural hybridity immanent in the diasporic writings. Ahmed G. Abdel Wahab summarises in 2014 the functions and characteristics of new immigrant literature in English or third-generation Anglophone Arab literature as follows:

[…] new immigrant literature recombines the generic elements and stereotypes of the English literary canon along with the non-canonized content and language of Anglophone writing to suit the alternative context of post bio-polar politics and culture. In that sense, it is a literature that is basically translational, interweaving several discourses, texts, literatures, and cultures. While the production of Anglophone Arab literature from the diaspora has increased in the last decades, in particular since the 1990s, English translations have historically dominated the field of Arab literature in a European language in the Arab world since the 1950s. This is due to the fact that critical post-colonial Arab literature in English was contained in the Arab world on grounds of gender-political, socio-political, cultural and educational reasons between the 1960s and the 1990s. These reasons included, inter alia, strict state regulations of critical socio- and gender-political national voices specifically addressed to western liberal audiences, influences of Egyptian nationalism and Nasser’s ideal of Pan-Arabism, the fear of and resistance to neo-colonial influences,

646 Wäil S. Hassan describes the Arab immigrant writer as “[…] a merger of the two classic stances of the native informant and the foreign expert.” (See Hassan 2011: 29)
647 See Abdel Wahab 2014: 223.
as well as the educational deficit of English in the formerly British colonised Middle East and North Africa. In spite of the changing historical, political and social preconditions in many Arab countries, English translations of post-colonial Arab writings have not stopped to increasingly capture the western market for the sake of strengthening the understanding of the Arab culture and counteracting discourses of Orientalism and Islamophobia within the West.

Even today’s relative scarcity of Anglophone Arab literature from the Arab world might be due to continuing suppressions, persecutions and censorships of critical national voices in wider parts of the region, such as in al-Sisi’s Egypt, as well as the poor English education during and after British colonisation. Unlike the French’s policy of assimilation with regard to Maghrebian education, British colonialism in the Mashreq (Arab Middle East) comparatively abandoned the aim of an extensive and forced implementation of a “ […] British-style system of education […]” as well as a “[…] widespread use of English during the colonial period […]”. Hence, the application of English in the Middle East represented a symbol of privileged educational status and free choice.

Notwithstanding the above, Geoffrey Nash argues in The Anglo-Arab Encounter: Fiction and Autobiography by Arab Writers in English (2007) that “[t]here is a qualitative difference between Arabic literature, Arabic literature translated into English, and a literature conceived and executed in English by writers of Arab background.” Salih J. Altoma picks up on the aspect of the quality of Arabic literature in translation when he critically refers to preconceptions of poor English translations of Arabic texts in Modern Arabic Literature in Translation: A Companion (2005). According to Altoma, these preconceptions by selected authors and translators of Arabic literature “[…] are vague or general and fail almost totally to refer to what has actually been translated, […].” Gayatri C. Spivak, in contrast to Salih J. Altoma, canvasses these preconceptions by arguing that translations of non-western texts for a western reading public are without doubt affected by a homogenisation in

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649 See Altoma 2005: 15.
650 See Gana in Gana 2013: 2f.
651 See Nash 2007: 19f.
652 See Nash 2007: 18f.
653 See Nash 2007: 19f.
654 See Nash 2007: 11.
655 See Altoma 2005: 12f.
favour of the dominant Self. Thus, she calls – similar to Lawrence Venuti – for open-minded and linguistically experienced translators who retain linguistic and stylistic characteristics of the original texts in its translations, preserve the native otherness and tradition of the original texts, and hence work critically and be visible (‘foreignization’). In this way, the languages and cultures of the Global South would not be fully silenced and the assimilation process of the traditional texts could be minimised (‘domestication’). To sum up, it is Altoma’s and Spivak’s approaches to post-colonial literature in translation, in particular to Arabic literature translated into English, which will be critically considered as part of the literary analysis in chapter 4. In so doing, it will become obvious that a translational preservation of the native otherness and tradition of the original texts may indeed entail a risk as it may reveal mixtures and errors of tenses caused deliberately by the author and reinforced by the use of both vernacular and literary Arabic. These mixtures and errors of tenses (past and present) are particularly demonstrated by Yusuf Idris’ short story, and so may reveal the socio-political upheavals of the Nasser regime, society’s educational level during the author’s productive period, as well as Idris’ sympathy for the Egyptian working class and poor population; however, the mixtures and errors of tenses do not affect the interpretation of the narrative within the specific timeframe as the analysis predominantly focuses on the literary representations of gender roles and relations.

660 See Wassef in Idris 1978: xi.
4. Representations of Gender in Post-Colonial Arab Literature in English – A Focus on Egypt and the Anglophone Egyptian and Sudanese Diasporas

4.1. Literature by Female and Male Authors in the Muslim Arab World –
Ihsan Kamal, Nawal El Saadawi, Yusuf Idris and Salwa Bakr

Focusing on the literary representations of gender roles and relations in post-colonial Arab literature from the Muslim Arab world, it is, to begin with, in “A Mistake in the Knitting” by second-generation Egyptian short-story writer and founder of the Egyptian Writers’ Union Ihsan Kamal[661] that one may detect the collision of Muslim traditional female and male behaviour patterns, Muslim women’s submission to patriarchal norms (traditionalism), and modernity in general and modern emancipation in particular as personified by the female protagonist Suzanne and her subaltern and traditionalist sister.[662] Since Kamal’s translated short story was not first published in Arabic until 1971[663] and refers to the construction period of the Aswan High Dam in the 1960s (115), one may assume that it thus depicts – like her previous short stories of the 1950s and 1960s[664] – the ongoing enslaved status of Muslim Arab women, in particular Muslim Arab wives, within the post-revolutionary Egyptian society of the Nasser regime. As Nasser’s presidency was characterised by the controversial insurgent actions and wide range of ideologies of Arab feminist movements which contrasted with Nasser’s state-feminism[665], it stands to reason that Ihsan Kamal openly addresses, debates and criticises – just like her contemporary revolutionist and sexual feminist writers of the 1960s and 1970s – the movements’ social taboo themes such as Muslim women’s social oppression[666], (sexual) exploitation[667], misogyny, forced marriage, female resistance and agency. Whether secular or Muslim feminists, Muslim Arab female authors have – since the early 20th century – had the universal goal “[…] to

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[662] See Kamal in Cohen-Mor 2005: 112-119. All quotations from this edition are from now on cited internally in the text.
“A Mistake in the Knitting” was first published in 1971 under the Arabic title “Satr maghlut” (Ihsan Kamal, Satr maghlut, Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization, 1971).
[665] Nasser’s state-feminism was constituted of Amina al Said’s liberal ideologies. She was the only feminist from 1952 to the 1970s who did not experience state oppression (See Badran in Kandiyoti 1991: 219-221).
change, through writing, Muslim perception of women’s role in society by simultaneously bringing attention not only to direct male-dominated gender discrimination and oppression but also to females’ suppression caused by paternalistically Arab “[…] political regime[s] and […] unjust social order[s], […]”. Aside from the fact that Muslim Arab men suppress women, inter alia, through their involvement with religious, legislative and governmental authorities, it is the Islam as such that also depicts evidences of women’s subjugation and male supremacy. Whilst the religious and socio-cultural circumstances and politico-historical developments in post-independent Egypt have influenced not only Muslim Arab female but also male authors in this region, one may argue that the latter have in turn incorporated – just like their female contemporaries – their critical gender-political, socio-cultural, political and religious stances into the textual productions of their novels and short stories. In the following chapter, it is therefore necessary to examine in which way feminist characteristics of selected Muslim Arab women’s writings are reflected in literature by Muslim Arab male authors. Hence, the text-centred literary analyses of Ihsan Kamal’s “A Mistake in the Knitting” and the following short stories and novels in chapter 4. will be combined with context-centred literary analyses that will focus on text, author and contemporary reader/critic.

The literary analysis of the socio-cultural, religious and gender-political acknowledgements of Muslim Arab women, as well as of the gender relations between Muslim Arab women themselves and their relationships to men in Ihsan Kamal’s short story “A Mistake in the Knitting” instantly introduces the reader to the male-dominated social structures and female subordination of the protagonist Suzanne, her sister and the rest of their and the previous generations of Muslim Arab women. Notwithstanding their suppressed statuses, the women occupy centre stage within Kamal’s short story, whereas the male main character is both presented in a negative light and relegated to the periphery. Suzanne, the first-person narrator and heroine of the short story, is scared of breaking off the engagement with a man who she has discovered is in fact calculating and loveless. Her anxiety is caused by gossip and rumours that are going to spread and

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671 See Moghadam 2003: 5; See El Saadawi 1997: 73.
confront her in case of an official break-up. On her sister’s command, Suzanne begins to knit a sweater for her fiancé Shukri Abd al-Aziz which symbolises not only the development of her relationship with him but also the emotional bonding between the engaged couple. Although she discovers a mistake in the knitting, she fails to correct the stitch, decides to hide it instead and continues her knitting of the sweater. While her hatred of knitting gradually increases stitch by stitch, her dislike of her future husband does so too. At the end of the storyline, Suzanne’s sister notices the mistake in the knitting and undoes it against Suzanne’s will by causing the entire sweater to unravel. Influenced by the knitting act and the sister’s symbolic action of unravelment, the first-person narrator breaks off the engagement and confronts its consequences. By narrating her past experience as a story of development, the first-person retrospective narrator is able to comment on her own feelings, personal struggle and personal development, as well as on the religious, socio-cultural and gender-political conditions and developments during Nasser’s presidency (112-119).

The storyline begins with Suzanne’s self-representation as a modern, emancipated and secular main character who has always had a great dislike and ignorance of knitting, but a pleasure and outstanding competence in sewing (112). The act of knitting is associated in this context with the effortful production from scratch while the act of sewing simply combines the already existent without extensive effort. For this reason, the differing competences and acts of sewing and knitting hence demonstrate from the beginning the binary opposition between modernity and traditionalism. To be precise, knitting signifies the reappearing motif of traditionalism within the short story’s plot line because it involves not only the aspects of female effort, sacrifice and respect, but also female subordination as well as the long path of giving, feeling and earning love, and gaining respect from the future husband (112). By knitting her fiancé’s sweater, Suzanne works hard in order to kindle and be rewarded by Shukri’s affection and respect in marriage: “‘He’ll feel your affection for him more if you knit it yourself. […]’” (112) It is the bond of matrimony that is also going to recompense her in return with societal respect and honour, as well as financial security. Notwithstanding that she rebels against the knitting of the sweater, Suzanne is yet forced to follow male-dominated socio-cultural and religious norms which are embodied by the protagonist’s sister and her persistency (112). As the sister is the bearer and voice of traditionalism and religiosity who appears to unfailingly honour the Islamic faith, its high regard of the
marriage contract, the importance of family as part of the ‘umma’ and “[…] the ‘superiority’ of men over women in the family […]” (112), she represents the prevalent female social role and marital gender relations: “But my sister insisted, saying it was almost a tradition that one had to follow: every girl must give her fiancé a sweater she had knitted herself.” (112) While the first-person narrator believes that “[…] a ready-made one’ […]” will be sufficient for her fiancé, her sister gainsays her by arguing that “[…], a ready-made one won’t fit him,’ […].” (112) Thereby, the sister’s argument reinforces the traditional patriarchal conception that the knitting of a marital partner’s sweater has to be homemade in order to answer the purpose of commitment, self-sacrifice and fight for love and respect of the suppressed Muslim Arab woman for the benefit of (a forced) marriage:

‘A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.’ […] ‘[…] When you decide to knit a sweater for your fiancé, making a front and back and two sleeves out of nothing, you’ll naturally think of him while you’re working, stitch by stitch, and with every stitch he’ll get closer to your soul, and his love will steal into your heart.’ (112)

Instead of adopting her sister’s and the society’s traditional perspectives and religiosity, Suzanne rather experiences the knitting act as a reinforcement of her rebellious behaviour and perspective as she increasingly despises her fiancé (112, 114f.). She also evinces a lack of understanding for her mother’s and the maternal generation’s conditions of arranged and forced marriages and ‘love’ by norms (112f.). Since Suzanne believes in the union of mutual love, (sexual) desire and respect as the basis of marriage, she refers to the traditionally loveless arranged or forced marriage as “[…] a gamble, even though my mother trie[s] to play it down by calling it ‘a closed watermelon.’” (113) The current generation of modern, emancipated and secular women is, however, influenced and guided by the same tradition so that marriage has stayed ‘a closed watermelon’ whose interior remains invisible and unpredictable until its consumption:

But even we – the few girls who are university educated and claim to be liberated and sophisticated – cut with a knife that doesn’t go very deep. We may discover the color,

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672 ‘umma’ is the Arabic term for the ‘Muslim community’ (Saul S. Fathi, *Glossary of Arabic Terms: An Islamic Dictionary*, Ingram/Lightningsource.com, 2012: 236; See An-Na’im 2002: 310).

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for example, whereas taste, smell, and hardness will remain a secret in the heart of the watermelon. (113)

By calling matrimony a gamble (113) or “[…] marriage game, […]” (114) – which may in its course reveal at the earliest the real character of the marital partner (113, 116) – the first-person narrator also refers to her relationship with and the oppressive behaviour of her patriarchal fiancé Shukri:

Yes, he was despicable; I could not describe it otherwise. He said he wanted details of my salary from now on, and when I expressed astonishment, he tried to appear tolerant.

‘You can enjoy the months left until our wedding.’ (113)

Even though Suzanne is a modern, educated and focussed university student, Shukri intends to exile her to the private sphere and to prohibit her from pursuing a career after their wedding (traditionalism). He aims to take possession of the young woman and to treat her as his personal slave (113). By depriving the protagonist of her power, self-confidence, rights and freedom, and by holding her in low esteem, Shukri thus intends to strengthen his own position and to grow in confidence (113). However, Suzanne has betimes become aware of her fiancé’s manipulation, as well as of his patriarchal mode of behaviour, including his constant defamations and suppressions since their first encounter (113, 115f.). As a consequence, her early affection for him has turned into alienation of affection, disgust and distance (113, 115f.):

[…], I went out with him for a whole month before I discovered how despicable he was. Yes, he was despicable; I could not describe it otherwise. […] I almost felt sick. […] – he wasn’t talking, he was throwing bricks, and it wasn’t the first time either. On every visit, he had brought a brick to throw at me. […] that day I stacked [the bricks] on top of one another, and suddenly they turned into a barrier between us. (113)

Considering Shukri’s misbehaviour and scheming, Suzanne regains – one month after their engagement – strength and counteracts his patriarchal instructions with an emancipatory provocation: “‘And after that?’ I pressed him further.” (113) Her emancipatory rebellion and self-confidence are even reinforced by her thought of breaking the engagement in spite of her father and family’s discontent, and the traditional socio-cultural and religious norms and approaches to life in Upper Egypt (113). In this context, Suzanne criticises retrospectively – as experiencing I and I-as-protagonist – contemporary Egyptian gender relations and the role of Muslim Arab
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women among her female generation – the so called “[...] generation of sacrifice.” (114) As per the female protagonist, Egyptian women are second-class citizens who are dominated and suppressed by men’s patriarchy and misogyny. An Egyptian woman has to serve a man. Then again, she needs to win any man over and earn his affection and good will. In return, she is going to be rewarded with a place in society and saved: “Perhaps our society regards a girl as a drowning person who has to clutch even at a straw.” (114) According to traditional Muslim perception, women behave hereby as religiously-guided mothers, wives and daughters. Moreover, marriage is – based on traditional Islamic conception – the sole framework for all physical and sexual desires. While men are indeed allowed to gather premarital sexual experiences as religiously legitimised by the Qur’an and the Sunnah (deeds, teachings and approvals of Prophet Mohammed), have sexual concubines and get involved in polygamous marriages, women are religiously forced to remain virgins until their wedding nights. In this sense, women are obliged to follow – in accordance with societal and family values – the morals of modesty, honour (‘sharaf’) and dignity as defined by the Shari’a’s code of conduct: “[...] woman under the Islamic system of marriage has no human rights [...] Marriage, in so far as women are concerned, is just like slavery to the slave, or the chains of serfdom to the serf.” Marital love, as Suzanne teaches us in her narration, is thus of little importance in 1960s Egypt and even today. A woman either satisfies her husband’s sexual lust or she becomes a rebellious prostitute – as demonstrated by the female protagonist Firdaus in Nawal El Saadawi’s Woman at Point Zero (1975). Accordingly, Suzanne’s feminist disrespect for Egypt’s patriarchs peaks

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674 See Mikhail 1979: 15.
675 See El Saadawi 1980: 139.
677 See El Saadawi 1980: 139.
678 See Dialmy 2010: 161.
679 See Dialmy 2010: 161f.
680 The Arabic term for ‘honour’ is ‘sharaf’ (See Accad in Mohanty/Russo/Torres 1991: 245).
682 See El Saadawi 1980: 139f.
683 See El Saadawi 1983: 54.
as soon as she denotes some of them as “[…] worth no more than a straw.” (114) By referring to women like herself, the first-person narrator praises Muslim Arab women who rebel against this Egyptian traditional social system and contradict Islamic belief in order to find themselves a safe place within society: “And we may indeed be drowning girls: we’ve left our old traditions and plunged into the sea of life, striking out for the opposite bank – liberation.” (114) According to Suzanne, the liberation of women is aimed for by Egyptian women of this generation but has not been fully achieved by them (114, 117): “But it seems we haven’t reached it yet. Perhaps our daughters will manage to get there.” (114) Nonetheless, she and her girlfriends are proud of having at least enforced the possibility of female mobility without family supervision as this symbolises a first milestone with regard to their female liberty and self-determination (114).

Although Suzanne continuously adopts a confident, emancipated voice within the storyline that reflects upon the idea of breaking the engagement and insists on achieving liberation for her and the next generations of women (113-117, 119), it is the male-dominated social structure and her status as a woman that repeatedly prevent her from regulating her objectives (113ff., 118). In Suzanne’s case, it is specifically the fear of gossip – even among “[…], the educated girls” (113) – and loss of her and the family’s reputation that hinder the first-person narrator from fully performing her emancipation (113f., 117). Especially, the act of marriage remains – in spite of the girls’ gain of freedom of movement (modernity) – a contentious issue between the narrator and her family. As the mother fears that her daughter might lose her virginity and thus risk the dowry and the family honour, she has continuously tried to force her conservative perspective and the society’s traditional norms upon Suzanne since the daughter’s female empowerment: “My mother told me, ‘From now on every young man will hesitate a hundred times before asking for your hand.’” (114) Those parental reproaches and fears of social stigmatisation, dishonour and patriarchal suppression – which in fact dominate the gender relations in the Muslim Arab world to this day – have in the long run created Suzanne’s long-lasting self-doubts, and thereby weaken on and off her fight for personal freedom and self-realisation (113ff., 117ff.): “If only we hadn’t left the first bank, despite its emptiness.” (114) Aside from the fear of the possible consequences of her breaking off of the engagement, Suzanne is rather alarmed that her fiancé might terminate the engagement himself as this would constitute an even bigger public
humiliation for both Suzanne and her family: “Perhaps I was afraid he would be the one to break the engagement. It would be a disaster.” (114) At this point, one may already claim that the storyline depicts a constant back and forth between traditional, and modern as well as emancipatory behaviour patterns and perspectives represented by the developing protagonist Suzanne. Just like Nawal El Saadawi’s female protagonist Firdaus in Woman at Point Zero, Ihsan Kamal’s main character aspires to a better future (modernity) rather than her mother’s and sister’s housewife statuses, their obedience to the patriarchal men in their lives, society’s socio-cultural norms and the Shari’a’s code of conduct. Hence, both Firdaus’ and Suzanne’s modern aspirations and rebellions against religious and socio-cultural oppressions demonstrate right from the beginning a conflict between their modern emancipatory tendencies and secular perspectives, and the Middle Eastern traditional obligations and religious values. However, one may observe that both Firdaus’ resistances throughout her life and Suzanne’s premarital modern aspirations are continuously fought back by predominantly male – but also female – traditional suppressions and exploitations of women, as well as female subjections. This consequently implies that the female protagonists always have to rebel anew against religious and socio-cultural oppressions (112-116, 119). One can assume that Kamal incorporates those two main contrary but consistent forces of traditional and modern behaviour patterns and viewpoints with regard to both male-female and female-female relationships in order to draw attention to women’s oppression by, and potential and necessity to revolt against authoritarian, patriarchal forces.

Even though Suzanne is determined to break off the engagement after her fiancé’s latest defamation (113f.), it is, as already mentioned, her mother’s distrust and propensity to exaggerate which intimidate Suzanne as to her next confrontation with her fiancé (114):

She looked at things through a magnifying glass. Could it be that she had convinced me? Of course not. It was impossible. But when he came to see me the following day, I didn’t say anything. I didn’t even tell him how angry his views had made me. […] It seemed that my mother had given me her magnifying glass along with her love and jewelry. (114)

685 See El Saadawi 1983.
Suzanne realises that her mother’s conservatism – contingent on Egypt’s male-dominated socio-cultural and religious norms und structures – and the traditional exploitation and oppression by her future husband have prompted her to capitulate, and they thereby repress her agency. While the dead mother’s protecting eyes become a source of courage, strength and agency for Firdaus’ lifelong resistance fights in Woman at Point Zero\textsuperscript{666}, the motif of her mother’s sharp eyes instead silence and tame Suzanne (115).

Suzanne’s temporary silence is, however, broken again on that same day in front of the pastry shop as she regains agency and self-esteem and speaks up to her fiancé by commanding his respect in public: “[…], I firmly made him understand that I would never allow myself to be ridiculed in front of the staff there, from the manager down to the waiters, as had happened on previous occasions.” (115) Nonetheless, her emancipatory attempt turns out to be “[…] a hollow victory” as her fiancé continues to ignore her stance and needs, and shows off his superiority and masculinility (115). He not only believes himself to be superior to his fiancée but also rebels against those within society who are involved in the political and elitist corruptions, and profit from the multilevel exploitations in the Muslim Arab world: “[…] Those who buy people’s respect by forking out more money are stupid and hypocritical.’” (115) On the one hand, one may argue that Shukri hereby criticises the socio-political and economic conditions in the region. As a man, he is – just like his fiancée Suzanne – socially, politically, economically and militarily exploited by the ruling Egyptian regime. At the same time, he – as her future husband – exploits Suzanne, who is already suffering from the Muslim Arab approach to female sexuality\textsuperscript{667}, “[…] dehumanizing marriage and family systems, class conflict, […], and the pervasiveness of inequality in Arab social order.”\textsuperscript{668}

On the other hand, his behaviour in front of the pastry shop reveals yet again his patriarchal point of view as he denies his fiancée her right of self-determination, liberty and respect: “[…] We’ll order tea so we can sit here, and that’ll be enough. […]” (115) This twofold reception of Shukri in this scene confirms Dalya Cohen-Mor’s argument that “[a]lthough there are instances in which male characters are presented in a positive light, they are more commonly portrayed as egoistic, insensitive,

\textsuperscript{666} See El Saadawi 1983: 16f., 29, 32, 78.
\textsuperscript{667} See Stephan 2006: 159.
\textsuperscript{668} See Joseph 1987: 298.
and vain, and as driven by greed, lust, and a primitive sense of honor.” Shukri’s superiority belief and ignorance of his fiancée’s wishes make Suzanne once more question her sacrifice for the engagement and convince her that she needs to speak up to society’s traditionalism and resist its authoritarian, patriarchal forces. All along she has believed that Shukri might have changed or she could be able to change his character and attitude one day. However, it is at this point of their engagement when she reconsiders her opinion and adopts the modern emancipatory perspective that “[…] this [is] not a positive outlook at all.” (115) The only chance to resolve this intricate problem is to think positive and look ahead while facing it:

Being positive means overcoming obstacles with a view to improving the future. […] Being positive, in my personal situation, meant courageously and decisively severing the ties that connected our two lives, refusing a marriage that from the outset clearly seemed bound to fail, and choosing a route to happiness that differed totally from his way of life. (115)

After all, as per Suzanne, nobody’s character and attitude can be changed by somebody else – not even her character because she has been and will remain the weaker sex within the Egyptian society (114f., 117). It is in the aftermath of the pastry shop incident that the first-person narrator, in a rage, criticises her religion’s and culture’s perceptions of engagement and marriage. Thereby, her modern emancipatory attitude towards marital respect and love challenges – but does not replace – prevalent Egyptian ignorance:

I was unable to break through the stupid notions that prevailed among people here. Only here. Everywhere else in the world, people regard an engagement as a trial period for the two partners and assume that if they break up, it means they lacked mutual understanding. (115f.)

The present and future criticisms of the modern emancipated protagonist also address her mother’s traditionalist ideals according to which an engagement functions as a final act and not as a trial period. By ridiculing her mother and society’s stupidity and narrow-mindedness, Suzanne retrospectively adopts an emancipated tone of voice: “But in our country – or in our conservative circle, to be precise – my mother, for example, said that the trial should precede the engagement. My God, Mother. Where on earth did

See Cohen-Mor in Cohen-Mor 2005: 11.
you get hold of this idea?” (116) While mentally approaching her mother with the capitalised word “[…] Mother”, Suzanne expresses her socio-cultural and educational superiority (116). As per the female protagonist, societal and religious norms should not regulate a man’s or a woman’s happiness and free choice of marriage (117).

It is in fact the knitting act that makes Suzanne also reflect upon the development of the calculating Shukri and their acquaintance, as well as on her transformation from a self-confident, pertinacious and self-reliant student into a paternalistically exploited and dependent fiancée (114ff.). While the first-person narrator has at first been attracted by Shukri’s secret character, she is by now able to see through his game because of his carelessness: “His calculating attitude was not something that I figured out after getting to know his personality: he revealed it to me by a few slips of the tongue.” (116) As a dazzler, Shukri has tried hard to outflank every academic barrier in order to register for and gain his PhD degree for the purpose of a higher salary. Additionally, he aims to profit from Suzanne’s expected degree and educational status as he hopes hereby for a higher social reputation: “In fact, I was merely a more lucrative deal, because of my expected degree.” (116) As a reaction to Shukri’s disrespect for, as well as debasing and exploitation of Suzanne, she has given up her academic self-fulfilment and “[…] started to hate the degree, […].” (116) One may claim in this regard that Suzanne’s fiancé in fact turns out to be a self-seeking and suppressing patriarch despite his pretended “[…] lack of that complex, latent in most Middle Eastern men, which pushes them to try to appear superior to their wives.” (116) This supports the female protagonist’s claim that one will never fully know the (prospective) marital partner’s character and attitude (116). By reflecting upon Shukri’s misbehaviour, as well as their incompatible views on love, equality, mutual respect, shared beliefs and matrimony, she criticises retrospectively her initial subalternity and lack of assertiveness during their engagement period:

How could I marry a person I didn’t respect? How could I live with him day after day, year after year, when our views clashed every time we met? Married life does not consist only of a union of two bodies, […]. Married life is first and foremost dependent on the compatibility between the characters and minds of two people as they set out together on the long journey of life. (117)

It cannot be denied that Suzanne’s lost enthusiasm for and confidence in her educational career in fact contradict her progressive reflections upon the limits of human
civilisation, meaning human narrow-mindedness and conservatism as in the form of gender inequality and discrimination (117). Not only Suzanne’s modern emancipatory behaviour patterns but also her critical perspective on Muslim Arab women’s continuous mental veiling remind us of Nawal El Saadawi’s secular feminist demand of women’s full emancipation by means of both physical liberation and unveiling of the female mind: “Our liberation has only been external. Our thoughts still wear the veil.” (117) It is also the narration’s interaction between progress and backlash – which is personified by the female protagonist Suzanne – that illustrates El Saadawi’s social criticisms and provocations since the 1960s. As per Suzanne, women should be able to think on their own and be able to make their own decisions for the purpose of personal happiness. Unfortunately, female defamation, in particular, exists among all societies and destroys women’s emancipation and opinion making in both ‘East’ and ‘West’ (117). In her argument, Suzanne draws on contemporary Third World and selected western feminists’ concepts as she claims that “[r]egardless of how developed and civilized we have become, we are unable to ignore people’s views or what they say about us, as long as we live among them.” (117)

It is the scene in front of the pastry shop that has temporary increased Suzanne’s self-confidence and female agency for the purpose of her fight against gender inequality and patriarchal showmanship. For the first time, she has also thought about how to deal with the possible consequences of breaking off the engagement with Shukri. In this connection, she has considered either ignoring the gossip or reacting to it (117). These emancipatory thoughts and quests for personal freedom and self-determination suggest at this point in the narration that Suzanne could – despite her continuous doubts (118) – indeed be capable of facing and opposing society’s traditionalism. However, it is her fear of the future and the discontent with the past that suddenly call forth Suzanne’s drive for a standstill and prevent her once more from breaking off the engagement one day after the pastry shop incident (117f.). In retrospect, the first-person narrator comments on her mode of behaviour as she concludes that the system is usually in motion and one is in control of one’s own destiny: “Yet nothing in the world can stand still. Even the knitting in my hands was growing.” (118) Just like her life’s journey, the production of Shukri’s hand-knitted sweater lies in Suzanne hands (118). It not only symbolises the narrator’s hard work, self-conquest, sacrifice and self-abandonment for the purpose of matrimony but also functions as a sign of the subjugation to traditional
forces and the repression of modern values and perspectives within Egyptian society. In particular, Shukri’s commentary on Suzanne’s work in progress as “[…] cheaper […] than the ready-made ones” (118) depicts both his stinginess and, once more, his patriarchal belief in women’s statuses as sexual slaves and servants. Wives’ hard work, sacrifices and self-abandonments are of prime importance to men; however, these female attributes and actions are ignored and go unrewarded. Unlike a hand-knitted sweater, a ready-made one is – comparable to a modern marriage – rather the outcome of a progress of civilisation than a product of individual female sacrifice, self-abandonment and subordination (118). Due to his patriarchal upbringing, Shukri prefers a homemade sweater, a forced and oppressive marriage based on traditional religious and socio-cultural obligations and values, and a virgin malleable wife to modernity’s progress, licentiousness and self-perfection.

While Suzanne has until recently fretted over her fiancé’s misconducts, she turns to silence and expresses tranquillity on the final day of her knitting and engagement (118):

I worked in complete silence and a deep serenity that were hardly disturbed by the friction of the needles or the movement of the ball of wool. […] The needles worked by themselves, or so it sometimes seemed to me. (118)

As the needles knit by themselves, they are composing love for Suzanne’s dream of an ideal marriage based on love and mutual respect. The needles – withal a symbol of the (prospective) marriage partners – are united by the woollen weave or bond of love. Cupid – as represented by the bird or ball of wool – directs this dream of a love marriage as aimed for by Suzanne. Even though Suzanne’s notion of an ideal marriage is characterised by ups and downs, the (prospective) marriage partners are inextricably linked with each other because of their mutual respect and eternal love (118):

The needles embraced each other, then disengaged, only to embrace again. They could not be separated. The woollen weave united them like an inescapable destiny. […] I heard no violent clash when they met, only a soft rustling, like a light kiss. The bird on the thread continued to dance in spite of the approaching end. It was as though it were happy to give its blood, drop by drop, so that a love story or symphony could be written. (118)

One may claim that it is this longing for an affectionate and respectful marriage in the course of her knitting that shows Suzanne her current dissatisfaction and her elusive
goal of marital happiness a final time quite plainly. Moreover, Shukri’s praise of the financial advantage of Suzanne’s knitting hereby demonstrates as well the incompatibility of the protagonist’s, her sister’s and other women’s female notions of marital submission and men’s traditional taming of and superiority over Muslim Arab women. Enraged by Shukri’s patriarchy and chauvinism, Suzanne brings herself to rebel as well against her sister’s traditionalist ideals and matriarchy which she has intended to force upon the modern first-person narrator (118). By addressing her sister as “[…] the devil” (119), the protagonist criticises her sister and other Muslim Arab women’s complete submission and unresisting assimilation to Egypt’s socio-cultural and religious mores:

I wished my sister would come to see us, so I could argue with her in front of our Lord in heaven. She had made me struggle for nothing. Talk of the devil. (118f.)

Suzanne’s agency and self-esteem peak when her sister detects the knitting mistake in the middle of the border, instructs her to fix it and eventually undoes the dropped stitch, thus causing the entire sweater to unravel (119). Although the first-person narrator has already detected the mistake earlier, she has concealed it and continued her work by confidently and sarcastically questioning “[…] what would happen if his excellency wore a sweater with one mistake in it? It [is] unthinkable for me to start all over again: […].” (114f.) In this context, the mistake in the border – which destroys the foundation of the sweater – suggests early on that Suzanne’s marriage is doomed to fail under the existing circumstances because it jeopardises her honour, pride and self-esteem. By confidently calling her fiancé “[…] his excellency […]” (114), she personifies a modern emancipatory force that is able to satirise and denounce the religiously and socio-culturally enslaved status of Muslim Arab women. Unable to speak at first, Suzanne suddenly falls into a rage, gains even more strength and agency then before and rebels against her sister’s dictation (119). The symbolic act of the sweater’s unravelling not only induces the breaking off of the engagement but also brings to an end Suzanne’s effortful and sacrificing attempt to build an affectionate and respectful marriage (115, 119):

Being positive, in my personal situation, meant courageously and decisively severing the ties that connected our two lives, refusing a marriage that from the outset clearly seemed bound to fail, and choosing a route to happiness that differed totally from his way of life. (115)
By speaking up and revolting independently against her patriarchal suppression, Ihsan Kamal’s female protagonist counteracts – just like the female protagonists of the subsequent short stories from the Muslim Arab world – Spivak’s assumption that subaltern Third World women are predominantly muted and need representation due to western imperialist oppression, as well as national social class subjugation and gender discrimination. On this basis, one may claim that Kamal’s literary employment of Suzanne’s heroically rebellious and libertarian character illustrates the secular feminist background of the work on grounds of its criticism of Muslim females’ paternalistically emotional and psychological oppressions, gender inequality, obedience, and, beyond that, the values and laws of traditional Islam. It is, however, the sister’s foray and upper hand, as well as her final rebuke and moralising lecture that shed light on the actual feminist orientation of the short story. Although the sister wants Suzanne to follow and respect traditional socio-cultural and religious norms, she acknowledges that a marriage cannot be based on faults and pressures. Problems that occur at the beginning of a relationship need to be not only detected but also resolved immediately:

‘It’s your fault!’ […] ‘You should have gone back to the row with the mistake as soon as you discovered it, while you were still at the beginning, so that you could do it again correctly. How can you build anything on faulty foundations? Once you discovered the flaw in the knitting, you should never have continued. Never!’ (119)

Her rebuke and moralising lecture imply that Suzanne’s sister has in fact adopted in the course of time an emancipatory attitude towards matrimony as she requires Muslim Arab women to gain agency and take responsibility of their life goals. This means, in particular for Suzanne, that she either starts over her relationship with Shukri or knits a new sweater for a more suitable marital partner. Even though Suzanne eventually decides to break off her engagement, it is the sister’s emancipatory change of behaviour that clearly reflects the Muslim feminist character of the short story. On the one hand, it stresses the need for females’ agency and their mental unveiling, the end of patriarchal oppression, and gender equality and respect. On the other hand, it highlights the praise of, conformation to and respect for socio-cultural mores, the Shari’a’s code of conduct, and the Islamic faith in general. According to Muslim feminist belief, it is, in fact, the male misinterpretations and misapplications of the Islam, in particular of the Qur’an, which cause Muslim Arab women’s patriarchal oppression. The Islam as such, though, brings liberation to women. After all, Kamal not only propagates in her short story the
possibility of a coexistence of females’ agency, their mental unveiling, gender equality, socio-cultural mores and the Islamic faith but also demonstrates the importance of men’s liberation from suppressive traditional Muslim value systems.\textsuperscript{690}

As described in the dissertation’s \textit{introduction}, \textit{chapter 3.1.} and \textit{chapter 3.2.1.}, it is – in contradistinction to the group of representative Muslim feminist writers – the rebellious secular feminist writer Nawal El Saadawi who has, in particular, continuously attacked in her writings not only the oppressive and misogynist authoritarian institutions, power structures and patriarchal traditions, the inequality between the sexes and the class differences but also the importance of religious faith and the influence of the religious establishment in the Muslim Arab world. In spite of her critique of the Islam’s patriarchal forces, El Saadawi regards the Islam – as already mentioned in the \textit{introduction} and \textit{chapter 3.1.} – not as the only religion that supports the subjugation of women to date. As argued in her interview with Sophie Smith in 2006, women’s oppression has, in fact, universally prevailed due to the rise of patriarchal capitalism.\textsuperscript{691}

In El Saadawi’s translated short story “The Picture”, whose year of publication in Arabic remains unknown, the 13-year-old daughter Narjis worships her strict father – the village mayor – as a god or a king.\textsuperscript{692} As she observes him having sex with the servant girl Nabawiyya one night in the kitchen, Narjis becomes furious and defies her father (63f.). In accord with El Saadawi’s literary post-1950s provocations, her female protagonist Narjis experiences the early adolescence as a period of lewdness, sexual arousal towards her father, envy and rebellion. Furthermore, Narjis’ pubertal change demonstrates – similar to Suzanne’s personal development from the narrative’s beginning – a conflict between the girl’s modern emancipatory tendencies and secularisation, and the prevalent socio-cultural and religious traditions.

The figural narrative situation’s third-person limited narrator describes Narjis as a young girl who is one day fascinated by her servant girl’s buttocks. This observation not only affects her body perception and sexual awareness but also intensifies her emotional bonding with her father:

\textsuperscript{690} See Cohen-Mor in Cohen-Mor 2005: 13.
\textsuperscript{691} See Smith 2007: 68.
\textsuperscript{692} See al-Saadawi in Cohen-Mor, 2005: 61f. All quotations from this edition are from now on cited internally in the text.
Everything could have gone as before in Narjis’s life, had her hand not collided accidentally with Nabawiyya’s backside, and had her fingers not hit a soft curve of flesh, and had her amazed eyes not seen a pair of small protrusions wobbling along under Nabawiyya’s dress in time with the jerking of her arms as she stood washing at the sink. (60)

Whilst sexually and emotionally aroused by the village girl’s voluptuous, sexual symbol of the fleshy buttocks, Narjis tries persistently to observe her own sexual development in the mirror (60). Although Narjis is afraid of her own body, she curiously touches her rear in order to compare herself with her servant girl: “She stretched out her hand inquisitively, exploring her rear. Her trembling fingers came across a pair of soft curves of flesh. Was she growing buttocks too?” (60) In so doing, Narjis disregards the Shari’a’s code of conduct, meaning the religiously based prohibition of premarital female sexual feeling and excitement and their satisfactions693, and thus reveals here already a looming conflict between her rebellious, emancipatory personal development and the patriarchal rules of customs and traditions. Unable to glance at and take control over her exposed body (60), she even considers asking her servant girl for an examination of her backside as Narjis is delighted about her changing outer appearance: “What shape were they? Round or oval? Did they shake when she was standing still or only when she walked? Did they protrude and attract attention or didn’t they?” (61) Since Nabawiyya is, though, a domestic girl to whom she maintains a master–servant relationship and solely issues orders, Narjis quickly discards the idea of consulting her. Enraged by her helplessness and hopelessness, she pulls up her dress and exposes her backside in her room. Hereby, she cranes her neck in order to take a glimpse at her buttocks (61). El Saadawī not only depicts through this sexually exposing and provocative scene once more the modern emancipatory and rebellious character trait of the female protagonist but also calls attention to and confronts the predominantly unspoken issue of Muslim girls and women’s subjugation within the North African and Middle Eastern misogynist socio-cultural and religious systems at large. Like Firdaus in El Saadawī’s novel Woman at Point Zero694, Narjis uses her pubertal personal development to break loose of the communal attitude of girls’ honourable obedience to the patriarchal value system and obligations. She provokes the readership with her

693 See El Saadawī 1980: 137ff., 204f.
694 See El Saadawī 1983: 54.
sudden nakedness, especially when she stands in front of her king-like father’s photograph hanging on her bedroom’s wall (61).

For one thing, Narjis is intimidated by her father’s determining and influential character, as well as his imperious posture (61ff.). While he never faces his daughter and interacts with her, it is the picture’s eyes that permanently watch Narjis in her bedroom. Unlike in El Saadawi’s novel Woman at Point Zero and Ihsan Kamal’s short story “A Mistake in the Knitting”, the parental eyes act both oppressively and magically arousing in this storyline. Afraid of his authority, Narjis respects her father and has thus always followed his instructions and attended his orders in total silence and without any eye contact (61):

She had her head turned in front of the mirror and her rear completely bared, when her gaze met that of her father, and she shuddered. She knew they were not his real eyes, only his picture hanging on the wall, but her little body continued to tremble until she had pulled down the dress and covered up her rear. […] For thirteen years, […], she had seen him only from the back. When he had his back to her, she could raise her eyes and contemplate his tall, broad frame. She never looked him in the eye, and never exchanged a glance or a word with him. When he looked at her, she bowed her head; and when he spoke to her, it was not words he uttered, but instructions and orders, to which she responded with ‘Okay’ or ‘Yes’ mechanically, in blind obedience. (61)

It is the father’s back that symbolises here not only patriarchy and male hierarchy but also the woman’s socio-cultural and religious subjugation and obedience to male power and dominance (61). Whilst Narjis is treated by her father as a subaltern ‘servant’ girl, it is the servant girl Nabawiyya who is the actual victim of what El Saadawi calls the paternalistically multilevel oppression of women in the Muslim Arab world. In fact, Nabawiyya is suppressed not only by the authoritarian, patriarchal head of the household but also by the upper-class Narjis’ class hierarchy (60ff.).

Taking a closer look at Narjis’ mode of behaviour from the beginning of the storyline, one may claim that she longs for her father’s full attention and affection in a way that one may even speak of a daughterly sexual admiration for and attraction towards the strong masculine father figure: “She couldn’t take her eyes off his. She wanted to see them. Every time she looked at her father, she felt that she was not seeing enough of him, that she wanted to see more of him.” (61) By trying desperately to look into her father’s eyes in the photograph, she provokes a rebellious lewdness that operates against
her father’s sense of honour and decency, as well as the religious ideal of female purity, awe and obedience (61). Even though Narjis erectly focuses upon her father’s eyes and approaches the picture, she is unable to gain his attention (61f.). It appears to the reader that her father remains remote and holds himself at a distance “[t]here [is] always a distance separating his eyes from hers, and she [is] unable to see them close up, even though her nose [is] almost touching the picture.” (62) Intimidated by her father’s authority, apathy and insensitivity, and ashamed by her lewdness in God’s presence, she all of a sudden buries her face in her hands. In this situation, she recalls her respect for and submission to “[…] this great man” and recollects herself by behaving with servility like the rest of the subaltern townsmen (62). It is her father’s authority, strength and generosity combined with his protection of Narjis that generally arouse a feeling of sexualised admiration, excitement and affection within the young girl (62):

She carried her head proudly as she walked beside him on the street. […] And when the two of them crossed the street, her father would hold her by the hand, and wrap his big fingers around her little fingers, and her heart would pound, and her breathing would quicken, and she would bend her head to kiss his hand. As soon as her lips touched his big hairy hand, that powerful smell, her father’s distinct smell, penetrated her nostrils. […] Sometimes she would bury her head in his clothes in order to smell it even more; she would kiss his clothes and stroke them […]. (62)

Narjis not only adores her father in a way that resembles sexual yearning but also worships him like “[…] a real god whom she could see with her own eyes, hear with her own ears, and smell with her own nose.” (62) It is the daughterly acceptance of female subalternity for all these years, the sexualised longing for a patriarchal father figure and master, the superiority of traditional masculinity and male self-presentation that El Saadawi reduces – by means of Narjis’ character – to absurdity. Especially, the scene, in which Narjis prays remorsefully in front of her father’s photograph and obediently and innocently kisses his hand after her divestiture (62f.), satirises gender inequality, masculinity, religious hypocrisy and absurdity in the Muslim Arab world. At the same time, the provocative and secularising Narjis becomes – fascinated and driven by her femininity or ‘awra695 – part of El Saadawi’s secular feminist retaliation against

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695 The term ‘awra’ “[…] is used in particular to mean those parts of the body that religion requires should be concealed – the sexual parts – defined by some authorities as the male body from the waist to the knees, and for the female the entire body.” (Leila Ahmed, “Arab Culture and Writing Women’s Bodies,” Feminist Issues (Spring 1989): 41-55, here 44)
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paternalistically religious and socio-cultural oppressions of Muslim Arab women. The awareness of her sexuality, in particular “[…] her protruding buttocks rubbing against the bed, […]” (63), points to her sexual arousal and indicates the development of an orgasm as

[…] a new, pleasant shudder [runs] through her body. […] Two rounded mounds of flesh […] [rise] up into the air, their weight pressing down on her stomach. She turns over onto her side, but they [continue] to rub against the bed every time she breathe[s] in or out. […] the breathing soon resume[s] at a rapid rate, sending tremors through her little body, which [shake] the bed, causing it to creak softly. […] She […] trie[s] to suppress her breathing so that the bed would stop creaking. She almost choke[s], but the air suddenly burst[s] out of her chest, and her body [shakes] violently, as [does] the bed, emitting its harsh creaking in the silence of the night. (63)

Nawal El Saadawi’s reference to Narjis’ rebellious orgasm in bed caused by a sexual drive and ecstasy over her fleshy buttocks is – from a religious viewpoint – a sin. Although the Islam allows women to have marital orgasms696, premarital female orgasms and masturbation of all sorts are declared dishonourable acts697. The only socially accepted form of female sexuality, in particular, is – as already portrayed by Ihsan Kamal’s short story “A Mistake in the Knitting” – heteronormativity with its basis of a family-supported, religiously accepted and state-approved marriage698. While Narjis’ body is sexually aroused due to her erogenous buttocks, she is afraid and ashamed to get caught orgasming by her father (63). It is, as a matter of fact, the pathological form of onanism at the beginning of Narjis’ adolescent phase that functions in this scene as a substitute for fatherly love699. At her climax, the young girl suddenly jumps out of bed as she is interrupted by a growing feeling of guilt and disobedience. She thereby realises with relief that the missing out of the ablution ritual has caused her sexual arousal and licentiousness (63). Even though Narjis ruefully catches up on her ablution (63), this scene reveals another one of the girl’s small steps towards female emancipation (modernity) and secularisation. The secular feminist El Saadawi once more challenges in this context the values and laws of traditional Islam within the

696 See Dialmy 2010: 162.
697 See El Saadawi 1980: 139, 204f.
Muslim Arab world. As per El Saadawi and her Arab feminist contemporaries, the Muslim Arab world is, in fact, in need of a separation of religion and politics/state affairs. In this way, the religious influence on the Arab culture of censure, repression, silence and shame could be considerably reduced. It is the author’s religious disapproval, her feminist rebellion against gender exploitation and her belief in women’s potential to resist their subalternity, male political/state oppression and elitist corruption that not only reappear but are also personified yet again by the female protagonist in the subsequent sexual scene.

While Narjis performs her ablution, she is confronted with her father’s authority over the servant girl’s sexuality. In the kitchen, the family patriarch and town’s authority figure has sex with the subordinate Nabawiyaa. Although Narjis first believes she is about to catch Nabawiyaa at “[…], exploring her new buttocks” (63), she suddenly bumps up against reality when peeping sinfully and without permission through the kitchen door’s keyhole (63f.). The keyhole hence symbolises both the door to reality and the final move towards Narjis’ emancipation (modernity) and secularisation. Shocked and hurt by her father’s sexual intercourse with the servant girl, she stares at the misdeed. Back in her bedroom, she exposes her buttocks in front of her father’s picture while “[…] staring at her father’s face without bowing her head.” (64) One may argue in this context that Narjis’ jealousy, disappointment and enrage over the father and Nabawiyaa’s sexual intercourse find expression in an act of emancipatory rebellion. Just like the female protagonists in Nawal El Saadawi’s novel *Woman at Point Zero*⁷⁰⁰ and Ihsan Kamal’s short story “A Mistake in the Knitting”, the female protagonist of El Saadawi’s “The Picture” is able to revolt – by means of her own physical observations and emotional comprehension – against the socio-cultural and religious repressive apparatus, and to commence her own secular revolution. All the same, one may speak in “The Picture” of the protagonist’s sudden and striking realisation of her emotional turmoil and physically suppressed status⁷⁰¹ – a phenomenon which James Joyce defines in his novel *Stephen Hero* (1916) as ‘epiphany’⁷⁰². Paradoxically, it is because of her early acceptance of her female subjugation, her

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⁷⁰⁰ See El Saadawi 1983: 95.
sexualised admiration for her father’s autocratic god-like personality and her observation of his self-seeking licentiousness in the kitchen that El Saadawi’s female protagonist Narjis eventually realises and internalises her need for female emancipation, and strives for physical freedom, emotional liberty, personal pride and self-fulfilment.

In contrast to Narjis’ evident revolt, the subaltern servant girl Nabawiyya abases herself by having premarital sexual intercourse with the head of the household. Although Dalya Cohen-Mor speaks here of rape, the narrator describes the sexual act as consensual:

> Her gaze froze on the big naked heap as it rolled about, as Nabawiyya’s head came down onto the floor, bumping against the garbage can, and as her father’s head rose up and hit the bottom of the sink. But they had soon swapped positions, and it was Nabawiyya’s head that was hitting the bottom of the sink, and her father’s head that was striking the garbage can. […] some of the toes were entangled with others, making a strange shape, like a water creature with many arms, or an octopus. (64)

As already discussed within the context of the analysis of Ihsan Kamal’s short story, premarital defloration and sexual experiences are religiously prohibited because they contradict the morals of modesty, honour and dignity as propagated by the Shari’a’s code of conduct. By having sexual intercourse with his servant girl, Narjis’ hormone-driven father also commits a sin as he contravenes the Islamic principles of justice and dignity, as well as tolerance and privacy protection. The reader may detect in this context El Saadawi’s critique of the contradictory Muslim approaches to female sexuality and marriage: While female virginity is declared as the religio-social basis of a wife’s honour and dignity, men sexually abuse women before marriage. Thus, Nabawiyya’s body constitutes a target of both sexual and socio-economic exploitations, and religious and socio-cultural abasements.

In the case of Nabawiyya’s sinful promiscuity and the family patriarch’s sexual lust and dependence, one may in fact argue that the servant girl is not only transformed into an object of sexual desire but also turns into a self-confident woman who casts a spell over Narjis’ father. El Saadawi employs in this connection the motif of the sticky spider’s web that spreads out on the most prominent part of the father’s awe-inspiring face. (62,

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704 See El Feki 2016.
64), namely his “[…] sharp, crooked nose […]” (64) The spider – represented by the servant girl Nabawiyya – symbolises a malicious woman and scavenger with meagre appearance who makes use of her ‘awra’ in order to achieve social liberty through a man’s debasement (60, 64). In so doing, she defies gender and social inequality, male sexual self-fulfilment and male elitist corruption. Although Nabawiyya’s action can be – similar to Narjis’ final rebellion – defined as emancipated, it contradicts Narjis’ ideals and dashes her hope of fatherly love. Hence, Narjis tries hard to remove the spider’s web from her father’s photograph. Thereby, her spit – a symbol of female sovereign contempt and disrespect – unites, though, father and servant girl even more, with the spider’s web sticking pertinaciously to the patriarch’s nose. When she fails to blow the spider’s web away, Narjis begins to remove the spider’s web by hand and hereby destroys the father’s picture (64). In the case of Narjis’ destruction of her father’s picture, the rubbing and tattering of the paper not only induces the end of daughterly love, sexualised admiration and affection but also implies the death of patriarchal oppression and the rescue of Muslim Arab female pride (64). Moreover, it is the patriarch’s passivity or inability to react that evokes – just in Nawal El Saadawi’s novel Woman at Point Zero and Salwa Bakr’s short stories “The Beginning” (year of Arabic publication remains unknown) and “That Beautiful Undiscovered Voice” (1992) – the female protagonist’s modern agency and strength: “[…] she destroyed the picture, which had become wet with her spittle, and it fell from between her fingers to the floor in little fragments…” (64) Narjis’ final modern emancipatory revolt against and emotional distance to the male main character not only demonstrate similar literary representations of male-female relationships among Ihsan Kamal’s, Salwa Bakr’s and Nawal El Saadawi’s short stories but also depict decisively common secular feminist ideologies and goals of women’s modern emancipation through mental unveiling among Nawal El Saadawi, Yusuf Idris and Salwa Bakr.

706 The motif of the female spider, embodied by a sinful and determined female protagonist, is reminiscent of Jeremias Gotthelf’s Die schwarze Spinne (1842) where it represents tyranny, malice, passion and demonic possession.
707 See El Saadawi 1983: 95f.
709 See Bakr in Bakr 1992: 69f.
As already mentioned in the introduction, it is the second-generation Egyptian writer Yusuf Idris, known for his literary and journalistic critique of the taboo-loaded Arab society, government and gender-political order, who was the male feminist counterpart of Nawal El Saadawi particularly in the 1960s. Just like the secular feminist writer El Saadawi, Yusuf Idris attached great importance to the sexual theme as well as to the representation of gender inequality and women’s suppression in his short stories. For this reason, he has become not only “[…] the foremost short-story writer in the Arab world” but also “[…] the caliber of an international writer of high standard” since his early years of literary creativity. Idris’ literary career as a writer of short stories, novels and plays began during his studies of medicine in late 1940s Cairo where he also became politically involved as part of the student movement at Cairo University. He demonstrated against the British influence and King Farouk’s corrupted government system, and was therefore temporarily imprisoned in 1949 and 1951. Without doubt, his political and social concerns and observations during his academic studies and early years of medical practice were early on reflected in his literary and journalistic writings, including “[…] the plight of people in less fortunate circumstances, such as poverty exploitation, particularly of women.” Ever since his medical studies, Yusuf Idris maintained both a personal and a textual relationship to and interest in the rural world, in particular to its working class and poor population. Denys Johnson-Davies, translator of many of Yusuf Idris’ short stories, thus writes in 2009 that

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714 See Allen in Allen 1994: 1; See Wassef in Idris 1978: ix.


716 See Jayyusi 2005: 391.

717 See Wassef in Idris 1978: xi.

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Yusuf Idris, more than other Egyptian writers, was outspoken in his contempt for the rich and powerful and their heartless exploitation of the less fortunate and of the various forms of hypocrisy that this gave rise to.\textsuperscript{719}

It is because of his strong sense of justice that he also aimed to apply the colloquial Arabic language to the production of Arabic literature. As per Idris, Arabic literature was in fact in need of a revolution by the time of the 1950s.\textsuperscript{720} Thus, “[t]he realism, the instinctive artistry, and the creative use of language […]” became the signature feature of Idris’ 1950s works.\textsuperscript{721} The combination of Egyptian vernacular and literary Arabic continued to inspire even his later works of the 1960s and 1970s, including the short story “House of Flesh”, for the purpose of reflecting the dominant domestic character of his narratives’ sceneries.\textsuperscript{722} After his graduation, Idris worked first as a physician and “[…] Health Inspector in the Ministry of Health”\textsuperscript{723} before he decided to concentrate fully on his career as a literary writer and journalist in 1967\textsuperscript{724}. While becoming a member of an “[…] underground organization fighting the British”, Idris supported Nasser’s political career and revolution in the early 1950s. Due to its failed political promises, the writer soon distanced himself from Nasser’s regime in 1954.\textsuperscript{725}

Notwithstanding his arrest by Nasser’s regime from 1954 to 1956\textsuperscript{726}, Idris continued to write down his political anger and social criticism in his short stories and plays in the 1960s. Thereby, he applied a symbolic and allusive mode of narration – combined with “[…] graphic and moving details”\textsuperscript{728} – with which he provoked the political establishment and its strict censorship of critical Egyptian literature\textsuperscript{729}.

\textsuperscript{719} See Johnson-Davies in Johnson-Davies 2009: 3.
\textsuperscript{720} See Kurpershoek 1981: 114ff.
\textsuperscript{721} See Allen in Allen 1994: 1.
\textsuperscript{722} See Kurpershoek 1981: 120ff., 181f.
\textsuperscript{723} See Wassef in Idris 1978: ix.
\textsuperscript{724} See Allen in Allen 1994: 1.
\textsuperscript{725} See Wassef in Idris 1978: ix.
\textsuperscript{726} See Wassef in Idris 1978: ix; See Kurpershoek 1981: 28.
\textsuperscript{728} See Jayyusi 2005: 391.
\textsuperscript{729} See Allen in Allen 1994: 1; See Wassef in Idris 1978: x.
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Yusuf Idris, who was born in the Egyptian Nile Delta in 1927\(^{730}\), was first introduced to sex during his childhood years on his parents’ estate. In 1983, Idris describes his early childhood sexual experiences in a statement as follows:

There were plenty of servants, and those huge-breasted teenage peasant-girls were more than willing to ‘play’ with me and even offered to reveal to me their most intimate female secrets. For, even though I was extremely young, it seemed they found satisfaction in having sex with the one and only real ‘prince’ they knew. This little prince was able to lord it over a people consisting of children, both young and old, bossing them about, chasing them, doing whatever he liked with them; […].\(^{731}\)

At the age of 14, he already had – while living with his parents and siblings in Cairo – regular sexual encounters with older women and “[h]is main concern then was to vanquish and possess; he was unable to imagine a relationship other than sex binding a man and a woman.”\(^{732}\) In his later years, he eventually aimed for a serious relationship even though he was afraid to give real love.\(^{733}\) One may argue that Idris’ experiences with and ambiguous relationship to sex and women were increasingly detectable in his writings since the 1950s, including his short story “House of Flesh” (1971)\(^{734}\), as the author aimed at portraying the everyday lives and struggles of both Arab men and women\(^{735}\).

The slightly researched short story “House of Flesh”, published in 1971 by Yusuf Idris, tells the story of a widow and her three sex-starved daughters who gain agency by seducing a blind Qur’anic reciter with the help of an exchange game of the mother’s wedding ring.\(^{736}\) The provocative short story focuses not only on female support of male polygyny but also on women’s emancipatory disrespect for social and religious norms within Egypt’s traditional society. It is, in particular, the provocation and absurdity of


\(^{732}\) See Wassef in Idris 1978: viii.

\(^{733}\) See Wassef in Idris 1978: ix.


“House of Flesh” was first published in 1971 under the Arabic title “Bayt min Lahm” (See Allen 1981: 46).

\(^{735}\) See Wassef in Idris 1978: xif.

\(^{736}\) See Idris in Johnson-Davies 1978: 1-7. All quotations from this edition are from now on cited internally in the text.
the exchange of the traditional patriarchal patterns that is achieved when the three daughters adopt male sexual desires and the roles of sexual exploiters. One may speak in this regard of a so called ‘misogyny reversed’ or misandry. Taking a closer look at the title of the short story, “House of Flesh” already points to the gender-related and sexual background of the short story. With the word ‘flesh’, one associates not only the soft substance of a human or animal body and soft tissues of fruits or vegetables, but also sexual lust and femininity. Sexual lust and femininity are, in fact, essential motifs in Idris’ short story. They are represented by the 35-year-old “[…] tall, fair-skinned, slender, […]” widow and her three unattractive daughters dressed in black (1). Central to the short story is also the mother’s wedding ring that becomes the symbol for sexual lust and femininity. In this connection, immorality interacts throughout the storyline with the wedding ring and the two elements of sexual lust and femininity. To be precise, the short story’s introductory paragraph or expository prologue, as well as the final paragraph function as the frame of the storyline or action proper as they metaphorically introduce the reader to the three central categories of immorality in “House of Flesh”, namely silence, deafness, and blindness through darkness: “Silence reigns and ears are blinded. […] In silence, too, the lamp is put out. Darkness is all around. In the darkness eyes too are blinded.” (1) Darkness symbolises in this connection wilful malice and ignorance (activity) on the one hand, and naïvety and lack of knowledge (passivity) on the other hand. In any case, both interpretations of darkness have a negative connotation in so far as they refer to a weakness of character. One may claim that the three central categories of immorality – silence, deafness and blindness – apply to both the four women and the blind Qur’anic reciter (4-7). Nobody in the household aims to discuss, listen to and/or view the misdeed (5ff.) even though “[t]he house is a room.” (1, 7) As everything happens in one space, the characters involved ought to be aware of the ‘secret’ actions within the room. Hence, the characters’ behaviour stands for cruelty and strategy. Although the blind Qur’anic reciter first appears naïve, he eventually turns out to be a calculating and exploitative man with both religious and patriarchal authority (6f.).

A specific form of silence introduces the storyline as it reflects the situation of the widow and her three daughters before the mother’s marriage to the Qur’anic reciter. Silence of mourning has dominated the female household ever since the father’s death (1). In the course of time, silence of mourning has turned into a persistent and hopeful
silence of waiting for a bridegroom (1f.). Friday afternoons are usually spent with the blind Qur’anic reciter, who is the only one to break this silence but stays unnoticed until he stops coming one day (2). Adjusted to the permanent break of silence by the male reciter, the four women decide to renew their arrangement with him. In fact, his sudden absence and return has made them aware of the fact that

[…] it was not merely that his was the only voice that broke the silence but that he was the only man, be it only once a week, who knocked at the door. […] while it was true that he was poor like them, his clothes were always clean, his sandals always polished, his turban always wound with a precision which people with sound eyesight were incapable, while his voice was strong, deep and resonant. […] Why doesn’t one of us marry a man who fills the house for us with his voice? (2)

For this reason, the daughters – who, though, do not want to marry a blind man – concoct a plan according to which the mother has to marry the reciter as tradition requires her to remarry before her daughters’ marriages: “[…], but the faces turn away, suggesting, merely suggesting, saying things without being explicit. Shall we fast and break that fast with a blind man?” (3) The girls convince their mother of the marriage by claiming that there is a need of a man in the house, meaning a father for them and a husband for the mother. As per the three daughters, the Qur’anic reciter’s presence in the house will automatically attract other men’s attentions and marriage proposals (3). It is in the context of this daughterly self-assurance that the short story’s authorial or third-person narrator with an omniscient point of view – in particular a male voice situated beyond the characters’ world with a godlike panoramic view and an insight into all the characters – sarcastically and misogynistically contemns the daughters’ existence:

What madman will knock at the door of the poor and the ugly, particularly if they happen to be orphans? But hope, of course, is present, for – as the proverb says – even a rotten bean finds some blind person to weigh it out, and every girl can find her better half. Be there poverty, there is always someone who is poorer; be there ugliness, there is always someone uglier. Hopes come true, sometimes come true, with patience. (1f.)

The narrator continues his disapprobation of the daughters’ arrogance and superficiality towards the blind Qur’anic reciter as he further states that

[t]hey are still dreaming of bridegrooms – and normally bridegrooms are men endowed with sight. Poor things, they do not yet know the world of men; it is impossible for them to understand that eyes do not make a man. (3)
It is during the mother’s wedding night that the daughters’ actual trick takes shape and their cunning takes effect. Although the mother and the Qur’anic reciter do not have sexual intercourse in the room, the girls pay serious attention in their sleep to the newlyweds’ actions as they already have a sexual awareness: “The three girls were asleep but from each one of them was focused a pair of searchlights, [...] searchlights made up of eyes, of ears, of senses. The girls are grown up; they are aware of things, [...]” (3) One may detect in this night scene that two elements of immorality – meaning deafness and blindness – are temporary reversed in favour of curiosity and lewdness, and dominate as well the daughters’ behaviour pattern aside from their silence of wickedness (3). On the morrow, it is the parental sexual amusement and the mother’s high spirits that not only break the mother’s silence after years of unhappiness and cause her internal and external change towards joy of living but also affect the daughters’ hopes for the future (3f.):

Her face, [...], had suddenly filled with light; there it was in front of them as bright as an electric bulb. Her eyes were sparkling; they had come forth and shown themselves, bright with tears of laughter; eyes that had previously sought shelter deep down in their sockets. (3f.)

Aside from the mother’s joy of living and exuberant motherly love (3), the Qur’anic reciter’s singing and masculine voice henceforth revitalises the room (4). Even though the mutual sexual experience and marital bond revive the mother’s spirits and increase her self-confidence and sexual lust (4), she lacks full rebellion against her daughters and the religiously and socio-culturally defined marriage norms in Egypt (4-7). In contrast to their mother, the three daughters gradually develop into modern emancipated and cunning characters (4-7) who not only are thankful for their mother’s naïve devotedness but also deride their subaltern mother by calling her – with an emancipated tone of voice – ‘Mother’ (3f.). It is this daughterly superiority belief that one can also find among the protagonist Suzanne in Ihsan Kamal’s “A Mistake in the Knitting”. While the mother devotedly cares about her daughters’ happiness and future, she also worries about her young husband’s relationship to his three stepdaughters and his marital role (4). Unlike Ihsan Kamal’s and Salwa Bakr’s male main characters, Yusuf Idris’ blind Qur’anic reciter – who continues to visit the houses of the poor – lacks at first sight patriarchal traits and allows his wife to work for the rich in the village. The male main character’s initial manipulability and subalternity – which contrast with the
stepdaughters’ agency – are also reinforced by the fact that the status of the Qur’anic reciter has historically and traditionally been ascribed to the blind.737 The reader may detect here not only an authorial reference to the social injustices during Nasser’s tenure but also an Idrisian provocation of the prevalent post-colonial gender discriminations and suppressions within the Egyptian private and public spheres738. It is the mother’s ab initio concern about the Qur’anic reciter’s relationship to his three stepdaughters that turns out to be justified. In fact, when the Qur’anic reciter returns home one night from work, he observes his wife’s sudden restlessness and her wedding ring on her finger which both remained unnoticed during ‘their’ afternoon sex (4). In this scene, the marriage ring – both a symbol of belonging for the Qur’anic reciter (4) and a symbol of sexual lust and femininity for the former widow (5) – first interacts with fatherly and daughterly immorality and the elements of daughterly lust and femininity. Astonished at and enraged by her husband’s observations, the mother falls silent again (5). Although the mother aims to find the sinner “[w]ith ears that [have] turned into nostrils, tactile sense and eyes, […]” and is aware of her long-time self-sacrifice for the sake of motherhood, she lacks her daughters’ assertiveness and determination to confront the suspected culprit and to end this adultery, breach of law and breach of taboo: “[…] it was she who used to take the piece of food out of her own mouth in order to feed them; she, the mother, whose sole concern it was to feed them even if she herself went hungry. Has she forgotten?” (5) Accordingly, the mother readopts her formerly subaltern status. At the same time, it is the scheming and cold-hearted middle daughter who gains agency by means of the betrayal of her mother, her sinful promiscuity and her sexual seduction of her stepfather: “[…]: in her eyes there is a boldness that even bullets cannot kill.” (5) In so doing, she initialises a reversal of traditional gender roles and relations within 1960 Egyptian society. It needs to be pointed out that the middle daughter and her sisters’ behaviour pattern hereby remind the reader of Idris’ description of his mother and grandmother’s modern “[…] toughness and utterly unfeminine nature, […]” and violence which contrasted with the grandfather’s reticence.739

738 See El Saadawi 1997: 86, 256.
As the mother concentrates on the apprehension of the culprit at night, she observes the daughters’ sinful premarital sexual hunger and erotic dreams (5) which remind the reader of Narjis’ nighty lewdness and erotic attraction towards the strong masculine father figure in Nawal El Saadawi’s “The Picture”:

> The breathing of the three girls rises up, […]; it groans with yearning, hesitates, is broken, as sinful dreams interrupt it. […] What she hears is the breathing of the famished. […], All are famished; all scream and groan, and the moaning breathes not with breathing but perhaps with shouts for help, perhaps with entreaties, perhaps with something that is even more. […] It is true that food is sinful, but hunger is even more so. There is nothing more sinful than hunger. (5)

It is this small room (1, 3-7) – filled with darkness of malice and naïvety – that links the characters’ lives in the short story “House of Flesh” with Yusuf Idris’ life story. Just like the characters in his short story, Idris lived – during his peasant life at his grandparents’ home – in a room which was characterised by both poverty and nightly human darkness. As Idris writes in 1983, “[t]here was a huge din of groans and snores, crying sometimes, and attempts at sexual congress. Everything repulsive and inhuman seemed to be gathered together in this small, totally dark room, […].”740 His observations in the small room not only shaped Idris’ relationship to womankind from an early stage but also influenced his sexualised production of and the gendered relationships within the short story “House of Flesh”. With reference to “House of Flesh”, one may argue that the daughters’ modern rebellion against religious commitment and the traditional concept of the preservation of personal pride and honour within the small room cause their mother’s retrogression towards traditional customs and structures. While a mutual silence of immorality dominates the relationship between the disappointed mother and each of her sinning daughters (5ff.) as from the first day of “[…] the ring game” (6), the husband’s behaviour towards the three daughters is characterised by joyfulness and naïve blindness (5f.). It is the motherly tolerance and self-sacrifice that climax as she silently gives her eldest daughter the wedding ring for the purpose of sexual enjoyment: “In silence she draws it off her finger; in silence the eldest puts it on her own same finger.” (6) Thereby, the mother’s support of the daughterly unchastity and adultery reflects both motherly subalternity and an act of rebellion against the prevalent religious and socio-cultural obligations in the

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Middle East. As the eldest daughter falls into silence after her sinful act of premarital sex with her stepfather, the youngest daughter solely joins her stepfather’s singing and joyfulness before she eventually participates in the sisters’ silent ring game (6). The immoral ring game continues in silence, deafness, and blindness through darkness with the ring situated beside the lamp (6). The moral absurdity of not only the daughters’ modern emancipatory acts of premarital sex, misandry, sexual exploitation of and disrespect for the stepfather, but also of the mother’s tolerance and support of the daughterly unchastity and adultery, and the stepfather’s polygyny confront society’s traditional religious and cultural oppressions and obligations. Whilst the blind Qur’anic reciter remains the only person singing and enjoying his life and aims to break this uncomfortable renascent silence of the women (6), he also begins to suspect a secret behind the women’s changing behaviour and appearances:

At first he used to tell himself that it was the nature of women to refuse to stay the same, sometimes radiantly fresh as drops of dew, at other times spent and stale as water in a puddle; sometimes as soft as the touch of rose petals, at other times rough as cactus plants. True, the ring was always there, but it was as if the finger wearing it were a different finger. (6)

Although the Qur’anic reciter anticipates the women’s break of the immoral silence, he becomes at the same time scared of a situation that may reveal the truth: “What if the silence should utter? What if it should talk?” (6) It is not only his suspicion and fear of the truth and the consequences but also his wilful ignorance and concealment of the truth in favour of sexual enjoyments (6f.) that turn the stepfather into an accomplice. In this manner, the Qur’anic reciter regains agency, turns the women into his human marionettes and adopts patriarchal character traits (6f.). The Qur’anic reciter’s malice and strategy are henceforth reflected by his sudden turn to silence of immorality (6f.). According to the omniscient narrator, one may thus speak of a silence based on silent agreement and intention that dominates the room: “Intentional silence this time, […] It is, though, the deepest form of silence, for it is silence agreed upon by the strongest form of agreement – that which is concluded without any agreement.” (7) This silent agreement is, inter alia, employed by the Qur’anic reciter to justify his lack of concern, cunning and impunity with regard to his illicit sex and moral decline. By assuming that the woman wearing his ring and lying in his bed must be his wife, he legitimises his actions and continues to enjoy the pleasurable experiences as part of the ring game.
4. Representations of Gender in Post-Colonial Arab Literature in English – A Focus on Egypt and the Anglophone Egyptian and Sudanese Diasporas

From the Qur’anic reciter’s point of view, the woman with sight takes in fact responsibility for the sexual intercourse and adultery whereas he is blind, unaware and blameless (7):

> Sometimes she grows younger or older, she is soft-skinned or rough, slender or fat – it is solely her concern, the concern of those with sight, it is their responsibility alone in that they possess the boon of knowing things for certain; […] (7)

The male narrator – who initially disapproves of the women’s self-confidence and their reversal of traditional gender roles and relations by means of a modern emancipatory and secular rebellion against patriarchal socio-cultural structures, traditional socio-cultural obligations and religious norms – questions at the storyline’s end the Qur’anic reciter’s innocence and diminished responsibility. As per the third-person omniscient and commenting narrator, it is morally questionable whether the male main character does not bear a moral responsibility within this polygamous constellation (7). It cannot be denied that the final words of the text are an intertextual reference to the Qur’an and hence further underline the short story’s function “[…] as a discourse on tradition.” In the narrative’s provocative and socially self-critical discourse on Egyptian tradition, it is basically the blind Qur’anic reciter’s immoral masculinity and cunning – as represented by his sexual (mis)behaviour and greed – that not only erode the traditional, religious equation of blindness and moral integrity but also link religiosity with male self-interest, patriarchal exploitation, culpability and consequently human flaw. To sum up, religion in general and the Qur’an in particular are hereby satirised and vilified by the Idrisian contradiction between the male main character’s occupation and his lacking moral understanding and sexual restraint. In this context, though, it cannot be denied that the Qur’an in fact allows a man to have a maximum of four wives on condition that they are all treated equally. In the case of the blind Qur’anic reciter, it is incontestable that he has sexual intercourse with all four women but marries only one of the four women – namely the mother – as he is aware that

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Islamic law forbids him to marry additionally the three daughters of the bride.\footnote{Joseph Schacht, \textit{An Introduction to Islamic Law}, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964: 162.} Notwithstanding this, Idris’ sexual theme – as represented by female voyeurism, as well as male and female libido and adultery – reflects the author’s conception of religion. Even though Paul M. Kurpershoek does not attribute any religio-moral and blasphemous character to Idris’ short stories\footnote{See Kurpershoek 1981: 158.}, one may argue that Idris satirically employs the leitmotifs of the Qur’anic reciter and the Qur’anic subtext within the context of human sinfulness in order to criticise in “House of Flesh” the traditional value system and suppressive patriarchal interpretations of the Islam. This can be reinforced by Dalya Cohen-Mor’s \textit{Yūsuf Idrīs: Changing Visions} (1992), which sees in “House of Flesh” a representation of Idris’ damnation of religion and its force of “[…] obstructing social change […]”\footnote{See Cohen-Mor 1992: 29.} In addition, it is Roger Allen who adds in \textit{Critical Perspectives on Yusuf Idris} (1994) that Idris’ socio-critical short stories are partly influenced by a humorous play with the Islam and its practices.\footnote{Roger Allen, “Yusuf Idris’s Short Stories: Themes & Techniques,” In Roger Allen (ed.) \textit{Critical Perspectives on Yusuf Idris}, Colorado Springs, Colorado: Three Continents, 1994: 15-30, here 25.}

In addition to the religious and socio-cultural provocation, Idris’ short story also demonstrates – by means of the sexual theme – the author’s progressive gender- and socio-political perceptions, moral principles\footnote{See Kurpershoek 1981: 132; See Hassan 2011: 160.} and call for female resistance. It is specifically the short story’s focus on the rigid and prevalent patriarchal power relationship between the Egyptian sexes that is challenged by “House of Flesh”. What Paul M. Kurpershoek writes in \textit{The Short Stories of Yūsuf Idrīs: A Modern Egyptian Author} (1981) on Idris’ literary challenge of the traditional gender roles in his short story “The Curtain” (1960) also applies to the secular feminist background of “House of Flesh” for “[…], Idrīs focuses on the precarious balance of power between the sexes in Egypt, with men often vainly struggling to impose their socially sanctioned authority and women trying to gain their ends by stratagems, blackmail and the unfailing deterrent of unfaithfulness.”\footnote{See Kurpershoek 1981: 136.}

Although the widow’s three daughters gain agency throughout the storyline, rise up against male Egyptian patriarchy and hereby manage to balance the patriarchal power relationship, their emancipation is finite. On the one hand,
they sexually exploit and manipulate the blind Qur’anic reciter by means of their increasing self-confidence. On the other hand, their stepfather tips to the scam, benefits from his victim role and sexually exploits in this manner the three stepdaughters himself. Moreover, both parties are aware that in case of a break of silence, they would be religiously and socially outlawed. Thus, one may claim that the liberal religious orientation and the female emancipatory attempts at modern social life and sexual norms – characterised particularly by the three daughters – indeed underline the secular feminist character of the short story but likewise demonstrate the need for more modern emancipation – through female unveiling, rebellion and unification – against Egyptian traditional gender roles and relations, and religiosity.

It is Idris’ morally questionable but highly esteemed blind male main character who personifies – as a religio-political figure – not only the religious but also the political corruption752 in Nasser’s Egypt of the 1960s. The author’s indirect literary reference to the Nasserian governmental failures and corruptions in post-revolutionary Egypt, as well as his disapproval of the combination of religion and state affairs remind the reader of Nawal El Saadawi’s secular feminist critique of the political and elitist corruptions, social injustice, patriarchal oppression and strict religious influence in post-independent Egypt. In spite of Idris’ call for change in “House of Flesh” and other literary works until his death in 1991, his social claims remained unheard for years. The author writes in a statement in 1983 that

> After thirty years of writing and after the publication of 33 books I can see no great difference between the world I struggled against and the world as it is now. There is however an enormous difference between the world I dreamed of and the world in which I now find myself living. That may be why I am still writing. Or, to be honest with my innermost feelings, that is why I feel that I have not yet begun to write.753

Salwa Bakr – Muslim Egyptian novelist and short-story writer of the post-1960s ‘female’ literary generation754 – vindicates similar secular, gender- and socio-political points of view as Yusuf Idris and Nawal El Saadawi755 as her positions have also been

755 See Hafez 1989: 188.
formed by Nasser’s years of reign. According to Bakr’s secular feminist point of view, Muslim men and women are equally suppressed by male-dominated “[…] political regime[s] and […] unjust social order[s], […]” in the Arab world. However, Muslim women additionally constitute an oppressive target for Muslim Arab men: “The norms of patriarchal society oppress them as women, just as the norms of authoritarian government oppress them (and men) as citizens of diminished rights.” Accordingly, Bakr’s literary productions display “[…] [the author’s] discontent with the cultural attitudes, social institutions and economic policies that shape women’s lives” and are in need of change. Furthermore, Bakr’s female main characters are represented as fighters who try to resist the violence, as well as emotional and psychological oppressions by Muslim Arab men. Just like Yusuf Idris, Salwa Bakr can be regarded as a social reformer who not only expresses her discontent with Muslim Arab gender politics but also sympathises with and in her writing concentrates on Egyptian women’s everyday lives. As Caroline Seymour-Jorn writes in 2002 – based on an interview with Salwa Bakr in Cairo on 7 August 1992 – “[…], her writing also reflects affection for many aspects of the everyday life of poor or uneducated urban Egyptian women.” Besides her controversial socio- and gender-political focus, Bakr has always elaborated on “[…] the strength of women’s belief in God and other supernatural entities, while at the same time poking gentle fun at these beliefs.” It is rather their socio-political and gender-critical literary productions and points of view than their critique of religion during Nasser’s and Sadat’s regimes that caused the temporary imprisonments of El Saadawi, Bakr and Idris. In an interview with Claudia Mende in 2012, Salwa Bakr officially distanced herself after many years – in spite of her strong literary critique of Egyptian women’s oppression and her categorisation as

Unfortunately, Salwa Bakr is not as well known in the West as her female contemporary Nawal El Saadawi (See Hafez 1989: 189).

politically feminist by literary scholars, critics and authors like Ramzi M. Salti765, Margot Badran766 and Mona N. Mikhail767 – from the Egyptian feminists, in particular from the newly founded Egyptian Feminist Union. According to Bakr in 2012, those feminists of the Egyptian Feminist Union represent the voice of upper-class women whose ideals and beliefs differ from the Arab native women.768 The fact is that she is able to build up such strong bonding to these native Egyptian females at the border of society because “[…], her stories […] focus on the emotional quality of women’s lives, the things that they desire and work toward, the structure of their belief system, and the ways in which they internalize and respond to social norms and values.”769

Salwa Bakr’s short story “That Beautiful Undiscovered Voice”770 is such a narrative of female self-discovery, desire for freedom, self-development, secularisation and modern emancipation that tells the story of a developing but eventually silent rebellion of the female protagonist Sayyida against her husband’s patriarchy and tyranny (59ff., 63f., 66, 70). As Sayyida is little appreciated and defamed by her husband and the father of her four children Abdul Hamid (57-59, 61f., 67f.) – who treats her as a domestic servant, lower class housewife (57f., 62f., 67) and sex object (58f., 62) – her own desires are of no interest to him (58f., 61f., 67f.). Similar to Ihsan Kamal’s “A Mistake in the Knitting” and Nawal El Saadawi’s “The Picture”, Salwa Bakr’s short story “That Beautiful Undiscovered Voice” – published in English translation in The Wiles of Men and Other Stories (1992) – describes the confrontation between religiously and socio-culturally based patriarchal oppression of a woman (traditional and religious force), female obedience (traditional force) and modern female fight for liberation, self-fulfilment and respect (modern emancipatory and secular force). Sayyida, who is

770 See Bakr in Bakr 1992: 57-70. All quotations from this edition are from now on cited internally in the text.
initially presented by the authorial or third-person omniscient narrator as a fearful, intimidated and unconfident woman (57f., 63), lacks agency to tell her husband of her beautiful singing voice at the beginning of the storyline (57f.). Whilst Hamid Abdul paternalistically commands his wife to confide her secret to him, he confronts her in a disrespectful manner (57ff.). He is annoyed not only by her disobedient manner of conversing with him “[…] as she should” (57) but also by her clumsiness, reticence (57) and hesitance (58). Although he initially pretends to allay his wife’s fears, Abdul Hamid soon exercises his male supremacy over his wife by autocratically lighting his cigarette and “[…] bar[ing] his teeth and knott[ing] his brows and mov[ing] his neck from left to right so as to make a cracking noise as he prepare[s] himself for the inevitable battle.” (58) He begins to assume that his wife intends to beg again for housekeeping money. Nonetheless, Abdul Hamid feels certain that he will remain steadfast and have the whip hand over both his wife and his savings:

    She would no doubt be asking for money and would give as a reason some incidental matter, or would try to persuade him that the monthly expenses had gone up. There was no other subject Sayyida would be embarrassed to talk about. […] He decided that he would come out the victor, however heated it was, for he was not going to pay one single red millieme over and above what he was already paying in household expenses each month, not if Sayyida – as the saying goes – were to see her own earlobe. (58)

In order to stay informed, the family patriarch Abdul Hamid yet orders Sayyida anew – in a patriarchal tone – to finally tell the truth before he headlong leaps to the conclusion that his wife could be pregnant once again (58). As he disapproves of another abortion, Sayyida’s husband not only shuffles out of responsibility but also passes it to Sayyida. As per Abdul Hamid’s patriarchal conception, his uneducated wife is both the weaker sex and to be blamed for the consequences of his sexual lust, acts of sexual self-fulfillment and recklessness (58f.): “Is it possible that you can again be pregnant, Sayyida? By my mother’s grave, I’ll be really annoyed with you if it’s true, and my pocket’s empty, which is to say no more children and, no more abortions. You get yourself out of this one, if you can.” (58) As in Nawal El Saadawi’s Woman at Point Zero\(^\text{771}\) and “The Picture”, as well as in Hanan al-Shaykh’s The Story of Zahra (1980)\(^\text{772}\), Muslim Arab women are portrayed as men’s sexual objects and slaves. Both


al-Shaykh’s Zahra\textsuperscript{773} and Bakr’s Sayyida are not only sexually exploited by the men in their lives but also have to deal with forced abortions (58). It can be argued that al-Shaykh and Bakr, both ‘female’ Muslim Arab writers, challenge females’ oppression (tradition(alism) in their narratives since they address gender-related, religious and socio-cultural taboo themes, such as (marital) sexual exploitation and abuse, forced abortion, as well as women’s psychological, emotional and physical oppressions, in the context of Muslim Arab women’s literary representations. By focusing in her narrative on common middle class’ forced abortions – an illegal practice in Egypt until today\textsuperscript{774} – Bakr specifically demonstrates the coexistence of both women’s sexual exploitation (tradition(alism), and society’s immorality and disobedience with regard to national abortion law (modernity).

Enraged by his assumption of his wife’s presumable pregnancy, the family patriarch Abdul Hamid begins to prepare himself mentally and physically for his physical and sexual abuse of Sayyida: “He gave himself a good scratch between the thighs and walked, crazed, towards the window, […] Should he hit her? Throw her to the ground and kick her till she started bleeding and had a miscarriage? Or should he open the window full and throw her out?” (58f.) Contrary to her previous hesitance and voicelessness (57f.), though, the subaltern Sayyida suddenly encourages herself to speak out against her husband’s brutality, disrespect and paternalism, and informs him of her newly discovered beautiful singing voice (59ff.). Although her husband disrespectfully laughs at first at his wife’s ‘mental confusion’, Sayyida shows courage and angrily silences Abdul Hamid by directing his attention to her morning experience (59): “‘Just listen, first.’” (59) It is the disruption of the storyline’s linearity at this stage that implies a changing status and attitude of the female protagonist. After Sayyida had finished up her housewife duties and the prayer at noontide, she performed her showering. In doing so, she discovered her beautiful singing voice while quavering a song that praises female liberty (59f.). Whilst the reference to her housework duties, the noon prayer


(59), as well as her invocations and worship of God (60f.) underline both Sayyida’s submission to the traditional religio-cultural and social norms and her religious fealty, the acts of showering\textsuperscript{775} and melodious singing of “[… ] ‘I love the life of freedom’ […]” (59) after the prayer scorn religiosity and signify a break with traditionalism’s decay and a female emancipatory longing and quest for modernity (59f.): “After the call to the noon prayer she had said to herself, ‘Go off, my girl, to the bathroom and pour a pail of water over yourself and you’ll feel refreshed and get rid of the dirt.’” (59) What is more, the symbolic water flow emphasises in this context the female protagonist’s longing for personal freedom. As Sayyida was symbolically washing her head, she was adopting a “[…] beautiful, clear and strong” (60) voice which rendered homage to women’s freedom (59f.). Besides the content of the song, it is Sayyida’s act of singing as such that can be interpreted as a modern female rebellion and secular action because it reveals one of the ‘awra’ parts of the female body – namely the female protagonist’s voice\textsuperscript{776}. Even though Sayyida was delighted about the revealing of her alter ego’s beautiful singing voice (60f.), she feared at first the spirit of the devil (60f.) and her husband’s lack of understanding and discrediting (60). However, the magic of freedom – represented by the beauty and content of her alter-ego’s singing voice – soon began to replace Sayyida’s fears with self-awareness and lust for life:

‘[…], I found that my voice was even sweeter, a voice that might have issued from Paradise, a magical voice that was unrivalled in this world. […], I was delighted and at peace with myself. The sensation of fear had left my heart, […]; it was a human voice, a completely natural voice and yet very different from my old one.’ (61)

It is this lust for life that encourages the subaltern Sayyida to sing in front of her husband in the course of her self-revelation. Hereby, her act of singing counteracts her years-long marital discrimination, sexual exploitation and subordination to traditional religio-social obligations. Without further ado, her husband disrespectfully rebukes and silences her (61). In fear of gossip, he not only orders his wife to keep silent (61f.) but also declares her mad (62). Sayyida tries once more to speak out against her husband, to vindicate herself and to gainsay her mental disturbance (62). Unlike the female

\textsuperscript{775} The ablution is generally performed before the prayer in order to be ritually clean (See Fathi 2012: 16).

protagonist in Salwa Bakr’s short story “The Beginning”\textsuperscript{777}, Sayyida is – similar to Hanan al Shaykh’s Zahra\textsuperscript{778} – verbally and emotionally too weak to regain strength and agency in this scene in order to fight her husband’s patriarchal hegemony and psychological oppression. Defamed and suppressed by her husband, the female protagonist thus continues her housework duties. Even though Abdul Hamid pretends to feel pity for his wife, he continues his defamation of Sayyida by declaring her story of the beautiful voice as “[…] rubbish […]” and her behaviour as disconcerting (62). On the one hand, Abdul Hamid believes that Sayyida is incapable of singing beautifully. On the other hand, he is afraid of her extraordinary singing ability as it may enable her to achieve female freedom and to fulfil herself (modernity): “[…] Just suppose that what you say is true – what does it mean? Are you intending to take up singing, for example? Intending to become a professional singer? By God, what a story?” (62) Accordingly, the male main character paternalistically and disrespectfully makes fun of his ‘bemused’ wife and keeps treating her as his domestic servant and sexual object by “[…] [giving] her a playful slap on the bottom and whisper[ing] to her, ‘After the coffee, come along and we’ll stretch out together on the bed.’” (62) Focusing on the relationship between Sayyida and Abdul Hamid since the female protagonist’s self-discovery, one may note at this point of the storyline that the female protagonist Sayyida – similar to Suzanne in “A Mistake in the Knitting” and Narjis in “The Picture” – fluctuates between her growing self-confidence (modernity) and the continuing oppression by the male main character (traditionalism).

Yet when Sayyida retires in the evening after an afternoon of housework duties (62f.), she quickly regains her newfound agency and self-esteem, reflects upon her newfound beautiful singing voice and confidently longs for the opportunity of singing in public as a modern secular Muslim Arab woman and mother: “What was wrong with people listening to someone’s voice regardless of age or whether he was a man or a woman?” (63) However, her emancipatory longing to sing aloud in bed is silenced yet again by her husband’s awakening (63).

It is on the next morning – when her husband and the children are out of the house – that Sayyida uncheckedly readopts her singing while doing the housework (63).

\textsuperscript{777} See Bakr in Cohen-Mor 2005: 281f.
Overwhelmed by her alter ego’s “[…] fascinating, unearthly […]” voice (63), she not only becomes more and more aware of her subalternity and patriarchal oppression but also develops an increasing pleasure (64). While she regards herself as “[…] the Sayyida that dust[s] and [sweeps] and [does] her head up in a kerchief each day because she [cannot] find the time to put a comb through her hair”, she in fact aches for the end of her socio-culturally and paternalistically oppressed housewife status as demonstrated by her alter ego’s voice of freedom – “[…], strong, pure and clear, like some priceless jewel.” (64) It is her act of singing “[…], ‘I love the life of freedom,’ […]” (64) and her reflection in the mirror that display her years-long suppressed lively and freedom-loving personality:

She watched herself, her lips dancing with the tuneful words, her eyes sparkling with joyful enthusiasm, her cheeks ruddy with blood which she imagined had gushed from hidden springs in her body, […]. She felt she was beautiful, perhaps for the first time for quite a long while. This feeling came to her and it rejuvenated her. (64)

It is in this scene that her newfound self-awareness and acquisition of self-esteem – initiated by her longing for female liberty and self-fulfilment – not only decisively increase Sayyida’s self-confidence but also expedite her self-development process in terms of female emancipation and modern life (64). Enraged by her subaltern status throughout their marriage – as reflected by the female protagonist’s neglected physical appearance (64) – Sayyida decides to change her approach to life and to begin to focus on her personal rights: “‘In order to sing I am obliged to feel beautiful. Yes, by God – obliged.’” (64) Sayyida’s emancipatory act of singing and withal her newfound self-awareness, acquisition of self-esteem and inner strength exemplify Nawal El Saadawi’s demand for Muslim Arab unveiling of the female mind, voice and sight.

As Sayyida confides soon after in Uncle Isa (66), she makes – against her husband’s order – publicly use of her newfound strength and speaks up against her husband’s patriarchal oppression. Uncle Isa’s disloyalty and Abdul Hamid’s anger about Sayyida’s disobedience, however, silence Sayyida once again (67). The same evening, Abdul Hamid orders his wife to accompany him to the psychologist (67f.) in order to treat her “[…] psychological illness […]” (67). Just as Hoda El Sadda writes about Bakr’s narratives on Muslim Arab women, it is the female ‘mental confusion’ (61f., 67f.) that
demonstrates likewise in “That Beautiful Undiscovered Voice” the act of rebellion against “[…] pre-ordained cultural/political/social/sexual roles.” In Sayyida’s case, it is particularly her marital gender discrimination, degradation and sexual exploitation by her egocentric, patriarchal husband which call forth her modern revolt against and disgust at marital oppression and the Shari’a’s code of conduct. Although Abdul Hamid pretends to worry about his wife’s ‘illness’, he rather aims to maintain his and his children’s reputation (67f.). Abdul Hamid’s traditional attitude towards Sayyida’s zeal of liberty is reinforced by the psychologist’s indifference and prepossession towards Sayyida’s singing and yearnings (68f.), as well as his insult (69).

It is the final scene of the short story in which the interaction between Abdul Hamid’s traditionalism and religious value system, and Sayyida’s modern aspirations and secularisation climaxes with regard to the literary representations of male-female dynamics. Particularly, Sayyida’s acts of disregarding the psychologist’s diet order and flushing down the pills, as well as the patriarch’s passivity or inability to react finally give rise to the triumph of female self-esteem, agency, modern emancipation and liberation. Sayyida displays courage when ultimately fighting her husband’s tyranny and defamations that find again expression in her outer appearance and silenced singing voice the morning after her visit to the psychologist (69f.): “[…]: a pallid yellowish face, despite its fullness, listless eyes, expressionless features, like those of someone from whom life had absented itself. […] She cleared her throat and tried ‘I love the life of freedom’, but in no way would the voice imprisoned in her throat come forth.” (69f.) Whilst challenging her silenced singing voice with scales, Sayyida is just able to adopt her ordinary subaltern voice. In this respect, the scales – sung by Sayyida’s old singing voice – demonstrate the ups and downs of the female protagonist’s life (70). At the same time, the “[…], weak and hoarse and devoid” voice embodies Sayyida’s lack of freedom and lost zest for life (70). Eventually, it is, once again, her reflection in the mirror that makes the female protagonist aware of her personal fate (70). The subsequent silent act of flushing down the pills (70) can be interpreted as a Bakrian provocation. To be precise, Bakr’s subaltern Sayyida successfully proves to be a fighter for female liberty and the preservation of personal pride, honour and self-development. All in all, it can be argued that Salwa Bakr’s, Nawal El Saadawi’s, Yusuf Idris’ and

even Ihsan Kamal’s short stories under discussion idealise and propagate – despite their differing feminist orientations and literary generations – the end of patriarchal oppression, gender respect and equality, female agency, empowerment, liberty and self-fulfilment. These native informants’ critical calls for change, goals and wishful thinking regarding the 20th-century non-fictional Arab world are addressed anew by Dalya Cohen-Mor in 2005 when she retrospectively observes that “[…], the Arab woman has gained more access to power and more control over her life. No longer valid is the image of the Arab woman as silent, passive, and submissive.” Nonetheless, “[…] the liberation of women has not yet been fully attained, […].”

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4.2. Literature by Muslim Arab Migrants in Great Britain and the USA – Ahdaf Soueif, Samia Serageldin, Leila Aboulela and Tayeb Salih

As demonstrated in the previous chapter on literature by female and male authors in the Muslim Arab world, it is the opposition between traditionalism and religiosity, on the one hand, and modernity – including emancipation – and secularism, on the other hand, that shape the literary representations of gender roles and relations in native Muslim Arab writings. Beyond that, the recurrent but contrasting motifs’ interplays interact with or rather are influenced by the secular and Muslim feminist tendencies of the narratives and the authors’ feminist orientations.

Taking a closer look at Muslim Arab diasporic writings, it is, for instance, the short story “Her Man” (1983) by British-Egyptian writer Ahdaf Soueif which also displays – similar to Nawal El Saadawi’s “The Picture”, Yusuf Idris’ “House of Flesh” and Salwa Bakr’s “That Beautiful Undiscovered Voice” – the collision of male traditional patriarchal forces, woman’s obedience to traditional socio-cultural and religious norms, and female modern emancipation and secularisation against Egyptian society’s traditionalism and religiosity. Ahdaf Soueif’s short story in fact builds on the author’s other short story “The Wedding of Zeina” (1983) from the same collection of short stories called Aisha (1983). To be precise, “Her Man” represents the story of Zeina, her husband Sobhi and his ‘durrah’ (second wife) Tahiyya in a traditional polygamous and rivalling marital structure. While Tahiyya is a traditional and religious woman who cares about her husband and follows her mother’s advice, Zeina is an emancipated woman who disrespects the Sharia’s code of conduct. Zeina not only shows off her legs in public and covers her face instead of her legs, she also refuses to speak to Sobhi, criticises his polygamous marriage concept and sexual desire for

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781 See Santesso 2013: 49.
783 Ahdaf Soueif’s title “The Wedding of Zeina” is an adaptation of Tayeb Salih’s “The Wedding of Zein” from 1962.
other women, as well as attacks Tahiyya. Influenced by her sister Hekmat’s emancipation and feminist comments, Zeina takes revenge one day and rebels against both her husband’s patriarchal behaviour and the second wife’s existence. In so doing, she seduces and intrigues against Tahiyya, and speaks out against her husband upon his return to his two wives: “‘Abu Sa’id, I want a word with you.’” It cannot be denied that Zeina’s female strong-mindedness, fearlessness and sexual laxity remind the reader of the representations of the female Muslim Arab behaviour patterns of Yusuf Idris’ three daughters in “House of Flesh”. Yet, Ahdaf Soueif’s “Her Man” tops the Muslim Arab authors’ secular feminist writings from chapter 4.1. off with a reference to both the female protagonist’s secularisation and the provocative themes of female masturbation, female marital infidelity and homosexuality.

In her short story “The Water-Heater” from 1982, Ahdaf Soueif even goes a step further when combining the contrasting motifs from the previous chapter – namely traditionalism, religiosity, modernity and secularism – with the themes of western exertion of influence and neo-colonialism respectively, and their underlying binary opposition between ‘the West/the Self/the North’ and ‘the East/the Other/the South’. In the manner of her female contemporary diasporic writers Samia Serageldin and Leila Aboulela, Ahdaf Soueif adopts the theme of the East-West encounter which was – until the post-independent era – solely a male writer’s subject. The novelist and short-story writer Soueif – who was born in Cairo in 1950, first moved to London at the age of

799 See Soueif in Soueif 1996: 65-85. All quotations from this edition are from now on cited internally in the text.
800 See El-Enany 2006: 185f.
four	extsuperscript{802} spent most of her childhood in Egypt and has lived both in Britain and the Arab world since 1973	extsuperscript{803} – makes use at this of both her secular feminist point of view and her diasporic perspective. In general, one may argue that Ahdaf Soueif “[…] challenge[s] the traditionally male-dominated narratives” of the Muslim Arab world as she focuses in her Arab feminist women’s writings	extsuperscript{804} on the binary opposition between East and West	extsuperscript{805}, including “[…] Arab and Egyptian nationalisms, gender politics, and Muslims’ response to both modernity and hegemonic prejudices emanating from the West.”	extsuperscript{806} Furthermore, “[…], Souef’s real interest lies in the depiction of female repression and alienation, especially in regards to sexuality.”	extsuperscript{807} She is known to be a master of allusion, who combines sexuality or sexual arousal with violence in her works.	extsuperscript{808} As Waïl S. Hassan writes about Soueif’s first years of fiction writing in Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature (2011)

 […]], Souef conceived of herself as an Egyptian and an Arab – not an Egyptian British or Arab British – writer, one who happened to write in English while following in the footsteps of Yusuf Idris […] and Tayeb Salih […], major novelists who analysed sexual mores and gender politics in Egypt and Sudan during the 1960s. This is the theme of several of her works, including her first two short stories, ‘The Wedding of Zeina’ and ‘Her Man’ […].	extsuperscript{809}

In an interview with Caroline Rooney in 2010, Soueif argues with respect to her and contemporary authors’ sexual provocations in Arab narratives that the Muslim author	extsuperscript{810} is aware of the fact that it is more difficult for a scandalous novel about sex by an Arab woman writer to become socially accepted, especially when the text demonstrates the problem of “[…] ‘ya’ni’ […]” (scandal)	extsuperscript{811} and is in addition written in English. Taking a look at the language factor, Soueif’s use of English can be detected not only in “The

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\textsuperscript{803} See Pakravan 1995: 275.
\textsuperscript{804} See Santesso 2013: 141.
\textsuperscript{805} See Santesso 2013: 49.
\textsuperscript{806} See Santesso 2013: 50.
\textsuperscript{807} See Malak 2000: 140.
\textsuperscript{809} See Hassan 2011: 160.
\textsuperscript{810} See Rooney 2011: 481.
\textsuperscript{811} See Rooney 2011: 479.
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Water-Heater” from the collection of short stories *Sandpiper* (1996) but also in other of her influential diasporic Muslim women’s writings such as *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992), *Aisha* (1983) and *The Map of Love* (1999). Her language choice is based therein on “[…] instinct […]” combined with the freedom to also address taboo themes, as well as the aim of resistance and speaking up for the colonised against orientalist discourse. Even her translations from Arabic into English show that the bilingual author Ahdaf Soueif consciously “[…] seeks to ‘powerfully affect’ the English language by its contact with Arabic.”

In political terms, Soueif, who is also a cultural commentator and political activist, can be situated between the West’s imperialist influence, on the one hand, and the Muslim conservative forces and the Islamist ideology, on the other hand, for she states in 2009:

> The conservative tendency that governs our countries today did not come out of nothing: it came about as a reaction to the (temporary we hope) failure of a national project that was outward-looking, secular, non-aligned, liberationist and socialist – Nasser’s project, in essence. And the failure of that national project was in very large part due to the West’s unrelenting war on it. And the elements within the Arab world that were the West’s partners in defeating this project were the conservative/reactionary Arab regimes and the Islamists. Well, they won that round and now they’re in the ascendancy and it is the most arrant hypocrisy of the West to complain about it.

Moreover, it can be argued that Soueif’s political stand interacts with her perspective on religion as demonstrated by her literary involvement with the Islam. While she eschews direct in-depth discussion or questioning of religion in her works, she indeed focuses strongly on the effects of Islamism. She does so by contrasting secularism, and Islamic radicalism or Islam’s oppressive forms and backward ideals. Here, secular and

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813 See Mahjoub 2009: 58.
816 See Hassan 2011: 160f.
817 See Chambers 2011: 245.
819 See Mahjoub 2009: 58.
821 See Santesso 2013: 51.
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westernised characters from the city face highly religious and traditional characters from the country while the Islam functions as the marker of oppression. It becomes obvious that Soueif combines religion with masculinity in her writings. At the same time, as demonstrated, inter alia, by her characterisation of the protagonist Zeina in “Her Man”, Soueif also makes clear that the practice of suppression is not necessarily gender-specific and that “[…] one cannot disavow or condemn the entire culture and civilization of Islam, in whose name several cruel practices are done against women.”

Although Soueif avoids – in contrast to Nawal El Saadawi – public critique of the Islam, she publicly addresses the authority of religion, female veiling, male chauvinism, and socio-culturally and religiously influenced patriarchal oppression in her short story “The Water-Heater”. Since the short story was written during Muhammad Anwar El Sadat’s regime in the early 1980s, it is consequently characterised by the discussion of not only social injustices, gender discrimination, socio-cultural and religious oppressions, economic instability and re-Islamisation, but also of strong western influences in the light of Infitah capitalism, and neo-colonialism in general. In particular, the western influences in the 1970s and 1980s through Sadat’s open door policy were in large part met with scepticism and anti-western atmosphere among the population. They caused the re-adoption of traditions, including the hijab as supported by religiously influenced feminism, and the revivalism of Islamic fundamentalism.

The figural narrative situation’s third-person limited narrator introduces the reader in “The Water-Heater” to the patriarchal protagonist and devout Muslim law student Salah. Salah is sexually attracted to his secularised and western-influenced sister Faten, who serves him and his mother at home. She used to prepare Salah’s bath but her duty has recently been replaced by the modern water-heater. Although Salah normally does not care about women, his sister has started to attract him as the most decent and sexually arousing woman. While Salah has increasingly become distracted by his sister’s appearance, he has tried to focus his attention on religion in order to stay sinless. Eventually, however, he forgets his praying as he slides into sin. Aroused by his sister’s sexuality, he is unable to differentiate between sexual dream and real action. Torn

822 See Santesso 2013: 51f.
823 See Santesso 2013: 53.
824 See Malak 2000: 142f.
825 See Nash 2007: 84f.
826 See Soueif 2001; See Badran in Kandiyoti 1991: 222f.
between his sister’s and his friends’ modern and secular beliefs and western ways of life, and his own traditional ideals and Islamic morals, Salah ultimately fights modernity, secularism and western intrusion. He not only prohibits his sister from reading a western magazine, the access to higher education (modernity) and the personal secularisation, but also denies her the right of female liberty and self-determination by forcing her into an arranged marriage to her cousin (65-85).

It is the symbol of the water-heater in the urban Cairo setting (65) that points out from the short story’s beginning the modern and western influences which affect and intensively shape the narrative’s patriarchal family life and the male protagonist’s mode of behaviour. Especially, Faten, Salah’s 16-year-old sister and secondary school educated girl, aligns herself with the influences of modern values and western standards in Egypt. By adapting to the modern and western influence of the water-heater, for instance, Faten is able to take a bath in the same way as her older brother (67, 71f., 81). Although she is a progressive young woman, Faten struggles throughout the storyline with western influences and modernity, on the one hand, and society’s traditional gender roles and religious values, on the other hand. She is treated as the family servant who offers tea to her mother and brother (66, 76), washes her brother’s clothes, cooks his meals (68), and used to prepare until recently her brother’s bath (65f.). The subaltern girl is described from the beginning by the third-person limited narrator as an obedient (65f., 68, 70, 74), studious (68), decent and caring daughter and sister (65f., 68, 75f.) who “[…] [goes] about her duties in the house or [bends] over her desk to do her homework. No flirting, no arguments, just acceptance and respect and love. […] Surely she has no secrets, no dark thoughts, no feelings that could not be confessed to.” (75f.) Furthermore, Salah, the storyline’s strict practising Muslim (66ff.) and focused university student (68, 75), is characterised by a lack of sexual interest in, a sexual retention towards and a religiously shaped respect for women due to his religious self-control, obedience and drive displacement (69, 75). On the cramped buses and on the stairs, for instance, he keeps “[…] his eyes lowered […]” (69) for the male gaze is as damaging as a bodily contact. 

He would walk carefully down the worn, winding stairs, keeping his eyes lowered in case any of the neighbours’ women were about. [...] In the bus it was stiflingly, unbearably hot. Your neighbour’s hair trickled your nostril, his foot was on your foot and, sometimes, overpoweringly close, was the scent of the female: a woman could be wedged tightly against him, a breast squashed against his arm, or a posterior pressing into his groin. He would keep his eyes lowered and his body as detached as possible. But it was difficult. (69)

Salah’s constant praise of God obviously functions not only as a religious confession but also as an escape from reality as well as an atonement in times of sexual temptation (66-70, 77f., 80f.): “‘God preserve us. God preserve us. I take my refuge in Thee.’” (69) Despite his religious strictness, self-restraint and chastity, the male protagonist has increasingly become aware of his sister’s sexuality, delicacy and female decency and in this way has begun to feel attracted to her (68, 70, 75). He has protectively declared the public bus as a sinful place for his sister in order to cushion her from sexual harassment by other men (70). Since the emergence of the modern, western water-heater in the household (65), the patriarchal family life’s traditionalism has thus been at stake.

It is two months after the water-heater’s instalment that the religiously idealised young man of God neglects momentously his religious values and duties because of his abasement of morality and lewdness (67). In the course of his estrangement from God through lewdness, he observes in the evening from his room the steamy bathroom’s door. Aroused by the steam within the bathroom and the imagination of his sister’s nakedness, Salah tries emphatically to concentrate on his religious obligation and praying in order to ask for forgiveness for his debauchment caused by the modern, western water-heater: “He averted his eyes and tried to concentrate on the prayer-beads. ‘Most powerful God, I return to Thee and beg Thy forgiveness …’” (67) In so doing, he jealously remembers – in the form of constant flashbacks to his way of life and routines (65-72, 75-81) – his mother’s long-time traditional intention to marry Faten off to another man: “A spasm shot through his stomach and he looked down quickly at his beads. ‘O Powerful God, I ask for nothing but patience and am grateful to Thee even for the ills that befall me.’” (68) It was in fact on the day of the water-heater’s instalment – a sign of modernity and western intrusion – when Faten’s religious (66f.) and traditionally minded mother uttered her desire for an arranged marriage between Faten and her cousin Isam (71). Strictly speaking, Faten and Salah’s mother not only embodies but also supports the Egyptian concept of society’s strict gender segregation.
as in the form of a differentiation between a female private sphere and a male public sphere (65ff., 71). Taking a closer look at this bygone scene, it can be argued that the reader may detect a temporary change of thinking and behaving in the male protagonist in favour of modernity. Salah, a spokesperson of his dead progressive father (71), namely counteracted on this particular day his mother’s traditionalism by attaching great importance to his sister’s education and personal self-development in compliance with the Islamic faith (71): “Education is good, Mother. The Prophet (the blessings and peace of God be upon him) commanded us to seek education even as far as China. You know that. […]’ […] ‘[…] Let her think of her studies. Marriage? It’s not possible.’” (72) As Salah has been acting as the head of the family since his father’s death, his subaltern mother has consequently backed his decisions (72). The traditional attitude of Salah’s mother reminds the reader of the mother’s traditionalist ideals in Ihsan Kamal’s “A Mistake in the Knitting”. Notwithstanding Salah’s modern change of thinking and behaving on the day of the water-heater’s instalment, his jealousy and overprotection of his sister have coincided with society’s traditional concept of marriage and the idea of male protection of women not just since his father’s death: “Of course it was true that marriage was protection for a woman. Particularly now her father was dead. But Faten was a good girl and not likely to go wrong. And he was there to look after her.” (72)

As Salah sits in his room observing the bathroom door, he feels sexually overwhelmed by his sister’s sudden appearance in the doorway (72). The third-person limited narrator’s description of an angelic, feminine Faten emphasises the male protagonist’s perception of his sister’s decency, innocence, chastity and subtle charm:

> The light was behind her. She stood for an instant framed in the doorway. Her face was in the shadow and all he could see was the light, shining through her thin cotton night-dress, silhouetting a curved shimmering figure, while her clean, wet hair clung to her neck. She only stood there an instant but he felt the steam new-released from the bathroom surround him and a great heat rise in his body. (72)

It is her childlike behaviour, sensitivity and kind-heartedness (73ff.) combined with her sensuality and exceptional natural beauty expressed in a night-dress (72ff.) that stimulate Salah’s lewdness, sexual desire and sexual ecstasy (72ff.). As Nawal El Saadawi writes in *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World* (1977), it is the
Islam that has turned women into objects of pleasure.\textsuperscript{828} Enamoured of her gracefulness and lightly clad appearance, Salah tries hard to control his thoughts and actions:

> Her damp hair curled around her neck and as she leaned forward he could see the drops of water follow the curve into the shadow between her breasts. […] He wanted to put out a hand and catch a droplet on the tip of his finger. He wanted to bend down and catch one on the tip of his tongue. Gently. He would not touch her. Only the water. […] His elbow shifted slightly. It touched her arm as she leant beside him and he drew away. (73f.)

In the balcony scene, Faten’s kind-heartedness and sympathy for the poor clash with her brother’s religious and social strictness, resoluteness and violence that may be interpreted as a reaction to his estrangement from God. Furthermore, the conversation between the siblings on the balcony over the fleeing thief demonstrates once more the opposition between female modernity and male traditionalism. It is eventually Salah’s patriarchy that temporarily silences his sister and her modern views (72ff.). The male protagonist not only suppresses his libertarian sister but also tries to fight back his uncontrollable desires as he has broken God’s commandment: “He who should guard has stolen.” (74, 76) Unlike the Qur’anic reciter in Yusuf Idris’ “House of Flesh”, Salah is aware of his immoral abuse of “[…] God’s explicit commandment: […]” (76) right from the beginning because man is supposed to follow invariably “[…] the moral good, the will of God, […]” as known as the law (75). By trying to regain self-control, the young law student self-exculpates and brings his work ethic and chastity into focus. As per the male protagonist, he has never felt attracted by or come on to the “[…] sullied […] outdoor girls. Always a bit dishevelled, windblown, bare feet in sandals covered with dust, voices too loud, manner too argumentative, too familiar.” (75) It is, however, the concept of ‘fitna’ – the idea of woman’s possession of sexual power to seduce men and to bring chaos to the persistent social order\textsuperscript{829} – that shapes his relationship to his attractive sister Faten. Although he regards his sister as mentally underdeveloped and questions her morality, he keeps on longing for bodily contact with her (76).

It is his reference to the previous night that sheds light on Salah’s actual abasement of morality, fornication and estrangement from God. While his male friends were feeling

\textsuperscript{828} See El Saadawi 1980: 138ff.
sexually aroused by the girls’ ‘awra’ in Cairo’s lively and European influenced Soliman Pacha Street, Salah was charmed by the corrupting influence of his sister’s female body (77). The third-person limited narrator describes in particular Salah’s comparison of Faten’s purity with the western white woman’s eroticism and hereby refers to the binary opposition between the West and the East as discussed in chapter 2. Even Egyptian feminist short-story writer Latifa al-Zayyat combines the contrasting motifs of modernity and traditionalism with the East-West encounter and conflict in her translated short story “The Picture” (1989) by employing the character of the sexually flirtatious white woman who openly presents her stimulating ‘awra’ and bewitches the Muslim Arab patriarchal husband Izzat. Izzat – a suppressive husband since his early engagement days – becomes a slave to western femininity and ‘vanilla skin’ just as Salah’s university friends to the western woman’s “[…], […] whipped cream” skin (77). One may claim that both al-Zayyat’s and Souefi’s white women not only satirise – by means of their rebellion against the Shari’a’s code of conduct – males’ patriarchy, fornication and sexual greed in the Muslim Arab world, but also denounce veiling and the religiously and socio-culturally enslaved status of many Muslim Arab women in the private spheres. At the same time, it is particularly the white women’s domination of Muslim Arab men’s minds and hormones that turns the white women into a western manipulative and scheming force. All in all, it can be argued that the reference to the provocative white woman and the modernised, westernised and secularised native girls in Ahdaf Soueif’s “The Water-Heater” illustrates the secular feminist perspective of both the work and its author regarding the criticism of Muslim patriarchal oppression and gender inequality in, as well as the increasingly neo-colonial influence on the Arab world.

While Salah was comparing that night his sister to the white woman and the modernised, westernised and secularised native females in the street, he was falling under the spell of Faten’s delicacy and female decency, and tending to turn into a modernised and secularised man who indeed enjoys women’s unveiling: “She was not as white as that woman – no – her skin had the glow of ripened wheat, when she walked

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he never saw her body move with such articulation, she wore loose skirts – but under them – then he would sharply pull his mind away, his fingers working feverishly on the prayer-beads in the pocket of his suit.” (77) Tempted by the bane of modernity, western influence and secularisation, he tried hard to resist it by concentrating on his praying, asking God for forgiveness and rebuking his friends for their fornication (77f.). In return, his progressive friends not only sarcastically called Salah “[…] a man of God” but also ascribed to him the sexual desire for female flesh (78), which reminds us of the Qur’anic reciter in Yusuf Idris’ “House of Flesh”. Taking a closer look at the young men’s modern attitude towards premarital sex and marriage (78), it can be argued that it draws in fact on the traditional Islamic concepts of and relationship between matrimony and sexual intercourse as already discussed as part of the analysis of Ihsan Kamal’s “A Mistake in the Knitting”. As noted previously, marriage plays an essential role within the context of Islamic religious tradition. According to the traditional Islamic concept of marriage, marriage legitimises all physical and sexual desires. Whereas men are allowed to enjoy premarital sexual intercourse, “[t]he woman must be an obeying sexual disciple who discovers sex thanks to her husband, her teacher in that domain. In relation to his wife, the husband should be unrestrictedly the sexual master, […]”.832 In addition, sex and love are – according to Islamic belief – two separate entities and marriage for love is rather uncommon in the Muslim Arab world.833

Upon Salah’s return home that night, he not only was hard on himself but also cynically questioned his sister’s innocence (78f.): “How do I know she is innocent?” (79) Instead of performing his ablution in the bathroom after the lustful talks and thoughts in the café, Salah entered Faten’s bedroom as he was driven by his sexual longing for his subaltern and “[…], defenceless, […]” sister lying in bed (79). When he was awaking the next morning, he was at first unable to differentiate between sexual dream and reality as to what had happened the previous night in his sister’s bedroom:

He had a memory of lifting a sheet, touching a breast. He had a memory of Faten holding him under the sheet, caressing him where he most longed to be caressed. Yet when he had whispered her name she had laughed at him and said, ‘My name is Sawsan. Don’t you know me?’ It was only a dream, he reassured himself, only a dream.

(80)

832 See Dialmy 2010: 162.
833 See El Saadawi 1980: 149.
Moreover, he remembered that he had broken God’s commandments not only by being lecherous but also by neglecting his evening prayers (80). His missed prayers and ablution can be interpreted as a sign of God’s revenge for Salah’s unfaithfulness and unchastity. Struck with guilt and wallowed in self-pity and self-flagellation (80), Salah has thus been hoping for salvation and God’s helping hand since the morning (67f., 70, 80f.). By early evening, as he sits on the sofa with his prayer-beads in his hands, observing the bathroom door and waiting for his sister to exit, he once more falls under his sister’s spell and fantasises that

Faten must be drying herself now. Rubbing her body all over. Bending to reach an ankle or raising her leg to the edge of – if he went on like this he would be lost. He would be lost to both this world and the next; his studies and his future would be lost. His soul would be lost. […] Surely she was wearing nothing underneath that night-dress. (81)

In the next breath, he blames his sister for his sexual arousal and fantasies by criticising her for constantly and provocatively showing her bare feet: “And why did she always come out of the bathroom barefoot? Was it a test? A test sent by God to try him?” (81) It is not only the sister’s showing of her ‘awra’ parts, meaning her female body, face, feet and voice, but also her revealingly dress that stands in contrast to the brother’s traditional jalabiyyah, slippers and prayer-beads (81f.). Faten is in fact inspired by her modern and secular French magazines that she has received from her progressive, westernised teacher Mademoiselle Amal (82f.). It is the scene in Faten’s room that peaks the confrontation between Faten’s modernity, secularisation and flirtation with westernisation, on the one hand, and her brother’s inner struggle with traditionalism and religiosity, on the other hand. As Salah enters Faten’s room once more, he is driven by his lewdness and his sister’s lasciviousness. By actively touching his sister for the first time, he goes beyond the pale and what is decent. Thus, he abandons himself to the bane of modernity and secularism as “[…] he put[s] out his hand and rest[s] it on her bare neck. She smile[s] up at him. His legs [tremble].” (82) Salah’s trembling legs indicate his state of confusion since he has just made a pact with the devil. It is, however, the modern secular French magazine that suddenly brings him back to reason. Not only does the magazine propagate female rebellion against male suppression and violence but it also depicts a modern model of femininity as illustrated by the conspicuous female breasts (82). Moreover, Faten’s unveiling and incontinent female gaze, innocence and frankness conflict with Salah’s paternalistically religious and socio-
cultural moral values and norms: “She smiled up at him. [...] ‘I like it. It’s amusing. It makes learning more interesting.’ She laughed up at him. ‘It’s better than doing boring grammar exercises.’” (82) For that reason, it is the brother’s standing position, his uncouthness and violence against his sister that are supposed to reinforce his superiority and traditional patriarchy. Nevertheless, Salah’s uncouthness and violence against Faten in favour of traditionalism and religiosity conflict with the young man’s lewdness and can thus be interpreted as both a specific Soueifian combination of themes\textsuperscript{834} and a Soueifian parody:

His hands are gripping her upper arm now, hurting her. The back of his fingers touch the side of her breast. His hand tingles and hums. [...] The blow to her right cheek swings her head around. The towel slides off her head and her wet hair comes tumbling down around her neck. [...] His hand is in her hair. [...] He shakes her. [...] The water from her hair trickles down his hand. He releases her arm and his hand moves across her breast to the neck of her night-dress (82f.)

While Faten has “[...] always spoke[n] softly, and she [has] always turned away” (66), she tries in the given situation to regain agency and provoke his brother with her female gaze (83). As a consequence, he punishes his sister for her sinful act of reading a blasphemous western magazine and her disrespect for the traditional Islamic morals as he agrees to an arranged marriage between Faten and Isam (84). In this manner, he not only patronises his subaltern mother but also puts an end to his sister’s education and liberty (84). Furthermore, Salah supports his mother’s traditionalist ideal of marriage as protection (71f.) since university would totally corrupt Faten (84). According to Daphne Grace in The Woman in the Muslin Mask: Veiling and Identity in Postcolonial Literature (2004), gender segregation in the Muslim Arab world aims at protecting women from turning into “[...] ‘the uncanny’ as well as ‘the forbidden’.\textsuperscript{835} Eventually, the male protagonist’s act of forcing his sister into an arranged marriage can be interpreted as revenge, on the one hand, and self-protection and self-deception, on the other hand. It is incontestable that Soueif – considering her support of secular feminist goals – employs the clash between Salah’s sexual desire for his sister and his inner struggle with and final reversion to religiosity and traditionalism in order to make aware of both the absurdity of religious strictness and the continuing patriarchal oppression of

\textsuperscript{834} See Mill in Soueif 1989: 173.

\textsuperscript{835} See Grace 2004: 82.
Muslim Arab women. Unlike in Yusuf Idris’ short story of the immoral and lecherous Qur’anic reciter, the sexual freedom of the devout Muslim law student is contained here by the authority of religion. In the final scene, Salah in fact cleanses his soul from sin with a cold bath or ablution, and hereby induces the end of modernity and lewdness caused by the western water-heater. One may argue that the male protagonist’s final turning away from the frivolities of the material world underscores the actual secular feminist character of the story and the author’s perspective. On the one hand, Souieif’s short story propagates positive western influence, modernity and secularism by means of Faten’s emancipation. It demonstrates, following El Saadawi’s example, the need for an end of Muslim patriarchy, the enhancement of women’s rights in Egypt and “[…] the issue of sexual oppression of women connected with everyday customs as well as the prevalence of deviant behaviours such as incest that [victimise] women inside the family.” 836 On the other hand, it challenges not only the dominance of neo-colonialism in post-independent Egypt but also the values and laws of traditional Islam by demanding a reduction of religious power and strict traditionalist socio-cultural norms as portrayed by Salah’s inner struggle and handling with the unfamiliar.

Just like third-generation ‘female’ author Ahdaf Soueif, third-generation Arab American writer Samia Serageldin was born and raised in Egypt. Before she first left Egypt in 1980 for her university education in London, England, and later immigrated to the United States, Serageldin had experienced the Nasser regime’s public propaganda against political families, their persecutions, imprisonments and properties’ confiscations and police surveillances. 837 It is the experiences of the rise and fall of the nationalist movement that influence her first novel The Cairo House (2000). Moreover, Serageldin’s home, the actual Cairo house, functions as the source of inspiration for her autobiographical novel and its title. 838 Since living in her American exile, Samia Serageldin has tried to blend in with her new surrounding and has behaved as a “[…] chameleon.” 839 With regard to Egypt’s development, the author is shocked by the political, social and religious changes within her home country whenever she returns. 840

838 See Abou-Youssef Hayward 2003: 86.
839 See Abou-Youssef Hayward 2003: 85.
840 See Abou-Youssef Hayward 2003: 85f.
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One may argue that the Arab American author deals with this cultural shock in her short story “The Zawiya” which was first published in Love Is Like Water and Other Stories in 2009. As a so called chameleon and hyphenated writer of Arab American descent, Serageldin has learned to look at her home country from two perspectives at the same time, meaning the insider’s and the outsider’s perspectives. Since diasporic writer Samia Serageldin was English-schooled in Egypt, and withal spent her adult years in Britain and the United States, English has become her language choice and marker of cultural identity. The author has not only written the autobiographical novel The Cairo House and the collection of short stories Love Is Like Water and Other Stories but also the historical novel The Naqib’s Daughter (2009) and several essays on gender- and religio-political themes, including women and Islam. In the past, she worked as a university professor and now functions as an editor.

In “The Zawiya”, the first-person narrator and expatriate Nadia tells her Egyptian experience as a Serageldinian chameleon upon one of her visits to her home country Egypt in the 2000s. By employing the secular, modern and westernised protagonist Nadia, Samia Serageldin challenges first and foremost the re-Islamisation of her country and thus denounces Egypt’s step backwards in the present age. At a Cairene hairdresser, Nadia and her girlfriends Camelia and Hala chat and walk down memory lane as they compare the past with the present, as well as Egypt with the Egyptian diaspora in the USA (62-65). Especially, Nadia visualises Egypt’s change during the last 20 years by means of the girls’ development from the modernity and secularism of childhood and adolescence to the traditionalism and religiosity of motherhood. The ground-breaking social change in Egypt is reflected not only in external characteristics but also in the short story’s female main characters. Camelia, for instance, is described nowadays as a conservative character who believes in arranged marriage (63), prays on a regular basis (66, 71), performed the Hajj (66), attends Doctora Nahed’s meetings (66, 71, 73), follows the religious rites (66, 71, 73) and cottons to the act.

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841 See Abou-Youssef Hayward 2003: 88.
843 See Serageldin in Serageldin 2009: 62-77. All quotations from this edition are from now on cited internally in the text.
844 In Samia Serageldin’s short story “The Zawiya”, a ‘zawiya’ does not denote an Islamic religious school or monastery but rather constitutes “[...] a small space set aside for praying [...] They’re [sic] usually like a large hall on the ground floor of a building.” (See Serageldin in Serageldin 2009: 68)
of public veiling (66). In contrast stands the first-person narrator Nadia who immigrated years ago to the United States (62), neglects her Islamic religion (68, 71), and visually and spiritually represents a modern, western and secular woman (64ff., 69f.). It is the progressive and westernised yet religiously oriented Hala who is situated between Camelia’s conservatism and religiosity, on the one hand, and Nadia’s modernity and secularism, on the other hand (63-66, 70f., 75f.).

While enjoying the familiar coiffeur ritual in Zamalek, the first-person narrator recalls pleasant experiences from teenage years in Sayid’s hair salon. Not only did the three women read magazines on modern western lifestyle in their teenage years but they also combined their Egyptian traditions with the zeitgeist as they adjusted themselves to the modern zeal for liberty, beau ideal and western trends (62f., 69):

We socialized and read magazines, studied, and sipped Turkish coffee, […]. In those days we all had long, lush hair that took hours to style fashionably stick-straight. […] On New Year’s Eve, we spent three hours getting elaborate chignons erected on our heads, and even then we weren’t done: we returned to the salon in the evening, all dressed up, for Sayid’s coup de peigne and perhaps a final flourish like a silk flower to complement the dress. (62f.)

Even though the coiffeur visit feels familiar to Nadia, she realises that the setting – meaning a hair salon with a decreasing number of customers – and her girlfriends have changed over the years (63). Camelia has adopted an old-fashioned moral understanding and attitude towards an arranged marriage for her daughter Dina, Dina’s ‘gehaz’ and her future husband’s ‘mahr’. Strictly speaking, Camelia attaches great importance to her daughter’s trousseau and the furniture for the bridal couple’s apartment. For this reason, she criticises her daughter’s fiancé’s inaction and his parents’ bragging as she has not yet been informed “[…] what kind of apartment the boy will provide – although his parents have been talking about building on a tract of land they have in one of the new compounds in the suburbs. […]” (63) It is her traditionalist moral principles that make her wonder which advantages this arranged marriage will bring to both her daughter Dina and the whole family. Consequently, Camelia is thinking about

846 ‘mahr’ refers to the bridegroom’s mandatory gift to the bride (See An-Na’im 2002: 308).
“[...] break[ing] off the engagement [...]” in case Dina’s fiancé and his parents will not provide the suitable ‘mahr’ in form of “[...] the right kind of apartment, and everything else they promised – [...].” (63) It becomes apparent that this conservative and religious attitude with regard to arranged marriage, family honour, ‘sharaf’ and dignity as defined by the Shari’a’s code of conduct, as well as women’s financial security nowadays shape not only Camelia’s but also a large part of the Egyptian society’s approach to life and identity. Hala concurs in Camelia’s matriarchal opinion according to which the mother is in charge of the daughter’s ‘gehaz’ and should regulate her own objectives: “‘By all means, get them,’ Hala agrees, ‘as long as you like them. [...]’” (63) It is the Egyptian society’s traditional Islamic concept of marriage that clearly differs from the American concept of marriage with regard to the type of marital union, the importance of love and respect, gender justice, dowry and wedding expenses (63f.). The westernised first-person narrator Nadia claims in this respect that Egyptian “[…]: young couples cannot afford to make their own start in life, and marriage remains an alliance between families and a concerted effort by both sets of parents to set them up as a new atom in the microcosm of their particular social set.” (73) Aside from the concept of marriage, the western status of divorce differs from its non-western counterpart. Nadia is ashamed of telling Sayid about her divorce in the United States (65) because of the divorcee’s different status in Egypt and the rest of the Muslim Arab world. According to Nawal El Saadawi, Muslim Arab women in fact do not have the same rights as men with regard to marriage and divorce.847 Dalya Cohen-Mor thus demands in 2005 further reforms as the Islamic law still regulates family life, marriage and divorce rights in favour of men.

Taking a closer look at the young women’s changing outer appearances, it is Hala’s and Camelia’s short hair (64f.) and Hala’s burliness (64) that indeed break with the prevalent beau ideal and thereby demonstrate rebellious acts of emancipation. Nonetheless, the women’s short hair and Hala’s plump physique represent transiency and social change within the Muslim Arab society. Besides the girlfriends’ changing hair and physical characteristics, it is their clothes that reflect both the late 20th-century social re-Islamisation, meaning the development from modernity and westernisation to

848 See Cohen-Mor in Cohen-Mor 2005: 25
849 See Moghadam 2003: 12.
Representations of Gender in Post-Colonial Arab Literature in English – A Focus on Egypt and the Anglophone Egyptian and Sudanese Diasporas

4. Traditionalism, and the clash between persistent Western influences and Muslim Arab conventions. When Nadia shows Camelia and Hala a photograph of herself and her youngest son (64), Camelia compares today’s American revealing clothes with Egyptian conventional and concealing garments (65): “‘That’s a pretty dress you’re wearing,’ […] ‘but you couldn’t get away with something so bare here in Egypt.’” (65) As a matter of fact, Camelia and Hala lose sight of the fact that the Egyptian society has moved backwards and that the Egyptian manner of life during the Sadat and Mubarak regimes once approximated to the American lifestyle of the late 20th century (65). Aside from the style of clothing, it is the hijab that illustrates in Samia Serageldin’s short story “The Zawiya” the late 20th-century Islamic revival, as well as the second veiling movement supported by Muslim and Islamist feminists. While the veiled manicurist Saniya in Sayid’s hair salon combines both the act of public female veiling and the modern lifestyle and beau ideal (64), Camelia’s hijab in the form of a “‘[…] loose scarf […]’” (66) and her conservative ideals embody solely traditionalism and religiosity as reinforced by her pilgrimage to Mecca: “‘Oh, it’s just that I’m not getting any younger, and since I came back from Hajj this year, I’ve been thinking I should do it.’” (66) Unlike Lila Abu-Lughod in “The Marriage of Feminism and Islamism in Egypt: Selective Repudiation as a Dynamic of Postcolonial Cultural Politics” (1998) 850, I argue with respect to Samia Serageldin’s “The Zawiya” that the late 20th-century act of veiling not only functions as a sign of Islamism and nationalism, and as a reaction to modern reforms, national social injustices, political misdemeanours and Western influences, but also represents a return to late 19th- and early 20th-century cultural traditional values as elaborated in chapter 3.1. Both Nadia and Hala disapprove of Camelia’s idea of religiously influenced veiling as it contradicts their modern lifestyle and secular ideals. In addition to Nadia and Hala, Camelia’s husband Hazem, who has been westernised by neo-colonialism’s capitalism and cultural influence, insists on female unveiling (66). Samia Serageldin challenges in the scene at the Cairene hair salon traditional gender roles and patriarchal perspectives once she attributes a progressive and secular mentality to Camelia’s husband Hazem (66). Camelia is at first torn between her husband’s modern, Western value system and Doctora Nahed’s religious teaching according to which “‘[…] a woman’s duty to God comes before her husband’s wishes, […]’” (66) However, Camelia soon brings the act of public veiling

into question and decides that her husband’s good will is more important to her than religious tenet. Hence, family life and heteronomy temporarily outdo religious belief and personal identity. In fact, Camelia’s temporary break with religiosity in Sayid’s hair salon is further reinforced by Sayid’s turning-on of the blow-dryer (66).

It is the discussion of Doctora Nahed – a female preacher at Camelia’s Koranic study circle and former friend of Hala’s and Nadia’s mothers (66) – and her lectures and sermons that reintroduce the themes of traditionalism and religiosity within the context of Egypt’s re-Islamised society (67f.). The first-person narrator’s description of Doctora Nahed or Nana al-Bashry shows that the female preacher has changed – not quite like Camelia – from a religiously raised child and wife in an arranged marriage to a fashionably dressed and ambitious secular feminist mother and back to a strict religious mother, highly respected preacher and Muslim feminist (66ff., 74ff.). Since Nadia presents herself as a chameleon with both insider and outsider perspectives from the beginning of the storyline (62, 68f., 71), she aspires to attend one of Doctora Nahed’s lectures at a Cairene ‘zawiya’: “‘Do you think I could attend one of those zawiya meetings?’ […] ‘No, I think it would be interesting, really.’” (68) However, it is once more Camelia – with the assistance of Hala – who points out the difference between Egyptian society’s traditional perspectives and religious affiliation, and the first-person narrator’s progressiveness and secularism: “‘Since when? It’s not like you, Nadia.’” (68)

On her way back to the hotel after her coiffeur ritual, Nadia experiences once more the binary opposition between her modernity, westernisation and secularism, and society’s traditionalism and religiosity. As a schoolgirl, Nadia used to purchase “[…] Chiclets gum and Salut les Copains teen magazines” at Everyman’s bookshop (69). Nadia’s modern behaviour reminds the reader of Faten’s reading of modern secular French magazines during the Sadat regime. Upon her visit to Cairo during Mubarak’s reign, she continues her ritual of buying foreign-language magazines at Everyman’s which proves not only the long-lasting modern attitude of but also the persistent western influence on the first-person narrator (69): “[…] I want to pass by the bookshop, Everyman’s, that hasn’t changed since I was a schoolgirl stopping on my way home to buy Chiclets gum and Salut les Copains teen magazines. […] I pick up the two latest English-language glossies published in Beirut for the Egyptian market: Cleo and Insight.” (69) Even
though Nadia veils her coiffured hair “[…], Audrey Hepburn-style” in the street, her own act of veiling works as a form of protection from the dusty wind rather than a socio-cultural, religious or political marker (69). By lifting the headscarf soon after, the first-person narrator notices the clash between conservatism and liberalism as she is suddenly approached by several taxi drivers (69). As described in chapter 3.1., post-1960s veiling has turned over the years in Egypt into a symbol of female education, high social class, political belief, faith and female protection against male gaze. In Nadia’s case, veiling particularly evokes native male respect for a Muslim Arab woman’s religious values and political Islam, and functions as a marker of Egyptian society’s traditional gender segregation. Contrary to Nadia’s assumption, social class does not matter in the scene with the Egyptian taxi drivers as public veiling is commonly attributed to Egypt’s upper class:

[…] I start to feel hot and prickly under the scarf, and slip it off. Almost immediately one taxi after another stops for me, unbidden. ‘Taxi, Madame?’ ‘Madame, taxi?’ It’s only then that I realize that no taxi driver had spontaneously offered me a ride while I had walked with my scarf on. Had they made a judgement on my belonging to the walking as opposed to the riding classes based on the scarf? (69)

It cannot be denied that Nadia is regarded, as soon as she unveils, as a modern or even a western woman who is easily approachable as compared to her traditional Muslim Arab compatriots (70). Nadia’s experience of the clash between conservatism and liberalism peaks when she reads through the foreign-language magazines at home. She realises that the Egyptian society is dominated by a controversial binary opposition of backlash and efforts for national progress and growth as represented by Cairo’s urbanisation (69f., 73) and the magazines’ “[…] glossy advertisements for everything from French perfume to Cairo restaurants; a fashion layout featuring Egyptian models in outlandish clothes; […]. The women are all dressed and coiffed in the latest fashions, only the rare hijab anywhere in sight.” (69f.) Nadia comments on the absurdity of the modern secular Arab magazines’ presentation of a model of femininity in a conservative Islamic setting by criticising that “[a] complete stranger to Egypt might get the general impression that the women are drawn from a different gene pool than the men, but it is only an illusion created by hair-colorists, makeup artists, and plastic surgeons.” (70) While digesting this exaggerated image of Egyptian modernity and assimilation to western mode of life as presented by the “[…] conspicuous consumption and over-the-top outfits barely
appropriate for Cannes, let alone Cairo, […]”, the first-person narrator begins to understand Camelia’s engagement with veiling (70).

The short story’s focus on the clash between secularism and religiosity continues in the scenes in which Nadia visits Hala for Ramadan ‘iftar’\(^{851}\) and they join Camelia afterwards for Doctora Nahed’s lecture at the ‘zawiya’. Although Nadia has never been a practicing Muslim, she attends Hala’s break-fast (70f.). In doing so, she once more observes today’s dominant role of Islam within a formerly highly secularised Egyptian society in times of Sadat’s open door policy (71). In addition to the binary opposition between secularism and religiosity, it is the contrasting motifs of traditionalism, modernity and westernisation that dominate the scenes of the Ramadan celebration and the ‘zawiya’ visit. Taking a closer look at the female character Hala, it can be argued that she not only normally attends Doctora Nahed’s lectures at the ‘zawiya’ but also joins the preacher’s sermons unless she has her period (71). Hala’s focus on traditional norms (63, 65) and religious values (70f.) stands in contrast to her own public enjoyment of the western lifestyle and her ten-year-old daughter’s flirtation with westernisation (71f., 75f.): “‘It’s all right, Sara dear, I’ll talk you through it over the phone on my way over there. You can recite the poem to me over the phone. […]’” (71) Similar to the water-heater in Ahdaf Soueif’s short story “The Water-Heater”, it is Hala’s modern, western cell phone that challenges in Samia Serageldin’s “The Zawiya” the religious setting (71f., 75f.) and demonstrates the absurdity and limits of the main characters’ religious strictness. What is more, the cell phone points anew to the conservatism-liberalism dichotomy within the contemporary Egyptian society as “[e]veryone in Cairo seems to have a cell phone glued to their ears at all times” except during prayer (72). In this context, Hala’s reproof of Nadia’s idea to call Camelia during prayer and to leave the cell phone on in the ‘zawiya’ (71f.) turns out to be a Serageldinian satire as Hala herself receives a phone call during Doctora Nahed’s lecture (75f.). Modernity and western influence clash with traditionalism and religiosity as portrayed not only by Hala’s ringing cell phone during the lecture (75f.) but also by “[…]: mostly designer shoes, and some thick-soled basketball shoes […]” in front of the ‘zawiya’ (72), Hala’s bag with a “[…] makeup clutch and nail kit” (76) as well as women’s hijabs in the prayer room, including Nadia’s western “[[…] silk Hermès scarf

\(^{851}\) ‘iftar’ refers to Ramadan’s fast-breaking meal after sunset (See Fathi 2012: 97).
[...]” (72) and Camelia’s “[...] sheer black robe over her clothes and [...] gold-embroidered headscarf.” (73) The ringing of the cell phone not only functions as a sign of both modernity and western influence but also reminds the praying women of their actual modern aspirations in life and (over)consumption of modern, western goods. Doctora Nahed’s call to distance oneself from modern materialism and its superficialities underlines the absurdity of society’s discrepancy (74), as does Nadia’s comparison of Sayid’s hair salon with the traditional ‘zawiya’ as today’s women’s meeting place (73). It is exactly this call for self-control and Doctora Nahed’s critique of Sheikh Sharmawi’s idea that a woman needs her husband’s consent to do good (75) which emphasise as well the female preacher’s Muslim feminist perception. Besides her dislike of western imperialism and neo-colonialism, it is her critique of men’s patriarchal misinterpretations and misapplications of the Islam that thus defines Doctora Nahed’s religio-, socio- and gender-political argument. Furthermore, her reference to the Hadith on Aisha, the goat and the Prophet (75) illustrates Doctora Nahed’s clear conception of a coexistence of gender respect, female agency and responsibility, and Islamic belief and practice in the Muslim Arab world:

 […] I recognize in her the headstrong, independent-minded Nana El-Bishry who rebelled against society’s expectations for a woman of her generation; the one who insisted on a divorce, defied convention, and traveled to England with such high hopes of making a new life for herself. She may have come back defeated, but if she submitted to God’s plan for her it was on her own terms. And if that means taking on the establishment clerics, she clearly relishes the challenge. (75f.)

Although the Serageldinian chameleon Nadia tries to comprehend Doctora Nahed’s Muslim feminist point of view with regard to gender respect and religiosity, the conservatism-liberalism dichotomy within and the religious hypocrisy and moral absurdity of the contemporary Egyptian society finally unsettle Nadia and fully abate her hope of rapprochement at the end of the lecture: “[…]; what seemed a bridgeable distance a few minutes ago now seems hopeless. I won’t try to speak to Doctora Nahed; even if she remembers me, it is too late now.” (77) In this context, it is also Camelia’s apology that re-emphasises the difference between Nadia’s progressiveness, westernisation and secularism and the Egyptian women’s traditional perspectives and religiosity: “‘She lives abroad, she doesn’t know any better, she didn’t think to turn off her phone.’” (76) By refusing to reapproach Doctora Nahed, Nadia reveals the secular
feminists’ critical attitude towards the values and laws of traditional Islam, and their call for the decrease of religious influence on society. Taking a closer look at the role and socio-cultural context of the author, it can be argued that the Arab American writer Samia Serageldin eventually fails — just like the Anglo-Arab writer Ahdaf Soueif in “The Water-Heater”\(^{852}\) — to mediate between western modernity and the East’s closed culture and traditionalism in her short story “The Zawiya”, and rather contrasts her own secular and orientalist (westernised) feminist perspective with Egypt’s strict re-Islamisation. As Serageldin points to early 21st-century Egyptian society’s discrepancy throughout the storyline and ends it with a socio-cultural and religious alienation of the westernised protagonist, she stresses a lacking solidarity of sisterhood between West and East, especially within the context of the interaction between gender (equality) and religion.

Unlike Samia Serageldin’s and Ahdaf Soueif’s critique of the patriarchal authority of religion, it is third-generation ‘female’ author Leila Aboulela who dedicates herself to the Islamic faith and its liberating force for women.\(^{853}\) By focusing on religion in her writings, Aboulela attempts to retranslate the Islam within the context of Arab British literature in order to contrast it with the contemporary western presentation of the Islam as a place of “[…] political radicalism, religious fundamentalism, global jihad, intellectual extremism, and new Islamism.”\(^{854}\) The author of novels, short stories and radio plays was born in Cairo, Egypt, in 1964 to an Egyptian mother and a Sudanese father. However, Leila Aboulela spent her childhood years in Khartoum as her family moved to the Sudan soon after her birth. There, the author of a so called mixed heritage attended the Khartoum American School, The Sisters’ School — a Catholic High School, as well as the University of Khartoum.\(^{855}\) With the author’s first relocation to Britain in the late 1980s, she became sensitive to the different religious culture of the West, and this feeling has continually persisted.\(^{856}\) After a 10-year stay in Scotland, Aboulela moved to Jakarta, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha between 2000 and 2012. Today, the

\(^{854}\) See Abdel Wahab 2014: 225.
author lives in Aberdeeen, Scotland.\textsuperscript{857} It is interesting that even though Aboulela believes that the English word choice does not carry the same divine and spiritual influence as attributed to her mother tongue Arabic, she generally writes in English by choice.\textsuperscript{858} This applies not only to her collection of short stories \textit{Coloured Lights} (2001) but also to her successful novels \textit{The Translator} (1999), \textit{Minaret} (2005), \textit{The Kindness of Enemies} (2015) and \textit{Lyrics Alley} (2010). The latter, a work of historical fiction, was produced during Aboulela’s residence in Abu Dhabi and is set in pre-independent Sudan of the 1950s\textsuperscript{859} – or what was called Anglo-Egyptian Sudan (1899-1956) after Lord Kitchener’s victory in the Battle of Omdurman in 1898 – which became independent from Anglo-Egyptian rule and administration in 1956\textsuperscript{860}. To be precise, the plot of the historical novel’s family saga was inspired by the life story of her father’s cousin – the poet Hassan Awad Aboulela.\textsuperscript{861} The 18-year-old Hassan had a swimming accident while he attended Victoria College in the 1950s.\textsuperscript{862} In \textit{Lyrics Alley}, it is the young student Nur who is paralysed after a swimming accident in Alexandria and ends up giving up on his dream of marrying his beloved cousin Soraya. Mahmoud, his ambitious father, not only acts throughout the storyline as the family patriarch but also moves between the Sudan and Egypt, traditionalism and modernity, and his first wife Waheeba and his second wife Nabilah.\textsuperscript{863}

As the novel’s settings are Sudan and Egypt, it needs to be pointed out that both countries had a British colonial history but they underwent the colonial control, power system and administration in different ways as represented by Aboulela’s \textit{Lyrics Alley} and reflected by the main characters’ power relationships within the novel.\textsuperscript{864} As Claire Chambers writes in \textit{British Muslim Fictions: Interviews with Contemporary Writers} (2011), pre-1956 “Sudan was not technically part of the British Empire nor was it administered by the Colonial Office. This was because it was an Anglo-Egyptian

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{858} See Cherry 2013: 1.
\item \textsuperscript{859} See Cherry 2013: 2.
\item \textsuperscript{860} Claire Chambers, “An Interview with Leila Aboulela,” \textit{Contemporary Women’s Writing} 3.1 (2009): 86-102, here 86f.
\item \textsuperscript{861} See Aboulela 2012; See Aboulela 2012: 309; See Chambers 2009: 87.
\item \textsuperscript{862} See Aboulela 2012; See Chambers 2009: 87.
\item \textsuperscript{863} See Aboulela 2012. All quotations from this edition are from now on cited internally in the text.
\item \textsuperscript{864} See Chambers 2011: 95.
\end{itemize}
Condominium. In spite of Sudan’s official status as a condominium under shared Egyptian and British rule, it was the British who were the actual driving force behind the colonial process in Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. Unlike Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Egypt was a British protectorate under the Crown’s military, political and governmental control, and thus officially part of the British Empire’s power system from 1914 to 1922. Even though the Islamic interpretations and practices have always differed in this North African region, relationships on the cultural, migrational and historical levels still exist between Egypt and the northern part of the Sudan after the countries’ independences. As encouraged and enforced by Egypt during Anglo-Egyptian rule, the Sudan is today characterised by an ethnic division and ongoing civil war between the northern Arab Muslims and the African Christians in the South.

As exemplified by the rarely discussed novel *Lyrics Alley*, Leila Aboulela, a writer of “[…] counter-discourses in general and counter-Orientalism […]”, makes particular use of post-colonial non-western writing back to the centre and to itself in order to rewrite the orientalist representation of Arab women, patriarchy and sexuality, and to achieve a cultural translation in an Arab British literary setting. She hereby demonstrates her post-colonial methodology of representations of Muslim Arab gender roles and relations by means of the contrasting motifs of modernity/traditionalism and secularism/religiosity, and the binary oppositions between West/East and westernised 1950s Egypt/pre-independent Sudan. Although Leila Aboulela claims in an interview with Claire Chambers in *British Muslim Fictions: Interviews with Contemporary Writers* that *Lyrics Alley* lacks – unlike her earlier works – the binary opposition

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872 See Abdel Wahab 2014: 220.
873 See Chambers 2009: 89.
874 See Abdel Wahab 2014: 220, 237.
876 See Chambers 2011: 100.
between West and East, my dissertation’s literary analysis will yet prove that Leila Aboulela indeed makes – similar to Ahdaf Soueif and Samia Serageldin – use of the West/East division in her storyline, especially when elaborating on the fictional Muslim Arab gender roles and relations. What is more, she is able to interlink – by means of her choice of contrasting motifs – the main theme of gender with a religious focus in her work but yet achieves to demonstrate a similar portrayal of Muslim Arab gender relations and roles as her male and female contemporaries already discussed in chapter 4. of my doctoral dissertation. Even though Waïl S. Hassan denies the fact of Aboulela’s post-colonial writing back to the centre, he correctly points out the author’s engagement with “[...] cultural misconceptions and stereotypes, the possibilities of cultural translation, the relationship between the sacred and the secular, and the status of women in male-dominated societies” in Lyrics Alley and her prior works. Just like the diasporic writer Samia Serageldin and Leila Aboulela’s role model Ahdaf Soueif, the British-Sudanese author’s focus in Lyrics Alley is not only on the social standing of Muslim Arab women and their relationships to men and female comrades but also on the acts of female circumcision (female genital mutilation) and veiling. In particular, the latter functioned in the 1950s as a symbol of nationalist belief, traditional values and religious orientation. Leila Aboulela, however, claims in this connection in an interview with Claire Chambers that only a small amount of Cairene women publicly veiled during this period of time as religion was not openly practised by Egyptians. Unlike her veiled Sudanese main characters Fatma (14, 69, 74, 252) and Hajjah Waheeba (16f., 105), Leila Aboulela started to wear the hijab in Britain in 1987 not as a religious marker but rather as a symbol of liberty, protection and self-fulfilment in the West. Despite her religious strictness, Aboulela in fact believes that Islam does not command women to cover their faces or perform the act of female circumcision (female genital mutilation). Although female genital mutilation was banned during Anglo-Egyptian rule, the practice continued in Sudan in the absence of prosecutions and an educational
deficit, especially among Sudan’s rural population. According to Claire Chambers in “An Interview with Leila Aboulela” (2009), Aboulela has been decisively influenced by Muslim feminism in her youth. Notwithstanding this, it cannot be denied that the author writes both Muslim and secular feminist books depending on her actual intended underlying message of her writings. In her novel *Lyrics Alley*, she even combines both secular and Muslim feminist approaches. What seems crucial to her feminist literary implementation, is the fact that Aboulela does not structure her women’s experience into explicit forms of feminist resistance such as might be found in al-Sa’dawi or Faqir. Like Soueif, in her fiction she rewrites the competing ideologies of Western culture and Islamic nationalism by resituating the usual areas of conflict into a feminised of her own choosing.

Closely related to the issue of feminist literary implementation is also the aspect of freedom that becomes part of Aboulela’s discussion of gender roles and relations in *Lyrics Alley*. To be precise, the award-winning author of the Caine Prize for African Writing integrates into her novel different perceptions of freedom within the Arab world and thereby enhances her post-colonial writing back strategies. As *Lyrics Alley* thus shows, the cultural importance of and the desire for freedom are interpreted and demanded differently around the world as cultural impacts, including patriarchy, gender inequality and female emancipation, define the prevalent concepts. Associated with the aspect of freedom is also the focus on the individual, class, gender, ethnicity, economic prosperity, access to opportunity and education which differs and is contingent on western and eastern perceptions.

Taking a closer look at the intergenerational and intra-familial gender relations and gender roles in Leila Aboulela’s *Lyrics Alley*, it is the male-female relationships that most decisively define the characters’ social standings and personal developments within the storyline, as well as demonstrate both the clash between and coexistence of the contrasting motifs of traditionalism, modernity, religiosity and secularism in both westernised and non-westernised settings. It is Mahmoud Abuzeid, the family patriarch,
who constantly tries to switch between the traditional world of the Sudan, meaning Waheeba’s hoash, and the modern Egyptian life attributed to western influences as represented by Nabilah’s space in the Umdurman residence and his life in Cairo (27, 268). Throughout the storyline, it becomes obvious, however, that the conflicted male main character Mahmoud is not able to maintain his cultural mobility as his two separate worlds begin to confront each other (31-36, 43, 171-176):

Something had happened this evening that he didn’t approve of. […] Yes, it was the women, Waheeba and Nabilah. His two wives in the same room! It was a sight he had never seen before and never wished to see again. They belonged to different sides of the saraya, to different sides of him. He was the only one to negotiate between these two worlds, to glide between them, to come back and forth at will. It was his prerogative.

As a hybrid cultural agent with Egyptian ancestors (40, 195), Mahmoud also acts as a cultural “[…] translator, […]” trying to reconcile the opposites whenever he crosses the physical and metaphorical borders between the West and the Arab world, as well as westernised 1950s Egypt and pre-independent Sudan. While he is able to adopt his chameleon behaviour in his business life (51-54, 88-92, 190f.) and for a while in his arranged marriage to Nabilah (29, 283, 268), Mahmoud fails to do so in his arranged marriage to his first wife Waheeba (46). Strictly speaking, this marriage can be defined as a relationship based on cultural, socio-political, religious and educational asymmetry and binary opposition. Although the family patriarch appreciates Waheeba’s caregiving during his illness (30ff., 39), hereby readopts his Sudanese accent (30) and after all stresses Waheeba’s key role as Nur’s mother (207, 267) who he will not divorce due to her primary position (29f., 207), Mahmoud is disgusted by her Sudanese heritage, culture, religious background, act of veiling, mental backwardness and disobedience (45-48, 105, 110-113, 199, 204):

Mahmoud, […], had hated Waheeba at first sight; hated her because of her dullness and lack of beauty and, most of all, because she was forced on him. Their wedding night was a disaster, a humiliation he had buried deep and did not talk to his friends about. It was almost a miracle that Nassir and Nur were conceived, but their arrival, and the force of the years, eroded his distaste for her, […]. (46)

889 See Abdel Wahab 2014: 232.
890 See Abdel Wahab 2014: 227f.
Mahmoud despises Waheeba not only for her lack of appreciation of Nur’s education at Victoria College (45f., 110) but also for her strict belief in and performance of the traditional custom of circumcision (47f., 204f.): “‘I will not have such barbarity in this house. I forbid it.’ […] ‘It’s modern talk. We need to stop these old customs, which have no basis in our religion and are unhealthy. Besides, it’s against the law.’” (47) It becomes clear that Mahmoud reinforces – in this scene and in the scene between him and his brother Idris following the outcome of Ferial’s circumcision (198f.) – Waheeba’s traditionalism and backwardness since it clashes with his modern points of view, ideals and looks (18f., 29, 47, 182, 198f.), his progressive idea of an Egyptianised (12, 21) and cosmopolitan Sudan (21f., 52f., 191, 203, 268), as well as his acceptance of and collaboration with British colonial rule (47, 53f., 107). The fact is that Mahmoud directs his criticism not only towards Waheeba but also towards the younger generation, including his son Nassir and his wife Fatma (48, 198). Even though Mahmoud eventually punishes Waheeba with a travel ban to Sinja (204), he fails to divorce her (207f., 275f.) as a consequence of her impertinence (48, 111ff.) and the unauthorised circumcisions of Ferial and Zeinab (186):

‘I explicitly forbade you from carrying out this barbarity in my house. Time and time again, I told you.’ […] ‘[…] You dragged my daughter into this. You were spiteful and wicked and I will not let this incident pass, believe me. Because of this, you are not going to visit your relations in Sinja. I absolutely forbid it.’ […] ‘[…] Tell them you disobeyed your husband. Tell them you broke my word in my house.’ (204)

In this context, it needs to be pointed out that the conflicted character in fact falls back into his patriarchal role when punishing Waheeba for her enforcement of traditionalism and, in so doing, demonstrates both the limits of his modernisation and the persistence of his misogynist views.

Unlike Mahmoud’s modern secular Egyptian wife (182), Waheeba withal veils her body with a Sudanese tobe\(^\text{891}\) not only in her Sudanese hoash (16f.) but also in Alexandria’s modern and westernised setting, which her husband scornfully regards as “[…] incongruous in this most cosmopolitan of cities.” (105) Aside from Waheeba’s religiously influenced act of veiling, it is her belief in Nur’s bewitchment by Nabilah’s evil eye (112f., 175f.) and her demand that he be treated by a spiritual healer (‘faqih’)

\(^{891}\) A tobe is a long scarf or piece of cloth that is wrapped around the body and head.
(112, 160) that underline her religiosity (106, 113), her backwardness conditioned by traditional customs and gender inequality (45, 110, 113), and her ill will (113). These same stand in contrast with Mahmoud’s patience, personal desire for modernity, secularisation and western progress as expressed as follows by the authorial or third-person omniscient narrator: “Vulgar, stupid woman. [...] Without a word, Mahmoud left the flat. He should have divorced the bitch a long time ago. Not only was she ugly and ignorant, she was chock full of venom, too!” (112f.) Once more, it is Mahmoud’s self-appraisal that contradicts his misogyny in this scene.

By contrast, it is Mahmoud’s relationship to his much younger secular wife Nabilah (38, 283) that can be defined as both affectionate and modern. As a progressive couple, Mahmoud and Nabilah live after all in an arranged marriage (38, 85, 182); however, Mahmoud fell in love with Nabilah the instance he first saw her portrait (84f.) and does not stop loving her even when she returns to Egypt and wishes for a divorce due to Mahmoud’s lack of assertiveness and allegiance, as well as Waheeba’s malice and circumcision of Ferial (85, 198, 207f., 265, 267, 275f.): “But he had no intention of divorcing her. Why should he give up something he possessed and cherished? She would eventually have her fill of Cairo and return to her senses. [...] He would forgive her everything if she came back: [...]” (267) Unlike the patriarchal male main characters in Salwa Bakr’s “That Beautiful Undiscovered Voice” and “The Beginning” and Ahdaf Soueif’s “The Water-Heater”, the family patriarch Mahmoud neither (publicly) abases nor dishonours, suppresses or uses violence against his second wife. Nonetheless, he occasionally lays down rules of conduct – in Cairo and in Umdurman – which Nabilah obeys as demonstrated by her stay in Cairo following Nur’s accident (114, 175), her trip to London for the purpose of Nur’s surgery (114, 174f.), and her and the children’s visit to the paralysed Nur in Waheeba’s section of the saraya (170f.). Despite his patriarchal status, Mahmoud is at the same time able to accept Nabilah’s emancipated tone of voice and protests (170f., 207f.), commands, demands (198), convincibility (37) and manners (197) as he is proud of Nabilah’s fitting into his modern cosmopolitan lifestyle in Egypt and his British and westernised Sudanese circles (53, 197): “A week later Mahmoud met Nigel Harrison at a reception in the palace. He introduced him to Nabilah, proud that she was next to him in her jewels and cocktail frock, her fair skin radiant in the lamp-lit garden. In his dinner jacket, with a drink in his hand, Mahmoud was satisfied that they made a favourable impression.” (53)
Besides her modern, secular attitude, it is thus her physical appearance that turns the ‘durrah’ into both a westernised Egyptian in her home country and in the eastern ‘subaltern’ Sudan (9, 30, 53, 74, 170, 176, 184). Soraya, Idris’ youngest daughter, goes as far as to define the “[…] Egyptian city lady, […]” Nabilah as “[…] modern” (9) due to her educational status, motherly love, elegant looks and swimming skills, and takes her cue from her uncle’s second wife (9f., 74, 239, 248, 285f.): “Nabilah’s elegant clothes were modelled on the latest European fashions, and the way she held herself was like a cinema star, with her sweeping hair and formal manners.” (9) Nabilah enjoys wearing and parading her modern European fashion in the style of elegant cotton dresses, silk nightdresses, a swimsuit, handbags, high-heeled sandals, jewellery, make-up and new hair styles (30, 53, 74, 170, 176, 184). Furthermore, she appreciates the western interior decoration, civilised table manners, superior Egyptian staff (24f.) and strict modern Egyptian child-rearing (25) in her space of the Abuzeidian saraya as it contrasts with the otherness, inferiority, “[…] primitiveness […]”, indiscipline (24f.) and lack of culture (84) of the Sudanese family members:

For Nabilah, the Sudan was like the bottom of the sea, an exotic wilderness, soporific and away from the momentum of history. […] Meals too, in Nabilah’s quarters, were served in the dining room, around a proper dining table, with knives, forks and serviettes, not clusters of people gathering with extended fingers around a large round tray, while sitting on those very same beds she had so many objections to. […] Nabilah surrounded herself with the sights, accents and cooking smells of Egypt, closing the door on the heat, dust and sunlight of her husband’s untamed land. (24)

Above all, Nabilah is thankful that her children not only bear the names of the Egyptian royal family (26f.) but also act like and have the looks of modernised Egyptians (24ff., 172). For that reason, she cannot stop reiterating her superior Egyptianness, her aversion to the inferior Sudanese society (84, 275, 281, 283) and her feeling of nostalgia (27, 38) for Egypt since “[…], the Sudan [is] like a province of Egypt, and now she, Nabilah, like her mother before her, [is] yearning for the metropolitan centre.” (38) By regarding Egypt as the ‘metropolitan centre’, Nabilah not only de-centralises Europe but also regards Egypt as both the Arabian West and the Arab region’s cultural centre. Its western culture is only performed by a certain class of Egyptians, and demonstrates a standard against which other Arab cultures, including the Sudan, are measured. Nabilah’s alienation from and hatred of both Sudan’s and Waheeba’s backwardness is reinforced by the barbaric act of female circumcision. At first, Nabilah only tells her
Egyptian grandmother that “‘[t]he Sudanese circumcise their little girls in the most brutal and severe ways. Waheeba wanted to circumcise her granddaughter, Zeinab, but Mahmoud explicitly forbade it.’” (97) In the end, Waheeba achieves to go through with her cruel plan and arranges Ferial’s genital mutilation (186ff.). Enraged by the brutal backward act itself (186ff.), its side-effects for Ferial (187f.) and lastly her daughter’s conversion into the uncivilised or “[…], one of them” (186), Nabilah hits Batool (185) and fires the maid (187): “A progressive, liberal man might not even want to marry [Ferial] in the first place. He would have to be Sudanese, one of them, and Nabilah, casting her vision to the future, had always wished that her children would marry Egyptians. […] Nabilah’s face burnt with shame.” (188f.)

Although Mahmoud is named the patriarch of the backward Abuzeid family, he approves of his Egyptian wife’s superiority belief, her stubbornness and her westernised physical appearance (197) which turns him both into “[…] an image he favour[s], the dashing Bey, a man of the world, sophisticated and dynamic” (197) and, according to Qadriyyah, “[…] one of us.” (182) Nabilah appreciates Mahmoud’s enlightenment (35), non-religiosity (196), and modern and westernised lifestyle in their Egyptian home but lacks understanding for his assimilation to traditional traits, customs and value system in his Sudanese home (29f., 283). It is yet their Egyptian exile and stay in London during which their relationship (re)flourishes and Nabilah conceives affection for Mahmoud, and his modern classiness, assertiveness and masculinity (29, 177):

She felt sorry for him, that rich, powerful man who could not buy a cure for his son. She fell in love with his vulnerability, his chivalry and eagerness to succeed. London drew them together, those three months in the Ritz that might well be the happiest period of their marriage. Free from their respective countries, the two of them became buoyant; […], equalised on imperial soil. Charming London, atmospheric London, solid and looking forward; it made them a couple, a ‘Mr and Mrs’, as was the English expression. (177)

While Mahmoud eventually cannot break away from his Sudanese ethnic background and at the same time sees it as his responsibility to bring progress and self-actualisation (267f.) to the steadily Islamising Sudan (296), his wife cannot bear the discrepancy between her progressiveness and secularism, and the Abuzeid family’s traditionalism and religiosity any longer (24, 41, 45, 102, 106, 113, 207f.): “Nabilah knew that she should be more flexible, that she should adjust, but she was not easy-going enough, and
too conscious of her status.” (24) At Mahmoud’s request, the imperious Nabilah leaves the Abuzeidian saraya in Umdurman in the wake of her husband’s cravenness of divorcing Waheeba (207f.): “‘Divorce Waheeba or else I am out of here.’ […] ‘Listen, it is either me or her.’ […] ‘Go!’ He waved his hand. ‘The door is wide enough for a camel to pass through. Go, I certainly won’t stop you.’” (208). In reaction to his insensitivity, Nabilah symbolically throws the expensive necklace at him (208) and in this manner repudiates and debases the Abuzeidian wealth and quest for progress. As per Nabilah, her husband is unable to abandon Sudanese customs, (marital) obligations and lifestyle in favour of Egyptian and western modernity and freedom (183, 207f., 275f.). In contrast, Mahmoud criticises his wife’s childish behaviour and stubbornness, as well as her lack of understanding for his duty of bringing progress, his intractability, his belonging to Sudan and his to-ing and fro-ing between Nabilah’s modern, westernised space and Waheeba’s traditional hoash (266ff.):

She had shared his life and not understood him. Not understood that he could not leave Umdurman, not understood that Waheeba, for all her faults, was Nur’s mother and always would be. Umdurman was where Mahmoud belonged. Here on this bed was where he would one day die, and down these alleys his funeral procession would proceed. […] Even if Nabilah came back, he brooded, her dismissiveness might continue to rankle, her desire to wrap his Sudanese identity and limit it with spatial classification. From early on she had mistaken his spirited love of modernity for a wholehearted conversion, and she had not taken account of the vicissitudes of Fate. (267f.)

At some point, Mahmoud thus begins to question his own status within the traditionalism-modernity and East-West conflict (268). It is eventually Badr, Nur and her children’s former teacher, who is able to convince Nabilah of her return to Umdurman (287ff.). Nabilah ruefully recalls her husband’s generosity, fairness and visions that have ever shaped Mahmoud’s personality apart from his traditional character traits (288f.): “She should have been his support, she should have understood and appreciated better.” (289) Moreover, Nabilah indulges, dismisses her wish for divorce and relinquishes her hope and demand for modernity and secularism by returning to the East, meaning Sudan, with her children Farouk and Ferial (289, 303). Nabilah’s sudden change of attitude, her return to what she regards as the backward (38, 89, 188, 283), conservative and Islamic (283) setting of Umdurman and thus the re-adoption of marital subalternity at the end of the storyline signify the Muslim feminist
character of Leila Aboulela’s novel *Lyrics Alley*. While Nabilah trades her agency, mobility and modern conception of freedom in the West – including her modern lifestyle and clothing, as well as personal self-fulfilment through handcraft (279, 290) – for a polygamous marriage, marital patriarchy, a religious community, and socio-cultural and gender-political backwardness, she compromises her secular feminist principles in honour of her promise of marriage, her family and her formerly female liberty in a traditional Islamic setting. At first, the description of Nabilah’s modern emancipatory behaviour patterns and western status in Umdurman, and of her modern self-fulfilment in Egypt propagates the need for modern gender equality and respect, the end of patriarchal oppression, and females’ agency. In the end, however, the representation of Nabilah not only highlights – in terms of the female main character’s return to the Sudan – the conformation to socio-cultural mores and Islamic moral values, but also stresses the conception of female Muslim Arab liberty and agency in accordance with Islamic moral values and belief. In this context, I disagree – against the backdrop of Nabilah’s re-adoption of marital subalternity in her polygamous marriage to Mahmoud – with Ahmed G. Abdel Wahab that “[…], both Nabilah and Mahmoud finally succeed to reconcile their different translations of Sudan; they reconstruct a contact zone that links together tradition and modernity.”\(^{892}\) Strictly speaking, Ahmed G. Abdel Wahab’s interpretation of Nabilah’s return to Umdurman incorrectly implies that Nabilah eventually comes home as a strong-minded, modern “[…] role model, as a champion of progress, […]” (286) rather than a rueful and chastened mother and wife (288f.).

It is the younger generation’s gender relations that reflect Mahmoud Bey’s socio-cultural and gender-political personal dichotomy. While the irresponsible Nassir (42, 201ff.) and his veiled wife and cousin Fatma (14, 69, 74, 252) represent a traditional couple in terms of their arranged, unequal and emotionless marriage (3), Nur and Soraya behave like progressive, westernised lovers (14, 70ff.). Nur, a western educated and ambitious student at Alexandria’s Victoria College (9, 43), supports his rebellious cousin’s quest for a modern and western-influenced Egyptian life in the Sudan and the rest of the Arab world (4f.) by both persuading her to learn swimming and diving (74f.) and supplying her with tales about progressive life in Sudan (11f.), English books (9)

\(^{892}\) See Abdel Wahab 2014: 233.
and her first pair of glasses (13): “He was her link to the outside world, that world that was not for girls.” (12) Especially, Nur’s pair of glasses symbolise Soraya’s enlightenment, her resistance to her father’s conservatism (70f., 155ff., 306), and the young man’s respect and affection for Soraya, her dreams and achievements (14, 35, 70). Unlike her obedient and Islamised sister Fatma (4f., 7, 69, 74), the emancipatory Soraya not only wears European dresses from Egypt (69, 73) but also insists on a love marriage to her betrothed cousin Nur (70, 72, 147) based on the model of Nabilah and Mahmoud’s western white wedding (9, 248). Moreover, the most progressive Abuzeidian girl aspires after a marriage freed from her father’s conservatism and backwardness (13), and based on love, mutual respect, equality (70, 72ff.), female right to education (7, 238, 306), self-fulfilment, unveiling, freedom and mobility (4f., 72ff., 245, 306): “She loved travelling to Egypt, and how she didn’t have to wear a tobe in Cairo. She wore modern dresses and skirts […].” (4f.) Inspired by both Nur’s and Nabilah’s thirst for knowledge and westernised lifestyle (9), Idris’ youngest daughter enjoys not only writing English diaries (7) but also “[…] reading romantic novels in which the heroine [is] beautiful and high-spirited.” (8) Whilst she not only fights for her love marriage to Nur (157) but also dreams of living a sophisticated and licentious life and enjoying the freedom and mobility of the 1950s Egyptian people (69, 71f., 74), Nabilah becomes – conditioned by Nassir’s glasses, Nur’s affection for her (70-73) and the young man’s swimming accident (238) – increasingly self-confident, rebellious, progressive and determined throughout the storyline (6f., 71f., 73, 157, 238, 243, 245, 250):

It was the glasses that made her crave a cigarette between her fingers. She wanted the sophisticated look, high heels … […] Nur held her hand and they walked arm in arm like other couples did, unthinkable in Sudan or in the presence of anyone they knew. Here, husbands and wives linked arms, whereas back home they did not even walk side by side. This was what Soraya wanted for them, to be a modern couple, not to be like Fatma and Nassir each in their separate world. (71f.)

Ever since she was a child, Soraya has in fact had a fondness for western culture and religion as demonstrated by her education at and later visit to the Christian Sisters’ School in Khartoum (3, 7f., 140-145, 235, 247) and her attendances of the Christmas celebrations of her Christian friend Nancy (139ff.) and the Harrisons (249). Driven by her strong mind and modern, western aspirations and goals, she refuses to marry Amal’s
brother since she is still in love with her paralysed cousin and, apart from that, regards Amal’s brother as “[…] not progressive enough” (245) given her intended modern living standard of personal freedom, beauty and materialism: “I have specific requirements and he doesn’t meet them. I want to live in a modern villa in Khartoum, I want to travel, I want to have short hair and smoke cigarettes. I want to wear trousers!” (245) The girl’s emancipatory behaviour patterns and female agency – in particular her aspiration for self-development and her preservation of self-esteem – remind the reader not only of Soraya’s initial stubbornness but also of the female main characters in Ihsan Kamal’s “A Mistake in the Knitting”, and Salwa Bakr’s “That Beautiful Undiscovered Voice” and “The Beginning”. Furthermore, it is Soraya’s act of unveiling in Egypt, the couple’s acting out of their feelings and public visits to both the cinema and the beach in Alexandria that also reflect the modern Egyptian life of Mahmoud and Nabilah. Once more, Egypt is represented as the modern and western ‘Eden’ in the Arab world since it contrasts with the traditional and religiously influenced gender roles and relations in the Sudan. Taking a closer look at the sisters’ behaviour in Alexandria, the veiled Fatma, for instance, represents – unlike her rebellious and libertarian sister Soraya – the distinct conception of female liberty and mobility prevalent in the Sudan (69, 74) when she suddenly “[...] prefer[s] shopping to the beach” (69) and abandons wearing dresses for the sake of her marriage to Nassir (74). While Nur’s concept of freedom involves, inter alia, his education at Cambridge University in England (69, 116) and his poetry writing (242f., 255), Soraya associates freedom not only with love and mutual respect, a marriage to Nur (157), the end of her father’s patriarchy (13, 157, 239), the West and European fashion (4, 240), modern Egyptian amenities (4), “[…] the freshness and adventure of new cities” (4) but also with a high educational level and female employment (238f., 306):

She saw herself in a dress and a white coat, stethoscope around her neck, moving forwards, away from Halima and Fatma, separating from them. They would do her housework for her and look after her children while she went to work. All her future fantasies included a villa in Khartoum, modern furniture like the kind of Nabilah had when she was in Umdurman, and daughters who were not circumcised. […], she would cut her hair short like Leslie Caron’s. Paris, with its exhilaration and appreciation of beauty – Soraya would go there, too, and on the Champs-Elysée they would approve of her tall slim figure. (239f.)
Taking a closer look at this quotation from *Lyrics Alley*, it cannot be denied that Soraya’s feminist goal of female freedom and self-fulfilment yet involves both female self-sacrifice and female companions’ oppression. All the same, Aboulela achieves to demonstrate – by means of her female main character Soraya and Nur’s hopeful poems – that gender equality and progress are principally possible in the Sudan. After all, it is Soraya who turns out to be the first girl of the patriarchal Abuzeid family to finish school (3, 8, 235) and to attend university (236f.).

In spite of their mutual affection (70, 152ff., 159f.) and Soraya’s conservative familial mores of solidarity (147-151), she eventually decides to give up on her fight for Nur, to accept their destiny (235, 239, 254, 256) and to marry Tuf Tuf (258, 271, 306) instead. Idris’ youngest daughter realises that a marriage to a paralysed man would mean both self-sacrifice and a step backwards: “She could not be Nur’s nurse. She was incapable of such a sacrifice. She would feel hard done by and ignored, she who aspired, like her Uncle Mahmoud, to a modern, upbeat life.” (256) While her marriage to Tuf Tuf opens up new possibilities for Soraya with regard to her lifelong goal of a modern, western and secular lifestyle, a western wedding, a progressive husband and the chance of a university degree (284f., 306), it is her rejection of real love and the approval of an arranged marriage that underlines the patriarchal influence of both Sudan’s traditional social structure and religious culture as demonstrated by Fatma’s persuading: “‘[…]
This is the natural thing. So stop being stubborn. When the next suitable suitor comes along, promise you will consider him.’ […] ‘Promise you won’t dismiss him out of hand. Soraya, you have to look to the future in a different way.’” (254) Similar to the final scene in Ihsan Kamal’s “A Mistake in the Knitting”, Soraya’s final decision-making can be interpreted in two different ways with regard to the novel’s feminist background and underlying messages. Whereas her quest for and realisation of a modern, western and secular lifestyle detached from Sudanese gender inequality, patriarchal oppression, female subaltern’s (mental) veiling and muteness remind the reader of a secular feminist background, Soraya’s sudden approval of an arranged marriage contradicts the secular feminist orientation of the novel as it undergirds Sudanese socio-cultural mores, and highlights the praise of, conformation to and respect for the values and laws of traditional Islam.
Nur, who is initially regarded by his father Mahmoud as the bearer of hope of the Abuzeid family due to his progressiveness, ambitiousness and high educational level (42f.), enjoys modern life in Alexandria to the fullest (9, 20, 42f.) before the swimming accident (81ff.) hinders him from spending the rest of his life with his fiancée Soraya (159, 163ff.). Although the swimming accident inspires him in time to take up again on his emotional poetry writing against his family’s will (35f., 43), he realises that fate has forced him to take a step backward as he is from now on dependent upon his traditional surrounding, including his conservative and religious mother Waheeba and the rest of the Abuzeid family (160-169). He not only dreams of his old modern life in Alexandria but also of his beloved Soraya (118-121). While Idris (244), Mahmoud (243f.) and Waheeba (242, 244) at first keep condemning Nur’s provocative poetry writing, the family patriarch Mahmoud eventually pockets his pride and overcomes his long-lasting shame (106, 109, 114, 162, 243f.) as he acknowledges literature’s healing capacity (244). Since writing progressive Sudanese poetry and poetry reading function as a gleam of hope and chance of freedom for Nur, he is able to continue life after his accident. Even though writing poetry, his leading role in Umdurman’s national Sudanese literature and reading circle (254ff.), as well as his fame as “[…] poet of love and hope” (308) seem to bring Nur closer to his formerly modern, western and secular lifestyle in Alexandria, he eventually has to accept Mahmoud’s breaking off of his engagement (159, 163ff.), and gives up hope of his life planning with Soraya for the sake of her self-fulfilment:

Through [Tuf Tuf], she is realising her dreams of modernity, discarding her tobe and cutting her hair short, moving away from Umdurman’s conventions, wearing her glasses freely and carrying her degree like a trophy, gliding through the fashionable salons and parties of the capital. Nur would have been possessive of her, he would have held her tight with passionate love, and through and through he was a poet who loved his colloquial tongue, the traditions of his people, the closeness of the Nile and the sounds of the alley. (306)

In the end, it is, however, Nur who turns out to be more progressive than his father since he lets go of his beloved Soraya for the sake of her desire of freedom. Furthermore, Soraya, in contrast to Nabilah, stays strong-minded when it comes to her aspiration for modern self-development and her preservation of self-esteem (238f., 245, 284f., 306). What the reader can detect by this particular comparison of male-female relations’ representations is not only a generational shift when it comes to both western-
influenced and modern-oriented gendered encounters but also the theme of the male Oriental and the female Westerener following the example set by 20th-century Arab male writers\textsuperscript{893}, including Tayeb Salih.

Taking a closer look at the intergenerational male-female relationships in \textit{Lyrics Alley}, it is the fatherly love for and support of Soraya that set Mahmoud apart from Idris. While Idris behaves like an ignorant, oppressive and conservative patriarch (6ff., 36, 48f., 108, 153, 236) who denies Fatma the chance to graduate for the purpose of her arranged marriage to Nassir (2, 7f.) and prohibits Soraya from wearing her glasses (11, 155f., 236) and reading books (155) and newspapers (8), Mahmoud cares about Soraya’s modernisation aims, including her educational goals and her wish for a new pair of glasses. In fact, he regards her as a daughter and sympathises with her views (157ff., 236f.): “[…] I do support you, Soraya. I want you to sit for the Cambridge School Certificate and I want you to go to university. There is nothing wrong with a girl wearing glasses. If you need them, then you must have them.” (158) Despite Mahmoud’s progressive views and support of Soraya’s educational goals, he breaks off Soraya’s engagement with Nur, and consents to and promotes the girl’s arranged marriage to his son’s school-friend Tuf Tuf (273). Even though Idris, for his part, continuously tries to force his traditional attitude upon Soraya (155, 252) by even using violence (155), Soraya keeps up speaking out against her backward father: “‘Yes, I can hear you. Yes!’ she bawled. […] ‘No. No I don’t think that.’ Her voice was flat. ‘These glasses are especially designed for women.’ […] ‘You disgust me, too,’ Soraya mumbled to herself.” (155f.) In contrast to Soraya, Fatma accepts her father’s traditional patriarchal values and religio-social expectations when she agrees to leave school (2, 6f.), give up on her unveiling and western clothing style at school and in Cairo (2, 4f.), and take over motherly responsibility for Soraya (156, 252).

It is Idris’ traditional perspectives, patriarchal behaviour and ignorance at home and in the Abuzeid business that enrages not only his daughters and his nephew Nur (153) but also his cosmopolitan brother Mahmoud (48f., 108f., 158). In fact, the two brothers are of different opinion when it comes to financial matters (6), an appropriate behaviour towards British officials and business partners (48f.), Sudan’s political development following Anglo-Egyptian rule (49), the importance of female education and gender

\textsuperscript{893} See El-Enany 2006: 185.
equality (157f., 236f.), as well as Sudan’s need of social progress as part of the modernisation process through westernisation (47, 199): “Idris was the other backward element in his life. […] Unlike Idris, who was in a jellabiya, [Mahmoud] was wearing his best suit, purchased from Bond Street, and his Bally shoes.” (48f.) In spite of the brothers’ differing attitudes and goals, it is their brotherly love that unites them (106). While looking at the different male-male relations in *Lyrics Alley*, it becomes obvious that Leila Aboulela bases them – in particular the relationship between Nur and Mahmoud, Idris and Mahmoud, as well as Nassir and Mahmoud (47, 201ff.) – on the binary opposition between pride and shame. All the same, it is the family honour and solidarity that binds the Sudanese family clan together.

Just like Ihsan Kamal in “A Mistake in the Knitting”, Leila Aboulela interlinks both male-female and female-female relationships with the main contrary but consistent forces of traditional and modern behaviour patterns and viewpoints, as well as religiosity and secularism in order to draw attention to women’s oppression by, and potential and necessity to revolt against authoritarian, patriarchal forces. Although the two Abuzeid sisters Soraya and Fatma have a close sisterly relationship, Soraya has – as already mentioned – modern, secular points of view, inspired by western influences, that contrast with Fatma’s traditionalism and religious self-fulfilment (69, 74, 78, 245, 253f.). On the one hand, it cannot be denied that the older sister enables Soraya to wear a pair of glasses provided by Nassir (70f.). On the other hand, Fatma calls for her rebellious sister to wear the tobe (237) and to behave properly in public (70, 74, 78): “[…] ‘Every day you two get more ridiculous than the day before. Behave, girl.’ […] ‘Soraya, behave or I will send you back.’ […] ‘Back to Cairo. Back to Umdurman.’” (78) Despite Soraya’s rebellious character and modern demands, Idris’ youngest daughter listens to her older sister and follows her order to live a life of her own after Nur’s accident and to consider the next suitable suitor in order to become independent from her father (253f.).

At the close of the gender roles and relations’ analysis of Leila Aboulela’s *Lyrics Alley*, one needs to point out once more the female-female dynamic between Nabilah and Waheeba as it strongly embodies the clash between and coexistence of the contrasting motifs of traditionalism and modernity, religiosity and secularism, and West and East. Although Mahmoud tries to keep his two separate worlds, meaning the westernised and
non-westernised spheres, apart from each other, he is yet unable to avoid a confrontation between his two wives Nabilah and Waheeba. As already discussed, Nabilah is portrayed – up to her loss of agency and her return to Umdurman – as an emancipated and strong-minded woman who aims at getting her will and bewitches her husband. Leila Aboulela’s representation of Nabilah’s youthful female agency, ability of articulation and strength remind us of the three daughters’ character traits in Yusuf Idris’ secular feminist short story “House of Flesh”. It is this representation of a modern, western and secular Nabilah that clashes with Waheeba’s traditionalism and religiosity. The relationship between Mahmoud Abuzeid’s two wives can be defined as confrontational, envious and hate-filled (31ff., 36, 172-176, 182f., 189) as demonstrated by their encounter at their husband’s sick bed (31-36) and after Nur’s return from his treatment in London (171-176). Whereas Waheeba scornfully ascribes – as depicted by the authorial or third-person omniscient narrator – coldheartedness, malevolence (172, 174ff.), factitiousness (32, 174ff.) and arrogance (172-175) to Nabilah, the ‘durrah’ deems Waheeba provocative (33) backward (33, 172), uneducated (33, 36, 172) and malicious (173, 182f., 189): “How could she compete with me! She, who was obese, menopausal, illiterate. She, who had no concept of fashion or travel. She, who had never walked into a club or read a book or eaten with a knife and fork, or even been inside a hairdresser.” (33) It is in the course of Ferial’s circumcision that the wives’ conflict escalates (189). While Nabilah eventually reconciles (286) with the formerly veiled, bad-mannered and self-assertive Soraya (25, 285), she is unable to come to terms with Waheeba’s backwardness (285f.).

All in all, one may resume that pre-independent Sudan is – by having looked at the interaction between traditionalism, modernity, religiosity and secularism on one level, and the East-West encounter on another level – presented in Lyrics Alley not only as a traditional, uncivilised and Islamic place with respect to Muslim Arab gender roles and relations but also as a contact zone that has the potential to open itself up to progress, modern changes and a secularisation. In contrast stands 1950s Egypt which claims to combine modernity, western influences and secularism as represented by the female main character Nabilah. However, Egypt’s representation as progressive and western is soon challenged by Nabilah’s submission to Sudanese traditional forces. Contrary to Ahmed G. Abdel Wahab’s interpretation, it is eventually Nur and Soraya who solely achieve to maintain their roles as cultural translators by crossing the physical and
metaphorical borders between and reconciling the opposites of “[…] the modern and the authentic, the secular and the sacred, and the foreign and the native.” Unlike the writings by Leila Aboulela’s contemporaries discussed in chapter 4., the British-Sudanese writer’s novel does not imply one underlying message in *Lyrics Alley*. By combining secular and Muslim feminist processes, the author gives the female reader the chance to deal with and choose between two approaches to female self-fulfilment, liberty, agency, western influence, and the importance of religious values and faith.

It is Tayeb Salih’s 1966 published Arabic novel *Season of Migration to the North*, a highly controversial piece of writing in the Arab world due to its critical approach to traditional Muslim Arab gender politics, which forestalls Samia Serageldin, Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela in their representations of traditional patriarchal and religiously influenced gender roles and relations. While Salih’s ground-breaking provocative novel of the East-West encounter was permitted in the Sudan until the 1990s, other Arabic countries such as Egypt temporarily or permanently banned it from its literary markets. What makes the novel highly controversial in the Muslim Arab world to date is – with respect to its representations of women and male-female relationships in particular – the comparison of and clash between modernity, meaning modern female emancipation and male cosmopolitanism, and traditional patriarchy and misogyny in both Sudanese and diasporic British settings. Salih’s two emancipated female main characters, the English Jean Morris and the Sudanese Muslim Hosna Bint Mahmoud, challenge however their understanding of traditional male domination of women in both post-World War I Britain and pre-/post-independent Sudan.

What makes *Season of Migration to the North* a unique diasporic Arab piece of writing is that the Sudanese author Tayeb Salih – whose writings have functioned as an intertextual point of reference for Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela – wrote the novel during his British exile in London in the 1960s, and first published it not in

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894 See Abdel Wahab 2014: 230.
895 Tayeb Salih’s novel *Season of Migration to the North* was first translated into English by Denys Johnson-Davies in 1969 (See Jayyusi 2005: 642).
899 See Chambers 2011: 249.
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English but rather in Arabic in a Lebanese literary magazine called Hiwar[^901]. In an interview with Mohammed Shaheen in 2001, diasporic writer Tayeb Salih declares that writing in English was never an option for him as

> [f]or me language is very important. I like to write in my mother-tongue – Arabic. For one thing, Arabic is a language capable of conveying ideas and images. It is a very rich language. And as you know part of the pleasure of writing is to experiment with language. I cannot do that with a language which is not my own. And another thing, I do not believe I have a sufficient command of English to enable me to do so.[^902]

At the same time, he appreciates (English) translations since Arabic literature has – despite its appreciation by the West – not been accessible to a western readership in the same way as literature written in one of the major European languages. In spite of his belief in Arabic as the language of fiction, he respects Anglo-Arab writers, including Ahdaf Soueif, who write in the language of their exile in order to introduce Muslim Arab fiction to a wider western readership.[^903]

Born in central northern Sudan in 1929, the diasporic short-story writer and novelist attended the University of Khartoum and the University of Exeter before he worked for the Arabic Service of the BBC in London.[^904] It was in 1952 London that Salih – similar to his protagonist Mustafa Sa’eed almost 40 years earlier – was first confronted with British culture on western soil. British-Sudanese writer Jamal Mahjoub writes in this context in the author’s obituary in 2009 that “Salih’s encounter with the west was to mark his fiction and his life, though his depiction of village life in northern Sudan formed the centrepiece of most of his fiction. Through a rendering that is both realistic and absurdist, he transformed that humble setting into a universal stage.”[^905] Before he permanently settled down in Britain up to his death in 2009, Tayeb Salih worked as Director-General of Information in Qatar, and held positions at UNESCO in Paris and

[^901]: See Salih 2003: v. All quotations from this edition are from now on cited internally in the text.
in the Gulf States.\textsuperscript{906} Aside from the novel \textit{Season of Migration to the North}, he is also the author of the world-acclaimed Arabic novella \textit{The Wedding of Zein} (1962) which is characterised by a strikingly sardonic humour in terms of sexualisation and religiosity\textsuperscript{907}, and has decisively affected Leila Aboulela’s socio-cultural and religious post-colonial counter-narrative\textsuperscript{908}.

Even though Salih’s novel can be defined as secular feminist, Leila Aboulela describes \textit{Season of Migration to the North} in an interview with Claire Chambers in 2009 as “[…] a highly masculine book, […].”\textsuperscript{909} Strictly speaking, this has to do with what Musa al-Halool describes in 2008 as the novel’s “[[…]] conceptualization of colonialism as rape and of anti-colonial struggle as sexual revenge”\textsuperscript{910} which is depicted by Mustafa Sa’eed’s self-liberation from colonialism. Unlike Aboulela, Salih also critically addresses – similarly to Nawal El Saadawi, Yusuf Idris, Salwa Bakr, Ahdaf Soueif and Samia Serageldin – the authority of religion against a secular feminist background in his fictional writing. In so doing, he combines the contrasting motifs of traditionalism and modernity\textsuperscript{911} with the binary opposition between religiosity and secularism. On yet another dimension, he places his representations of cross-generational gender relations and clashes between gendered generations\textsuperscript{912} into the context of the discourses on and the eras of imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism. As Mona Takieddine Amyuni writes in her article “The Arab Artist’s Role in Society. Three Case Studies: Naguib Mahfouz, Tayeb Salih and Elias Khoury” (1999), the novel thus depicts “[[…]] the […] dialectical interaction between East and West, Black and White, Muslim and Christian.”\textsuperscript{913} As a diasporic writer of the second generation, who preferred writing in Arabic rather than in the language of his British exile, Tayeb Salih situates – unlike the female Anglophone diasporic writers in \textit{chapter 4.2}. – the East-West or South-North encounter and binary opposition between traditionalism and modernity not only in a non-western but also in a western setting. This enhances both his writing back to the

\textsuperscript{906} See Jayyusi 2005: 642; See Salih 2003.
\textsuperscript{907} See Jayyusi 2005: 642.
\textsuperscript{908} See Chambers 2009: 96.
\textsuperscript{909} See Chambers 2009: 96.
centre strategy with regard to his discussion of imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism, and his idea of self-critique of Sudanese socio-cultural and religious customs and national politics (writing back to itself strategy).\textsuperscript{914} It is particularly his reversion of European colonialism by means of his male protagonist Mustafa Sa’eed that Salih’s writing manages to counteract Britain’s superiority belief, re-narrate the imperial history of his home country Sudan and challenge the historic dualism between the East’s traditionalism and the West’s modernity.\textsuperscript{915} Therefore, \textit{Season of Migration to the North} can be situated “[…] between the traditional categories of East and West – that confusing zone in which the culture of an imperial power clashes with that of its victims – the antithetical relationship between which provides much of its driving force.”\textsuperscript{916}

It is – as already mentioned in the dissertation’s \textit{introduction} – Tayeb Salih’s sympathy for Muslim Arab women, his quest for equal rights, and his awareness and condemnation of society’s patriarchal oppression of women in both pre- and post-independent Sudan\textsuperscript{917} that have had a lasting effect on the storyline. It cannot be denied that these aspects also shaped the feminist secular character of, moral and call for change in \textit{Season of Migration to the North}. Along with Naguib Mahfouz, that pioneer of the Arabic novel, Tayeb Salih is known for his demands for change of Arabs’ and Westerners’ social perceptions.\textsuperscript{918} For this reason, he intended to raise his readership’s awareness around development and progress, gender equality, gender relationships based on love and respect, and freedom in the non-fictional Arab world as the latter constitutes, inter alia, the basis for “[…] creativity.”\textsuperscript{919} Against this backdrop, I specifically disagree with Saree S. Makdisi that \textit{Season of Migration to the North} “[…] lacks any firm conclusion or resolution, […]”\textsuperscript{920} which the reader can draw on with regard to the storyline’s representation of the long-time unspoken problems associated with the interaction between “[…] gender, sexuality, violence, male hegemony, and

\textsuperscript{914} See Takieddine Amyuni 1999: 209.
\textsuperscript{915} See Makdisi 1992: 807, 811, 816f.
\textsuperscript{916} See Makdisi 1992: 807.
\textsuperscript{917} See Takieddine Amyuni 1999: 214.
\textsuperscript{918} See Takieddine Amyuni 1999: 119f.
\textsuperscript{919} See Takieddine Amyuni 1999: 220.
\textsuperscript{920} See Makdisi 1992: 815.
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colonialism [...]”921 At the same time, I concur with Makdisi that “Season of Migration to the North does not merely reinvent the present, it opens up new possibilities for the future”922 in post-independent Sudan, especially with regard to the novel’s secular feminist call for change, moral values and wishful thinking inherent in the fictional narrative.

Season of Migration to the North has been widely though pertinently and one-sidedly researched, in particular with respect to its inherent anti-colonial discourse and representation of non-western masculinity923, the male oppression of women in the Sudanese village924 or the emancipation of the Sudanese female main character925. My approach to Salih’s novel rather focuses on its reading as a continuum in terms of the relationships between and the movements of the main characters throughout both of the narrative’s settings, West and East, and as a representation of writing back to the centre and to itself strategies. It is the frame narrative’s first-person narrator who introduces the reader to the story of Mustafa Sa’eed, Wad Rayyes, Hosna Bint Mahmoud, Bint Majzoub, Mahjoub, the narrator’s father and his grandfather in the Sudanese village Wad Hamid. As described by the unnamed narrator upon his return to the Sudanese village in 1953 after a seven-year study visit in Britain (1f.), it is the idea of western licentiousness, female promiscuity and unveiling that dominates the traditional and religious villagers’ non-western image of the West (3f.): “They say that the women are unveiled and dance openly with men. ‘Is it true,’ Wad Rayyes asked me, ‘that they don’t marry but that a man lives with a woman in sin?’” (3) Although the narrator convinces the traditional Sudanese villagers “[...] that Europeans [are], with minor differences, exactly like them, marrying and bringing up their children in accordance

with principles and traditions, that they [have] good morals and [are] in general good people.” (3), he is aware of their fear of secular and modern, western influences and changes as portrayed, inter alia, by Bint Majzoub and the villagers’ sense of foreboding regarding “[…] ‘[…] an uncircumcised infidel for a wife’” for the narrator (4). In recent years, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan has undergone agricultural changes as part of the British westernisation and modernisation process in the Arab world as displayed by the Nile pumps. It is the modern mechanisation that has replaced the continuity of traditionalism as represented by the former water-wheels (4). It is upon the narrator’s return to his village that he is also re-confronted with traditional gender inequality, marriage customs, and women’s suppression by socio-culturally and religiously influenced patriarchy. During his absence, Hosna Bint Mahmoud, the narrator’s childhood friend (100), has been married off by her father Mahmoud to the religious and prosperous incomer Mustafa (6f.) as, according to the grandfather, “[…] ‘[t]hat tribe doesn’t mind to whom they marry their daughters.’” (6) Moreover, society’s gender segregation continually dominates not only the public but also the private sphere, with housewives dining and sojourning in their separate quarters (11), and men misogynistically and paternalistically misusing and discrediting the act of divorce through swearing (14).

It is the embedded story, narrated by Mustafa Sa’eed, which brings the reader back to Sudan’s early 20th-century status as a condominium jointly ruled by Britain and Egypt. By narrating the life story of his childhood years in early 1900s Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, his studies and academic career at London University during Britain’s 1910s and 1920s, his imprisonment from 1928 to 1935 and his return to Anglo-Egyptian Sudan in the early 1940s, the narration takes the shape of “[…] an allegorical Bildungsroman, […]”927. During his childhood years in late 19th-/early 20th-century Khartoum, Mustafa begins to turn into the detached, cold-hearted, calculating, self-seeking and determined personality (20f., 22ff.) that he later represents during his act of sexual imperialism in London:

‘[…] I learnt to write in two weeks, after which I surged forward, nothing stopping me. My mind was like a sharp knife, cutting with cold effectiveness. […] I was cold as a field of ice, nothing in the world could shake me. […] This is a fact in my life: the way

chance has placed in my path people who gave me a helping hand at every stage, people for whom I had no feelings of gratitude; I used to take their help as though it were some duty they were performing for me. [...]’ (22f.)

Raised by an emotionless woman (19, 23) with “[…]: a thick mask, or rather a series of masks. […]” (23), Mustafa becomes not only an egoistic but also a freedom-seeking young man (23) unhindered by his mother (19, 21, 23): “[…] She and I acted as relatives to each other. It was as if she were some stranger on the road with whom circumstances had chanced to bring me. […] I used to have – you may be surprised – a warm feeling of being free, that there was not a human being, by father or mother, to tie me down as a tent peg to a particular spot, a particular domain. […]’” (19) Since his father’s death has made Mustafa the male leading figure in the family, he has to decide henceforth whether he wants to leave his mother and his socio-culturally ‘backward’ home country (20, 23) for a modern life and western education in Arab’s West, meaning Cairo, or not (23). Just like in Leila Aboulela’s Lyrics Alley, the West, in Salih’s novel, embodies not only the European coloniser’s sphere but also modern, westernised Egypt as the metropolitan and cultural centre of the Arab world (28). The mother’s socio-culturally and religiously inferior and anti-authoritarian status is underlined in this scene by her lacking sense of responsibility and assertiveness: “[…] ‘Had your father lived,’ […] ‘he would not have chosen for you differently from what you have chosen for yourself. Do as you wish, depart or stay, it’s up to you. It’s your life and you’re free to do with it as you will. In this purse is some money which will come in useful.’ […]’” (23) In contrast to his emotionless and detached relationship to his mother, it is both the filial and the sexual feeling towards Mrs Robinson that shapes Mustafa’s puberty in Cairo. Mustafa is attracted by the Englishwoman’s bodily smell, her breasts and eye colour, as well as her unusual armpit hair which represent the western unknown and exotic in the Arab world (25f.): “[…] I felt as though Cairo, that large mountain to which my camel had carried me, was a European woman just like Mrs Robinson, its arms embracing me, its perfume and the odour of its body filling my nostrils. In my mind her eyes were the colour of Cairo: grey-green, turning at night to a twinkling like that of firefly. […]’” (25). While Mustafa develops in Cairo his desire for female sexual attraction, possession and manipulation evoked by Mrs Robinson’s sexuality (25f.), his self-interest, self-enrichment, scheming, lovelessness and coldheartedness increase (26): “[…] At that time I was wrapped up in myself and paid no attention to the love they showered on me. […] My sole concern was to reach London, another
mountain, larger than Cairo, where I knew not how many nights I would stay. […] my sole weapon being that sharp knife inside my skull, while within my breast was a hard, cold feeling – as if it had been cast in rock. […]” (26) Despite his inner strength, Mustafa finds himself rootless and lonely while crossing the border to the West and entering the unknown and cultivated sphere of the British coloniser (27f.). It is in London that Mustafa Sa’eed is able to act out his self-interest, self-enrichment, scheming, determination, lovelessness and coldheartedness acquired during his childhood years in Khartoum and Cairo. By sexually seducing British women as part of his anti-colonial act of revenge and self-fulfilment in western civilisation, he regains masculinity, develops a feeling of sexual ecstasy, craving and possession, and wields power over his female victims:

‘[…] I would do everything possible to entice a woman to my bed. Then I would go after some new prey. […] The women I enticed to my bed included girls from the Salvation Army, Quaker societies and Fabian gatherings. […] My bedroom was a graveyard that looked on to a garden; its curtains were pink and had been chosen with care, the carpeting was of a warm greenness, the bed spacious, with swansdown cushions. […] on the walls were large mirrors, so that when I slept with a woman it was as if I slept with a whole harem simultaneously. […] My bedroom was like an operating theatre in a hospital. There is a still pool in the depths of every woman that I knew how to stir. […].’ (30f.)

Although the "‘[…] ‘[…] heartless machine.’ […]’” (28) sexually empowers his British mistresses (30f., 35, 43f., 68, 139, 142, 146) by means of his penis (120), it is his first wife Jean Morris who leverages Mustafa’s patriarchal domination and polygamy by turning him into her sexual slave:

‘[…] My bedroom became a theatre of war; my bed a patch of hell. […] That bitter smile was continually on her mouth. I would stay awake all night warring with bow and sword and spear and arrows, and in the morning I would see the smile unchanged and would know that once again I had lost the combat. It was as though I were a slave Shahrayar you buy in the market for a dinar encountering a Scheherazade begging amidst the rubble of a city destroyed by plague. […].’ (33f.)

From their first encounter onwards, the emancipated and provocative Jean Morris aims to head for a confrontation with her "‘[…] ‘[…] savage bull […]’, ‘[…]’” Mustafa (33, 157) and bewitches him with her looks and transformative ability as a reaction to his macho behaviour and polygyny (29f., 33f., 155-165). The first-person narrator states in
this respect that one night, during a confrontation between Ann Hammond and Jean Morris, the latter “[…] stay[s] on, standing in front of me like some demon, a challenging defiance in her eyes that [stirs] remote longings in my heart. Without our exchanging a word, she [strips] off her clothes and [stands] naked before me. […]’” (156) While the secular feminist Jean Morris hence resists Mustafa’s traditional conception of Muslim Arab man’s patriarchal role in society and woman’s suppression and sexual enslavement, his mistresses hope for a marriage to Mustafa Sa’eed as “[…] ‘[…] a bridge between north and south, […]’ […]’” (68), allow themselves to be oppressed by non-western male polygamy, patriarchy and jugglery (35), and commit suicide (31f., 34, 68, 140, 145). The relationships between the embedded narrative’s first-person narrator and Ann Hammond, Isabella Seymour, and Sheila Greenwood reveal the orientalist basic conception according to which the male oriental savage or the Muslim South chases the female European coloniser, meaning here the “[…] feminised Other” or the Christian North. “[…] And I am a thirsty desert, a wilderness of southern desires. […]’’” (37f.) At the same time, the female European coloniser is attracted by and curious about the unknown and exotic, and wants to possess it (30f., 35, 37-44, 139, 142, 145f.) as she “[…] – knows no fear; […]’’” (37): “[…] Unlike me, she yearned for tropical climes, cruel suns, purple horizons. In her eyes I was a symbol of all her hankerings. […]’’” (30) Unlike Wäil S. Hassan’s claim in “Gender (and) Imperialism: Structures of Masculinity in Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North” (2003), the European women do not turn native by getting sexually involved with Mustafa Sa’eed in London because the reversed coloniser remains after all the exotic during his sexual relationships. By adopting the European coloniser’s epistemic violence and superiority belief, taking control over and casting a spell over the West and its curious sex-starved women during his early years in Britain (30f., 34f., 37-44, 68), the exotic non-western Mustafa yet oversteps the mark. As a self-described toothless “‘[…] ‘[…] aged crocodile […]’, […]’” (40), which is sexually attracted by female body hair and women’s primary sexual characteristics (41), Mustafa and his multiple identities (35, 40) turn each one of the European women into a traditional woman slave (39), “‘[…] a harlot. […]’” (30) and a carrier of “‘[…] the germs of self-destruction […]’. […]’” (35) without making them ‘go native’:

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928 See Velez 2010: 194, 196.
‘[…] Sometimes she would hear me out in silence, a Christian sympathy in her eyes. […] Curiosity had changed to gaiety, and gaiety to sympathy, and when I stir the still pool in its depths the sympathy will be transformed into a desire upon whose taut strings I shall play as I wish. […] I felt the flow of conversation firmly in my hands, like the reins of an obedient mare: I pull at them and she stops. I shake them and she advances; I move them and she moves subject to my will, to left or to right. […]’ (38f.)

By comparing westernised or western cities, such as Cairo and London, with mountains (24ff.) and European women (25, 28, 34, 39), it becomes obvious that Mustafa disrespectfully defines his female triumphs in Britain not only as sexual seductions of western harlots (30) but also as conquests of mountains and mountain tops (39, 41), meaning female vaginas: “[…] It would be but a day or a week before I would pitch tent, driving my tent peg into the mountain summit. […]” (39) As the English judge later states, it is love – “[…], ‘[…] the noblest gift that God has bestowed upon people – […]’” – which Mustafa repudiates through his acts of seduction (54). However, it is under the spell of Jean Morris that Mustafa finds himself beaten at his own game, sexually and emotionally manipulated, provoked and physically oppressed by his calculating wife (33f., 155-165):

‘[…] She was my destiny and in her lay my destruction, yet for me the whole world was not worth a mustard seen in comparison, I was the invader who had come from the South, and this was the icy battlefield from which I would not make a safe return. I was the pirate sailor and Jean Morris the shore of destruction. […] When I slapped her, she would slap me back and dig her nails into my face; a volcano of violence would explode within her and she would break any crockery that came to hand and tear up books and papers. […] She used to like flirting with every Tom, Dick and Harry whenever we went out together. She would flirt with waiters in restaurants, bus conductors and passers-by. […] I knew she was being unfaithful to me; the whole house was impregnated with the smell of infidelity. […]’ (160ff.)

Nevertheless eventually Mustafa becomes both westernised and modernised due to his wilful destruction of his traditional spitting image of or mirror relation to Jean Morris, and Jean Morris’ revengeful, instrumentalised and scheming killing on request (164f.). Strictly speaking, the character of Jean Morris cannot only be regarded – similar to Yusuf Idris’ emancipated three daughters in “House of Flesh” – as ‘misogyny reversed’ and hence modern western emancipation per se but also functions satirically as Mustafa’s non-western spitting image. In this context, one may thus claim that it is by means of the provocative character of Jean Morris, her scheming killing on request and,
most importantly, the controlled westernisation and modernisation of Mustafa Sa’eed, by which Tayeb Salih symbolically achieves to draw attention to and condemn male traditional conceptions of polygamous marriages, women’s sexual exploitation and their suppressed status at large in the Muslim Arab world. At the same time, Mustafa Sa’eed’s provocative self-liberation – by means of his utilisation of western Orientalisation and stereotyping, as well as his sexual conquest and destruction of insatiable possessive European women – reflects hyperbolically Tayeb Salih’s conception of writing back to the centre with respect to British colonialism. As Waïl S. Hassan correctly argues in this regard, Salih’s Mustafa is not only a parody of European stereotypes but also ironically the product of colonialism.\textsuperscript{930} In the later course of the storyline, the female main character Hosna Bint Mahmoud – Mustafa Sa’eed’s second wife – and her second marriage to Wad Rayyes in Wad Hamid (128) can be regarded as a reflection of the strong-minded Jean Morris and her polygamous relationship to Mustafa Sa’eed (35, 156, 161f.) in post-war Britain. To be precise, it is the female rebellion against and revenge upon Muslim Arab patriarchy and traditional customs, male sexual drive and emotional and psychological oppressions which define the gender relations and roles in both male-female relationships in East and West (122, 125ff., 155-165).

In order to free himself from his westernisation and modernisation in Britain, Mustafa thus returns after his release from prison to Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and marries the traditionally raised Muslim Hosna Bint Mahmoud in Wad Hamid (6). In his traditional home country, he is, however, unable to abandon his westernisation and modernisation (66f.) in spite of his reversion to Islamic faith (64), and it is through his marriage to Hosna that the spell eventually takes over Wad Hamid by challenging the “[…] Islamic patriarchy of the village on the Nile […]”\textsuperscript{931}: “When Mustafa married Hosna, he brought that same Western, bourgeois attitude toward women to their marriage by treating her well. While this may be another subjugation in European eyes, it represents a vast improvement on, and liberation from, the traditional ways of the village.”\textsuperscript{932} As displayed by his last will, Mustafa’s respect for and his faith in his wife Hosna shape their modern relationship in the traditional and religious eastern setting beyond death:

\textsuperscript{930} See Hassan 2003: 311.
\textsuperscript{931} See Davidson 1989: 388.
\textsuperscript{932} See Davidson 1989: 393f.
“[…] My wife knows about all my property and is free to do with it as she pleases. I have confidence in her judgement. […]” (65) In this regard, it is the Nile’s flow direction “[…] from south [sic] to north [sic], […] from west [sic] to east [sic]” (62) that represents the continuum of Mustafa’s life journey, personal development and relationship to women as it reaches alterably beyond borders. At the same time, the Nile’s final flow direction to the East indicates, in particular, both Mustafa’s and the unnamed narrator’s (1f., 49) return to the persistency of traditionalism and religiosity within the Sudanese village of Wad Hamid, as well as their relationships to Hosna Bint Mahmoud. In spite of Mustafa’s western and modern influence on Wad Hamid, there are several factors that peak the clash between and coexistence of the contrasting motifs of traditionalism and modernity, religiosity and secularism, and West and East in the Sudanese village. These include the unnamed narrator’s return from Britain in 1953 (1f.), Mustafa’s death in the same year\(^933\) (45f.), the unnamed narrator’s condemnation of the villagers’ backwardness and socio-cultural and religious mores and marital customs (86f., 96-99, 131ff.), his denial of his love for and marriage to Hosna (99, 103), and the forced marriage of Hosna and Wad Rayyes in 1956\(^934\) (122).

It is upon the unnamed narrator’s visits to Wad Hamid following Mustafa Sa’eed’s death in 1953 that the young man is not only more and more confronted with the spell and “[…] phantom of […]” (55) the dead ““[…] ‘[…] black Englishman’. […]’” (53) (50-59) but also becomes enraged by the rural, traditional and male-dominated society and religious village life (74-87, 96-99, 103, 121-128, 131ff.), in particular by the forthcoming forced and arranged marriage between Hosna Bint Mahmoud and the 40 years older much-married (77, 79, 86, 128) Wad Rayyes (86f., 96-99):

I felt real anger, which astonished me for such things are commonly done in the village. […] I pictured Hosna Bint Mahmoud, Mustafa Sa’eed’s widow, a woman in her thirties, weeping under seventy-year-old Wad Rayyes. Her weeping would be made the subject of one of Wad Rayyes’s famous stories about his many women with which he regales the men of the village. The rage in my breast grew more savage. (86f.)

Although the villagers develop the dream of progress and prosperity in the course of Sudanese independence and self-government in 1956 (64, 69), they cannot turn away

\(^933\) See Hassan 2003: 185.
\(^934\) See Hassan 2003: 185.
from societal traditionalism and religiosity. The misogynist community stigmatises women as subordinates, sex objects (74ff., 77ff., 80-83, 85ff., 97-100, 103, 122-129, 132), and human devils (123f., 132), and misapplies the Shari’a for the purpose of own interpretations, including gender discrimination935 (78). Accordingly, they also contemn the unnamed narrator – both guardian of Mustafa’s widow Hosna and her children (65, 88), and the neo-colonial blueprint of Mustafa936 – for his secular and modern, western perceptions of marriage (86f., 99, 103), love, respect for women and their female honour (80, 86f., 99, 103), freedom of decision and self-fulfilment (86, 99, 103). Nevertheless, it is the Nile’s flow direction that presages the village’s move towards modernity, secularisation and western progress in the long term as “[…] the river, […] flows northwards, pays heed to nothing; a mountain may stand in its way so it turns eastwards; it may happen upon a deep depression so it turns westwards, but sooner or later it settles down in its irrevocable journey towards the sea in the north.” (69)

As commanded by her patriarchal father and male relatives (98f., 122), Hosna – who combines both affection and self-sacrifice – firstly marries the sexual lecher Wad Rayyes (122) and thus turns into another woman to be conquered by traditional patriarchy and misogyny. It is Wad Rayyes’ lecherous character – meaning his idea of conquering any attractive, sexually mature and even uncircumcised female (74ff., 77ff., 81, 85f., 97f., 100), his sexual exploitation of women (74ff., 77ff., 81) and his polygamous marriages (77, 79, 128) – that resembles Mustafa Sa’eed’s pre-marital sexual behaviour and male gaze in Britain (48) as emphasised by the frame narrative’s first-person narrator (86f.). Most strikingly, the patriarchal and misogynist Wad Rayyes does not – unlike the frame narrative’s first person narrator (5, 80, 86f.) – cherish love (77, 79, 81, 85f., 97f.), considers women as objects of sexual lust (74ff., 77ff., 81, 85f., 122), regards marriage as the framework for all physical and sexual desires (47f., 79, 85f., 122), and thinks of it as a game (77ff., 85f., 97f., 100):

‘Do you know of a widow or divorced woman who would suit me?’ […] ‘[…] Almighty God sanctioned marriage and He sanctioned divorce. ‘Take [women] with liberality and separate from them with liberality,’ [God] said. ‘Women and children are the adornment of life on this earth;’ […]’ […] ‘In any case, there’s no pleasure like that of fornication.’ (77f.)

935 See Ghattas-Soliman in Harrow 1991: 91f.
936 See Kudsieh 2003: 213.
As opposed to the unnamed narrator’s modern empathy with (86f., 96-99) and love for Mustafa’s widow (89f., 104, 132ff., 141), Wad Rayyes’ intention of marrying Hosna against her will (96ff.) further underlines his patriarchal attitude towards and disrespect for women’s honour, choice of freedom and self-fulfilment:

‘I shall marry no one but her,’ […] ‘She’ll accept me whether she likes it or not. Does she imagine she’s some queen or princess? Widows in this village are more common than empty bellies. She should thank God she’s found a husband like me.’ […] ‘[…] Why do you interfere? You’re not her father or her brother or the person responsible for her. She’ll marry me whatever you or she says or does. Her father’s agreed and so have her brothers. This nonsense you learn at school won’t wash with us here. In this village the men are guardians of the women.’ (97f.)

Aside from Wad Rayyes’ patriarchal and misogynist opinion of and sexual seduction of women, it is the sexual innuendos and socio-religious fundamental values of his friends Hajj Ahmed (81f., 86, 122ff.), the unnamed narrator’s father (87), Bakri (81, 122), Mahjoub (103, 121ff., 127ff., 132f.) and “[…] (the manly matriarch) […]”937 Bint Majzoub (75f., 80, 124f., 127ff.) which define the non-western villagers’ socio-cultural and religious small-mindedness, backwardness and arbitrariness. In this context, it is Bint Majzoub who embodies the clash between modern emancipation, secular tendencies and traditional, Muslim moral values in the non-western setting of Wad Hamid. Even though Bint Majzoub appears to be an emancipated, progressive and secularised woman (75ff.) – who was actively involved in her sexuality throughout her eight marriages (75) – the conflicted character nevertheless regards modern, western and secular women’s sexual intercourse and behaviour as non-traditional, dishonourable and irreligious with due regard to their infidelity and uncircumcision (4, 80):

‘The infidel women aren’t so knowledgeable about this business as our village girls,’ […] ‘They’re uncircumcised and treat the whole business like having a drink of water. The village girl gets herself rubbed all over with oil and perfumed and puts on a silky night-wrap, and when she lies down on the red mat after the evening prayer and opens her thighs, a man feels like he’s Abu Zeid El-Hilali. The man who’s not interested perks up and gets interested.’ (80)

Bint Majzoub takes issue here with Wad Rayyes’ questioning of the barbaric act of female circumcision and its relation to Islamic belief (81). Notwithstanding this, she

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continues being amused rather than critical of her friend Wad Rayyes’ male chauvinism, sexism and provocations.\textsuperscript{938} (75, 84): “‘You doubtless run after women because what you’ve got to offer is no bigger than a finger-joint.’ […] ‘Wad Rayyes, you’re a man who talks rubbish. Your whole brain’s in the head of your penis and the head of your penis is as small as your brain.’” (84)

In spite of her religious commitment (76) and traditional socio-cultural and religious moral values as to female sexuality and sexual behaviour, Bint Majzoub downgrades – just like Wad Rayyes – marriage and divorce by regularly “[…] swear[ing] on oath of divorce like a man” (76): “‘May I divorce,’ […]” (75) In so doing, Bint Majzoub’s modern rebellious act of swearing blackguards the Shari’a-governed handling of divorce which allows men to verbally declare a divorce but asks women to go before court and bring evidence in order to file for divorce.\textsuperscript{939} Moreover, Bint Majzoub’s sexual laxity and self-confidence remind the reader of Jean Morris’ modern emancipation and secular feminist tendency. In this regard, it is not only her emancipated language towards Wad Rayyes (75, 77, 84) and loose tongue in general (77), her smoking (75f., 83, 125) and drinking (75f., 124f.) but also the description of her marriage to and sexual life with her late husband Wad Basheer (75f.) that underline Tayeb Salih’s representation of Bint Majzoub as an emancipated and secularised female figure, matriarch and sex maniac in a male-dominated, misogynist Muslim Arab village:

[…] ‘if when my husband was between my thighs I didn’t let out a scream that used to scare the animals tied up at pasture.’ […] ‘if his thing wasn’t like a wedge he’d drive right into me so I could hardly contain myself. He’d lift up my legs after the evening prayer and I’d remain splayed open till the call to prayers at dawn. When he had his climax he’d shout like an ox being slaughtered, and always when moving from on top of me he would say, ‘Praise be to God, Bint Majzoub.’” (75f.)

It is, however, Bint Majzoub’s solidarity with Wad Rayyes and her empathy for his lewdness, as well as her damnation of Hosna Bint Mahmoud’s massacre (124f., 128f.) at the end of the story that not only depict her once more as a loyal follower of male’s traditional Islam, as well as misogynist socio-cultural and anti-reformist values\textsuperscript{940} but also hints at her Muslim feminist conception of female self-fulfilment within the

\textsuperscript{938} See Davidson 1989: 387.
\textsuperscript{939} See Mikhail 1979: 19; See An-Na’im 2002: 172.
\textsuperscript{940} See El-Nour 1997: 161.
framework of traditional Muslim moral values and norms: “[…] This is a great catastrophe that has befallen the village. All our lives we have enjoyed God’s protection and now finally something like this happens to us! I ask forgiveness and repentance of Thee, O Lord.”” (128)

In contrast to the manly, aged Bint Majzoub stands the young and truly modern emancipated Hosna Bint Mahmoud (123, 126f., 132) – a woman with “[…] a foreign type of beauty – […]” (89) – whose marriage to Mustafa Sa’eed has turned her into “[…] a city woman, […].”” (101) With reference to Eiman El-Nour in “The Development of Contemporary Literature in Sudan” (1997), Hosna even functions “[…] as a symbol of her village’s dream of progress and prosperity.”941 Under the spell of Mustafa’s westernisation and modernisation, she vehemently refuses to accept Wad Rayyes’ traditional patriarchal marriage plan (96): “‘After Mustafa Sa’eed,’ […] ‘I shall go to no man.’ […] ‘If they force me to marry, I’ll kill him and kill myself.’” (95f.) Just like the unnamed narrator, who “[…] want[s] love to flow from [his] heart, to ripen and bear fruit” (5), Hosna believes in marriage based on mutual affection and respect (90, 95f.). Thus, by begging Mahjoub (132) and the unnamed narrator’s father to marry her off to the unnamed narrator (123), Hosna – “[…] an impudent hussy […]” and “[…] modern women [sic] […]” according to the unnamed narrator’s mother (123) – breaks with the Shari’a’s code of conduct addressed to women, women’s suppressed and discriminated status within the Sudanese society and the traditional socio-cultural conception of marriage as a loveless gamble (123). Although the unnamed narrator challenges – by means of his love and respect for and moral support of Hosna, and his condemnation of polygamous and forced marriages based on male sexual satisfaction (86f., 96-99) – Muslim Arab gender roles as defined by the Shari’a’s code of conduct and men’s enjoyment of social and sexual freedom942, he eventually fails to protect her. The enlightened narrator refuses to marry Hosna due to shame, moral scruples and his already existing marriage and fatherhood (63, 103ff.). Thus, it is his modern, western and secular belief in a changing world (99) that enables him to distance himself from and to strive for the end of traditional patriarchy. At the same time, it is his self-restraint, passivity and acceptance of the boys’ circumcision (88, 105)

941 See El-Nour 1997: 159.
that turn him indirectly into a supporter of these “[…] things that no longer fit in with our life in this age.” (99)

Unlike the unnamed narrator, his friend Mahjoub is convinced that “[…]he world hasn’t changed as much as you think,’ […] ‘Some things have changed – pumps instead of water-wheels, […], sending our daughters to school, […].’” (100) Furthermore, he does not believe in a foreseeable end to traditional socio-cultural and religious oppressions (100) and political and elitist corruptions (100, 118). It is Mahjoub’s socio-cultural concerns and political scepticism that reflect both the unnamed narrator’s (99, 119f.) and Tayeb Salih’s social criticisms and calls for change. In contempt of his concerns and criticism, Mahjoub suggests marriage to the unnamed narrator and thereby argues in support of polygamy and disrespect for female honour, pride and self-determination (103, 132). Eventually, it is, however, the conflicted character Mahjoub who turns out to be – in spite of his later misogynist critique of Hosna’s determination, rebelliousness, agency and “[…] act of a devil” (132) – the most progressive and level-headed male villager as he tries, albeit unsuccessfully, to convince both Hosna’s violent patriarchal father and Wad Rayyes of dropping their plan of a polygamous and forced marriage (122). Resolutely, Wad Rayyes marries Hosna against her will (122) and the Islamic law for it actually forbids forced marriages. Sonia Ghattas-Soliman writes in this connection in 1991 that “Season of Migration is more than the story of a woman married against her will; it is also the denunciation of hypocrisy and authority in the name of Islam.” Through her marriage to Wad Rayyes, Hosna Bint Mahmoud thus turns into a mute, stubborn and sexually rebellious wife (122): “[…] For two weeks they remained together without exchanging a word. […] He complained to all and sundry, saying how could there be in his house a woman he’d married according to the laws of God and His Prophet and how could there not be between them the normal relationship of man and wife. […]” (122) In this connection, Hosna’s female rebellion against and revenge upon Muslim Arab patriarchy and other traditional customs, male sexual drive and emotional and psychological oppressions remind the reader of Jean Morris’ sexual rebellion and strong-mindedness in London. It is the spell of Mustafa’s westernisation and modernisation that was not only brought to the East by the embedded narrative’s first-person narrator in the first place but also takes shape

943 See Ghattas-Soliman in Harrow 1991: 97.
944 See Ghattas-Soliman in Harrow 1991: 100.
thereafter in the form of Hosna’s emancipated actions and confrontation with Sudanese traditional socio-cultural and religious norms. Hosna’s murder of Wad Rayyes and her subsequent suicide (126f.) finally top the confrontation between her modernity and secularisation, on the one hand, and Wad Rayyes’ traditionalism and religiosity, on the other hand. In so doing, Hosna Bint Mahmoud’s actions destroy “[t]he old oppressive order that ha[s] been in place since Islam came to the region […]”.945 To be precise, Hosna’s murder of Wad Rayyes is a reaction to his sexual abuse of her (125ff.). According to the conflicted character Bint Majzoub, Hosna Bint Mahmoud’s revengeful and modern emancipated action “[…] is something we have never seen or heard of in times past or present.” (124) It is the scenery of the two naked and mutilated dead bodies of Mustafa’s second wife and Wad Rayyes after the abusive sexual act that reminds the reader of the scenery of Jean Morris’ killing on request:

‘[…] Wad Rayyes was as naked as the day he was born; Bint Mahmoud too was naked apart from her torn underclothes. The red straw mat was swimming in blood. I raised the lamp and saw that every inch of Bint Mahmoud’s body was covered in bites and scratches – her stomach, thighs and neck. The nipple of one breast had been bitten through and blood poured down from her lower lip. There is no strength and no power save in God. Wad Rayyes had been stabbed more than ten times – in his stomach, chest, face, and between his thighs.’ […] ‘[…] We found her lying on her back with the knife plunged into her heart. Her mouth was open and her eyes were staring as though she were alive. Wad Rayyes had his tongue lolling out from between his jaws and his arms were raised in the air.’ (126f.)

Similar to Firdaus’ murder of the greedy, lecherous and oppressive pimp Marzouk in Nawal El Saadawi’s Woman at Point Zero946, Hosna’s emancipated act of stabbing Wad Rayyes gives rise to an end of females’ patriarchal oppression and induces the preservation of Muslim Arab women’s pride and honour. In particular, Tayeb Salih’s female subaltern is – unlike Spivak’s assumption that subaltern Third World women are predominantly muted – able to take successful action since Wad Rayyes’ tongue is ultimately “[…] lolling out from between his jaws and his arms [are] raised in the air.” (127) Moreover, it is the patriarchs’ fear of, passivity and surrender caused by the stabbing that evoke in both novels an increasingly female agency and strength947 (127).

945 See Davidson 1989: 396.
946 See El Saadawi 1983: 95f.
4. Representations of Gender in Post-Colonial Arab Literature in English – A Focus on Egypt and the Anglophone Egyptian and Sudanese Diasporas

Just like Firdaus’ death penalty\textsuperscript{948}, Hosna’s final suicide – meaning the knife stuck into her heart and the blood dripping from it (127) – does not symbolise weakness or a plea of guilty but can rather be interpreted as a deliverance from and final victory over male-dominated oppression, fighting spirit and self-respect, as well as a chance for a new beginning since she is killing her paternally oppressed alter-ego. It is her emancipation and strong-mindedness that distinguish her from Mustafa’s British mistresses whose suicides stand for hopelessness, emotionalism and weakness. Hence, Hosna functions – as Mona Takieddine-Amyuni writes in “Images of Arab Women in Midaq Alley by Naguib Mahfouz, and Season of Migration to the North by Tayeb Salih” (1985) – as “[…] the precursor of the future woman of the Sudan, for she is not allowed to live her present, to live her life. […] Her self-sacrifice in the name of dignity and autonomy, the author suggests, is one of the important elements that might bring about the birth of the modern Arab woman.”\textsuperscript{949} It is the female character of Mabrouka – Wad Rayyes’ eldest wife – and her insubordination, cynicism and spitefulness (128f.) that round out the representation of Hosna’s female rebellion against and revenge upon Muslim Arab patriarchy in the Sudanese village: “[…] Wad Rayyes dug his grave with his own hands, and Bint Mahmoud, God’s blessings be upon her, paid him out in full.” (128)

In conclusion, Hosna’s rebellious murder of Wad Rayyes and her suicide not only indicate a new era of self-determined Sudanese women\textsuperscript{950} but also reveal – together with the final scene of the narrator’s decision for life and his aim of bringing progress to the South (168f.) – the narrative’s underlying secular feminist call for change. As Waïl S. Hassan correctly summarises, “[c]olonialism, anticolonial struggle, and traditional society are all sustained by a foundational misogyny”\textsuperscript{951} within Season of Migration to the North. Accordingly, Tayeb Salih aims to demonstrate and convince his readership – by means of the novel’s most progressive Sudanese characters Hosna Bint Mahmoud and the frame narrative’s first-person narrator – that it is worth countering this foundational misogyny and fighting for gender equality, gender respect, female self-fulfilment and social justice in the Muslim Arab world: “I choose life. I shall live

\textsuperscript{948} See Saiti/Salti 1994: 160.
\textsuperscript{949} See Takieddine-Amyuni 1985: 35.
\textsuperscript{950} See Takieddine Amyuni 1999: 214.
\textsuperscript{951} See Hassan 2003: 321.
because there are a few people I want to stay with for the longest possible time and because I have duties to discharge.” (168)
5. Conclusion

Based on the theoretical and historical background information presented in chapters 2 and 3, my doctoral dissertation has focused – within the framework of a text- and context-centred analysis – on Muslim Arab literary (self-)representations of gender by both female and male (exile) authors. By analysing the narrative prose of selected cross-generational writings from Egypt, as well as the Muslim Egyptian and Sudanese diasporas in Great Britain and the USA, my doctoral dissertation’s analysis has proven first and foremost that gender-blind similarities indeed exist among the diverse literary representations of Muslim Arab gender relations and roles examined in chapters 4.1 and 4.2. In this regard, however, it needs to be pointed that my selection of literary works by female and male writers only serves as a specific example of critical literary productions. Moreover, it reflects the long-time gender imbalance of gender-critical Muslim Arab authors that has been the result of a comparatively small amount of gender-critical Muslim Arab male literature in the course of the 20th century and its historical decrease at the turn of the century. By taking a closer look at the second- and third-generation post-colonial Arab writings in chapter 4, the reader is able to detect that the short stories’ and novels’ Muslim Arab female protagonists and their male-female and female-female relationships under discussion are consistently affected by authoritarian, patriarchal forces which rule Arabs’ socio-cultural, political, economic and religious spheres of life. Unlike Evelyne Accad in “Sexual Politics: Women in Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North” (1985)\textsuperscript{952}, my doctoral dissertation’s analysis has revealed that the selected second- and third-generation female and male authors attempt to confront and challenge similarly the prevalent Muslim Arab women’s oppression and gender discrimination which are conditioned by paternallyistically socio-cultural moral values and norms, socio-political malpractices, socio-economic inequalities and religious misdemeanours. What is more, the paternallyistically oppressed female main characters presented in the authors’ cross-generational native and Muslim Arab diasporic writings are able to change in various ways their status quo as subalterns and victims by overcoming their fears, (re)gaining agency, self-reliance and pleasure, as well as rebelling against and/or reversing – at least temporary – the patriarchal social and religious systems which reduce women as the female Other in the non-fictional

\textsuperscript{952} See Accad in Takieddine Amyuni 1985: 57.
non-western world. This finding contradicts not only Evelyne Accad’s argument on women’s role in literature from 1985 that “[…] women remain the real victims. […] They seldom reverse the power structure which oppresses them”\(^953\) but also Gayatri C. Spivak’s theoretical assumption that the female Third World subaltern is predominantly muted, needs representation and is hence rather unable to take real action due to western and national forms of suppression. With the exception of Ihsan Kamal’s short story “A Mistake in the Knitting” and Leila Aboulela’s novel *Lyrics Alley*, the other short stories and novel from the Muslim Arab world and the diaspora can be unambiguously interpreted as both female and male native informants’ literary representations of critical literary calls for change, wishful thinking and even examples for imitation regarding the implementation of modern gender respect and equality, female self-fulfilment and female empowerment alongside the goal of secularisation in a steadily Islamising MENA region. Without doubt, religiosity plays a crucial role in all of the short stories and novels from *chapter 4.* as it defines women’s status and their gender relations in the Muslim Arab world by hindering their full modern resistances to their cultures’ traditional value systems and suppressive patriarchal interpretations of the Islam. Nevertheless, none of the selected (Anglophone) Arab writings – including the post-colonial texts by Kamal and Aboulela – directly calls for the reader to follow a particular path or suggests an ideal solution to Muslim Arab women’s problems and sufferings in real life. Despite their differing feminist orientations, all of my selected post-colonial Arab short stories and novels from Egypt and the Muslim Egyptian and Sudanese diasporas analysed in *chapters 4.1* and 4.2. also show that men are not only closely connected to the “[…] religious authority, the legislative body and the state as well as the laws and inherited traditions”\(^954\) but also function more or less as victims of their own patriarchal social systems. Yet, exceptions exist among the male (main) characters as demonstrated by Camelia’s progressive and secular husband Hazem in “The Zawiya”, the modern and western-influenced Nur in *Lyrics Alley*, and the modern, westernised and secularised unnamed narrator in *Season of Migration to the South*.

By examining and comparing those aforementioned cross-generational, gender-blind and transnational literary representations of Muslim Arab gender roles and relations with each other, it became apparent throughout *chapter 4.* that the diverse Arab feminist

\(^953\) See Accad in Takieddine Amyuni 1985: 55.
5. Conclusion

social discourses with their predominantly secular and Muslim orientations – as introduced in chapter 3.1. – shape the texts’ underlying discussions of gender-related social taboo themes and thus the literary depictions of gender. On the one hand, these taboo themes include the subjects of patriarchal oppression and violence in general, women’s obedience and (sexual) exploitation, rape/sexual abuse, arranged and forced marriages, as well as polygyny. On the other hand, the textual discussions deal – as already mentioned – with any form of female agency and resistance to this oppression, violence, (sexual) exploitation and abuse, including female education, female (sexual) freedom and pleasure, the belief in love, progress and secularism, as well as female self-confidence and the act of unveiling. To be precise, these contrasting textual themes discussed in chapter 4. not only interact with the societies and authors’ 20th- and 21st-century Arab feminist socio-political, socio-cultural and religious orientations but also define the recurrent but contrasting motifs of traditionalism, religiosity, modernity and secularism within the narratives. While the texts’ underlying motifs interact with each other, their interplays are in turn influenced by and simultaneously reflect the prevalent secular and Muslim Arab feminist ideologies. At bottom, my dissertation’s analysis has demonstrated and proven that Ihsan Kamal, Nawal El Saadawi, Yusuf Idris, Salwa Bakr, Ahdaf Soueif, Samia Serageldin, Leila Aboulela and Tayeb Salih work – regardless of their differing generational, ethnic and gendered backgrounds – with those various interactions of themes, motifs and feminist ideologies as part of their distinct narrations. Hereby, the female and male authors not only ultimately present – regardless of differing thematic realisations, interplays of motifs and feminist approaches – a transnational image of Muslim Arab women’s suppressed status, modern emancipations, self-developments and aspirations in their socio- and gender-critical post-colonial Arab literatures but also articulate the gender-blind literary message of the need of (further) gender equality, female emancipation, freedom and justice in the non-fictional Muslim Arab world. This in turn confirms the assumption of a male feminism in the Arab context. Moreover, it cannot be denied in this context that personal experiences with patriarchal, authoritarian oppression, sexual laxity and modern emancipation – as in the cases of Nawal El Saadawi, Salwa Bakr and Yusuf Idris in particular – not only influence the literary depictions of women and their relationships to men but also reinforce the gender-blind critical literary calls for change, feminist moral principles, goals and wishful thinking.
Taking a closer look at the cross-generational Muslim Arab short stories from chapter 4.1., it can be summarised that Ihsan Kamal’s “A Mistake in the Knitting”, Nawal El Saadawi’s “The Picture”. Yusuf Idris’ “House of Flesh” and Salwa Bakr’s “That Beautiful Undiscovered Voice” differ in their motifs’ interplays of traditionalism, modern emancipation and rebellion as forms of modernity, religiosity and secularism depending on the narrative’s underlying feminist approach and contrasting themes. Ihsan Kamal’s short story “A Mistake in the Knitting”, for instance, communicates a different feminist orientation and literary message than the short stories by Nawal El Saadawi, Yusuf Idris and Salwa Bakr, in particular with regard to the praise of, conformation to and respect for socio-cultural traditional morals and values, the Shari’a’s code of conduct, and the Islamic faith. While Ihsan Kamal’s modern emancipated character of Suzanne stands for secular feminism, it is the protagonist’s subaltern and traditionalist sister who eventually defines the Muslim feminist character of the narration. In contrast, it is Nawal El Saadawi’s “The Picture”, Yusuf Idris’ “House of Flesh” and Salwa Bakr’s “That Beautiful Undiscovered Voice” that express the authors’ secular feminist ideology and goals of female agency, mental unveiling and personal freedom through a strategic and provocative confrontation between modern emancipation, rebellion and secularism, on the one hand, and traditionalism and religiosity, on the other hand. In spite of the writings’ differing feminist stances towards religiosity, the Egyptian short stories analysed in chapter 4.1. consistently propagate the end of patriarchal oppression and misogyny, as well as the need for gender respect and equality, female agency, empowerment, liberty and self-fulfilment. Especially, the diverse literary representations of male-female relationships in chapter 4.1. depict men as exceedingly lusty, egocentric and insensitive characters who are – in the course of the storylines – often pushed back to the periphery while the female main characters occupy centre stage and, in so doing, distance themselves from the passive males.

Just like the short stories from Egypt, the short stories and novels by Muslim Egyptian and Sudanese migrants in Great Britain and the USA employ the motifs of traditionalism, religiosity, modernity and secularism in order to present a similar image of socio-culturally and religiously influenced Muslim Arab gender relations and roles as in chapter 4.1. In addition to the recurrent motifs’ various interactions, the Muslim Arab diasporic writings discussed in chapter 4.2. are characterised by the themes of western exertion of influence and (neo-)colonialism respectively, as well as by their underlying
binary opposition between ‘the West/the Self/the North’ and ‘the East/the Other/the South’. The latter, in particular, takes shape in the form of both East-West divisions and encounters in both western(ised) and non-western settings. Except for Leila Aboulela’s novel *Lyrics Alley*, the selected writings by Ahdaf Soueif, Samia Serageldin and Tayeb Salih are solely defined by 20th- and 21st-century secular feminism which challenges the socio-culturally and religiously influenced patriarchy and misogyny, the traditional religious values, the Islamic revivalism, female veiling and (neo-)colonialism in the Muslim Arab world. Leila Aboulela’s *Lyrics Alley*, in contrast, is in so far unique and rather ambiguous with regard to its feminist background and underlying literary message as it combines both Muslim and secular feminist processes. On the one hand, the novel highlights – by means of its female main characters Nabilah and Soraya – the need for reforms regarding women’s gender respect, female agency, women’s (mental) unveiling and secularisation. On the other hand, it demonstrates the limits of modern female emancipation and women’s rights as to the societal importance of religious identity, the Islamic value system and its culture of silence and shame. After all, the female acts of speaking out and physical rebellion remain a shameful given. Unlike *Lyrics Alley*, Ahdaf Soueif’s “The Water-Heater” and Samia Serageldin’s “The Zawiya” address directly and connect provocatively the themes of gender and religion in order to satirise religious hypocrisy and make aware of the absurdity of Egyptian society’s discrepancy. Moreover, the Muslim Arab diasporic short stories by Soueif and Serageldin call pointedly into question Egypt’s late 20th- and early 21st-century phases of re-Islamisation and their gender-specific effects on women’s private and public spheres.

All in all, the selected novels and short stories from Egypt and the Muslim Egyptian and Sudanese diasporas in Great Britain and the USA cross borders not only in terms of their national backgrounds and the authors’ ethnic identities but also with respect to their gender-blind, cross-generational and transnational literary discussions of and textual feminist messages as to Muslim Arab women’s patriarchal oppression, modern female emancipation and rebellion, and the role of the Islamic faith. Strictly speaking, it is, however, the post-colonial counter-discourse to the centuries-long dominant western hegemonic discourse on the Orient’s male despotic rule and sexual oppression of women whereby the socio- and gender-critical post-colonial Arab writings thematically overcome socio-cultural, religious, political, artistic and intellectual restraints. In so
5. Conclusion

doing, they address – by means of their non-western writing back to the centre and to itself strategies – socio-cultural and religious customs and national politics, as well as imperialism and (neo-)colonialism. With respect to men’s misogyny and male-dominated socio-cultural and religious patriarchy, the post-colonial Arab short stories and novels reflect that change is possible in the fictional Muslim Arab world. However, the liberation of women can only be fully attained in the non-fictional MENA region if women continue to gain agency and strength, stand up for their rights and collectively fight for gender equality, female self-fulfilment and the end of socio-culturally and religiously based patriarchal oppression. In so doing, society needs to open up particularly for male change of thinking, as well as religious, socio-cultural, political and economic reforms. In this regard, it is Dalya Cohen-Mor who already argues in her 2005 published book *Arab Women Writers: An Anthology of Short Stories* (2005) that

[a]dmittedly, the traditional roles assigned to women still persist in great measure in Arab society, but at the same time, old barriers have been removed and social frontiers expanded. The new status of Arab women is varied and complex. Some areas of their lives, notably education and employment, show a marked improvement; others, especially the laws regulating marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance, still await reform. Moreover, certain segments of Arab society, such as peasant, village, and bedouin women, have not benefited equally from the process of modernization, which has mainly affected the urban population.⁹⁵⁵

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Um im Zuge einer text- und kontextzentrierten literarischen Analyse in Kapitel 4. die arabisch-muslimischen literarischen (Selbst-)Repräsentationen von Gender zu untersuchen, beschäftigt sich meine Dissertation zunächst mit der theoretischen Einbettung (Kapitel 2.) und den historischen Hintergründen (Kapitel 3.) der postkolonialen arabischen Texte, ihren Autorinnen und Autoren sowie ihrer Epoche. In diesem Zusammenhang diskutiert der Theorieteil die historisch westlich dominierte Beziehung zwischen „West/Selbst/Nord“ und „Ost/Andere/Süd“, im Speziellen die jahrhundertelangen westlichen Repräsentationen der (post-)kolonialen Welt und ihrer
Geschlechterbeziehungen, wobei er den westlichen ethnischen und genderspezifischen Alteritätsdiskursen (Kapitel 2.1.) die postkolonialen Gegendiskurse (Kapitel 2.2.) gegenüberstellt.


Basierend auf der theoretischen Einbettung und den historischen Hintergründen, untersucht meine Dissertation in Kapitel 4. die literarischen Repräsentationen von arabisch-muslimischen Geschlechterverhältnissen und –rollen in der Erzählprosa anhand ausgewählter arabischer (Exil-)Literatur aus Ägypten (Kapitel 4.1.) sowie den ägyptisch- und sudanesisch-muslimischen Diasporas in Großbritannien und den USA (Kapitel 4.2.). Da die Feminismusthematik faktisch die Grundlage der literarischen Untersuchung von arabisch-muslimischen Geschlechterverhältnissen und –rollen in den

einem speziellen Weg zu folgen, oder suggeriert eine Ideallösung für die Probleme und Leiden arabisch-muslimischer Frauen des Nahen Ostens und Nordafrikas.


Abschließend lässt sich feststellen, dass die ausgewählten postkolonialen arabischen Kurzgeschichten und Romane in englischer Sprache nicht nur Grenzen im Sinne ihrer nationalen Hintergründe und der ethnischen Identitäten der Autorenschaft überschreiten, sondern vielmehr mittels ihrer geschlechter-, generations- und länderübergreifenden literarischen Diskussionen von und feministischen Botschaften hinsichtlich

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patriarchalischer Unterdrückung von arabisch-muslimischen Frauen, moderner weiblicher Emanzipation und Rebellion, und der Rolle des Islams soziokulturelle, politische, religiöse und künstlerische Linien überschreiten.