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FIRDAUS' STRUGGLES FOR EMANCIPATION TOWARDS PATRIARCHAL
CULTURE IN NAWAL EL SAADAWI'S WOMAN AT POINT ZERO

THESIS
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirement of the Degree of Sarjana Sasra

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1. Introduction

Literature is not about the written history. It can successfully reflect the society. Forster said that great literature is wonderful that it transforms the man who reads it towards the condition of the man who wrote it (196). There have been many works of women writers who were published to reflect the society. Nawal El Saadawi is one of them. As an Egyptian writer, her works focus on women, sexuality, and religion. She is not only a writer but also psychiatrist, socialist, and an advocate of the women’s rights especially in the Middle East. She indeed reflects Middle East society and transforms the readers towards Middle East condition of her time. For Middle East society, the problems of traditional values are still unresolved. One of them is women’s rights in a patriarchal culture.

Problems related to gender become a crucial problem for Middle East countries. This is because the countries have patriarchal culture, the rule of the father or the power relationships by which men dominate women. According to Moghaddam (2010), in the Middle East the woman status is low as measured by some indicators such as, literacy levels, women’s fertility, health, educational attainment, access to employment, earnings, and political participant. A demographer, Caldwell, labelled the Middle East, South Asia, and North Africa as considering the “Patriarchal Belt” (1982). In the Middle East, the presence of women in the public area is very low. Hafez stated that women in the Middle East face big challenges such as, being denied a right to vote, right to work, and being sexually harassed (2012).

In view of the above is major problem in Middle East countries nowadays because as developing countries, as well as Indonesia, they are in transition to modernization. Some experts who concern with women case are known as feminists, they lead the movement of women and pursue emancipation of women in Middle East society. Women can be treated equally if they fight for emancipation. Emancipation can also reduce the discrimination toward women. There are some ways that women can do to change the world and pursue their emancipation. Such as conferences for women, empowering each other by sharing
experiences or reading literary texts with the main female characters who are strong and independent, and also have courage.

Among these ways literary texts can also be the way to reveal things about society and inspire readers, in this case women readers to get strength in women’s right in a patriarchal culture. It is because the characters can influence readers effectively. According to Morris (1993:7), literary texts provide a more powerful understanding of the ways in which society works to the disadvantage of women. Positive image of female experiences and qualities can be used to raise women’s self-esteem and lend authority to their political demands. Representation is perhaps the most fundamental of all human activities, structuring our consciousness of ourselves and of external reality.

Saadawi’s work Woman at Point Zero as the object of this study reflects patriarchal culture in the Middle East, as the story is set in Egypt. Men domination in economic, politic, and ideological, including social domination were represented in the story. Also, by forbidding women educational keeps women powerless in the story. Therefore, this research discusses Firdaus’ struggles for emancipation towards patriarchal culture. It is important to know why the struggles for emancipation towards patriarchal culture are needed in the society.

Woman at Point Zero is one of the novels that reflects women problems in society. The researcher sees that struggles for emancipation towards patriarchal culture are emphasized by the author.

Whenever talking about emancipation, people associate this word with freedom from control or power. According to Steel (2000:220), emancipation means to become free from the restraint, control, or power of another. It can be about the children’s freedom from their parent’s, the slaves from their masters, the colonized from the colonizer’s rein, or black people from white people’s rule. Therefore, emancipation is a necessary step towards liberation (Arat in Stivachtis and Georgakis. 2008:2)

Literally emancipation means to give away ownership. More broadly, it means to relinquish one’s authority over someone. This implies that the ‘object’ of emancipation, that is, the person to be emancipated, becomes independent and free as a result of the act of emancipation. (Jacques Ranciere: Education, Truth, Emancipation 27). Emancipation always becomes an interesting topic, especially women’s emancipation. Although nowadays women get education and job like men, but still need emancipation because of gender discrimination.
that still found in some part of the world. We can find this topic in any newspaper, magazines, and literary texts. Discrimination against women in all aspects have made women to struggle for their emancipation because emancipation is an important and necessary step towards liberation. They realize that they are treated unequally by their society. This happens to the main character in the novel, Firdaus, she is treated unequally by her society. Firdaus is a prostitute who is in jail awaiting for the death sentence. Since her childhood, she had to suffer a lot. All the men in her life just used her for sexual pleasure. She has never had the courage to lift her hand. (WPZ:10)\textsuperscript{1}

This research concerns on the struggles for emancipation towards patriarchal culture. Based on the explanation, the researcher formulates two research questions as follows:

1. What are Firdaus external conflicts toward patriarchal culture?
2. What is the struggle of Firdaus through external conflicts for emancipation toward patriarchal culture?

Based on the explanation above, the researcher formulates objectives of this research. The objectives of this research are to analyze the external conflicts that Firdaus faces toward patriarchal culture and to reveal the struggle of Firdaus for emancipation.

It is believed that this research would give knowledge of understanding literary works. In addition, this research would make readers more aware of women’s existence, and inspire women to get strength because as Morris wrote that texts influence readers through the characters.

2. Literary Review

2.1. Feminist Literary Criticism

Lois Tyson (1999) says, “Broadly defined, feminist criticism examines the ways in which literature and other cultural productions reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social and psychological oppression of women”. Morris and Porter have definitions of feminism that are acceptable to analyze the novel. Therefore, their definitions will use in this research. Morris (1993:1) states that feminism is a political perception based on two fundamental premises: (1) that gender difference is the foundation of a structural inequality between women and men, by which women suffer systematic social injustice, and (2)

\textsuperscript{1}Nawal El Saadawi. Woman at Point Zero. (New York: Zed Books Ltd, 1983) 10, All subsequent reference to this work (abbreviated WPZ) will be used in this paper with pagination only
that the inequality between sexes is not the result of biological necessity but is produced by the environmental construction of gender differences. Also Porter (1999:27) says that feminism is a perspective that seeks to eliminate the subordination, oppression, inequalities and injustices women suffer because of their sex.

In some cases, women are having a lower position than men. Sometimes they have a less important position in society. Many experts who concern with this case are called as feminist. Feminists are interested to reveal women cases through literature. According to Kristeva (1981:33) “Females still need to claim their place in human society as equals, not as subordinate members, and they still need to emphasize the difference between male and female experience of the world. But that difference is shaped by the patriarchal structures feminists are opposing; and to remain faithful to it is to play the patriarchal game”.

There are some definitions of feminist literary criticism that formulated by the experts. In this research, the researcher uses two of the definitions. Feminist literary criticism is focused on the critical analysis of literary works based on the feminist perspective that usually begins with a critique of patriarchal culture. More importantly, feminist literary criticism appears as the representation of women’s power in criticizing the society, delivering, and expressing their ideas (Humm in Jackson and Jones, 1998:336).

2.2. Patriarchal Culture

Patriarchy is the focus of this paper. When the men rule of everything, from the family, region, and the country, it is patriarchy. The word ‘patriarchy’ literally means the rule of the father or the ‘patriarch’, and originally it was used to describe a specific type of ‘male-dominated family’ – the large household of the patriarch which included women, junior men, children, slaves and domestic servants all under the rule of this dominant male. Now it is used more generally “to refer to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and women are kept subordinate in a number of ways” (Bhasin 2006:3). Patriarchy, in its wider definition, means the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that “men hold power in all the important institutions of society” and that “women are deprived of access to such power”. However, it does not imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and resources” (Lerner 1989:239).
Simone de Beauvoir argues that because men view women as fundamentally different from themselves, women are reduced to the status of the second sex and hence subordinate (Beauvoir 1974). Kate Millet’s theory says that women are a dependent sex class under patriarchal domination (Millet 1977). The men’s domination make women’s positions are below men. According to Figes (1970), men pass down idea that women are intellectually inferior and men are superior ones. Therefore men do not consider women as important as them. French (1992) also stated that in the past, women possessed almost no human rights; to a political voice, to own property, and they even lacked right over their own bodies.

Thus, Beauvoir firmly believes the solution for women to fulfill their true potential is to find liberty: “what woman needs first of all is to undertake, in anguish and pride, her apprenticeship in abandonment and transcendence that is, in liberty.” Yet, just as she does not believe that women are inferior to men by nature, nor does she believe that they are their natural superiors either. In order to emancipate woman, Beauvoir also stated that woman emancipation is to refuse to confine her to the relations she bears to man, not to deny them to her; let her have her independent existence and she will continue nonetheless to exist for him also: mutually recognising each other as subject, each will yet remain for the other an other.

2.3. Conflict

Conflict is a struggle between opposing forces or the opposition between large groups of people, or between protagonist and larger forces such as natural objects, ideas, modes or behavior, public opinion (Roberts and Jacobs 1995:1694).

There are two types of conflict:

1. Internal Conflict

Internal conflict is a struggle that takes place in character’s mind. For example, a character may have to decide between right and wrong or between two choices. Sometimes, a character deals with his or her own mixed feelings or emotions.

2. External Conflict

External conflict is a struggle between a character and an outside force.

The differences between internal conflict and external conflict is internal conflict is just a conflict that takes place internally then external conflict is a conflict that can be seen physically.
2.4. The Struggle in the Middle East

A journalist, Taylor Smith has experienced eight months living in the Middle East. Taylor learned that trying to make a way in a career as a female in the Middle East is a lot harder than anywhere else in the world. During her time there, when women are sitting at the dinner table with men; they have to wait until after the men have finished and left the room. She also realized that in the Middle East, only 20 per cent of women participate in the workforce. This is the lowest level of female workers of any region in the world. According to the Population Reference Bureau, less women attend university than men in the Middle East. In 18 of Middle East countries, men can stop their wives from accepting a job offer. If a woman consciously makes the choice to stay at home, raise a family, and tend to the household, she should be supported in the decision. But the problem occurs when the decision is not so conscious.

Based on the struggles above, we know that emancipation should be fought. Prashadin (in Nguyen, 2009:203) states that we can recreate our bonds and we can fight, ceaselessly, for what we deem to be our rights and for what we envision. In political, legal, social, and cultural positions for women are the struggle for emancipation that should be fought and achieved because victory doesn't come by accident.

3. Research Method

This research is qualitative, Moleong (2006:6) says that qualitative research as research procedure resulting descriptive data from the written or the spoken words of the subject of the research being observed. Therefore, descriptive-qualitive method is the most suitable method. In this research, the researcher analyzed Firdaus conflicts and struggles toward patriarchal culture in Saadawi’s Woman at Point Zero. The researcher understood certain phenomena by interpreting the meaning of certain text.

The main resource of the data is a novel by Nawal El Saadawi entitled Woman at Point Zero in the form of phrases, clauses, sentences and expressions related to: (1) the external conflicts Firdaus faces toward patriarchal culture; and (2) the struggles for emancipation toward patriarchal culture.

Since descriptive-qualitative method is used in this research, the researcher is not only a planner, but also an implementer, an organizer, an evaluator, and finally a reporter of his/her own research (Moleong 2006: 168). In collecting the data, the researcher
used four steps: (1) In order to understand the text, the researcher read and re-read carefully; (2) Taking a note was done to collect the data that related to the objectives of this research; (3) Interpreting the data using feminist literary criticism; (4) Data categorizing was done to categorize and classified the interpreted data into thematic meaning related to the objectives: the external conflicts that Firdaus faces toward patriarchal culture and the struggle of Firdaus for emancipation toward patriarchal culture. After those four steps, the researcher drew a conclusion as the result of the research.

4. Finding and Discussion

4.1. External Conflicts

As mention in basic concepts, external conflict is a struggle between a character and an outside force. The researcher found that the conflicts Firdaus faced were caused by patriarchal culture. Here are the external conflicts faced by Firdaus in the novel:

1. Women’s Subordination

According to Advanced Learners Dictionary, subordination means having less power or authority than somebody else in a group or an organization. (Hornby 2003:1296). Ciotlăus (2010:164) believes that the universality of women’s subordination came under heavy critique and became problematic because of the binaries (male/female, nature/culture, production/reproduction etc.) on which it was based. This dualistic framework failed to understand women’s position when translated to other cultural contexts. This can be concluded that women’s subordination occurs because of gender differences. This is the first conflict related to gender discriminations Firdaus faced. The subordination that Firdaus faced lack of educational opportunity for her and son preference.

a. Lack of Educational Opportunity for Firdaus

In a patriarchal culture, getting education was not an easy way for Firdaus. She must struggle to fight against gender discrimination. The conflict occurred when her uncle forbade her to get education in El Azhar because he thought that El Azhar was only for men. We can see from the quotations below:

When my uncle would clamber into the train, and bid me farewell, I would cry and beg him to take me with him to Cairo. But my uncle would ask, ‘What will you do in Cairo, Firdaus?’ And I would reply: ‘I will go to El Azhar and study like you.’
Then he would laugh and explain that El Azhar was only for men. And I would cry, and hold on to his hand, as the train started to move. But he would pull it away with a force and suddenness that made me fall flat on my face. (WPZ:14) El Azhar was an awesome world peopled only by men, and my uncle was one of them, was a man. (WPZ:20)

The quotations above show that men are superior to women. Firdaus’ uncle keeps her powerless by forbidding her to get education. Moreover the university is a place where Firdaus will be sitting side by side with men (WPZ:36). When her uncle forbad Firdaus to follow him, Firdaus cried and hold on to his hand. It shows that she really wanted to study. Because of her low educational qualification she was not able to achieve what she wanted and made her choosing prostitution. She knew that education was a weapon to empower women to financial independence. Education for men is prioritized over women because it is believed that men must be equipped with educational skill to work in public area, while women will just work in domestic area and become wives and mothers. Hence, education is not believed as being important for women.

Rich believes that removing the sexism in universities is a necessity. She advocates the same quality in universities (Rich 610). Fuller, as stated in "Women in the Nineteenth Century" says, "What woman needs is not as a woman to act or rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely, and unimpeded to unfold such powers as were given her when we left our common home" (Fuller 31). Rich encourages that all women must be taken seriously by all faculty, they should seek out criticism to push themselves and find their true potential. Women can learn is how men have perceived and organized their experience, their history, their ideas of social relationships, good and evil, sickness and health etc" (Rich 609). Rich says “the key to success; as women, we have to be engaged and use a propelling force to learning. We must have a serious pledge about our knowledge of the world. If our professors engage in what is supposed to be a mutual act, having seriousness about women, about language, about ideas, methods and values” (Rich 18).

The sexism was also experienced by Firdaus. When she wanted to study at El Azhar, her uncle refused it just because Firdaus was a woman and El Azhar was only for men. As a woman, Firdaus did not experience the same quality in education. We know that education is one of the ways to develope society and change the world, especially for women. Women should get education as men in quality because it would be a great way for women to know about human rights which are equal to men, voice their mind, and make their own decisions
for themselves. It can be concluded that patriarchal culture does not allow Firdaus and other women to develop their capabilities by getting education.

b. Son Preference

Since childhood, Firdaus lived in a patriarchal culture where women are inferior to men. Born in a poor family, she saw her father was treated as a king to his wife and children. The conflict between Firdaus and her outside force can be seen below:

When one of his female children died, my father would eat his supper, my mother would wash his legs, and then he would go to sleep, just as he did every night. When the child that died was a boy, he would beat my mother, then have his supper and lie down to sleep. My father never went to bed without supper, no matter what happened (WPZ:17).

Firdaus’ father did not care with other family members. When there was no food, they all went to bed with empty stomach, but her father always had a meal because Firdaus’ mother always hid his food from other family members. One day Firdaus dared to stretch out her hand to her father’s plate but he struck her a sharp blow over the back of her fingers (WPZ:18). Firdaus was always hungry but she could not cry. It shows that a man should be treated as a number one individual among other individuals. Not only should be treated as a king but Firdaus’ father considered his daughters as “others”. He didn’t mourn in his daughter’s death and he would beat his wife for the death of his sons because he thought it was his wife responsible to take care of his sons. The word woman, therefore, has the same implications as the word other. The reason why Firdaus’ father would eat his supper when one of his female children died but he would beat Firdaus’ mother when the child who died was a boy because a woman is not a person in her own right. She is man’s other; she is less than a man; she is a kind of alien in a man’s world; she is not a fully developed human being the way a man is (Tyson 96).

Lack of educational opportunity for Firdaus and son preference are the impacts of women’s subordination that occurs because of gender discrimination. Those caused Firdaus tried to struggle to free from gender discrimination.

2. Women’s Economic Marginalization

Marginalization is the economic, religious, social, and/or political disempowerment that a person may experience within a society because he/she is lacking in social recognition and value (Marshall in Maslen, 2008: 8). The economic marginalization causes the economic
disadvantage of women, such as high levels of female unemployment and poverty (Reckdenwald and Parker, 2008: 1). The economic marginalization is one of Firdaus’ conflicts occurred in the novel. In the midst of a poor family, her father never gave her money although she worked in the fields and in the house. She ate the scarp food left over from her father, and sometimes there was no food left over from him. Firdaus went to bed without supper (WPZ:69). The conflict occurred when Firdaus asked her father for a piastre. Instead of getting a piastre, Firdaus was hit by her father. Her father said that if Firdaus asked for a piastre, she should go and clean under the animals and load the ass and take it to the fields. It shows that Firdaus was placed in domestic work. The construction of gender places women in domestic sector.

Delphy (Tyson 98) states that women’s domestic work in their own homes is unpaid not because their work is unimportant or involves less time or labor than the paid work performed by men outside the home, but because patriarchy defines women in their domestic roles as non-workers. And non-workers should not expect to be paid. Delphy also said that the dominant classes make the classes in their power do the productive work, that the preeminent sex does less work. In other words, in a patriarchy culture, women do the domestic labor at home that men don’t want to do, and their work day is twenty-four hours long. So it shows that women work longer hours than men, although women’s work in the home isn’t recognized as real labor deserving of pay. Delphy argues, that all relationships between men and women are based on power: patriarchal men want to keep all of it; non-patriarchal women want power to be equally distributed. As Landsberg Lewis (1998) says, women do not have independent access to financial resources because men in their families control the access that women have.

In economy field, Firdaus experienced unfairness. Domestic work made her did not dependent free because domestic work was priceless. In the story money represented power but money was forbidden for Firdaus. It can be seen when she held a coin, her father hit her, and when Firdaus’ husband counted his piastres and he saw Firdaus came, he put them away (WPZ:72). Those show that Firdaus was never allowed to hand any money as her own. Since she was dependent and never had money of her own, she tried to struggle against the marginalization by working outside home.
3. Violence

Violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, violence may cause or have a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation (World Health Organisation, 2014: par.1). Violence against human being is derived from various sources, one of them caused by gender. There are many forms of crime that can be categorized as gender-related violence. They are rape against women, force marriage, domestic violence, genital mutilation, prostitution, and violence in the form of pornography, molestation, sexual and emotional harassment (Fakih, 1996: 17-20). Below is gender-related violences faced by Firdaus:

a. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

According to the United Nation's World Health Organization, ‘‘FGM includes procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. The procedure has no health benefits for girls and women. Procedures can cause severe bleeding and problems urinating, and later cysts, infections, infertility as well as complications in childbirth increased risk of newborn deaths.’’

Salami (37) says that FGM is traditional practice in which a person, sometimes unskilled or a health worker, cuts off parts or whole organs of the female genitalia usually using the knife or razor blade, which for the most part is unsterilized. It is considered, variously, a cleansing ritual from evil spirits, a female rite of passage, a guarantor of a woman’s chastity and her marriageability, and a boost to fertility or to a man’s sexual pleasure. Firdaus underwent FGM at a young age. She remembered that her mother brought a woman who was carrying a small knife or maybe a razor blade. They cut off a piece of flesh from between her thighs. She cried all night (WPZ:12). Firdaus’ experience of FGM was given minimal explanation in the story, but we can see that Firdaus had no power to deny FGM and cried all night because this FGM left a devastating effect in Firdaus’ life. According to Firdaus, a part of her, of her being, was gone and would never return (WPZ:13). As a woman, the process of FGM is a form of violation toward her right. It caused a life-long trauma.

Before the brutal act of FGM, Firdaus could feel sexual pleasure when her clitoris was touched. For the first time, she experienced this sensation during her childhood when she played “bride and bridgroom” with a boy, named Mohammadain. She says “From some part
in my body where exactly I did not know would come a sensation of a sharp pleasure.” (WPZ:12). A study in Africa reported that women who underwent FGM in their childhood have the same level of Post Tarumatic Disorder (PTSD), and the 80% of the women suffer anxiety disorders (Keel, 2014, p.6). The psychological impact of FGM faced by Firdaus. It can be seen when she recalled the moment when she played with Mohammadain, she says. “I saw Mohmmadaian lying on a bed of straw under the open shelter. The touched of his fingers moved over my body. My whole body shuddered with a faraway yet familiar pleasure arising from some unknown source, from some indefinable spot of my being.” (WPZ:25). It shows that FGM caused trauma for Firdaus. After the FGM, Firdaus also was not able to experience sexual pleasure, we can see below:

In fact, he was doing even more, but I no longer felt the strong sensation of pleasure that radiated from an unknown and yet familiar part of my body. I closed my eyes and tried to reach the pleasure I had known before but in vain (WPZ : 13).

FGM is at the harm of women and involved with the satisfaction of man’s pleasure. Okpara asserts that “while the woman’s body is mutilated for the benefit of the man, the male organ in the course of circumcision gets manicured for the reification of woman.” (193).

b. Forced marriage and domestic violence

When Firdaus was a teenager, she was forced by her uncle to marry a man whose name was Syekh Mahmoud. He was rude and miserly. Firdaus didn’t have the right to say no, she was sold in exchange of an expensive dowry. The conflict occurred in her household, when Firdaus got harsh treatment from her husband just because she was a wife and a woman. It can be seen below:

On one occasion he hit me all over with his shoe. My face and body became swollen and bruised. So I left the house and went to my uncle. But my uncle told me that all husbands beat their wives, my uncle’s wife added that her husband often beat her (WPZ:46).

It can be inferred that wife-beating was accepted. When she complained to her uncle, she realized she could not avoid the wife-beating because her husband beat her as her father beat her mother. Marriage trapped Firdaus’ freedom. Firdaus had no any voice at all and was not supposed to complain because her duty was perfect obedience. All husbands beat their wives. Firdaus’ husband got into the habit of beating her whether he had a reason for it or not. After her husband hit her with his heavy stick until the blood ran from her nose
and ears, Firdaus showed struggle to fight against her husband by leaving her husband’s house.

Millett says that the entire structure of power in society; that is, patriarchy. She says that marriage is the agency that maintains the traditional pattern of man's power over woman. According to Gloria Steinem, patriarchy requires violence or the subliminal threat of violence in order to maintain itself. The most dangerous situation for a woman is not an unknown man in the street, or even the enemy in wartime, but a husband or lover in the isolation of their own home. Linda Gordon, as stated in her book *Heroes of their Own Lives*, expresses "The basis of wife-beating is male dominance, not superior physical strength or violent temperament but social, economic, political, and psychological power. Wife-beating is the chronic battering of a person of inferior power who for that reason cannot effectively resist."

FGM, forced marriage, and domestic violence Firdaus faced show that she must submit to people around her. She did not have courage to refuse and at the end she had to struggle to be bolder.

4.2. Struggles

Beauvoir (Tyson 97) claims that women are trying to escape their own freedom to fulfill their own potential in the world. As stated by Paletschek and Ennker (2004:6), women should fight for self-determination and improvements in the legal, social, cultural, and political positions of women. If they do not struggle, they cannot change their condition in society. Prashadin, as stated in Nguyen, 2009:203 says, “We can re-create our bonds and we can fight, ceaselessly, for what we deem to be our rights and for what we envision.” In women’s emancipation, struggle is to achieve emancipation in the legal, social, culture, and political positions of women, and to erase oppressions and discrimination in the society.

Firdaus’ struggles identified by researcher are being independent and being brave in order to solve her conflicts toward patriarchal culture. Furthermore, the conflicts Firdaus faced have been explained in the previous. Those conflicts were caused by patriarchal culture had left her no choices but to be a prostitute. Thus, now the researcher will elaborate the struggles Firdaus performed to conquer patriarchal culture. The struggles are seen through the external conflicts identified before.

1. Being Independent
In the past Firdaus was a dependent, she depended her life to her father, her uncle, and her husband. She did not have ability to control her life. Man had an authority to decide about her life. Her uncle forbade her to follow him to study in El Azhar and forced her to marry with Sheikh Mahmoud. People around her let her had no money of her own. Moreover, Bayoumi and Sharifa took control over Firdaus after she escaped from her husband’s house. From those conflicts Firdaus faced, she had no power, Firdaus often got lost. She did not know what to do and people around her took advantage from her easily. That can be seen when her uncle sold her, her husband beat her, Bayoumi raped her, and Sharifa enslaved her. Firdaus realized that she was controlled by people around her. Therefore, she fought to be independent. Her current financial situation also forced her to be independent.

Growing to be an independent woman as a result of facing external conflicts: violence, especially forced marriage and women’s economic marginalization. Firdaus used to live under men’s authority. We can see when she was sold by her uncle to get married and she was not allowed to hand any money as her own. It shows that Firdaus used to be a dependent. Facing lack of educational opportunity also caused Firdaus struggled. She used to depended to her uncle, but she changed to be independent.

Firdaus grew to be an independent woman after escaping from Sharifa, a woman who changed her into a prostitute. Firdaus was aware that Sharifa sold her as a prostitute after her customer, named Fawzy says, “Sharifa’s fooling you. She’s making money out of you” (WPZ:65). That words made Firdaus left Sharifa and tried to live her own life. Firdaus transformed to be an independent prostitute. She states, “Because I was intelligent I preferred to be a free prostitute, rather than an enslaved wife. Every time I gave my body I charged the highest price” (WPZ:99). It shows that Firdaus had control over men who wanted her service.

Being a free prostitute, Firdaus got money and could live independently. She also was able to buy an apartment and could employ any number of servants.

A quarter of a century had passed, for I was twenty-five years old when I first started to have a clean apartment of my own, overlooking the main street, engage a cook who prepared the food I ordered, and employ someone to arrange for my appointments at the hours which suited me, and in accordance with the terms which I considered acceptable (WPZ:74).

Firdaus’s struggle to be an independent woman is the result of some conflicts she faced in patriarchal culture. She used to be powerless in her society. At the end Firdaus did
not depend on other people. She lived her own life and did not want to give in her life as a controlled woman to anybody.

2. Being Brave

Growing to be brave as a result of facing external conflicts: FGM, son preference, and forced marriage. Firdaus had no courage to refuse FGM even though it was painful for her. She also had no courage to complain to her father when she was hungry because her father did not put her as a priority. In page 18 she tells that she could not cry. As a woman and a daughter, her father considered her as “others”. When her uncle forced her to get married, she was not brave to refuse it too. Those conflicts show Firdaus should submit herself to people around her. She used to be a fearful woman. It can be seen she had no courage to complain and refuse.

During her marriage, Firdaus got physical abuse. Getting harsh treatment from her husband, Firdaus decided to escape. She tried to defeat her fear by escaping from her husband house. She states, “One day he hit me with his heavy stick until the blood ran from my nose and ears. So I left, but thus time I did not go to my uncle’s house. I walked through the streets with swollen eyes, and a bruised face” (WPZ:47). Instead of getting a better life, she experienced many problems. After she ran away, she encountered some people who had sex with her, taught her become a prostitute and made money from her body. However Firdaus’ life after escaping from her husband’s house made her grew braver.

Being a prostitute forced her to meet different men. One day Firdaus decided to stop being a prostitute and worked in a company for three years. However, patriarchy also existed among male employees in the company. She concluded that all women whether they are married, single, workers or jobless are victims of patriarchy. Because of this fact Firdaus became a prostitute again. But this time she became a different prostitute who was proud of herself and had courage to spit at man’s face. She did not let people to rule her anymore. Firdaus also learned to say no and dared to choose what she wants.

A man came up to me and whispered. I look him straight in the eye and said ‘No.’ Another man came up to me and muttered something in a secretive voice which could barely be heard, I examined him carefully from head to toes and said, ‘No’ (WPZ:73)

Becoming a high-level prostitute, Firdaus said. “A prostitute always says yes, and then names her price. If she says no she ceases to be prostitute. I was not a prostitutes in the full sense of the word, so from time to time I said no. As a result my price kept going up.
Firdaus decided to become a prostitute to rebel against patriarchal culture. Since her childhood until she became a wife and an employee, she was mistreated by men. She states, “A successful prostitute was better than a misled saint. All women are victims of deception” (WPZ:64). Therefore, being a prostitute is her way to get freedom.

As a high-level prostitute, Firdaus grew stronger. She was brave to reject an important man from a foreign. She says, “One day a very important personality from a foreign state heard about me. He arranged things in such a way that he could look me over without my noticing. Immediately after he sent for me, but I refused to go” (WPZ:97). Her body could not be owned by anybody, she had a power over herself. It also can be seen below:

‘Every prostitute has a pimp to protect her from other pimps and from police. That’s what I am going to do.’
‘But I can protect myself.’ I said.
‘There isn’t a woman on earth who can protect herself.’
‘I don’t want your protection’ (WPZ:100)

At the end of the story, Firdaus was brave enough to kill Marzouk, a pimp who wanted to enslave her and put her under his authority. She had no fear to kill, for her, it was the only way to get out of the pimp’s control over her. She got the courage because she has been controlled by men all her life and it was beyond her limit.

I continued to look straight at him without blinking. I knew I hated him as only a woman can hate a man... I raised my hand even higher that he had done, and brought it down violently on his face. The white of his eyes went red. His hands started to reach for the knife he carried in his pocket, but my hand was quicker than his. I raised the knife and bried it deep in his neck and then thrust it deep into his chest, pull it out of his chest and plunged it deep into his belly. I stuck the knife into almost every part of his body (WPZ:104)

Firdaus showed her brave action to fight for her freedom. Hurlock (127) states, “When the motivation to improve the personality pattern is strong enough, changes can be effected.” Firdaus had a strong motivation to get rid from her cruel society. Before becoming a brave woman, she used to be a fearful woman. She says,

“When night fell I had not yet found a place where I could spend the long hours until morning. I felt something deep inside of me screaming with panic. I was now worn out with fatigue, my stomach racked with hunger. I rested my back against a wall and stood for a while looking around me. I could see the wide expanse of street stretched out before me like the sea. There I was, just a pebble which someone had tossed into its waters, rolling along with the crowds that rode in buses and cars, or walked the streets, with unseeing eyes, incapable of noticing anything or anyone. Each minute a thousand eyes passed in front of me, but for them I remained non-existent.” (WPZ:43)
It can be inferred that Firdaus had a tendency to have fear over herself. At the end of the story she grew braver to express her rejection toward patriarchal culture. By killing the pimp, Firdaus had a serious consequence. She was under sentence of death. She knew that in politic and law women always put after men, it has been known that women can’t become heads of state because the rulers are men (WPZ:25). She also found out that the law punishes women like her, but turns a blind eye to what men do. What men have in common is an avaricious and distorted personality, a never-ending appetite for money, sex, and unlimited power.

Killing has committed no crime for Firdaus. She taught she killed only criminals and no woman can be a criminal. To be a criminal one must be a man. She had an argument with a person in the prison, it can be seen below:

‘There’s hope for your release if you send an appeal to the President asking him to pardon you for the crime you committed.’
‘But I don’t want to be released,’ I said, ‘and I want no pardon for my crime. For what you call my crime was no crime.’
‘You killed a man.’
‘If I go out once again to the life which is yours I will never stop killing. So what is the use of my sending an appeal to the President to be pardoned?’
‘You criminal. You deserve to die.’
‘Everybody has to die. I prefer to die for a crime I have committed rather than to die for one of the crimes which you have committed.’ (WPZ:110)

Firdaus refused an appeal to the President Anwar Sadat. Her rejection over the appeal means she did not want to be ruled by any man, including the President. She let them put steel handcuffs around her wrists, and let her off to prison. She knew why they were so afraid of her. She was the only woman has torn the mask away, and exposed the face of their ugly reality. They condemned her to death not because she killed man, there were thousands of people being killed every day, but because they were afraid to let her live. She was brave to resisted to ask for help because she thought what she had done was right for her freedom.

Conclusion

After analysing Saadawi’s novel Woman at Point Zero, the researcher found that there are two main points. The first one is Firdaus’ conflicts toward patriarchal culture. The second one deals with the struggles of Firdaus to pursue emancipation.

Based on the analysis conflicts Firdaus faced toward patriarchal culture are divided into three categories. They are women’s subordination, women’s economic marginalization,
and violence. Conflicts related to women’s subordination are lack of educational opportunity for Firdaus and son preference. In a patriarchal culture, education is prioritized for men over women because men will work in public area, while women will just work in domestic area and become wives and mothers. Men consider women as “others”, when female children die, a father will eat his supper, but when the child that dies is a boy, a father will beat the mother. The second conflict is women’s economic marginalization. Firdaus’ father never gave her money although she worked in the fields and in the house because patriarchy defines women in their domestic roles as nonworkers. Nonworkers should not be paid. The last conflict is violence. Gender-related violences faced by Firdaus are Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), forced marriage and domestic violence. Firdaus underwent FGM at a young age, a piece of flesh from between her thighs was cut off. In her teens, Firdaus was forced by her uncle to marry. She was beaten and got harsh treatment from her husband just because she was a wife and a woman.

Facing the conflicts that are the effects of patriarchal culture causes Firdaus struggles to pursue emancipation as a reaction to the discrimination against women. The struggles that Firdaus performs to encounter the conflicts are being independent and being brave. As we know Firdaus has long-life struggles as a child, a wife, and a prostitute. She has no freedom until she left her husband house, became a prostitute, killed a man and refused an appeal to the President and got to prison. At the end of the story physically she was trapped in prison, she experienced freedom. Finally she had no longer live under someone else’s power. She grew braver to express her reaction toward patriarchal culture.

By reading literary texts readers gain knowledge, get some values, and see the social issues and conflicts faced by the characters in the novel. In this case, as an inspiring feminist novel, Woman at Point Zero portrays an Egypt woman, Firdaus, who lives in patriarchal culture and experiences a dramatic life. Since a novel reflects society and culture of a specific place, the readers get knowledge on how Firdaus lives in society and her cultural situation in Middle East. After reading the novel, the readers especially female readers are able to learn from Firdaus. They will know how to struggle in order to break free. As the main character, Firdaus influences the female readers and makes them able to get strength. An author, Brittany Morin frequently says, “Empowered women empower women” (2017). Firdaus raises up her voice so that women without voice can be heard.
All women and men are born free and equal in dignity and rights. The life story of Firdaus has inspired women to stand for her freedom. If she could be brave and independent enough during that time when everything was going against her, any women nowadays should show similar spirit to fight for their right in the society. Now is the era of emancipation where women’s contribution is needed in social, politic, and economy. Every women deserves to be respected because both woman and man got their own responsibility and the same right in life, men should see women as a partner more than “others”. And women should claim her right and respect men as her partner.
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