

The Patriarchal Class System in Nawal El Saadawi's *God Dies by the Nile*.

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Abstract

Socialist feminists see class as central to women's lives, yet at the same time not ignoring the impact of patriarchy on their lives too. For them, women are victims of both the capitalist class and patriarchy. My argument is that women in *God Dies by the Nile* are victims of the patriarchal class system consolidated by politics, religion, and social customs. I argue further that for patriarchal class ideology to survive as an oppressive system, brutal force implements and instills such ideology in society. The impact of such ideology on women has been manifested through double moral standards, rape, sexual exploitation, psychological instability, illegitimate children and violence. This study also sheds light upon the plight of poor women employed by upper-class people at shamefully low salaries and who are frequently sexually abused by their masters and masters' sons. Furthermore, I foreground how El Saadawi strives hard to deconstruct the patriarchal class system by revealing its dark side where women are preyed upon, raped, and destroyed for being women and even men are eliminated for failing to support fully such system. Finally, *God Dies by the Nile* ends with a note of resistance against the patriarchal class system by both Fatheya and Zakeya respectively. It is a message that collective efforts, by women all over the world regardless of their class, race and religion, are urgently needed to eradicate their oppression. I come to conclude further that for El Saadawi, it is only through political organization and a patient, long-enduring struggle that women can become an effective political power which will force society to change and abolish the patriarchal class structures that keep women victims. My analysis will be drawn on views of socialist feminist theorists like Juliet Mitchell, Nancy Holmstrom, and Heidi Hartmann.

Introduction

For Socialist feminists, women are victims of both class and patriarchy. Nancy Holmstrom defines socialist feminism as an attempt "to understand women's subordination in a coherent and systematic way that integrates class and sex, as well as other aspects of identity such as race/ethnicity or sexual orientation, with the aim of using this analysis to help liberate women."(2003:38). In other words, socialist feminists see class as central to women's lives, yet at the same time not ignoring the impact of patriarchy on women's lives.. For example, Juliet Mitchell believes that some aspects of women's lives in the family are economic while the others are social and ideological.

Mitchell argues that any change in the status of women should be accompanied by the defeat of capitalism as well as patriarchy through social and ideological means respectively. “The Marxist revolutionary must link arms with the Freudian Psychoanalyst in order to effect women’s full and final liberation.” (1974:412). She suggests that we should use Marxist strategies to topple capitalism and psychoanalytic strategies to overthrow patriarchy. Socialist feminists like Nancy Holmstrom, Juliet Mitchell and Heidi Hartmannⁱ summarize Nawal El-Saadawi’s socialist feminist views centering on original causes of women’s oppression; “the patriarchal class system which manifests itself internationally as world capitalism and imperialism, and nationally in the feudal and capitalist classes of the third world countries.” (1997: 91).

My argument is that women in *God Dies by the Nile* are victims of the patriarchal class systemⁱⁱ consolidated by politics, religion, and social customs. El Saadawi deconstructs the patriarchal class system by showing us its dark side where women are raped and destroyed for being women and even men are eliminated for failing to support fully the patriarchal class system. If we examine the title of the novel, *God Dies by the Nile*ⁱⁱⁱ, one may say that it is a metaphor for both patriarchal class and religion. The title may also reflect El Saadawi’s intention to reveal the interplay between the political power of the ruling class, the oppression of women in rural Egypt and the misuse of religion. “In any society, it is not possible to separate religion from the political system, nor to keep sex separate from politics. The trilogy composed of politics, religion and sex, is the most sensitive of all issues in any society.” (El Saadawi 1980:4). Furthermore, in *God Dies by the Nile*, we find that the Mayor of Kafr El-Teen, symbolizes the patriarchal class system “ People like him ,who live on top of the world, don’t know the word impossible. They walk over the earth like Gods.”(54)^{iv} while Zakeya, on the other hand, symbolizes how women can be victims of such system. Within this context, April Gordon argues:

Women typically face more disadvantages and exploitation than men do. They must cope not only with poverty and underdevelopment; they are also limited by patriarchal attitudes and practices, some predating capitalism, others established during the colonial period. These patriarchal attitudes and practices, which privilege men, continue to permeate African societies from the level of the family up to the state. (1996:7)

In other words, the capitalist economic system tends to promote a growing class inequality, which can leave many women subject to patriarchal class oppression. In this regard, El Saadawi attributes women's oppression and subordination to the fact that the gap between the rich and the poor is increasing and that is why women are suffering more. They suffer from the capitalist economic system. (McMillan: 1999).

2. Patriarchal Class System and its impact on women in *God Dies by the Nile*

For Karl Marx “The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.” (1972:20-1). Therefore, we can see the impact of upper class is manifested on the consciousness of the toiling class whether women or men. In case of Nefissa, when her father has told her that she is expected to go to the Mayor's house, she has not been able to sleep that night. “She was only twelve years old at the time, and her small mind spent the dark hours of the night trying to imagine what the rooms of the Mayor's house could be like. Through it flitted images of a bathroom in white marble, which the children of the neighbors had told her about. They added that the Mayor bathed in milk each night.”(20). Such impact is also manifested economically on Haj Ismail who tears himself away from the comparison between himself and the Mayor only to find himself “lost in the contemplation of the mayor's expensive cloak, while his hand kept fingering the coarse fabric of his own *galabeya*.”(12). Class also has its tremendous psychological impact on the lives of the poor lower class people. For example, when the Mayor jokes with Haj Ismail in a friendly way, the feelings of inferiority which have recently invaded Haj Ismail are largely dispelled. “Was not the Mayor cracking jokes with him? Was this not a good enough reason to feel his confidence restored, to feel that the social gap between them was narrowing? He felt pleased.” (13). It seems that not only lower class people's economic lives are defined by the Mayor and the bourgeois class he symbolizes but also their psychological balance and emotional stability. “The village barber was still busy turning over in his mind the title of ‘doctor –healer’ which the Mayor had bestowed upon him. It made him feel as though he had been accorded a

bachelor's degree in medicine, which put him on an equal footing with any medical doctor in the area." (16). In another incident, we also find that feelings of inferiority have led Sheikh Zahran to extol the Mayor's bourgeois class "Tell me, your highness, you who knows so much. Are people in Misr the same as in Kafr El Teen?" (16) while simultaneously speaking ill of his own poor lower class people.

All peasants steal. Theft runs in their blood like the Bilharzia worm. They put on an innocent air, pretend to be dull, kneel down before Allah as they would never think of disobeying him, but all the time, deep inside, they are nothing but accursed, cunning, unbelieving, impious sons of heretics. A man will prostrate himself in prayer behind me, but once he has left the mosque, and gone to the field, he will steal from his neighbor, or poison the man's buffalo without batting an eyelid....He might even commit murder, or fornication. (15)

Here, one can see how far class gap between the rich and the poor can terribly affect the psychological balance and emotional stability of the poor toiling classes. And how such gap creates social evils and breeds hypocrite characters like Sheikh Zahran who are ready to do anything to please their masters.

In *God Dies by the Nile*, El-Saadawi uses sex metaphorically to expose and reveal the dehumanizing effects of the patriarchal class order. We notice that sex is used as an instrument of power, which may take a material, physical and religious form against women. For example, the Mayor's affairs with the daughters of Kafrawi, Nefissa and Zeinab reflect the material power of the ruling class serving as a source of the sexual exploitation of women in particular and the ruled in general. The Mayor "the representative of government in Kafr El Teen"(13) symbolizes the ruling class in general whose power and resources are ultimately under his basic control. Within this context, Nabila Jaber argues "that Gender oppression is class oppression and women's subordination is seen as a form of class oppression which is maintained because it serves the interests of capital and the ruling class."(2001:101). Moreover, Sheikh Hamzawi sheds the light on the Mayor's oppressive power. "He holds their daily bread in his hands and if he wants, he can deprive them of it. If he gets angry their debts double, and the government keeps sending them one summons after the other. "Either pay or your land will be confiscated." (106). Commenting on the significance of the land for poor farmers,

Frantz Fanon says that “ for them the most essential value is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and , above all, dignity.(1963 :34). Here, one tends to say that such government represented by the Mayor is tyrannically based on sheer caprices of those who control it and on a crude display of brute force. “The Mayor was using his position to exploit the peasants, and to spend the money he squeezed out of them on his extravagant way of living, and his extravagant tastes in food, tobacco, wine and women.”(13). In other words, we find that the Mayor uses his wealth and power to exploit poor people economically , psychologically and sexually

Concerning the Mayor’s sexual exploitation of women, we find that “he’s got strange tastes where women are concerned, and if he likes a woman he can’t forget her. You know he’s pretty obstinate himself. Once he sets his eyes on a woman he must have her, come what may.”(54) . In the case of Nefissa, Sheikh Zaharan tries to persuade her to accept the Mayor’s offer. “Our Mayor is a generous man... You will be paid twenty piastres a day. You’re a stupid girl with no brains. How can you throw away all the good that is coming to you? Do you prefer hunger and poverty rather than doing a bit of work?”(20-1). Nefissa resists back “I work here in my father’s house, Sheikh Zahran, and I work in the fields all day..... I do not want to go to the Mayor’s house.’(21). Finally , she is forced to work in the Mayor’s house against her will by her father, Kafrawi. “Violence against women and extracting women's labour through coercive labour relations are, therefore, part and parcel of capitalism.”(Mies 1986: 170-1). Her painful tragic exit from her house to the Mayor’s house is metaphorically conveyed to us through the eyes of the donkey. “The donkey suddenly lifted its head and brayed in a long, drawn –out gasping lament....She looked into the eyes of the donkey and saw tears. (21-2). Later, the Mayor rapes Nefissa. She becomes pregnant, bares a child, throws the baby away, and disappears. “The girl has disappeared, Zakeya. She is gone.” (6). Ironically enough, through the scheming consciousness of the Mayor, her painful end is narrated to us.

True, Nefissa’s story had remained a secret, but who knew? May be this time things would not be concealed so easily. He tried to chase away his fears. Who could find out the things that had happened?. He was above suspicion, above the law, even above the moral rules which governed ordinary people’s behavior .Nobody in Kafr

El Teen would dare suspect him. They could have doubts about Allah , but about him....It was impossible.(98)

Even superstitious beliefs based on ignorance and poverty are used by the ruling class to continue oppressing the poor in general and women in particular in the name of religion. For example, the Mayor uses Haj Ismail , one of his oppressive tools, to use traditions and religion to persuade Zeinab, Nefissa's sister, to work in the Mayor's house, something which will in turn cure her aunt Zakeya.^v

On the following day, before dawn, Zeinab is to take another bath with clean water from the Nile, meanwhile repeating the testimony three times. Then do her prayers at the crack of dawn. Once this over she is to open the door of your house before sunrise, stand on the threshold facing its direction and recite the first verse of the Koran ten times. In front of her she will see a big Iron Gate. She is to walk towards it, open it and walk in. She must never walk out of it again until the owner of the house orders her to do so. He is a noble and great man, born of a noble and great father, and he belongs to a good and devout family blessed by Allah, and His prophet. During this time Zakeya should lead the buffalo to the field, tie it to the water-wheel, take her hoe and work until the call to noon prayers. (91).

Here, one may notice that women are victims of patriarchy fortified by religion, traditions and politics. Within this context, Adrienne Rich argues that "Patriarchy is the power of ideological, political system in which men--by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male." (1976: 57-8). In the Mayor's house, Zeinab is sexually exploited and raped by the Mayor. " He pulled on it so hard that it split with a rending sound. She gasped, ' My *galabeya!* It's my only *galabeya!*'. He tore the remaining folds around her body, held her tight, whispering in her ear, ' I will buy you a thousand *galabeyas.*'(100). In this regard, Susan Brownmiller says that the secret of patriarchy lies in rape which is an act of forcing a woman to have sexual intercourse against her will. "Both the possibility and the actuality of rape served as the main agent of the perpetuation of male domination over women by force." (1975 :209).^{vi} Here, one may contend that the meaning of rape is connected to the concept of women as property which has become man's basic weapon of force against women. Furthermore, these rape cases

of both Nefissa and Zeinab shed the light on the plight of women who work as servants in upper- class houses.

It is important to note that *God Dies by the Nile* presents a horrific picture of how poor servant women are employed by upper-class people at shamefully low salaries and who are frequently sexually abused by their masters and sons. In this regard, Heidi Hartman attributes women's underpayment and oppression of women to "men's desire to control women is at least as strong as capital's desire to control workers. Capitalism and patriarchy are two different beasts, each of which must be fought with different weapons." (1981 :23). Consequently, even the Mayor's son, Tariq, uses his class status to molest and violate female servants in the Mayor's household. This is conveyed to us by Tariq's mother who is conscious of the plight of poor servant women. "Matters have gone so far that I have now decided to employ only menservants. Pray tell me what happens to your virtue when you are so occupied pursuing the girls on the telephone, or across windows, or standing on the balconies, or don't you know that our neighbors in Maadi have complained to me several times?"(39). Concerning female domestic servants working in upper-class homes, El Saadawi clarifies that they are particularly prone to sexual assault as a result of class differences.

The small maidservant . . . is the only remaining "sex avenue" for the hungry males that are panting with thirst of sexual frustration, and lying in wait for any chance or hope of satisfying it The boys are less liable to feel guilty if sex is practiced with a servant girl, and in addition they are not doing wrong to somebody of their own class, but to a creature who is socially very much their inferior. In addition she is preferable to a prostitute since sex with her is free of charge and does not threaten them with the chance of venereal disease.(1980: 23)

Hence, one may say that Tariq's aggressive sexual conduct can be considered as a violation of the powerless women by the powerful upper class people where the values of greed, lust, extravagance and pleasure are allowed to flourish on the misery of the toiling masses.

However in *God Dies by the Nile*, we find that the Mayor is not only a symbol of class but also symbolically foregrounded as the ultimate god of patriarchy. He is

perceived as a kind of demigod in the village. Such perception of the almost godly power of the Mayor leads Sheikh Zahran to say "we are God's slaves when it's time to say our prayers only. But we are the Mayor's slaves all the time" (53). This shows how the lives of lower class people are completely controlled by the Mayor both economically and psychologically.

For patriarchy to survive as an institution, it has to be fortified by religion, politics, and social customs. Interestingly enough, we notice that the Mayor, a symbol of patriarchy, is fortified by three interrelated forces. Religious ideology represented by the Imam of the Mosque, Sheikh Hamzawi, local and cultural traditions symbolized by the local healer, Haj Ismail, and the coercive power of the political establishment personified by the Head of the Village Guard, Sheikh Zahran. Through the consciousness of the Mayor, we are introduced to his tools of oppression and domination "there were three men in Kafr El Teen who knew almost everything about him. The Chief of the Village Guard, the Sheikh of the mosque, and the village barber. Without them he could not rule Kafr El Teen. They were his instruments, his aides and his means for administering the affairs of the village."(98). Here, El Saadawi tries to deconstruct the patriarchal class system by exposing its dark side where women are raped and destroyed for being women and men are killed for failing to fortify and support fully the patriarchal class domination. "You do not know the Mayor, Fatheya. He's a dangerous man, and fears no one, not even Allah. He can do injustice to people and put them in goal when they have done nothing to merit it. He can even murder innocent people."(106). Therefore, the oppressive nature of the patriarchal class order can be explicitly seen through the incarceration of Kafrawi and Galal, the rape and disappearance of both Nefissa and Zeinab and the murder of Elwau, Fatheya, and their adopted child.

Moreover, *God Dies by the Nile* uncovers a social world of what it is like to grow up in a patriarchal class society based on gender and class. Patriarchy, for El Saadawi, is an all-inclusive system that informs social, political, and religious structures. (Malt-Douglas : 1995). It has social, religious, and political roots that serve to fortify it. For example, the Mayor's wife, is able to see the hypocrisy of the patriarchal ideology.

When her son, Tariq, complains that sexual immorality has become rampant because women have supposedly thrown virtue overboard “Girls have no morals these days, father.”(39), she challenges him while throwing suggestive glances at her own husband, the Mayor.

She raised one eyebrow and said, ‘Is that so. Master Tariq. Now you are putting on a Sheikh’s turban and talking of virtue. Where was your virtue hiding last week when you stole a ten pound note from my handbag, and went to visit that woman with whose house I have now become familiar ?where was your virtue last year when you assaulted Saadia, the servant , and obliged me to throw her out in order to avoid a scandal ? (39)

Within this context, Nabila Jaber argues “that there are two modes of patriarchy: private patriarchy that is enacted in the authority of men over women in family and public patriarchy as manifested through the state and increasingly the religious establishment, particularly Islam.” (2001:101).^{vii} The patriarchal class oppression of women rooted in the sexual division of labor within the family is protected by government, which sees the family as private rather than public. (Gordon:1996). And that reflects how state plays a crucial role in fortifying the patriarchal class system through enacting laws which consolidate the authority of men.

Deconstruction of patriarchy continues through exposing these patriarchal double moral standards concerning female and male sexuality. For El Saadawi , the whole society is permeated by a dichotomy of moral standards for females and others for males. “At the root of this anomalous situation lies the fact that sexual experience in the life of a man is a source of pride and a symbol of virility, whereas sexual experience in the life of women is a source of shame and a symbol of degradation.”(1980:31). since men rule over and dominate women, they, in turn, permit for themselves what they forbid for women. The Mayor, a symbol of patriarchy, justifies the double moral standards “Men have always been immoral. But now the women are throwing virtue overboard, and that will lead to a real catastrophe. The Mayor’s wife replies “Why catastrophe? Why not equality, or justice?”.(39). Therefore, chastity and virginity are considered essential for women while freedom and sexual licentiousness are looked upon as natural where men are concerned. John Caldwell argues that “The patriarchal belt is characterized by male

domination, son preference, restrictive codes of behavior for women, and the association of family honor with female virtue. In many areas, the preoccupation with female virginity leads to honor killings in the event of real or perceived sexual misconduct by women.”(1982:162) .Therefore, moral values are man made and imposed by the ruling class with the aim of serving certain economic and political interests to ensure the situation from which that class draws power is maintained^{viii}. To put it differently, the historical defeat of the female sex ,for Friedrich Engels, has begun in the wake of the agricultural revolution and the advent of civilization and class society. (Engels :1972) . Hence, one cannot ignore the economic and political dimensions that shape and influence the moral values imposed on women. “We cannot look at the cultural gap without looking at the economic gap or at the inequality between countries, the inequality between classes in each country, and the inequalities between the sexes in the family and in the state.” (El Saadawi 1997: 135)

It is noticeable for patriarchy to survive as an oppressive system; its ideology must be instilled in society. We also find when that ideology has not fully been imbibed; force has been used to implement it. Even force is used from the lower class people like Kafrawi and Masoud who are reminded that their patriarchal authority and manhood is at stake if they do not resort to the use of force to get their daughters comply with their orders. For example, when both Kafrawi and Masoud ask what they are to do when their daughters refuse to comply, Sheikh Zahran retorts by challenging their manhood. “What can you do?! Is that a question for a man to ask?” responded Sheikh Zahran, even more heatedly. ‘Beat her. Don’t you know that girls and women never do what they’re told unless you beat them?’” (21). Hence , one may argue that in patriarchy, even the victim plays the role of the victimizer. We can see that even the most powerless man is led to believe that he has the right to beat his wife and daughters and accept the idea that his women like everything in his peasant life belong to the patriarchal ruling class. Commenting on how ideology is forcibly implemented, Antonio Gramsci argues that patriarchy is “a repressive system that can be maintained only by the sheer force of coercion.” (1971: 12). For Gramsci, a complete hegemony of an oppressive system is achieved only when the victims, through a process of cultural and religious socialization,

become alienated. They learn to deny their existential being and imbibe the views of their oppressors. In *God Dies by the Nile*, this is clearly represented by Om Saber, the *daya* whose various functions include female genital mutilation, abortions, defloration, and exorcism.^{ix}

At weddings she would lead the *yoo yoos* , paint the feet of girls and women with red henna, and on the wedding night she would tear the virgin's hymen with her finger , or conceal the fact that it was already torn by spraying the white towel on which the virgin's blood was supposed to pour with the blood of a rabbit or a hen. But when it was a time for mourning her suffering knew no bounds. She would slap her face with both hands repeatedly, scream out in agony, chant a hymn of sadness to the deceased, and wash the body if she was a female. She was always busy solving the problems of girls and women, carrying out abortions with a stalk of *mouloukheya*, throttling the new-born baby if necessary, or leaving it to die by not tying the umbilical cord with a silk thread so that it bled to death.(72)

The most critical role of the *daya* is to uphold and consolidate the patriarchal image of women. She is simply reinforcing the patriarchal value placed on the sanctity of the hymen in the life of a woman to preserve the sense of honor of the men in the patriarchal family. Here, El Saadawi narrates to us the importance and sanctity of the hymen in the life of Fatheya. "she did not see the clean white towel stained red, nor the wound the woman's nail had made in her flesh. But she felt her virgin colors had bled, for in her ears resounded the beat of the drums, the shrieks of joy and the high-pitched trilling of the women."(31-2). Within this context, Gordon-Chipembere argues that "maintenance of one's virginity ensured a good marriage, which created the possibility of moving the family out of economic hardship, or into another class."(2006:3).^x El Sadaawi continues exposing the ugly head of patriarchy by shedding the light on genital mutilation, an inhuman practice which is fortified by economic, social, moral and ideological factors.^{xi} It has profound physical and psychological impact on women. In regard to such barbaric practice meted against women, Dorkenoo argues that the health risks are immense.

The first being death. A long term result of circumcision is the development of neuroma, which renders the entire genital area unbearable to touch. Also, there is the presence of vulval abscesses, constant infections, damage to other vital organs, and the greater susceptibility to HIV because of the interchange of blood during penetration or de-infibulation with an unclean circumciser's tool. Needless to say, a

circumcised woman feels severe pain during intercourse - known as dyspareunia.
(1992:.8)

Fatheya is conditioned culturally since her childhood that she has something impure about her and needs to be cut. "Then one day Om Saber came to their house, and she was told that the old woman was going to cut the bad, unclean part off. She was overcome by a feeling of overwhelming happiness. She was only six years old at the time." (32). Here, we find that El Saadawi tries to make us pay attention to this inhuman crime and the patriarchal mentality behind such practice; a practice which is meant to dominate women and consolidate the patriarchal image of women as sexual objects "To keep women monogamous, to attenuate the woman's sexuality, to control reproduction too." (1997: 65). Taking into account the economic and political factors behind such practice, Fawzia Khan emphasizes that "we must place the issue of clitoridectomy in a global context of capitalist oppression and injustice of which women are victims." (1997 :88).

However, El-Saadawi seeks to examine the multi- dimensions of patriarchy and its reliance on religion as its ideological bulwark.^{xii} In regard to patriarchy and how it is fortified by the religious ideology, Sheikh Hamzawi and Fatheya's marriage stands as an example. It seems that Sheikh Hamzawi's position as a religious leader of the community "responsible for upholding the teachings of Allah, and keeping the morals and piety of the village intact" (30) enables him to force Fatheya to marry him against her will.

What do you do?' exclaimed Haj Ismail, now looking furiously. 'Is that a question for a man to ask? Beat her, my brother; beat her once and twice and thrice. Do you not know that girls and women are only convinced if they receive a good hiding?' Masoud remained silent for a moment, then he called out, 'Fatheya, come here at once.' But there was no answer, so he climbed up on the top of the oven, pulled her out by her hair, and beat her several times until she came down. Then he handed her over to Haj Ismail and the same day she married the pious old sheikh. (31)

Sheikh Hamzawi was himself an impotent man and all of "Haj Ismail's potions and amulets had been totally ineffective restoring or even patching up his virility. (27-8). Due to his sexual impotency, the most that Sheikh Hamzawi can manage is to caress Fatheya's thighs and nothing more. Therefore, one may say that by marrying Fatheya, Sheikh Hamzawi has condemned her to a perpetual state of virginity and misery.

She was expected to live in his house surrounded by all due care and respect, never to be seen elsewhere except twice in her life. The first time when she moved from her father's to her husband's house. And the second when she left her husband's house for the grave allotted to her in the burial grounds. Apart from that(30).
[check your reference book about ellipses at the end of a quote]

It seems that in the Arab-Islamic family, the wife's main obligations are to maintain a home, care for her children, and obey her husband. "He is entitled to exercise his marital authority by restraining his wife's movements and preventing her from showing herself in public."(Moghadam 2004:137). Commenting on the situation of women in general, El Sadaawi says "I remember my mother saying that my grandmother had moved through the streets on only two occasions. The first was when she left her father's house and went to her husband's house to be buried. Both times no part of her body was uncovered. (1997:87)".

God Dies by the Nile ends with two scenes symbolic of resistance against the patriarchal class system by Fatheya and Zakeya respectively. We find Fatheya reject the double moral standards of patriarchy that condemns the 'son of sin' rather than the sinner himself.^{xiii} "Every time something goes wrong in the village, they will blame this [the] poor, innocent child. What has the child got to do with the cotton worm, Hamzawi? Was it he who told the worm to eat the cotton? The brain of a buffalo has more sense in it than the mind of these people here in Kafr El Teen." (112-3). In regard to the question of the illegitimate child, El Saadawi argues that "moral codes and standards in our societies very rarely apply to all people equally. This is the most damning proof of how immoral such codes and standards really are." (1980:27). It also alludes to the fact that many illegitimate children were born as a result of the sexual freedom enjoyed by men in the patriarchal class system. We see Fatheya fighting tooth and nail against those who now seek to destroy her adopted 'son of sin.' "She was a wild animal, ferociously fighting those who surrounded her in the night. She hit out at the men with legs, and her feet, with her shoulders and her hips all the while holding the child tightly in her arms." (115). During the course of her courageous resistance, Fatheya ultimately comes to her ultimate

death resisting the religious, political and traditional forces that consolidate and legitimize patriarchy.

Suddenly his eyes picked up a small shadow lying on the bank of the river, a short distance away. He went up to it, lifted it from the ground and came back carrying the torn body of her little child. Sheikh Metwalli held it out in his arms and laid it down softly on her chest. She curled her arms around it tightly and closed her eyes. And now when they lifted her they found that her body was light and easy to carry. They carried her as far as the house, and on the following morning buried her with the child held tightly in her arms. Hamzawi bought her a shroud of green silk and they wrapped her in it carefully. They dug a long ditch for her and lay her softly down in it, then covered her with the earth which lay around (116-7).

It is worthy to note that the victims, whether illegitimate children or raped women like Nefissa and Zeinab are sacrificed at the altar of the patriarchal class system, “a civilization where man is god and decide how best to satisfy his interests, his desires and his whims.”(Saadawi 1980:62). The other scene ends with Zakeya whose son Jalal and her brother Kafrawi are being jailed by the Mayor and her brother’s two daughters Nefissa and Zeinab were raped by him too. Zakeya finally becomes desalinated and god of patriarchy becomes demystified in her own mind. She sees counter-violence as her only sensible choice to resist the oppression meted against her own family in particular and women in general. Consequently, she walks out of the door and pauses for a moment before crossing the lane to the Iron Gate of the Mayor’s house.

The Mayor saw her come towards him. ‘One of the peasant women who work on my farm,’ he thought. When he came close he saw her arm rise high up in the air holding the hoe. He did not feel the hoe land on his head and crush it at one blow. For a moment before, he had looked into her eyes, just once. And from that moment he was destined never to see, or feel, or know anything more. (137)

By killing the Mayor, a s symbol of the patriarchal class oppression, one comes to conclude that El Saadawi , through her character Zakeya , conveys a message to all women in the world that resistance is the only option left for them if they want to eradicate oppression meted against them.

Conclusion

One comes finally to conclude that patriarchy in *God Dies by the Nile* emerges as a system with political, economic, social, cultural, and psychological manifestations bound together by underlying class dynamics. Such oppressive systems, represented by the abusive and exploitative figures of male authority, is the real cause behind the suffering of Zakeya ,Nefissa, Zeinab and Fatheya. For oppressive patriarchal class ideologies to survive, brutal force implements and instills such ideology in society. The impact of such ideology on women has been manifested through double moral standards, rape, sexual exploitation, psychological instability, illegitimate children and violence. With the murder of the Mayor, Zakeya finally restores her sense of freedom and self-respect by resisting oppression meted against her family. Within this context, Frantz Fanon comments that “this violence represents the absolute line of action.” (1963 :67). One also comes to find out that women pay dearly with their freedom and dignity to obey the laws of the patriarchal class system that dominates society. They also pay a heavy price in order to become free. El Saadawi, through her characters Zakeya and Fatheya, conveys a message to all women that resistance is the only option left to eradicate oppression and deconstruct the patriarchal class structures that enslave them. Furthermore, one can see the importance of collective action taken by women to resist the patriarchal class oppression meted against them. And that may reflect El Saadawi’s vision which it is only through political organization and a patient, long-enduring struggle, women can become an effective political power which will force society to change and abolish the patriarchal class structures that keep women victims.^{xiv}

Notes.

1- Heidi Hartmann observes “the categories of Marxist analysis give no clues about why women are subordinate to men inside and outside family and why it is not the other way around.(1981: 41). In regard to patriarchy, she defines it as “a set of social relations between men which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women.”(1981:14) Please see Heidi Hartmann. “ The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism : Towards a More Progressive Union,” in *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, Lydia sergeant, ed. Boston :South End Press, 1981.

2- Classes are often formed by similarly situated people who share the same wants and needs. According to Marx, these people initially have no more unity than “ potatoes in a

sack of potatoes”, (1968:608) but through a long and complex process of struggling together about issues of local , and later national, interest to them , they gradually become a true class. See please Marx, Karl. *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. New York: international publishers, 1968. You can see for further information, Mandel, Ernest. *An Introduction to Marxist Economics Theory*. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970. Heilroner, Robert . *Marxism : For and Against* . New York: W .W. Norton, 1980. Engels, Friedrich. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. New York: International Publishers, 1972. and Tong, Rosemarie. *Feminist Thought*. London. Unwin Hyman, 1989.

3- For Mary Murry “class and patriarchy have been organically rather than accidentally or contingently related. Because class and patriarchy have been organically connected ,we cannot draw hard-and-fast boundaries around them. The relationship between them has been a symbiotic one.” (1995:123). Please see Murray, Mary. *The Law of the Father? Patriarchy in the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* .Rout ledge: New York, 1995. In regard to Maria Mies , she argues that “capitalism cannot function without patriarchy. Capitalism requires never-ending capital accumulation; therefore, it requires patriarchal man-woman relations.”(1986: 170-1) . She also believes that capitalism and patriarchy are not two separate systems, but intrinsically connected as capitalist patriarchy. Please see Mies, Maria. *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labor*. London: Zed, 1986. “I am going to characterize as a socialist feminist anyone trying to understand women's subordination in a coherent and systematic way that integrates class and sex, as well as other aspects of identity such as race/ethnicity or sexual orientation, with the aim of using this analysis to help liberate women.” (Holmstrom 2003:38). Please see for further information Holmstrom, Nancy. “The Socialist Feminist Project.” *Monthly Review*. 54.10(2003): 38

4- In regard to the suffering faced by El Saadawi in her writing career, we find that the original title, *God Dies by the Nile* was censored by Arab publishers, seemingly due to religious sensitivity to the metaphoric extension of death to God. “I want to write freely about . . . religion, sex, God, authority, the state. But the publishers also censor me. Even in Beirut. I'll give you an example: my book *God Dies by the Nile*-they rejected the title totally. We settled on Mawt al-Rajul al-Wahid 'ala al-Ard.” (1990:403) . Please see El Saadawi, Nawal . “Reflections of a Feminist.” In *Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing*. Eds. Badran, Margot and Miriam Cooke. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990 . 394- 404. El Saadawi speaks about the corrupt nature of her country's government, the dangers of publishing under such authoritarian conditions and her determination to continue to write and convey the truth. Danger has been a part of my life ever since I picked up a pen and wrote. Nothing is more perilous than truth in a world that lies. Nothing is more perilous than knowledge in a world that has considered knowledge a sin since Adam and Eve... There is no power in the world that can strip my writings from me. (*Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* :1989). Please see El Saadawi, Nawal .*Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*. Trans. Catherine Cobham. San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1989.

5-All references will be henceforth taken from El Saadawi, Nawal .*God Dies by the Nile* Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed, 1985.

6- In regard to the Zar, El Saadawi says that women are “ treated with all sorts of magic or traditional rituals, including a form of exorcism in which the ‘devils’ or ‘evil spirits’ are driven away by a violent collective dance carried on until all the participants reach a trance –like state.” (1997:89). Please see El Saadawi, Nawal. *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader*. London & New York: Zed Books, 1997.

7-In order to put an end to rape, Simone de Beauvoir proposes that women must demystify it, by naming it, describing how it operated, and above all, by fighting it. (De Beauvoir: 1989). See De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. USA: Vantage: Books Edition, 1989.

8- According to Michael Mann, the patriarchal society is one in which power is held by male heads of households. There is also clear separation between the public and private spheres of life. In the private sphere of the household, the patriarch enjoys arbitrary power over all junior males, all females, and all children. In the public sphere, power is shared between male patriarchs according to whatever other principles of stratification operate. Please see Mann, Michael. “A crisis in stratification theory.” In *Gender and Stratification*. Eds. Crompton, Rosemary and Michael Mann. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986.40-56. “The Arab states embody various patriarchal structures and Arab society clings to a patriarchal system in which women's position within and duties toward the family precede their rights as individuals.” (Zuhur 2003:17). Please see Zuhur, Sherifa. “Women and Empowerment in the Arab World.” *Arab Studies Quarterly*.25.4. (2003): 17. In *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett establishes that patriarchy is a system where male domination is achieved through ideological means. She argues that it is the patriarchal system characterized by power and dominance that oppresses women. (Millett: 1970). Please see Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. New York: Doubleday, 1970.

9-For El Saadawi,“ the patriarchal family, therefore, came into existence mainly for economic reasons. It was necessary for society simultaneously to build up a system of moral and religious values, as well as a legal system capable of protecting and maintaining these economic interests. In the final analysis, we can safely say that female circumcision, the chastity belt and other savage practices applied to women are basically the result of economic interests that govern society.”(1980:41). Please see El Saadawi, Nawal. *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab world*. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books, 1980.

10-Concerning the inhuman practice of genital mutilation, El Saadawi says “Circumcision is most often performed on female children at the age of seven or eight (before the girl begins to get menstrual periods). On the scene appears the *daya* or local midwife. Two women members of the family grasp the child’s thighs on either side and pull them apart to expose the external genital organs and to prevent her from struggling-like trussing a chicken before it is slain. A sharp razor in the hand of the *daya* cuts off the clitoris.” (1980:33). She argues further that “ numerous were the nights which I spent by

the side of a young girl in a small country house or mud hut during my years in rural Egypt, treating hemorrhage that had resulted from the long dirty finger nail of a *daya* cutting through the soft tissues during the process of defloration.”(1980:29). Please see El Saadawi, Nawal. *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab world*. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books, 1980.

11-In regard to ceremonies performed, Natasha Gordon-Chipembere argues that some female circumcision ceremonies were accompanied by ululating women and in rural areas drumming and other musical instruments, primarily to celebrate this rite of passage, but essentially to drown out the screams of pain from the young girls. Please see Gordon-Chipembere, Natasha. “Carving the Body: Female Circumcision in African Women's Memoirs.” *Esharp*. 6:2. (2006): 1-20. Within this context , El Saadawi says that “In many villages , this ritual ceremony in honor of virginity is performed by an ugly old crone , the *daya* who earns her living by amputating the clitoris of children , and tearing open the vagina of young brides. The father of the bride then holds up a white towel stained with blood, and waves it proudly above his head for the relatives assembled at the door to bear witness to the fact that the honor of his daughter and of the family is intact.”(1980: 29). Please see El Saadawi, Nawal. *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab world*. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books, 1980.

12-Concerning the economic factors behind the practice of genital mutilation, El Saadawi argues that “the continued existence of such practices in our society today signifies that these economic interests are still operative. The thousands of *dayas*, nurses, para-medical staff and doctors, who make money out of female circumcision, naturally resist any change in these values and practices which are a source of gain to them. Economic factors and, concomitantly, political factors are the basis upon which such customs as female circumcision have grown up. It is important to understand the facts as they really are, and the reasons that lie behind them.” (1980: 41). Please see El Saadawi, Nawal. *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab world*. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books, 1980. You can also see for further information, Khan, Fawzia “Introducing a New Course: Muslim Women in Twentieth-Century Literature.” *NWSA*.9:1 (1997): 88 and Lionnet, Françoise. “Feminisms and universalisms.” *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A reader*. Eds. Lewis, Reina and Sara Mills. New York: Routledge, 2003. 368- 380.

13-For El Saadawi, religion “aims at truth, equality, justice, love and a healthy wholesome life for all people, whether men or women. There can be no true religion that aims at disease, mutilation of the bodies of female children, and amputation of an essential part of their reproductive organs.”(1980: 41-2). Please see El Saadawi, Nawal. *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab world*. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books, 1980. In her interview with Stephanie McMillan, she says that my conception of god is that god is inside us, and if god is outside us, it is the collective power of people, when they act, when they revolt against injustice. So god to me is justice. The revolution of people is divine. Please see McMillan, Stephanie. “A Conversation with Dr. Nawalel Saadawi.” (1999). <home.earthlink.net/~twoeyesmagazine/issue1/nes.htm> .

14- Concerning the question of illegitimate children, many illegitimate children were born as a result of the sexual freedom enjoyed by men in the patriarchal class system. El Saadawi argues that the “phenomenon of ‘illegitimate children’ stands out in history as one of the crimes committed by the patriarchal class system.” (1980:52). Please see El Saadawi, Nawal. *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab world*. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books, 1980.

15- “It is necessary that women unite everywhere to strengthen and broaden their movement towards liberation. Solidarity between women can be a powerful force of change, and can influence future development in ways favorable not only to women but also to men.”(1980:14). She contends further “It is necessary at all the times to see the close links between women’s struggles for emancipation and the battles for national and social liberation waged by people in all parts of the ‘third world’ against foreign domination and the exploitation exercised by international capitalism over human and natural resources.” (1980:8). Please see El Saadawi, Nawal. *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab world*. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books, 1980. Chandra Mohanty says “I was committed, both politically and personally, to building noncolonizing feminist solidarity across borders.”(2004:224). She contends further that “I want to speak of feminism without silences and exclusions in order to draw attention to the tension between the simultaneous plurality and narrowness of borders and the emancipatory potential of crossing through, with, and over these borders in our everyday lives. (2004:2). See Mohanty, Chandra. *Feminism without Borders*. USA: Duke University Press, 2004.

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