

Woman at point zero: oppression of women

[Sociology](#), [Identity](#)



In many patriarchal societies, women find it difficult to unchain themselves from the control and power of men. Women are oppressed in order to serve men and prolong the existence of patriarchal command. This makes it difficult for women to be able to find release from a society that endorses this lifestyle. In the 1950s, Egyptian culture believed that a woman was expected to bear children, especially sons. They are viewed to be homemakers and care for their husbands. It was a practice to pull females from school as they reached puberty to minimize interactions with males as men preferred to marry a woman who was viewed as pure from other men. Nawal El Saadawi illustrated this culture in her book *Woman at Point Zero*. The story follows Firdaus, a woman that struggled throughout her life with consistent oppression from many men including family members and complete strangers. The oppression of Firdaus is demonstrated through situations of child marriage, physical abuse, and rape that is accepted by the Muslim culture of that time.

Female oppression begins early in life where family members choose a husband for their daughter at a young age. Women in a Muslim society do not choose their own husbands and are arranged one by their family. “ This practice enables the girl’s family to get rid of her because she is regarded as an unnecessary liability” (Fwangyil). Firdaus was forced to marry Sheikh Mahmoud who was much older than her because her uncle’s wife no longer found it important to have her in their household. The dowry also benefits the family of the bride so they usually try to find a husband that can give them a large sum. Firdaus did not love Sheikh Mahmoud nor did she find him attractive. This is shown by her description of her husband, “ When the hole

dried up, I let him kiss me... but on days that it was not dry I would turn my lips and face away to avoid the odour of dead dogs which emanated from it” (El Saadawi 57). Even though she tries leaving, she finds that there may not be a safe place for her outside of Sheikh Mahmoud’s home, so she returns. She later suffers from many instances of physical abuse.

In Egyptian Islamic culture, it was taught that physical abuse was normal as girls watched their mothers get beaten. Then as they matured and had husbands themselves, they were also beaten. As Firdaus grew up, she routinely watched her mother get beaten but mostly when her male siblings had passed. Later when she was older, she states, “ But my uncle told me that all husbands beat their wives, and my uncle’s wife added that her husband often beat her. I said my uncle was a respected Sheikh, well versed in the teachings of religion, and he, therefore could not possibly be in the habit of beating his wife. She replied that it was precisely men well versed in their religion that beat their wives” (El Saadawi 59). This indicates that the Islamic religion in Egypt allows the action of beating their wives. It was often normalized by Muslims, as in the Quran it states that when women are disloyal or show ill-conduct, men can strike them as it is allowed by Allah. Women were taught to be submissive and dutiful without question. Firdaus withstands physical abuse from her husband but also other male figures throughout her life such as Bayoumi, Marzouk, and many other men that she crossed throughout her time as a prostitute and a female official in a company. Physical abuse was not the only type of abuse that she withstood but also rape.

Due to the Islamic view that women are servants of men, many men took their power and abused it to rape women. Firdaus first experienced sexual manipulation at a young age with her uncle after her parents passed. Right after Firdaus received her primary school certificate, he touched her and kissed her sensually. Once living with Sheikh Mahmoud, she is continually raped as a wife is meant to serve her husband. Later, after she leaves her husband after an awful beating, she met Bayoumi who took her in and seemed like he truly wanted to help her. But, when Firdaus wanted to use her education for work, Bayoumi locked her into his apartment where he then repeatedly raped her. He even allowed his friend to come in to use Firdaus. Gloria Ada Fwangyil, a faculty of arts member of the University of Jos, Nigeria, agrees that “ Sheikh Mahmoud and Bayoumi molest Firdaus because culture demands that she submits to male authority (Fwangyil). Firdaus later employs herself as a prostitute as she finds this is the only way she can use what she has to take advantage of men to overcome the oppression.

The oppression of Firdaus is due to the beliefs and values of the Muslim culture. This culture makes it difficult for women to escape this oppression as it is engrained in their religious beliefs that are found in the Quran.

Therefore, Firdaus uses her agency at the end of her story to continue with her death sentence so she can finally be free of the constant abuse from men that she fought her entire life to accomplish. Even though Woman at Point Zero was illustrated in an earlier Egypt patriarchal society, there are many instances in other cultures and religions that mistreat women. It has

been brought forward to educate readers on the detrimental effects that the oppression of women brings to other societies.

Works Cited

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