

Re-envisioning National Communities and the Short Story Genre in Nawal El Saadawi, Salwa Bakr and Ibtihal Salem

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Abstract

This paper looks at the particular genre of the short story in playing a significant role for Egyptian women to articulate their relationships within and without the male-dominant new nation after national independence in 1952. The paper focuses on three representative Egyptian women writers' short stories, including Nawal El Saadawi's (1931-) "In Camera," (1979) Salwa Bakr's (1949-) "Zeinat at the President's Funeral," (1986) and Ibtihal Salem's (1949-) "The Boot," (1999) to examine how they re-write femininities in relation to the modern national space dominated by the male elite who they have worked together and fought hard in the independence struggle since the turn of the twentieth-century. The juxtaposition of the three writers demonstrates the diverse political positionings from which Egyptian women rights activists have participated in the anti-colonial struggle. Sabry Hafez points out that the short story is particularly apt to capture the isolation, pain and fragmentation of the individuals' experiences in modern Arabic literature. Utilizing Homi Bhabha's theory of the in-between spaces, this paper considers the silences and the untranslatability with which Egyptian women's rights activists re-envision their nation. Bhabha suggests that the present temporality of the nation is both pedagogical and performative. He also holds that the storytelling of the people and national communities is subjected to unpredictable pulsations of the present temporality that constitute the people's identities in the modern nation. This paper aims at unraveling the decentered, incoherent and multiple identities with which Egyptian women writers re-envision the Islamic notion of femininities in relation to the nation through their daily life accounts embodied in the compressed moment of the short story.

Keywords: femininities, Ibtihal Salem, national communities, Nawal El Saadawi, Salwa Bakr,

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(Received October 28, 2015; Accepted March 22, 2016)

Each time he came to visit he pulled off his boots and the smell of buried sweat rose, stifled and hidden sweat that with time had intermingled with fumes of their passion.

---Ibtihal Salem, "The Boot" 123

Introduction

Nawal El Saadawi (1931-) is one of Egypt's prominent nationalist-feminists whose work on Egyptian women's equality with men in the private space as well as in the public space makes her a unique figure in the long-standing history of Egyptian women's liberation movement. She links patriarchal systems to sexual exploitation and deals with many issues of gender equality, including female virginity, sexual purity, sexual aggression toward women's bodies and public sexual exploitation of women's bodies, clitoridectomy in particular (Badran, "Independent Women" 140-41). In her "In Camera," El Saadawi situates the female bodies in neo-colonialism and fundamentalist resurgence in Egypt in the 1970s and opens the female bodies up to unstable significations. This short story deals with Anwar Sadat's regime between 1970 and 1981 when the call for Egyptian women to return to their place at home was in sharp contrast to Jamal Abdel Nasser's policy before him which ascertained Egyptian women the rights to education and employment. The heroine, Leila, in "In Camera" is tortured by the government precisely because, as the heroine suggests, men who lead the nation into all kinds of problems are afraid of owning up to their inferiority complex. It is exactly men's fear that prompts them to erase women's histories, mutilate their divinity, and to impose severe punitive measures on the unwavering heroine.

Different from El Saadawi, who was brought up in rural Egypt, Salwa Bakr (1949-) grew up in Cairo. She studied business and literary criticism at university, and had a career in journalism for some time in her life, besides her career as a writer. Hoda El Sadda's comments on Bakr's fiction are that she is neither feminine nor feminist (xi). Instead, as El Sadda suggests, Bakr does not confine her fiction to "dual, hierarchical oppositions," as Hélène Cixous has described the patriarchal binary system (qtd. in El Sadda xi). Raised by a

single mother after her father's death, Bakr naturally takes up the lives of the impoverished and marginalized women in her writing. Her "Zeinat at the President's Funeral" characterizes an impoverished woman who writes to the president, Jamal Abdel Nasser, asking him to help improve her living condition in the dilapidated slum of Cairo. Nasser was known for his nationalism which arose out of the Free Officers Movement consisted of the members of the Egyptian middle class, young workers, government officials and junior officers that overthrew King Faruq, the constitutional monarchy and aristocracy in 1952.

The work of Ibtihal Salem (1949-) demonstrates the significance with which the Egyptian women adopted the short story in constructing Egyptian cultural identities and experiences from the 1970s on. In "The Boot," the smell of the boot fermented with time hoards a lonely woman's memory about the war between Egypt and Israel. Unlike El Saadawi and Bakr whose settings are often located within the reach of Cairo, Salem's scene of writing is built around the waters of sea and river, such as the Nile, the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal and the Red Sea. In "The Boot," Salem narrates the relationship of female sexuality intertwined with war having been overlooked by the masculinity and violence of nationalism, while nationalist men consistently use traditional women as a spiritual symbol to cordon off the guidance and interference of the colonial state. "The Boot" is concerned with the story of a woman left behind with her newborn baby all alone when her husband goes to war with the Israeli military in the October War in 1973. Writing the story in 1999, Salem remarks that the boot "carries the odor of memories" and that the wife of a long-ago fighter remembers the forgotten war (121).

This paper examines the significance of the short story as a vehicle for Egyptian women to articulate their voices in relation to the male-dominant national communities with the entrenched genderized stereotypes created by both nationalism and orientalism. This paper investigates the three writers' engagement in resisting and disrupting the norms on femininity as bodily and speech acts to construct the new nation as constituted by incoherent and multiplex identities in the making. Sabry Hafez, leading literary critic in the Arab world, notes that the social, economic and political changes have been intricately tied in with the

birth of the narrative genres, such as the short story and novel, since the turn of and throughout the twentieth century in Egypt (*The Quest for Identities* 41-67). He further indicates that the short story is suitable to capture the individuals' pain of being marginalized in society and the fragmentation of the individuals' living experiences in modern-day life (36). This paper first starts with Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity in relation to the immediacy and brevity of the short story genre, then discusses the instantaneous temporality that the three short stories embody in connection with national communities and their people, and finally analyzes the short story's capacity due to its spontaneity to initiate what Bhabha calls an "instantaneous" time and to embody the unspeakable living condition in the postcolonial/postmodern societies (158).

I. The Short Story and the National Space

This paper utilizes Homi Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity to illustrate the short story's capacity to embody his "instantaneous" and unspeakable, while examining the translational moments of Egyptian women's daily life as inherently liminal experiences where the norms on women are iterative, unstable and incoherent. This paper proposes that the space constituted by the short story is a space of interstices inhabited by women from all walks of life who re-signify national communities by bodily and speech acts around femininities. This section first establishes the short stories written by the Egyptian women writers. In "In Camera" by El Saadawi, the heroine, Leila, employs her body as a symbol to represent the modern Egyptian nation which makes the transition from the old to the new order. She is physically punished in the prison, including cudgeling and ruthless rapes, for publicly going against Anwar Sadat: "Her body was no longer hers but was like that of a small calf struck by the heels of boots. A rough stick entered between her thighs to tear at her insides (78).

In "In Camera," Leila is put on trial for her standing up as an intellectually independent woman against the paternalistic ruler, which emphasizes the heroine's bravery to break away from male-defined femininities and transgress the boundary of men's world into the public space. Her loving mother once tries to dissuade her from engaging in politics: "What's

politics got to do with you? You're not a man. Girls of your age think only about marriage. [...] Politics is a dirty game which only ineffectual men play" (83-4). The short story which articulates colonial exploitation at the transition from feudalism to modernity is a national allegory through the female body traumatized by rapes as the symbol of national spaces. The symbol of the rough stick entering Leila's body suggests the privilege of penises in the phallogocentric system. For El Saadawi, penises stand for the all-encompassing oppressions that the West continues to exert in academia and universalist gender/sexuality studies. The penises that rape women are part and parcel of western modernity built in the notion of western gender equality within new Egyptian modern family in which patriarchy is once again established as backward tradition in Islam and westernized women are ambivalently portrayed as disrespectful.

In "In Camera," the rapes that the heroine, Leila Al-Fargani, suffers from in part represent economic exploitation of the American-led global capitalism which gives rise to extreme poverty in Egypt. As Fredric Jameson comments on the Third World literature, it is all about creating storytelling of the collective self, despite its seemingly intention to tell the stories of the individuals (qtd. in Bhabha 140). As Jameson suggests, "Third-world world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic—necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory [...]" (Jameson 69). The rights to education are believed by Egyptian nationalists to improve the condition of the country. The raped student vies with men in leadership in the public space with her inner self remaining genuinely conformed to the middle class: "She had been shocked and hadn't understood how a [western] woman could flirt with her in such a way [by suddenly winking at her strangely]" (90). Like her male nationalist counterpart, Leila draws a clear line between the respectable and western woman. She successfully competes with the ruler for the power of self-representation to stand for the new nation, which articulates the untranslatable space of female agency caught between Islamic fundamentalists and western imperialism:

Although his [Sadat's] mouth was pinched in arrogance and sincerity, his cheeks

were slack, beneath them a cynical and comical smile containing chronic corruption and childish petulance. (80)

Echoing El Saadawi's sexual politics, Leila, repudiates to be seen as men's sexual object in this short story. El Saadawi ventriloquizes for her heroine to underscore sexual exploitation to be the primary and deepest form of oppression that causes inequality in other areas of oppression. The ruler who conceals his feelings of inferiority in the pictures widely circulated in the media nation-wide becomes the object she boldly looks back. Islamic fundamentalism and modernist nationalism are not mutually exclusive, but rather have points of contact.

In "In Camera," Leila's eyes in the story reverses the position of male spectatorship which procures much pleasure precisely because seeing what is not allowed to with respect to the female body (Doane 179). Despite acute pain, Leila stares at the men at court in a mocking manner:

Her eyes began to make out bodies sitting on that elevated place, above each head a body, smooth heads without hair, in the light as red as monkey's rumps. They must all be males, for however old a woman grew, her head could never look like a monkey's rump. (78-79)

Leila runs counter to the ruler's double game of pro-American economic policy which angers Egyptians and of encouraging Islamic fundamentalism which drives Egyptian women home. Leila is being accused of blasphemy by the judge for standing up against him: "This student, who is not yet twenty years old, refers to Him, whom God protect to lead this noble nation all this life, as 'stupid'" (84). Rapes are the worst possible punishment that a woman can expect in Islam, since it violates the heroine's chastity, but still, she is reluctant to surrender to the court. Female masculinity embodied through the character, Leila, does not translate into coherent identities about Islam. More importantly, sexual exploitation is one of the issues about female sexualities that El Saadawi has been concerned with since the 1970s.

Salwa Bakr's concern is less with Egyptian middle-class women's political rights in "Zeinat at the President's Funeral," when compared with El Saadawi's emphasis on female sexualities and maternal warmth. In this short story, Bakr depicts the slum-dwelling woman, Zeinat, who is passionate about sharing her ideas on the nation with Jamal Abdel Nasser whose policy helped cultivate a younger generation of revolutionaries in the 1970s and they were willing to spread revolutionary nationalism in Arab world gradually metamorphosed into pan-Arabic movements. As a heroine, Zeinat gives readers a quick glimpse into Egypt's wide-ranging social problems during Nasser's time, including rapid urbanization, housing shortage, price inflation and hence labor emigration in the Arab Gulf countries, which grew serious despite his welfare reforms:

His [Nasser's] Pictures remained exactly in their place in her little shack: they were the only objects that decorated the lodging that Zeinat had built herself—using stones, bricks and tin sheets—after appropriating a few metres of government land on the side of the main road. (23)

Zeinat asks her neighbor, Abdou, the barber, to correspond with President Nasser concerning improving her life as a lonely woman whose father passes away early in her life, whose newly-wed husband dies in a fire in the shop he works for without even consummating their marriage and whose brother is married and cannot accommodate her at his place. Nasser was thought to be a national hero who genuinely cared about the lives of normal Egyptians, and whose agrarian reform, modernization projects and nationalization schemes contributed to substantial growth in national economy, when aristocratic influence waned after the national independence struggle. The national economy took a downturn toward the late 1960s in Nasser's term in office, though. Bakr deploys a character, Zeinat, who is from the lower class and cannot find even cleaning jobs due to her illiteracy, to make a critique on Egyptian male-led nationalism which provides changes for women only when they continue to take up the role of protecting and nurturing mother at home. In other words, Zeinat exposes the myth created by the male nationalists who exploit the image of traditional

women without really doing anything for them.

Both Bakr and Ibtihal Salem, who share different views from EL Saadawi about Egyptian women and nation in regards with female sexualities, in contrast to Nawal El Saadawi, are from the new generation of writers emerging in the 1970s and experienced Nasser's financial support in providing education to the public. During Nasser's time, Egypt enjoyed a golden era of culture encouraging theater, poetry, fine arts and so on. Like Bakr, Salem, whose writing is not separable from Egypt's political and economic milieu, shows deep appreciation toward Nasser's Arab nationalism and lingering sadness for the war-torn nation:

Writing is also intense pain. For instance, I'm from the generation [that grew up with] Nasser: I opened my eyes upon joyful dreams and fantastic ambitions. I continued to dream: to read, to imagine a better and more welcoming world through the stages of childhood and adolescence—until I was slapped by the Catastrophe of 1967. It shook me like an earthquake, yanked me apart from the tree [of my identity]. (7-8)

“The Boot” by Salem taps into the national spaces by probing the daily life of an ordinary, young woman whose husband goes to war and leaves her behind alone with her newborn baby in the port town ravaged by Israel in the October War. Pertaining to nationalism, Evelyne Accad points out that female sexuality is essential to women's liberation for its potential power in changing the psychological and physical relations of men and women, and thus nationalism that leaves out the question of female sexualities is problematic, as this continues to reproduce the way male sexuality is viewed (*Sexuality and War* 19). Accad further suggests that women have proved themselves being valiant fighters alongside men in the warfare, but are still treated as second-class citizens whose place is none other than home by the nation they help create (12). Furthermore, she argues that the issues, ranging from pleasure, to masturbation, birth to virginity and abortion, are kept off from any serious attention in the agenda of the new nation (21-22). According to her, a new men and women rapport based on mutual recognition on an equal footing should replace the relations between the sexes based on jealousy, oppression and power games (25). Ibtihal

Salem's "The Boot" offers a brand new vision in the thoughts, problems and interpretations of Arab nationalism. Confronting the question of female sexualities, Salem does not shy away from western feminists' progressive indoctrination about female sexualities, and thereby pushing the Third World women further into the ideological warfare of defending their national identities.

Bakr and Salem's writing also reveals the myth created by the postcolonial nation making women stand for the spiritual inner core in modernizing the nation but leaving them out in history. Significantly, they do not have the heavy nationalist baggage rooted in the need to speak up for traditions that El Saadawi, who resorts to reversal strategy against patriarchy, does. Transgressing cultural boundaries incurs orientalist assumption about female sexuality in Islam, either treating Muslim women as victims or as patriarchy fighters in the cycle of western epistemic violence. In "Zeinat at the President's Funeral," Bakr revisits the question of the norms on women without appealing to a hostile relationship with men. In "The Boot," when dealing with female sexuality of the soldier's wife, the heroine does not emphasize men's sexual exploitation, but makes sexuality as power that she can draw on to sustain herself through the tough times of atrocities. For Leila in "In Camera," the rapes speak to many other touchy issues, such as sexual pleasure, female genital mutilation and obedience (*bayt al-ta'ah*), that El Saadawi has been concerned with and EL Saadawi draws her argument from the appropriation of and challenges against western gender/sexualities study. Her notion about women's independence tends to take multiple positions, while distancing herself from both western feminisms and her nationalist counterparts.

In his study of the short story in Arabic, Sabry Hafez notes that the "short story is the solitary genre, one that most concerned with the trials and tribulations of the forlorn individuals and marginalized groups" (*The Quest for Identities* 36). In pursuit of a new literary discourse, the short story is not totally exempt from the desire to create the homogenous, empty time of the new nation; the short story genre, rather, has its roots in Arabic prose fiction and it intermingles with the new homogenous, empty time that Benedict

Anderson assumes for the rise of the novel (36). Notably, when the women writers discussed in the paper wrote in the 1970s with the purpose to experiment new expressions of women's lives, they were writing in a genre already in a decline since the 1960s because of the preeminence of the novel in international literary conventions (Jacquemond 216-17). Bakr and Salem belonged to the generation of the literary avant-garde emerging in the 1970s, decisively using the short story as the medium for their conveyance of Egyptian women's personal experiences (190). Part of the decision stems from their underprivileged social conditions, and hence the consideration of the inability to produce more work within limited time and resources (190). Egyptian women in the late-nineteenth century also published non-fiction and poetry like men. The novel and short story, for Egyptian writers, however, were the result of contacts with European culture because of travelling and translations of literature (Booth, "Introduction" to *My Grandmother's Cactus* 2). Egyptian women's short story writers reached the stage of maturity during the 1940s and 1950s, using this genre to articulate their marginalization.

Homi Bhabha points out that Benedict Anderson's homogeneous empty time fails to consider the splitness of the present (161). For Bhabha, the present temporality is comprised of two incommensurable temporalities that threaten the nation's coherence: one pedagogic and the other performative (158). The histories of migration and settlement have contributed to the ambivalence in the significations of the modern social narration (161). According to Bhabha, the ambivalence of cultural interpretations derives from the non-synchronous, incommensurable gap of people living a perplexed life in liminal spaces of the national communities (161). With regard to the narration of the modern nation, Bhabha emphasizes the difference between the process of signification and the progress of narratives: "From the margins of modernity, at the insurmountable extremes of storytelling, we encounter the question of cultural difference as the perplexity of living and writing the nation" (161). As Bhabha characterizes the present temporality that creates the postcolonial, postmodern condition:

The "meanwhile" is the sign of the processual and performative, not a simple present

continuous, but the present as succession without synchrony—the iteration of the sign of the modern nation-space. (159)

Because repetitions of social practices, that is, the meanwhile time, are subjected to endless cultural translations, the existence of nations, open to cultural translations, has to be articulated within constant transcultural negotiations (162). Thus, cultural newness emerges from competing narratives vying with divergent cultural differences in the processes of significations due to mass migration and settlement. The inter-mingling of the local and global is projected onto the decentered, fragmented subject, that is, “its decentred ‘subject’ signified in the nervous temporality of the transitional, or the emergent provisionality of the ‘present’” (216). Cultural contestations, neither originary nor copy but fragmented and decentered, that migrant communities bring about in the West do not lead to a stable consciousness for the host countries (221). However, the minorities in western countries are subjected to “racialization of religion,” in which cultural translational practices become unitary rather than interventional (229). An instance of this is the regulation of gender and sexuality that patriarchal fundamentalism involves with not only creates challenges against heterosexism but is also fixed by western gender/sexuality studies as the major issue of the minorities (229).

Valerie Shaw points out that the short fiction were popular in late-nineteenth century England, mostly receiving attention from writers who were anti-Victorian artists (4). For Shaw, the nature of the short story affords this particular genre the ability to allow colloquial spontaneity, to give vibrant images, to mingle divergently extreme styles, to be compressed and poetic, and particularly, to envision social changes (6-14). This suggests that historically the short fiction which develops alongside the novel and other types of art has been curiously under-evaluated in literary history. Indeed, the short story with its limited, non-sequential, direct characteristics is a decent genre for the Third World writers to seek out new identities and provide the individuals in the society with visions for social reform (*The Quest for Identities* 26). Concerning the genesis of the modern novel and short story in Arabic, Sabry Hafez argues that they are not simply borrowed from the West, but are a

multiplex intertextual space between western narrative discourse and classical Arabic fiction (*The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse* 27). Richard Jacquemond also points out the characteristic hybridity of modern Egyptian literature (110). During the 1950s and 1960s under Nasser, the state promoted an unprecedented project of translations which introduced a great amount of European works into Egypt (119). Translated works, social changes and discursive plurality of literary production are part and parcel of the new social and cultural experiences and the pursuit of new national identities in postcolonial Egypt (*The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse* 22).

In terms of skills, these three writers utilize their language to speak directly against the male-dominant literary tradition reflected in the protection of classic Arabic as the only written language, or *al-fusha*, by male elite. El Saadawi's writing style appeals to the general reading public by employing an accessible language that emphasizes neither academic sophistication nor literary techniques: "Her simple diction, crisp sentences, and short paragraphs give her books a journalistic flavor and appeal to a wide reading public" (Amireh 53). Bakr's language which offers polyvocal narrative voices also attempts to transcend the binary oppositions inherent in the patriarchal language system (Hafez, "Women's Narrative in Modern Arabic Literature" 171-72). Bakr coins a new language, *al-'ammiyya al-fasiha*, meaning a standard colloquial language, to express the lower-class women's lives without isolating her works from the tradition of classical Arabic (Seymour-Jorn 160-61). Bakr's particular creation of language would not be found in the colloquial language; it is resonant with everyday speech and a direct translation of the colloquial phrase into *al-fusha* (164). The new language carves out new selfhood for Egyptian women. Using a language enriched by peasants migrating in urban areas, young nouveaux riche class and contemporary Arabic pop culture, Salem's short stories are not always very easy to read, nor do they provide nicely close-ended answers (Booth, "Introduction" to *Children of the Waters* 8-9)

The Arabic short story genre has drawn on traditional writing and has been a result of eastern/western inter-textuality since the inception of modernity. The pioneering short story writers in Egypt had to cope with didacticism and worked toward eliminating the element of pure entertainment in traditional literature (Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative*

Discourse 160). The pioneers strove toward creating a genre of narratives that could express the defeat that the nation faced and reflected distinctive human existence (160). An instance of the pioneers' efforts was their creation of real people in contrast to stylized characters with psychological archetypes (229). According to Hafez, realism in Egyptian short stories is not influenced so much by western classical literature as by Russian literature, and it endeavors to construct reality not so much objectively but as experienced by individuals (*The Quest for Identities* 76). For Hafez, the emergence of the short story in Arabic corresponds with the aspirations to create local narratives (76). The survival of the short story genre is manifested differently according to different cultures and literatures (29). As western short story writers lament, the genre seems to be on the way to extinction (29). However, nationals in the Third World find the genre popular and respectable to express the richness in society (28-30).

Because of its ties with folktale and orality, the short story which comes from multiple sources has a troubling relationship to modernity (Awadalla and March-Russell i-ii). While western short story seems on the brink of decline, the short story plays a dissident role in the neo-colonial activities at the time of increasing globalization (vii). The short story genre in Arabic is a vehicle to challenge the real, the sociopolitical circumstances, the historical past and questions truths about men and women. Due to limitations in mass circulation and little magazine, the short story suffers from critical and popular neglect both in the East and West (vi). Being suited to express fragmented identities and open-endedness, the short story responds to western audiences, de-territorializes and re-territorializes the nation (iv). It associates with modernity and the horizontal empty time of the novel, while articulating the transitional of the new societies (Hafez, *The Quest for Identities* 36). The short story should be re-considered for assessing its role in postcolonial studies (Awadalla and March-Russell vii). The following section deals with this paper's concern with Egyptian women's multiple positionings within and without Egypt through the everyday time-space they create in their short stories.

II. The Present Temporality in the Short Story and the National Space

The right to define who women are has been fallen into the hands of the Egyptian male elite at the turn of the twentieth century. According to Barbara Stowasser, the modernists at the turn of the twentieth century re-interpreted the conjugal relationship in the modern family to catalyze a moral rebirth of the Muslim society (8). Conservatives, on the other hand, saw in the appeal to gender equality western tricks plotted to erode Islamic social order (14). Islamic fundamentalists regarded the feminists as nothing but mouthpieces of their enemies (21). El Saadawi, who disrupts gender boundaries by being outspoken about female sexualities, is unique in the history of Egyptian feminism. By contrast, not clinging to feminist resistance and national boundaries, Bakr and Salem adopt the short story to provide the nation with polyvocality of the underprivileged individuals at a time when the UN Decade for Women's Development promoted human rights-friendly discourse. The non-governmental organizations play a significant role in influencing the policymaking of the state. As Marilyn Booth characterizes this new generation of women writers in the 1970s:

These women writers are part of a generation which has to a great extent broken away from traditional modes of expression. Their revolt hinges on a concept of reality which privileges the changing, the uncertain and the fragmented over the stable, the controllable the unified. ("Introduction" to *Children of the Waters* 9-10)

Bakr and Salem unravel the norms on femininity without perpetuating the dichotomous structure of men and women. Together with El Saadawi, their writing represents the urgent need for transcultural knowledge in modern-day world.

In "Zeinat at the President's Funeral," Zeinat reverses the criminal and the innocent as well as the idiotic woman who needs a man to write letters for her and a woman of activism in the bread riot. Egyptian people took to street to protest against Sadat's policy to terminate food subsidy based on the agreement with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in 1977. Zeinat's insistence on a personal meeting with Nasser represents the jarring meanings of the national liminal spaces and the double writing of the nation. Her voices speak to many Egyptian women rights activists who were not satisfied with the Nasserist

ideology of equating women's rights to national progress. Mervat Hatem's label of Nasser's "state feminism" manifests the major problem of Nasser's encouragement of women's position:

[S]tate feminism under the Nasser regime produced women who were economically independent of their families, but dependent on the state for employment, important social services like education, health and day care, and political representation. (qtd. in Al-Ali 68)

Zeinat's deprivation highlights Nasser's state feminism that strengthens Egyptian women's position mainly through their participation in education and employment. As Deniz Kandiyoti also suggests, the nationalist project is itself ambiguous in creating the contradictory as victims of cultural backwardness and the icons of mystified cultural authenticity (qtd. in Al-Ali 54). The everyday life, as shown in these women writers, better embodied in the short story, constitutes the complexity of the national communities as heterogeneous time-space, the borderline space of translations in which the "foreignness" of the short stories is multiple-layered and untranslatable (Bhabha 163). New voices emerge from the representations of the outlawed individuals in the Third World; translating their lives in English means that acknowledging the Other, neither reducing them to a homogenous Other nor celebrating cultural differences (173).

In "In Camera," the heroine, Leila, is punished because of her attempts to reverse the representational system which presents woman as the enigma: "She craned her neck to raise her head and penetrate the fog with her weak eyes" (93). Her eyes are wounded deliberately in tortures so that she is turned into a wretched animal, nothing but a raped woman: "Ten men raped her, one after the other. They trampled on her honour and on her father's honour" (92). Even when she is raped, she does not surrender: "The most valuable thing I possess is not between my legs. You're all stupid. And the most stupid among you is the one who leads you" (93). Here, El Saadawi emphasizes the intersectionality of female sexualities with the mobilization and proliferation of different identity positionings. Though struggling against

each other for power in the nation, the groups based on secularity and religiosity both valorize the nuclear familial structure central to the rise of the middle class in postcolonial nation (Hatem 86). The heroines in these short stories should be viewed differentially. For a feminist such as El Saadawi, who is clearly a modernist-nationalist, her heroines' struggles toward autonomy are fundamentally Islamic. The term, Islam, employed to describe the heroines in relation to the war of identities should not be used homogenously, but must be regarded as molded by cultural exchanges and specific historical processes. Sharify-Funk argues that the term, Islam, as conjured up by the West is very much left in eastern/western religious/secular and traditional/modern binary constructions by its scholars and in the media (26-27). According to Sharify-Funk, the critiques on authoritative patriarchal system in Islam are more effective within the "context of a new, pluralistic hermeneutic field" in which Muslim women's participation in religious interpretations and transnationalism are in constant negotiations and in need of creative approaches toward interpreting Islam (25).

"In Camera" shows that female sexuality based on the conjugal relationship in the modern Muslim family is subjected to cultural, political and economic impacts outside the family that contribute to Leila's fragmentations and untranslatability. The Islamic revival resurged right after the defeat of the June War testified to the dashed hope toward Nasser's nationalism. Western imperialism made it impossible for Egyptian Islamists to find a space to articulate self-identities and to regain hope toward their country. Bakr and Salem are not so much burdened with the desire to verify a sense of cultural authenticity in their writing, as is El Saadawi, whose attachment to a national identity demonstrates the difficulty with which she deals with sexual oppression in relation to female sexualities in Arabo-Islamic context:

In the West, as people become aware of this practice [female circumcision], they may fail to see this foundation, which allows them to see that it is a form of the same system of domination that most societies have experienced, still experience. It is not, essentially, a 'bizarre African' practice. (*The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* 66)

El Saadawi fiction demonstrates her swiftness to cope with multiple audiences in her

sexual politics:

Can we be creative if we submit to the rules forced upon us under different names: father, god, husband, family, nation, security, stability, protection, peace, democracy, family planning, development, human rights, modernism or postmodernism? (158)

The rapes that Leila in “In Camera” suffers from demonstrate sexual domination still having effect on many aspects of Egyptian women’s lives. El Saadawi’s middle-class lens can sometimes obscure the voices from the more peripheral spaces in the colonial and pre-colonial ages. For instance, her notion of sexual exploitation of men and women in Arabo-Islamic context can run the risk of failing to grasp the question of female circumcision done to impoverished peasant women in rural areas of Africa, when dealing with Islamic feminism.

By prioritizing gender equality over the backward practices of gender seclusion, El Saadawi subscribes herself to the view of gender hierarchy as backward, a perspective emphatically showing her middle-class perspectives. She considers relations of the sexes to be based on sexual exploitation, thereby misrepresenting prostitution, demonstrating didacticism toward western sex-positive feminist politics and reducing men and women’s relations to rapists and victims. El Saadawi’s efforts of legal reform on the personal status law concerning clitoridectomy and abortion are part of the variegated project of modernizing the nation. By associating the fundamentalist revival with global politics, especially America’s, which forms the circuit of epistemic violence and makes the fundamentalists put forward more conservative policymaking about women within the nation, El Saadawi drives the point home that Islamic fundamentalism is complicit with, and not independent of, the polarities of gender and Islam, an ideology produced by the West to legitimize the invasion they carry out in the Middle East. El Saadawi stands for the position that resists relativist postmodernism in which complex cultural differences are reduced simply to different forms of patriarchal systems.

In “In Camera,” Leila defends herself in front of the judge. By this, she makes it clear

that Muslim women's position and global economy are not irrelevant, but rather interlocking. Her relationship with the nationalist male elite is both cooperative and disruptive. She keeps a distance from western feminisms, while showing her restrictions due to the need for an imagined, shared national past. Time focuses on the trial only in "In Camera". The nation's modernity is revealed through the disjunctive time of the present moment. Female masculinity in place of bankrupt male masculinity reveals the instability of the patriarchal system through the ruler in the heroine's eyes:

Foolishness means that he doesn't think, worst thing you can call an ordinary man. And all the more so if he's a ruler. You don't know rulers, Your Honour, but I know them well. Each of them fancies his brain to be better than any other man's. And it's not just a matter of fantasy, but of blind belief, like the belief in God. For the sake of this illusion, he can kill thousands. (95)

El Saadawi creates new conditions in which she bridges religious and gender issues in ways that are incompatible, contradictory and unsettling (Cooke 49). Traditions manifested through gender hierarchy, postulated against the accusations of primitivism and barbarism in nationalism, are not totally static in El Saadawi's writing, but are under constant constructions involving the reform of the personal status law, political negotiations and human rights questions. Islamic reform is inevitable for both modernists who intend to modernize women, or for traditionalists who intend to re-establish an original order (Stowasser 6). The gaps within different strands of Egyptian women rights activists are ideological and complex, as is shown in the discussion of female circumcision in 1985. While El Saadawi struggled to maintain the ban on the practice, some leftist women opposed to maintain the ban, arguing that Sadat passed it unconstitutionally and that they disapproved of his Open Door policy (Al-Ali 75-76).

Like El Saadawi, Bakr and Salem endeavor to translate the silences of the Egyptian women taking place at their time through the short story to break down traditional generic boundaries and find new ways to articulate betwixt and between times and places. Their protests against heteronormativity in Bakr and Salem's writing do not intend to reinforce a

particular group of women in relation to traditions. None of them employs the term, feminism, to qualify their work on women's rights. One must note that there is no such a word in Arabic that would match the western word, feminism, or gender equality. The nearest term in Arabic would be *nisa'i*, which can both mean feminist and feminine/womanly depending on contexts. Bakr's depiction of Zeinat differs from the concern with traditional virtues and decorum of the middle and lower-middle class in urban Cairo of the 1980s which attracted women to study the Quran and participated in philanthropic services in the mosque movement. Zeinat sells street food, such as honey sticks, popcorn, lupine and little plastic toys, to the boys and girls in the primary school from sunrise till sunset. Her letters to the President gets the attention of social workers who pay her visits and provide her with meager subsidies that greatly improve her life. Zeinat eventually falls in love with President Nasser so that she requests Abdou, the barber, who writes the letters for her, to tell the president about her feelings and to arrange a personal meeting with him.

Bakr adopts the short story genre to articulate the everyday life of a marginalized, neglected Egyptian woman living below the poverty line and being regarded as a lunatic because she attempts to meet up with Nasser, when he passes by after the Friday prayers. "Zeinat at the President's Funeral" offers a critique of social problems, the drastic social, political and cultural changes, since the national independence struggle in the 1920s, particularly the pro-American Open Door policy during Sadat's rule. Bringing Egypt out of the restrictions that bound her through the Open Door policy, Sadat met domestic opposition opinions which debilitated his abilities in implementing his economic and foreign policy. Also, according to Hafez, it is impossible not to engage with the upheaval and violence brought about by the Palestinian question, political assassination and religious conflicts up to the 1970s (*The Quest for Identities* 41-46). "Zeinat at the President's Funeral" introduces the weird single woman who does not accord with feminine decorum outside family during the height of the fundamentalist impact in the 1970s but who is not an example of women's liberation by the standard of liberalism. Her voices speak through the progressive

temporality of western civilization that intends to save the oppressed Muslim women from their misogynist culture designated as inferior and backward. Muslim women are not simply constituted by ideologies that purport to move them forward into an era of modernity but are transformed by practices and institutions from international finance and human rights to local administrations that have encompassed the entire fabric of the societies (Mahmood 191).

As Bhabha comments on the horizontal, empty time, there is always also the meanwhile time, that is, “[t]he non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space—a third space—where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences” (218). In Bakr’s short story, taking the initiative to write letters to the president in the ordinary, forlorn individual’s daily life signifies Muslim womanhood that is neither resistance nor subversion in relation to heterosexual regime. As Saba Mahmood demonstrates on the Islamic resurgence in Cairo during the 1980s, the Muslim women from the lower or lower-middle class strata who decided to take up the veil again can be understood neither as simply resistance against western imperialism nor as activism against the failed project of Egyptian modernity (24). For Mahmood, there are no core identities to femininities in Islam: “Norms are not only consolidated and/or subverted, I would suggest, but performed, inhabited, and experienced in a variety of ways” (22). Furthermore, Zeinat’s participation in the bread riot represents diversities of positionings in the bottom up activism within the nation. Here, the norms on women do not apply to Zeinat for whom marriage is too much to be even dreamed of:

[The monthly pension from the president] might even contribute to the fulfillment of her dream, the dream that forever haunted her, to be married and a mother of children. Granted, she was a long way from fulfilling this dream because time had raced by and she was getting on in years. (29)

Zeinat is hoping that the five pound pension each month would entice a man to realize her dream. The attempts she makes toward having a word with the president eventually is either considered idiotic or anti-governmental activities going against Nasser: “Some years

after this report [for stopping Nasser in the street] was filed at the police station she was detained a few days at another police station for joining the riots that had erupted when the government raised the price of bread” (31).

At first, Abdou, the barber, in “Zeinat at the President’s Funeral” would not allow Zeinat to express her love toward Nasser. He gradually gives in to her logic of communicating with the president: “[...] he feared that her words might prove to be the magic potion that would work wonders, wonders he would not want to deprive her of, she a poor woman” (28). Woman in daily life, as a symbol and as signifiers constituting the unifying imagination of the national communities, initiates a temporality that re-inscribes and negotiates with the male elite, here the President. This short story also provides the readers with a look into Egyptian ordinary people, the barber, who has only elementary schooling and who feels a sense of achievement in discovering his rhetorical talent in writing the letters. He is neither portrayed as some sexually neurological Arab man, nor does he give a lecture on women’s responsibilities at home. The portrayal of Zeinat’s struggle is quite different from the cult of domesticity that the magazines promoted through liberal-modernists’ praising of women’s family roles in the 1920s and 1930s. A temporality of splitness, ambivalent and crisscrossed with time and space, inscribes the horizontal spaces of the western nations in the letters that Zeinat dictates to the barber. As Bhabah points out, it is in the borderline space of enunciations where race, gender and class are more problematic than totalitarian (170).

Zeinat’s voices complicate the earlier debate led by Egyptian male nationalists who advocate freeing Egyptian women from the domestic imprisonment. Early male debaters in the late nineteenth century argued that feminine honor governed by patriarchy is not true honor, but the indication of the intention to sin (*Feminists, Islam, and Nation* 18). What the modernist male elite did is that they imagined a national community solidified by the secularization of the family law (18). Zeinat’s self-narration provides the newly liberated population in postcolonial Egypt, with an angle of femininities not to be measured by the intellectuals, or by maternalism and eugenics in the nuclear family. For Zeinat, falling in

love with a man is not necessarily conformity to the patriarchal system:

Zeinat had her eye on an old street-sweeper whom she had seen many times sweeping the main street where she sold merchandise. [...] Her discerning gaze told her that he was still capable of fathering a child and she wished that the luring appeal of five pounds would succeed where nature had failed to render her attractive in his eyes. (29)

Though deeply deprived, Zeinat does not become bitter in Bakr's sense of humor. The man that she is after is actually a man having abandoned his family back in the countryside with the intention not to be tracked down in Cairo. Without being judgmental about this man, Salwa Bakr's storytelling reverses crime and rebellion, and links women's predicament to economy, thereby turning women's psychological problems upside down.

Homi Bhabha's instantaneous time re-constitutes counter-narratives of the postcolonial nation. For Bhabha, the disjunction existent between bourgeois private life and the decentering of postmodern subjects under capitalist system is more complex than Frederick Jameson's fragmentation of cultural practices and his juxtaposition of disjointed narratives (217). Problematizing Jameson's idea that the Third World's texts are always already read as allegories, Bhabha emphasizes the "new historical subject [emerging] at the limits of representation itself" and a "situational representation on the part of the individual to that vaster and unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole" (217). In "Zeinat at the President's Funeral," the policemen yank Zeinat away from the car that the President is in, and she falls onto the ground surrounded by heavy leather boots which "concealed enough guns to massacre a whole country (23). Eventually Zeinat loses hope in Nasserism and she has a record at the police station for participating in the bread riot against the government in 1977. As a Third World woman, Zeinat with her powerlessness produces incompatible signifying processes that engage in the distinct forms of social identities.

Zeinat's position tells us that Egyptian women's liberation movement is in conjunction with a variety of positionings, such as religious beliefs, social-economic status and

occupations. In the letters, Zeinat details her life and difficulties to no one but the president. Her letters contribute to a borderline space in which the new subject speaks her discontent at economy with a man she once loves and no longer trusts by using a feminine language Bakr invents to participate in the national communities, an issue that I will turn to later. Her letters generate an alternative nationalist discourse different from the print culture that Benedict Anderson relies on. The symbols, traditions and Arab nationalism are cultural constructs. Zeinat, who takes the initiatives with men to discuss welfare issues, is unusual in a male-dominant society. Her position exposes the inability of Egyptian nationalism to deal with the concerns with activism from lower-class women and the global gendered division of labor, continuing to pay women in the South with low wages to keep a worldwide capitalist system working.

III. The Instantaneous Enunciations of Egyptian Women's Narratives

As Sabry Hafez suggests in the previous discussion, the development of the Egyptian short story derives from social and political upheavals after World War Two, such as urbanization, mechanization, intensification of class conflicts and women's positions, to mention but a few (*The Quest for Identities* 57). During the post-war period, translations of western work were on the increase (60-61). Vigorous inputs of translations spurred the writers to convey social realities and motivated them to develop distinct Egyptian identities in the short story (63-65). Also, the prevalence of education increased the population of literacy, which in turn gave rise to new reading publics of the short story who had communications with the writers in the market of publications that brought the readers closer to the writers than (55). Egyptian women's contribution in the short story started as early as the late nineteenth century, and up till the 1950s and 1960s, Egyptian women writers were no longer behind men in the short story writing.

Partha Chatterjee describes the ways in which nationalism solves the women's question in the new nation: it removes the question from the domain of the material and political, and posits it in the domain of the spiritual (117). According to Chatterjee, nationalism has not dismissed the women's question; rather, it appeals to an ideologically selective principle that

makes women's question consistent with the project of modernity within nationalism (121). The home, as it is implicated the social activities, should make adjustments accorded with the external world, but women's roles at home should remain virtually the same at all times within the nationalist project (126). Women should take the responsibilities to take care of the family, conform to feminine virtues and be kept away from westernization (126). The characteristics of the short story to make experiments, to stage non-sequential time and to account for the unexplained initiate a disjunctive temporality that Homi Bhabha defines as people's enunciations as the postmodern in postcolonial societies (214). Sabry Hafez argues that the short story has a different history in Arabic and that for the newly-risen reading public, the short story has a larger audience than the novel (*The Quest for Identities* 9). For Bhabha, who clarifies the decentered subjectivity of the postmodern through Fredrick Jameson, the propounding of the death of the subject suggests the demanding need of transnational cultures to capture the provisional of the present moment (216).

Yuval-Davis underlies the transformations of nationalism and its crisscrossing with other issues in contemporary debate of identity politics (111). She develops the notion of transversal politics that is skeptical of the nationalist constructions of womanhood for feminism (110). The approach attends to the shared values in forging feminist solidarity and caters to individuals and collectivities across divergent positionings, priorities and strategies (198). Yuval-Davis argues that there is no need to dichotomize nation-states and nations or polarize the civic/good and ethnic/bad nations (86). Instead, it is more important to look at the different nationalist constitutions at specific historical moments and the contributions that globalization plays in managing national boundaries (86-87). Saba Mahmood looks at the mosque movement in Cairo during the 1980s and 1990s, emphasizing a performative aspect of the norms on women achieved by studying the scriptures and complying with comportment, as dictated in Islam (23). Feminist scholarship which aims at recovering the absences of Muslim women's voices refutes the submissive images in the western media. Rather than seeing their agency as unrepresentable, Mahmood considers Muslim women by discovering how they live traditions in ways no longer conceivable by male-centered mosques (7). Lila Abu-Lughod cautions against misattributing a feminist consciousness

primarily preoccupied with resistance and global sisterhood to women who do not have the same experiences (qtd. in Mahmood 8).

Cultures are necessarily translational across scattered, uneven locations. These three short stories under examination, from divergent camps of Egyptian women's activism, represent the in-between space of the global text that Homi Bhabha defines as the postmodern. In El Saadawi's "In Camera," Leila's bravery of challenging the dichotomies of masculinity/femininity, the rational/irrational and head/body brings about another more hidden layer of women's questions in postcolonial Egypt, such as female honor and clitoridectomy, which the religious conservatives have affirmed against the international and governmental eradication attempts. The language experiment that Bakr takes on board is not translatable into English. Salem's depictions of the October War hinging upon the accounts of female sexuality demonstrate cultural differences of heterosexuality to be both universal and culturally situated. The heroines here are necessarily alienated and split in consciousness because they are graspable only within unstable significations across uneven locations in the perpetual movement of present temporality.

Bakr claims that, as a woman writer, she has a different perspective from a man, that is, she should have a positive role in finding self-expressions for women, but not in defying men (Johnson-Davies x). In the writing presented by the three women writers, female bodies take the central stage for a discussion on urbanization and human exploitation, as opposed to the domestic issues of the wives and mothers in favor of nationalism. Female bodies in the private space, best articulated by the heterogeneous space of the short story, disrupt the perception of the nation based on gender difference which stabilizes the national self. The short fiction genre becomes a safe place for Egyptian women writers to utter voices in the public spaces and a vehicle to register the intricacies of being Egyptian women at that era. Egyptian women are not simply aligned with horizontal comradeship in working with their men, but are subjected to race, class and religion and the shifting meanings of women as heterogeneous signifiers.

According to Sabry Hafez's viewpoint which classifies Egyptian women's participation

in shaping the new nation into roughly the feminine, the feminist, and the female stages, Bakr's writing has gone through the egalitarian demand of the feminist stage which aims at struggles for power and all too often valorizes bourgeois system ("Women's Narrative Modern Arabic Literature" 170). Hafez considers Bakr's specific female style a multi-layered structure that defers any reproduction of patriarchal binary thinking (171-72). As Hafez argues, the renouncement of the vernacular in the literary realm of standard Arabic ruptures the establishment of the male dominance (156). In western mythology, Pygmalion, a sculptor, falls in love with the statue he creates, which exemplifies phallocentrism in the symbolic order. In Islamic culture, heteronormativity is even more powerful, since it is enshrined in the scriptures. Radical writers who break away from standard Arabic, or *al-fusha*, make experiments by utilizing colloquial Arabic in everyday conversations to replace *al-fusha*.

Bakr adopts a "proper colloquial language," *al 'ammiyya al-fasiha*, to demonstrate the richness of her heroines, as they cope with daily life under an inefficient government (Seymour-Jorn 161). An example of the new lexicon that Bakr uses is the conventional religious expressions employed by the uneducated woman in "Zeinat at the President's Funeral" (162-63). Bakr's adoption of formal religious expressions generates a writing style in which the mixture of *al-fusha* used by lower-class Egyptian women in their religious conversations with the colloquial together reflects the complexity of the ordinary Egyptian women. The new lexicon reveals that the new forms of traditionalism emerged from the 1970s is untranslatable into English. The constant formal religious references made by Zeinat in her conversations point out that it is not merely men that the traditionalists find problematic, but the drastically changing realities already out of hand which propels them to go back to "traditional" way of life. When Abdou suggests her to add poetry at the end of a letter, Zeinat replies: "[...] the President would understand the plain language, just the way it was—there was no need for poetry" (29). Her letters suggest the genderized and classed aspects of nationalism left unattended.

Publishing her short stories during Hosni Mubarak's presidency, Salem was in a political atmosphere where the Egyptian government was increasingly asked to comply with

UN conventions pertaining to women's rights. During Mubarak's term in office, Egyptian women's activists were politically divided and full of ideological gaps across various strands. As the personal status law in 1985 showed, the discourses regarding women's rights basically surrounded nationalist and liberal-modernist concerns which directed towards the modern nation, and this only began to change after Sadat's open door policy (Al-Ali 76). The 1985 personal status law was able to re-consider contraception and clitoridectomy which were previously impossible to challenge. While "traditionalist" women activists attached to cultural authenticity perpetuate dichotomous thinking about East/West, the modernists who focused on the questions, such as veiling and education, implied that Islam couldn't deal with women's issues, which further suggested the inevitable convergences of western influence on Islamic feminism (82).

Salem's focus on female sexuality in the war expresses how female sexuality is invisible in the anti-Israel warfare and the persistence of the religious authorities in claiming that feminism is western and immoral. Nasser's defeat in the June War in 1967 resulted in the loss of the Sinai to Israel and gave Sadat, who succeeded him, a reason to launch the October War. Egypt and Syria led the war and caught the Israelis unprepared on the Jewish festival of Yom Kippur in 1973. At first, Egypt's attacks were successful and Israel was on the verge of defeat. With the aid from America, Israeli army reached an area very close to Cairo, and trapped Egyptian army near the city of Suez where "The Boot" sets its scene. This war was a political victory for Egypt, but the tremendous casualties it incurred were too devastating to call this a triumph.

The generation that experiences the UN Decade for Women's Development draws on their financial donors from foreign organizations (Al-Ali 79). Ibtihal Salem writes at a time when Islamists pressurizes Hosni Mubarak to implement more conservative laws toward women, but Egypt's dependence on international donations forces the Mubarak government to comply with the values of democracy, human rights and women's rights accorded with the promotion of the international benefactors. Islamic communities connect the local with the diasporic as a contact zone of multiple relations. Egyptian women rights activists,

together with non-governmental organizations, have a breakthrough in preventing the ambivalent government from implementing Islamic laws and from restricting women to form organizations (80). On the other hand, religion-based Egyptian women activists strive for gender equality within Islam and apply the religious scriptures to changing environments. These women activists in Islamic communities around the world particularly take issue with patriarchal systems based on Islam for not taking individual reasoning and interpretations into considerations (82). Evelyne Accad's argument that sexuality is central to social transformations is a case in point about personal interpretations of the religious scriptures ("Sexuality and Sexual Politics" 3). The reason Accad offers for emphasizing sexuality is that nationalism and feminism in their cooperative and polar relationships need to re-conceptualize sexuality to make revolutions of the society more viable (4).

In "The Boot," the heroine's husband fights in the October War, and every time he visits her, it is in the odors of his boots that she and her husband spend time together after separation. She is pregnant during the time when he is away. She later carries her son who is suckling in her embrace to find him, when he does not return from the war. Her fate of waiting at the harbor is similar to many other women's in wartime:

Every day, late in the afternoon, she walked to the harbor. She watched seagulls and the ferry and the lighthouse beam, and the women whose eyes clung to sails that were nowhere, with children hanging on their long gowns in back while before them hovered the ships departing for distant countries. (122)

Women's issues are not just about their rights in the public space, but are their everyday life, their intimate relationships and their positions in the family. The heroine looks for her husband everywhere in the city where women, children and the elderly run and wail with the flames breaking out around them. The reality may be cruel, as she searches for her husband: "She ran into black heaps of flesh, fled from groans and slit chests" (123). Salem's agile management of the hybrid short story genre catches bits and pieces of the young Muslim wife's unique insights in the day-to-day life.

Like El Saadawi, Salem deploys women's bodies to do a critique on a wide range of

social problems that influence Egyptian women. The similarity of El Saadawi and Salem lies in their suggestion that Islamic fundamentalism is a political and economic phenomenon interpenetrated with the West. While El Saadawi employs western feminisms, practically a psychoanalytic language, to contest that gender inequality is not unique to Islam because of her psychoanalyst profession, Salem utilizes Egyptian daily items like henna, the smell of iodine and the boots to articulate women's relations to their bodies and society as a whole. The signifiers of everyday life tell a disjunctive story of a woman in the storytelling of the nation. Salem represents a space of the interstitial between Islamism and modernity that the daily life disturbingly relates to. The images of the ordinary life, the poetic expressions and organic unity around the details of the boot better capture the unemotional alienation of the young mother's personal memory about her husband than rationality of realism in the novel.

Nationalism has not been able to deal with female sexuality because it stresses spiritual companionship between the conjugal couple to replace sexual exploitation more than the role of sexuality as basic needs. Furthermore, because nationalism accentuates eugenics and household management in the nuclear family as women's primary responsibilities, nationalism does not cope with the many problems women face concerning intimacy in the private space, as suggested in "The Boot":

She [the heroine] undid her knotted handkerchief and wiped the little one's face. She slipped her hand inside her bosom, and beneath the edge of her handkerchief the little one fixed eagerly onto the source of his nourishment, his cry suddenly muted. (121).

If women activists keeps ignoring sexuality and disregarding its relation to other questions of poverty, class and politics, women's own accounts concerning polygamy, reproduction health and veiling which nationalism has always highlighted will only turn into self-censorship on the part of women (Accad, "Sexuality and Sexual Politics" 6). According to Accad, when women voluntarily or involuntarily keep silent about their sexuality, they engender negative emotions toward their own bodies (7). In "The Boot," the heroine's

memories about the war are connected with her wedding night, the night of henna, and eventually her sex-positive attitude brings her good news. “The echoing sea came to them [the couple], joyful, and the lighthouse beam turned, above the rooftops, capering in time with the rhythm that rose from below” (122), as she recalls the tidbits of her marriage and smells the familiar sweat to find out that her husband has come home to her. The sex-positive attitude brings about tenderness, love, pleasure and hope to the future because it eases up on the tensions of social relations, according to Accad (“Sexuality and Sexual Politics” 11). The smell of the husband’s boots reminds her of their wedding night: “And he and she danced, intoxicated with a reverie that lay silent in their dreamy eyes” (122).

Salem’s memories of female sexuality in “The Boot” disrupt the genderized space created by Egyptian nationalism which is embodied by the Suez Canal with the monuments in Port Said to remind Egyptians of their successful resistance led by Nasser against the West’s economic and military oppression in 1956. Sadat gave way to American-led capitalism, which made him the target of both fundamentalists and leftists within the nation who saw him as allies with America. The heroine’s memories with her husband provide Egypt with a narrative that eventually reveals the collaboration between Muslim patriarchs and western orientalism that makes Muslim women the stereotype of sexual passivity and availability. As Ayesha Imam points out regarding female sexuality in Islam, Islamic discourses of female sexuality are not homogeneous, neither do they remain the same in all communities and over time (55). In “The Boot,” the heroine describes her passion:

They [she and her husband] would take in each other’s aroma and hug exactly as they’d done on the night of henna. He would dance, on and on to exhaustion, until he would throw himself into her burning arms. (124)

Universalism exhibited in western gender/sexuality studies has not been able to deal with cultural differences about sexuality in Muslim culture. In Islam, women’s sexuality is believed to be natural and active, whereas men are vulnerable to seduction (Imam 54). Not all Muslim countries carry out honor killing and clitoridectomy (54). Imam brings forth the social, personal, economic and historical aspects of sexuality, and argues that heterosexuality

is not universal, even if reproduction is a biological function and is necessary for humankind to continue (55-56).

For the heroine in “The Boot,” the October war consists of a number of shots and flashbacks in conjunction with her life. Marilyn Booth comments on Salem’s techniques of short story writing which is fluid in moving between vignettes, film takes and prose poetry: her writing is difficult to classify (“Introduction” to *Children of the Waters* 3). Her style attests to the cross-genre writing which is very popular among Egypt’s avant-garde today (3). The heroine’s newborn baby, her hennaed night, the lighthouse, and the boot, i.e. the rags and patches of daily life, are the wartime memory. These unlinear shots in Salem’s writing mark the repetitions of pulsations that intervene between the spatialized images of the people and incessant, ambivalent temporal significations. As Salem talks of her writing, “For me, writing has long represented an exquisite sense of existence, beauty and self-realization” (4). In other words, textual experimentations are expressions of selfhood for her. The narrative and linguistic fragmentation in Salem’s writing registers the perplexity of living in Egypt where liberalization of economy, warfare and social problems are everyday experiences in the 1970s. Port Said, where the young mother waits for her husband, signifies the colonial history that makes the fishing village a cosmopolitan sea port and a reminder of wars, and furthermore, a distant memory.

Conclusion

The intimate life with which El Saadawi, Bakr and Salem represent Muslim women shows that traditions that fortify national boundaries are precarious. El Saadawi’s Leila in “In Camera” demonstrates the influence of culturally variegated inter-mixtures in the middle-class private space. Bakr’s Zeinat in “Zeinat at the President’s funeral” disrupts standard, written Arabic with a rich language in order to incorporate illiterate Muslim women into the postcolonial nation. The homogeneous time and space of the imagined national communities contributed to by realism and the print culture, as Anderson suggests, is interrupted incessantly by bodily practices in the private space in Salem’s “The Boot” through generic fluidity. The Egyptian women writers under examination employ the short

story to grasp the women of postcolonial societies in the day-to-day life in which traditions are a fragmented, exilic and decentered existence. Identities are never final products, neither are they existence prior to discourses. Instead of expressing cultural origins, Muslim women writers here enunciate their stories as fragmented subjects, and thus opening religious-inspired femininities to cultural synthesis. Though manifesting narratives about Egyptian women's liberation movement and national modernity, their voices open up a time-space of Bhabah's "time-lag" outside western defined individualism. Though sounding like repetitive stories about oppressed women in the Third World who break away from imperialism and patriarchy, their storytelling dwells in the inter-subjective space of their writing where the present temporality moves between cultural differences non-synchronously, unpredictably and discontinuously.

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重寫國家空間 —— 當代埃及女性作家的短篇小說

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摘要

本文檢視三位當代具有代表性的埃及女作家，分別是 Nawal El Saadawi (1931-) 的〈In Camera〉(〈攝影鏡頭〉, 1979), Salwa Bakr (1949-) 的〈Zeinat at the President's Funeral〉(〈總統葬禮上的賽娜〉, 1986), 以及 Ibtihal Salem (1949-) 的〈The Boot〉(〈靴子〉, 1999)。這三位作家，分別代表了埃及婦女解放運動中的不同政治立場，其對女性化特質的書寫，重新書寫了埃及現代國家的空間。哈費茲(Sabry Hafez)提出，短篇小說適於捕捉邊緣主體的孤獨、痛苦和主體分裂。本文藉由侯米巴巴的第三空間理論，探討短篇小說的片刻性和立即性等特質，如何成為邊緣位置的第三世界女性個人自我表達的工具。從短篇小說在阿拉伯的歷史發展來看，在文體上不若小說直接承載殖民歷史的收編和對抗，因為小說是引介自西方的新文體，而短篇小說為傳統散文書寫同源。短篇小說的特殊時間性造就了文化流動性，並成為邊緣主體表達社會改革的工具，繼而鬆動了小說均質的性/別化空間。本文引用侯米巴巴的混雜論述，認為第三世界女性運動沒有本源，亦沒有模仿，而是特定的在地性所形成的不穩定意義系統。後殖民國家空間、第三世界婦女日常生活無法完全被翻譯，顯示所謂的回教女性文化傳統，總是混雜的翻譯空間，碎片、遊走、重複而又多重。

關鍵詞：女性化特質、Nawal El Saadawi、Ibtihal Salem、國家空間、Salwa Bakr

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(收稿日期：104.10.28；通過刊登日期：105.03.22)