

The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**Becoming Women:
Gender and Religion/Culture in Novels by
Nawal El Saadawi and Gabriel García Márquez**

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of English and Comparative Literature

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

By
Sherin Hany Abd Rabouh

Under the supervision of
Dr. Tahia Abdel Nasser

September/ 2017

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Tahia Abdel Nasser, for her effort, patience and motivation. Her constructive feedback and aspiring guidance steered me in the right direction throughout my research and writing process. I would, also, like to thank Dr. Ferial Ghazoul and Dr. Mounira Soliman for providing me with valuable comments and academic support to successfully complete my dissertation. Also, many thanks to Ola Shanab and Omneya Ali for always being of great help, on a personal and academic level.

I would like to acknowledge and thank my family and friends for their unconditional support. I would especially like to thank my father for always believing in me, my mother for her wise counsel and my brother for helping me approach difficulties with a positive mindset. I owe a debt of gratitude to my grandfather who continues to inspire me in my life and studies. I would also like to thank Nada Hemamy, Mariam Salem, Farah Geninah, Sarah Mahmoud and Fatma Massoud for their ongoing encouragement and help.

Abstract

This study examines male characters' subjugation of women through religious discourse as a validating institution. Two third world writers' works, Nawal El Saadawi's *The Fall of the Imam* and Gabriel García Márquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, explore this subjugation through the social construction of religion, resulting in the preservation of "discourses" such as religion over the years. I use Simone de Beauvoir and Edward Said's theories in my study of how women came to be identified with inferiority while men came to be identified with superiority. Beauvoir's theory addresses women and men directly, focusing on how societies shape women, classifying them as the "second sex" and men as the first and superior sex. Said addresses the feminized Orient, where his political discussions of the Occident-Orient relationship bring out how the stereotypical image of the inferior Orient came to be.

In addition, I refer to Michel Foucault's concept of "discourse" to help in reaching the roots of the embeddedness and solid position of social constructions and their upholding through knowledge and history, along with Giambattista Vico's notion of history, too. El Saadawi focuses on presenting religion as a daily tool that governs the community while García Márquez uses religion as a tool to promote the entrenched cultural traditions that the community has no choice but to abide by. The study aims to present the ongoing error of attempting to gain equality between both genders when there should be an acceptance of the differing roles, however, without hindering the progress or success of any of the two genders.

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Introduction:

Imagined Characteristics and the Second Sex

The French feminist Simone de Beauvoir sets the overall theme discussed in the opening of her book *The Second Sex* thus: “There is a good principle that created order, light, and man and a bad principle that created chaos, darkness, and woman — PYTHAGORAS” (5). Beauvoir illustrates how gender inequalities have been persistent in our societies over the centuries. More importantly, literature is a field that allows the examination of such inequalities where fantasy and reality merge to produce controversial narratives much like in Nawal El Saadawi’s *The Fall of the Imam* and Gabriel García Márquez’s *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. The two established Third World writers are concerned with the persistence of social constructions of gender that lead to the oppression of women.

The persistence of social constructions of gender is examined by two theorists, Simone de Beauvoir, through her theory of the second sex, and Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism. The gist of Beauvoir’s argument in her book is: “One is not born a woman; one becomes one” (Beauvoir 301). Beauvoir exhibits the making of a woman in relation to man and asserts how men have always been superior and associated with the “majority”: “humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being . . . He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the 'Other'” (8). Therefore, Beauvoir articulates how the existence of men is made possible through the “othering” of women. In *The Feminist Theory*, Dani Cavallaro defines women in relation to Beauvoir’s theory as “deficient creatures incapable of matching the norm embodied by masculinity” (13). Cavallaro examines women’s inability to be allied with “wholeness”, where they

were, are and will continue to be lacking in some ambiguous way. This lack associated with women is constantly being identified; however, as to why it exists, there has never been a clear explanation for it. This is why Beauvoir describes the absolute/other relationship where man is the “original” or the “subject” and woman is the “extension” of the male gender or the “object” (Beauvoir 287). To conclude Beauvoir’s argument, the social construction of women relies on the social construction of men, where, for any of them to exist, they have to be identified with the other. This sole dependence on one another is the beginning of exploring how they *become* women and men. Said’s work and his discussion of Orientalism may be adopted to read the construction of the female gender as the secondary sex in parallel to the Orient, where the male gender is represented as the first sex and the Occident. Feminists have used Said’s theories and extended the Orient to the study of subjugated women, as the Orient is feminized throughout its examination over the years. Said identifies Orientalism as a “male province” and this identification could be found in: “the writing of travelers and novelists: women are usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy” (*Orientalism* 207). The exotic nature of the Orient associates it with “magical features” of which the Occident makes use based on what the Occident needs from the Orient. Said goes on to further reinforce the idea of the feminized Orient by identifying Orientalism with having a “peculiarly male conception of the world” (*Orientalism* 207). Said demonstrates the connection between the Orient and woman through Gustave Flaubert’s encounter with an Egyptian courtesan:

Flaubert’s encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. *He* spoke for and represented

her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was “typically Oriental.” My argument is that Flaubert’s situation of strength in relation to Kuchuk Hanem was not an isolated instance. It fairly stands for the pattern of relative strength between East and West, and the discourse about the Orient that is enabled. (*Orientalism* 6; emphasis in original)

Said could not have conveyed the inferiority of the Orient in a more accurate manner had he not drawn a parallel between the Orient and women to emphasize their “inferiority.” With Kuchuk Hanem identified as a prostitute, this further enhances the degradation of both. Moreover, the comparison grants the superior Occident access to the Orient both in the physical sense in terms of “colonizing its body” and, as argued by Said, representing it to the rest of the world. Said’s use of Orientalism is defined as such:

Orientalism is the generic term that I have been employing to describe the Western approach to the Orient; Orientalism is the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice. But in addition I have been using the word to designate that collection of dreams, images, and vocabularies available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies incongruent, since by the use of them both, Europe could advance securely and metaphorically upon the Orient. (*Orientalism* 73)

Said explains the relationship between the Orient and the Occident leading to the production of Orientalism as a concept that expands on the construction of the Occident-Orient. Said extends his description of the Occident-Orient relationship as he describes it as “a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (*Orientalism* 5). As a result, this complex authoritative position that the Occident has persistently possessed generated what Said calls “imaginative geography.” Even though Said uses imaginative geography to explain the idea of the Occident colonizing the Orient in terms of physical space, he extends his definition to the emotional sense of the term. He uses Gaston Bachelard’s analysis of the poetics of space to explain the relationship between space and its emotional connotation. Said stresses what he calls the “imaginative and figurative value we can name and feel” (*Orientalism* 55). Therefore, the term “imaginative geography” becomes more metaphorical in its use, more than it is literal, as one connects it to social constructions. Jon May defines Said’s imaginative geography as “a geography that overlays a more tangible geography and helps shape our attitudes to other places and people. He concentrates upon the production of those ideas that helped create this image of the Orient, describing these ideas in terms of 'discourse' of Orientalism, and examines why the Orient has had a powerful hold on the European imagination” (May 57). May emphasizes how imaginative geography goes beyond the meaning of physical geography. It is more about the mental and psychological “space” which the superior side allocates to the inferior side. This space employs the power and knowledge which the West possesses, allowing the West to create illusionary aspects which results in the superiority of the Occident and the inferiority of the Orient. This metaphorical geography is the link between Said’s concept of Orientalism and

Occident-Orient relationship and the illusionary characteristics shown by Beauvoir through her illustration of the subject/object relationship being a social construct.

That said, I examine gender inequality with a focus on how women are oppressed in relation to religious discourse. Religious discourse will differ in the two works I examine and in terms of how it is applied. This leads to the production of the dominant discourse which guides each novel: the practice of religion in El Saadawi's *The Fall of the Imam* and García Márquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. Religion is socially constructed in both novels. El Saadawi's novel uses direct religious references, educates its community based on Islam and even has a religious leader govern the community based on the laws of Shari'a. On the other hand, the role of religion in García Márquez's novel is different and perhaps more discrete in its applicability to society. Religion is used to promote culture, making cultural traditions the dominant discourse in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. Religion is used as a tool to protect the code of honor which is intertwined with "machismo" in the novel. In this case, religion is used to restore and affirm the code of honor and machismo, making culture the dominant discourse. The subtle references to Christianity reflect the buildup to Nasar's murder where everyone knows of the imminent crime and of its importance as an event, yet no one is able to prevent it. Moreover, García Márquez uses religion as part of his writing style to promote irony instead of using it in the obvious sense, unlike El Saadawi.

There are other issues to take into consideration when examining gender inequality such as the different discourses used in its construction. Politics, economics, culture, religion, and race contribute to the social construction of gender. The acknowledgement of other discourses in relation to gender produces an awareness of how one cannot tackle gender without tackling all these discourses,

which is impossible. Moreover, the problem lies in being able to separate the five discourses listed above from one another. I use the term ‘discourse’ in relation to Michel Foucault’s definition of it: “We shall call discourse a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation” (Foucault 117). To closely dissect Foucault’s definition of discourse, I. Jansen describes the four central aspects which contribute to the lengthy process of forming “statements.” “Discursive formation, in the sense of Foucault, has four indispensable characteristics: these are that statements refer to the same object, are enunciated in the same way, share a common system of conceptualisations and have similar subjects or theories” (Jansen 109).

In relation to my analysis of women and the role of religion, Foucault’s “objects” are equal to women and characteristics attached to women, which conform to the continuously flourishing and repetitive social constructs of gender. Moreover, the “subjects” and theories are what dominate the navigation of these objects. Not only do the “subjects” and theories dominate, but they also limit the object in every sense of the word. That said, discourse is used as a term to criticize how aspects such as religion, politics, and culture continue to be tautological in the way they function and reconstruct themselves. Said discusses his use of discourse in relation to Orientalism thus:

I have found it useful here to employ Michel Foucault’s notion of discourse, as described by him in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, and in *Discipline and Punish*, to identify Orientalism. My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and

even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.

Moreover, so authoritative a position did Orientalism have that I believe no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism. In brief, because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action. This is not to say that Orientalism unilaterally determines what can be said about the Orient, but that it is the whole network of interests inevitably brought to bear on (and therefore always involved in) any occasion when that peculiar entity “the Orient” is in question. (*Orientalism* 3)

Therefore, the only use “discourse” is associated with is how it creates tools such as religion to assign roles and characteristics to individuals. It is the presence of “discourses” which mislead individuals into believing that they have organized systems. The only system they have is a system that regenerates the confined space of the oppressed “Other.” Therefore, this leads to the existence of blind faith in societies that appear to be “coherent” but, when analyzed closely, the opposite becomes apparent.

I will examine the two authors’ use of the male characters and their religious discourse to help in understanding one of the many ways in which women are oppressed. I will use Beauvoir and Said’s aforementioned theories of the subject/object and Occident-Orient relationship which correspond to the patriarchal societies of El Saadawi and García Márquez’s works where women are identified with the object and men with the subject. Furthermore, I will apply imaginative geography in its metaphorical sense to help explain the socially constructed and illusionary

characteristics attached to women in El Saadawi and García Márquez's works. The idea of space informs a critical discussion in each of the two works as each author makes metaphorical references through the allusion to the limitations of freedom by the use of different social codes. Moreover, the idea of psychological space and socially constructed hierarchies are connected via power. Power is the factor that sustains socially constructed discourses.

The discussion of male characters in relation to their dominance in society will open up the exploration of the type of power that male characters pursue through such oppression or perhaps the type of power that is forcefully imposed on them by society. Therefore, if there is a possibility that power is socially imposed on men, who benefits from the persistence of power? David R. Blanks explains power: "In 1943, it was a medievalist, Nellie Neilson, who became the first female President of the American Historical Association . . . Neilson pointedly made the connection between knowledge and power, arguing that a solution to the difficult problems women were facing could be found by looking into the past" (48). Knowledge is explained in relation to the knowledge stored about politics, religion, and other different discourses. However, knowledge needs to exist primarily then power follows from how knowledge is put into use, as summed up by Said as "created consistency" (*Orientalism* 5). Said uses Vico's ideas in relation to history: "men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made" (*Orientalism* 5). Therefore, to examine history, the knowledge that is made available to individuals needs to be analyzed thoroughly in order to be able to form a poised understanding of how individuals came to "make" their history. Moreover, the issue that arises from Said's explanation of history is that we base our knowledge on the limited historical accounts where past generations chose what to include and eliminate from their

records. As a result, there will always be an issue of the history *they* picked out for us today and its objectivity. This relates to my analysis as the history of religious discourse coalesces with the powerful discourses of gender, culture, and religion to oppress women.

Both Said and Foucault come together to examine the production of knowledge, further expanding on Foucault's concept of "discourse" and how it came to be put to use through its connection to knowledge. The confinement to certain subjects or perhaps even the confinement to certain *ways* when discussing subjects is directly connected to history: "There is a rather complex dialectic of reinforcement by which the experiences of readers in reality are determined by what they have read, and this in turn influences writers to take up subjects defined in advance by readers' experiences" (*Orientalism* 94). As a result, the previous knowledge is what limits today's knowledge and the way in which it is put to use by individuals. Said expands on this in relation to Foucault's concept of "discourse" through explaining how texts create knowledge as well as the "reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it" (*Orientalism* 94). As a result, it is safe to say that any oppressed entity remains oppressed due to the "imaginary reality" that past generations have passed down to us today. Moreover, the labelling of these "imaginary realities" as "traditions" renders them a norm in the way they are applied and reproduced over the years.

Social codes in each of the two works differ in relation to the entanglement of religion and culture. Culture is a primary area of study that is directly linked to and has a major effect on how discourses are built and maintained in the two novels I

examine, especially in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. Maijan H. Al-Ruwaili suggests that the problem of cultural practices in relation to gender lies in the culture we construct instead of the scientific justification of “biology.” He quotes Ruth Bleier’s opinion of what culture does: “it imposes limitations on our minds and development, constructs definitions of woman and man, of male and female, and produces a science that helps to explain and justify the differences of biological, social, political, and economic origins as natural and biological (52-53; cf.: Flax 628-629)” (Al-Ruwaili 9). Through this, culture creates tools such as religion, politics, and so forth in order to be able to impose its historically and socially constructed version of individuals. This definition of culture relates to García Márquez’s work as religion is one of the subdivisions of culture, which is used to justify male dominance.

In terms of the gender of the authors, I attempted to maintain a balance as I chose a female and a male writer for each of my primary sources and theoretical framework. My choice of El Saadawi and García Márquez is based on the works’ national setting and the consideration of writers from the so-called “Third World” where their communities operate on the basis of religion and culture. The blend of fantasy and reality to produce their narratives, along with their play on narration, is what makes El Saadawi and García Márquez suitable for examining the social construction of religion versus the abuses of religion. The shocking death which sets off the two novels is what brings them together under the umbrella of “violence.” El Saadawi begins her novel with the stoning of her female character, “Bint Allah”, by the people of her town, much like the death of her mother, for being a child of sin. As the narrative unfolds, the reader discovers that Bint Allah is the Imam’s illegitimate daughter whom he refuses to acknowledge as his child. The “Imam” is a religious leader who is in charge of the town in which El Saadawi sets her novel; his refusal to

acknowledge Bint Allah as his daughter is directly linked to his fear of discrediting his religious authority. This brings us to the credibility of the narration, where El Saadawi shifts the narration between first-person, having Bint Allah speak to her readers, and third-person. This is explained as follows: “Often that voice merges with the central consciousness of Bint Allah, so that Saadawi’s voice is also Bint Allah’s, and readers are offered the sense of this ‘character’ Bint Allah as a vehicle for mediating between author and reader. In this easing of the dark outlines of Bint Allah’s ‘character,’ the narrative can also move back and forth between the author and reader, with less sense that the two are mutually exclusive” (Ingersoll). The play on narration is directly linked to what Ingersoll explains as Bint Allah, El Saadawi, and even Bint Allah's mother being identified as “one.” Through this, El Saadawi attempts to unify the voice of women. This unity aims to focus on strengthening women’s voices instead of focusing on them as individuals. Hence, the “clustering” of voices by El Saadawi aims to resist the religiously acceptable lifestyle imposed on them by the male characters’ practice of religion.

On the other hand, García Márquez’s *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* also begins with the gruesome death of Santiago Nasar, a Latin/Arab man who is accused of taking away the virginity of a young girl named Angela Vicario. The revelation of Angela’s “sin” happens the night she marries Bayardo San Román, a wealthy, young man who chose Angela out of all girls in her town to be his wife. However, nowhere in the novel is it verified that Nasar took Angela’s virginity except for her confession but her two brothers (Pedro and Pablo Vicario) set off to find Nasar and redeem their sister's honor by killing him. Santiago Nasar is Orientalized in García Márquez’s novel due to his Arab origins. Even when referring to Nasar’s physical appearance, he is described as having “his father’s Arab eyelids and curly hair” (García Márquez 5).

The reference to “Arab eyelids” is a description that allows the reader to visualize these “Arab eyelids” yet, as to why they are labelled as such, there is no answer. This links the idea of the “Orient” and the question of why it is “Orientalized.” The physical description of Nasar’s eyelids and hair is the narrow lens that leads to viewing all Arabs as having the same features, extending that beyond physical features. This narrow view of Orientalizing the Orient is explained through Said’s definition of Orientalism: “Orientalism is better grasped as a set of constraints upon and limitations of thought than it is simply as a positive doctrine” (*Orientalism* 42). Through this, Said links Orientalism to constraints, lack of freedom, and limitations where the Orient’s so- called exotic nature disappears.

The choice of Said and Beauvoir is directly connected to illustrating the overlapping of discourses. For example, Said’s *Orientalism* is primarily used to engage in political discussions in relation to the role of religion and culture within the novels’ societies while Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* emphasizes the important role of culture in constructing discourses of gender. However, each of Said and Beauvoir are too deeply involved in the two theories of their works. Said’s discussion of Orientalism is influenced by his Palestinian-American identity. While he attempts to distance himself when writing about the East-West relationship, one cannot overlook that it is his affiliation with his two identities that drew him into the discussion of Orientalism. On the other hand, Beauvoir is the object in her theory; she is the embodiment of the “inferior” and the “second sex.” Therefore, inasmuch as their theories are applicable to my analysis, the question remains: how objective are they, or are they required to be objective at all in order to produce their theories and extend their discussion of the “Other”?

In the first chapter of my thesis, I will focus on El Saadawi's *The Fall of the Imam*. I will explore how male characters use religion to segregate the religiously acceptable lifestyle for them and that of women. This will consist of a close analysis of specific scenes where male characters make references to Quranic verses or Hadith (the sayings of Prophet Muhammed whose example Muslims follow) in Islam in order to justify their oppressive and prejudiced actions. In the second chapter, I focus on García Márquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* as I examine how the practice of religion plays a minor and indirect role, where its primary use is strictly for a cultural purpose of restoring and affirming the code of honor and machismo. Finally, my last chapter will conclude by bringing the two novels together to demonstrate the different approaches each writer takes in order to emphasize the social discourses and their different uses in Third World societies.

Chapter 1:

Male Domination and Religion in Nawal El Saadawi's *The Fall of the Imam*

El Saadawi has constantly attempted to resist what is described as “the flawed social morality that poisons women’s consciousness thus from the moment of their birth” (Sazzad 816). She brings into the game social morality as an influential factor which is instilled in each individual, putting each of woman and man in their so-called “places.” She questions the basis of any society, the ethics which build up any society. El Saadawi is critical of how women disregard any possibility of being intelligent where “the depressing world of women is not governed by intelligence; it is ruled by their practices to please men” (Sazzad 816). Notably, El Saadawi points out that it is the “practice” of pleasing men that governs women’s minds. This means that it is only through the repetition of attempting to please men that gender roles came to be a given right within Third World societies. However, El Saadawi does not deny that both women and men have “veiled minds” in the sense of being affected by politics, media, and so on. But one gets the sense that El Saadawi is biased as she identifies women as “people that suffer the most from neocolonialism and patriarchal structures” where they are identified as being in need of “solidarity in their struggle for rights” (“The Seventh International AWSA Conference” 24). El Saadawi’s description of women’s desperate need to be “saved” is problematic at times as one starts to question if her readers sympathize with women because they really do need sympathy or because of her overemphasis on their victimization.

El Saadawi has always been extremely critical of the longstanding oppressive system in which women in Egypt are trapped and her primary criticism is based on

religion, culture, and politics, in this specific order of importance within Egyptian society. However, religion is one of the essential discourses that drives her narrative in a certain direction to emphasize how too much weight is allocated to it in the way the society functions. I will explore how male characters use religion to differentiate between gender roles. I examine Beauvoir's subject/object and Said's Occident-Orient relationship, along with the "imagined characteristics" in relation to Said's use of imaginative geography. Imaginative geography is affiliated with freedom in terms of the space allocated to each gender, which results in their association with "assigned roles" within society. The amount of space where women exercise their freedom is granted to women by men, on the grounds that they are the inferior sex, the "Orient" so to speak in Said's discourse. The two theories will be used to emphasize the political aspects which govern gender relations in El Saadawi's society.

By politics, I mean the way in which men in El Saadawi's novels use discourses such as religion to regulate societies based on their personal predilections. Said speaks of Orientalism, where he puts great emphasis on how the Occident-Orient relationship cannot be examined if the two concepts are separated because they are structured and defined in terms of one another: "In short, my study hitherto has tried to describe the *economy* that makes Orientalism a coherent subject matter, even while allowing that as an idea, concept, or imagine the word *Orient* has a considerable and interesting cultural resonance in the West" (*Orientalism* 202; emphasis in original). Said highlights how the grounding and consistent existence of the concept of "Orientalism" is based on the West's ongoing perspective of the inferiority of the Orient. Similarly, El Saadawi illustrates in the majority of her works how men (the West/Occident in Said's analysis) control how women are to be treated within society based on the practice of religion. Moreover, Said's main focus in describing this

imbalanced relationship is based on analyzing the “economy” of relationships. In El Saadawi’s novel, the economy rigorously operates through what Said calls the “cultural resonance.” However, the cultural resonance here is associated with the major role which religion plays in Egyptian culture and how El Saadawi accentuates the relationship between culture and Islam, making them inseparable discourses. Haideh Moghissi explains this intimate bond: “after all, as a woman from the Middle East, I was expected to remain true to my “culture” – and Islam is supposedly all that there is to my culture” (84). Moghissi highlights the role of culture, acknowledging that culture is nothing but a synonym for religion, in her case, Islam. However, Moghissi mocks the inseparability of the two concepts, making her readers question the certainty of her thoughts as she uses the word “supposedly.” Supposedly, Islam is not all there is to culture; however, the importance of religion, in some societies, especially Third World societies, is part of culture. This is because Islam is one of the central systems which individuals are forced to uphold in order to maintain a show of publically acceptable religious acts, be they political or cultural. However, to be able to identify an illusionary “balanced” method as in *The Fall of the Imam*, in practicing religion, education is required, which I aim to examine through specific scenes from the novel.

In El Saadawi’s *The Fall of the Imam*, religious discourse is presented as a social construct through the character of the Imam, the religious and political leader of the community. The dominant religion in the narrative is Islam; however, the use of religious discourse for gender oppression is not limited to one religion; it can be found in other religions as well as non-religious institutions. Each of Bint Allah and the Imam are the two characters who help in examining how religious discourse is socially constructed to oppress the inferior sex. The Imam is portrayed as a character

of double standards, one who uses religion as a veil to attain a higher social status and as a male figure. He refuses to acknowledge Bint Allah as his daughter due to her mother's low social status. This corresponds to an issue of representation or perhaps the misrepresentation of Islam, as El Saadawi portrays how the character of the Imam does so. This is because his acknowledgement of Bint Allah would discredit his religious authority. It is important to note that the Imam's leadership is based both on religious and political aspects. However, Marilyn Booth explains that, in *The Fall of the Imam*, religious discourse governs the text more than the political (61). This could be both justified and rejected. The justification of the dominance of religion lies in El Saadawi's choice to label the character as the Imam, a religious leader. It also lies in the Imam's use of his religious power and "knowledge" to attain authority, thus making religious discourse the driving force of such power. However, to reject the statement would mean to look at how religion and politics overlap since the Imam uses his position to govern and become the leader of the community. I would say that both the religious and the political overlap yet the basis of this connection is rooted in the religious authority which the character is granted to begin with.

Furthermore, El Saadawi's choice of the characters' names, which are identified with religion, sheds light on the elevated religious aspects of the novel. Nowhere in the novel does the reader know what the Imam's real name is as he is always identified as the "Imam" and is always referred to as the religious leader. The same applies to his illegitimate daughter, Bint Allah, "the daughter of God." The reader is never acquainted with her real name; however, she does reveal that this is the name she gives herself after her mother passes away and without knowledge of who her father is. As a result, God is a father figure for her which is why she gives herself the name "the daughter of God." The acknowledgement of the characters' names is

vital as it highlights the controversy in using religion as a verification for identity. The Imam is able to attain his authority through his identification with a religious title as his name. On the other hand, looking at Bint Allah's character in the novel, she is presented by El Saadawi as a rebellious character who is not afraid to pose challenges. She challenges religious authorities and is El Saadawi's pride within the novel in terms of breaking away from the religious code which restricts one's identity, especially women's. Therefore, the question becomes why identify this rebellious character with religion when all she does is challenge religion as an institution? I suppose that this brings out another side of El Saadawi when it comes to religion where it becomes apparent that she does not oppose Islam itself but the way in which it is practiced. In an interview, El Saadawi identifies God with "justice" (Newson-Horst 57). This is why she associates her young female character with being the daughter of God, who, when she has no one to provide her with a sense of protection, turns to God, to justice.

The dominance of the religious discourse within El Saadawi's novel is highlighted through the Imam's socially constructed authority. When the townspeople tell Bint Allah that in order to speak to other men she needs to cover her shameful parts, in other words, her face, she questions the source of this information. The townspeople's answer is God, where God's words are written. El Saadawi does not have Bint Allah stop at this answer; she extends her questioning to identify the illiteracy of the townspeople. Therefore, they could not have possibly been able to read God's words. El Saadawi aims to discredit the townspeople's understanding of their religion. However, after a long pause, they point to the Imam's picture on a wall, stating that he is the link between them and God. Bint Allah does not recognize the Imam and, for her, their answer is insufficient and lacking: "His name is the Imam

and he is everywhere. But, I said, he who is everywhere is nowhere. They looked at me silently for a while. Then pursed their lips and said: We have sworn eternal loyalty to him. He is our master, the Imam. God has visited him many a time and so he knows His word better than anyone else” (El Saadawi 7). This sentence concludes El Saadawi’s second chapter titled “They Cannot Read,” where El Saadawi aims to emphasize how any religious justification circles back to the Imam’s “holy words.” El Saadawi asserts the Imam’s authority through playing around with punctuation where she capitalizes the “H” in “His” when referring to the Imam. At the same time, this asserts his divinity. Thus El Saadawi aims to demonstrate the townspeople’s confusion at the Imam being God, where he is elevated to a sacred and holy position due to his identification with “God on Earth.” In the Arabic original, the word “Imam” is emphasized through the use of brackets. Moreover, the Imam is referred to as “sayyidna” al-Imam, which is translated into “our master the Imam,” but the word “sayyidna” has a strong connotation linked to the Prophet Mohamed. As a result, the emphasis becomes associated with attempting to elevate the Imam to a sacred and superior category, making the play on punctuation, in English, and emphasis, in Arabic, essential tools for asserting the Imam’s divinity.

It is important to acknowledge that *The Fall of the Imam* is set in *al-aryaf* (known as the countryside in Egypt) where, as the novel unravels, the reader finds out that the only education children receive is religious. Therefore, the only reason that the characters in El Saadawi’s novel are taught to read and write is to practice their religion and the only understanding and usage of education become strictly linked to practicing religion. Through this, the problem arises as the interpretation of religious references cannot be guaranteed, for this very reason of the limited educational level of individuals. Mohammad Ali Syed sums this up in a sentence: “there is a significant

gap between what the Qur'an says and the manner in which its teaching are practiced; and the Qur'an provides rights for women which can immediately be drawn upon to improve women's circumstances" (59). Again, the issue of literacy arises from this statement as the answer to why women do not draw upon their rights based on religion is because of their inability to read and write. In *The Fall of the Imam*, El Saadawi demonstrates how even in the so-called religion classes, sometimes children are verbally introduced and acquainted with their religion. Moreover, this gap that Syed speaks of is based on the historical context in which the Qur'an was interpreted. As a result, the rights of women today become the product of previously acknowledged rights that are to be traced back centuries ago. Consequently, history becomes problematic as not only do today's religious interpretations and teachings become outdated but they also become questionable in their primary practice.

Death is how El Saadawi sets off her novel. She begins with a horrific event that demonstrates how religion could be constructed in a way that makes it seem as though religion is what governs such actions. The novel begins with "Bint Allah" being stoned to death because her mother is an adulterous woman and she has to die the same death as her mother. When Bint Allah attempts to explain that the Imam is her father, the crowd is outraged and shouts: "May your tongue be cut out of your head" (El Saadawi 1). Later, as the crowd grows angrier because of Bint Allah's so-called "accusation" of the Imam, they cut off her tongue: "They cut out her tongue first. Later came the rest. For the Imam ruled according to the laws of God's Shariat. Stone adulterous women to death. Cut off the hands of those who commit a theft. Slash out the tongues of those who spread rumors about [death from] irradiated milk" (El Saadawi 1-2). It is important to point out that the first thing they cut off is Bint Allah's tongue, a metaphor for silencing her which is why the primary action had to

be the cutting off of her tongue. Moreover, through such an act, El Saadawi plays upon the first-person narrative, leaving readers to question the rest of the novel's content since the first-person narrator has had her tongue cut off. Through such an extreme act of cutting her tongue off, El Saadawi uses it at the very beginning of the novel to assert women's voice, where even when they cut off her tongue in an attempt to silence her, she will still be able to tell her story. The silencing of women is thoroughly discussed by Gayatri Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak identifies the colonized minds, where she identifies with the other or as she puts it, the "subaltern." Spivak states that the subaltern cannot speak due to the speech she uses, which cannot and will never be heard. This unheard speech or words, which Spivak speaks of, is directly linked to the social constraints imposed onto women from the day they are born. As a result of Bint Allah's attempt to speak with what El Saadawi portrays her as doing so, with freedom, she is banished from society. However, El Saadawi proposes the opposite of Spivak's notion that the subaltern cannot speak. El Saadawi uses the action of cutting Bint Allah's tongue to enhance the strength which women should possess in forcefully calling for their voice to be heard. Bint Allah's character is a representation of resistance, a character who is keen on her voice reaching endless boundaries for her to narrate the ongoing brutality which she, her mother, and many other women undergo. Even though the narration shifts to third-person, through this action, El Saadawi aims to unify women who continue to uplift one another in alerting societies to their oppressed position.

Resistance is apparent in the first question which Bint Allah utters to address her position as she says: "Why do you always let the criminal go free and punish the victim?" (El Saadawi 1) Bint Allah is referring to the Imam who was very much responsible for the bringing of an "illegitimate child" into this world, a child who has

to pay the price for something she has no control over whatsoever. However, she has to live with how society sees and addresses her as a “sin,” where the only solution is for her to die, too. But then the readers experience, with Bint Allah, the cutting off of her tongue and the extreme brutality she is exposed to due to her questioning and acknowledging the Imam as her father. Again, another important scene that El Saadawi depicts for her readers is where, each time Bint Allah speaks the truth or perhaps just with the action of speaking, she causes an uproar in the crowd, leading to the imposition of violence. El Saadawi sheds light on the fact that for women to speak they will experience cruelty and violence but the key is to go on. However, even when women do attempt to speak, they speak and are heard by a hierarchical society. They are heard and categorized from the superior side’s perspective, leaving them in the same position in which society continually places them.

On the other hand, men’s oppression of women, embedded through religious discourse, has been socially accepted by women over the centuries. This links back to Said’s idea of the historical context of representation. El Saadawi reveals this through having an old woman, whom the children at the orphanage call “grandmother,” tell them the story of *One Thousand and One Nights*, demonstrating the acceptance of treachery by religious law, as elaborated by the grandmother. It has to be noted that El Saadawi has the grandmother narrate *One Thousand and One Nights* differently in comparison to the original plot. Bint Allah asks the grandmother about Shahrayar, the king who kills women as revenge for his wife’s treachery. Bint Allah questions why the act of treachery is acceptable for men but not for women and reasons that it was King Shahrayar who left his wife to go to another woman, so he committed a sin before her. It is only after he returns that he finds her in the arms of another man, so this makes both King Shahrayar and his wife in an equal position emphasizing the

objectionable standing of the king. The grandmother is infuriated with Bint Allah's question and explains such actions through women's nature of being "born treacherous, like their mother Eve," justifying that the act of treachery is permitted for men "by divine law, as God Himself has said. But the treachery of women is inspired by Satan" (El Saadawi 82). El Saadawi's choice of having an elderly woman express such a view, with the support of divine law, establishes her as an authority. This is because age is usually linked with wisdom and knowledge hence eliminating the possibility of her error. Such an act of a woman verifying the illusionary and "natural" traits of a woman corresponds to Said's notion of auto-Orientalism. Women have been made to believe such imaginative traits with reference to the first woman, Eve. Another similar issue is presented by Said in *Representations of the Intellectual*. This is the idea of how certain ethnic groups are placed "in a very particular historical context, with its own problems, pathologies, triumphs, and peculiarities" (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* 26). Said's description applies to the historical context in which women have been placed but, importantly, that they have come to believe it as the valid, unquestionable truth. El Saadawi's example of the grandmother's explanation of the nature of women further enhances the idea of history justifying it. However, the issue when discussing history in general is the idea of subjectivity versus objectivity in our perception of it. This issue would lead to an endless debate with the conclusion that history as well as our perception of it is associated with subjectivity in one way or another. What El Saadawi aims to do in terms of liberating women is equal to what Said attempts to do through *The Question of Palestine* in terms of liberating Palestinian culture. However, to liberate Palestinian culture, Said takes into consideration the variable that is responsible for constrained freedom, the Western audience. One could say that to liberate the "inferior side," one

has to inform the “superior side.” Said unveils the expense of the building of the Israeli nation which brought about the destruction of the Palestinians. It is this idea of proposing the rise of one nation at the expense of the destruction of another. This corresponds to El Saadawi’s portrayal of how, historically, men rise at the expense of women’s freedom and rights.

The achievement of power is apparent in a scene in the novel where the state, God, and men are all placed in almost one category. In the religion classes Bint Allah attends at the orphanage, their male teacher establishes the goals every Muslim should aim for in order to be able to demonstrate their devotion to religion. His teachings about being a “good” Muslim are summarized thus: “To obey God is an unbreakable law and without obedience to father and husband there can be no obedience to God” (El Saadawi 33). Various issues stand out from such a scene: firstly, the Imam links God to the “law.” This is enhanced as El Saadawi demonstrates that the linkage or obedience to God and the law could only be achieved by obeying the male figure in one’s life. The author places God and the law in the same category, making them both divine in a way. Throughout the novel, the idea of “divinity” is in not questioning God or the law; all one is entitled to do is follow both without understanding or questioning either. El Saadawi also leaves it up to the reader to interpret what kind of law she is speaking of: the legal system or religious law. She purposely does not clarify this issue and leaves it open to interpretation in order to magnify the issue of mixing religion with governing the state.

El Saadawi formulates the expected role of women, which is to obey the dominant male figure in her life in the name of religion. Nowhere after the teacher’s quote does he attempt to verify his statement, perhaps through the use of religious sources, such as referring to the Quran or to Islamic law, which is the source referred

to for religious verification. His lack of reference demonstrates how his words have to be taken as authoritative and correct due to his gender and his occupation. Moreover, through such a statement El Saadawi unfolds two aspects: how the teacher establishes the superiority of the male figure due to the necessity of a woman's obedience to abide by religion. The second aspect identified by El Saadawi is how, through men constructing their superiority through religion, women are automatically identified as secondary to men or the "object" as described by Beauvoir. It is important to point out that the teacher speaks to a group of children between the age of seven and fourteen, hence formulating their mentalities at a young age where they will grow up to believe in what they have been taught at that age, regardless of its accuracy. The age of the children in this scene is one way in which El Saadawi indirectly traces the roots of an oppressive patriarchal system. She demonstrates how, within this community, religious authorities force their position onto these children, hence placing the information with which they provide them in an almost sacred category. Religious authorities plant such values and concepts into young children's minds so that it becomes almost impossible to dislodge them. They nourish them further by imposing other religious practices, one of which is marriage or at least the "socially accepted" understanding of man being the first sex and the woman being the second.

Moreover, in relation to the "religious law" which El Saadawi identifies in her novel, it is important to note that the community is governed by Islamic law, which is explained thus:

In Islam, law is not distinct from religion. The two streams flow in a single channel and are indistinguishable. They are known as *Shari'a* and *fiqh*, the two aspects of the religion of Islam. *Shari'a* is the wider circle, it embraces in

its orbit all human actions, *fiqh* is the narrower one, and deals with what are commonly understood as legal acts. *Shari'a* always reminds us of the revelation, that *'ilm* (knowledge) which we could never have possessed by the Qur'an or hadith; in *fiqh*, the power of reasoning is stressed, and deductions based upon *'ilm* are continuously cited with approval. The path of *Shari'a* is laid down by God and His Prophet; the edifice of *fiqh* is erected by human endeavor. (Fyzee 151)

This statement justifies the overlapping of the religious and political discourses in El Saadawi's novel. As a result, the way in which communities are governed becomes reliant on Islam with all its senses. However, the statement dissects the two elements which constitute the religion of Islam with much emphasis on "the power of reasoning" and "human endeavor," which are two very subjective concepts. It would be easy to state that the practice of religion would be an easy process due to its excessive dependency on "common sense;" however, this further problematizes the way in which it is applied. The human factor navigates its way through the practice of religion, making it acceptable to subjugate women and refer to this "religious common sense" as being part of the reasoning process, where the basis of common sense is constructed through individual subjectivity.

That said, it is important to acknowledge the possibility in the alteration of law: "Shari'a is both law and religion. Law is by its very nature subject to change. The heart of religion, on the other hand, is unchangeable, or at any rate, the belief in God is an unalterable ideal, a perennial quest" (Fyzee 152). Through this, one can actually propose a solution in terms of the freedom which women are granted within Third World societies. The current practice of religion, based on outdated laws,

becomes an apparent contentious issue that must have been purposely practiced over the years. This idea is further enhanced as the distinction between religion and law is made: “religion is based upon spiritual experience; law is based upon the will of the community as expressed by its legislature, or any other law-making authority” (Fyzee 151). Thus, religion becomes an individualistic and personalized practice in contrast to the constitution of law, which heavily relies on the collective good of the community. The personal aspects of religion can and should be separated from the government, or at least individuals should not be treated based on these limiting and socially constructed religious discourses. However, the Imam in El Saadawi’s novel is identified with what Fyzee calls the “legislature” or the “law-making authority.” That said, his authority permits him to intentionally misinterpret religion, making religious references based on extracting them out of context and relying on the illiteracy of women, and even men in many cases.

In reference to the incident between the grandmother and Bint Allah, the grandmother, as stated before, is infuriated by her questioning. El Saadawi’s portrayal of the grandmother’s reaction suggests her fear of Bint Allah getting used to questioning and makes the process of questioning problematic. This unveils that any attempt of interrogation of religious matters, in relation to women, threatens cultural codes within Egyptian society.

Haideh Moghissi speaks of the outlook of the possibility of violating these unspoken cultural codes. She speaks of her experience at a debate about *hijab*, where she was asked by a moderator to “stay within the boundaries of her culture” and “use Islamic conceptual framework in discussing feminism” (Moghissi 84). Such statements are too broad and present nothing but vagueness when using terms such as “culture,” “Islamic conceptual framework,” and “feminism.” To be able to do as the

moderator asks Moghissi, one has to examine each term in an attempt to make some sense out of it. Which culture is being referred to in this situation and how limited or unlimited is the Islamic framework that is referred to in this context? Finally, what is feminism? These instructions, given to Moghissi, and questions that are raised reflect the situation in El Saadawi's novel as female characters are constantly limited by broad concepts, without being allocated space to question or think about their validity and applicability. Not to mention the ongoing contradictions in male characters who preach certain values and concepts, and go on to do the exact opposite, with a justification of their status within society as the "superior" sex. This again is apparent in the two scenes of Bint Allah's interaction with the grandmother and her male teacher during religion class.

The establishment of what is religiously acceptable is constructed by the Imam through his various marital relationships throughout the text. As the narrative unfolds, El Saadawi portrays one of the Imam's wives as rebellious which astonishes him and strikes him as abnormal: "My legal wife no longer reads what I write and refuses to respect the Laws of the Obedience or the Shari'a and keeps arguing with me about things sacred. She insists that she has a head on her shoulders and that her head is as good as mine" (El Saadawi 171). El Saadawi introduces how illusionary characteristics are created, attached, and expected of women within the allocated "imaginary" space. She presents the astonishment of the Imam through the exaggeration of how his wife's head could not possibly be as good as his. El Saadawi plays upon the notion of presenting imaginative geography in the sense of its physical and metaphorical meaning. This is because she attempts to illustrate how the Imam dehumanizes and alienates his wife in the physical sense of stating that she has a head like a man. On the other hand, she presents the metaphorical side of being able to

think freely. Such a representation shows how these imagined characteristics are created or moreover so deeply embedded in societies that when a woman diverges away from this framework it is viewed as odd. In this case, the imagined characteristics of a woman are how she is expected to remain under her husband's control but, more specifically, not to try to think for herself. Notably, El Saadawi unfolds the mechanism which the Imam uses to justify what he says about his wife's "disobedience" as she has him lay out first the religious aspects which his wife violates. Part of the problem lies, as presented in El Saadawi's novel, in the man not wanting the woman, especially his wife, to question religious aspects because, if she does so, there lies the possibility of discovering the misuse of religion. The possibility of female creativity threatens the manhood of a character like the Imam. Said describes the establishment of male power through the Occident-Orient relationship: "[the] Orientalist's presence is enabled by the Orient's effective absence" (*Orientalism* 208). This further enhances the idea of the establishment of manhood which is carried out through the absence of the Orient, which corresponds to the woman in El Saadawi's text, and the sole presence of the Occident, the man, the subject. The relationship between Occident and Orient, as explained by Said, may be adopted to consider gender relations in El Saadawi's novel. The woman is brought up to accept her inferiority to men and that he is the superior sex. It is in the absence of the woman's ability to voice her creativity and opinion that the man asserts his authority and power. More importantly, the woman's absent voice, as illustrated by Spivak, supports the construction of the illusionary characteristics that are attached to the woman, confining her freedom.

The establishment of women as the second sex, along with the illusionary characteristics which are attached to them at birth, makes women a "symbol" for the

stability of a society's culture and the possession of power by such characters as the Imam. This is why when Bint Allah challenges religious authorities through her need to form a clear understanding, dissociated from religion, she is seen as violating her religion, but, most importantly, her culture. As a result, El Saadawi presents Bint Allah as the beginning of breaking away from these cultural constraints. Valentine M. Moghadam explains this thus: "one answer to identify politics which seeks to control women is to disarticulate 'woman' from 'culture,' deconstruct woman as a symbol, reconstruct women as human beings, and problematize women's rights as human rights" (22). The rage that takes over the religious authorities which Bint Allah questions is subtly linked to her gender and age, which work against the grandmother and the male teacher. Bint Allah is a young girl who questions aspects that no one has hitherto dared to question. Her age and gender place her in an inferior category where she is treated as a *woman*. Moghadam proposes that women are not treated as human beings; therefore, in order to eliminate women as symbols, they need to be treated as human beings, with their right to freedom of whatever they require or want.

El Saadawi shows how the Imam places himself in an almost holy position when his previous wives accept being beaten by him according to the "laws of chastisement," and when he goes to see his mistresses they would "pretend to be asleep" (El Saadawi 171). The women's behavior towards the Imam and enforced silence place him in a higher hence holy position. This is because this "holy" position, much like many religious matters in the novel, eliminates the option of debating matters such as the women's beating or acceptance of infidelity. In such a case, the problem arises in the way in which the Imam chooses to view cheating and beating his wives as permissible acts and mentions that it is religiously acceptable to do so by the "laws of chastisement." Manhood is established through such acts but, more

importantly, through the reality which women have endured and refrained from questioning. It is the repetition of such actions by men and the acceptance of women that have contributed to the dominance of men with the support of a religious discourse. Since men construct religion into a social code by which women should abide, it becomes a hindrance, one that they are socially obliged to follow. Their acceptance of their beating and the Imam's infidelity is an example of how men formalize such actions as part of religion, just like the Imam identifies that he would beat his wife "according to the law of chastisement." This is a different issue which raises the issue of the misinterpretation of religious references. The misinterpretations are perhaps intentional, which is part of shaping religious ideology, or what women should expect and accept from their husbands. It is also important to point out that this process of intentional misinterpretations is what creates the stereotypes of women and their expected roles within society. This is parallel to the concept of how the Orient was first constructed and identified as the other by the West. Jon May suggests that what is intriguing about the Orient is the perception of the label that comes with it as "the exotic" (57). He traces back the origins of the word "exotic" in Greek and its context in sixteenth-century Europe, stating that *exo* means outside; hence it was applied to anything that was exotic as being "outside Europe" and this is where the "imaginative" aspect came to eventually become the "Other" (May 57). Such interpretations of the Orient can be traced back not only historically but also to its origins in Greek, making the connection between how the word was conceived and applied. Even though the term means "outside Europe," what is important is the extended traits and description that was given to anything outside Europe. Similarly, this is what has taken place in conceptions of men and women. It is taking one thing, such as religious discourse including references to the Quran and to the Prophet, and

adjusting it to create those illusionary characteristics associated with women and what is expected and not expected of them.

El Saadawi presents the relationship between God, man, and woman where man is placed in between God and woman. Such a construction makes it unattainable for woman to reach God without her having to, so to speak, “pass through” man or at least gain his permission to be identified as religiously devoted. In this case, Said’s concept of “self-Orientalizing” offers a way to explain how women’s desperate need for identity within their societies makes them primary contributors to their own oppression.

Such an issue of bringing God, the state, and the male figure together is illustrated by John Law’s discussion of establishing authority. Law speaks of how societies have been bred into accepting the rules which have been imposed on them where “the need for rules is not questioned” (3). In the case of the Imam, he uses his power to establish his authority in order for him to be able to eliminate the questioning of rules. However, the kind of power established by the Imam is based on fear, fear from the Imam as he represents himself as an almost God-like figure. Through the way he portrays himself as God’s representative on earth, he is able to convey to his community that to disobey or question his authority would be a disrespectful act towards their religion. El Saadawi further enhances this in a scene where the Imam beats his wife because she left the house without his permission and he tries to find out where she went. The wife eventually “confesses,” as El Saadawi puts it, and the Imam “forgives her like God does” (41). Moreover, it is in this equating of the Imam to God that he is able to place himself in a powerful position where his people would fear him and thus follow his commands. As a result, one of the main components of power, in the case of the novel, is the establishment of fear,

where the authority puts himself in a place that seems superior. This silence and lack of questioning that we see in the novel is what Law objects to. The desperate need to establish power is problematic as it contributes to the formation of categories and, more importantly, to the use of categories such as gender, race, ethnicity, and so on to have full control of one's surroundings. Even within the category of gender and the definition of women, the limitations are socially constructed in the sense of what Beauvoir explains: "no biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine" (48). Beauvoir asserts that one is made into a woman through society, through the imagined characteristics she is assigned and trapped within. A woman's inferiority is identified with her difference and hence she is viewed as inferior.

The final event that closes El Saadawi's novel is the assassination of the Imam, which justifies the title of the book, *The Fall of the Imam*. The vital aspect of this event is the Imam's endless attempts to protect himself from being killed where he wears a mask to attempt to escape his destiny. Eventually he dies; however, it is the events in between that raise issues regarding power, which emphasizes the fact that, no matter how powerful a person is, one cannot escape death. The Imam forgets that there are factors and realities that he cannot control or escape no matter how hard he tries to do so. These factors are based on the ongoing guarantee that the oppressive system to which women have been confined cannot be questioned or overthrown. El Saadawi begins and ends on a shocking note, leaving her readers astounded and in pain due to the dreadful events that take place. However, it is through these dreadful events around which the novel revolves that she amplifies the voices of women who are oppressed and dims down the voices of men who perpetuate oppression.

Religious discourse is one of the many aspects which presents women's oppression through the manipulation and misuse of religion. El Saadawi's novel offers an example of Said's imaginative geography and sheds light on how history may offer insight into the continuing success of such social constructions. John Burt discusses this idea: "the unhappiness of past eras is the result of the errors of past generations, errors defined in such a way as to make them easy to correct" (Burt 891). Through this, he affirms the role of history in passing down certain ideologies that societies have absorbed throughout the years, ones that have become very difficult to alter. El Saadawi is able to extract some of the core issues when it comes to women's oppression, where knowledge plays a vital role in contributing to the growing oppression of women. However, this oppression consists of a psychological connection to the spiritual aspects of religion: "the core of individual identity already contains a sense of belonging to some group, defined along many different dimensions. Ranging from families, kin groups, residential and ethnic groups, races, religions, and nations" (Papanek 44). A sense of belonging is what governs our thoughts as humans; however, El Saadawi also magnifies the role of culture in doing so. As Moghadam notes, "culture masks more than it reveals, making claims on people (especially women) as much as for them" (7). The masking is apparent in the central role of religion in society in the novel. Said enhances this idea of El Saadawi's analysis of culture, women and men, in relation to his concept of Orientalism: "It is Europe that articulates the Orient; this articulation is the prerogative, not of a puppet master, but of a genuine creator, whose life-giving power represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries" (57). By extension, the discourse of religion is responsible for creating the Occident-

Orient relationship. Said's statement opens up more questions that require one to go beyond what he calls "the familiar boundaries."

Chapter 2:
**Orientalizing Gender in Gabriel García Márquez's *Chronicle
of a Death Foretold***

Chronicle of a Death Foretold is summed up by Gene H. Bell-Villada as follows: “For indeed at the core of *Chronicle* is a love story, a narrative about customs, clashes, illusions, and emotions of love” (225). Bell-Villada starts and ends the quote with love being the central theme governing the novel. This is accurate where love is defined as “honor” within the novel (García Márquez 98). Therefore, in order for any individual within the Colombian community to demonstrate love, honor needs to be preserved. Moreover, love is usually known and attached to characteristics such as dedication, honesty, sacrifice, and consistency, which are all characteristics that the community within the novel abide by when treating “honor” as a vital code within society. However, this does not happen in Angela’s case and honor becomes a governing tool which enforces responsibility on the Vicario brothers to “restore” their honor after finding out that their sister Angela lost her virginity to Santiago Nasar. As a result, Angela becomes the central figure in a novel that revolves around her giving Nasar’s name to her brothers as the perpetrator.

In the novel women are governed by very specific cultural traditions and social structures where sacrifice leads the way throughout the novel as almost all characters undergo some sort of sacrifice. Angela sacrifices her voice and honesty to protect someone she loves, and Nasar ends up being the sacrificial figure for her actions. The Vicario brothers sacrifice their free will where they have a social obligation to restore their sister’s honor. The community sacrifices one kind of moral responsibility, which is to stop the murder of Nasar, to fulfill another form of moral

responsibility they have towards their society, which is to abide by the code of honor. Therefore, one could say that in García Márquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, culture is based on sacrifice and loyalty to one's cultural traditions and social codes. Cultural traditions are beliefs and a way of life which have been passed down from one generation to another. In Colombia, women are governed by cultural traditions which restrict or allow them to act in a certain way. However, men also contribute to the development of this role but one cannot say that men are in charge either, which is what García Márquez shows us through the role enforced on the Vicario brothers to restore Angela's honor. If there is an aspect that controls the role of both men and women, it is culture where culture pulls the strings that socially construct a "woman." This is one of the main themes discussed by Beauvoir in her book where she states that it is culture that defines a woman (69). Through this, Beauvoir stresses that a girl is born with a set of expectations and certain chores, as I will examine further. However, women are also defined with the help of the role allocated to men by society, giving men *almost* full authority to perform their gender in a certain way. This renders women "secondary," making men thus "primary" within society. I will define culture in relation to men and women and in the context of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* where "the boys were brought up to be men. The girls had been reared to get married. They know how to do screen embroidery, sew by machine, weave bone lace, wash and iron, make artificial flowers and fancy candy, and write engagement announcements" (García Márquez 31). My choice of this statement positions men and women in relation to culture in García Márquez's novel, highlighting the central roles of each men and women. However, it is also a woman's honor that plays a large role in making the woman a central figure in this novel.

Social codes are also important in García Márquez's novel as they are the outcome of the aforementioned cultural traditions. Social codes are certain standards that are set because of culture, which lead individuals within the community to act in a specific manner. Examples of social codes in the novel are the code of honor and machismo. As a result, all these codes become essential "vocabulary" for defining the role of women and men within Colombian society.

My main focus throughout this chapter is to examine how the enforced practice of culture governs the role of each of women and men with more attention to the role of women. Even if men are viewed as capable of exercising more freedom than women in the novel they are still confined to the idea of space. Unlike El Saadawi's novel, the men in the novel do not intentionally use culture to oppress women but rather silently perform their duties which in turn oppresses women. As a result, the social codes – honor and machismo – demonstrate the process of socially constructing a woman with the help of the role granted to men within society. This will require a close analysis of the cultural traditions with much focus on the central role of women, especially Angela Vicario, as well as honor and machismo. Other male characters will be closely analyzed, especially the Vicario brothers, in order to demonstrate the strength of the social codes they need to abide by. Through this examination, I hope to reach a conclusion of how a community, much like the one in the novel creates an illusion of protecting a woman and her honor when in reality it causes women more destruction. Unlike El Saadawi's novel, both genders are the victims and oppressed entities of cultural constraints.

Unlike El Saadawi's novel, religion will not come into play in the same sense; however, one minor detail that leads to the construction of the plot is the reference to Catholicism in the sense of that a girl should remain a virgin until marriage. However,

the novel is set in the 1950s in Colombia in a more traditional social milieu.

Therefore, I examine “religious discourse” in terms of how culture possesses the same “sacred” system by which individuals abide.

The origins of the code of honor, which constitutes a large part of Colombian culture, was “brought into the indigenous culture by Renaissance Spain. Moreover, the understanding of honor was based on living up to expectations to fulfill the terms established” (Ahmad et al. 3). Even though Ahmad et al aim to clarify honor in the novel, the reference to “terms established” is still quite vague. No doubt a large part of the code of honor relies on fulfilling “expectations” that the culture imposes on individuals. However, even in attempting to understand the terms that allow the code of honor to run the community in such a way, it is still not clear. This allows the “terms established” to be placed in an unnamed category where one does not really know where this unspoken code of honor originates.

To define and understand the code of honor, one must trace it back to colonial Latin America where it was seen as “premarital chastity and post-marital fidelity” (Ahmad et al. 3). This statement does not seem to state to which gender honor is applicable. As one reads *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, it becomes clear that such a statement is directed to women, even though nowhere in the text does it explicitly state that. It is more of an “unspoken fact.” It is such unspoken facts that become problematic in that they contribute to social constructions be it of religion, gender, culture, and so on. In *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, the preservation of a girl’s virginity before marriage plays a major role in the Colombian community. The violation of this communal regulation is what causes the Vicario brothers to perform their “cultural duties” and fulfill the “code of honor.” This is what is known as

“machismo” where male characters such as the Vicario brothers demonstrate their strength and pride in defending their honor which gives them the right to rule women.

Machismo is seen as another branch of culture that socially constructs a woman through the man’s understanding of his duty. Machismo is defined as male characters demonstrating their strength and pride in defending their honor, which includes women in their family. Another definition of machismo is: “Machismo as a concept characterizing male behavior and personality has the potential of influencing boys who are socialized in corrective matters that are harsher than girls and their own sense of worthiness is brought to their attention to be a man before they reach manhood” (Villereal and Cavazos 33). However, machismo can be understood or viewed from a positive standpoint, presenting men as willing to work hard to support their families and children (Villereal and Cavazos 34). Therefore, one could explain the creation of these social codes (honor and machismo) as ways of protecting women rather than purposefully oppressing them. This could be valid from such a standpoint as, unlike El Saadawi’s male characters, there aren’t any direct verbal offences to women, or at least not with the intention of associating them with inferiority. On the other hand, this argument would not and could not possibly be developed fully because the reader would be pulled back to the starting point of why the Vicario brothers do not verify the name of their sister’s perpetrator before committing such a horrific act. This is why machismo has a negative connotation in García Márquez’s novel. Machismo is there in each and every culture yet practiced differently. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, machismo functions based on cultural traditions; however, most of all, it functions based on how much of a “normal” phenomenon it is within Colombian culture:

As boys transition into adolescence and young adulthood, machismo is played out in relationship to how they conduct themselves against other males and in their relationship with females.... By the time that they enter young adulthood males have experienced a strong dose of how to exert machismo and they practice dating behaviors while maintaining the upper hand with girls (Villereal and Cavazos 34).

As a result, one could say that machismo becomes a normal aspect learnt while growing up as nothing about it becomes odd or unfamiliar as machismo is performed unconsciously. The Vicario brothers are an example of the code and the unintentional, obligatory fulfillment of the duty imposed on men. As a result, the Vicario brothers are elevated due to their fulfillment of the code of honor where they prove “their status as men” (García Márquez 84). The Vicario brothers’ act upholds their honor as men and restores Angela’s honor, again demonstrating “machismo.” Thus social codes are used to justify the murder of Nasar.

Angela’s isolation, beating, and the murder of Nasar are products of the code of honor that is meant to regain harmony yet ironically brings about more of disharmony. Critics link honor to culture in order to be able to form a clearer understanding of its value within Colombian society: “the backdrop of the cultural values deemed as necessary to measure prestige on both individual and societal level. It is the same idea of prestige that works behind the cultural construction of gender, whereas the latter was what played a major contributory factor in building the system of honor” (Ahmad et al. 15). The key words within this statement are “prestige” and “social level.” It is through the constant attempt to maintain the collective prestige of society that individual pressure arises, eliminating individualistic thinking and freedom. Moreover, it is the ongoing practice of these social constructions that form

what Ahmad et al refer to as the “building of the system of honor,” a system that requires one to stop and think about its social and individual consequences.

The contradiction within the system functioning on this code of honor surfaces when it comes to Angela marrying Bayardo San Román: “If lack of love is not a good enough reason to stop Bayardo San Román and Angela Vicario from getting married, Angela’s loss of her virginity to someone other than Bayardo is enough to cause her return. The town’s moral value of virginity is superior to a man’s death” (Pelayo 113, 126). This superiority is heightened, eliminating any sense of moral responsibility towards an innocent man's life where the community’s moral responsibility “takes a backseat,” when it comes to the act of murder or even to Angela marrying a man she does not love (Pelayo 126). Moreover, conflict arises from the fulfillment of the code of honor and a woman’s virginity as explained by Pelayo: “it may seem contradictory for the reader to realize that Bayardo returns his wife because she is not a virgin when the same society glorifies men who go after women only to take away their virginity” (125). Such a statement demonstrates how the code of honor and the code of machismo work against and in conflict with one another. The code of honor and machismo both inflict responsibility on the Vicario brothers to protect Angela; however, machismo functions based on demonstrating a man’s masculinity through having as many sexual relationships as he wishes, both before and during marriage. This freedom in the number of sexual partners and relationships men engage in is one of the main acts that asserts a man’s position within society. Therefore, the practice of machismo involves sex and women where, to men, women are explained through this statement: “in terms of its sexual implications, machismo emphasizes viewing women as sex objects” (Kaoukji and M’Jid). This statement dehumanizes women, placing them in an inferior position. However, this statement says more about men than in

does about women, likening men to animals where their only aim is to be acknowledged as “macho” within their society, regardless of the oppression women face due to their acts.

On the other hand, women in Colombian societies are raised to view sex as part of their marital duties as explained: “In our society, women attach punitive attitudes to their sexuality. They associate sex with sin, so they carry a negative emotional burden” (Paternostro 83). Therefore, sex is viewed and practiced as nothing more but a chore. It does not and should not take place for pleasure; as a result, any divergence away from sex as a marital duty becomes a sinful act.

One could say that Angela is seen to have challenged the code of machismo as she almost pushes herself into the category of having an “uncontrollable sexual appetite” (Graham 204). Her identification as such is because she risks engaging in sexual intercourse prior to marriage, which is one of the greatest sins in her society. As a result, Angela challenges the notion of women having to stay within the category of being objects as labelled by Beauvoir. In Said’s description of the Orient, he describes the Occident as viewing the Orient as a “fierce lion” which is silenced (*Orientalism* 95). Angela could be viewed as going from a tamed lion, which the reader never gets to experience before she admits her sexual relationship prior to marriage, to the fierce lion. This transformation is, in her society’s lens, Angela’s violation of the social code of honor and act of bringing shame to her family and town. This is why with women being viewed as an exotic entity, due to the sexual pleasure they provide a man with, her sudden change brings about panic as May describes the Orient: “As the exotic may be something that is both desired and feared, but it must always be understood as standing in opposition to a white, Western identity” (57). Even though May describes the Orient as being both feared and

desired, much like a woman, he does not forget to mention that the Orient's identity is there and considered real because of its opposition to the Occident. Therefore, Angela is able to use the same tool as men, sexual intercourse, to challenge the superior sex and the one component of culture – machismo – which maintains the social construction of a man. As a result, one can say that part of the Vicario brothers' reaction to their sister's loss of virginity is more of fear as she seems about to break away from the secondary category in which she has been placed, where she is the object, and to enter the "primary" category of gender where she could become the subject. The problem with Angela's attempt to break away from these social constructions lies in the threat she poses to the community as a whole, as well as to the ongoing system that has long been maintained.

Thus, public validation becomes an extremely important instrument that combines both honor and machismo as tools for exercising social duties. The Vicario brothers could not have killed Nasar without informing the community. Not only do they have to perform their duties, but they have to do so in public: "we killed him openly ... but we're innocent" (García Márquez 55). This demonstrates a moment of glory for the Vicario brothers; however, they still wanted to justify their innocence. The statement unveils their inner conflict, where García Márquez presents the inner feelings against the duties imposed on them. Moreover, they describe the moment after they killed Santiago Nasar as though they were "galloping on horseback" (García Márquez 120). A horse is a symbol for victory, wisdom, pride, and honor. Through the comparison to galloping on a horse, they are either choosing to take part in what a horse symbolizes, the victory of fulfilling their duty, or, it could be that in the moment they really felt all of victory, wisdom, pride, and honor. However, this

raises the question of whether this short moment of all these feelings is worth their psychological agony in the aftermath.

More importantly, reputation plays an integral role when it comes to machismo. Its importance is emphasized by Hirsch et al through males taking “physical risks” but remaining “socially safe” (Hirsch et al. 1987). Therefore, a good reputation relies on performing physically violent acts in order to attain “social safety.” The last part of this statement applies to the Vicario brothers as they act to attain “social safety” in terms of avoiding being shamed if they do not kill the man who took their sister’s virginity. Not only would they have been shamed, they most probably would not have been able to stay in their town because they would be labelled as cowards due to their inability to prove their status as men. As a result, since machismo is what society uses to push individuals to carry out social duties, it becomes a vital element that governs the way the Vicario brothers act. García Márquez juxtaposes Angela with her brothers where they act for social safety yet Angela takes social and physical risks through her premarital intercourse. This juxtaposition aims to interrupt the social harmony, where García Márquez creates a means of action for Angela to assert her rebellious identity and freedom. The other important part of machismo is the male display of strength in front of other men: “As boys transition into adolescence and young adulthood, machismo is played out in relationship to how they conduct themselves against other males and in their relationship with females” (Villereal and Cavazos 34). As a result, for the Vicario brothers to maintain a good and reputable name within their society, other men had to experience not any death but more of the butchering of Nasar. This public affirmation is what resulted in the passing down of the Vicario brothers’ machismo.

The false accusation of Nasar as the one who took Angela's virginity is justified within the Colombian community: "once the word is spoken, the facts become secondary; the telling creates the reality" (Christie 29). The statement magnifies the authority of words within the community where verbal communication is the key element which is responsible for the navigation of any situation. This is also apparent in the previous analysis of reputation where individuals rely on words for social affirmation of their gender identity. This is further emphasized when even solid facts become inferior, as explained by Christie. The Vicario brothers could not go through the process of verifying the information they had received from their sister. This is because they would risk their reputation of being labelled as "cowards" and too scared to redeem their honor. However, this is explained through the lack of individuality and how society is ruled by communal values (Subhamukhi 53). The narrator himself states: "no one is able to spare those poor boys from the horrible duty that's fallen on them" (García Márquez 65).

On the other hand, as mentioned, Angela's loss of virginity threatens the community as a whole because women play a fundamental part in establishing culture. When closely analyzed, the two key codes which the society uses to function are both related to interacting with women. The code of honor requires women to stay faithful hence behaving in the manner set by society while machismo exists because of men's dominance over women. Margaret Atack defines a woman as "a magical entity, an emblem of the cultural beliefs in which are properly kinds of possessions, that is to say in the manner of fetishes and totems, they play a privileged role in cultural identity and meditations with the natural world" (45). The world "magical" allows such words to come to mind: unreal, illusionary, fairytale-like, untouchable, and the list could go on forever. All these adjectives associate women with an almost

sacred object that is extremely delicate. Such descriptions may seem to be associated with positive implications; however, it is this extreme delicacy and isolation that results in women being oppressed both physically and emotionally as they are in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. Women are presented as an important aspect of society, though in the sense that a woman only exists in relation to man.

Towards the end of the novel, Angela experiences freedom as she reunites with Bayardo after writing him letters. However, it is important to point out that Angela experiences freedom only when she leaves her community and begins to pour her thoughts and feelings out on paper: “she achieves her emancipation through the magic of the letter, the liberating effect of the word” (Rendon 355). García Márquez thus includes an emancipatory, modern tool such as writing to provide an ending that breaks away from those imagined characteristics of a woman and the idea of women being the inferior and second sex as presented by Beauvoir. Also, García Márquez’s choice of writing to express oneself is what Beauvoir encourages as she has a strong standpoint regarding woman being categorized as secondary.

As Atack notes: “Beauvoir is writing against the way gender socialization gives the illusion of permanency and security, falsely naturalizing a hierarchal difference, effectively offering a belief in the illusionary metanarrative of gender as security for both sexes” (41). In this quote, Atack criticizes how this social system produces nothing but illusionary stability which is why, with one incident that threatens the community, chaos is all that they are left with in the novel. However, it is important to note that the process of studying gender roles is in itself a construct of this “false naturalization of hierarchal difference.” Scott provides an explanation for gender:

This usage insists that the world of women is part of the world of men, created in and by it. This usage rejects the interpretive utility of the idea of separate spheres, maintaining that to study women in isolation perpetuates that one sphere, the experience of one sex, has little or nothing to do with the other. In addition, gender is also used to designate social relations between the sexes. Its use explicitly rejects biological explanations, such as those that find common denominator for diverse forms of female subordination in the facts that women have the capacity to give birth and men have greater muscular strength. Instead, gender becomes a way of denoting “cultural constructions”- the entirely social creation of ideas about appropriate roles for women and men. (1056)

Therefore, in order to ground the role of women in a society, such as the one in García Márquez’s novel, one needs to be able to have a clear understanding of definitions of gender. Secondly, one needs to acknowledge, as Scott points out, that gender cannot be analyzed based on “social constructs” only. However, in García Márquez’s novel, one can say that men and women have complementary roles based on their biology and social codes have been maintained because of this biology.

However, it is important to note that just as men are reared into their gender roles, so are women. This is apparent in García Márquez’s description of Purísima del Carmen, Angela’s mother: “‘She looked like a nun,’ Mercedes recalls. She devoted herself with such spirit of sacrifice to the care of her husband and the rearing of her children that at times one forgot she still existed” (30). The comparison of Purísima to a nun is nothing but a description of her dedication to her chores as a housewife, much like a nun dedicated to her religious duties. This description might seem

conventional for a mother; however, the tone of such a statement aims to magnify the women's sacrificial attitude when their existence becomes linked to their role as housewives. As a result, Purísima's acceptance is demonstrated through her sacrificial attitude and "religious" dedication to her husband and children. This is similar to the community whose "silence can be viewed as a form of acceptance, with the belief that the crime against Angela had to be avenged" (Pelayo 126). Purísima dedicated herself to raising Angela as an obedient housewife and thus is furious when Bayardo returns her a few hours after their wedding. Purísima beats Angela because she has violated the social code of how a girl should be. However, one can say that García Márquez attempts to present Angela Vicario as a character who attempts to break away from these set social codes, even after various years have passed since the crime. Angela expresses her discomfort towards the bishop: "I didn't want to be blessed by a man who cut off only the combs for soup and threw the rest of the rooster into the garbage" (García Márquez 39).

This further enhances the corrupt system that the community abides by, where even a so-called "sinner" in their eyes refuses to start a new life with the blessing of a man who watched a murder take place without stopping it. Even though Angela seems like the central character because of whom the murder takes place, one can also say that Bayardo is the external force that causes this chaos. If it wasn't for his arrival and keenness to marry Angela, no one would have found out about Angela's loss of virginity, or at least not for the time being. In addition, Bayardo was seen as a good opportunity for Angela's family given his wealth. Therefore, social class comes into play when assessing Angela's character. Bayardo provided Angela and her family an opportunity to change their social and financial status within society; however, with the shame Angela brings to her family, she has little or no chance of remarrying.

Religion plays a very different and minor role in García Márquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. In this case, religion is used to restore and affirm the code of honor and machismo in that it is so deeply intertwined with cultural traditions. Moreover, García Márquez is interested in religion as an event that is part of culture where religion is all about public demonstration of faith and belief. In contrast to El Saadawi's novel, religion or religious references are used by García Márquez to create irony within the novel; however, not for the purpose of including religion as a governing institution in Colombian society. The subtle but sometimes strikingly obvious references to Christianity are nothing more but a technique used by García Márquez to develop sacrifice as a prominent symbol throughout the novel. They do nothing more but reflect the buildup to Nasar's murder and his sacrifice for the honor of family and community.

An example of how religion is treated as an event is the bishop's arrival and that, too, is treated by García Márquez and the community as nothing more but a tradition that takes place every year and in which the town is forced to participate. The people wait for the bishop to get off the boat but he does not, which does not come as a surprise as he never got off the boat the previous years. They continue to carry out the same preparations blindly without any regard to the previous years. Such an incident sheds light on how faith is more about its public display rather than its practice as a personal and individual action. This event is essential and is given much attention due to its importance in Colombian culture. Such an ostentatious act is deliberate by García Márquez as it adds to the plot of the novel, diverting the community's attention away from the crime that is about to take place. García Márquez juxtaposes Nasar's unfortunate fate with the Bishop's arrival. It is in such irony that culture and religion collide, bringing out how they could also work in

opposition to one another. Nevertheless, in the end, it is culture that prevails as Ruben Pelayo describes Nasar upon the bishop's arrival: "Indeed, Santiago's screams go unheard as they are confused with the sounds of the bishop's festival" (115). Nasar's voice, which illustrates the pain he goes through as he has sacrificed for the good of the community, gets jumbled up with the event that is both a religious ceremony and a symbol for cultural traditions. Moreover, the faint screams of Nasar symbolize how individual suffering is insignificant when placed in comparison with the collective and cultural good of a community.

Much like El Saadawi, García Márquez plays around with the names of the characters within his novel to create more irony. García Márquez uses names that have religious significance; however, they demonstrate the contradictory nature of the characters in relation to their actions. Santiago Nasar's last name makes a reference to "Nazareth" where Jesus Christ was born. It attempts to make a link between him and Jesus Christ to demonstrate his sacrifice. The Arab origins of both Jesus and Nasar liken them to one another, too.

Furthermore, the Vicarios' family name is translated into "vicarious" which is described as having "a highly relevant and meaningful Catholic connotation. Vicarious denotes something done or endured by one person substituting for another" (Pelayo 129). This is the religious meaning of the word and the Vicario brothers act in such a way. They pursue Santiago Nasar without ascertaining his guilt. Moreover, Pelayo goes on to further analyze the family name: "The family's name is Vicario and Vicario translates as vicariously, which in turn means to play the role of someone else. This family is intentionally named Vicario because its members are playing a role they wish not to lead" (131). This is apparent in Pedro, Pablo, and Poncio's names:

Pedro (Peter) and Pablo (Paul) ‘are the names of two principal apostles of the Catholic Church. Both are considered pillars of the Church. Peter was the first Pope, appointed by Jesus himself to take his place (vicariously) to lead his flock, the Church (Matthew 16:18)’ – described as ignorant, much like Pedro, he is in charge just like Pedro himself being in charge of leading this murder within the novel. While Paul’s mission was to carry Christianity to pagan communities. Without his efforts, Christianity might not have spread beyond Israel. (Pelayo 130)

Therefore, Garcia Marquez plays around with their names and connotations. Pedro does seem ignorant from the decision he takes of blindly fulfilling a code based on inaccurate facts. On the other hand, Pablo is the one who goes around spreading the word, asserting his and his brother’s machismo. However, García Márquez’s choice of choosing his name based on how he spreads Christianity, again, further enhances how this code of honor is likened to the sacred value of religion. Lastly, Poncio’s name is the name of a man who “washed his hands during the trial of Jesus. He did not want to be held responsible for the death of an innocent man” (Pelayo 131). Poncio seems to be the only character who has minimal or no voice at all in the novel. Even though García Márquez mentions that he is blind, his blindness ironically allows him to see more than the rest of the characters as he, much like his name implies, does not interfere in any decisions or actions concerning his daughter’s marriage or Santiago Nasar’s murder. However, Poncio reflects the rest of the Colombian community as they remain silent and refrain from stopping the murder.

Lastly, Angela's name translates into "angel" where an angel is affiliated with freedom, wisdom, and doing good, and its positive qualities are described as follows:

The word angel also denotes qualities of beauty, innocence, truth, and purity. Angela Vicario is certainly beautiful, but unlike an angel, she is not pure. She not only loses her virginity before she is married but also hides the truth from her husband-to-be. She is, like her twin brothers, a vicarious being. She assumes the role of an angel but performs it poorly. She condemns the innocent Santiago Nasar to death and her husband, Bayardo San Román, to shame. (Pelayo 130)

Through this, García Márquez juxtaposes her name with her actions, enhancing her contradictory role within society. Generally, the juxtaposed contradictions in the characters' names and personalities are a way in which García Márquez enhances the cultural contradictions which bring social disorder instead of harmony.

García Márquez uses communal values as a tool to assert certain cultural codes such as the code of honor and machismo. The two codes govern the community and contribute to the oppression of women within Colombian society. He aims to show that the social codes are social constructs; however, unlike El Saadawi's novel, they are not implemented and used intentionally by men to oppress women. The Vicario brothers know their duty towards their community where honor is central: "A female's honor is observed in the idea that her sexual purity requires restraint, whereas a male's honor lies in the way he defends the sexual purity of the females of his family" (Graham 201). As a result, men and women are Orientalized in the novel in the sense that they are rendered subject to social and cultural practices. Thus

Angela and the Vicario brothers' response is indebted to the cultural constraints imposed on Colombian society.

Conclusion:

Sacred Discourses

El Saadawi and García Márquez deploy different styles when writing; however, they both present women in their works as passive characters. The central figures or events differ in each of the two novels. El Saadawi centers on Bint Allah as the rebellious, young girl with a shameful history who tries to educate herself and comprehend the system while García Márquez's focus relies on two events: Angela and Bayardo's marriage and Santiago Nasar's murder. In both cases, female sexuality and its assigned role within each of the Egyptian and Colombian societies is what governs both works to produce different social codes that their characters follow. However, in El Saadawi's case, the practice of religion is central and dealt with directly by El Saadawi and her characters. There is a direct confrontation with the abusive power exercised by male characters to justify their superior position as men. On the other hand, García Márquez presents social codes which expose the oppression experienced by women and exercised by men due to cultural traditions.

History, as discussed by Said, plays an important role in terms of regenerating those social codes and "sacred discourses." The main problem which surfaces from the questionable role of history is the distortion of clarity due to an issue of "monopolization," whether it is monopolizing ways of adapting theories, thinking or putting theories and thoughts into action. The idea of men being the leading gender is a deeply embedded one and described as "a triumph in biology" (Brown 122). Such thoughts are how chaos is created in El Saadawi and García Márquez's novels where questions are raised: What is this "triumph" based on? Whether a triumph has taken place or not, the problem does not lie in attaining equality between men and women

but in the remaking of gender and sexuality as proposed by Butler through the feminist revolution (Butler 137). This all comes down to gender being a social construct, one that is imposed on women, and sometimes men too, who have in fact adapted to gender roles. As examined through El Saadawi and García Márquez's work, these social constructs rise due to the existence of religious and cultural codes by which societies operate.

El Saadawi focuses on Islam as a religion yet her other novels address other important issues that are specific to Egyptian society such as morality, female circumcision, and arranged marriage, and finally religion which has strong ties with culture. However, feminists such as El Saadawi are often attacked for addressing religious issues in the same direct manner she does in *The Fall of the Imam* and many of her other novels. Badran explains: "Islamist women are seen as having cultural norms on their side while feminist women appear to be challenging indigenous culture. The burden of proof of authenticity, or correctness, is on feminists. They have to show that they are not tainted by alien, mainly Western, influences" ("Gender Activism: Feminists and Islamists in Egypt" 208). The feminist struggle continues, and, as Badran states, is usually discredited because feminists do not have "culture" on their side. They are seen to be attacking their own culture hence their individualistic and collective "Egyptian" identity. Therefore, this is perhaps why feminists and characters such as Bint Allah threaten female identity because they are seen to threaten society as a whole. The threat lies in the probability of their influence by "Western culture," where women are usually identified with exercising more freedom than women in the Middle East. The threat of women gaining freedom is a threat to their Egyptian society as a whole. Badran goes on to explain this through a conversation with Hala Halim: "there seems to be something mutually exclusive

about being a feminist and being an Egyptian, as if you reject your bonds to your own country” (207). Egyptian feminists are therefore looked down upon and perceived as traitors to their countries because of their constant attempts to challenge whatever oppressive and imbalanced system comes their way. This is why El Saadawi has her female protagonist openly question the deeply rooted and encouraged oppression of women by men through a socially constructed religious discourse. She demonstrates how Bint Allah takes the risk of asking such questions that seem to be unusual or that remain undiscussed. She opens up the question of the role of man and woman within society; furthermore, she questions both roles with a focus on how the man acts within society, along with the power and space he is granted. Sherif Hetata, an Egyptian translator and El Saadawi’s former husband, talks about a “masculine shell” that protects men. What he asserts is the beginning of acknowledging where the problem lies for a man to be able to confront himself. Hetata’s argument addresses the struggles of accepting El Saadawi’s so-called rebellious attitude as she helped him begin his writing career. As a result, this is how he came to realize the presence of this shell.

On the other hand, García Márquez uses culture as a tool to assert the identity and roles of each of men and women. These assertions are made through the strong role of the word being spread around. It is revealed more than once that there is no guarantee that Nasar is the man they are looking to murder; however, this is not what counts: “The code of honor is one which, Christie explains, derives from a paternal authority associated with the ‘mythic past of some religious or moral order which has now dissipated.’ Still, the code remains sufficiently relevant in the community that an entire town stands by and watches as Pedro and Pablo brutally kill Santiago Nasar in the street” (Michaels). This magnifies how the code of honor is based on an outdated

religious order that is blindly upheld and becomes problematic as its blind acceptance leads to the oppression of women. It creates a morally acceptable reality of watching a young, innocent man being murdered while the crime is not treated as a murder but as a retrieval of one's honor. Moreover, a verification and truthfulness of information is not required because "communally" the town agree that Nasar is the one who took Angela's virginity. Much like religion being the leading factor for men's oppression in El Saadawi's novel, honor has the same role in García Márquez's novel. Honor is used to justify the Vicario brothers' murder of Nasar. Therefore, fulfilling honor is seen as a religiously accepted act; in fact, it is presented as the only act that should be undergone in the case of Angela and Nasar.

As for the different writing styles and the construction of each of the two novels, both authors use irony as a way to magnify the corrupt social systems in Egypt and Colombia. El Saadawi uses Bint Allah, the main female character, as her narrator for the first two pages; therefore, the reader gets a glimpse of both the events and her feelings and reactions towards her town. El Saadawi assigns Bint Allah a very critical and strong narrative. However, the shift in the narration, or the intentional blur in who the narrator is unifies women's voice to bring their voices together into becoming one.

In García Márquez's novel, irony and the form of the "chronicle" are the dominant features. The integral role of irony is highlighted as it becomes a tool for magnification in García Márquez's writing. Moreover, the use of irony is combined with magical realism: "his magical-real narration dissects the legitimacy, granted by both culture and religion, of the traditional concept of honour and presents it as an empty norm to safeguard the so-called social reputation" (Ahmad et al. 3). Ahmad et al pinpoint how magical realism amplifies emptiness. This emptiness, which is the product of social codes, produces the "social image and reputation," with which

García Márquez's characters are concerned in the novel. The Vicario brothers murder Nasar so people would not look down on them; Angela's parents marry her off to Bayardo because of his display of wealth. Even the way the Vicario brothers murder Nasar is as though they are dissecting an animal; they display his insides.

Moreover, García Márquez applies his journalistic and historical feature in bringing the past and the present together where his novel is seen in two ways:

García Márquez's novella disguises its crafts in a similar way by claiming from the title to be something else: a chronicle. This statement constitutes an instruction for reading the work as if it were a chronicle, while we suspect and hear from other orienting voices (such as publicity), that it is a novel. These perplexing instructions for reading are further complicated by the fact that two meanings of the word come into play: historical descriptions and journalistic reports. (Pope 184)

His historical and journalistic writing attempts to provide his readers with an objective narrative; however, the repetition of various scenes, especially Nasar's murder, makes this non-linear narration confusing for assembling the story. This confusion parallels the chaos brought about in the novel community through the social codes upheld by the male characters. García Márquez's non-linear narration becomes vital for exposing the solidity of social codes where any disorder that takes place could not have prevented Nasar's murder. This amplifies social codes, grounding their presence and asserting their infinite survival.

My choice of the two authors limits the area of study to Third World countries; however, having a male and female author requires a closer analysis of the

influences and driving forces behind the production of each narrative. In *The Fall of the Imam*, El Saadawi allocates her narrator an aggressive voice. Those who have read other works by El Saadawi and listened to her speak about men will find similarities in the aggression and anger of her female characters. Female circumcision, one of the recurrent themes in El Saadawi's works, is the product of El Saadawi's experience as a young girl. El Saadawi discusses this in one of her novels, *A Daughter of Isis*:

"When I was six, the *daya* [midwife] came along holding a razor in her hands, pulled out my clitoris from between my thighs, and cut it off. She said it was the will of God and she had done his will" (*The Daughter of Isis* 39). One can see how El Saadawi's critical views were nurtured as she experienced a painful process that was justified by religion. As a result, one can say that El Saadawi writes firsthand experiences that affected her as she was growing up. However, this is just one experience; El Saadawi speaks of other incidents which she watches other women go through such as sexual harassment and arranged marriage, which are the leading theme in her book *Woman at Point Zero* and the experiences of the main character, Firdaus. In *Woman at Point Zero*, El Saadawi demonstrates how women are treated as mere objects and are degraded by men's treatment of them. All the different experiences of women's oppression have helped El Saadawi create her own voice. Some could criticize El Saadawi's work by mentioning how most of her female characters seem alike in terms of the anger they possess. However, it is this anger that creates unity between her female characters to produce one female identity that is not afraid to fight against the practice of religion and cultural traditions. This is why El Saadawi has been able to maintain a dedicated audience of readers as she has shown them consistency in her characters and the causes she fights for.

Similarly to El Saadawi's use of true anecdotes, García Márquez's narrative is based on a true story but with changes in the characters' names and outcome. However, the murder of a young, innocent man is the main story which García Márquez narrates since he was a friend of his. Therefore, his personal involvement in the story exists; however, more than narrating the murder, he attempts to demonstrate the stagnant society which has been ruled by certain social codes. However, Carlos Alonso criticizes García Márquez's action of writing to reveal these cultural constraints or even attempt to demonstrate liberation through Angela's writing or his own. In García Márquez's case, Alonso connects his writing to victimization and violence where the writing process contaminates more than it cleanses: "Indeed, rather than engaging in a ritual cleansing, what *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* accomplishes is a process of ritual pollution, one that is repeated time and again with each successive reading of the text" (Alonso 160). Therefore, for Alonso, García Márquez's writing worsens the situation. However, there could be another perspective to view his writing where the personal experience of this story pushes him to expose the archaic codes of Colombian society.

As Beauvoir shows her readers, a woman is restricted through the community in which she lives, the politics of her state, and lastly the position in which she is placed by men. One cannot acknowledge the power a woman or even a man has within society as this varies but, more importantly, it depends on one's understanding of power. However, the important aspect to acknowledge and clarify is what Freya Schiwy explains using the term "gender complementarity", one's position in society, meaning that men and women should not seek to have similar roles but rather complete one another through the performance of different roles. Schiwy explains: "men and women have different but complimentary roles and responsibilities" (272).

Rather than attempting to establish power, the war of genders should be understood in terms of their relationship to one another and how each gender contributes to the world, an aspect that is far from being achieved in today's world but is worth pointing out.

It is through discourses such as religion and culture that the space between genders is exaggerated, which intensifies the oppression of women. Both El Saadawi and García Márquez demonstrate how oppression in general takes place through lack of contextualization, which means that women are exposed to violence based on how males extract codes of their culture or religion and apply them to gain power. This raises the question of whether men's oppression of women through the practice of religion and cultural practices could be resolved. Moreover, there has to be an acknowledgement of the "socially acceptable denial" that we, as communities, have been enduring (Jiwani xv). This socially acceptable denial feeds on fear, allowing discourses such as religion to prevail in maintaining this "social denial" *and* allowing it to become a normal state. The gist of the social constructions which the Imam and the Vicario brothers enforce on women in the novels is the fear of change. The male characters' oppression of women is the result of fear of destroying years of systematizing communities because individuals do not know of anything other than these systems which they and past generations have followed. As a result, the possibility of change creates chaos, where the fear of ambiguity and dealing with change dominates. This fear produces sacred institutions such as religion, the ideal discourse to socially construct men and women to maintain the 'socially acceptable denial' that we live in.

We are constantly falling into the pitfall of attempting to establish equality between the status of men and women when we should be striving for something

other than equality; we should aim for women to *become women*. Women should not be confined to the discourses that are maintained through social constructions. One cannot deny the difficulty of attempting to change a whole community that has been built on the ongoing social constructions of gender, culture, religion and so forth yet what we could do is put an end to assigning men and women roles within society, confining their space, and limiting their identities to these sacred discourses. Fighting against abiding by these sacred discourses will allow women to become women, leading their own lives and making their own choices. El Saadawi and García Márquez offer us different ways out through Angela and Bint Allah's characters, or at least the beginning of different ways out of this confined space, along with solid assertions that it will be a long and exhausting process to break away from these sacred discourses.

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