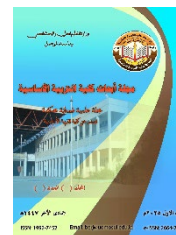




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Female Subjectivity under Political Power: A Comparative Study of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Latifa Al-Zayyat's *The Open Door*

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Abstract

The present paper compares Margaret Atwood's dystopian fiction *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) with Latifa Al-Zayyat's Egyptian realism fiction, *The Open Door* (Al-Bab al-Maftooh) (1960). The comparison concentrates on female subjectivity under patriarchal political power. Regardless of the difference in genre, language, and historical setting, the two novels question women's perspectives, political awareness, and the social systems that delineate female autonomy. The analysis is based on a feminist comparative methodology of biopolitical theory of Foucault, the postcolonial feminist criticism of Mohanty, and narrative voice and authority of Lanser. By juxtaposing literary techniques, thematic concerns (patriarchy, nationalism, sexuality, memory), and the styles of resistance, the paper explains the two protagonist's psychological experiences as sites of political struggle and radical transformation. Additionally, the comparative approach reflects both the universality and cultural distinctiveness of women's reactions to patriarchal control.

الذاتية الأنثوية تحت السلطة السياسية: دراسة مقارنة بين رواية "حكاية الجارية" لمارغريت أتوود ورواية "الباب المفتوح" للطيفة الزيات

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المستخلص

تقارن هذه الدراسة البحثية بين روايتي الديستوبيا للكاتبة مارغريت أتوود "حكاية الجارية" (1985) والواقعية المصرية للكاتبة لطيفة الزيات "الباب المفتوح" (1960)، مع التركيز على موضوع الذاتية الأنثوية تحت سيطرة السلطة السياسية الأبوية. وعلى الرغم من اختلاف الروائيتين في النوع الأدبي واللغة والسياق التاريخي، فإنهما تطرحان تساؤلات حول منظور المرأة ووعيها السياسي، وكذلك حول الأنظمة الاجتماعية التي تحدد حدود استقلالية المرأة. ويعتمد البحث منهجاً المقارنّة ذا المنظور النسوي، مستنداً إلى نظرية السلطة الحيوية عند فوكو والنقد النسوي ما بعد الاستعمار عند موهانتي والتقنيات السردية للانس. ومن خلال المقارنة بين القضايا الموضوعية مثل السلطة الأبوية والقومية والجنس والذاكرة، وكذلك أنماط المقاومة، يناقش هذا البحث بأن الروائيتين تقدمان التجارب النفسية للمرأة بوصفها مواقع للصراع السياسي والتحول الجذري. كما يظهر المنهج المقارن في الدراسة كلاً من الطابع الإنساني العام والاختلاف الثقافي في استجابات النساء لسيطرة النظام الأبوي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مارغريت اتوود؛ لطيفة الزيات؛ الادب المقارن النسوي؛ السياسة الحيوية؛ الديستوبيا؛ الواقعية المصرية.

1. Introduction:

The relationship between political authority and women's liberation movements has taken a key role in feminist literary research studies since the 1970s. Literary works written by and about women frequently show how political systems, whether they are authoritarian, colonial, nationalist, or theocratic, broaden their control beyond governmental institutions into the psycho-emotional experiences of women. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Latifa Al-Zayyat's *The Open Door* illustrate this idea through different yet harmonious artistic perspectives.

The two novels emerge from distinct historical and cultural landscapes. Atwood's novel is, according to Amin Malak (1987), a dystopian fiction reflecting Western anxieties about an authoritarian religion-nationalist period. The novel is a fictional depiction of a possible future Western society that is oppressive. It is based on concerns from a political ideology combining religious rule with nationalist elements. This theocratic government claims to maintain its laws from "biblical precedents" (Atwood, 1985, p. 305), as Nathalie Cooke says: "Gilead is a logical extension of trends already present in our own society, a warning of what could happen if these trends are carried to their extreme conclusions. Atwood's genius lies in making the familiar terrifying" (Cooke, 2004, p. 112). Al-Zayyat's narrative is a foundational work of Arab social realism documenting Egypt's anti-colonial struggle. Despite these different settings, both novels are groundbreaking feminist texts that use the heroine's body as the key terrain where patriarchal control is contested. Atwood creates Gilead, a regime that imposes a "biological destiny" upon women through government-approved ritualized sexual violation, diminishing them to breeding

containers. Al-Zayyat, conversely, draws a society where patriarchal rules are enforced through family customs, and societal norms, restricting the protagonist Layla's self and wishes within domestic boundaries. The study discusses Atwood's use of dystopian fiction to establish a horrifyingly believable future of total biopolitical authority, and Al-Zayyat's use of analytical realism to examine the complicated patriarchal systems interconnected with national politics. Additionally, both authors focus on a core idea of the emancipation of women—whether from a theocratic religious state or an oppressive family—that is deeply entangled with political liberation and authentic identity.

The theories of Michel Foucault, Chandra Mohanty, and Susan Lanser, together constitute a strong basis for understanding women's subjectivity under biopolitics and patriarchal oppression in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Latifa Al-Zayyat's *The Open Door*. Thus, the study integrates three theoretical conceptual tools. First, Michel Foucault's idea of biopower (Foucault, 1978) provides an interpretation of the ways political systems use to control women's bodies and conduct spiritually and biologically. Moreover, it offers the critical terms for understanding how Gilead controls through authoritative bans on freedom and the constructive organization of population and fertility. Foucault's other work on technologies of the self (Foucault, 1977) also highlights Offred's secret actions of self-formation within oppressive restrictions.

Second, Chandra Talpade Mohanty's postcolonial feminist theory, which explains how women, in non-Western social contexts, are framed within homogenous categories, with emphasis on the historical and political particularities of each society. Mohanty's critique of "Third World Woman" as a

homogeneous entity (Mohanty, 2003), guides the approach to Al-Zayyat's novel. The study does not discuss Layla's struggle as a "non-Western" type of a feminist fiction, but it focuses on a particular historical situation of nationalist resistance and its relationship to women's liberation.

Third, feminist literary approach directs the analysis of how Atwood and Al-Zayyat apply narrative perspective and historical frame to construct their protagonist's subjectivity. Susan Lanser's (1992) opinions on narrative voice and authority form a major framework for the comparison between Atwood's first-person account and Al-Zayyat's third-person realism. These theoretical perspectives provide the basis for the following analysis of female subjectivity and resistance in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Open Door*.

2. Analysis:

2.1. Historical and Cultural Contexts:

Margaret Atwood wrote the novel in 1980s, during the period of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher's elections and the ascendancy of a political force known as the "religious right" in the West. The novelist sheds light on the possibility that all gains of the 1960s-70s feminist emancipation movements could be reversed (Howells, 2005). The period also witnessed the rise of conservative politics in the United States and Canada. This kind of politics was influenced by the Moral Majority and the Christian Right which tried to limit reproductive rights and strengthen the traditional structure of male supremacy (Grace, 1998). Discussions on abortion, birth control, women joining the workforce, and family structure were dominant cultural clashes motivated Atwood to imagine a community where women lose their liberty, education,

property, and identity (Grace, 1998). The rigid hierarchy of wives, handmaids, and housewives signifies amplified forms of real social inequalities (Atwood, 1985). So that, the cultural fears about decreasing birthrates, spread of AIDS, Cold War dangers, religious radicalism, and dictatorial leadership fundamentally structured Atwood's dystopian perspective of Gilead (Malak, 1987), which serves as a cultural warning from a community where religion and patriarchy unite to suppress women's liberties (Armstrong, 2018).

Atwood declared that she incorporated "nothing in the book that had not already happened in recorded history" (Atwood, 2012, p. 67), referring to the Puritan theocracies of seventeenth-century New England, and the reproductive policies of Ceaușescu's Romania (Atwood, 2012). The Republic of Gilead is a totalitarian, patriarchal regime established upon historical foundations of radical group called "Sons of Jacob," who overthrew the U.S. government utilizing an economic crisis and ideological fervor. For Gilead, this foundation is the "heavy-handed theocracy of 17th-Century Puritan New England" (Howells, 2005, p. 34). The main policy of the regime is to control women's reproductive abilities, reducing them to government property. According to these circumstances,

"The Gileadean government, which echoes medieval times, has created a platform whereby men are placed high in the hierarchy of society and women are treated as mere objects to observe..... men in the story are perceived as stronger than women, and thus they are given higher positions in society. Meanwhile, women are portrayed as taking on a more liquid form, as they can easily be manipulated and changed." (WanYahya & Poh, 2013, p. 4).

Latifa Al-Zayyat spent most of her life as an activist and was imprisoned for her anti-colonial politics. Her novel, “*The Open Door* is set between 1946 and 1956, a crucial decade in modern Egyptian history... marking the end of British occupation” (Elsadda, 2023) through: student protests, revolutionary ideas, and the emergence of nationalist movements. The novel records the events of 1952 culminating in the Free Officers’ Revolution, which secured Egypt’s independence and promised political and social reforms. “Al-Zayyat’s *The Open Door* is considered a foundational Arab feminist text, boldly connecting a young’ woman’s sexual and emotional awakening to the political awakening of the post-colonial nation” (Allen, 2018, p. 214). Accordingly, Layla’s political awareness parallels Egypt’s collective struggle for freedom, demonstrating the intertwining of the personal and national freedom. During this period, Egyptian society was distinguished by rigid patriarchal structures. Women were controlled by men, bore the family honor, and were expected to obey social rules that restricted their freedom. Thus, women have limitations in choice, voice, mobility. The novel condemned these traditions through Layla’s bitter experiences with her conservative middle-class family. Al-Zayyat draws the conflict between past norms and modernity as Egypt tries to reconstruct itself in many aspects. Thus, the mid-20th century becomes a turning point in intellectual awakening. Artists, thinkers, and authors debated social issues like nationalism, feminism, and identity. The narrative follows the heroine's awakening to protest against colonization linking it to social modernization. The writer tries to create a direct relationship between Layla's personal struggle for freedom and Egypt's fight for independence. Hoda Elsadda affirms that: “The novel’s innovation lies in its structure, which insists that Layla’s journey from the confines of the

bourgeois home to the political street is not just parallel to, but constitutive of, Egypt's own struggle for sovereignty" (Elsadda, 2023).

As Al-Zayyat explains, the family home is the obstacle preventing the country's progress and the basic place of oppression, where a girl's body and behavior are strictly monitored to safeguard "honor". "The novel is considered a feminist classic... It tackles the patriarchal constraints on women's bodies and lives." (Fayed, 2017). The novel begins with the protagonist Layla's first monthly cycle, an incident met with her father's anger, representing how female biology is policed by societal norms. As a girl from a middle-class family, Layla receives an education that creates an active consciousness that pushes her to rebel against the limited future scope planned for women by the restrictive social rules (Amireh,1999).

These communal socio-historical settings affect the two novels' varied literary genres: Atwood writes dystopian speculative narrative to warn the 1980s American and Western societies from turning to authoritarianism. Her novel questions, "What if these reactionary tendencies won?" (Howells, 2005, p. 77). Al-Zayyat writes literary realism, for she is recording and engaging in the progressive change of her society. Her novel asks, "How do we break from internal and external oppression now?" (Al-Zayyat, 2002, p.55). Therefore, the American context is presented as a nexus of risky political forces resulting in a dystopian future. In contrast, the Arab context is shown as a complicated reality of connected private and national conflict.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the place, where women are imprisoned, is an imaginative, dystopian, rigidly isolated Women's Quarters of Red Center. The Gilead authority uses a closed system created to prevent escape or group

resistance (Atwood, 1985). In *The Open Door*, places range from the confined home to the protesting streets in Port Said and Cairo. The setting is an arena of struggle between traditional values and modernity. Atwood utilizes setting to assert that severe patriarchy makes a prison. Al-Zayyat makes use of setting to maintain that patriarchy is first ingrained in home and is reflected in the oppressive society (Al-Zayyat, 1990).

2.2. Biopolitics vs. Domestic Patriarchy:

The state of Gilead portrays the ultimate political control over people's bodies, health, and reproduction, and this is called "biopower." This kind of regime explicitly dominates and manages the bodies of women, claiming to increase population growth and address the nation's problem of declining birth rates. Thus, "sexual relationships are regimented and supervised by the ruling elite, ostensibly in the interest of producing the maximum number of children in the state, but actually... to eliminate chances of forming personal relationships and private loyalties" (Gottlieb, 2001, p.12). The Commanders possess the women's bodies, so they are not theirs at all. The Handmaids are arranged and named according to their Commanders; the protagonist Offred is named after the name of her Commander Fred, so she declares: "My name isn't Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it's forbidden" (Atwood, 1985, p. 94). Consequently, "Anatomy is destiny" (As cited in Coad, 2001, p. 54); Handmaids who do not bear children have no value in the state. All the Handmaids are forced to undergo a ritual "Ceremony," a form of state-sanctioned rape. The protagonist bitterly says about the Handmaid's function: "We are two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices" (Atwood, 1985, p. 184). Offred's main tactic of psychological survival is to leave

her body during “The Ceremony,” she coldly detaches herself and becomes an observer: “I am a cloud, congealed around a central object...” (Atwood,1985, p. 133). The Ceremony is based on a twisted interpretation of biblical rhetoric citing: “And she said unto Jacob, behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knee, that I may also have children by her” (The Holy Bible, 2011, Genesis 30:1-3). Atwood manipulates this verse to serve her purpose of creating a dystopian fiction, as she declares, “Gilead distorts the biblical story of Rachel and Bilhah to legitimate the forced reproduction of Handmaids” (Atwood, 1985, p. 60). In this way, Gileadean regime presents a religious and formal seemingly legitimate justification for its brutal acts against vulnerable women. Thus, a private and voluntary act is generalized to become a national rule to legitimize state control. Atwood's imagination reflects real societal anxieties about state policies controlling women's right to reproduction. The novel is considered a call for supporting identity and personal freedom of will (McAdams, 1993).

Whereas in Al-Zayyat's Cairo, middle-class family and social traditions, instead of political power, play an important role in having full control over women's lives. Within the walls of the house, the mother strictly disciplines the protagonist's behavior through continuous advice to be calm and polite. In order to confront her fears of the social rules and middle-class judgment, Layla constructs a psychological cocoon to protect herself. Yet, this cocoon helps her to evolve and mature to be a different woman. Her emotional and psychological development leads her to active political participation in Cairo and Port Said demonstrations at the end of the novel. Al-Zayyat's message is threefold: Layla's reconstruction of self, Egypt's national and political renewal, and a critique of social structure and middle-class traditions. Layla's personal and emotional life is

a mirror of the whole nation's socio-political conditions. "Al-Zayyat presents the Suez War not as a backdrop but as the catalytic event that dissolves the false barrier between the personal and political, allowing Layla to finally act as an autonomous historical subject" (Elbadawi, 2010, p. 8).

Atwood and Al-Zayyat, argue how religion and traditions are manipulated to control women. Gilead distorts biblical verses to present a justification to use state power against the Handmaids. Meanwhile, cultural conventions and social traditions are utilized to repress women, so their choices in life are severely restricted. Whereas, Atwood portrays the biopolitical power utilized through religious justification; Al-Zayyat depicts the patriarchal authority enforced through societal customs.

2.3. Resistance Strategies:

Fiona Tolan suggests that: "Offred's narrative is an act of resistance in itself. By telling her story, she reclaims authorship of her life from a regime that seeks to reduce her to a silent, biological function" (Tolan, 2017, p. 34). Offred's rebellion is subtle, yet dangerous, powerful, and stubborn. She resists silently through psychological struggle and sometimes through small and secret acts that could disturb the members of the regime. "We are for breeding purposes... There is supposed to be nothing entertaining about us." (Atwood, 1985, p. 244). Therefore, she steals a pat of butter to use as a hand lotion, reads a banned magazine borrowed from the Commander, shares the pivotal "Mayday" conspiracy, engages in a secret relationship with Nick, and meets the Commander privately. She tries to find an outlet from the imposed boundaries, as she suggests that, "A rat in a maze is free to go anywhere, as long as it stays inside the maze" (Atwood, 1985, p. 272). Memories and flashbacks are also

used by Offred as an important tool for survival (Howells, 2005). Thus, she preserves her selfhood against Gilead's rigid attempts to erase the individual's identity:

“Identity connects the individual to a broader social category, in which the individual associates himself/herself with. Traditionally, the concept of identity has not focused on the individual’s personal definitions of social categories such as gender, race, ethnicity, sex and class identities; but rather identity has always been a strictly structured label that has left little room for individuality” (Rao, 1993, p. 79).

Layla's rebellion starts as an internal struggle and ends as external acts. Her awareness begins gradually through resisting her father's constraints, middle-class norms, her mother's orders, her first love memories, and her unsuitable suitor's arrogance. The culmination of her growth is crowned by joining her first love in public demonstrations: “Layla paused on the bank, observing the current of life as it pushed forward, and something in her heart rebelled. Something was willing her to join the current. Yet something in her mind pulled her back, enveloped her to imprison her on shore. And there she remained” (Al. Zayyat, 2002, p. 91). Consequently, what starts as an individual, emotional and intellectual challenge ends as a collective, practical and national one. Layla's evolution passes through several stages of psychological development, from the stage of the cocoon to a mature woman of full free will. Moreover, Al-Zayyat implies that there is a deep connection between Layla's personal development and Egypt's political and national change (Elbadawi, 2010).

The protagonists of the two novels share similar forms of resistance: the psychological conflict and the use of memory. Offred undertakes clandestine acts to feed her psychological survival in a deadly environment (Stillman & Johnson, 1994). Layla subtly resists domestic confinement to find an outlet for herself from suffocated rules. Memories form an imaginative space of light for both protagonists when darkness invaded their reality. Atwood and Al-Zayyat assert the necessity of women's sovereignty over their own lives in order to obtain freedom of mind and destiny. Ultimately, the two novels' ends witness the fulfillment of their protagonists' hope for liberty; Offred, through the imagined, futuristic collapse of the theocratic authority in the US. She describes the moment of arrest: "And so I step up, into the darkness within; or else the light" (Atwood, 1985, p. 142). This is the last line from Offred's narrative, as she gets into the van, which will lead her to prison, death, or, maybe escape. Layla passes through painful labor for transformation of self and nation, and finally gains self-actualization and the country's liberation. Layla finds herself in the "defense of the homeland" (Al-Zayyat, 2002, p. 205). This is her final decision.

Atwood criticizes the failure of some women to be united against external forces, like Aunt Lydia, who is influenced by Gilead's ideology; and is used as a tool to torture the Handmaids. In addition to men, women, within the chain of command, are devoid of empathy and subjected to brainwashing through indoctrination.

Similarly, Al-Zayyat presents a critique of the woman who internalized patriarchal ideologies toward females, such as Layla's mother, who enforces the domestic constraints over her daughter; she prefers to flatter middle-class people over her daughter's feelings. For instance, the mother says: "Courtesy requires

flattering people...Even when you don't like them. ” Layla replies: “So people should just lie, you mean?” (Al. Zayyat, 2002, p. 96). The mother is the first to teach Layla the traditions, which Al-Zayyat considers as a barrier to the individual and national attempts to rise (Al-Zayyat, 1990).

Both novels emphasize that the patriarchal conditions are not only enforced by men, but also by women, who devote their lives and efforts to serve such authoritarian systems. Those women dehumanize other women as they are themselves dehumanized by oppressive regimes.

2.4. Narrative Technique:

An important aspect of *The Handmaid's Tale* is the use of first-person narration and direct testimonies, which creates an immediate effect, profound intimacy, and deep psychological immersion. The reader is captivated by Offred's psyche, encountering her fear, touching her memories, and engaging with her fragmented thoughts (Howells, 2005). Atwood uses flashbacks and an unreliable narrative voice to achieve two goals: survival and defiance for the protagonist, and delivering political testimony (Stein, 1996). For instance, a flashback highlights the protagonist's husband's, Luke, advices:

“I remember the rules, rules that were never spelled out but that every woman knew: Don't open your door to a stranger, even if he says he is the police. Don't stop on the road to help a motorist pretending to be in trouble... We lived, as usual, by ignoring. Ignoring isn't the same as ignorance, you have to work at it” (Atwood, 1985, p. 79).

The incomplete narration of some stories of the past and the hesitation in narrating others reflect the amount of fear and weariness the first-person narrator

hides. Thus, the narration is non-linear and concentrates on memories of political awareness through which personal experiences are generalized.

Al-Zayyat is more linear and realistic in her narration. She finds that the third-person perspective is most suitable for *The Open Door*, for this technique allows the author to present a critique of both personal and institutional sides. As Fayed argues, “the narrative can critique the middle-class family, the education system, and colonial politics with a clarity that a strictly internal perspective might not allow” (Fayed, 2017, p. 182). The reader traces Layla's actions and reactions within her social and political environment, observing all the constraints that curb her impulses and freedom (Al-Zayyat,1990).

Yet, like Atwood, Al-Zayyat asserts the priority of political awareness. Therefore, what is regarded as personal anguish forms a strong base for collective struggle. Both authors employ memory to link the private struggle with the political system. The difference is in their narrative modes; Atwood uses a fragmented non-linear narrative with unstable and ambiguous memories that call into doubt the truth and the official documents; whereas Al-Zayyat uses realism with a more straightforward and clearer narration. Despite the differences, memories are the best device of resistance used by both writers.

2.5. Symbolism:

Atwood's symbols, such as: the red color, the eye, and the wall, are considered tools of the Gilead regime. The red color represents sin and fertility, the Eye symbolizes all-seeing surveillance, the Wall displays killed activists (Callaway, 2008). Atwood's symbolism functions as items of a Foucauldian “disciplinary society” (Foucault, 1977, p. 176), where the excessive use of

authority is clear, yet accepted by the citizens without thinking. This creates a feminist critique of total institutional control.

Al-Zayyat's symbols are all realistic and part of the social context. The “open door” is a fundamental symbol of choice; it reflects freedom and the nation's independence. “The 'open door' itself is a powerful symbol... representing both the possibility of escape from oppressive norms and the frightening uncertainty of what lies beyond” (McAlpine, 2018). The “shell” symbolizes the disconnected self under patriarchal control and also reflects the repressed life of Layla's psyche: “She constructed a shell of emotional serenity from her certainty that she was acting correctly, that she was perfectly self-sufficient, and that no one could harm her or cause her pain” (Al. Zayyat, 2002, p. 71). “The imagery of the 'shell'... signifies the emotional and social armor Layla builds around herself for protection” (Fayed, 2017). The mirror represents her search for identity.

Atwood uses public symbolism to show patriarchal authority over women. In contrast, Al-Zayyat uses personal symbolism to comprehend and protest against such an authority. The theocratic regime of Gilead, supported by the political state, violates and reconstructs the identities of the women, like what happens to Offred's body, name, and memories. Hence, the regime's symbols precisely alter the protagonist's identity. Conversely, the self of Layla, apparent in her desires, education, and bodily shame, is presented to mirror the political vision of the country. Her own struggle is a reflection of Egypt's social struggle. To express her rebellious self against the restrictions of home, Layla participated in the public demonstrations against the British colonization. Therefore, the open door symbolism opens a new space of change and liberation.

3. Discussion:

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie defines feminism as, “the social, political, and economic equality of women and men” (Adichie, 2014, p.25). She asserts that we should “dream about and plan for a different, fairer world of men and women” (p.27). Through her fictional works, Atwood,

“has generated a new and original contribution to feminist discourse. An examination of both Atwood’s novels and the contemporaneous progression of feminist discourse from the 1960s to the present day quickly reveals a sympathy of concern and a coincidence of enquiry Consequently, Atwood has repeatedly been pressured to support and endorse feminist politics and to explicitly associate her work with the movement” (Tolan, 2007, p. 101).

Accordingly, feminism becomes an implied personal struggle for survival, with concentration on preserving private memories. Offred's testimonies, which become important means of narrating the novel, are themselves considered feminist acts. She confesses, “I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance” (Atwood, 1985, p. 35). In Layla's case, feminism is associated with the social and political awakening. This vision links Layla's personal awareness to the national conflict against occupation, showing that individual freedom is directly connected public liberation.

The role of *The Handmaid's Tale* readers is to witness and document the trauma; and also to share, with empathy, Offred's limited viewpoints and fearful perspectives. The reader of *The Open Door* has to be an analyst and observer, for he is given a broader view of the powers at play (family rules, political

constraints, class norms), which allows him to critique the authoritarian constructions side by side with the protagonist.

Consequently, Atwood uses dystopian form to produce an enclosed, interiorized feminist critique of dictatorship, while al-Zayyat uses realist form to create a communitarian, collectivist feminist critique connecting the personal to the national. Both present powerful visions, yet their narrative techniques formalize their feminist dialogues in different ways (Al-Zayyat, 1990). Atwood and Al-Zayyat use form and technique to establish their varied feminist discourses. The variation of literary devices such as symbolism, setting, and irony are vital by which each writer criticizes the particular pattern of patriarchal authority they face.

The difference in issues like language style and translation is apparent to the readers of the two novels. Atwood utilizes the sharp and ironic English language besides the biblical and Puritanical references. Al-Zayyat employs colloquial Arabic, which enhances the novel's voice and feminist dimension. Therefore, the translator of *The Open Door* should consider the cultural idioms and tone of the original edition of the novel.

4. Conclusion

This comparative study has asserted that Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Latifa Al-Zayyat's *The Open Door*, although, divergent historically, yet, basically integrate their manipulation of themes such as: domination over female bodies, gendered power relations in domestic spheres, exploiting traditions, and the use of memory as a therapeutic mechanism.

The analysis has basically resulted in three findings. First, the similarities between the methods of patriarchal oppression in the two novels, whether state biopolitical power in Gilead regime, or the domestic constraints in revolutionary atmosphere. Both ideologies use gender discrimination, controlling female bodies, and elimination of female's identity. Second, the protagonists' modes of defiance and resistance that mainly rely on what is known as "mnemonic" resistance. These strategies help the two protagonists to continue living under and protesting against patriarchal injunction. And third, the narrative techniques the two writers use are themselves methods of feminist critique, in addition to being means of telling stories. Furthermore, Atwood's first-person narration, which is very close and intense style of narration, and Al-Zayyat's third-person technique, through which she sympathizes with the protagonist as well as criticizes the social context. Despite the differences between the techniques, Atwood and Al-Zayyat explore women's awareness under oppression.

Additionally, the comparison examines differences in some aspects like political presentations and story endings. Atwood pessimistically produces a critique of a radical regime. The fate of the novel's protagonist remains unknown and the futuristic system remains unconcerned with women's suffering trivializing Offred's testimonies. The aim of Atwood's novel is to create hope from a bitter experience. Whereas, Al-Zayyat optimistically produces an anti-colonialized revolutionary society of Egypt. Layla achieves her wishes when she defends the shell, engages in liberation protests. Yet, still Layla's future is uncertain, for she opens the door to freedom and to the unknown as well. Both ends do not represent a fundamental difference, as they reflect the divergence in cultural and historical contexts of both writers. Atwood mirrors the failure of her utopian dream which coincides with the failure of the second-wave feminism.

Whereas, the setting of Al-Zayyat's novel coincides with revolutionary zeal and liberation ambition. The two novels show the twentieth century progression of feminism.

These findings contribute mainly to feminist literary analyses, as they assert that Western and Arab feminist critiques are not distinct but unified and complementary. The study revives Al-Zayyat's novel to redeliver her regional message to become a universal call for women and national freedom. It also emphasizes that Atwood's dystopian pessimism and Al-Zayyat's revolutionary optimism are harmonious in their triumphant feminist goals.

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