



Sexuality and Resistance: Rethinking Prostitution and Agency Through Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*

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Abstract

Prostitution has long been a controversial topic within feminist discourse, with ongoing debates about whether it represents a form of freedom or remains fundamentally exploitative and oppressive. Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* offers a powerful and complex portrayal of prostitution as both a site of resistance and a form of constrained agency within patriarchal structures. This article examines El Saadawi's depiction of prostitution and its implications for contemporary feminist debates on agency, autonomy, and exploitation. Through close reading and critical analysis of the novel, supported by feminist theoretical frameworks including abolitionist feminism, sex-positive feminism, and intersectional feminism, this study demonstrates that prostitution in *Woman at Point Zero* functions neither as pure liberation nor as absolute victimization. Instead, Firdaus's engagement with prostitution emerges as a tactical form of resistance that simultaneously exposes and remains structured by patriarchal, socio-economic, and biopolitical systems. By analyzing Firdaus's experiences and situating them within the broader socio-cultural and postcolonial context of Egypt, this article argues that El Saadawi presents prostitution as a form of constrained agency. While prostitution allows Firdaus to assert a degree of autonomy and resist certain forms of male domination, it ultimately remains embedded within structures that commodify and regulate women's bodies. El Saadawi's narrative, therefore, challenges binary feminist interpretations of prostitution and reveals the complex and contradictory nature of agency within systems of domination. This analysis contributes to feminist and postcolonial scholarship by demonstrating how *Woman at Point Zero* reconfigures prostitution not simply as exploitation or empowerment, but as a situated form of resistance that exposes the structural conditions limiting women's autonomy.

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Introduction

Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* offers a powerful and complex narrative that engages deeply with feminist discourses on prostitution, agency, and power. Through the life story of Firdaus, the novel explores the tension between subjugation and resistance within patriarchal structures and raises fundamental questions about autonomy, gendered violence, and the socio-economic forces that shape women's lives. Firdaus's trajectory—from childhood abuse and social marginalization to her engagement with prostitution—forces readers to confront the structural conditions that constrain women's choices while simultaneously revealing the possibility of resistance within those constraints.

The novel challenges binary interpretations of prostitution as either inherently exploitative or inherently liberating. Instead, El Saadawi presents prostitution as a contradictory space in which agency and domination coexist. Firdaus's experience demonstrates that prostitution can function as a form of resistance against patriarchal control, while at the same time remaining embedded within systems that commodify women's bodies and regulate their sexuality. Her assertion that "a successful prostitute was better than a misled saint" (El Saadawi 94) reflects her recognition of prostitution not as liberation in itself, but as a strategic response to a system that already treats women as objects of exchange.

This article argues that *Woman at Point Zero* portrays prostitution as a form of constrained agency—a tactical form of resistance that exposes the patriarchal economy of sexuality while remaining structured by it. Firdaus's engagement with prostitution does not represent complete autonomy, but rather a situated form of agency that emerges within conditions of violence, economic necessity, and social marginalization. By choosing prostitution over marriage, Firdaus rejects one form of patriarchal control, yet remains subject to the broader structures that regulate women's bodies and social existence.

To demonstrate this argument, this article employs close reading and critical analysis of El Saadawi's novel, supported by feminist theoretical frameworks including abolitionist feminism, sex-positive feminism, and intersectional feminism. These frameworks provide the conceptual tools necessary to understand prostitution not as a simple question of individual choice, but as a phenomenon shaped by the intersection of patriarchy, class inequality, economic constraint, and social control. The analysis situates

Firdaus's experiences within the broader socio-cultural and postcolonial context of Egypt, emphasizing the structural forces that shape her trajectory. The article is organized into four main sections. The first section examines feminist theoretical debates on prostitution, focusing on abolitionist feminism, sex-positive feminism, and intersectional perspectives. The second section analyzes Firdaus's experiences in the novel, highlighting the paradoxical nature of her agency. The third section explores the socio-cultural and economic factors that structure prostitution within the postcolonial context. The fourth section examines the relationship between prostitution and agency through the lens of biopower and feminist critiques of autonomy. Ultimately, this article demonstrates that El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* complicates feminist binaries of empowerment and exploitation and reveals prostitution as a form of resistance that simultaneously exposes and remains constrained by patriarchal power.

1. Theoretical Frameworks

Feminist debates on prostitution and sexuality have evolved considerably, with significant divisions emerging between different theoretical approaches, particularly abolitionist feminism, sex-positive feminism, and intersectional feminism. These frameworks provide essential conceptual tools for understanding the complex relationship between prostitution, agency, and power in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*. By examining these perspectives, this article demonstrates that Firdaus's engagement with prostitution reflects a form of constrained agency shaped by patriarchal, socio-economic, and political structures.

1.1 Abolitionist Feminism and the Critique of Patriarchal and Carceral Systems

Abolitionist feminism emerged as a critique of interconnected systems of oppression, including patriarchy, racism, capitalism, and carceral punishment. Feminist scholars such as Angela Davis, Mariame Kaba, Beth Richie, and Ruth Wilson Gilmore have emphasized that systems of punishment and social control disproportionately affect marginalized communities, particularly poor women and women of color. Angela Davis explains that although imprisonment affects a relatively small proportion of the general population, it disproportionately impacts marginalized communities, revealing the

structural inequalities embedded in systems of punishment (15).

A central contribution of abolitionist feminism is its critique of carceral approaches to social problems, including gender-based violence and sexual exploitation. Rather than relying on punitive legal systems, abolitionist feminists emphasize the importance of addressing the structural conditions that produce gender inequality, economic vulnerability, and social marginalization. This perspective highlights the relationship between patriarchy, economic exploitation, and systems of social control, which is particularly relevant for understanding Firdaus's trajectory in *Woman at Point Zero*.

At the same time, radical feminist critiques of prostitution, such as those developed by Catharine MacKinnon, emphasize the central role of sexuality in maintaining gender inequality. MacKinnon argues that sexuality functions as a fundamental structure through which male domination is organized and maintained within society. (3) According to this perspective, prostitution represents a form of sexual commodification in which women's bodies are transformed into objects of exchange within patriarchal systems. Sexuality is the social process through which social relations of gender are created, organized, expressed, and directed, creating the social beings we know as women and men, as their relations create 'society. As work is to marxism, sexuality to feminism is socially constructed yet constructing, universal as activity yet historically specific, jointly comprised of matter and mind (MacKinnon 3).

This critique resonates strongly with El Saadawi's portrayal of prostitution in *Woman at Point Zero*. Firdaus recognizes the pervasive commodification of women's bodies when she declares, "I now knew that all of us were prostitutes who sold themselves at varying prices, and that an expensive prostitute was better than a cheap one". (El Saadawi 82) This statement reflects her awareness that prostitution is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather an extension of a broader patriarchal economy in which women's bodies are commodified and controlled. El Saadawi's narrative therefore illustrates how prostitution both reveals and reproduces the structural inequalities that shape women's lives.

1.2 Sex-Positive Feminism and the Question of Agency

In contrast to abolitionist perspectives that emphasize exploitation, sex-

positive feminism argues that prostitution can function as a form of agency and empowerment under certain conditions. Sex-positive feminists challenge the assumption that all forms of sex work are inherently oppressive and emphasize the importance of recognizing women's capacity for decision-making and resistance within constrained circumstances.

Carol Leigh, a prominent advocate of sex workers' rights, argues that sex work must be understood within its social and political context, rather than being reduced to a purely moral or ideological issue. From this perspective, prostitution can represent a strategy through which women assert control over their bodies and economic conditions, even within systems that limit their choices.

Firdaus's experience reflects this complex and contradictory dynamic. Her engagement with prostitution allows her to achieve a degree of economic independence and to resist certain forms of male domination. Her refusal to submit to male authority is symbolically expressed when she tears up the money given to her by a man who attempts to assert control over her. As Nausheen Ishaque observes, money in El Saadawi's novel functions as a symbol of male power, and Firdaus's act of tearing the banknotes represents a rejection of that power: "Money, in El Saadawi's novella, therefore, is a metaphor for male power. Firdaus' act of tearing up the three-thousand-pound note is emblematic of her belief that such power should be destroyed by those who are controlled by it" (Ishaque 641). Firdaus herself describes this moment of resistance: "When he held out his hand with the money, I was still wildly angry with him. I snatched the notes from his hand and tore them up into little pieces with a pent-up fury" (El Saadawi 107).

At the same time, El Saadawi complicates any interpretation of prostitution as simple empowerment. Firdaus's declaration, "I want nothing. I hope for nothing. I fear nothing. Therefore I am free" (El Saadawi 110), reflects both her assertion of autonomy and her profound alienation. Her freedom is not the result of social liberation, but rather emerges from her rejection of a system that has consistently denied her dignity and autonomy. This ambiguity illustrates the limitations of agency within structures of domination.

A similar dynamic can be observed in African literature, such as Flora Nwapa's *Women Are Different*, where female characters navigate their agency within systems that constrain their autonomy. Like Firdaus, these characters

seek forms of self-determination while remaining subject to social and economic limitations. These parallels highlight the broader structural conditions that shape women's experiences across different cultural contexts.

1.3 Intersectional Feminism and Structural Constraints

Intersectional feminism provides a crucial framework for understanding how multiple forms of oppression interact to shape women's experiences. Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the concept of intersectionality to describe how systems of oppression, including racism, sexism, and class inequality, operate simultaneously and produce unique forms of marginalization. (Crenshaw 140) Intersectionality emphasizes that women's experiences cannot be understood through a single axis of analysis, but must instead be examined in relation to the multiple social, economic, and political forces that shape their lives. Crenshaw states: "Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (140). This framework is particularly relevant for understanding Firdaus's trajectory in *Woman at Point Zero*. Firdaus's experiences are shaped not only by patriarchy, but also by poverty, lack of education, social marginalization, and violence. These intersecting forces limit her access to alternative forms of economic survival and contribute to her engagement with prostitution. Her experience illustrates how agency is shaped and constrained by structural conditions rather than existing as an abstract or purely individual capacity.

Maggie O'Neill's analysis of prostitution as an intersection of "sexual politics, economic exploitation, and social marginalization" further illuminates Firdaus's situation. This perspective emphasizes that prostitution must be understood within the broader socio-economic context that shapes women's lives. Similarly, Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* explores how economic hardship and social expectations shape women's decisions and constrain their autonomy. These literary and theoretical perspectives reinforce the importance of examining prostitution within its broader social and structural context.

Intersectional feminism therefore provides a critical framework for understanding prostitution in *Woman at Point Zero* as a phenomenon shaped by the interaction of multiple forms of oppression. Firdaus's experience

illustrates how patriarchy, economic inequality, and social marginalization interact to produce conditions in which prostitution emerges not simply as an individual choice, but as a response to structural constraint.

2. Firdaus's Experiences in *Woman at Point Zero*

Firdaus's experiences with prostitution in *Woman at Point Zero* are not simply about sexuality, but about power, agency, and survival within a patriarchal system that systematically denies women autonomy and dignity. Her engagement with prostitution emerges as a response to the violence, exploitation, and structural inequalities that shape her life from childhood. Rather than representing a straightforward descent into victimhood, her trajectory reveals the complex ways in which agency can emerge within conditions of constraint.

Firdaus's transformation reflects Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (14). Her identity is shaped through a series of experiences involving abuse, domination, and social marginalization. From her early experiences of violence within the family to her exploitation within marriage, Firdaus learns that her body is not treated as her own, but as an object subject to male control. Her decision to engage in prostitution represents a turning point in her consciousness, as she begins to assert a degree of control over her own body and economic survival.

Firdaus herself recognizes prostitution as a form of strategic response to patriarchal domination. She explains:

The time had come for me to shed the last grain of virtue, the last drop of sanctity in my blood. Now I was aware of the reality, of the truth. Now I knew what I wanted. Now there was no room for illusions. A successful prostitute was better than a misled saint. All women are victims of deception. Men impose deception on women and punish them for being deceived, force them down to the lowest level and punish them for falling so low, bind them in marriage and then chastise them with menial service for life, or insults, or blows. (El Saadawi 94)

This passage reveals Firdaus's critical awareness of the structural nature of women's oppression. Her rejection of marriage is not a rejection of morality itself, but a rejection of a social institution that functions as a mechanism of control. By choosing prostitution over marriage, Firdaus refuses the illusion

of respectability that conceals women's subordination within patriarchal society.

This interpretation resonates with Gayle Rubin's analysis of women's bodies as objects of exchange within patriarchal systems. Rubin argues that patriarchal societies maintain male dominance through systems that regulate women's sexuality and social roles. (Rubin 40) Firdaus's experience illustrates this dynamic, as her value within society is consistently defined in relation to male control, whether through marriage, economic dependence, or sexual exploitation.

At the same time, prostitution allows Firdaus to achieve a degree of economic independence and self-awareness. She observes, "I became a very successful prostitute. I was paid the highest price, and even men of great importance competed for my favours" (El Saadawi 97). For the first time, she experiences a form of economic power that allows her to refuse certain men and exercise limited control over her interactions.

This economic independence contributes to her sense of autonomy. She declares, "My body was my property alone" (El Saadawi 99), asserting ownership over her own physical existence. However, this autonomy remains fragile and constrained. Despite her economic success, Firdaus remains subject to the broader patriarchal structures that regulate women's lives. Her encounter with Marzouk, the pimp who ultimately reasserts control over her, demonstrates the limitations of her autonomy. Her apparent independence exists within a system that continues to commodify and regulate her body.

Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity provides a useful framework for understanding this contradiction. Butler argues that gender is not a fixed identity, but rather a set of repeated social performances shaped by cultural norms and power relations: "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (Butler xv). Firdaus's attempt to assert autonomy through prostitution does not allow her to escape patriarchal structures entirely. Instead, her actions remain shaped by the very system she seeks to resist.

Firdaus's experience also reveals the paradoxical relationship between economic independence and social control. She reflects on the relationship between money, honour, and freedom:

I refused to go to men of this sort. My body was my property alone, but the land of our country was theirs to own. On one occasion they put me in prison because I turned down one of these important men. So I hired a very big lawyer, for a very big sum of money. Shortly after, I was released from gaol without charges. The court decided I was an honourable woman. Now I had learnt that honour required large sums of money to protect it, but that large sums of money could not be obtained without losing one's honour. An infernal circle whirling round and round, dragging me up and down with it. (El Saadawi 99)

This passage illustrates the structural contradictions that shape Firdaus's life. Money provides her with a degree of protection, yet it also reinforces the system that commodifies her body. Her autonomy remains conditional and precarious, dependent on the very economic and social structures that limit her freedom.

Firdaus's rejection of traditional gender roles therefore represents both an act of resistance and a recognition of structural constraint. Her declaration, "I have triumphed over both life and death because I no longer desire to live, nor do I any longer fear to die" (El Saadawi 110), reflects her ultimate rejection of the patriarchal system that has governed her existence. However, this declaration also reflects the tragic nature of her resistance. Her freedom emerges not from social transformation, but from her refusal to submit to a system that denies her humanity.

El Saadawi's portrayal of Firdaus therefore complicates traditional feminist interpretations of agency. Firdaus's engagement with prostitution allows her to resist certain forms of patriarchal control, yet it does not allow her to escape the structural conditions that produce her marginalization. Her experience illustrates the paradox of constrained agency: the capacity to resist within systems that continue to shape and limit that resistance.

3. Cultural and Social Factors of Prostitution in Context

Firdaus's experiences in *Woman at Point Zero* cannot be fully understood without examining the broader socio-economic and cultural context that shapes her life. Her engagement with prostitution is not simply the result of individual choice, but emerges within a system structured by patriarchy, economic marginalization, and postcolonial social conditions. El Saadawi's narrative emphasizes that prostitution is deeply connected to structural

inequalities that limit women's access to education, economic independence, and social mobility.

Economic constraint plays a central role in shaping Firdaus's trajectory. As an uneducated woman with limited access to employment, Firdaus faces structural barriers that severely restrict her economic options. Her engagement with prostitution reflects the lack of viable alternatives available to women in her position. This situation reflects broader patterns identified by postcolonial feminist scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who argues that feminist analysis must account for the specific historical, economic, and cultural contexts that shape women's lives. Mohanty emphasizes that feminist scholarship is not neutral, but is itself a political practice that must examine the power relations embedded in social structures. (Mohanty 334) Firdaus's experience illustrates how patriarchy, economic inequality, and postcolonial social structures interact to shape women's lives and limit their autonomy.

El Saadawi's portrayal of prostitution also reflects the commodification of women's bodies within patriarchal and capitalist systems. Firdaus recognizes this dynamic when she observes, "That men force women to sell their bodies at a price, and that the lowest paid body is that of a wife". (El Saadawi 99) This statement reveals her awareness that marriage itself functions as a system of economic and sexual exchange in which women's labor and bodies are controlled.

This analysis resonates with Silvia Federici's critique of the relationship between capitalism and the control of women's bodies. Federici argues that capitalist systems depend on the regulation and exploitation of women's reproductive and sexual labor, transforming women's bodies into sites of economic control and social regulation. (Federici Preface) Firdaus's experience illustrates this process, as her body becomes a source of economic value within a system that simultaneously exploits and regulates her.

The socio-cultural context of Firdaus's life also includes the influence of social norms that regulate women's sexuality and behavior. These norms function as mechanisms of social control that reinforce patriarchal authority. As Leila Ahmed explains, gender norms in many historical and cultural contexts have functioned to regulate women's autonomy and reinforce male authority. Firdaus's rejection of these norms represents an act of resistance against the social expectations imposed upon her.

At the same time, El Saadawi's narrative highlights the relationship between prostitution and social marginalization. Prostitution is not presented as an isolated phenomenon, but as part of a broader system of inequality that affects marginalized women. Maggie O'Neill emphasizes that prostitution must be understood as an intersection of sexual politics, economic exploitation, and social marginalization. Firdaus's experience reflects this intersection, as her engagement with prostitution emerges from the interaction of economic necessity, gender inequality, and social exclusion.

El Saadawi also situates Firdaus's experience within a broader postcolonial context in which systems of power continue to regulate women's lives. The legacy of colonialism contributes to the economic and social inequalities that shape women's opportunities and constrain their autonomy. Firdaus's marginalization reflects the structural inequalities embedded within postcolonial society, where gender, class, and economic power intersect.

Literary parallels in African and postcolonial literature further illustrate these dynamics. Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter*, for example, explores how economic constraint, social expectations, and gender inequality shape women's lives and limit their autonomy. As Shirin Edwin observes, the character of Ramatoulaye navigates her personal struggles within a social system that imposes expectations on women while limiting their economic independence. (Edwin 724) These parallels reinforce the broader structural nature of women's marginalization and highlight the importance of examining prostitution within its socio-cultural and economic context.

Firdaus's experience therefore illustrates how prostitution emerges within a system shaped by multiple forms of structural constraint. Patriarchy, economic inequality, social marginalization, and postcolonial power relations interact to produce conditions in which prostitution becomes one of the few available strategies for survival. El Saadawi's narrative demonstrates that prostitution cannot be understood solely as an individual choice, but must instead be examined as a phenomenon shaped by broader social and historical forces.

4. The Relationship Between Prostitution and Agency

The question of whether prostitution can function as an expression of agency is central to Firdaus's narrative in *Woman at Point Zero*. El Saadawi's portrayal of prostitution challenges simplistic feminist binaries that define prostitution

as either empowerment or exploitation. Instead, the novel presents prostitution as a contradictory space in which agency emerges within, and remains constrained by, patriarchal structures.

Firdaus explicitly frames her engagement with prostitution as a conscious rejection of patriarchal domination. She states, “Because I was intelligent I preferred to be a free prostitute, rather than an enslaved wife”. (El Saadawi 99) This statement reflects her recognition that marriage, which is socially constructed as respectable, often functions as a system of control that restricts women’s autonomy. In contrast, prostitution provides her with a degree of economic independence and the ability to negotiate her interactions with men.

However, Firdaus’s autonomy remains shaped by structural constraints. Julia O’Connell Davidson argues that prostitution cannot be understood through a simple opposition between autonomy and exploitation. Instead, women’s agency within prostitution is shaped by broader systems of power that regulate their lives (O’Connell Davidson). Firdaus’s experience illustrates this dynamic, as her engagement with prostitution allows her to resist certain forms of domination while remaining embedded within systems that commodify her body.

Firdaus’s reflections on honor, money, and autonomy reveal the paradoxical nature of her agency. She explains:

Yet not for a single moment did I have any doubts about my own integrity and honour as a woman. I knew that my profession had been invented by men, and that men were in control of both our worlds, the one on earth, and the one in heaven. That men force women to sell their bodies at a price, and that the lowest paid body is that of a wife. All women are prostitutes of one kind or another. Because I was intelligent I preferred to be a free prostitute, rather than an enslaved wife. (El Saadawi 99)

This passage demonstrates Firdaus’s critical awareness of the structural nature of her condition. Her decision to engage in prostitution is not based on the illusion of absolute freedom, but on her recognition that all available options for women exist within systems of patriarchal control. Her agency therefore emerges not as absolute autonomy, but as a strategic response to structural constraint.

Even though Firdaus achieves economic success, her autonomy

remains fragile. She observes, “I became a very successful prostitute. I was paid the highest price, and even men of great importance competed for my favours” (El Saadawi 97). While this success provides her with economic independence, it does not free her from patriarchal control. Her value continues to be defined within a system that commodifies women’s bodies.

Michel Foucault’s concept of biopower provides a useful framework for understanding the mechanisms through which Firdaus’s body is regulated. Foucault argues that modern systems of power operate through the regulation of bodies and populations, producing forms of control that extend beyond direct physical coercion (140). Foucault states: “Hence there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of ‘biopower’”. (140) Firdaus’s experience reflects this process, as her body becomes subject to multiple forms of regulation, including economic exchange, social stigma, legal authority, and patriarchal norms.

Firdaus’s imprisonment illustrates the operation of these regulatory mechanisms. Her refusal to submit to male authority results in her incarceration, demonstrating how institutional power functions to discipline women who resist patriarchal norms. Her experience reveals that agency is not simply a matter of individual will, but is shaped by broader systems of power that regulate women’s bodies and behavior.

Firdaus’s final act of resistance represents the culmination of her struggle against patriarchal control. Her declaration, “I have triumphed over both life and death because I no longer desire to live, nor do I any longer fear to die” (El Saadawi 110), reflects her rejection of the system that has governed her existence. However, this act does not represent liberation in a conventional sense. Instead, it reveals the tragic limits of agency within a system that offers no true escape from structural domination.

El Saadawi’s portrayal of prostitution therefore reveals the paradoxical nature of agency within patriarchal systems. Firdaus’s engagement with prostitution allows her to resist certain forms of domination and assert a degree of autonomy. At the same time, her autonomy remains constrained by the structural conditions that shape her life. Prostitution functions not as a space of absolute freedom, but as a site of constrained agency in which resistance and domination coexist.

This analysis demonstrates that *Woman at Point Zero* challenges

simplistic feminist interpretations of prostitution and reveals the complex relationship between prostitution, agency, and power. Firdaus's experience illustrates how agency emerges within structural constraint and highlights the need to examine prostitution within its broader social, economic, and political context.

Conclusion

Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* offers a powerful and complex examination of prostitution as a phenomenon shaped by the interaction of agency, patriarchy, and socio-economic constraint. Through the character of Firdaus, El Saadawi challenges simplistic feminist interpretations that frame prostitution solely as either empowerment or exploitation. Instead, the novel reveals prostitution as a contradictory space in which resistance and domination coexist.

This article has demonstrated that Firdaus's engagement with prostitution represents a form of constrained agency. Her decision to become a prostitute emerges not as an expression of absolute freedom, but as a strategic response to the structural conditions that limit her autonomy. By choosing prostitution over marriage, Firdaus rejects one form of patriarchal control, yet remains subject to the broader system that commodifies women's bodies and regulates their existence.

The theoretical frameworks examined in this article (including abolitionist feminism, sex-positive feminism, and intersectional feminism) highlight the complexity of prostitution as a social and political phenomenon. Abolitionist feminist perspectives emphasize the structural nature of women's oppression, while sex-positive feminist perspectives highlight the importance of recognizing women's capacity for agency. Intersectional feminism further demonstrates how multiple forms of oppression, including gender, class, and economic inequality, interact to shape women's experiences. El Saadawi's narrative engages with these debates by illustrating how prostitution functions simultaneously as a form of resistance and a manifestation of structural domination.

The analysis of Firdaus's experiences reveals the paradoxical nature of her autonomy. Prostitution allows her to achieve a degree of economic independence and to resist certain forms of male domination. However, her autonomy remains constrained by the patriarchal, economic, and institutional

structures that shape her life. Her experience demonstrates that agency must be understood not as absolute independence, but as a situated and constrained capacity that emerges within specific social and historical conditions.

By situating Firdaus's experience within the broader socio-cultural and postcolonial context, this article has also demonstrated that prostitution cannot be understood solely as an individual choice. Instead, it must be examined as a phenomenon shaped by structural inequalities, including economic marginalization, patriarchal power, and postcolonial social conditions. El Saadawi's narrative exposes the structural nature of these inequalities and reveals the ways in which women's bodies become sites of economic and social regulation.

Ultimately, *Woman at Point Zero* challenges feminist binaries that oppose empowerment and exploitation, and instead reveals the complex and contradictory nature of agency within patriarchal systems. Firdaus's story illustrates that prostitution can function as a form of resistance, while at the same time remaining embedded within structures of domination. Her narrative exposes the limitations of individual autonomy within systems of structural inequality and highlights the need for feminist analysis to examine the social, economic, and political conditions that shape women's lives.

By presenting prostitution as a form of constrained agency, El Saadawi's novel contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between sexuality, power, and resistance. This analysis contributes to feminist and postcolonial scholarship by demonstrating how *Woman at Point Zero* reveals the structural conditions that shape women's autonomy and challenges conventional assumptions about prostitution, agency, and liberation.

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