

# How far and in what ways is the Arab female body oppressed by Western laws and power within *Woman at Point Zero* and *Silence is a Sense*?

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## Thesis

Both *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi (1972) and *Silence is a Sense* by Layla AlAmmar (2021) challenge repressive stereotypes of the Arab female body. This illuminates the conflict between self-knowledge and external perceptions that aim to dismantle the Arab female body into something for male consumption.

## Resistance



Government-funded systems such as Counter Extremism and PREVENT police the Arab female body, developing the narrative that she is malleable and available for Western consumption. Yet the self-knowledge of her status as an Arab woman allows her to resist society's perceptions, stopping them from controlling the way she presents herself and countering stereotypes of powerlessness.

## Moving forward

Like the Arab female body itself, these texts are susceptible to misinterpretation. By giving the Arab woman a voice, these authors force the reader to listen to her and to recognise the social implications of colonialism, exposing the harsh realities of a world that refuses to respect everyone equally. This project encourages the reader to adopt a critical mindset to the world around us, and to question the systems of oppression that exist within the seemingly 'progressive' West.

## Silence

The Arab woman becomes something of little importance to herself due to the lack of importance others assign to her. It acts as a retaliation to the perceptions of the Muslim and Arab female body. Silence is also powerful when used purposefully and acts as resistance to systems of oppression towards the Arab female. Silence places more attention on the body, forcing the world to witness her.



## Power and the Law

Law enforcement controls the Arab women's self-understanding within both texts, but each protagonist finds her own sense of freedom despite attempts by systems of power to constrain her. Yet the body remains a place of conflict due to racialized Western hierarchies that try to contain Islam. The Arab women in these texts equates herself with the powerful, resisting her silencing... but still she cannot access her freedom.



## References

- Nawal El Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero*, trans by Sherif Hetata (London: Bloomsbury, 2015)  
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Nawal Sadawi, Sherif Hetata, and Ronak Husni. 2015. *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World* (London: Zed Books)  
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