

## Leila Ahmed's *A Border Passage* (2012) and Nawal Saadawi's *A Doctor's Memoir* (2012) as a Model of Creative Nonfiction

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### Abstract

Memoir is a creative literary device of recording memories that can generate narrative immersion because of their aesthetic and literary techniques. Memoirs are written in a figurative language tackling real life experience, they are also a form of creative nonfiction which represents a real-life event in a literary style. This study focuses on memoirs as a form of nonfiction recently gaining more interest among writers and expanding in publication arena. Moreover, it aims at illustrating two important aspects: how creative nonfiction has the same narrative and dramatic effect as fiction, though it differs from it, and how Leila Ahmed's *A Border Passage* (1999) and Nawal Saadawi's *A Doctor's Memoir* (2012) employ literary techniques in their memoirs to convey their messages in a compelling creative style. The two works are tackled from a postcolonial ecocritical perspective which illustrates the far-reaching effect of both colonization and environment on the shaping of the two writers' awareness and ideology.

**Keywords:** border passage, gender, identity, Leila Ahmed, memoir Nawal Saadawi, post colonialism

### *A Border Passage karya Leila Ahmed (2012) dan Memoar Seorang Dokter Karya Nawal Saadawi (2012) Sebagai Model Nonfiksi Kreatif*

#### *Abstrak*

*Memoar adalah perangkat sastra kreatif untuk merekam kenangan yang dapat menghasilkan narasi yang mendalam karena teknik estetika dan sastranya. Memoar ditulis dalam bahasa kiasan yang membahas pengalaman kehidupan nyata, juga merupakan bentuk nonfiksi kreatif yang merepresentasikan peristiwa kehidupan nyata dalam gaya sastra. Kajian ini berfokus pada memoar sebagai salah satu bentuk nonfiksi yang akhir-akhir ini semakin banyak diminati oleh para penulis dan semakin meluas dalam kancah publikasi. Selain itu, artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengilustrasikan dua aspek penting: bagaimana nonfiksi kreatif memiliki narasi dan efek dramatis yang sama dengan fiksi, meskipun berbeda dari fiksi, dan bagaimana *A Border Passage* (1999) karya Leila Ahmed dan *A Doctor's Memoir* (2012) karya Nawal Saadawi menggunakan karya sastra. teknik dalam memoar mereka untuk menyampaikan pesan mereka dalam gaya kreatif yang menarik. Kedua karya ini diambil dari perspektif ekokritik pascakolonial yang menggambarkan dampak luas kolonisasi dan lingkungan terhadap pembentukan kesadaran dan ideologi kedua penulis.*

**Kata kunci:** border passage, gender, identitas, Leila Ahmed, memoar Nawal Saadawi, pasca kolonialisme

## INTRODUCTION

Creative nonfiction is a genre of writing which uses literary techniques. In contrast with creative nonfiction, nonfiction, such as academic or technical writing or journalism, does not aim at entertaining the reader. Accordingly, in creative nonfiction, the writer tackles the events from his own perspective. Contrarily, the nonfiction writer represents events as they are, so he tends to use a third person narrator (omniscient) and to be objective. In addition, Gutkind (2012) defines CNF as “true stories well told”. The main difference between CNF and NF is the use of literary devices which entertain the reader. Creative nonfiction is as compelling as fiction because it uses the same aesthetics and literary devices. Both fiction and creative nonfiction seek to make the reader delighted and fascinated by what the writer recounts to involve him into the subject matter. Significantly, the main difference between them is that CNF tackles facts and real experience of real life while fiction depends on fantasy or events, the product of the writer’s imagination. As for nonfiction, it does not use literary devices, and its main aim is not to entertain the reader but to inform him of news or facts. Moreover, Miler and Paola (2005) illustrate that “while the phrase “creative nonfiction” had not yet come into popular use, “personal essay” seemed adequate to convey that sense of combining a personal voice with a factual story” (92). This means that creative nonfiction is the new form of personal essay. A personal essay is to write about a personal truth or a real experience, using the pronoun “I” and first-person narrator. Williams (2013) indicates that “To write creative nonfiction is to bring together the relating of events, people, and places... With the narrative techniques and lyrical tool of novelists and poets” (25). It is a combination of reality and fiction as it mixes reality with literary techniques to gratify the reader’s desire and make him feel the same effect of fictional stories. Rees (2000) also reflects that “Creative nonfiction doesn’t just report facts, it delivers facts in ways that move the reader toward a deeper understanding of a topic” (1). Therefore, there is a broad difference between CNF and journalism: a writer of CNF aims at informing the reader about facts and introducing these facts in an attractive way to entertain the reader, while journalism aims at transforming information formally and making the reader aware of the momentous events.

This study is mainly concerned with reflecting the linking points between Postcolonialism and Ecocriticism. This study incorporates insights from the postcolonial approach to literature into ecocritical studies for the purpose of investigating the potential of the ongoing dialogue between these two fields. It also aims at employing this combined approach to illustrate that creative nonfiction has the same effect as fiction. Hence, this study attempts to answer these questions: What is creative nonfiction and how it differs from fiction and nonfiction? What are the basic tenets of creative nonfiction? Why can memoirs occupy a special

stance in human rights writings? As for Postcolonialism and Ecocriticism, what are the linking points that gather these approaches together? How can postcolonial ecocriticism offer a novel reading of CNF writings illustrating the complex relation between individuals and environment in which they live? As for feminism and memoirs, what are the linking points that gather these approaches together? To what extent have the two female writers succeeded in changing their reality and become two icons in the history of feminist movement in Egypt? To what extent have the two female writers been able to depict the different conditions and circumstances they lived in the Egyptian and American societies?

This study is conducted to explore the importance of autobiography and memoir in reflecting and recording the social, economic, and political issues in the era in which they are written. Leila Ahmed's *A Border Passage* (1999), on her own tongue says her novel in language that vividly evokes the lush summers of Cairo and the stark beauty of the Arabian desert, Leila Ahmed movingly recounts her Egyptian childhood growing up in a rich tradition of Islamic women and describes how she eventually came to terms with her identity as a feminist living in America. As a young woman in Cairo in the forties and fifties, Ahmed witnessed some of the major transformations of this century—the end of British colonialism, the rise of Arab nationalism, and the breakdown of Egypt's once multireligious society. As today's Egypt continues to undergo revolutionary change, Ahmed's inspirational story remains as poignant and relevant as ever. Nawal Saadawi's *A Doctor's Memoir* (2012) goes on to recount her memoir as a doctor who at one point needed someone to heal her, heals her hopes that have been resurrected with the moments of her femininity, and her pains that burst with the explosion of this femininity in a society that has repercussions for its beliefs, parents who are imprisoned for their customs and ideas, and the self with its obsessions, its aspirations, its disobedience, its rebellion, and finally its submission to something, she announces her memoir. The study aims to shed light on the life journey of two important female writers from Egypt coming from two different social classes, witnessing the different events and changes that came over the Egyptian society from the forties of the 20th century towards the 21st century, to what extent they have been affected and affected the environment they lived in, and how they see themselves as Muslim female writers and how the world sees them.

## **METHOD**

In Leila Ahmed's *A Border Passage: From Cairo to America – A Woman's Journey*, and in Nawal Saadawi's *A Doctor's Memoir* several characteristics of a postcolonial ecocritical approach can be identified. While the primary focus of the memoir is on Ahmed and Saadawi's personal journey and experiences, elements of postcolonialism and ecocriticism are interwoven into their memoirs. Both Ahmed

and Saadawi reflect on the impact of British colonialism in Egypt and its influence on their upbringing. The memoirs provide insights into the ways in which colonial legacies shape cultural identities and contribute to a sense of cultural hybridity. The memoirs contain elements of ecological consciousness, where Ahmed and Saadawi reflect on the changes in the natural environment over time. Their journeys from Cairo to America involve a physical displacement, and this transition must be accompanied by reflections on the ecological differences between the two locations.

Descriptions of landscapes and environmental imagery in the memoirs can offer insights into the authors' connection to the natural world. This includes depictions of Egyptian landscapes, the Nile River, or the contrast with the landscapes in the United States. Such depictions are analyzed for their cultural and ecological significance.

The memoir engages with issues of language and representation, which are common in postcolonial studies. Saadawi and Ahmed's use of language and their negotiation of linguistic challenges are analyzed through a postcolonial lens, exploring how language reflects power dynamics and cultural influences. The memoir contains reflections on memory and nostalgia for pre-colonial or pre-industrial environments. This can provide insights into how individuals perceive their cultural and ecological history and the impact of colonialism on these perceptions.

By examining their memoirs through a postcolonial ecocritical lens, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between cultural identity, colonial histories, and ecological concerns in Saadawi and Ahmed's memoirs. The memoir serves as a personal and cultural exploration that can be analyzed for its broader implications related to postcolonial and ecocritical themes.

## **DISCUSSION**

As for the basic tenets of creative nonfiction, there are five Rs: real life aspect, reflection, research, reading and writing. The first R is the real – life aspect of the writing experience. In other words, creative nonfictional writings must be based on real life, but they also contain personal messages from the writer to the reader, which give extra meanings; some writers may use their own personal experience to shed light on real life experience or events, and this leads to the second element of creative nonfiction, namely reflection (Gutkind 2008). Reflection allows the reader to see how the writer views a certain real issue and renders his point of view in intelligible message. CNF blends personal reflections and real information in a creative combination that does not go away from reality but represents it from the thinking perspective of the writer. Thus, “a writer's feelings and responses about a subject are permitted and encouraged” in order to “reach out to readers in a number of different and compelling ways” (Gutkind 2006,

10). The third R is research which aims at gathering information to tell readers about a person, place, idea, or situation combining the creativity of the artistic experience with research and quest for information. The subject - whatever it is – must be carefully researched and explained in such a way as to make a lasting impression on readers and engage them (Gutkind 2006). This leads to the fourth R, reading. Writers must read the best writers in their field and investigate their stylistic approaches (Gutkind 2006). “Finally, there's the fifth R: the ‘writing,’ the most artistic and romantic aspect of the whole experience” (Gutkind 2008, 20). This is the most important element in the process of creative writing when writers allow instinct and feeling to guide their fingers as they create a piece of writing (Gutkind 2008). Their spontaneous writing then should be refined by craft to make their art appealing and compelling.

In fact, the Egyptian memoirists have added their own creativity to the memoir form, capable of stimulating the reader’s “empathetic understanding of these works—and what actuates them—by seeing them both as a testimonial—to what was and is Egyptians’ experience, and simultaneously as a ‘remembering’ of a past that no longer exists” (DeYoung 2017, 7). Muller (2018) explains that a main reason why readers demand reality from nonfictional works, such as environmental documentaries and memoirs, is that the ethical arguments raised by memoirs rely on the skillful manipulation of cognitive processes especially the stimulation of the reader’s empathy with people who have been wronged.

Thus, the CNF first-person narrators are more trustworthy. Their narrative must be based on real life and personal integrity otherwise it deviates from the tenets of CNF. This is consistent with Lissa, Caracciolo, Duuren and Leuveren’s empirical study (2016) which indicates that the readers’ empathic engagement with narrative is promoted when the narrator is reliable and when their trust in his narration is reinforced. Thus, trust and empathic engagement interrelate in readers’ response to texts. This discovery is in favor of the hypothesis that CNF has efficient potentials to elicit the same response as fiction does.

Drawing on narrative theory, the most common feature that fiction and CNF share is narrative effects, an aspect of narrative form. Keen (2015) defines them as attributes conveyed directly by a narrator “employing thought report or psycho-narration about a character’s emotions... they may be inferred by a reader responding to external cues delivered through actions or characterization” (152). They differ from feelings attributed to characters as they represent the emotions which accumulate in the reader’s mind along the development of narration and emerge from the actions of human agents who play active roles in the plot. “They also belong to readers who respond to the techniques of storytelling with curiosity, suspense, and surprise. They are shared across the narrative transaction by authors who seek to evoke feelings in readers employing the powers of narrativity” (Keen

2015, 152). Thus, narrative emotions are forms of affect explicitly or implicitly embedded in the act of storytelling, comprising a development, disruption or transformation of emotions and states of mind resultant from and stimulant to the plot progress. Keen (2016) asserts that narrative effects are involved in readers' experience of both fiction and creative nonfiction, indicating that real-life persons represented as active agents in CNF also may evoke narrative effects.

When the author manages through some narrative techniques, such as actant, character complexity, appealing narrative voice and changes of state, to evoke these effects, he engages the reader cognitively and emotionally with the text. The set of techniques are combined to produce three core, interrelated effects of narrativity, curiosity, surprise, and suspense which can engage the reader in either fiction or nonfiction (Sternberg 2010). *Curiosity* stimulates engagement with narrative by inviting the reader to go forward with his mind "lingering on the gapped antecedents, trying to infer (bridge, compose) them in retrospect" (Sternberg 2010, 641). Keen (2015) explains "*Surprise* startles the reader or viewer with the unexpected, a reward of narrative that in turn results in renewed curiosity. *Suspense* hinges on the cognitive state of 'what if,' enlivened by the anxious feelings of 'how long?'" (154).

The following analysis of two memoirs points out the literary and narrative techniques which are potentially apt and predisposed to cultivate readers' engagement with text and the humanitarian case they demonstrate. The importance of Leila Ahmed's and Nawal Al Saadawi's books lies in the reflections of the two writers on specific events, connecting their life experience and reactions with others and creating emotional fusion with the text through the application of effective narrative and literary techniques. The two writers make sure that when readers see through their eyes, they recognize their idiosyncratic vision of the given incident from which they extract and address universal human issues.

As for Postcolonialism, it is a school that deals with writers who deconstruct the preconceived ideas of colonialism. It stresses the struggle of some writers against colonialism and its passive consequences. It also raises the negative effects of colonial regimes in some countries. Vijay (2005) illustrates that:

Postcolonialism is a neologism that grew out of older elements to capture a seemingly unique moment in world history... taking advantage of new conditions to search for alternatives to the discourses of the colonial era. (p. 378)

As for the ecocriticism, it is also known as green literature because it deals with the environment and all its components. Buell (1995) defines ecocriticism as "a study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist's praxis" (430). Ecocriticism reflects how

the environment affects people and their behavior and this is the core of our current study.

Since this study is a postcolonial ecocritical one, it stresses the linking points between these two approaches. Huggan and Tiffin (2015) indicate that “it seems necessary to point out that the convergence of postcolonial and eco/environmental studies over the last decade or so is neither intellectually unhidden nor historically unanticipated” (12). First, both postcolonial and ecocritical studies illustrate how writers use natural and environmental elements in their narratives to prove their attachment to their indigenous environment. Their ideologies and narratives, shaped by indigenous environment, are dedicated to defending their land against the exploitation and hegemony of the colonizer. Thus, the joint approach of postcolonial ecocriticism demonstrates how writers are deeply affected by the environment, how the circumstances of their occupied land shape their awareness, how that is reflected in their interaction with the occupation and how they struggle to passionately defend their identity against occupation. Nelson adds “postcolonial ecocriticism forces one to think about how ownership and identification with land and space plays a role in individual’s and groups’ actions in a globalized world” (3). Thus, a postcolonial ecocritical study focuses on illustrating the dynamically changing relationship between human beings and the environment in occupied or ex-colonized places.

Second, this joint approach also demonstrates the negative effects of colonialism on environment to expose the catastrophic consequences and exploitation of the land. Any colonial regime intends to exploit the natural resources of the colonized land to achieve a development in its economy for the sake of the colonization. The colonial exploitation of a land causes environmental damage: desertification, landscape degradation, instability of the domestic security, because of the process of displacements, and the pollution of air and water. At the same time, the occupation endeavors to keep the economy of the colonized land in a state of de-development to create a subaltern who depends completely on the economy of the colonization. Being strangers to the indigenous environment, colonizers are always unaware of its ecosystem and incompetent at dealing with it. Consequently, their constructions seem to be at odd with the nature of the land. This point accentuates the catastrophic consequences of colonialism as Clark (2015) states that “Ecological devastation became a chief agent of rapid colonization and conquest” (124).

Third, postcolonial ecocritical approach explains how the colonized, post-colonized, and neo-colonized people feel and think about their colonized space under the restrictions and regulations imposed by the colonial power. Nelson (2014) defines Postcolonial Ecocriticism as:

Postcolonial ecocriticism ... is a way of thinking that seeks to understand how top-level, elite driven processes like (neo) colonialism, capitalism, international development, interstate alliances or the centralization or devolution of power are connected to the spaces in which people live and act, while at the same time recognizing that the reclamation of space, land, and resources is a key part of the process of people's liberation. (Para. 5)

Fourth, both postcolonialism and ecocriticism shed light on the victims of environmental injustice, inciting an empathic response in readers which always generates a positive reaction against this injustice. Thus, both focus on the portrayal of complex characters, illustrating their internal and external conflict, arising from their interaction with the environmental circumstances and changes resulting from occupation, exploitation, and oppression. Ecocriticism is interested in the environmental cases in which people suffer because of increasing pollution caused by newly industrial establishments, climate and environmental changes, expulsion from the land or displacement. This ecocritical interests logically and naturally overlaps with postcolonial studies which also demonstrates the distortion and exploitation taking place in the colonized lands. Weik (2017) argues that narratives based on a true story "use our capacity for empathy strategically in order to encourage readers to feel moral allegiance with the victims of environmental injustice," belonging to a disenfranchised group (79). She adds that "[The] ecocritical approach that draws on the insights of cognitive science... can give us a better understanding of how we interact with such narratives on the mental and affective level" (3). Colonialism aims at exhausting the resources of the colonized land and demolishing its system.

Fifth, both postcolonial and ecocritical studies shed light on the rivalry of colonial powers to maintain their hegemony on natural resources. Nelson (2014) states that "this postcolonial ecocriticism is not so much about the beauty of flowers or trees as it is about mineral mines, oil fields, river deltas and urban areas whose ownership and meaning are still wildly contested" (3).

Sixth, postcolonial ecocritical study focuses on illustrating the change and dynamicity in the relationship between human beings and their indigenous environment. This approach illustrates how the circumstances of the writers' occupied land shape their awareness, how that is reflected in their interaction with the occupation and how they struggle to passionately defend their identity against the occupation. Nelson adds "postcolonial ecocriticism forces one to think about how ownership and identification with land and space plays a role in individual's and groups' actions in a globalized world" (3).

Finally, we come to the description of the environment which is a crucial point. The postcolonial writers depend in their narratives on describing the



environment and all its surroundings to prove their attachment to it. They reflect the negative effects of colonialism to stress the disastrous and devastating consequences caused by the colonial power. Therefore, the two approaches, ecocriticism and postcolonialism share the same interest of analyzing how the land, nature and environment are depicted, described, and appreciated from the perspective of the colonized. In addition, they also reflect how the land is deformed and restructured by the occupation in a way that satisfies their interests.

Leila Ahmed was born in 1940 in the Heliopolis area of Cairo, where her father belonged to the middle class in Egypt, and her mother was from the Turkish upper class. Her childhood was thus shaped between the Egyptian Islamic values and the Liberal aristocratic tendencies found in the Egyptian state at the time. After the Free Officers Movement overthrew the last king of Egypt in 1952, the life of Leila's family changed significantly with the surrounding environment. Her father, who worked as a civil engineer, was opposed to the idea of Gamal Abdel Nasser establishing the Aswan High Dam due to environmental conditions, which angered the ruling regime for years. This had a bad effect on the family. She received her PhD from Cambridge University in the sixties before moving to the United States to teach and write. She became a professor of women's studies and Oriental Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in 1981. She became a professor of women's studies and religious sciences at Harvard Divinity School in 1999, where she now teaches.

In her memoir, *A Border Passage*, Leila describes her multicultural childhood and young adulthood as an expatriate and immigrant in Europe and the United States. She also tells how she was introduced to Islam by her grandmother during childhood. As a result, it had the ability to differentiate between Islam and "official Islam", which was practiced and preached by the elite clergy. It was this realization that would later form the cornerstone of her first book, *women, and gender in Islam*, in 1992, which was well received by many. This book is a creative work on Islamic history, feminist Islam, and the historical role of women in Islam. Leila also talks about her experiences in Europe and the United States as one of those whose lives have been fraught with tension and turmoil as she tries to reconcile her Egyptian Muslim identity with Western values. It has faced racial discrimination and intolerance against Muslims. After breaking down male thought in her country's culture, she removed the myths and illusions that the West holds about Islam and Muslim women. Today, Leila is best known for her pioneering work on Islam's view of women and their historical and social status in the Muslim world.

Leila was a strong critic of Arab nationalism in Egypt and the Middle East. She devoted an entire chapter of her memoirs to the issue of Arab nationalism, the factors and political efforts that were made to create an Arab identity for Egypt after

the 1952 revolution. According to Leila's memoir, the idea that Egyptians were originally "Arabs" was not actually common until the twentieth century. It describes Arab nationalism-like other forms of pan - nationalism-as a kind of cultural imperialism. This imperialism devours the cultural diversity and creativity not only of the Arabic-speaking national majority (who often speak various vernacular dialects), but also of the non-Arabic-speaking minority across the Middle East and North Africa.

Leila Ahmed is one of the most important contemporary figures in the field of Gender and Women's Studies, especially in "relation to the contemporary Middle East. Best known for her seminal book entitled *Women and Gender in Islam*, Leila Ahmed has contributed widely to opening the field and conferring depth to the western academic discussion of gender in the Middle East, the Arab world and Islam. This volume, comprising a personal memoir, is a further contribution to that field, while at the same time annexing new intellectual space for multicultural productions. It is a post-colonial memoir unfolding the constructs of Ahmed's multi-aspectual identity, wedded beautifully to an exploration of the historical, political, and intellectual circumstances (and changes) in which she matured." (Burt 156)

Burcak Keskin states in *Memories of a (Personal) Transformation: Different Landscapes, Different Mindscapes* (2012) about Leila Ahmrd's *A Border Passage* that:

This book provides an easy-to-read introduction to the issues surrounding identity formation in the Middle East. The memoir comprises two sections -- a child's eye account of Egypt's twentieth century transformation, and the subsequent account of a self-enlightened Egyptian woman scholar because of her travel to the 'West'. Her articulate narration throughout the memoir conveys how and why she came to "examine, analyze and think about the world which [she is a part of] from the vantage point [of] the margins" (p. 288).

Ahmed stops at some important developments in Egypt's modern history that seriously affected her family, such as the Suez Crisis of 1956. Young people, including herself, began to analyze the lives of older members of their families, and realized that although many citizens in colonial countries yearned for independence, they were impressed by the cultures of the colonizers. Her father as an engineer believes in critical thinking and science and this makes him "internalize the colonial beliefs about the superiority of European civilization" (p. 25). The author tells us how her father lost his job and left the country after rejecting one of King Farouk's tricks and points out that he also suffered at the hands of the British, who blocked the realization of his passion to study engineering for fear of giving Egyptians the potential to qualify them for independence. Ahmed goes on to talk about her mother, who represents the colonized culture of Egypt, of which Ahmed becomes more

aware when she goes to college in England. Growing up with such parents makes her conclude that "we always embody in our multiple shifting consciousnesses a convergence of traditions, cultures, histories coming together in this time and this place and moving like rivers through us" (p. 25).

Keskin states that "Throughout the memoir, Ahmed does not only grapple with the subalternity of Arabness vis-a-vis the "West" but also unpacks the very notion of Egyptian national identity with respect to being an Arab in the Middle East. She discusses the 1948 war with Israel, Nasserite socialism and nationalization of the Suez Canal to elucidate how the category of "Arab" is constructed with respect to the politics of the day. Her elaboration of these crucial historical moments does not sound as "a lecture on Egypt", because she talks about them as she lived through them as a child." (2012)

Ahmed moves on to talk about her studies, where she attended an English School in Heliopolis, and her love of reading has made her years ahead of her peers. She later attended a missionary school but was soon taken out of it by her father when he learned of a teacher's attempt to evangelize her. Then she talked about some of the confusion she had about different religions, she grew up with the idea that everyone believed in the same God, but everyone had to believe in what their fathers found. The writer faced many difficulties during her academic career because of being a Muslim, and sometimes because of being a girl. She then takes us to talk about the tension she felt about her "identity," and it becomes clear that she has always believed that Western culture is better than her native culture. "Throughout the memoir, Ahmed does not only grapple with the subalternity of Arabness vis-a-vis the "West" but also unpacks the very notion of Egyptian national identity with respect to being an Arab in the Middle East. She discusses the 1948 war with Israel, Nasserite socialism and nationalization of the Suez Canal to elucidate how the category of "Arab" is constructed with respect to the politics of the day. Her elaboration of these crucial historical moments does not sound as "a lecture on Egypt", because she talks about them as she lived through them as a child." (Keskin 2012)

During her study in London, Ahmed meets a small group of non-British students, and she constantly communicates with them, recounting the horrific experiences of racial segregation that they went through as soon as they arrived at college, and discovers that teachers were always trying to persuade Muslim students to enter Christianity. Apart from everything she has been exposed to, London has given her the opportunity to make her own way in the practice of academic life. Then she talked about her vision of the negative attitude of Arab women, she feels contempt towards Arab women and especially towards her mother. Only Western men and women had the right to achieve success in their lives, and non-white women had nothing to contribute. The writer then decides after these successive

attitudes that she will never be like the women she grew up among in Egypt, especially her mother. Keskin highlighted this as follows:

A related "geographical" dislocation in her intellectual contemplation is about her Muslim identity as a woman. In her own words, Ahmed "became black when [she] went to England . . . [and] a woman of color when [she] went to America" (p.238). Ahmed meets with feminist analysis in the 1970s when she begins to read American authors such as Kate Millett, Elaine Showalter, Patricia Spacks, Adrienne Rich, and Mary Daly. When Ahmed comes to the United States with enthusiasm for utilizing a feminist approach in her scholarly work, she encounters the "whiteness" of American feminism. She thinks about those days as being interwoven with the "implication and presumption that, whereas they -- white women, Christian women, Jewish women -- could rethink their heritage and religions and traditions, we [Muslim scholars] had to abandon ours because they were just intrinsically, essentially, and irredeemably misogynist and patriarchal in a way that theirs (apparently) were not"(pp.292). She then feels the necessity to unpack these "white" prejudices about women in Islam and allies herself with the emerging black feminist criticism launched by June Jordan and bell hooks in the late 1970s. (2012)

She spoke of feeling alienated in England because everything she was studying did not apply to her, prompting her to think about the issues of racial and cultural difference she faced during her life, and was then going through a trauma because of her "identity", where she faced many serious consequences associated with her Arabism. Then she talked about her mother's visit to her, her decision to marry her boyfriend Alan in the presence of her mother, and then her mother's diagnosis of cancer and her death shortly afterwards; this causes her to feel very lonely and sad, and then suffer from several diseases. It was at this time that the conflict of dogmas ignited in her head another revolution, she always lived in a society where religious belief was only part of life. At the same time, the idea of "the consequences of being a Muslim woman" had swept through her mind.

Ahmed goes on to talk about her friendships with many people from other religions, despite the widespread belief at the time that being an Arab means hating other religions, as she talked about that repressive era in Egypt, where the police placed their secret ears everywhere to monitor any "non-Arab" behavior. The success of propaganda and intimidation that made no one question the idea of Arabism, but the writer was not convinced by this interpretation of Arabism, and decided to go deeper into the research, realizing that Arabism is made by peoples and cultures that wanted to preserve the Islamic empire, and feel that this Arabism is only a political identity. She rebels against "other people's inventions, imputations, false constructions of who [she is]-what [she] think[s], believe[s], or ought to think or believe or feel"(pp. 255-6) She decides to live with being an Arab

woman, especially as she faces ignorance and prejudice, and falls into the trap of two false versions of Arabism: the first built by the West, and the second founded by the Arab peoples. The author states that Europeans use the term "Arab" to justify their suspicious treatment of Arabs, for Arabism means a lower level of humanity. The book ends with the author's move to Abu Dhabi to participate in an initiative to improve the educational system, where she worked there in a committee of all its members are men, and in doing so she herself interviews women to find out what they specifically want from the new educational system and seeks to ensure that all women can benefit from this system. She discovers that most of the women she encounters from the ruling class are illiterate, but they are also very intelligent, and know what they want from life. The author was amazed by their passion and strong will, but she needed a great deal of patience and perseverance to deal with the chairman of the committee, who was a particularly sexist and hateful man.

Keskin concludes his review of her memoir as follows:

At the end of her memoir, Ahmed once more quotes Rumi, this time referring to the stanza: "This is how it always is/ when I finish a poem. / A great silence overcomes me, / and I wonder why I ever thought to use language"(p.306). I contend that these lines determine Ahmed's ultimate position in the struggle between oral and textual Islam. Even though Ahmed's memoir may not provide a clear-cut answer to this question, it presents a precise account of the changes both in the socio-political architecture of the Middle East as well as its twentieth century interpretations in academia. (2000)

On the other hand, Nawal Al-Saadawi is one of the most controversial characters, where it is difficult for the reader to stand in a middle position, either to be with her or to be against her. She is best known for calling for the liberation of women from their chains, and for expressing disobedience to what she called "male society". Nawal Al Saadawi was born in "Kafr Talha" in the governorate of Dakahlia into a middle-class family; her father was an employee of the ministry of education, and has played a big role in her life, from him learned to rebel against the restrictions of society, and that the constants that do not believe in them are idols easy to break. Her mother is a simple rural lady from whom her daughter inherited the skin and took responsibility. Nawal al-Saadawi completed her university studies and graduated in the faculty of medicine. Despite the constant conflict between literature and medicine, one of them did not resolve the battle; our author was a feisty and questionably literary doctor. She was married three times and her marriage produced a son and a daughter, and it was her recent marriage to "Sharif Hatata" that brought her works to the world by translating them into English.

Nawal Al-Saadawi wrote more than fifty works ranging from novel, story, play and biography, and played with her pen on the Holy Trinity (religion, sex, and

politics) to undermine it; she calls for women to be freed from the bondage of men flying on a wider horizon than equality itself. On the threshold of politics, she lost everything and spent her life defending women; she was deprived of her freedom, dismissed from her job, and her name was included in the list of assassinations, and she had no choice but to seek freedom and safety elsewhere, but wherever she went, the cause of women was her greatest concern. Despite her efforts to advocate for Egyptian and Arab women's issues, she has been celebrated by several non-Arab countries and has been nominated for the Nobel Prize. Nawal Al-Saadawi remains one of the most important names carved in the imagination of feminist literature. Dr. Nawal Al-Saadawi passed away on March 21st, 2021, at the age of 90, after a lifetime of bold positions and abundant writing.

*A Doctor's Memoir* belongs to the Egyptian writer Nawal Al Saadawi biographical literature, a genre that overlaps with the art of fiction, where she presented to the recipient details of her life in the first person (I) confirmation of the dominance of her personality on the structure of this literary work, and thus became the narrative speaker and producer of speech in general. Saadawi reveals from the first pages of the tongue of heroine about her constant struggle with her femininity, which did not discover its features only over time, because of the link of the interlocutor with the indicators that we read below: "what is this strange body that surprises me every day with a new shame that increases my weakness and contraction?"! See what else will sprout tomorrow on my body or see any other new phenomenon erupting from my brute femininity!"(P. 8). She even hated being female from a young age, because she found herself under the forced protection imposed on her by her mother: "and if my mother loves me truly and the goal of this love should be my happiness and not her happiness, why are all her orders and desires contrary to my comfort and happiness?"! Can she love me putting chains every day on my feet and in my hands and around my neck?"!(P. 14).

*A Doctor's Memoir* is based on Nawal Al Saadawi's life and what she tries to recover with the so-called nuggets of her autobiography that reeks of pain, as she preferred to rebel against her femininity after her academic excellence to enter the field of medicine: "medicine is a terrible thing... Very terrible... Mom, brother and dad look at it with respect and reverence. I'll be a doctor then... I'll learn medicine... And I'll put on my face shiny white glasses... And I'll make my fingers strong, pointed, grabbed by a long, sharp, scary needle..."(P. 22).

The madness of knowledge seizes the entity of Saadawi to discover the secrets of man, and this is what motivates her to erase those differences drawn by memories between her and her male brother, as stated in the words of the narrative: "science proved to me that women are like men and men are like animals... A woman has a heart, brain, and nerves just like a man... An animal has a heart, brain, and nerves just like a human... There are no fundamental differences between one

of them, but there are formal differences that all agree in origin and substance."(P. 32).

The memoir marvels at that small oval piece of flesh that made man mighty on earth, as we see in the narrative scene: "and I grabbed the scalpel and cut the brain into pieces... Then I cut the parts into portions... I looked, felt, looked, and found nothing... Just a piece of soft meat that melts under my finger..."(P. 28).

She moved from the city to the countryside and left everything behind, to find herself another place to regain her shattered spirit: "I let the Air Lift Me Up... I felt at that moment that I was reborn, and my passion was born with me... She was just born, but she was born a mighty giant who wants to live and demands his right to live..."(P. 47).

There is a time span between the past and the present in *A Doctor's Memoir* where Saadawi used the technique of flashback, to return the recipient from time to time to her childhood and her relationship with her mother and family in general: "my childhood was lost in a struggle against my mother, my brother and myself... Science and medicine books devoured my adolescence and blew up my youth... Now I'm a twenty-five-year-old girl. A child who wants to run, play, have fun and love..."(P. 51).

Al Saadawi reveals her relationship with that engineer who visited her one day in her clinic, to thank her for the duty of her profession as a doctor after she examined his mother, who immediately explained to him: "his words were carried to her rebellious depths and calmed her and entered into her bewildered heart and reassured it... I felt that the conflict between me and the man was melting to the last drop..."(P. 61).

Saadawi tells us about her deep remorse for marrying that engineer. She even thinks that freedom is her salvation from that weak man, but she soon falls into the window of unity and finds herself searching again for love, as we read it in the memoir: "Isn't it necessary to seek it out among men? And how do I look for it if I don't move here and there looking at men's faces and eyes... I hear their voices and their breath... Touch their fingers and their mustaches... and reveal the depths of their hearts and minds? Can I know my leg in the dark, behind the window, over a kilometer away?" (p. 76).

Al Saadawi's memoir mixes in a satirical way with the inability of science to preserve human life in general, and this is the moment that the heart of the woman who gave birth and died before her: "This proud, mighty man... Who doesn't stop moving and noisy and thinking and innovating...? This man carries it on the ground, a body between him and death, a very thin hair... If you cut... It must be cut... No power in the world can deliver..." (p. 40).

The reader of *A Doctor's Memoir* will inevitably live the moment of the rebellion of the creative Nawal Al Saadawi - as most of her work attests to this - in

the face of a society that rejects the idea that women should live without men, not without the aesthetic of the simple language that helped the heroine in the process of revealing between herself as a writer/character and her surroundings.

She also explores and affirms the social carelessness of women's feelings, and the consequence of ignoring their emotional and mental needs. Most of her writings "call for gender equality by law; she has demanded legislation that will establish women rights not only in the social and political arena, but first and foremost, the right to personal autonomy of their bodies, their thoughts, their property, and their right to choose or at least give their consent regarding their spouse and their profession." (Sullivan 115-116)

The British colonization of Egypt, in the year 1882, "helped to spread more influence of western culture on the development of the women's movement in Egypt." (Hanna 61). During the era of British colonization, "tens of schools for girls were constructed and hundreds of girls started to join schools on a regular basis. Parents began to show interest and became involved in the formation of the curriculum." (Abu Al-Assad 144)

Education has become a basic feature of women's liberation from the male-dominant society. New social trends in Egyptian society led to the birth of the women's movement "calling for freedom from oppression. Between 1892 and 1908, a series of women's newspapers were founded. These newspapers promoted gender equality and raised the issue of the women's desire to be involved in the public life of the state." (El-Baz 110)

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Leila Ahmed's *A Border Passage: From Cairo to America – A Woman's Journey* and Saadawi's *A Doctor's Memoir* present a captivating narratives that lend themselves to a dual lens of postcolonialism and ecocriticism. The memoir, which intricately weaves together personal experiences and broader socio-environmental contexts, offers a nuanced exploration of identity, displacement, and the impact of historical legacies on both culture and the natural world.

From a postcolonial perspective, Saadawi and Ahmed's journeys become a symbolic representation of the enduring influence of colonialism on individual and collective identities. The narratives reflect the complex interplay between colonial histories, linguistic influences, and cultural hybridity. Saadawi and Ahmed's reflections on the British colonial presence in Egypt and their subsequent migration to the United States provide a lens through which readers can analyze the lasting effects of colonialism on cultural norms, personal identity, and the broader socio-political landscape.



Simultaneously, an ecocritical analysis unveils the environmental dimensions of Saadawi and Ahmed's narratives. The memoir allows readers to traverse diverse landscapes, from the banks of the Nile to the American terrain, prompting considerations of ecological consciousness and the impact of geographical displacement. Descriptions of natural environments, whether lush Egyptian landscapes or the unfamiliar American surroundings, serve as a backdrop for understanding the intersections between cultural practices, environmental ethics, and the broader ecological consequences of human actions.

The memoir, within the framework of postcolonial ecocriticism, underscores the interconnectedness of cultural and environmental narratives. Saadawi and Ahmed's narratives prompt readers to contemplate how cultural practices and identities are entangled with ecological concerns, and how the experiences of displacement and migration can reshape perceptions of the environment. Furthermore, they highlight the potential for environmental injustices stemming from historical colonial forces, which continue to reverberate in the contemporary world.

Saadawi and Ahmed invite readers to embark on a literary journey that transcends personal memoir, evolving into a profound exploration of the intersections between postcolonialism and ecocriticism. Through their experiences, Saadawi Ahmed not only recount a personal odyssey but also invite readers to critically engage with the broader implications of colonial legacies and environmental consciousness. As we navigate the borderlands of cultural identity and ecological understanding with Saadawi and Ahmed, the memoir becomes a compelling testament to the enduring relevance of these critical perspectives in contemporary discourse.

Succinctly, creative nonfiction is as effective as fiction itself because it uses the same techniques of fiction. The only difference between the two orientations is the experience: whether it is a factual or a fictional one. Obviously, creative nonfiction (CNF) uses the same literary techniques of fiction to be able to engage the reader empathetically with the literary text, and some of these techniques are the description of the environment, the figurative language, narrative and quoted monologues and the use of "I" voice. Postcolonial Ecocriticism clearly indicates how a man is profoundly affected by the environment. Both postcolonialism and ecocriticism are interrelated with each other through certain linking points: deformity of the land, changing the demographic nature of the colonized land, exploitation of the natural resources, changing the relationship between human and nature, the environmental injustice, the disillusionment of the ideology of the colonial power and the description of the environment. Succinctly, Both the human being and the environment are interrelated with each other in postcolonial literary texts, and this is the main aim of Postcolonial Ecocriticism. The two female writers

with no doubt succeeding in presenting the environment in which they lived and affected their life greatly and they both succeeded to change the stereotype image of the Muslim Arab female in both the Egyptian and the American societies alike as they both were able to have highly respected positions whether in Egypt or the United States.

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