



Poisonous Pedagogy: Patriarchal Religious Tenet of Child Illegitimacy in Nawal El-Sadaawi's *The Fall of the Imam*

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Abstract. This paper interrogates the interconnection of religion, patriarchy and child illegitimacy in Nawal El Saadawi's *The Fall of the Imam*. In Islam, *Zina* laws are part of the jurisprudence that give cogency to the phenomenon of child (il)legitimacy and the criminalisation of female sexuality. Thus, juristic terminology, *Waladul zina* designates the illegitimate child as a product of fornication. Even though a child belongs to the one in whose bed it is conceived, the legitimacy of a child is tied to the nuptial bed in Islamic law. Focusing on the prism of the novel's narrative of the subject matter of religion, patriarchy and female sexuality, the paper interrogates the concern with the phenomenon of child illegitimacy. A qualitative textual data collection from the novel is employed to interrogate and discuss the contradictions underscoring the interconnections of religion, patriarchy and female sexuality in a fictional Islamic society. Textual data analysis is anchored broadly on Marxist and Feminist literary dialectics. The concepts of "feminism", "patriarchy" and "ideology" are understood and deployed in the context of the religious sentiments and the established religious ethos which define the superstructure of the setting of the novel. Critical literary analysis revealed that, in Nawal El Sadaawi's *The Fall of the Imam*, male characters manipulate the religious tenets of Islam, use these tenets as poisonous pedagogy to execute personal, political and gender biases agenda. The paper concludes that the novel carpets the politics of gender by regarding it as a constitutive religious discourse and ascertains that Islam is a political agency for executing and maintaining traditional male dominance and gender disparities in the Arab society.

Keywords: Illegitimacy, Patriarchy, Girl-Child, *Waladu Zina*, Islam, Criminalisation

1. Politics and/in Religion

This paper interrogates the fictional depiction of religious patriarchal tenets, hegemonic dispositions

that cumulates to criminalising sexuality and stigmatising the child born out of wedlock, in Nawal El Sadaawi's *The Fall of the Imam*. The paper considers representation of oppressive religious doctrines used by male characters against female characters in the novel as a form of poisonous pedagogy. The broad aim of the paper is to highlight and discuss the implications of the politicisation and criminalisation of religious tenets on the idea of the illegitimate child in the Arab society. A critical reading of the novel provides an access into the socio-political and cultural configurations of an imaginary Arab society, which serves as the spatiotemporal context of the novel. The background of this novel depicts an Arab society, which is predominantly occupied by people who profess Islam as their faith, characterised by patriarchal cultural activities. It depicts a society that thrives on the leadership of men who, under the guise of religion, politically and culturally sustain the hegemonic control of women and treat them as commodities in a supposedly ideal Islamic society. The scenario captured in the novel indeed ventilates Hubert Seiwert's (2016) argument that, any attempt to dichotomise the interdependency of religion and politics would be a demonstration of a reflection of normative idea of modernity (431). In other words, the influential role religion plays in giving allowance to the manipulation and management of the social and political process, particularly in modern African societies such as the one depicted in *The Fall of the Imam*, is incontestable. Criminalisation of female sexuality as a result of genderisation of social-acceptable versus social taboos/deviant behaviours are a common characteristic of many African societies which the novel contextualises using the Arab (Egypt) example.

When properly conceptualised religion, in whatever form or origin, relies fundamentally on a set of doctrines, which are supposedly immutable, unalterable, obligatory, and unquestionable to adherents. These tenets are taught and internalised

formally and informally and implemented pedagogically by adherents. However, adherents' interpretations of religious doctrines often reflect the interlocking of religion with politics and so are always plagued by diverse outcomes for adherents. Studies in the sociology of religion affirm that religion indeed is an expression of the undercurrents of and/or a communication between the secular and the sacred (John Mbiti 1970; Bolaji Idowu 1973; Wilson 1954). The argument here tilts to the idea that religion is an ideological indoctrination which teaches the people to accept their present lot in life in relation to the influence wielded on them by the sacred realm of the supernatural existence. By that same token, Shishima, S.D and Apenda, A.Z (2004) argue that religion is "an adjustive mechanism within the social system" (57). In a nutshell, religion functions to sustain an organised social group (and political group, too) within a network of human relationship; hence, religion does not exist in a vacuum because it is an important element of a society's superstructure. It comprises elements of beliefs, values, creeds, laws, codes among others and, therefore, is inseparable from the society and its political process especially in the third world countries such as the Arab socio-political and cultural society where El Saadawi's novel, *The Fall of the Imam* is set.

The politicisation of religious ideals to achieve patriarchal agenda often provides the allowance for privileged individuals and groups to engage in the deployment of crude, poisonous methods to address perceived sins of individuals within the community. Although the concept of "poisonous pedagogy" is used in psychology and sociology to refer to methods of raising children that are considered repressive and uncivilised, the idea is used, in this paper, to refer to the maltreatment of not only the children in the orphanage, but also the raping of Bin Allah's mother by the Imam who orders also that the product of the illicit affair with the woman, Bint Allah, be stoned to death on accusation of having committed adultery. Femicide is committed by the Imam in the killing of Bint Allah and the stoning of her mother to death in the name of punishment for the sin of fornication. Indeed, a fundamental sociocultural vision of *The Fall of the Imam*, as literary text, is to project the relationship between human beings and the spiritual otherworldly reality as mutually interactive even though this is poisonous to basic human justice during implementation. The fact that the characters in the novel coexist in a religious cum political sphere of life shows the kind of social control embraced by the people. The complexities trailing the expressions of socio-political, religious and cultural ideals the characters express are of major concern to this paper.

Similarly, Sellin Volker (2014) maintains that the meaning of politics, like that of religion, is shrouded in a multiplicity of interpretations that are driven by philosophical insights and sociological assumptions with practical concerns (23). And reasoning alongside Volker and Hubert is the concern that religion, politics, sociology and philosophy are interlocked with a complicated sense of ambiguities even though politics and religion, as concepts, have evolved as key ideas for classifying different aspects of sociopolitical realities.

According to William T. Tucker (1965), Max Weber analysing its functionalist characteristics observes that, religion is the breaking point in human existence; the basic mechanism for administering the frustrating elements of social and political system. Weber is particularly critical of the effects of the economic factor on the social function of religion and maintains that the larger economic framework in which religion evolves remains the context where the internal significance of religion can be interpreted (9). More importantly, however, is that Weber considers religion as part of the process of actualising the dynamics of politics where the concept of politics is understood as the process of contesting for political power or influencing the distribution of power both between states and between social groups within states (Tucker 1965: 10). To exemplify Weber's functionality of religion theory, El- Sadaawi in *The Fall of the Imam* call attention to the way in which the tenets of Islam are weaved into the fabrics of politics as the Imam uses his political and religious position to influence and manipulate power relations between men and women in the society to his personal advantage. It is significant to this paper, therefore, that Weber extends the relationship between religion and politics to formations that do not belong strictly to the sphere of states and governments such as the distribution of power in religious communities. By and large, critics whose concerns have focused on the relationship between religion and politics agree that religion wields enormous influence on politics and governance systems and that this influence pervades every facet of the human society and its institutions. To this end, the central focus of conflict in *The Fall of the Imam* is how characters in *The Fall of the Imam* who are adherents of Islam believe that the ideals of religion must dictate politics, gender delineation, sexuality, marriage, and of course child legitimacy/illegitimacy. Hence, in order to exemplify critics' linkage of religion and politics to patriarchal religious tenets to poisonous pedagogy, this paper contextualises the interdependence of these ideas within ideological

conversation evident in the subject matter of child illegitimacy in *The Fall of the Imam*.

2. Child Illegitimacy (*Waladu Zina*) and Female Sexual Preference in the Arab Society

Maybe the subject of child illegitimacy, as it were, should not be as much a serious contentious issue in the Arab society depicted in *The Fall of the Imam* as the expression of its implementation by privileged members of the society in the novel. Marriage is understood as an ordained and prescribed institution which has an overall spiritual implication for the Muslims in the novel. To that extent, a marriage contract is expressed as an authentic proof of paternity in Islam even though child legitimacy is hinged on legal paternity and not on an abstract spiritual belief. Yet, the Islamic legal tradition criminalises sexual relationship between two opposite sexes who are not legally married; it condemns *zina*, which is sexual relationship outside marriage. Consequently, the product of an illicit relationship or *zina* is referred to as *waladul zina*, child of fornication; a child born outside of wedlock (Ebrahim Moosa 1992: 26). Moosa argues that Muslims in Arab societies believe that “a child belongs to the one on whose bed it is conceived and born” (28) therefore child legitimacy is tied to marriage even though the Quran is silent on the issue of illegitimacy. The backing and implementation of *zina* law, according to Moosa is sought from prophetic traditions and subsequent consensus and analogical conclusions of jurists (29), which are secondary in preference and authenticity to the Quran in the Islamic legal process.

In portraying *zina* law, however, Nawal El Saadawi in *The Fall of the Imam* theoretically situates the conclusions of jurists on cultural and religious law. By so doing she foregrounds the feminist perspective on sex and sexuality, which views *zina* law as a cruel way to sanction female sexuality. The novel demonstrates that *zina* is an aspect of the Islamic legal tradition that must be situated within the tradition’s classification of human behaviour, especially sexual relationship and gender roles (84). Similarly, Noel James Coulson (1971) avers that “legitimacy of birth is the legal postulate for admission into the family” (22). In other words, a child is admitted as a member of a family if it is of a legitimate birth. Moosa and Coulson are in agreement with Saadawi’s narrative point of view contending that, in Islamic tradition, a child is only legitimate if it is conceived in a lawful marriage of a man and a woman (its parents). These positions pointedly highlight the implication of anyone’s sexual choice whether in marriage or not. And it is for this that sexuality and genderisation to which the idea of

child illegitimacy may be examined in Islamic jurisprudence. Yet, there is a sense of conundrum created with critics’ insistence that the absence of legal paternity disqualifies bond between father and child and confers on the child the status of illegitimacy because this is inconsistent with the prescribed penalty for *zina* in Islamic jurisprudence as contained in the Quran.

The pedagogical execution of child legitimacy or illegitimacy in the Islamic law suggests that legal paternity could be understood through two methods. The first is the presumption of paternity within a validly established marriage while the second method is through acknowledgement. The second method entails that formal recognition of the status of legitimacy already exists and results in establishing the paternity of a child. To put it succinctly, the man must acknowledge and formally recognise the child as his child before paternity is established; which presupposes that if a man acknowledges the child of his slave or concubine, the child becomes a legitimate child regardless of the fact that its mother is not a legal wife. In particular, the second method makes concubinage an acceptable tradition in Islam even though it is a form introduced into the practice of the religion in the Arab society (Coulson 1971: 26). Kecia Ali (2012) opines that before the abolition of slave trade in the late 19th and early 20th century, the tradition of concubinage was an acceptable mode of sexual relationship among the Arabs. Ali observes that legal sexual relationship was not exclusive to legally married couples because keeping slaves as mistresses and concubinage was practiced by affluent Arab men, maintaining also that there were rules governing the possession and use of female slaves that were unique to them (39). Ali further insists that the availability of female slaves as sex partners had social implication for the development of Muslim thought on sex, which is expressly sanctioned by the Quran in various verses. For instance, the Quran, being the most authentic source of legal injunctions in Islam, outlines the type of women a man can engage in sexual activity with as well as the procedures for marrying even a slave. But Ali, indeed, emphatically cites the example of a prominent 8th century Jurists, al-Shafi’, who expressed a legal view on concubinage. According to Ali, al-Shafi’ posits that a man could take as many concubines as he desires because God did not restrict the number of concubines for men. (41) Ali is not, however, unaware that al-Shafi’s position is nullified by the fact that “He (God) forbids men taking more than four wives” (41). In any case, sex is a social activity that is both a private and intimate act human beings engage in, which perhaps is the reason all human societies and cultures deliberately seek to regulate sexual activities

among their members. Hence, certain pairings of male and female in the Qur'an are tolerable while others are not; some acts are approved while others are disallowed. The emphasis here is that, Muslims are not alone in regulating sex or distinguishing between lawful and unlawful sex and proper and improper sexual behaviour (Kecia 56).

To a large extent, this paper calls attention to the novel's representation of *zina* laws, emphasizing the feminist theoretical point of view and Marxist scholarship base of the novel. It analyses the wider sociocultural and institutional structure of inequality that take validity from male characters' interpretations of religious texts (The Quran and the Hadiths) in the novel. The point here is the fact that the sacred texts and laws derived from them are matters of human interpretations rather than the actual ideal of the religion. Hence, the following questions come to mind in this paper: What is legitimacy? Who is a wife? Who is a concubine? Who is a legitimate child and who is an illegitimate child? Interrogation of these questions are targeted to seek equal life chances for all the human characters in *The Fall of the Imam* irrespective of circumstances of their birth, social and gender choices. These questions are interrogated through literary and content analysis of El Saadawi's concern with how religion and religious tenets are manipulated for socio-political oppression of women, the criminalisation of women's sexuality in relation to meaning of child illegitimacy.

3. The Intersection of the Religious and the Political in *The Fall of the Imam*

As earlier asserted, religion and politics are closely intersected and interlocked especially in societies where people are deeply religious. From an extremely feminist perspective, El Saadawi ideologically foregrounds this clash or intersection against the background of gender realities in many human societies in *The Fall of the Imam*. The Imam, the villain of the story, is at fore front of the execution of the religious tenets and politics of cultural assaults on women in the novel. He is portrayed as a religious and political leader to reflect the novel's feminist and gender concerns. Religion is represented in the novel as one of the sociocultural systems dictating the individual and collective consciousness of the people. Attention is drawn specifically to the linkage between the events that connect the characters of Bint Allah, her mother and the character of the Imam. These characters are not only the central focus of attention in the novel, they are presented to demonstrate how an oppressive political cum religious manipulations work. The so-called religious leader (the Imam) is

pitched against the vulnerable (the child) and the victim of sexual assault (the woman). The Imam's character ensconces religion in an exploitative political rather than spiritual ideology and as an instrument for the criminalisation of female sexuality and stigmatisation of an innocent child as an illegitimate child. The Imam controls both religious and political spheres of the community, governing the state supposedly activating religious law, the Shari'a as his guide. It is amusing to see the Imam in the novel as the leader of the ruling political party, Hizb-Allah, and simultaneously the founder and financier of the opposition party, Hizb al-Shaitan (41, 48). Indeed, the narrator notes that the Imam had founded the opposition to disguise his autocratic political agenda. It is quite intriguing also that, he is of a low birth; an indigent and unintelligible school boy who latches on self-styled patriarchal ideological provisions in religion to attain high social and political status (15-17). His innate desire has been to control the world and execute self-explained rigid theology of Islam. Now that he is the Imam, he enjoys being regarded by the society as God's representative on earth. It should not be surprising that he uses the same religion that lifted him from the margin of the society as a tool of oppression and subjugation of the vulnerable members of the society, especially women. He unashamedly denies the paternity of Bint Allah whose mother is of low class even though Bint Allah is a product of the sexual escapades the Imam had with her mother.

The novel uses the Imam to offer a narrative through which the reader is availed knowledge of sexual assault and brutal oppression of women, which elevates the complex construction of masculinity in the narrative. The Imam's refusal to accept Bint Allah as his legitimate child is not unconnected with the child's mother's social status coupled with his grand design to cover his criminal activity of rape. He is aware that identifying with either Bint Allah or her mother will be inimical to his socio-political image as the Imam (a religious and political leader) and will discredit his hypocritical claim to holiness and religious authority. In his lame defence of self-styled theology of Islam, he justifies his rejection of his biological child. In other words, the Imam's image corresponds with the ideological misrepresentation of the religion of Islam, and this is kernel to the critical caution offered by Perin Gurel on the need to 'historicize feminism, historicize Islam, and highlight the complexity of representation' (3)

The Fall of Imam is interested in the intricate puzzle underscoring the phenomenon of the illegitimate child in a highly patriarchal religion-based society. This interest emerges from the author's feminist vision to challenge the misnomer of genderisation of sexes. It is

a concern in the novel which reinforces the need to understand the Arab patriarchal society where Islam and its extant theology are manipulated to advance both gender inequality and gender violence, which further calls attention to the problem of femicide in such societies. Femicide is the act of killing the woman and or the girl child on account of their gender. Gender related violence and femicide in the name of religion is associated with patriarchy and the politicisation of religion by state actors and/or institutions in the novel. The author, through the novel, demonstrates the politicisation of religion and the criminalisation of female sexuality (another form of gender violence) in various colourations. For instance, the treatment of the phenomenon of child illegitimacy and/or *Waladul Zina* resonates in the novel to demonstrate criminality of female sexual choice and gender violence. In this manner, *The Fall of the Imam* blends fantasy and reality and develops a controversial narrative about femicide, brutality and injustice against the child labelled illegitimate and the woman criminalised for her sexuality.

In unpacking the riddle underscoring the phenomenon of child illegitimacy in an Arab society, the novel puts Bint, Allah, a fictional alter ego of the author, in the centre of the discourse. Bint Allah's mother is a prostitute; a belly dancer and woman of low social status. Bint Allah's mother is impregnated by the Imam who refers to Bint Allah as a child "born out of a moment rashness and numerous cups of wine" (57). The Imam is purportedly actualising the ideals of a religious tenet which regards Bint Allah as a child of an unlawful union. For him Bint Allah is not "the child of the bedding", rather, she is a child of fornication; hence, an illegitimate child, a *Waladul zina*. She is taken to an orphanage where other children like her who have no father, no mother and no chain of reference are kept. God becomes their father since the society considers them as "children of God" (26). Assigning the word 'Allah' to the names of the children tagged illegitimate as their surname is deliberate in the novel. This comes with the implication that, in a religious and sociocultural environment, such as the Arab society where the concept of *Waladul Zina* is operationalised as the illegitimate child, Allah (God) must take responsibility for the plight of the children designated as illegitimate. Hence, the so-called illegitimate children are named variously to reflect this self-styled tradition i.e. Bint Allah meaning the "Daughter of God", Nemat Allah (the "Blessing or Gift of God") and Fadl Allah ("God's bounty") etc.; hence, the illegitimate children become God's children (68).

To this end, while El Saadawi's feminist stance on the phenomenon of cultural denigration of women is clear, it would seem that her view of religion is inseparable from those she expresses about other social and cultural phenomena. It is perhaps crucial to note therefore that she seemingly does not oppose religion (Islam) per se, rather, she is aversive and shows her disinclination to the interpretation and practice of basic religious doctrines by the privileged male dominated religious tenets. For instance, she makes her opinion clear about God in an interview with Newson-Host Adele where she insists that God is justice; she claims that even her grandmother identifies God with "justice" (Newson-Horst Adele 2012: 57). Her firm position that God is synonymous to justice however challenges the notion as to whether God is male or female and this is what gives cogency to her 'queer' association of a female character, Bint Allah. She unapologetically renders the image God in female attributes, which is a form of blasphemy in Islam. Thus, even though she is rejected and labelled illegitimate child in the novel, Bint Allah/Daughter of God to El-Saadawi is a creation of a just God to reflect how justice should manifest.

Marilyn Booth (1996) is, indeed, also correct when she observes that in *The Fall of the Imam*, "religious discourse dominates the text more than that of politics." (34) In other words, religious doctrine takes precedence, giving preference to religion laws and rules in day-to-day governance in *The Fall of the Imam*. By and large, El Saadawi's treatment of the phenomenon of child illegitimacy in the novel also shows her predilection for probing the hidden femicide that colour the actual interpretation and execution of some critical religious doctrines; the various shades of violence carried out against females. This is demonstrated in the novel's narration of the phenomenon of *waladul Zina*. This doctrine is presented as an isolated religious practice and acceptable life only meant to achieve some form of femicide. Bint Allah's mother is, for instance, summarily stoned to death as a result of the belief that she engaged in an illegal sexual activity which produced Bint Allah, the *waladul zina*. It is not surprising to see also that the woman and her child receive sanctions, social marginalisation, mental torture and general repulsive attitudes, and death, from the hegemonic patriarchal society led by the Imam. Furthermore, a connection is drawn between the patriarchal tendencies, religious extremism, gender violence against women and the girl-child and the act of femicide through the execution of the law on *waladul zina*. All the illegitimate children in the novel are kept in an orphanage with very strict orders and are punished severely for any slightest offence. (29) The only parental care they receive are those they

experienced in their dreams where they fantasise of parental warmth (45). These children are violated and subjected to inhuman treatment, particularly rape. To further execute the concern with maltreatment and insecurity that pervade the life of the children in the orphanage, El Saadawi creates a two-face character referred to as Baba. One part of his faces is smooth and gentle like the bosom of a mother's face while the other part is fierce-looking and covered with hair. (32-33) The two parts signify the metaphor of religion as a gentle, smoothing and empowering phenomenon yet harms, disempowers and renders man unable and incapable of controlling and affecting his life. Baba goes about the orphanage with a stick and intermittently drags small girls to punishment cells. (33) The same Baba also gathers the children around himself and teaches them lessons on religious catechism holding the Holy Book of God in one hand and guiding the children as they recite prayers from the sacred texts. (34) However, he will drag a girl into the punishment cell where she is made to close her eyes in reverence to God while Baba rapes and deflowers her in the guise of punishment. (37) Baba, like the Imam, uses religion as an instrument of violation of the female sex, pointing to the double-edge faces of religion and which the male privileged members of the society in the novel practice and sustain. Baba even audaciously makes references to Quran verses or the Hadith to justify child illegitimacy.

Similarly, the Imam uses his privileged position, authority and power and knowledge to gain socio-political and cultural ascendancy. The Imam, by the design of political and hierarchy in the religion, purportedly rule according to the law of God that stipulates punishments for offences. The narrator tells us that, according to the Imam, it is religious to stone adulterous women to death, cut off the hands of those who commit

theft, slash the tongue of those who spread rumours about irradiate
milk, pour all brothels, all casks, and barrels of alcoholic drinks into
the water of river. (12)

These are the tenets of the theology of Islam which Baba and the Imam must purportedly uphold and executed on behalf of God. However, the question which the novel raises from the law on "stone adulterous woman to death" is, what happens to the woman's male partner in the act? This question becomes pertinent bearing in mind that it takes two people, male and female, to commit adultery. Also, is it not that the women labelled adulterous are victims of rape as in the case of the Imam and Bint Allah's mother? Of course, the principle of punishing an

adulterer or fornicator is clearly spelt out in Quran as follows, but the Imam is never going to consider this context in isolating punishment for Bint Allah and her mother:

The [unmarried] woman or [unmarried] man found guilty of sexual

Intercourse- lash each one of them with a hundred lashes, and do

Not be taken by pity for them in the religion of Allah. (24 verse 2)

Going by the fact that the Quran is placed as the most authentic and highest source of the Islamic law, one would have thought that the Imam as a religious leader will place the injunctions in the verse quoted above any other opinion or pronouncement on the subject matter of illegal sexual activity. In other words, if there is any reason to belief that the law has been violated by any not legally married individuals who engage in sexual activity and the need to punish them appropriately, would it not affect the two of them rather than punishing one and be silent on the other? Besides, why does the law being executed and applauded by the people fail to investigate the incidents to identify the actors? These questions are addressed in the novel by nudging the reader's attention to the patriarchal structure that places religion and genderisation as the base of its superstructure.

El Saadawi agreeing with Sazzad, who likens the treatment of *Zina* laws in Islam to flawed social morality that poisons women's consciousness from the moment of birth (84), states that the treachery of men is allowable by divine law, while that of woman is inspired by Satan. *The Fall of the Imam*, to this end, not only carpets the double standard and abuses in the name of religion, as exemplified by the character of the Imam who not only secretly violates a vulnerable woman, impregnates her, orders that she be stoned to death for adultery but also condemns the denying of the paternity of the offspring of the illegal relationship. Bint Allah reveals that, "nobody knew that the Imam was my father... only my mother and my dog Marzouk knew he was my father. Marzouk, which means 'fortunate creature of God', is privileged to witness the sexual act between the Imam and Bint Allah's mother. Bint Allah further claims that, "it was Marzouk who saw my mother kneeling on the ground, stifling her sob, and it was Marzouk who saw my father slipping away in the dark." (21) In other words, the sexual act between the Imam and Bint Allah's mother was not consensual but through coercion from him. Unfortunately, the Imam is God's representative on earth who is beyond reproach and at liberty to commit rape. His action of rejecting the paternity of

Bint Allah is not unconnected with the fear of diminishing his religious authority.

To further pursue the feminist ideological agenda of the novel El Saadawi employs character stereotyping through metaphor, symbolism and allusion which underscores the feminist vision of the novel. The author stereotypes Bint Allah as a defiant, rebellious and bold female figure who is not afraid to raise her voice in the society. Bint Allah's boldness is evident in the way she answers the townspeople who instruct her to cover her shameful face for being an illegitimate child of a whore. The collective belief of the townspeople is hinged on the interpretations of the Islamic law on sex, marriage and legitimacy/illegitimacy of the child by their Imam who, unfortunately, is the political and religious leader. But Bint Allah queries them on the source of their authority regarding their perception of her as *waladu zina*. Of course, the townspeople's answer is not unexpected: "God, where God's words are written", which gives Bint Allah more opportunity to speak about the ignorance of the townspeople and use the occasion to challenge the manipulated and misinterpretations of religious doctrines by the patriarchal religious leaders. Bint Allah, as already observed earlier is El Sadaawi's alter ego; she is the voice women liberation and call for equity and justice in all spheres of sociopolitical life of modern society.

The metaphors of the Virgin Mary, Bint Allah and that of The Philosopher are directly used to parallel activities and biblical and Quranic images and characters. The character of The Philosopher symbolises a man who is conceived through the test tube technology and challenges the idea of illegitimate child and the myth of female virginity. Through this narrative construction, she x-rays the paradox of the Imam's pietism, as he conferred on the test tube baby who is not 'the child of bedding' the title of a Philosopher because he meets the stipulated conditions of declaring faith in the oneness of Allah and in His Prophet Muhammad, cutting off the foreskin that covers his male organ (141-142). El Saadawi calls her readers attention to the differential and preferential treatment engendered by patriarchy in collaboration with religion that underscores gender and class regulations. The issue of social class also comes to fore in the novel to further uncover and establish the problem of double standard that characterise patriarchy and religion as collaborators in the treatment of the question about child illegitimacy in an Arab society. Even though The Philosopher as a character is educated, he has no father but has a mother. In comparison, the children in the orphanage who are "born out of a moment rashness and numerous

cups of wine" (57), have no chain of reference, no father (because their fathers deny their paternity), no mother (because their mothers are stoned for adultery), no name; not having any parent or not cared for by parent surrogates. In the case of the Philosopher, renouncing his faith for Islam and his social status offers him the identity that family bestows. The question this novel seems to be asking here is, does class and faith wipe the religion tenet of illegitimacy? The Philosopher, accepts the Islamic faith for material gains. A short while after the Imam bestows on him the title of Philosopher, he says "God multiples my gains to the extent that...I packed ...bays full of gold and smuggled them through the customs without..." (143) Ironically, the privileges the Imam accorded him, an equally illegitimate child as the children in the orphanage, cannot be accorded to any of the children hoarded in the orphanage, violated and deprived by both the Imam and Baba who represent the face of patriarchy and religion in the novel.

4. Conclusion

This paper has so far made an attempt to interrogate the politicization of religion that engenders the concept of child illegitimacy and establishes injustices embedded in the *zina* law in *The Fall of the Imam*. It has been established that the novel is concerned with a self-styled patriarchal Islamic sociopolitical system that subjugates and criminalizes innocent and vulnerable women. It analyses that El Saadawi in *The Fall of the Imam* questions the entrenched oppression of women through social constructed religious discourse and interrogates the ways in which the boundaries between religion and politics blur contemporary politics. The novel's treatment of a plethora of issues relating to the intersection of religion and sexual relationship between man and woman in *The Fall of the Imam* suggests that child illegitimacy in the Arab society is instituted and reinforced by the concept of the 'sleeping child'. The novel's contention is therefore built upon the idea that patriarchal religious tenets are a form of poisonous pedagogy in implementation. The overall conclusion to be drawn is that Nawal El Saadawi's concern in *The Fall of the Imam* is ideologically subjective in its approach to the issue of child legitimacy/illegitimacy in Arab societies. There is the supposition demonstrating the poisonous pedagogy that regulate and execute sexuality and female sexual laws in the novel.

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