

Gender Performativity and Women's Resistance in The Blue Aubergine

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Abstract:

The current article reads *The Blue Aubergine* through Judith Butler's articulation of gender performativity, and how Nada's passage through adolescence serves to signal the constructed nature of femininity in postcolonial Egyptian society. Building on Butler's (1990, 1993) *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* respectively, the analysis examines how Nada's nascent sexuality and corporeal awakening are disciplined through religious, familial and institutional practices that reiterate paternalistic regulation. Her ironic play with traditional symbols of femininity: clothing, modesty, and bodily comportment, exposes gender as a performative act never wholly unconstrained from scrutiny. Also, though suppressed, Nada's bodily desires stay as a subversive undercurrent that undermines the firm scripts that compel her. Through reading Butler alongside textual instances from al-Tahawy's novel, this research maintains that Nada's affective resistance, silenced and internal as it may be, works to erode the myth of a coherent, naturalized female subject. This subversion of normative sexual individuality places Nada at the borders of both her gendered expectations and patriarchal society. By exploring the faultlines in desire, shame and the gaze of authority in Nada's story, *The Blue Aubergine* exposes the fractures within Egypt's paternal symbolic order and demonstrates how gender performativity also becomes a locus of subjectivation.

Keywords: *The Blue Aubergine*, Miral al-Tahawy, postcolonial, Judith Butler, gender performativity.

1.1 Introduction:

In *The Blue Aubergine*, Miral al-Tahawy depicts the psychological and corporeal development of her central character, Nada, as an argument between personal volition and the inflexible performances established by Egyptian patriarchy where women are not equal to men. Al-Tahawy's novel explores the gendered cast of Nada's childhood, the ways that her body serves as a site for social marking and moral influence. The young woman's growing awareness of herself, caught in the overlapping grip of family, tradition and patriotism. Nada is a young woman who lives in a society that finds her existence problematic. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity as elaborated in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies*

That Matter (1993) offers a critical approach to appreciating the multiple scenes through which al-Tahawy stages Nada's identity as a series of acted practices that reinscribe and sabotage phallic power. "It's the repetition of acts, that through time, and over-and-over makes up this performative style," writes Butler: "In this sense, gender is always a doing" (Butler 1990: 92). Nada conducts herself as so many women are trained to do – repeating images in hope of some meaning taking root.

Located in the context of 1970s and 1980s Egypt, a period defined by political conservatism and the reassertion of patriarchal moral codes, it shows how state and family institutions conspire to discipline female bodies into docile subjects. The

female figures of Al-Tahawy are not just representations of oppression, but they expose the ways in which it is rendered natural and reproduced. In Nada's world, gender is not a natural identity but an act of performance that must be constantly inscribed onto the body through daily behaviors: the lowering of the gaze, the covering up of hair, the repression of desire, as her effort to meet these expectations, and her inevitable failures to do so fluidly, lay bare the shakiness of the norms that are at once defining her. To quote from that line, Butler argues that "where gender itself is concerned, the conclusion would be therefore, cause to deny identity" (Butler 1990: 126). Nada's ambivalence toward the gendered rituals foisted on her, from the agony of the way she has to cover herself in a way that is suitable for her society to her sense of repugnance at religious modesty amounts, to an understated but potent critique of the cultural logic that equates womanhood with moral virtue.

The Blue Aubergine also places Nada's body as lived within a larger context of desire and subjugation, discussing sexuality as a form of discipline and possible site for revolt. The novel depicts Nada's sexual coming-of-age not as a linear journey towards maturity, but rather as piecemeal, even traumatic, confrontations with her body's autonomy. Whether for the girl at school or one of those far-off types of men, her desire (shame, fear) is constructed as transgressive; this corresponds to Butler's claim that "desire is formed by the very [prohibition] which it opposes" (Butler, 1990, p. 78). Al-Tahawy's representation of Nada's sexuality therefore undermines the binary logic of purity and depravity, demonstrating a continuum of desires and imaginings that refuse the hegemonic scripts for heterosexuality in her surroundings. Juxtaposing the contradictions that define Nada's performance of gender identity, Al-Tahawy offers a profoundly feminist critique of how it is social norms, not inherent moral values, which dictates what counts as acceptable womanhood.

Simultaneously, with its broken structure, the narrative reflects Nada's psychological decline under the weight of convention, proffering a formal equivalent for Butler's claim that performativity as reiteration is always incomplete. Every scene from Nada's girlhood, the boys and girls moral instruction class, the hush-hush conversations of menstruation, the lingering gazes of male authority figures, piles toward her slow dislocation from her body. But within this alienation is the scope for subversion. In moments of internalized reflection and silent refusal, Nada begins to recognize that the act is performative: There's nothing inherently oppressive about a man wanting an act that assures him of the "purity" he has been taught so that his desire is fulfilling and on demand. And its burgeoning self-awareness is an act of resistance, dogged and quiet: Its realization that the body can be a place not just of control but redefinition and consciousness. "Agency is not the refuse, but the potential to inhabit them otherwise" (Butler 1993: p. 3).

Al-Tahawy's *The Blue Aubergine* is a meditation on the politics of female embodiment, desire and the difficulty of articulating an agency in a patriarchal symbolic order. Nada's move from submission to self-awareness yokes the ways that gender identity (if socially enforced) can also be destabilized through the very acts of will through which one may wish to secure it. In exposing Egypt's gendered hierarchies and the moral double standards to which it – al-Tahawy is just as critical of the patriarchal norms of her cultural context, as reaching back in a sense towards a more general feminist understanding of resistance as performative: performed through repeating out of place, failing and re signifying 'women's' (failed) acts.

1.2 Literature Review:

To understand how femininity is controlled and formed through performative acts, critical scholarship on gender depiction in *The Blue Aubergine* has often linked to Judith Butler's theoretical framework. Butler's theory, in feminist literary studies, of gender performativity, which

emphasize that gender is shaped by repeated acts rather than an intrinsic identity, has been influential in feminist studies (Butler 1993: 26). Benefiting from this idea, a number of studies have inspected how woman characters in Middle Eastern stories employ minor acts of reinterpretation and deviation to manage constrictive gender standards. For example, scholars like Miriam Cooke argues that literature by Arab women frequently indicates "multiple strategies of resistance embedded within everyday life," where conformity and defiance coexist (Cooke 2001: 143). Analyses of *The Blue Aubergine* under this framework underline how the character's actions—characterized by silence, hesitancy, and internal conflict, mirror the conflict between imposed gender roles and developing self-awareness. Such studies display performativity as a site where resistance is made feasible through variation and disruption, in addition to being a tool of control.

In addition to Butlerian studies, postcolonial feminist frameworks that emphasize how gender overlaps with religion, culture, and sociopolitical context have been benefitted by critics to examine *The Blue Aubergine*. Scholars like Chandra Talpade Mohanty advise against generalizing representations of "Third World women," preferring to focus on historically specific circumstances that influence women's experiences (Mohanty 1998: 338). In this respect, studies of *The Blue Aubergine* display how the protagonist's struggle is intricately entwined with cultural expectations and social restrictions rather than being just associated with gender. In a similar vein, Lila Abu-Lughod defies presumptions that relate agency only to explicit revolt by emphasizing how resistance in Muslim civilizations regularly takes complex and dependent forms (Abu-Lughod 1990: 43). Depending on these viewpoints, earlier studies focus on the protagonist's actions not as simple acts of disobedience, but as socially situated negotiations. By employing gender performativity in a larger sociocultural context, these studies deepen one's knowledge of resistance and defy

overgeneralized interpretations of liberation and oppression.

In addition to postcolonial viewpoints, scholars have investigated women's resistance in *The Blue Aubergine* from the perspectives of embodied agency and everyday negotiation. The idea that resistance should take oppositional or overt forms is argued by feminist theorists like Saba Mahmood, who highlights that agency might be expressed through endurance, self-discipline, and accommodation (Mahmood 2005: 15). This standpoint has impacted interpretations of the novel that view the protagonist's cooperation as a complex way of negotiating constrictive social associations rather than as passive submission. Similarly, Deniz Kandiyoti's notion of the "patriarchal bargain" stresses how women operate strategies to secure restricted autonomy within preexisting power relations (Kandiyoti 1988: 278). These methods, when applied to *The Blue Aubergine*, indicate that behaviors like silence, restraint, or deliberate compliance may serve as negotiated agency rather than as indicators of powerlessness. These studies develop the notion of resistance by emphasizing how deeply ingrained it is in the very constructions it aims to challenge.

However, much of the existing literature that discusses *The Blue Aubergine* emphasizes on apparent acts of resistance or external forms of restraint, regularly ignoring how the character's gradual awareness and introspection aid in the development of a critical viewpoint. This gap is significant because it confines our understanding of how resistance purposes through interpretation and perception in addition to action. Recent critical methods begin to overcome this limit by highlighting the connection between consciousness and performativity, indicating that resistance in the novel is both epistemic and behavioral.

Within Butler's framework, several studies have inspected how female characters employ minor differences in silence, gesture, and behavior to navigate prescribed gender roles. These methods highlight that conformity may serve as a site where norms are both perpetuated and destabilized, rather

than essentially demonstrating submission. The women's acts in *The Blue Aubergine* are regularly viewed as performative negotiations that underline the weakness of gender standards and show how femininity is sustained via repetition.

1.3 Methodology

Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity serves as the theoretical frame for this study's interpretive, qualitative methodology. Butler's notion regards gender as an assembly of recurrent behaviors shaped by regulatory procedures and societal norms rather than as an innate or fixed identity (Butler 1993: 26). To examine how gender is enacted, created, and challenged in *The Blue Aubergine*, this study depends on a close textual analysis. Key narrative events that underline deviant, recurring, and disruptive patterns in the protagonist's words, actions, and emotional expression are the focus of the analysis. The article shows how performative behaviors reveal the instability of gender categories by detecting situations in which normative femininity is concurrently disturbed and reproduced.

2.1 Performance, Gender, and Desire of Femininity: A Butlerian Reading

Judith Butler's gender performativity proposes a compelling background for investigating Nada's disturbed navigation of femininity in Al-Tahawy's novel. Butler (1990: 192) argues that gender is not an inherent identity but "an identity tenuously constituted in time through a stylized repetition of acts". Butler's claim can be overlapped with the character of Nada, whose subjectivity is not merely formed by patriarchal regulations, but actively shaped by her frequent attempts, and repeated failures to represent the socially certified model of Egyptian woman. Al-Tahawy (1988: 44) portrays this conflict in Nada's struggled relation to her own body, mainly during her initial experiences of menstruation, which she links with fear and shame rather than maturity and growth. "I wanted to hold the blood inside me," she confesses, "to deny it had ever come, so I could stay the way I was". This

visceral reaction discloses Nada's refusal of the symbolic arrival into womanhood, which indicates the beginning of subordination, regulation, and surveillance. Nada exposes, by resisting these early gendered words, the coercive and constructed nature of femininity, emphasizing how woman body becomes a place of patriarchal inscription.

This situation of bodily awakening initiates Nada's confrontation with the sexual regulating entrenched in her socio-cultural environment; as Butler (1993: 97) contends, "the regulation of sexuality is central to the maintenance of gender norms", and in Al-Tahawy's novel, this regulation takes the shape of both internalized shame and overt punishment. When Nada feels she is attracted to her classmate's brother, her desire is not met with openness but with instant fear: "I was afraid of being discovered... of the look on my mother's face if she knew" (al-Tahawy 1998: 62). Rather than turning to a cause for self-discovery, her desire becomes a site of guilt and anxiety, signifying the cultural constraints that conflate woman sexuality with moral contravention.

The suppression of Nada's sexual agency becomes complicated by the performative prospects imposed upon her by society, school, and family, organizations that, as Butler (1993: 51) mentions in her *Undoing Gender*, oblige the subject to repeat standards that secure lucidity within a given culture. Nada, at school, is taught to symbolize the stereotype of the pious, modest girl, a performance required of her for social legibility and not for self-realization. This gendered performance is authorized by disciplinary mechanism, as seen when a teacher disciplines Nada for letting her hair loose, associating one's appearance with morality: "Good girls don't show off like that" (al-Tahawy 1998: 66). The scrutiny of her body strengthens what the territoriality of the female body", wherein monitoring females' appearance is a way of managing their behaviors. Furthermore, in her article "Modesty and the Control of Women", Lila Abu-Lughod's (1990) discusses modesty and honor in Middle Eastern situations. Abu-Lughod's research helps structure Nada's dilemma: Nada's

body turn out to be the battleground on which social values are defended and inscribed. For Abu-Lughod (1990: 44), "the discourse of modesty is not only about individual virtue but about communal reputation". Which means Nada's sexuality is not hers, but it is public matter, policed and preventively shortened, the outcome is that Nada is forced to be alienated from her own body, doing what is supposed to be done without internalizing its meanings, a typical instance of Butler's (1990: 176) idea that "gender is an imitation for which there is no original".

Though suppressed, Nada's bodily desires stay as a subversive undercurrent that undermines the firm scripts that compel her. Her experiences with moments of desire, whether in her enchanted gaze at the young revolutionary, or the implicit attraction she feels towards some of her girls' classmates —expose a type of "gender trouble" that Butler in her *Gender Trouble* (1990: xv) describes as the failure to completely occupy the normal gender roles. These moments of attraction, while never fully understood or consummated by Nada, however disturb the consistency of the subject that patriarchal discourse requires. Nada, in one evocative extract, remembers standing in front of a mirror, ashamed and confused by the stirrings in her body: "She stared at herself long and hard, not sure if the image reflected desire or sin" (1988: 75). This passage summarizes what Jasbir Puar (2007: 58) labels as the "disciplinary intimacy" of heteronormativity, in which the subject adopts not only the look of others, but likewise the disciplinary logic of normativity, which means that outcome is a fragmented bias where Nada's internal world oscillates between guilt and longing, a conflict that demonstrates the inability of the hegemonic gender system to completely obtain its subjects. Developing at the threshold of consciousness, Nada's unspoken desires embody what Butler labels, in her *Bodies That Matter* (1993: 3), as the "constitutive outside" the potentials that are excluded so as to reduce gender intelligible; through these moments, the story rejects the conclusion that normative gender

dogmas demand, enlightening in its place the instability at their core.

It is worth mentioning that this promising awareness of desire, often unnamable, is not merely a psychological or personal development, but an intensely ideological moment that reveals the regulating of woman sexuality in Egyptian society. Sexuality and gender, as Butler (1993: 192) argues, are not inherent identities, but are established through a conventional recurrence of acts controlled by heteronormative discourse; Nada's desires, which are not considered normative female sexuality, are left inarticulate within the figurative order that associates woman virtue with subservience and chastity. Nada, in one moment, echoes her attraction to the rebellious student not as a romantic affection, but as a projection of escape and rebellion: "He made me feel like I existed. Not like a daughter or a girl, but like someone who could become" (Al-Tahawy 1988: 59). The male student turns to be a fantasy person, but one filled with more than sexual interest, he is a personification of existential and political possibility, of disobedience against the tasks ascribed to her as a girl. Meanwhile, her connections with girls classmates are indicated by alike confusion: feelings of curiosity, admiration, and longing become sites of internal struggle, formed by the silence about woman sexuality in her social world. These examples demonstrate how desire is suppressed and structured by the patriarchal state, creating what Foucault in his *History of Sexuality* (1978: 28), defines as "discourses of silence" about non normative sexualities. Therefore, her sexual awakening is a moment of detection than one of misrecognition, she feels desire, but she does not know the cultural vocabularies to name it; this increases her psychic bewilderment, as her inner world gradually fails to reflect the discursive standards imposed upon her. This subversion of normative sexual individuality places Nada at the borders of both her gendered expectations and patriarchal society. Dragging on Butler's theory of gender performativity, Nada's emotional inclinations and conflicted sexual could

be read as a disturbance of the regulatory fictions which maintain hetero-normative gender identity. Her inability to represent the role of the self-effacing, modest daughter is not just an individual deviation, but a political act that disturbs the social norms regulating woman behavior. This is obvious in her passionately charged affection to females, which, although never spoken, suggests at homoerotic longing, a type of lust that cannot be labelled within the discursive restrictions of her societal world. Nada's yearning, as such, hanging at the edge of legibility, hovers the consistency of the symbolic order that structures womanhood through heterosexual relationally. Al-Tahawy's text aligns with feminist assessments, like Sara Ahmed (2017: 92), who observes that "queer desires are made invisible by the very familial forms that script intelligible lives". Nada's unspeakable and unfulfilled desires become a silent yet extreme resistance, defying not just patriarchal rule over females' bodies, but also the heterosexual background that describes which lives are bearable and which are not.

The regulating of Nada's sexuality is tortuously tied to wider constructions of moral discipline and surveillance that control the woman body in Egypt. From the scrutiny of her mother to the normative pressures applied by religious institutions and school authorities, Nada adopts a pervasive sense of bodily anxiety and shame. This aligns with what Foucault labels as biopower, where organizations exert rule over individual desires and bodies through disciplinary and discursive practices. Though, this regulation clarified through a feminist lens, it takes on a definitely gendered aspect, one that mirrors what Quawas (2003: 32) classifies as the "codification of the female body" as a place of shame and honor in Arab cultures; as Nada's fear of being touched, exposed, or even seen echoes this adopted gaze, as she associates her physical existence with dishonor, transgression, and danger. Her estrangement from her body, termed in moments of self-loathing and dissociation—exemplifies how patriarchal system not merely control females externally, but also form their

agency and self-perception from within. This personified experience of suppression exposes how gender is not just performed but intensely inhabited, copying Butler's (1993: 141) claim that performativity "is not a particular act, but a ritual and a repetition" that marks standards onto the body over time.

This suppressed shame exhibits in Nada's disjointed relationship with her own desire and body, formed by the discursive constructions that depict female sexuality taboo. Benefiting from Butler's theory of gender performativity, Nada's experience illuminates how femininity is not an inborn essence, but a situational, everyday practice, one established through repetitive performances that bring into line the woman subject with socially sanctioned standards (Butler 1993: 90). However, Nada's refusal or failure to completely achieve this idealized type of womanhood positions her in a liminal space. Her silence, her bodily discomfort in the existence of man authority, and her cautious interest about sexuality all reveal the gaps in the hegemonic gender scripts she is likely to follow. As Mervat Hatem (1992: 231) remarks in her examination of nationalism and gender in the Middle East, the regulation control of woman sexuality is vital to preserving patriarchal domination, as it associates females' integrity to their bodies and reduces their behavior a representation of collective identity. Nada's story defies these reductions, as her body becomes a place of both subtle subversion and ideological inscription.

This dis-identification becomes gradually visible as Nada starts to doubt the performative roles appointed to her as a young female. In her *Gender Trouble* (1990: 192), Butler contends that gender is not stable identity, but an identity unconvincingly established in time, an identity created through a conventional recurrence of acts, as Nada's refusal or failure to flawlessly imitate these stylized acts is not simply a private struggle but a disturbance of the gender patterns that depend on repetition for their consistency. Her body movements, her voice, and even her self-conscious discomfort with

clothing underlines the performative description of gender and emphasizes the moments where she hesitates in personifying the supposed role. In her examination of Egyptian women novelists, Marilyn Booth (2009: 53) argues, bodily and veiling comportment in such stories are fixed symbols but dynamic sites where resistance, power, and identity are actively questioned. Nada's discrepancies also reveal the cracks in the allegedly flawless structure of womanhood in Egyptian society.

This dis-identification displays most obviously in Nada's vacillating relationship with normative femininity, as she shifts between efforts at conformity and occurrences of resistance. Her unease with wearing a bra, her embarrassment during the moral instruction classes at school, and her silent aversion at the gendered customs of modesty and hygiene all suggest a failure to entirely inhabit the female role assigned to her. As Butler argues, "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time" (Butler 1993: 26). Nada's subjectivity is shaped not via acceptance but through embodied refusals, hesitations and interruptions, signs that expose the fragility of gender rules. Her failure to completely achieve womanhood, indicates what Butler label "a failure to repeat," an action that undermines the very authority of the controlling model it pursues to achieve. Rather than conforming, Nada's body turns out to be the place through which the artifice of gender is revealed.

This dissonance between external expectation and internal experience mirrors what Butler (1990: 138) phrases as the "failure to approximate the norm," where gender cannot be a stable identity but a group of recurrent acts that may deviate or falter. Thus, Nada's resistance is not explicitly rebellious but arises in embodied discomforts and subtle refusals that undermine normative femininity. Her unwillingness or inability to persuasively perform imposed gender roles indicates a space of agency, though forced. Sometimes she ignores social performances, doubts moral proclamations, or

bodily resists physical discipline, Nada portrays what Butler labels as "gender trouble": a performative crack that reveals the contractedness of the gender binary. *The Blue Aubergine*, through this lens, re-imagines teenage femininity not as a static growing milestone, but as a ground of conflict where bodies resist, negotiate, and sometimes times fail to obey.

Nada's teen-age crisis achieves its peak during adolescence, a period when the religious, family, and state institutions strengthen their surveillance over her desires, and body. The onset of the menstrual series turns out to be an essential moment of gendered rule, as Nada is rapidly introduced into the regulations of womanhood—silence, modesty, and generative potential. As Bahun (2013: 91) notices, in *The Blue Aubergine*, trauma performs as both psychological reality and narrative structure, disturbing linear time and cracking Nada's awareness of self. The biological variations she experiences are neither normalized nor celebrated; they are troubled with secrecy, shame, and ideological weight; thus, the text employs these scenes not to draw a soft coming-of-age route but to emphasize the conflict between psychic readiness and physical maturation, between personal agency and social expectations.

This biological change is not conveyed by open dialogue or emotional support, but in its place covered in shame and secrecy, strengthening Butler's view that gender is performatively established through repeated performances. Her experience of menstruation, indicated by increased scrutiny, hidden sanitary products, hushed advice exemplifies how the woman body is disciplined to obey to patriarchal prospects of propriety and modesty. Instead of a moment of growth or empowerment, this ritual of passage strengthens Nada's estrangement from her identity and body, hardening her awareness of femininity as a burden instead of a cause of agency.

Such moment indicates Nada's greater entrenchment within what Butler (1990: 152) labels as the "heterosexual matrix," a social web that adopts fixed gender roles and compulsory

heterosexuality, as her entry into biological womanhood is not met by empowerment but by a series of expectations and restrictions, emphasizing that femininity is less an inherent condition than a socially imposed performance formed by continual discipline and surveillance. This supports Booth's (2009: 20) proclamation that bodily alterations in Arab females' stories frequently operate as ideological verges, where the isolated self is enrolled into familial, national, and religious discourses.

Nada's sexual recognition evolves within a paradoxical space: although her body experiences natural variations, her perception of these changes is formed by fragmented knowledge shame, and silence. Instead of being presented frames for self-understanding, Nada is met with implicit warnings, prohibitions, and euphemisms, which generate a disjuncture between the discursive standards around woman sexuality and her internal experiences. This gap actually demonstrates what Butler (1990: 22) recognizes as the "regulatory ideals" of gender, ideals that determine coherence and intelligibility within the hetero-normative matrix but leave little space for dissent, ambiguity, or substitute expressions of desire.

This tension between discursive repression and bodily experience results in a cracked awareness of self, where she is concurrently hyper aware of her body and estranged from it. Her internal chaos, marked by guilt and confusion, echoes the performative restrictions of femininity in a culture that equates virtue with silence with invisibility. As Rula Quawas (2003: 89) notices, al-Tahawy's woman characters often bear "a bifurcation of self" torn between external gaze and internal desires that controls them. Nada's teenage years therefore becomes a battlefield where the natural developments of maturation crash with ideological constructions intended to render female sexuality subordinate, contained, and invisible.

Far from being a liberating or linear process, the appearance of Nada's sexual recognition, is fraught with contradiction, repression, and anxiety. Her desire towards both man and woman figures is

never fully articulated, indicating not only the internalization of social restrictions, but also a greater ambiguity about the rightfulness of her own desires. This sexual and emotional vagueness speaks straight to Butler's (1993: 192) contention that gender is not an "essence but an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts". Nada's refusal or failure to repeat those acts properly, whether in conduct, clothing, or emotional responses, indicates a disturbance in the predictable performances of gender, illuminating the fragile framework upon which normative femininity is constructed.

This disturbance turns out to be remarkably visible in Nada's intuitive reaction to bodily norms and gendered rituals forced by her surroundings. When challenged with her mother's persistence on using a bra, Nada says that it "dug into her skin like a punishment," an effective metaphor that associates femininity with discipline and discomfort (al-Tahawy 1998: 27). Correspondingly, her fear during school sanitation lectures—where teenagers are taught about bodily cleanliness and menstruation in silent, critical tones—arouses her awareness of separation from the category of "woman" she is supposed to symbolize. Nada's feelings disclose a silent protest: "She wanted to escape her body, to be unseen, untouched, unjudged" (al-Tahawy 1998: 36). These events not just mirror Butler's concept of performativity, but also supports Rula Quawas's (2003: 89) analysis of the text as charting "a feminist counter-narrative to patriarchal structures of knowledge," where the woman body becomes a place of ideological rebellion.

Nada's personified resistance appears in her opposed relationship with the veil, a rebellion oscillates between silent protest and compliance. Although she in the beginning accepts the veil in a try to imitate, the act is covered with discomfort and ambiguity. Al-Tahawy inscribes, "She wrapped the scarf tightly, not out of piety, but to shield herself from their gazes—like armor" (1988: 41). This extract about the veil as shield submits

that for Nada, the veil is a symbol of obedience and a tactical reply to endless surveillance. For her, veiling becomes a multifaceted performance, neither completely resistant nor fully compliant. Booth's (2009: 72) reading reinforces this view, noting that in modern Egyptian literature, the veil is not just an indicator of spiritual identity but a shifting symbol, imitating females' negotiation of visibility, privacy, and power. Nada's uncertainty therefore discloses the variable meanings allocated to gendered customs and the ways in which young females manipulate, within and against, patriarchal prospects.

This conflict between resistance and conformity becomes more apparent in Nada's experience of school, a place that works as a miniature of state sanctioned gender standards. The daily customs of bodily discipline and moral instruction are depicted as instruments for constructing passive, "proper" women. Nada remembers how "the teacher's eyes would scan our bodies, checking for signs of shameful negligence—unbuttoned collars, untied scarves, the hint of a bra strap" (al-Tahawy 1998: 54). This quote reduces the woman body to a place of continuous scrutiny, where slight infractions are considered as ethical failures. The compulsory routines reflect what Butler (1993: 192) names as the performativity of gender: an identity "instituted through a stylized repetition of acts". However, Nada's discomfort within these tiresome acts, her fiddling during lessons, her fantasizing about other lives, implies the slippages in this act. Instead of becoming completely interrelated into the role of the "ideal Muslim girl," Nada gradually considers such acts as absurd, even arbitrary, signifying an early awareness of the socially formed life of gendered identity.

Nada's increasing consciousness of her difference is more supported through her hesitant relationships with other girls at school, such relationships confuse both her position within the heteronormative order and her perception of desire and. Her feeling toward a female classmate "the girl with the long lashes and lilting voice"—is described in admiring, sensuous expressions that

distort the lines between attraction and identification (al-Tahawy 1998: 67). This vagueness disturbs the normative prospects imposed upon her, signifying a type of resistance that is affective and internal. Nada's silent obsession, unspoken yet intensely felt, therefore becomes alternative location where the firm binaries of womanly decorum start to unravel. Instead of describing a clear way toward rebellion, al-Tahawy permits space for longing, shame and uncertainty feelings that testify to the restrictions of performativity of gender and the costs of opposition in a society where divergence is punished by exclusion.

Nada's teen-age journey in *The Blue Aubergine* exemplifies how woman subjectivity is built not merely through explicit subjugation, but also through the insidious, subtler procedures of internalized discipline and normalization. Marked by resistance, curiosity, and shame, her bodily experiences reveal the high stakes of performance of gender in a culture where difference intimidates social legibility; which means that Al-Tahawy depicts this formative act not as a change into steady identity, but as a container of paradoxes, where Nada's nonconformity, confusion, and silence show the performative instability of normative femininity.

Conclusion

The Blue Aubergine, in a Butlerian reading, exposes the performance of femininity in the Egyptian culture: this is a gender that is maintained and orchestrated through silence, discipline, iteration, and surveillance. Nada's own physical conflict, desire, discomfort and her eventual rejection to obey the conventionalized standards, shed the light on of fractured nature patriarchal control and the fragility of gender identity itself. By emphasizing the irrationalities personified in this shape of sexuality, al-Tahawy does not only signify the woman body as a locus of adjustment, but rather she alters it into a ground of contestation. As it traces Nada's varying performatives — from resenting accommodation to

peaceful resistance— the novel concurrently investigates the mechanisms making “woman” as a social paradigm, while pointing up what somewhere else might be called disarticulating agency along a redirected itinerary of self-consciousness, desire, and disobedience.

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