



**NAWAL EL SAADAWI**

**DISSIDENCE AND WRITING**

**A Conversation on My Intellectual Itinerary**

**DISSIDENZA E SCRITTURA**

**Conversazione sul mio itinerario intellettuale**

(2008), PAGES 141

**The important matters that Egypt  
and the whole planet has to face,  
according to a dissident woman,  
doctor and writer**

The Egyptian Nawal El Saadawi is well-known for her courageous campaigns in defence of Arab women. Her book offers a precious glimpse of Egyptian society, of its origins and transformations, from the colonial submission to Nasser's reforms during the Fifties, then the return of mass poverty due to the establishment of religious fundamentalism (first under Sadat and later during Mubarak's government). It is an autobiographical and particularly valuable story, in which the writer openly recounts her life: the outrage and the injustice she felt at her brother's unearned privileges, the undaunted example of her grandmother, who rebelled against poverty and exploitation, and that of her father, a traditionalist though "enlightened" person; her first doubts about religion, while attending a primary British school; her medical studies during the Fifties and subsequent practice as the only woman doctor in Egypt working with poor people.

“ **The leading spokeswoman on the status of women in the Arab World** ”

*The Guardian*

“ **Throughout her writing she sheds new light on the power of women in resistance  
against poverty, racism, fundamentalism and inequality of all kinds** ”

*The Middle East*

“ **Those who write have a double responsibility: towards themselves and towards others.  
For the Egyptian author Nawal El Saadawi, critical analysis and the release  
of individual creativity are the first step towards recognizing the other** ”

*il manifesto*

*“A.V. What do you wish the Egyptian girls who will be born over the next ten years?  
N.E.S. To be themselves. If I had to struggle my whole life long to be myself, to express my mind, I would say to this young woman in Egypt, try to be yourself, your true self, your true mind. Don't imitate the great philosophers, or great art, don't worship any god, use your mind, try to be yourself, it's a long struggle, but you must do it; that is what I would say. Of course, you must learn from others, learn as much as possible from other civilizations, from all ideas all over the world; but be yourself, take this civilization, take it into your body, like food, and then express your own mind”.*



**Nawal El Saadawi** is a psychiatrist and a writer of novels, stories, plays, memoirs and essays. She is Professor of Eastern and African Languages and Literature at Duke University, USA. She was also Director of the Health Educational Department of Cairo and has been prominent member of the Superior Council of Arts and Social Sciences. In 1981, during Sadat's regime, she was imprisoned as a result of her political involvement. The review "Health", which she had founded and directed for over three years, was closed. She emigrated to the USA in the mid-Nineties. Her books and her campaigns for women in Egyptian and Arab society have had a deep influence on the young generations. Today, her name appears on a list of death-sentenced people, issued by a number of terrorist organisations.