

## Research Article

**FEMALE SELF-DIRECTED  
OPPRESSION IN MARIA IRENE  
FORNES THREE PLAYS *FEFU* AND  
*HER FRIENDS*, *SARITA* AND *THE MUD*: A  
POST-FEMINIST READING**



## Comparative Literature

**Keywords:** women oppression, internalized oppression, Maria Irene Fornes, *Fefu and her friends*, *The conduct of life*, *Sarita* and *The mud*.

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## Abstract

The study reveals women self-directed oppression in Maria Irene's plays *Fefu and her friends*, *The Conduct of Life*, *The mud* and *Sarita*. The purpose of this paper is to describe female characters with their self-suffering and aggression to each other. As an American playwright and dramatist, on one hand, Maria analyses feminist characters with their traditional images are portrayed as domestic characters and badly abused under male-dominated society. On the other hand, she produces another perspective or different images of women's oppression which is internalized oppression which is explored among women. By female internalized oppression, the researcher means the major source of female oppression is other women. Women receives oppression and violence with a negative reaction and when they are going to defend their self-hood, the act becomes harsher on their characters.

## Introduction

Female oppression is continuously produced and reproduced through institutionalized inequality. Violence against women is a social and public problem, defined as the physical or psychological abuse of women because of their biological condition and their social role (Lobmann, Greve, Wetzels & Bosold, 2003). However, a question has to be posed: How is female oppression produced and reproduced in that context? This necessitates providing a gender analysis framework so as to understand female oppressive narratives the thing which can help maintain women in such oppressive relationships or set themselves free. These oppressed women are socially marginalized as they are thought to live according to the conventions and the norms of the society. They are the victims of the male-dominated institutions. They are tormented and take positions inferior in relation to the offender. Phrased differently, we are concerned with the assumption that the major reason behind women's oppression is other women. As we all know, gender discrimination between males and females is ascribed to other females who were raised suffering from on younger generations. This study adapts the concept of internalized oppression to explore the major issue of female self-directed oppression. Internalized oppression is seen not as internal; psychological phenomena, but rather as socio cultural phenomena. Internalized oppression is a concept currently used to describe and explain the experience of those who are members of subordinated, marginalized or minority groups, those who are powerless and often victimized, both intentionally and unintentionally by members of dominated groups; and those who had "adopted the dominant group's ideology and accept their subordinate status as deserved, natural, and inevitable" (Griffin, 1997, p.76).

Internalized oppression has been viewed as internal, deep, unchanging, psychological qualities or characteristics of the oppressed, on the one hand, and the privileged on the other. The

phenomenon of internalized oppression has been extensively explored in the work of the Psychiatrist Fanon (1963-1967), the Tunisian Jewish writer Memmi (1967), and the Brazilian educator Freire (1970). A term first coined by two American psychiatrists, Kardiner and Ovesey (1951) which focuses on how we internalize the ideological ideas of oppression. In this sense, internalized oppression means the oppressor doesn't have to exert any mere domination or oppression, because we a group of powerless or oppressed people do it to ourselves and each other. Freire (1970) provided a well-known and useful summary of these consequences. He began by arguing that the goal of the oppressed is to liberate themselves and their oppressors. The difficulty of achieving this goal, said Freire, comes about because in the initial stage of their struggle against oppression, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend to become oppressors themselves or sub oppressors. This study illustrates women's oppression by focusing on female internalized oppression; the oppression comes from the oppressed group.

According to Britannica website: Maria Irene Fornes, (born May 14, 1930, Havana, Cuba-died October 30, 2018, New York, U.S.), Cuban-born American dramatist. Her family moved to the United States in 1945, and she became a painter before beginning to write plays in the early 1960s. She wrote more than 40 stage works and directed her own works as well as classic drama. Her innovative dramas made her one of the most successful and frequently produced of off-Broad way playwrights. Her best-known play, *Fefu and her friends* (1977), explores women's relationships with one another. Fornes's numerous awards include nine Obies, and in 1972 she received a Guggenheim fellowship. This job is implemented by examining the three plays of Maria's *Fefu and her friends*, *Sarita* and *The mud*.

In these selected texts, women are concerned with their self-interests and they hardly care for other oppressed women. Hence, western culture focuses on patriarchal aggression against women due to the concept of patriarchal social structure. According to Deborah Capaldi of the Oregon social center, "Still, the newest finding challenges the feminist belief that, it is men only who cause violence'. That is a myth" (Minaker and Sinder 760).

The character of Fefu illustrates how a woman may desire to act like the traditional oppressor and it is not only because men are valued in western society but also because women adopt the patriarchal aggression with each other. The aggressive behavior Fefu displays is not based on her gender, but rather is socially learned through her own experience. This is further illustrated by Eckhart Tolle says here:

*This illusionary sense of self is what Albert Einstein, who had deep insights not only into the reality of space and time but also into human nature, referred to as an optical illusion of consciousness. That illusionary self then becomes the basis for all further interpretations, or rather misinterpretations of reality, all thought processes, interactions, and relationships. Your reality becomes a reflection of the original illusion. (28)*

Aggression comes from people attempting to assert themselves toward the threat they perceive. The women within the plays can't attain self-esteem due to their inherent and myths of male-dominated aggression and the undervaluing the feminine characteristics that surface the insidious violence among those female characters. *In Fefu and her friends*: "Fefu: ..... I still like men better than women. I envy them. I like being a man. Thinking like a man. Feeling like a man. They are well together. Women are not..... Men have natural strength. Women have to find their strength and when they do find it, it comes forth with bitterness and it's erratic.....women are restless with each other."

In Marias's *The Mud*, a hopeful, hard-working Mae lives in bleak rural poverty, but she is going to school, and plans to better her life through reading and learning, but Lloyd, who lives with Mae, spends his time caring a little too much for the farm animal; he scorns to learn from a book, and treats Mae with angry disrespect. When Lloyd becomes ill, Mae goes searching for a diagnosis and their neighbor Henry home with her in order to help her read the difficult medical language. In Maria's *Mud*, Fornes has created a stark and uncompromising drama, in which self-improvement is a wistful, far-off goal and the bleak nature of everyday life is impossible to escape in the end.

By female internalized oppression, the researcher means the major source of female oppression is other women. Women receive oppression and violence with a negative reaction and when they are going to defend their self-hood, the act becomes harsher on their characters. Hence, the researcher adopts the post feminist perspective in order to best explore and develop the main thesis of my study.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study seeks to answer the following:

1. What is female oppression?
2. What is female self- directed oppression?
3. How are they related\interrelated?
4. What are the major sources of female self- directed oppression?
5. How are the major concepts expressed in the three selected plays?
6. How does Maria Irene give expression to the overpowering issues of female self- directed oppression in *Fefu and her friends* and *Sarita*?
7. Will they reveal the insidious experiences that they go beyond men – made towards a truly matriarchal society?
8. How does Fornes express these issues?
9. What are the visions informing these plays?

### Finding and Discussion

The researcher has chosen to explore the major question of female self-directed oppression which is one of the overpowering issues of contemporary European societies. Hence Fornes' *Fefu and her friends* and *Sarita* and *The mud* are selected to help the researcher do implement this study textually. These plays are selected to give the best expression to such major concerns/issues. The thesis also tries to illustrate internalized oppression through the implementation of power by examining the two plays of Maria Irene Fornes, *Fefu and her friends* and *Sarita*. Maria Irene Fornes is an American playwright and the founder of the New York theatre. *Fefu and her friends* are a group of women. They are bored and affected in the manner of wealthy women who have too much free time. The images of women are personified through this vision of female self-directed oppression which is explored via internalized oppression. Hence, the researcher adopts the post feminist perspective in order to best explore and develop the main thesis of my study. The texts, and *Fefu and her friends*, *Sarita* and *The mud* are rich texts for such representative plays that dramatize these issues that can be underscored through the two visions of the playwright. Here this drama finds clues rather than presenting women with their misery life and create new ideas by over exploring different sources for their misery life.

## **Method**

This study adopts the post-feminist perspective which best suits its major thesis which is the female self-oppression. This feminist lens particularly best suits its purpose. The post-feminist approach exclusively focuses on the female images in the three plays in study.

## **The objectives of this study**

The aim of this study is to explore female self-directed oppression. This is done by examining critically and analytically this major question/issue in Marias' *Fefu and her friends*, *Sarita* and *The mud*. This is best done by juxtaposing the orthodox view of female oppression (by males) and female self-directed oppression (by women).

## **Literature Review**

In the domain of studying female self-oppression, Diana Rogers Adkinson (2022) addresses the concept of female-to-female bullying by women leaders in higher education and proposed the goal for success is individualistic that can implement to support female leaders. Also Xi Li (2018) in her study illustrates some feminist theories related to victimization in Poe's stories, mainly women in these stories, and their relationship with patriarchal power. A woman in these stories no matter traditional or progressive they all suffer oppression in a patriarchal world in order to display those progressive women status was similar to victimization. Davina Cooper (2019) illustrates both the present towards change in relation to gender's future.

The study relies on different conceptions of gender means and explores the challenge of gender's conceptual future. Gloria Ada Fwangyil (2012) explores women oppression in facing male oppression and suppression and how this type of oppression women face from infancy to adulthood as portrayed in Nawal El Sadaawi's *Women at point Zero*.

Liicka Andima (2014) shows how women oppression in particular African narratives. At last, Christine A. Gidycz (2006) examines how women's perception among their sexual victimization and their ability to respond to threat in specific situations as well as implications for interventions for better future for women.

This study has the following structure:

### **The Theoretical Framework and the Post-Feminist reading of female self-directed oppression by internalized oppression**

The researcher means the major source of female oppression is other women; hence the researcher adopts the feminist perspective in order to best and develop the main thesis of my study. Female internalized oppression an implementation of power in Maria's *Fefu and her friends*. The researcher argues about women self-directed oppression that covers the extras of male-dominated oppressive relationships.

#### **Aggression and Women in *The Conduct of Life***

The topic of oppression toward women can be found in literary works, one of literary works is the conduct of life by Maria Fornes. It was written in 1985. It is one of Maria Fornes's most critically acclaimed plays. This work brings together issues of politics, gender, and sexuality to show how forms of national and domestic violence often exist in direct relationship to one another. Contrarily, in Maria's *Fefu and her friends*, Fefu adopts male ideology and uses it against other women and this leads to women self-directed oppression. Maria's technique depicts oppressed women as the subject of the emblem of oppression such as domestic servants as in *The conduct of life* which is called realism. But her work is both a theater about utterance (i.e., a meta-theatre) and a theatre about the disfavored or in more particular realistic.

#### **Social and psychological Behaviors in Maria's *Sarita***

Maria examines the idea of social and psychological behaviors that have a great impact on women's self-directed oppression in their relationships with each other.

## Conclusion

To conclude, women's oppression is no longer restricted to male-domain or inferior in relation to male-dominated society, but there is a different perspective to see somehow insidious oppression among women's world in which the reason behind women's oppression is other women and the source of implementing gender discrimination between males and females is other females who implement what they were raised suffering from on younger generations. Women who have authority and power use this power against other women and follow the same strategy of male oppression, here women are positioned as self-independent and strong, although this power is claimed to be women's self-made and independent. Indeed, this power is constantly inferior in relation to the offender (male-society) in which the idea that women are weak or lacking agency. Female self-oppression can be seen as a way for getting rid of the implicit threat and stereotype image of oppressed women from patriarchal society and men's rules.

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