The Architecture of Affect: Spatial Politics and Emotional Resistance in Latifa Al-Zayyat's *The Open Door*

DOI: https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes1321

Nayera Mohammed Hassan
Minia University, Egypt
Jouf University, Saudi Arabia

Received: 29.3.2026 Accepted: 16.11.2026 Published online: 17.11.2026

Abstract: This paper analyzes Latifa Al-Zayyat's 1960 novel *Al-Bab Al-Maftuh* (Booth's 2000 translation, *The Open Door*) by exploring the interplay between spatial politics and affect theory. While the protagonist, Layla, is often viewed as a symbolic representation of Egypt's struggle for independence, this critical reading argues that her liberation is primarily a localized, visceral process rooted in the politics of the domestic sphere. To execute this spatial-affective analysis, the paper divides its approach into three distinct frameworks. By drawing on spatial politics, it maps the middle-class Cairene household as a surveillance space through Foucault's lens, where movement is meticulously regulated to maintain patriarchal authority. Through the perspective of affect theory, the analysis demonstrates how these physical boundaries induce a politics of numbness, a state of literal corporeal paralysis and emotional stasis. Layla's series of minor domestic rebellions consequently functions as a form of spatial dissent and counter-conduct that destabilizes patriarchal architecture long before the national door ever opens. This synthesis of concepts from Foucault, Berlant, and Ahmed clarifies that particular architectures do more than contain; they actively construct distinct affective states, creating conditions like Berlant's "cruel optimism" and Ahmed's "feminist killjoy". In moving beyond broad national allegories to examine these sensory and spatial dimensions, this paper offers a new perspective on Al-Zayyat's work, revealing how specific spaces generate localized emotional resistance.

Keywords: affect theory, counter-conduct, cruel optimism, emotional resistance, feminist killjoy, spatial politics

1. Introduction

Al-Zayyat transformed Egyptian literature by proving that a woman's search for identity is inseparable from her nation's struggle for independence and sovereignty. Stimulated as a child by the trauma of witnessing the 1934 British-led massacre, she was transformed from a timid girl into a militant Marxist leader, eventually serving as the Secretary General of the National Committee of Students and Workers in 1946. She faced multiple imprisonments due to her activism and defiance of state authority (Mukerjee 2015; Nabil 2023:140).

In her 1960 masterpiece, *The Open Door*, she pioneered a revolutionary literary technique, breaking long-standing taboos through the protagonist Layla's coming-of-age, from the violent anti-British demonstrations in Ismailiya Square in 1946 and the 1952 Cairo Fires to the pivotal 1956 Suez Crisis, known as the Tripartite Aggression of the British-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt. The story is

famously a national allegory, linking Layla's search for liberation with Egypt's fight against British rule. By exposing the harem mentality and unmasking patriarchal authority, Al-Zayyat moved beyond observing inequality to actively spurring social reform. She asserts that a woman's right to choose her life path is identical to a nation's right to choose its own destiny, replacing the image of the passive victim with one of active resistance.

To evaluate the academic value of this study, it is necessary to examine how other researchers have analyzed Latifa Al-Zayyat's work over the years. For a long time, critics have mostly looked at *The Open Door* through two main lenses: political history and the traditional feminist coming-of-age story. The most prominent example of this is the work of Buijsse (2010), who explores how the main character, Layla, grows up; she argues that Layla's personal journey is a profound national allegory that mirrors Egypt's fight to break free from British colonial rule. In this view, Layla's body and her struggle for freedom are tied directly to the country's political independence.

Other recent studies have shifted the focus slightly toward how women try to find their own voices in patriarchal societies. For instance, Bedeir (2023) investigates what she calls "daughterly narratives," showing how Al-Zayyat handles the heavy expectations of Egyptian families and the social rules that silence young women. Similarly, Hamza et al. (2025) approach the novel through gender performance. They examine how women in the text try to reclaim their identities and resist social oppression by participating in social and political movements. Another group of scholars has focused on how characters simply try to survive under pressure. Ganaie and Sarkar (2024), for example, explore how the characters in *The Open Door* negotiate power with those around them just to keep their agency and survive everyday hardships.

When it comes to applying specific theoretical tools, Abdel Hafeez (2023) makes an important contribution by using Michel Foucault's idea of counter-conduct, linked to Judith Butler's concept of persistence, to establish a dual framework. Through this framework, Abdel Hafeez illustrates how Egyptian women writers depict defiance against patriarchal systems by highlighting the small, ordinary actions female characters take in their daily lives to disobey these rules. The two concepts work together because Foucault's idea explains how women resist daily control, while Butler's concept reveals how continuing this resistance day after day helps them form a new identity. Building on this relationship between confinement and identity reconstruction, and given that Al-Zayyat was a political activist who was jailed for her ideas, critics such as Nabil (2023) have examined her autobiographical book, *Personal Papers*. Nabil shows the way Al-Zayyat used her memories of being in prison to reshape her political identity and female subjectivity.

While all these studies are highly valuable, they leave a major gap. They either treat the novel as a grand political allegory or examine resistance in general social terms. Even when Abdel Hafeez (2023) uses Foucault, she does not examine how physical spaces shape human feelings. This study addresses that exact limitation. Instead of focusing only on major political events or general themes of

survival, it combines Foucault's spatial ideas with the affect theories of Lauren Berlant and Sara Ahmed. The analysis focuses specifically on the domestic sphere- the home itself- as a physical structure that actively creates emotional states. By doing this, the paper shows how the domestic spatial layout causes physical numbness in women and demonstrates that emotional resistance inside the home is what actually allows political consciousness to grow in the first place.

To achieve this, the paper first establishes the socio-political backdrop of mid-century Egypt and grounds Al-Zayyat's biographical context. Next, drawing on the spatial and affective theoretical intersection, the analysis traces Layla's transition from a disciplined, docile body within the domestic sphere to an active agent of resistance in public spaces. It concludes by connecting these spatial and emotional findings to offer a critical model for analyzing physical spaces and psychological states across modern Arabic feminist literature.

2. Methodology

This paper adopts a spatial-affective methodology to analyze Al-Zayyat's *The Open Door*, integrating specific concepts from Michel Foucault's spatial theory and the affective frameworks of Lauren Berlant and Sara Ahmed. This lens tracks the precise intersections where physical containment actively constructs internal emotional dimensions. The analysis is conducted through a close reading of Marilyn Booth's 2000 English translation, *The Open Door*, while consulting Al-Zayyat's original 1960 Arabic novel, *Al-Bab Al-Maftuh* (2015), to ensure the conceptual accuracy of the spatial-affective nuances. This approach examines how domestic spaces generate localized emotional and psychological experiences.

3. Theoretical framework

The following discussion draws on selected theoretical concepts from Foucault, Berlant, and Ahmed, providing the tools to map the domestic sphere as a panoptic enclosure and investigate the somatic consequences of such discipline. This combined approach to spatial and affect theories examines how physical spaces can restrict movement and produce visceral bodily reactions that shape human experience, highlighting that emotions are deeply connected to social identities. Such a framework reflects the "spatial turn" in the humanities, particularly within literary studies**,** where narratives become a crucial medium for emphasizing the extent to which "space is intrinsic to issues of identity, power, and resistance" (Ben Amara 2024:267-281). Concurrently, this perspective participates in current academic dialogues regarding the ways in which material and physical settings actively construct intense affective states that exist "outside the realm of language" (Salman and AlAmmouri 2023:125).

3.1 Spatial theory: Michel Foucault

Foucault's spatial logic offers a clear way to analyze how architecture functions as a "disciplined enclosure" whose spatial design becomes a tool of "disciplinary power," using walls and rooms to turn individuals into "docile bodies". These are subjects whose behavior is controlled through the "partitioning" of their

environment, i.e., through separate, monitored, and restrictive spaces. Foucault (1995:136,138,197) states,

> discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience) … and turns it into a relation of strict subjection…disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination…[So, a docile body] can be subjected, used, transformed and improved [in] enclosed segmented space.

This space-power dynamic operates through "panopticism," a system of constant "surveillance" where the architectural design - whether a prison or a patriarchal home - ensures that inhabitants always feel visible and "their slightest movements are supervised" (Foucault 1995:197).

Because individuals believe they are being watched, they internalize the "panoptic gaze," leading to self-surveillance and the automatic exercise of power. In this context, power is defined as conduct-of-conduct (conduite des conduites), a method of limiting individuals' possibilities so they spontaneously conform to established norms (Foucault 1995:201; Gindorf 2025:10).

Foucault (1982:789) clarifies that the term "conduct" has the exact meaning of power relations, stating, "to conduct is at the same time to lead others (according to mechanisms of coercion which are, to varying degrees, strict) and a way of behaving within a more or less open field of possibilities". Therefore, this network of gazes compels individuals to regulate their own movements, thoughts, and freely chosen actions, effectively governing themselves on behalf of the "pastoral power" embodied by patriarchal figures or "governors in the plural" (Foucault 2007:204). This system thus causes power to operate automatically.

Resistance, however, is deeply rooted in this space-power dynamic. Within these enclosures, individuals practice "counter-conduct": "the art of not being governed like that and at this price… [It is] the active sense of the word 'conduct'...counter-conduct in the sense of struggling against the processes" designed to control others (Foucault 2007:268). Abdel Hafeez (2023:350) adds, "conduct includes the way in which one conducts oneself and the way in which one is conducted by others…conducts are inextricably bound up with counter-conducts…are constituted by and constitutive of each other."

Counter-conduct, nevertheless, is not a complete rejection of the system but a minor everyday rebellion that employs the same architectural means to "be conducted differently" (Foucault 2007:259). By changing the rules of the home or using survival strategies like false compliance, the individual disrupts the disciplined enclosure, allowing one to overcome oppressive rationalities without confrontation. This shift from a passive, docile body to an active subject of self-conduct transforms the architectural site from a space of "social death" into a place for shaping independent subjectivity.

3.2 Affect theory: Sara Ahmed

Sara Ahmed's theory of Affective Economies extends Foucault's spatial analysis of surveillance and control by examining how environments, such as a home, "orient" the human body and how, in turn, the body disorients. At the start, Ahmed (2004:117) states that "emotions are not simply 'within' or 'without' but that they create the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds." She adds that feelings do not then "reside" within subjects and then move outward toward objects; rather, feelings are how objects create impressions in shared spaces of dwelling (Ahmed 2004:119). In other words, emotions are neither solely inside the individual, nor do they simply move from the outside world into us; instead, they circulate. Like capital in the economy, emotions gain value and strength through spatial circulation; they "slide" between signs (words or symbols) and bodies (Ahmed 2004:120). As Ahmed (2014a:63) explains, "Fear envelops the bodies that feel it, as well as constructs such bodies as enveloped, as contained by it, *as if it* comes from outside and moves inward." Feelings like fear or love consequently move back and forth between people and things, creating borders and boundaries—the feeling of a wall between self and other.

Emotions are always intentional; they are directed toward an object or person, shaping both the body and the world. They are not just feelings we have but a social force that assigns values to specific bodies, determining who is seen as belonging and who is seen as an outcast. This force has a sticky nature that explains the link between ideas, values, and objects.

Ahmed (2004:120-121) clarifies that power dynamics are not neutral but are part of an embedded system of orientations that shape how a person acts, explaining why the body remains aligned with, for instance, patriarchal authority. By following established rules and sticking to the familiar, traditional path of domesticity, certain bodies find the world to be peaceful and comfortable. This sense of comfort is sustained through an "affective economy" of emotion, in which social happiness serves as a tool to align individuals with patriarchal norms, making compliance feel like a natural fit rather than something obligatory.

Within this economy, places like home orient the individual toward the only acceptable goals for the disciplined body designated as "happy objects" (Ahmed 2010:22)—such as a wedding dress or the promise of domestic stability and social happiness. Hence, they are "sticky"; they accumulate intense emotional value over time and are seen as the only valid source of joy, regardless of the affective "attrition" they can cause to the spirit. This highlights the idea of the slippage of emotion between bodies and the world (Ahmed 2004:121). But what happens when individuals refuse to see these objects as promising? According to Ahmed, they experience profound disorientation; it is a physical and social sensation of not being in line with the moral and architectural model.

Due to this refusal to conform, the individual becomes a "feminist killjoy," a figure who challenges the shared domestic atmosphere by exposing its restrictive nature. Wunker (Dobbin 2016) explains to CBC News:

> A feminist killjoy is someone- could be any gender- someone who feels uncomfortable with the status quo in society... things like racism, misogyny, and definitely patriarchal culture. And so not just being uncomfortable with them makes you a feminist killjoy, but speaking up, naming the inequities... working to change them.

Since the term is viewed as a stance of resistance, this deviation is often countered by the symbolic "patriarchal hammer," the forceful social and family pressure used to straighten out "willful subjects" who diverge from traditional patriarchal norms (Ahmed 2025).

To survive this pressure, the subject must find "wiggle room": the "corporeal willfulness" strategy of "wiggling about" in tight spaces to create the "freedom to be" (Ahmed 2014b). Wiggling is an act of "willfulness," when the body pushes against the edges of a restrictive social category to expand its possibilities and attain freedom. While this resistance eventually leads to confronting the "brick wall", the institutional barrier that stops those who are "out of tune" with the norm, it also opens the door to a new space. Thus, the individual transforms the home from a site of confinement into a space of flourishing. Ahmed (2014b) says,

> Sometimes that is what we struggle for: wiggle room; to have spaces to breathe…To embrace wiggle room is…the beginning of another kind of embrace. It is to call for us to make more room…so that even in being given assignments, we are not restricted, or less restricted, not expected to live in this way or that. We might in spilling out of the rooms we have been assigned… mess things up. What a spillage. Things, persons: flying out of hand. And that is hopeful.

Having wiggle room thus means avoiding strict rules and rigid expectations. When pushing against these limits, things can become messy or uncontrollable, like a spillage. But this is hopeful because it shows breaking free from a restricted life to achieve subjectivity.

3.3 Affect theory: Lauren Berlant

Berlant (2008:5) describes affect as a "sense of a shared affective quality through which the present is rendered sensible and apprehended." The affective infrastructure refers to the built environment that is fundamental for shaping a sense of place and belonging, guided by emotions, feelings, and attachments. Therefore, it is conceptualized as an affective impulse - a sensory force that influences an individual's daily desires and their perceived map for a "good life" (Berlant 2011:24).

A key concept in this framework is "cruel optimism," a double bind where an individual's attachment to a specific architectural ideal - such as domestic bliss or a patriarchal home - becomes the main obstacle to their well-being. Ironically, these ideals advocate the inequalities from which the person hopes to escape. Berlant (2011:3-4) explains,

> optimistic objects/scenarios had once held the space open for the good-life fantasy, and tracks dramas of adjustment to the transformation of what had seemed foundational into those binding kinds of optimistic relations we call 'cruel'. This unconscious attachment is "profoundly confirming" yet "profoundly threatening", a fantasy of lively, durable intimacy. Consequently, inhabitants stay attached to these compromised hopes even when disappointed because losing the familiar world feels worse than the harm of remaining.

Her words show that cruel optimism happens when someone is hopeful about a harmful goal or relationship. Its cruelty stems from the fact that hope is snatched away by those who are supposed to give it. Crucially, even if the situation is dangerous, the person remains attached because being connected to that hope is more comforting than facing the pain of letting go.

This dynamic creates an "impasse": a state of "exitlessness" in which neither habitual way of living works nor alternatives seem reachable. Berlant (2011:10) displays the emotional impasse of Foucault's docile body, revealing the visceral burden of maintaining an attachment to a stagnant domestic life marked by numbness. Often called a constant systemic crisis or, as Berlant describes it, "crisis ordinariness," the impasse is a "stretched-out present" that leads to a state of petrification- a physical "hardening" or a psychological freezing and stupefying of everyday life. In this state, the person becomes stuck in rigid, numbing roles to survive in an environment that offers no real opportunity for success or true thriving. Schaefer (2020:8) defines the term, stating that

> The impasse is not a punctual event in time. It is a condition, rather, drawn out across different locales and episodes; a condition defined by a sense of 'exitlessness', a formal figure of halting transit: one cannot simply take a *pass* to get somewhere or resolve something. Instead, impasses require us to tarry with the abeyance and delay they connote. To find oneself at an impasse is to be stuck between a no-longer and a not-yet. A period of suspension, the impasse describes a disturbance in one's affective and epistemic habits. To be adrift in this way can feel any number of ways: from joyous uncertainty to puzzled numbness, from detached indifference to anxious curiosity. It is a space of time that defies easy narration. Neither catastrophic (insofar as catastrophe means change) nor trivial, its hazy landscape disorients.

Within this stagnant space, individuals experience the gradual physical and mental attrition- the wearing out of a person caused by the normal pressures of daily life. Berlant (2007:754), additionally, describes "slow death" as the space and time,

> where life building and the attrition of human life are indistinguishable…a condition of being worn out by the activity of reproducing life, agency can

> be an activity of maintenance, not making; fantasy, without grandiosity; sentience, without full intentionality; inconsistency, without shattering; embodying, alongside embodiment.

In a patriarchal context, daily efforts to survive through social compliance become identical to the erosion of the self, highlighting the enigma of ambivalence - one coexists with the very structures they wish to reject (Berlant 2007:754-759; Schaefer 2020:59). This links the confined physical space to the emotional state of the self, a condition that limits the mind and spirit. Therefore, the cruel optimism of impasse is to remain attached to this state of slow death, gradually eroding the capacity to thrive.

To endure this state, individuals create an intimate public, an affective temporary space in which shared struggles in spaces of collective recognition provide an outlet from the isolating enclosures. By engaging with this public, the subject can break free from petrification, abandon the habits of cruel optimism, and pursue vitalizing modes of existence. Berlant (2011:9-10) pinpoints that an intimate public is structured around everyday suffering and disappointment. The experience of mitigation and empathy, in turn, generates optimistic reattachment to social normativity, forming a collective entity.

In what follows, I will proffer an analytical reading of *The Open Door* employing the concepts mentioned to investigate how the physical and emotional architecture of the domestic setting produces a politics of numbness, and through what spatial movements does Layla transform this affect into revolutionary agency.

4. Spatial politics and emotional resistance in *The Open Door*

4.1 The domestic panopticon and somatic petrification

The domestic architecture in *The Open Door* enforces a straight line of patriarchal obedience, where the father, mother, and brother act as literal wardens of Layla's mobility. It is designed to restrict female movement to a one-way track among the roles of daughter, wife, and mother. Here, this Cairene middle-class home functions as a Foucauldian disciplinary site where puberty marks the transition from childhood to the creation of a docile body whose agency is systematically overpowered to fit rigid middle-class molds. The home thus becomes a somatic prison, a site of slow death.

Layla's menstruation is faced as a threat to family honor, a traumatic entry into a "fixed slot", a prison of surveillance (Al-Zayyat 2000:21). It immediately subjects her to a restricted regime where her movement is limited to the path between school and home. Her father, Sulayman Effendi, explicitly outlined non-negotiable confines during a domestic gathering, forbidding Layla to leave the house unaccompanied. He told his son, Mahmud, not to bring his novels or girlie magazines but to hide or read them outside so as not to poison Layla's mind. The father gave Mahmoud "a man-to-man gaze," and the son replied with a "knowing smile" (24), gestures that reinforce the household's gendered bias.

This architecture of affect produces a politics of numbness that is not merely emotional but also somatic. Through heavy limbs and quivering pale lips, Layla

somatizes the structural internalized weight of domesticity, which demands total docility and requires heightened surveillance. Within this enclosure, the home acts as a space of constant patriarchal monitoring where Layla's identity is decisively fixed by the household wardens, intending to prohibit her orientation and paralyze her movements before she can reach the public realm.

The onset of menstruation serves as the critical catalyst for this petrification, revealing a sharp disparity in the gendered mapping of the home. Her father celebrates Mahmud's sprouting beard by dragging him to the "light of the window" to see more clearly (21). It is a proud acknowledgment of masculine visibility and public legacy. But Layla's maturation is met with a traumatized and hysterical reaction by her father's "sobbing wail" that solidifies her domestic confinement and gender disparity: "She heard pleading invocations to God cut into the sobbing- Lord, give me strength! She's just a helpless girl! Protect us, Lord…Shield us from harm!" (23).

Her father's presence in the entrance hall- "ensconced in a chair facing the front door" and his "corpse-like gaze" and "the flashing of his dreary eyes" (2) transforms the home into a site of permanent surveillance, where he exerts absolute control over her mobility, enforcing a state of petrifaction that stops her body at the threshold. His frightening gaze is a metaphorical sliding bolt, stopping Layla's body the moment she orients herself toward the front door.

This spatial stagnation enforces what Ahmed describes as a stuckness, in which the father embodies the patriarchal demand for immobility. Applying Ahmed's concept of orientation, Layla is physically stopped by patriarchal rules that restrict her path to the domestic interior. Her father's gaze functions as a tool of spatial mastery, viewing Mahmud's growth as an extension of his own agency while treating Layla as a problem to be managed.

The father's rigid enforcement of her imprisonment also illustrates a deliberate distribution of stasis; he lets his son participate in demonstrations, while trapping his daughter in a stalled reality, condemning her to a life of petrified enclosure. This affective gender discrimination creates a state of suffocation and slow death, where Layla is awakened to a profound cultural hypocrisy: masculinity is equated with expansive freedom, while femininity is synonymous with a shrinking world and a domestic discipline.

This is further complicated by a societal schizophrenia embodied in the figure of Mahmud, who advocates for equality and liberty with only "lovely words on paper" (60). Despite his status as a fiery political activist fighting for national liberation, Mahmud maintains the same conservative, patriarchal views that confine Layla. This contradiction highlights the gendered double standard of the era, where nationalist men advocate for liberty in the public sphere while still enforcing strict domestic control. Mahmud reinforces the Foucauldian disciplinary grid that polices female honor (Foucault 1995:145). For Layla, this hypocrisy turns her family into her jailer, where the national promise of freedom remains a cruel illusion until she physically ruptures this domestic enclosure.

The mother's role in the novel entrenches the father's domination. Bedeir (2023:56) states that "her mothering becomes the epitome of patriarchal

mothering". She instills "fundamentals" (Usul) of the 1950s and gendered propriety in Layla through relentless monitoring of proper conduct, ensuring that the home remains an intensive site of amendment, in which Layla's natural impulses are not simply accepted but replaced by a disciplined femininity. Layla is treated as a commodity whose value is predicated on silence and obedience to uphold her worth in the marriage market. This architecture of affect produces a profound sense of self-estrangement. Layla's body becomes a site of dehumanization, as she despises herself, stating,

> A slave, nothing but a jariya…in the slave market! Dressing and adorning herself to raise her price... She would have to accept this situation or die...They taught a girl to lie - to wear a corset that would pull in her middle and lift her chest so her price would go up in the market and she could marry. Marry whom? Any old person; after all, "the only thing that can shame a man is his pocket" (41).

This is the hateful affective side, as Layla internalizes the hate and disdain that sticks to her body. This means that hated bodies start seeing themselves as hateful. Internalizing this hostility culminates in an affect-driven self-colonization, or as Ahmed (2001:358) puts it: "The hated body becomes hated, not just for the one who hates, but for the one who is hated."

Through a Foucauldian lens, the mother acts as a secondary agent of normalization, transforming every domestic movement -from sitting to speaking with guests-into a disciplinary script instructing Layla that any spontaneous affect-as a frank statement or a heartfelt laugh-is improper or inappropriate and "not befit the daughter of respectable folk…[and] out of the bounds of polite conduct" (24-25). Her mother's view is that if everyone said whatever was on their mind the world would have gone up in flames long ago" (36). This constant reprimanding produces a state of detachment that inevitably generates a profound disorientation. It creates a suffocating environment in which the daughter is treated as a crisis to be contained, and everything she does turns out to be wrong (23).

Through the lens of Berlant, framing Layla's body as a commodity for the marriage market represents a slow death of the self. The focus on external appearance serves as a disciplinary tool that molds Layla into a docile body, exemplifying the slow death of her agency: "When Layla asked her mother to bring her two undershirts as all her underclothes are falling apart, her mother's answer says, 'People don't see your underwear. What is important is a good appearance" (47). The exposure of the corset and the price in the market further dehumanizes Layla, reducing the female subject to a *jariya* (slave) within the legal architecture of social exchange. This commodification creates a state of suffocation, where Layla must either accept her role as a marketable object or face social death (41). Hamza et al. (2025:22) highlight this role, stating, "Women were presumed to be housewives even if they were given the chance to be educated. Marriage was viewed as their priority".

Hence, the home is displayed as an affective storage for repressed desires. The constant surveillance ensures that Layla's world shrinks as she grows up and expands. Consequently, the physical toll of patriarchal fear is reflected through her somatic response- the inability to speak, the heavy limbs and others but clearly stated when she pauses by her father's chair to say something:" she searched for words that would not come, and if she approaches to lay her hands gently on his shoulder, halfway there it hung motionless in mid-air and then dropped heavily to her side. Tears curtaining her eyes" (3).

Applying Foucault's concept of conduct-of-conduct, power in the household operates by limiting Layla's possible actions. Rather than direct brute force, the parents use moral and social norms to enforce her into domestic petrifaction. Her father's deathly stillness, pastoral governance, the mother's nagging, and behavioral regulation produce an environment of slow death, where the transition into womanhood is experienced not as growth, but as the moment the prison door slams shut. By limiting her movement and grooming her for the marriage market, Layla is taught to conduct herself as a passive object of the patriarchal gaze. This disciplinary enclosure mirrors the broader weight of colonial control, forcing Layla to internalize her own confinement and incarceration.

The father's rigid enforcement of Layla's imprisonment illustrates what Berlant defines as a cruel attachment. Though the family ostensibly provides love and safety, this good life is the primary mechanism of Layla's slow death. Through Berlant's framework of cruel optimism, Layla's home is unmasked as an impasse, a stagnant present where she feels physically paralyzed; thus, a site of stuckness that stalls her agency and potential for flourishing. Given this, it is clear that the patriarchal architecture - equating womanhood with a fixed slot - forces Layla into an affective impasse where her vitality is a liability, and her dreams are obstacles. As a result, Layla's early romantic attachment to her cousin Isam and the promise of a good life within the private sphere are revealed as the primary mechanisms of her entrapment. This attachment is cruel because, ironically, it fastens her to the same patriarchal structures- marriage and domesticity-that cause her emotional and physical petrifaction and suffocation.

Layla's body accordingly acts as a sensor for this patriarchal pressure, registering the domestic atmosphere and social codes as physical, literal heaviness. Her mechanical motions at home and hunched posture are somatic responses to the visceral weight of being watched. This stifling atmosphere produces a state of structural fatigue, where every step is monitored, leading to Berlant's impasse. Layla's repeated physical sensations of suffocation, smothering, stiffness, motionlessness, transfixing, choking voice, and bodily alienation further map the home as a space of petrification, which denies the female subject the right to expand. She is reduced to a docile body trapped within the fixed slots of middle-class propriety, forced into a defensive stiffness to survive the compression of the domestic sphere. However, the continual conformity to this rigid atmosphere is impossible since it demands that Layla remain a stationary object within the family, in a straight line of obedience.

4.2 Affective enclosure and minor counter-conduct

To this end, Layla's room becomes a site celebrated for Foucauldian counter-conduct. She constructs alternative modes of existence as a survival strategy through minor daily dissents: reading forbidden texts, listening to the radio, or opening the window wide. Abdel Hafeez (2023:351) illustrates that "Al-Zayyat…employed a wide range of everyday resistance methods situated in [Layla's] acts of negotiation, agreements and disagreements, even in [her] silence."

These acts of resistance form the foundation of her political agency long before she engages in the street. Her awakening dreams function as Berlant's fantasies of the good life, serving as internal rehearsals that attempt to break the impasse of her physical reality. In this private architecture, she exchanges her "suppressed ghost" personality for "airy lightness," using the bedroom as a site of cognitive mobility to prevent the total slow death of her spirit. She states that she wants "no silly business from outside to distract her from this marvelous private hidden world" of her bedroom (33). However, Layla's confinement within her bedroom is presented ironically, as her outlet dreams of romantic attachments unfold the reality of her subjugation within patriarchal structures.

The window additionally becomes a site of ambiguous delight, a liminal space where the private self meets the public world. It also acts as a threshold of Berlant's cruel optimism. It allows Layla to see the possibility of freedom, while the architecture of the house keeps her a passive, imprisoned observer, physically barred by familial and patriarchal walls: "Scurrying to the window, yanking it wide open she'd certain that in this state of exuberant joy she could fly" (33). It offers a view of the street, fueling Layla's hope for a different life outside home. Layla opens the window wide to smell a breath of fresh air from outside compared to the stifling air of home (71). In my opinion, the notable absence of the Cairene balcony forces a more dramatic spatial binary between domestic stasis and public liberation.

On a deeper level, her bedroom turns out to be a site of deep contradiction: it is both a sanctuary for her hidden world and a site of incarceration. Her dreams truly allow her to transcend the decisively fixed confines imposed by her father. But the physical toll remains evident in her glass-like fragility and the shaking that follows her muffled screams into her wardrobe:

> those indistinct longings…accumulating layer upon layer to press heavily on her chest…layers of mourning for something gone and something to come…so many that they threatened to smother her, and she would run to her wardrobe, bury her open mouth in a heap of clothes, and scream with all the strength she had inside her…she was shaking all over. She threw herself across the bed and started to sob (33).

I see that the small enclosure of the wardrobe symbolizes the compressed, restricted female self. It functions as affective storage for desires that find no place in this rigid domestic sphere. This context illustrates how "physical places within the house…function as active agents" and how "places and objects...serve as carriers of memory" (Galil, Mustafa and Alharbi 2026:375-381). In my opinion,

this confined interior space acts as a temporary bypass of Layla's petrifaction, where she preserves her revolutionary potential until she opens the door, allowing these private thoughts to integrate into a public, collective resistance.

Looking closer at the text, I find that the open door represents the visceral threshold between the heaviness of patriarchal surveillance and the potential for revolutionary agency. Crossing this boundary is not merely a physical exit but a radical affective rupture that disrupts the linear route of patriarchal roles. The open door consequently represents the site of radical productive disorientation, the symbolic rupture. Layla should step through it and refuse the cruel domestic safety of the home, which functions as the primary mechanism of her slow death. Doing so, she can then embrace the delight of the unpredictable, yet liberating, flow of national resistance.

Hence, Layla's unintentional act of joining the demonstration is a transition from private constraint to the public street, a pivotal moment where her personal and political awakenings collide, offering a short-term sense of liberation. The demonstration can function as a Foucauldian "heterotopia," a real space operating as a "counter-site" outside the vertical disciplinary grid of the home (Foucault 1986:24; Foucault 1995:145). In the street, Layla is no longer a governed object but part of a counter-society where her body attains a political lightness. The third-person narrator states, "she felt alive, at once strong and weightless, as if she were one of those birds circling above" (51). Her feelings express how the street is portrayed as the threshold of liberation, marking an opening of the door, a transition from the private impasse to the public street.

This movement from the petrified home to the mobilized street signifies a transition from internal trauma to externalized ecstasy, effectively reorienting her toward collective solidarity. Bedeir (2023:76) remarks that the merging between the private and the public spheres plays an integral role in the formation of Layla’s selfhood.

When Layla’s father spots her in the crowd, his twisted anger reflects the top of domestic surveillance: "A pair of eyes was drawing her, staring in mute distance…her father's face darker than usual, twisted in anger…Even from here she could see his teeth as he chewed furiously on his lower lip" (51). This sense of horror and fear is soon shifted to joy and delight as she feels protected and enveloped by the crowd. The horizontal solidarity of the masses nullified his power:

> Behind her the crowd pushed forward…pushing her further from her father and away from the image of her mother...Her father vanished from sight and she saw only the crowds of thousands, and herself melting into the whole…She began all of a sudden to shout again, in that voice that belonged to someone else… Everything around her…embracing her, protecting her…Even her father had not been able to frighten her then, amidst all those demonstrating people (51-60).

By melting into the whole, Layla breaks the mother’s claim that everyone has a fixed slot, effectively transforming a passive identity into active agency. Abdel

Hafeez (2023:354) elaborates, "among the demonstrators, Layla feels…safe. [This] helps her acquire a new voice [that] can be regarded as a synonym for presence, and immediate self-expression [referring] to Layla's new subjectivity, intentionality of a newly-discovered speaking subject."

However, Layla's inevitable return home re-establishes the architecture of petrification. The transition from the liberated street to a physical beating with slippers embodies her return to the domestic prison. This slow death state is articulated through her sensation of "squeezed lungs", "suppressed breathing", "stiffness", and "quivering lips", where the father and mother remain present even behind locked doors (54). This stresses how this affective enclosure is a powerful equivalent for Berlant impasse, as Layla recognizes that under the patriarchal gaze, her attempts to act as a real human being are marked as social errors: "All of them scold Layla for scandalizing and disgracing them all over the neighborhood…[Everything] she did with her whole heart…thought that was right, but lo and behold, every time it turned out to be wrong" (54). Her self-identification as a "doormat for shoes" (56) highlights the potency of the fundamentals in reducing females to a stationary, domestic utility. As a result, the home functions as a disciplinary space, in contrast to the street, a site of counter-conduct, where her movements reclaim her subjectivity.

To add insult to injury**,** Isam- the beam of light in prison- is revealed to be another iteration of moral hypocrisy and patriarchal structure he claims to oppose because of his illicit affair with the housemaid, refusal to participate in the national struggle, and obsessive nature, treating Layla as belonging to him. This disillusionment forces Layla to abandon the fantasy of a male savior, marking her entry into a second, more stagnant phase of life.

4.3 Numbness and conformity as affective survival strategies

In this stage, the home functions as the physical site of an affective impasse. To survive the invisible bars of patriarchal surveillance, Layla adopts her mother's passivity as a defense mechanism. She retreats into a state of somatic petrifaction, where her eyes harden, her vitality substituted by a ghostly presence. This numbness is a Foucauldian survival strategy, conduct-of-conduct, where the subject attempts to become invisible to authority by preemptively killing her own desires. Her life is stalled within the disciplinary enclosure, where even her tears become voiceless, reflecting the heaviness of living by a rulebook she did not write (63).

Nevertheless, Layla's numbness is recognized as a self-destructive attempt to endure a suffocating environment where Layla's identity is defined by the slow death of domestic enclosure. Her vitality is eroded by alignment with the straight lines of patriarchal obedience to maintain a fragile, frozen safety.

This defensive architecture, however, remains fundamentally unstable. The involuntary "trembling lips" and internal "convulsions as if in response to a stabbing internal pain" (58) function as somatic eruptions, where suppressed fear and buried agency leak through the mind's defenses. To bridge this void, Layla shifts her emotional loyalty to her brother Mahmud, now one of Al-Fedayeen, civilian volunteers, who physically risk their lives fighting the British in the zone around

the Suez Canal. She uses their correspondence to vicariously transcend her private suffering and remotely join the collective national struggle.

Layla remains in a state of somatic rigidity, intellectually awakened but physically stiff and brittle. This stiffness manifests as impasse, a defensive stasis where the fear of total psychological collapse prevents the body from following the mind toward the exit. This is evident in the suppression of her feelings toward Hussein, her brother's companion. He acts as a disruptive architect whose presence later pierces Layla's impasse, offering a reciprocal space to acknowledge her humanity.

At Cairo University, this impasse is mapped onto a binary opposition between Adila's rationality and Sana's sentimentality. Since Layla sticks to the shield within the traditional safe zone of the fundamentals, she initially adopts Adila's cold pragmatism as a form of spatial inclusion and socio-emotional stability; it is a self-imposed psychological prison mitigating the risks of emotional intimacy. She is self-sufficient and compliant, so that no one can hurt her or cause her pain (240). Despite this, Sana's authentic bond with Layla's brother reminds Layla that her isolation is a living death.

This state of repression intensifies when Layla has Adila ghostwrite her letter to Hussein in cold, pragmatic prose. By attempting to be like a stone, Layla seeks to replace her vulnerability with a rigid facade. This is a supreme act of affective repression, a preemptive effort to kill her own desires. Yet, the somatic act of crying while dictating the letter creates a crucial affective rupture. This implies that while the written architecture remains rational, the physical body rebels. In essence, these tears serve as a somatic leak, a failure of the rationalist mask to suppress her humanity, and a final piece of evidence of her authentic self-surviving inside the dead body.

Beyond this, a state of profound self-alienation is created when her father and Dr. Ramzi finalize the marriage agreement in Layla's absence, a legalistic manifestation of marginalization under the architects of tradition. Dr. Ramzi's intellectual paternalism further reduces Layla to nothing. He transforms her mind and body into raw material to be molded by the demands of his social standing, for what matters to him is only uprightness and obedience (332). Though Layla's external facade appears satisfied, her chronic body aches act as somatic leaks-physical evidence of the structural fatigue caused by psychological imprisonment, and proof of survival beneath the dead body of social conformity.

Under Ramzi's authoritarian gaze, Layla's body becomes a site of trauma, enacting a defensive paralysis to survive an environment that denies her autonomy. Her loss of voice signifies the total occupation of her intellectual choice, as she begins to parrot his rhetoric and replace her internal self with his linguistic structures (330). This transformation renders her hollow; she no longer inhabits her own thoughts but exists as an echo of the fundamentals she once resisted. Ramzi's motive confirms that the rational path Layla chose as an emotional shield was, in reality, a scheme of re-imprisonment. Her stagnation and apathy imply a total shutdown of her emotional connection. This death of the spirit leaves her as a

hollowed-out space, enclosed by the *Usul*, waiting for a force large enough to shatter the structures of her domestic and intellectual confinement.

4.4 Affective counter-conduct and the spatial rupture

Layla is intellectually aware of her imprisonment but somatically unable to step. She thereby starts to adopt dual psychological roles: to survive, she designs a fragile, obedient facade for patriarchal satisfaction, while maintaining a hidden space through secretive meetings with Sana as an affective escape, preserving her last connection to reality and freedom.

Layla, in addition, realizes the structural failure of her rationalism through her cousin, Gamila, who acts as a specular architecture, a mirror reflecting the emptiness of high-status social conformity. Seeing Gamila's splendid, miserable marriage grants Layla a predictive vision of her spiritual death with Ramzi. For Layla, this realization arouses a transformation of the wedding dress, this happy object, from a celebratory garment into a symbolic burial shroud. By unmasking Dr. Ramzi as merely an intellectualized extension of her father's control, Layla recognizes that the rational path she chose as a sanctuary was, in reality, a golden cage. This internal awareness compels her to abandon the stiffness of reason and fight for survival. Her recovery is supported by Hussein's letter, which serves as a structural intervention offering a new life based on equality rather than patriarchy.

The geopolitical event of the 1956 Suez Crisis forces the collapse of Layla's split self, shattering her static life. It is perceived as an external affective spatial rupture. The war outside provides the permission to awaken the suppressed chaos within, turning a global conflict into a private catalyst for demolishing the internal barriers. Layla's radical spatial rupture manifests in her rejection of Ramzi's authority and her securing a job away in Port Said. The removal of her engagement ring within the war-torn public space marks her transition from the stifling domestic interior to an expansive, liberating national landscape.

This radical act of resistance signifies the end of her slow death and the rejection of suppressing her true self to maintain the roles of good daughter and respectable fiancée in a futile search for patriarchal safety. Her rebellion implies a refusal to align with these happy objects and domestic bliss. This development denotes that Layla becomes a feminist killjoy: She states that prison life is also "painful for the wardens" (24) and that "no one was left to love her" (54). Declining the sticky promise of false happiness, Layla constitutes a radical Foucauldian counter-conduct, a struggle against the conduct of conduct, rejecting the prevailing patriarchal power that seeks to govern women under the guise of fundamentals and conformity. This refusal implies a structural shift from confinement to liberation, physically signaled by the collapse of her somatic prison. The sudden disappearance of her chronic exhaustion and body aches signifies the removal of the psychological burden that led her to past trauma.

In this context, Fernández Velasco (2025:15) highlights that our extended affective feeling toward a place is not "synchronic," born of the moment. Rather, it is a built-up process, "diachronically constituted over long time-scales". Hence, our conception of affect should be "onto affective assemblies of heterogeneous

elements that extend both spatially and temporally". This is exemplified by the stagnant domestic assembly, characterized by closed doors, repressed desires, and social rules; elements that have suppressed Layla for years. To break free, she has to connect to the contrasting affective assembly of the street, which extends spatially through the crowd and temporally through the national struggle. Therefore, the open door is a transition between these two different affective assemblies.

By moving from the stalled space of the home to the vivid one of the 1956 national resistance, Layla joins the intimate public, the proof that emotions can be contagious, flowing through communities to generate shared moments of collective feeling. This asserts that the vibes of a space can trigger reactions that influence how we perceive the social world and each other. This intimate connection is a viral force capable of destabilizing the disciplinary system of patriarchy, exposing the inherent fragility of the domestic architecture of control, and marking the final spatial rupture from patriarchal domination. Hamza et al. (2025:28) declare, "Through Layla's journey, al Zayyat challenged the traditional notions of womanhood and got over all patterns of injustices from which women suffered."

Given this, the open door again represents the literal threshold where the heaviness of surveillance meets the lightness of freedom. The threshold becomes the site where her pale lips regain color through revolutionary enthusiasm, replacing her somatic prison with the architecture of the "collective whole" (360). By integrating her individual "I" into the revolutionary "We," Layla passes through the open door.

4.5 The mother's failure to open the door

It is worth mentioning to give a glimpse of Layla's mother. In light of Berlant's theory, the mother is a victim of long-term trauma of patriarchal authority; the closed door through which her life is drained of vitality and agency. She herself is trapped in an impasse- an inescapable situation due to social and economic codes and inherited shame, within which it is impossible to flourish. Existing in a state of permanent stasis, she experiences slow death where her physical and emotional life are wearing out. The mother's body becomes a visceral map of what happens when the patriarchal impasse is never resolved.

The portrayal of her pale lips, gloomy smiles, soundless tears, movements, physical depletion, and inferior slot indicates her habitual submissiveness and petrification, which is not a choice but a survival silence strategy**.** The mother's submissive acceptance of her inferiority among her relatives, believing that "everyone has their own slot in this world" (34), denies the possibility of self-definition.

These spatial consequences have become embedded in her bodily sensations that are void of reactions, expressions, or protests. Her submissiveness is a "lateral agency" denoting sideways mobility and self-suspension. It is a phrase Berlant uses to describe how people under extreme pressure only try to get through the day: "an experience of self-abeyance, of floating sideways" (Berlant 2011:116).

She also represents the endpoint of Berlant's cruel optimism. She spent her life attached to the good-life fantasy of happy marriage and domesticity, though the result is a suffocating and repressive environment:

> Her mother's walk would become a hushed tiptoe…peering everywhere with anxious eyes to reassure herself that all was properly prepared. Naturally, her mother was vigilant not to commit any act that might draw censure…the father must also find something with which to rebuke her but she never responded, but her tightly pressed lips would grow white (18).

Because she has survived a patriarchal system, the mother entrenches Layla in the same mold of silence, as her only known way to keep her daughter safe and successful in the marriage market, repeating the same cruel cycle of numbness and vicarious living**.** For Layla, the mother serves as a constant, haunting reminder of the gloomy future that awaits her if she remains within the confines of patriarchal architecture and fails to open the door.

5. Conclusion and findings

By integrating selective concepts from Foucault, Berlant, and Ahmed, the paper provides a vital interdisciplinary bridge between spatial theory and affect studies. The architectural analysis of Layla's journey concludes that her liberation is at its core a spatial and affective breakthrough from the disciplined enclosure of patriarchy. At the start, Layla is a docile body governed by a panoptic domestic gaze, where all the patriarchal figures in her life, including her mother, act as pastors attempting to conduct her conduct toward traditional patriarchal conventions. Her life is built upon a form of cruel optimism, where Layla's attachment to happy objects, the promise of a good life through domestic conformity and stability, is the very thing that keeps her in a state of petrification and slow death. She exists within an impasse, characterized by a stagnant crisis ordinariness, where her daily efforts to survive only lead to the further attrition of her spirit (Foucault 1995; Ahmed 2004; Foucault 2007; Berlant 2011).

However, Layla's resistance and counter-conduct begin through small acts of going against expectations. By seeking wiggle room within the narrow limits of the home, she practices a corporeal willfulness, refusing to attune her emotions to the family's affective economy. As she stops trying to align with patriarchal expectations, she becomes a feminist killjoy, a sticky figure of disorientation who spoils the shared domestic atmosphere by exposing its restrictive walls. In doing the sweaty feminist homework of seeking her orientation and freedom, she finally hits the brick wall of patriarchal resistance to cause a spillage (Ahmed 2014b).

Lastly, Layla's transition through the open door is a rejection of the spatial politics of shame and confinement enforced by domestic patriarchy, the patriarchal hammer that seeks to straighten her out. When mobilized by the intimate public of the revolutionary Egyptian street, Layla renounces her cruel attachments, escaping the passivity, heaviness, and exitlessness of the home into a space of lightness and active vitality. She ceases to be a governed object and becomes an active subject,

proving that a vital, independent identity is found by the radical act of staying out of a harmful line (Berlant 2011; Ahmed 2014b).

The paper argues that liberation in *The Open Door* is not just a regime change, but a restructuring of the relationship between the female body and the occupied spaces. Just as Egypt struggles to move beyond the control of an overbearing mandate, Layla struggles to move beyond the controlling man and the overbearing family.

While the home's architecture is designed to enforce a straight line of patriarchal obedience, the phrase open door anticipates productive disorientation. From Berlant's perspective, the opening of the door marks the point where Layla's cruel optimism, her attachment to the good life of domestic safety, dissolves, replaced by the delight of joining national resistance and freedom demands. It is the site where the impasse of the private bedroom gives way to the intimate public of the Egyptian street.

The door is not only a physical and literal exit but also a figurative, visceral threshold and boundary between the petrification and domestic suffocation of the heaviness of patriarchal surveillance, and the tranquility and lightness of revolutionary agency and collective solidarity. To step through this door is not merely to leave home, but to perform a radical affective rupture, breaking a state of slow death to enter the vivid national resistance.

The door is also a spatial choice: either to remain a suppressed and oppressed subject in the disciplinary enclosure of the past, or to become a light and active subject of the future. As Layla stands at the threshold, her somatic experience- the shivering, the flushing, and the sudden release of heaviness -mirrors a nation on the verge of awakening. That is why *The Open Door* is regarded as a national allegory linking the liberation of the female self to the independence and liberation of the Egyptian state.

The findings demonstrate how specific domestic architectures actively produce and regulate affective states, showing that physical surroundings do more than merely contain characters. This spatial analysis moves beyond depicting the home as a mere shelter to reveal how domestic spaces can restrict personal autonomy and impede individual development; the rooms characters occupy and the thresholds they cross actively shape their identity and emotional states. By mapping the middle-class household as an affective economy, this spatial analysis also uncovers how patriarchal authority relies on emotional stasis and bodily regulation. The paper therefore proves that individual emotional resistance within private spheres is regarded as a vital prerequisite for broader political and national liberation. Layla must first disjoin the patriarchal architecture of her home before she can enter the open door of the postcolonial nation.

The study sheds light on why characters may survive oppression and accept it as normal within their spatial architecture, even if psychologically harmful, explaining that familiar comforts, customs, habits, and inherited conventions can keep them feeling stuck, unable to recognize the concept of change.

Literary narratives such as *The Open Door* function as critical models of female empowerment, illustrating how marginalized characters contest oppressive

power dynamics to assert their autonomy by breaking the silence, expressing their inner thoughts, recognizing their own value as human beings, moving beyond any overbearing control, and advocating for equality and justice. The analysis concludes that minor, everyday movements of domestic counter-conduct function as foundational acts of resistance that enable marginalized subjects to reclaim agency and attain modern subjectivity.

For further research, analyzing other post-colonial and patriarchal narratives is recommended to evaluate the extent to which limiting environments affect character development, the ways in which emotional and spatial impasse impedes individuals, and how marginalized subjects find specific ways to overcome those restrictions and open the door for release.

Nayera Mohammed Hassan (PhD) – Corresponding Author
Minia University, Egypt
Jouf University, Saudi Arabia
ORCID Number: 0009-0009-3371-0803
Email: nayerahassan@yahoo.com

References

Abdel Hafeez, Ghada. (2023). 'Counter-conduct and persistence in selected works by Egyptian women writers'. *Jordan Journal of Modern Languages and Literatures*, 15(1): 347–363. https://doi.org/10.47012/jjmll.15.1.18

Ahmed, Sara. (2001). 'The organisation of hate'. *Law and Critique*, 12(3): 345–365. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1013728103073

Ahmed, Sara. (2004). 'Affective economies'. *Social Text*, 22(2 [79]): 117–139. https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-22-2_79-117

Ahmed, Sara. (2010). *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Ahmed, Sara. (2014a). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Ahmed, Sara. (2014b). 'Wiggle room'. *Feministkilljoys: killing joy as a world-making project*. https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/09/28/wiggle-room/ (Retrieved on 14 November, 2026).

Ahmed, Sara. (2025). 'Patriarchal hammers'. *Feministkilljoys*. https://feministkilljoys.substack.com/p/patriarchal-hammers (Retrieved on 14 November, 2026).

Al-Zayyat, Latifa. (2000). *The Open Door*. Translated by Marilyn Booth. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press. (Original work published 1960).

Al-Zayyat, Latifa. (2015). *Al-Bab Al-Maftuh* [The Open Door]. 2nd ed. Cairo: Al-Karma Books. (Original work published 1960). https://www.bookleaks.com/files/ketab/ketab3/257.pdf

Bedeir, Rania. (2023). Daughterly narratives in search of voice: Fadwa Tuqan, Latifa al-Zayyat, and Samar Attar. Unpublished MA Thesis, The American University in Cairo, Cairo, Egypt. https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds/2092

Ben Amara, Ahmed. (2024). 'The politics of space in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* and Jamal Mahjoub's *A Line in the River: Khartoum, City of Memory*'. *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies (IJAES)*, 24(1): 267–284. https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes.v24i1.551

Berlant, Lauren. (2007). 'Slow death (sovereignty, obesity, lateral agency)'. *Critical Inquiry*, 33(4): 754–780. https://doi.org/10.1086/521568

Berlant, Lauren. (2008). 'Thinking about feeling historical'. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 1(1): 4–9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2008.08.006

Berlant, Lauren. (2011). *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Buijsse, Marie. (2010). A struggle for independence: A young woman's coming of age as national allegory in Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt's al-Bāb al-maftūḥ. Unpublished MA Thesis, Leiden University, Leiden, Netherlands.

Dobbin, Natalie. (2016, November 23). 'What does it mean to be a feminist killjoy?'. *CBC News*. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/feminist-killjoy-book-erin-wunker-1.3864727

Fernández Velasco, Pablo. (2025). 'Atmospheres and extended feelings'. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-025-10097-0

Foucault, Michel. (1982). 'The subject and power'. *Critical Inquiry*, 8(4):777-795 https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343197?origin=JSTOR-pdf http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343197.

Foucault, Michel. (1986). 'Of other spaces'. Translated by Jay Miskowiec. *Diacritics*, 16(1): 22–27. https://doi.org/10.2307/464648 https://www.jstor.org/stable/464648?origin=crossref

Foucault, Michel. (1995). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books. (Original work published 1975).

Foucault, Michel. (2007). *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*. Edited by Michel Senellart. Translated by Graham Burchell. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Galil, Sameh A., Wael Mustafa and Fawzia Alharbi. (2026). 'Memory and diasporic spaces: The imaginaire in Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986)'. *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies*, 26(1): 375–392. https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes988

Ganaie, Mudasir Bashir and Kusumika Sarkar. (2024). 'Negotiating power and survival in *The Open Door*'. *International Journal of Novel Research and Development*, 9(11): 415–423.

Gindorf, Maximilian. (2025). 'Foucault's conduct: A link between government, power, and philosophy'. *Intertexts*, 29(1): 1–15. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/978370

Hamza, Rna Essam, Nahla Saad Abdel Fattah Imam, Rania Reda Nasr and Shaden Adel Nasser. (2025). 'Reclaiming the self: Gender, performance, and resistance in Latifa al Zayyat's *The Open Door*'. *Miṣriqiyā*, 5(2): 13–31. https://doi.org/10.21608/MISJ.2025.403656.1071

Mukerjee, Amit. (2015). '*The Open Door* by Latifa Al-Zayyat and Marilyn Booth (trans.)'. *Amit Mukerjee's Book Excerptise*. https://www.cse.iitk.ac.in/users/amit/books/al-zayyat-2002-open-door-albab.html (Retrieved on 14 November, 2026).

Nabil, Rowa. (2023). 'Prison memories: Reconstructing subjectivity in Latifa al-Zayyat's *Personal Papers*'. *Cairo Studies in English*, 2023(1): 126–142. https://doi.org/10.21608/cse.2023.204235.1137

Salman, Dina and Bayan AlAmmouri. (2023). 'Concretized realism in Pamuk's *The Museum of Innocence*'. *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies*, 23(2): 125–138. https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes.v23i2.456

Schaefer, Hanna Antonia. (2020). Theorizing impasse: Affect, agency, politics. Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University College London, London, UK. https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10122144/