

# THE DILEMMA AND RESISTANCE OF SALMA IN FADIA FAQIR'A NOVEL *MY NAME IS SALMA*

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## ABSTRACT

*This study aims to describe the dilemma and resistance of Salma, the major character in Fadia Faqir's novel My Name is Salma. Faqir sheds light on all the problems and agonies that Salma encounters in her life. She explains how Salma lives in a hypocrite world where people show clemency and humanity but the reality reveals the opposite. Salma is the victim of prudery and racism of east and west worlds. She flees from her family and country to save herself from the crime of Honour killings. Being alien woman with a new identity does not give her comfort and peace. She feels restricted between inescapable past and a tormented present. She fights against different kinds of oppression and deviltry, succeeding to prove her strength and resolution to build up her new life in a new culture.*

Postcolonial feminist theory analyses the representations of women in once colonised countries and in Western locations. It explains how women suffer from "double colonization" as simultaneously face the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy. It focuses on the representation of women in anti-colonial and postcolonial discourses with particular reference to the work of women writers. Postcolonial women writers deal with the burdens of female, their dual oppression, and challenges. They present the issues of traditions and revise western literature by the themes they treat. They analyse women's life in colonized countries and in western world, attacking the idea of universal women or the 'third world women'. Postcolonial women writers try to recognize certain differences among women in other countries, abandoning their ethnocentrism and the reproduction of orientalist categories of thought. (Henry Schwarz & Sangeeta Ray, 2005, p.54). They depict women in both the developing and developed world, explaining how 'third world' women are victims of ignorance, conventions, religions, male control, and restrictive cultures. "Mohanty" states that "third world women, like western women, are produced as subjects in historically and culturally specific ways by societies in which they live and act as agents" (Feminism and Post-colonialism). Women in different societies are neglected and put in position of 'other'. They experience oppression and oblige to express themselves in the language of oppressive.

Among the significant postcolonial women Arab writers is the publications of Anglo-Arab writer in the west, the Jordanian novelist Fadia Faqir (1956- ) who depicts the Eastern culture. Her works motivate the reader to learn about Arab culture. "Faqir" has the opportunity to notice the Western hypocrisy and racial violence against Arab people especially against women. As postcolonial women writers "Faqir" tries to give a voice for women's rights. Her living in-between Eastern and Western culture helps her to recognize the misery of Arab women and their real lives. She states that one "cannot fight the authoritarian sultans and mullahs in [one's] country of origin without fighting reductionism, colonialism

and misrepresentation in the Western media" (**Faqir&Eber, 1998, p.53–54**). Faqirexplains her feelings towards Western misrepresentations of Arabs when she says "When you fail to recognize the truth of your experience in the Western perception and representation of it, when you realize that you are—after all years of living in exile—still dark, incomprehensible, and completely surrounded by high white walls [...] you become so anguished over seeing yourself mutilated every day on [TV] screen" (**Faqir&Eber, p.59**).

"Faqir" writes in English to reflect the arbitrariness and subjugation of Arab women in a certain patriarchal society, depicting the issue of 'Third World ' women's lives, dilemma, migration, and cultural in-betweenness. She gives a voice to the badly treatments of women in humiliated and persecuted societies trying to heal the issue of marginalization of women in all societies especially in Arab society. "Faqir" highlights the issue of Honourcrimes which consider as a major issue in tribal and traditional society that contribute the misery and tragedy of women. "Lama Abu-Odeh" defines a crime of "Honour" as the "killing of a woman by her father or brother for engaging in, or being suspected of engaging in, sexual practices before or outside marriage" (**Lama Abu-Odeh, 1997, p. 287**). The social status of the Arab country follows strictly the social traditions more than religion and political orders. It is evident the misunderstanding of the real Islam is not only limited to Orientalist discourse, but also to Muslim societies which grant full power, control, and privilege over women for men."Faqir" comments on this issue:

"Honour crimes happen in many countries and to associate them with the

Arab world is unfair...if one looked for honour crimes incidents, they can be found in Sweden, The United Kingdom, Portugal, and many other countries.

So the problem cannot be dismissed as an Arab Muslim problem. It is important to be self-critical . There will be no reform without that. I am not orientalist or Islam basher. I write about the Arab world because I love it and because have a deep desire to change it for the better". (**FadiaFaqir, 2010, p.9**)

Honour issue which called "Alsharf" considers the traditional taboo and sacred none can across it, especially women. If anyone whether male or female tries to cross it, she/he must be killed.

"Faqir" presents in her novel My Name is Salma (2007) which carries another name Acry of Dove a double oppression of East and west worlds on her major character Salma. She explores the issues of women as dominated by the patriarchal society and as subpart in England society. She illustrates the dilemma of Salma a fugitive woman who becomes pregnant out of wedlock. As a protective custody, she spends more than seven years in prison where she gives birth to illegitimate girl who is taken away from her to an orphanage."Faqir" shows Salma's hopelessness and how even religion could not save her in her village from the repressive culture. She introduces the misery of Salma in prison explaining how she stops talking for a long time unable to defend on herself in tribal society. This silence elaborated by "Patricia Klindienst" by saying" behind the women's silence is incomplete plot of male dominance, which fails no matter how extreme it becomes. Dominance can only contain, but never successfullydestroy, the women's voice" (**Layla Al Maleh, 2009, p. 292**). Salma's silence in prison for long time and stops talkingcould be interpreted as a kind of resistance. Her silence contributes in building her new personality as she indicates:

"If I kept stitching and fasting, if I kept silent, I would slip slowly out of my body

Like a snake shedding her old skin. I might stop being Salma and become someone

Else, who never had a bite of the forbidden apple. Time might pass quickly so I would

slide gently from prison to grave. No pain, resistance or even boredom". (**Faqir, p.59**).

By changing her skin, Salma decides to start a new life. Sheflees her country to avoid her destiny of being murder by her brother who intends to kill her to protest for his family's honour. Salma gives a new name (Sally Asher) by the church to help her to immigrate to England. She faces a set of problems of being aliened from other people in a new place, struggling with her hybrid identityand trying to compromise with. Her exile and adopting England identity takes her away from Arab society."It is as if [she] they are caught between two zones: a modern liberating zone, and a traditional subjugating zone"(**DallelSarnou, 2016, Vol.5, No.3, p.515**)

She darts between homeland and England, between her new identity and purported identity. She feels "released and imprisoned at the same time" (Geoff Pound, 2007). Being alien, Muslim, and Bedouin in a new society forces Salma to feel shattered and wandered. She is unable to live happily and comfortably in both Arab world and Western world. She lives in a sense of disunity of place and even community especially with her different name which affect on her psyche. She says "Many names I. Salma and Sal and Sally" (Faqir, p.103). In addition her physical appearance with dark skin provides her a feeling of 'otherness' and exclusion. She comprehends England's view towards Arabs and how they are so sensitive to Arabs. Her skin prisons her especially when she tries to contact with people in England. She describes her image reflected in broken mirror, explaining a symbolic representation of broken wholeness, she says "A thin olive-skinned fractured reflection, with big brown eyes, a crooked nose and long dark thick frizzy hair, looked back at me in the broken mirror. If I did not know me I would have said that I was Salma, whole and healthy" (Faqir, p.12). She confronts a double marginality from her native society and England racism. She tries to develop a dialogue with other people who contact with them such as friends, and neighbors, which helps to improve her connection and trust with them. Salma tries acclimating with a solid sense of identity within Western culture although she feels desperate from people around her. She says:

"No, it was not easy living here in England as an 'alien', which was how the immigrations officer had described me. I once wrote on the walls of public toilet: 'A dark alien has passed through the skies of Exeter'. Every morning I was reminded of my alienness. Every morning, while mist was still enveloping us, Jack, the postman, would wave to me and call, 'Hello , girl!' I would get upset. I wanted to be 'chuck' like Bev next door. Despite correcting him several times, 'Salma, please' he would forget the next day and call me 'girl' again. But Jack never had anything to remind him because I never received any letters with my Arab name, Salina Ibrahim El-Muses, printed on them. 'Salma with tender hands and feet. Salina as fragrant as white Jasmine flowers and as a pure as honey in glass jars.' But sometimes I wanted Jack to shout abuse at me the way the skinheads did at the White Hare.' Hey, alien! You, freak! Off! Go home!' I did not deserve to be here. I did not deserve to be alive. I let her down". (Faqir, p.37).

However, Salma understands that her physical appearance and actions are rejected by Western culture. As an Arab immigrant she experiences the sense of entrapment especially when they ask her about her nationality. She hides the reality of her country which reminds her of sin and shameful guilt:

"Where do you come from?"

I foresaw with dread the next few minutes. How many times had I been.

Asked this question since I came to Britain? After years of working in his shop, Max, my boss, still asked, 'Where did you say? Shaaam? Hiiiiimaa?'

The list, as usual, included every country on earth except my own.

'Nicaragua? France? Portugal? Greece? Surely Russia?'

No. There is a big chunk right in the middle.'

'Turkey?'

'No, the Levant.'"(**Faqir, p.87**)...

"It was like a curse upon my head; it was my fate: my accent and the colour of my skin . I could hear it sung everywhere: in the cathedral, 'WHERE DO YOU COME FROM?'; in the farmers' market, 'Do you know where this vegetable comes from?' Sometimes even cows on the hills would line up, kick their legs in unison and sing, 'Where do you come from, you? Go home!'"(**Faqir, p.245**).

Salma should conciliate with the differences inside her psyche in order to adjust with the outside world. She eliminates the elements that make her reject the new world to accept her new experience as Arab refugees and living in England community." Now Salina the dark black iris of Hima must try to turn into Sally, an English rose, white, confident, with elegant English accent, and pony" (**Faqir,p.7**). At the beginning of her life in England, Salma lives without shelter and food attempting to reconstruct her shattered life. Alas her living in England and working in a bar as a bartender collecting used glasses from tables in the evening imposed things on her should obey it without adjournment. She obliges to take off her veil to have a job as her friend Parvin informs her "you will never get a job with that on"(**Faqir, p. 213**). This decision forces Salma to feel a strong sense of bitterness because she considers her veil as a connection with her origin and family. She realises that she has alienated from her family:

"As my head was covered with raw sores and I had taken off the bandages. I felt as dirty as a whore, with no name or family, a sinner who would never see paradise and drink from its rivers of milk and honey. When a man walked by and looked at my hair my scalp twitched. I sat down on the pavement held my head and cried and cried for hours". ( **Faqir,p.108**)

It is observed that Salma accepts to get rid of her veil to avoid the English aggressive insights towards the veiled woman and to get a job. Western world considers veil as a symbol of Muslim male oppression, they treat women as a source of abusing and harassment if they step into a Western space. Salma tries to hide her identity to survive in a new community. It is clear that Salma keeps wearing her veil in her home most of the time to feel warm and safe. She remembers "her mother's letter together with the look of her daughter's hair inside a leather pocket and turned them into an amulet as a necklace around her neck"(**Faqir, p. 59**).

Salma lives in a sense of loss and displacement because she feels that her being is unworthy in her homeland for having a shameful history and in England her social being has been cut into pieces."Alghamidi" states on Salma's status:

"Within Salma's story, racial identity and gender identity strongly affect one another, and the subject is affected by both. Salma's identity at this point seems to have too many pieces to it. In return, the sense of having too many un wanted pieces of elements of her being is likewise linked to the sin in

her past. Even in her home of origin, Salma does not and could not fit. Her fragmentation and her shame are strongly connected". (AlaaAlghamdi, 2011, p.189).

Salma adopts Western cultural style in eating and dressing to become one of Western community. She imitates Western women in dress trying to be one of them she asks herself "how can become a Sandy, a beautiful white doll? I am only a Shandy, a black doll, a black tart, which was heavily made up and quick with her strops and un suspenders"(Faqir, p. 150) . She spends hours beautifying herself trying to attract men. Faqir depicts Salma in this situation trying to explain such innocent woman in Western world working in a bar may sell her body:

" I wanted to show that Arab women are oppressed in a certain way, but

Western women are too... Parvin says to Salma:--Groom yourself!

Beautifying yourself! Sell yourself! You are in the west now. So that

is the idea behind her trying to follow in the steps of a Western women,

to hold a mirror up to contemporary British society. Both environments

are oppressive, but in different ways. In each case, there are penalties

for not conforming. Salma also dresses skimpily and puts herself in

dangerous situations because she has no self-esteem or respect. She

wants to be punished , killed even".(FadiaFaqir, 2011, Vol 6, No 2, p.16)

In fact her dress in working in the bar has an effect on her personality, she imagines herself as a visible person. Her faith in Islam is strong especially when she travels to England on board the ship Hellena, Salma rejects the offer to drink alcohol and to eat pork saying: "It forbidden in Islam. You lose control and make all kinds of sins" ( Faqir, p.188). But Miss informs her that she does not commit any sins, Salma insists: "No, but I different. I am Muslim. I go crazy. Allah says so"(Faqir, p.188). Salma realizes her transmutation of setting, trying to find a home in England. Salma receives a sympathy and attention by her friends after her accident of Liz's whip which heals her physically and psychologically. She dreams of meeting a "sensitive, generous, rich white Englishman"(Faqir, p. 40), due to the inferiority of her first lover Himdan . She tries to forget her shameful past when she is exploited and rejected by Himdan who uses to call her "my slave girl" and " my whore" (Faqir,p. 27). Himdan refuses to marry her when he knows her pregnancy and considering her as "a slut, cheap, damaged goods"(Faqir,p. 289). As a result Salma wishes to live in England throwing a side her black memories of indiscretions.

Salma tries to reconcile the disparate pieces of her being, surviving all the difficulties she goes through but there is a destructive fact that she could not forget her child who forced to leave behind. Salma's Imagination gives her a power to endure the pain of reality. She imagines her daughter who is taken from her in great detail. She tries to live her life with peace and rejecting the real world and creates a temporary solace to escape the ugly facts. In her fantasy she gives a name to her daughter Layla imagining her face in her mind, "Layla was faceless, but three years ago I decided to give her a face. I dressed her up, combed her hair" (Faqir,P.105). In reality Layla grows and becomes older with the passage of the years, "Layla would be crying afraid to go to school for the first time [...].Layla, a teenage girl, would be telling me about a boy, like Hamdan: I would rub her back then kiss her" (Faqir,P.103). Her ability to form a hybrid identity and the instinct of motherhood helper to attend two jobs increasing her income to peruse her education which helps in forming her self-esteem.

Salma intends to survive with learning English language. She decides to complete her education looking at her future with different sight and discipline and organize her life in the new culture as "The doctor said, you have to cut your ties with the past; you are here now so try to get with it" (Faqir, p.7). Salma considers books as a facility to get her away from her dilemma trying to be independent in her new culture. She struggles to "understand all the words, see why the human child suffers, find a cure for weeping" (Faqir, p.501). She puts in a position forces her to compare her life as woman in Bedouin society and her new life with what women have supposed to be. She begins to understand that she should have a private room and enough money to be able to work. She says "mother had nothing of her own, her brother took her share of the farm; when her husband died Shahla was thrown out of her house so she came to live with us; and all I had was a daughter of my own, who cried and cried for me". (Faqir, p.501) Salma realizes that her mother and herself are victims of the greedy and cruel men in the society. Faqir's feminism is very important she tries to grant Salma total liberation from the yoke of male oppression in patriarchal society. Faqir's feminism is depicted clearly when Salma studies literature she focuses on studying Shakespeare's sister, the fictional character invented by feminist critics. Salma completes her higher education and marries her professor at the university and has a little boy. Her marriage to British John and having acquired British citizenship does not change the reality of Salma as a Muslim Bedouin Arab. Her friend Parvin informs her honestly England will not protect you when you pass into terrible situation in origin place. She tells her: "Look at the colour of your skin. You are a second-class citizen. They will not protect you" (Faqir, p.311). In fact her life in England is haunted by the shadow of her daughter. Salma spends all her life imagining the moment of facing her daughter. She decides to return back to her origin place to meet her. Unfortunately, she discovers that her brother killed her daughter many years ago. The novel ends with the cruelty killing of Salma by her brother Mahmoud who shoots her after 20 years. Faqir depicts the dilemma of Salma and how she lost her daughter, and life for a single mistake hoping to reform such social traditions.

## CONCLUSION

We concluded from this study that Fadi Faqir sends a message of mending to the social traditions in Arab society and discrimination in Western society; it is a cry for all women who need a help and assistance. Faqir explains how Arab woman isolated and oppressed in her society and even in English society. She tries to rebuild and reform the attitudes of conservative people who blindly follow the social traditions more than religion and political orders. She depicts the agonies and sufferings that Salma faces in her life for committing a sin in a stage of recklessness. Faqir explains how a difficult experience for a pure Bedouin uneducated women to live in a place like England with a new culture. Salma works hard to rebuild her being and life forgetting her shameful sin in the past. Salma proves her resolution and strength to stand and healing her wounds. She manages to reconcile the disparate pieces of her being again surviving all the difficulties, proving that physical and cultural alienation leads to the formation of new identity.

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