

# Fadia Faqir's My Name is Salma: Witness to Patriarchy Persecution

*by* Intisar Rashid Khaleel

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## Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma*: Witness to Patriarchy Persecution

Intisar Rashid Khaleel

Umm Al-Qura University

College of Education for Women

Department of English Language

Email : [Intisarrashid@tu.edu.iq](mailto:Intisarrashid@tu.edu.iq)

**Abstract** *My Name is Salma* (2007) is a feminist trauma narrative that emphasizes Fadia Faqir's desire to represent the experiences of voiceless women. Faqir's writings mostly address the voices of those who have lost a loved one, usually describing and inscribing their words against a background of shock and forgetfulness. *My Name is Salma*, focuses on modern challenges, particularly those arising from the fallout of colonialism, postcolonialism, and fundamentalism. She may be the most qualified to articulate the components of voices, spaces, and traces. The focus on the voices of traumatized women may retrace the steps that those who have experienced loss have made in their quest for liberty, truth, and self-identification. For the voiceless Arab women, Faqir converts their silences into written testimonies highlighted in the neatly partitioned realm (Jordan, in particular). The lack of a unified sense of self represents fragmentation in this context

**Keywords:** Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma*, Witness to Patriarchy Persecution, Arab women

### 1. INTRODUCTION

*My Name Is Salma* (2007) which is entitled also *The Cry of the Dove* has been published in 16 countries and has been translated into 13 languages. In an interview between Bower and Fadia Faqir in 2012, Bower asked her about this novel, which was published as *The Cry of the Dove* in the United States. Faqir admits that she first rejected the name change and that she has no influence on the book's appearance because it differs greatly across nations. She criticizes the book industry harshly for its propensity to purchase and translate works that reinforce negative perceptions regarding the Arab world.

Numerous accounts of stories describe the horrors of honor crimes in Arab communities, which are frequently harmed by girls who cause social stigma in their households. Honor crimes generally involve the murder of individuals and are committed by tribes and families despite legal restrictions to uphold honor in society or to disprove the misconceptions that accompany the skepticism and perspectives about dishonored families. Honor is highly valued and firmly ingrained in Arab and Muslim civilizations in general. Because of how essential this value is, countless individuals view acts undertaken in the protection of honor as their family's single chance to avoid societal disgrace. As stated by Erving Goffman (1963:3) "stigma is an attribute that extensively discredits an individual, reducing him or her from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one."

Faqir produced several works that examine the painful stories regarding women and the consequences of subjection in Arab society, in addition to their struggles to reestablish their own lives

after persecution. Salma's subjective experiences are similar to the author's life experience in some aspects. For instance, Faqir in an interview with Moore talked about describing her terrible event when her child <sup>14</sup> was taken away since her father forcibly removed her from a failing marriage. As stated by Faqir, "I felt such a failure; I was riddled with guilt. I started writing because it was the only way out of this ... verging on the edge of madness". (Moore, 2011:2).

*My Name is Salma* shows how one must constantly turn to the violent past to connect to the confusing present and future in terms of one's motherland and place of origin and investigates <sup>12</sup> the relationship between migration and psychological distress and the role memory plays after violent events. She discusses how traumatized voice and traumatized memory, imagination, stream of consciousness, and unconsciousness can combine to revive the past and give it new life. It shows also how this novel defines home as a locus of identity for Arab women by using it as a quest object. It covers a few subjects about the representation of home and country, the hunt for recently established locations and perspectives of exile, traumatic experiences, patriarchy, and matriarchy. The primary issue then becomes, how would this diaspora writer identify the voices of the fragmented subjects, re-present their in-between spaces, and re-identify their home(s) and it portrays a female bearing witness who provides written testimony. This female bearing witness is the author herself represented by Salma.

## 2. SALMA: WITNESS TO PATRIARCHY VIOLENCE

The protagonist of the novel, a shepherdess young girl named Salma, loves a young male and unknowingly bears his child and this act causes dishonor to her family name. As a result, in her village called Hima in Jordan where she resides, this act is punished by death. Following her admission of the pregnancy for her lover, he deserts her, and her younger brother decides to murder her to restore the reputation of his family. Salma's mother attempts to abort her daughter's pregnancy trying to protect her life, but she fails. Salma tells her kind female teacher about her situation, and she immediately helps her and goes to the police, who put her into prison to protect her and say, "The best thing to do is to hand you over to the police and pray they will keep you in protective custody forever". (Faqir, 2007: 41). Salma gives birth to her daughter who is named Layla, but before she has a chance to spend time with or nurse her, the child is quickly taken from the mother. Salma is later transported to the Ailiyya monastery in Lebanon, and she receives assistance and protection from several nuns. Sister Asher successfully transports Salma to England, where she begins her new journey with another moniker and inside a new place and she changes her name also to Sally Asher.

*My name is Salma* explores the traditional prohibited, the family's honor, which each person must uphold. Nobody deviates from this sacred tradition, especially ladies. Someone needs to be

killed to cross it. It's common to use the word honor to refer to <sup>2</sup>Women's behavior, particularly when it regards <sup>2</sup>their bodies. For example, if a woman gets pregnant outside of marriage or commits adultery, she will be executed. Salma, "which means healthy, pure, and clean... the woman with soft hands and feet", is the name of the main character in Faqir's text (Faqir 12-13). In Arab society, the lady is deemed guilty and requires purification. The cultural norm is powerless over the allure and temptation of man. The man has the option to flee and seek safety among other tribes. Liana Badr (2008) in her *The Eye of the Mirror* says:

Women of Arab descent are often considered to be a minority in the majority of Arab nations. They have a sense of being forgotten, misunderstood, and diminished. There is a special kind of internal orientalism that is directed at them since they are considered to be second-rate locals. Native males tend to put women in a subordinate position, misrepresent them, and, in the majority of instances, fail to recognize their existence(ix)

Because of this, a woman is not permitted to leave her tribe if she has committed adultery or if she has been pregnant outside of her marriage. She needs to be put to death by the culture <sup>2</sup>to restore the honor of the family. The male members of the family are required to carry out this task while remaining concealed from the police. Tar has been splattered on our name by you. According to Faqir 57, <sup>2</sup>your brother will shoot you while you are between the eyes. There is no respectable authority that <sup>2</sup>can stop them. It is expected of a woman that she will be a virgin on the night of her wedding, and that she will continue to be sexually loyal to her husband after the wedding (Eck 9). A woman who falls pregnant before being married is not subject to any kind of punishment from her state or religion, according to the law. According to the officer, <sup>2</sup>Salma, you are now in protective custody, which indicates that you are not being held here because of anything you have done but rather for the sake of your safety. I guarantee that releasing you will not violate any laws. Therefore, <sup>9</sup>from the point of view of the state, you are innocent. It is Faqir 52. According to El Saadawi (2002:76), the individual in question was a straightforward individual who had insisted on maintaining his honor. He said that he could kill her with a pistol if he saw her with another guy, and a court would still declare him to be innocent. Despite this, the state does not have any legislation that violates this limitation that has been in place for a very long time. It is then that social goals and religious aspirations get confused with one another, according to Lila Abu-Lughod (2016:144). These sexist ideas are influenced by people's Bedouin ancestry, which offers a source of inspiration. According to <sup>2</sup>Abu-Lughod, the root of the power and persistence of this attitude rests not in Islamic philosophy, but in the tribal social-structural paradigm, based on the primacy of connections of consanguinity and arranged in terms of patrilineal lineage (145). Mahmoud, Salma's brother, exhibits an aggressive demeanor that reflects this. Mahmoud's responsibility as a male close relative is to murder Salma for her adultery. It is his

responsibility. He must maintain a proud demeanor. Dishonor can only be erased with blood, says *Ll aar Ma Yimhiyeh Ila Il Dam* (Faqir 327). As a result, <sup>2</sup> in the Arab world, a woman who becomes unfaithful or becomes pregnant against her will is executed by a male relative.

Rodriguez & Irons-Georges (2001:341) state that “guilt is a cognitive and emotional response often associated with the grief experience in which a person feels a sense of remorse, responsibility, and/or shame regarding the loss.” Salma is burdened with pain and regret as a result of losing her virginity alongside the ensuing societal scandal. Salma, a teenager, endures serious traumatic symptoms as a result of her lover taking advantage of her. She admits “They stripped me of everything: my dignity, my heart, my flesh, and blood” (Faqir 95). “She can’t seem to get over Hamdan betraying her honor and leaving her behind in jail, losing her infant daughter Layla, her flesh and blood. She always wonders Was it possible to walk out of my skin, my past, my name... to open a new page...?” (Faqir 42).

Salma suffers trauma when Hamdan abuses her emotions to him to meet his selfish desires. He departs her once he learns she is pregnant. Salma's suffering is made worse when Hamdan responds to her pregnancy saying: “You are responsible. You have seduced me” (Faqir 171). Hamdan's irresponsibility <sup>4</sup> leads us to believe that this is a usual occurrence in the village; men are not blamed, while women are. <sup>4</sup> As the events unfold, Salma's brother and father never look for Hamdan; they only condemn Salma. Indeed, Hamdan entices Salma to love him with romantic words. Faqir argues that young girls shouldn't be held accountable, because men may have seduced them while caring for their animals in the highlands or filling water containers at springs.

Due to patriarchal control and local customs, Arab women have suffered trauma in their homes, where they have historically been denied the right to speak. However, Cathy Caruth contends that history (past) is made up of occasions and occurrences that link people to one another's traumatic experiences showing that human activity or inactivity is the core of the traumatic response. However, it is debatable whether this is a convincing hypothesis regarding how traumatic identities may develop. According to Caruth, trauma represents an unpleasant force that pushes people to reconsider their experiences by its nature (Caruth, 1995: 4). Her viewpoint is highly useful in literary analysis since books frequently serve as a platform for authors to discuss the past and reconcile it with the contemporary life of the traumatic victims.

Traumatic experiences are difficult to integrate into memory due to their overpowering character, which hinders recall. Traumatized individuals struggle to process events in their entirety, resulting in fragmented memories and heightened sensations. Luckhurst (2008:3) underlines the inaccessibility of painful memories and their change during rebirth. He describes this process in the following way: “Traumatic memories are repressed as they are formed, leaving them unavailable to

conscious recall; subsequently, they recur in various displaced ways, such as hallucinations, flashbacks, or nightmares.” In the following quotation, Faqir tries to rearrange Salma's thoughts and memories to be clear for the reader, since with the painful psych of Salma, the mission is not easy for the reader:

“Plucked out one by one. She (Salma's mother) yanked, bit, belted until I turned black and blue and sank blissfully into darkness. Walking alone under electric poles, whose shadows were getting longer and longer, I hugged my shopping bag. No, it was not easy living here in England as an alien, which was how the immigration My petals were officer had described me.” (Faqir 34)

Traumatic experiences are often suppressed by the unconscious, requiring transformation to reach the conscious consciousness for expression. Bond and Craps (2019:5) use the term slippery to emphasize the impossibility to define trauma. <sup>1</sup> They go on to characterize it as blending the lines between mind and body, memory and forgetting, speech and silence. It moves between the internal and external, the private and the collective. Traumatized individuals may struggle to identify and address the root cause of their misery due to the aforementioned fluctuations. According to Bohleber (2010:102), trauma can be a long-lasting experience that affects not only the survivors but also their children and future generations. Salma's memory of her father putting her life in danger sheds vivid light on the treatment of women who disobey patriarchal rules and values. This constant sensation of impending victimization forces a memory into her present reality and highlights the negative effects it has on her sense of self. It is understandable why this experience has traumatized her.

“ While I was holding the railing of the bridge, I glanced up again just in time to see a shadowy figure hiding behind the woods. He was injured, his honor was compromised, and his eyes were radiating sparks of fury. As he prepared to shoot, his weapon was directed at me. When I was ready to be murdered, I took a deep breath, placed my bag on the ground between my knees, gripped the iron bars tightly, and opened my chest. I was ready to commit suicide” (Faqir 205).

As a result, Salma's recollections of her past <sup>11</sup> reflect her nostalgia for her mother and her native country, her boyfriend Hamdan, and herself, which gives her the impression that her mother is looking out for her while also serving as a representation of her reluctance to let go of the past even if it causes her to experience anxiety. She frequently imagines her brother's image as a criminal waiting for the ideal opportunity to kill her in the eyes. Male jail guards abuse young women and refer to them as prostitutes (Faqir: 44). Salma's restricted possibilities for survival serve as an example of how powerless women are in societies that rigorously adhere to the patriarchal system.

Salma recalls her temporary shelter imprisoned and her following journey to Lebanon until she ultimately settled in Exeter to start a new life there. Most of the incidents that occur in the story

are set in England and are shown in the style of flashbacks. In England, Salma develops deep friendships with certain English individuals while she is there. She accomplishes her study at college to earn a BA in English Literature, afterward, she secures employment in a hotel. Salma marries Dr. John Robson, a professor at the university, and they have a son named Imran. However, Salma remains nostalgic about her native home and is particularly concerned about her daughter Layla, even though she seems to have settled in England and built a good life. Salma returns to Hima in quest of her daughter despite the advice of her husband and colleagues not to go. When she arrives, she finds that her brother had murdered her daughter several years ago and she encounters her untimely death by her brother Mahmoud who determines, after nearly 20 years, to finally make reparations for his sister's fault by killing her by ensuring the traditional Arab idea that shame <sup>10</sup> can only be wiped off with blood.

Salma's narrative demonstrates how, compared to Islamic legislation, people have exploited social traditions to defend honor assaults against women. Moreover, in some Arab societies such as Jordan the setting of the novel, there is a blind commitment to social customs and conventions that, in the name of religion, treat <sup>16</sup> women as second-class citizens. In light of this explanation, Islam cannot be held responsible. Afzal-Khan writes in his book <sup>6</sup> *Shattering the Stereotypes: Muslim Women 'speak Out*:

“ Vile and inhuman customs practiced in different part of the Islamic world by tribal-minded men, who are more interested in maintaining their patriarchal power than in creating the type of just society envisioned by 7th-century Islam—a religion that gave property and other rights to women.” (2005:12)

The novel illustrates the role that women perform in resistance by showing how both inner and exterior types of oppression coexist in their daily lives and the way that she expresses it. Women are under the power of men because they view them as their possessions, much like colonialism views the Arab world as its domain. In Salma's narrative, resistance serves to expose the social norms that are invoked to defend against atrocities against women. The reader is left wondering throughout the entire story whether the idea <sup>4</sup> of purity and cleanliness is justified by a woman's life being wasted, as well as the reason women are regarded as criminals even though they are the victims of what happened to Salma. She is perplexed as to why she has been treated so poorly by her loved ones and the community as a result of making an error she never intended to make.

As a consequence of her traumatic feelings, she is repeatedly being taken advantage of, exploited, and deceived, first by Hamdan who destroys her innocent existence by sexually abusing her, and then by a man in England who realizes Salma is experiencing traumatic emotional estrangement and loneliness. He makes her feel as though they will be together forever because of

his emotions. They then enjoy a night together before he quietly departs the next morning. The third is by a Christian nun named Mrs. Asher who pretends to be from Lebanon and arrives to help Salma while she is English and uses the social issues of some innocent ladies to convert them to Christianity. Mrs. Asher remarks during their meeting “I am a civil nun from Lebanon. I have saved many young women like you. I only travel between prisons and smuggle out women. I cannot bear the thought of an innocent soul getting killed” (Faqir: 54). Mrs. Asher makes a concerted effort to persuade her to become a Christian because Lord Jesus regards her and is going to forgive her sins. Asher tries to persuade Salma to accept Christianity, but she refuses. Salma has a hard time accepting and understanding Asher's Christian religion besides Western cuisine.

The writing style uses a nonlinear mode of narration. The image of the broken glass refers to the broken psyche, traumatized memory, and split mind. Bolheber (2010:130) tackles such a state saying: that in “patients who have undergone trauma, parts of their psyche are like split-off states of the self and when activated give rise to a severely altered state of consciousness.” There is considerable overlap between the past and the present are closely connected as Salma stumbles over old memories that have permanently scarred both her present and future. Salma seems to be a prisoner of her past and memory which puts her in a traumatic state and is held captive by a depressing present with no signs of hope for the future. Faqir illustrates Salma's emotional trauma through the wobbly transition of the narrative across the past and present. Salma frequently experiences nightmares, which suggests that the hurt of previous experiences is still hanging on her psyche. She is unable to feel true freedom, even being countless miles away since her culture has caused her to embody her guilt. She says “I felt as dirty as a whore, with no name or family, a sinner who would never see paradise” (Faqir:108). The story of Salma's existence in England is driven by traumatic recollections, which serve to reinforce Salma's exposure to prior humiliation, remorse, dread, and brutality. In Salma's existence in England, imagination has a significant role because it makes her calm and enables her to cope with the suffering of reality. She displays a distressed mindset that rejects reality and seeks momentary comfort in building an imaginary world to escape intrusive truths. She vividly imagines her little girl, named Layla, who strives to imagine her face and creates a drawing of her.

Salma continues surviving despite the threat feeling of being murdered due to her experience and persistent pain are intrinsically linked to. Trauma, therefore, defines her, which is further by her complicated feeling of belonging inside her new country, which depends on a break from her native country. The last factor of belonging is closely linked to her trauma because according to Faqir is essentially harmful to having a strong sense of self. The notion of latency is crucial here in this context when discussing trauma. Berger says that “the concept of latency, of how the memory of a traumatic



event can be lost over time but then regained in a symptomatic form when triggered by some similar event” (Berger, 1997: 570).

According to Herman (1992:37), Images may be used in the field of trauma literature to emphasize the frozen and wordless aspect of remembered traumatic experiences. Identifying mental impacts, repetition, compulsion, sentiments of despair, hopelessness, and other markers of trauma may be accomplished via the use of visual clues and imagery that appears repeatedly throughout the book and is being investigated under scrutiny. Whitehead (2004:38), narratives of trauma are distinct in that they are marked by repetition and indirection...Recollections of traumatic experiences are not accompanied by a spoken narrative or context; rather, they are recorded in the form of intense feelings and visuals. Salma is plagued by hallucinations in which she sees pictures of a man, who may be his brother or father, or multiple men, who are members of her clan, plotting to murder her to repair the family's damaged dignity via the blood that she sheds. There are several lines in which Salma is portrayed as being troubled and tormented by this horrific sight. This occurs throughout the day in the form of recurring flashbacks and recollections, and it also occurs when she is sleeping in the form of a great number of dreams. One of her visions is bitterly described by her :

Pay attention to the sound of his arm gripping Leyla's neck and pushing it back behind him, as well as the sound of his blade slicing through skin and shattering bones to reach the heart. You should pay attention to the sound of your daughter's warm, scarlet blood trickling and bubbling out on the parched sand...Instead, I yelled at Mahmoud's shadow beside the stolen railway, and he responded by killing me (Faqir: 262).

By using an assortment of words and visuals to create synesthetic images of perception, sound, color, motion, and heat in this painful description “Listen to your daughter's warm red blood bubbling out and drip dripping on the dry sand”, the novel is successful in illuminating the invasive symptoms of trauma. By skillfully utilizing these aesthetic elements, the reader is effectively disoriented by powerful feelings. *My name is Salma* uses intrusive repeated imagery to show the trauma that is caused by the growing sense of powerlessness and fear.

The trauma victims suffer from high levels of excitement and split their memory into various isolated, somatosensory elements: images, affective states, and somatic sensations, as well as smells and sounds “(Bohleber: 117). Salma's tragic loss of her daughter is related to how the sound of wind blowing in England is used. Following giving birth to her daughter on a windy day while she was imprisoned, the kid is taken away from Salma right after, and the disappointment of not being able to hold and care for the child follows her to this day. She is reminded of her daughter Leyla by

the chilly and strong wind “I knew breeze. She was out there crying for a foothold ... A sudden chill ran through me so I bent forward as if winded” (Faqir: 192).

### 3. CONCLUSION

*My Name is Salma* emphasizes how Faqir used literature to undermine social inequality and violence against women and to provide a testimony voice to a Muslim immigrant witness woman who faces racism and discrimination in her new country as well as traditional principles in her native one that enable harmful customs like "honor killings". The study explores the impact of trauma on a woman who has been forced to flee her home and demonstrates that even though most trauma theorists claim that trauma is characterized by unrepresented and solitude, it can be traced through literary devices and narrative tactics such as non-linearity, images, repetition, flashbacks, and sounds. The reader is asked to take part in the production of the text by bearing witness to the agony of the hidden and alienated character by following the fragmented, repeated, and polyvocal language of the novel's first-person perspective, which is comprised of pauses and silence. *My Name is Salma* uses these strategies in combination to make the reader understand the ambiguous aspect of the traumatic experience and emotionally and mentally engage them with the narrative.

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