

**EXPLORING THE REPRESENTATION OF FEMINIST
REINVENTIONS, CULTURAL ALIENATION AND WESTERN
IDEOLOGICAL PRESSURES ON MUSLIM WOMEN IN FADIA
FAQIR'S MY NAME IS SALMA**

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Abstract

This research explores the socio-cultural issues, identity formation and ideological pressures presented in the writings of exiled writer Fadia Faqir's My Name is Salma. There is a vibrant evidence of cultural diasporic predicament and alienation with the postcolonial perspective. Protagonist of this novel tries to know her identity at a new place and struggles to gain a new multicultural identity. This research sets out to examine how identity is formed by a Muslim subject in a postcolonial Western context. Edward Said's Orientalism, provides a solid stage to know about the west's patronizing and fictional depictions of the East. Theories of hybridity, liminal space, mimicry and ambivalence presented by Homi K. Bhabha also provide a major ground to analyze the selected text. Issues related to Islamic ideology, new culture and the attitude of the new society in the modern era have also been brought under discussion and analysis. This research not only provides a basic knowledge about the culture and norms of Middle East but also about Islamic ideology and Islamic practices; it also provides an account off information about the pressures and ideology clashes on the basic of East and West. The research concludes that a Muslim character living in the West will form for themselves a hybrid identity that encompasses both their Muslim heritage and that of the modern, secular culture of the West.

Keyword: Women, Exile, Culture, Ideology, Pressures, Identity, Liminal Space.

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INTRODUCTION

Colonization and post-colonization has been experienced by most Africans and Muslims in the East alike. Like Muslims in the East, Africans have had to react to their encounter with Empire with regard to identity formation. In a world that is increasingly becoming globalized, mimicry, “hybridity” and ambivalence have come to define the postcolonial African identity much like that of other colonized societies. As a result of immigration, many Africans have found themselves located in a place of liminality, their identity formed in a space determined by the colonizer. Salma, the novel’s main character, a shepherdess, is a free-spirited young woman who falls in love with a young man and gets pregnant by him out of wedlock. In the village of Hima where she lives, this is punishable by death because she has brought dishonor to the name of her family. Her lover denounces and dumps her after she informs him of the pregnancy while her brother is determined to kill her in order to redeem their family’s honour. When Salma informs her sympathetic former teacher about her predicament, the teacher rushes off with her to the police, who put her in protective custody in prison. While in prison, Salma does the work of sewing and cleaning. She befriends other women who are also victims of the patriarchal society much like her. Salma comes to the attention of a religious group that has aided other women in the same predicament as hers. She is smuggled out of prison in the thick of the night and spirited out to a convent in Lebanon. However, when the nuns at the convent get word that her brother who has discovered her whereabouts is hunting her down, Salma is adopted by a British nun who changes her name to „Sally“ and taken to live in England as a refugee. Upon her arrival in England, the immigration authorities doubt the authenticity of her adoption papers and Salma is detained in the port prison for two months before the impasse is resolved and she is allowed into Britain. While living in a hostel in Exeter, she meets Parvin, a second generation Asian-British who has fled an arranged marriage. Later, Salma moves out of

the hostel to live with Liz, finds employment as a seamstress (and also a part-time job in a bar), learns English and later enrolls for a course in English Literature at the Open University. She forges a meaningful friendship with Gwen, a retired Welsh headmistress. With her landlady Liz slowly going insane, Salma struggles to look after her before Liz eventually passes away. Salma later gets married to her tutor at the university and gives birth to a son. While she appears to have come to terms with England and has established her life there, Salma still thinks about her home in the Levant, and in particular, is haunted by the memory of her daughter Layla. Against the advice of her husband and friends, Salma travels back to Hima in search of her daughter only to meet her death at the hands of her brother Mahmoud who shoots her between the eyes.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Bill Ashcroft and others in *The Empire Writes Back* state: "Debates concerning the traditional and sacred beliefs of colonized, indigenous, and marginalized peoples have increased in importance. Since the Enlightenment the sacred has been an ambivalent area in a Western thinking that has uniformly tended to privilege the secular" (Ashcroft, Bill et al. 2010: 212). In the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks in New York and the ensuing war on terror currently being fought in many countries, Arabs and Muslims have felt targeted because of their ethnic and religious identity thereby fueling discussion on Arab/Muslim identity in this new light. This study discusses identity formation amid the complex interplay of *Arabness*, Islam and feminism in a postcolonial context. The research analyses these issues and characterization in Faqir's novel *My Name is Salma* in order to find out how identity is formed by a Muslim subject in a postcolonial Western context. This research enriches our understanding of the concept of Arab identity and the diaspora and how the experience of immigration impacts identity formation for an Arab Muslim woman in a postcolonial Western environment.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research sets out to attain these objectives:

- To present the status of women under the influence of patriarchal society.
- To prove that physical and cultural alienation of the novel's protagonist leads her to a quest for identity formation.
- To analyze identity formation in *My Name is Salma*.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How has Faqir's novel portrayed the *hijab* dilemma, "honour" killing, personal reinvention and feminism?
2. How physical and cultural alienation of the novel's protagonist leads her to a quest for identity formation?
3. How has Salma attempted an identity formation based on the experience of her movement between geographical regions and cultures?
4. How Salma Faqir has presented the consequent experience of adjustment following the loss of her original home?

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

"The historic encounter between Islam and the West has always been one of domination of the East on political, cultural, and religious grounds" (Said, 2003, p.40). According to Said, European discourse constructed the people of the West as culturally superior to the people of the East. Many Arab writers, in an attempt to counter this stereotypic and Orientalist discourse, have strived to create a position of respect for Islam and the East in their works through a (re)definition of Eastern/Muslim identity. *My Name is Salma* belongs to this group of works as it portrays a Muslim Middle-Eastern native

forming her identity within a postcolonial context contrary to Orientalist discourse. This study is therefore concerned with how the localized experience of immigration and life in the diasporic West impacts identity formation for an Eastern postcolonial. The fragmented postcolonial society demonstrates a disorder which originates from within. It is only after individual members of the society are studied that the inner causes of this disorder may be discovered. Postcolonial inquiry has mainly focused on the loss of identity and the marginalization of minority subjects; however, this research transcends these concerns and examines the unique identity formation which occurs among Muslim subjects in a postcolonial environment. Millions of people all over the world experienced life under colonization while many others still live under post-colonialism. It is therefore worthwhile to study the experience of post-colonization and the diaspora in relation to identity formation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi K. Bhabha states: "The image of human identity and, indeed, human identity as *image*, both familiar frames or mirrors of selfhood that speak from deep within Western culture are inscribed in the sign of resemblance. The analogical relation unifies the experience of self-consciousness by finding, within the mirror of nature, the symbolic certitude of the sign of culture based on an analogy with the compulsion to believe when staring at an object" (Bhabha, 1994: 70). Bhabha implies that in order to construct a solid sense of identity within Western culture, there is an intrinsic need to see one's image reflected, society acting as a mirror capable of showing the subject images of "selves" that resemble their own. Bhabha's arguments enrich this study because they enable an examination of how the character under study forms her identity.

Bonny Norton Pierce in "Social Identity, Investment, and Language Learning" (1995) the approach to defining identity is valuable to this

study because the sense of self for Salma, the subject under study, her relation to the physical, cultural and social realities of the world around her in an attempt to form her identity are analyzed from this perspective. Shahnaz Khan in *Aversion and Desire: Negotiating Muslim Female Identity in the Diaspora* (2002) examines “third spaces”. She writes, “By opening up supplementary discourses in what has been called the third space, women rescript notions of the original, the pure, and the stereotypical” (khan, 2002). Khan posits that the identity of a Muslim woman living in the West is replete with many contradictions. Such a woman may opt to express her identity in multiple ways as a form of navigating the complexities of life in the West. This research examines how a Muslim woman forms her identity in a Western context.

According to Thomas Fuchs in “Fragmented Selves: Temporality and Identity in Borderline Personality Disorder” (2007), this study in the sense that it is the basis for studying Salma’s identity formation as a fragmented subject. Layla Al Maleh describes Arab British literature as “mostly female, feminist, diasporic in awareness, and political in character” (Al Maleh, 2009). She adds that the works of these writers deal with the struggles in the life of an Arab/Muslim character who moves to Britain from the East. Al Maleh’s views shed light in understanding Salma who moves from her original home in the Levant to live in Britain. Fatima Felemban in *Linguistic Strategies and the Construction of Identity in My Name is Salma* by Fadia Faqir (2012) explores the use of language by the main characters. She argues that the narrator uses interlanguage and code-switching to define self. Even though Felemban’s topic of study differs from this research, her paper informs this research’s understanding of language as an integral part of one’s identity. Seda Canpolat in *Hybridity in British Muslim Women’s Writing* (2014) examines the identity crisis Salma experiences in Britain as an Arab British. She states, “As the present in Britain became so compelling for Salma it soon crowds thought of how to remedy the effect of the new lifestyle on the sense of self

produced by dislocation". Whereas Canpolat's study deals with the subject of hybridity, this research focuses on identity formation.

Ba's novel describes the plight of a Muslim woman in a West African context. *So Long a Letter* portrays the difficult life for women who inhabit cultures dominated by values that subordinate the interests of women to those of men much like Faqir's *My Name is Salma*. Latha posits that "although *So Long a Letter* emanates from a specific socio-cultural milieu at a particular time in its history, it reflects many of the present-day concerns of Muslim women worldwide" (Latha, 2001). Ramatoulaye's statement: "I am not indifferent to the irreversible currents of women's liberation that are lashing the world. Instruments for some, baits for others, respected or despised, often muzzled, all women have the same fate, which religion or unjust legislation have sealed" (Ba, 1989) is further proof that her plight as a Muslim woman is no different from those of other women worldwide.

Waris Dirie's *Desert Flower* narrates the experiences in the life of Somali-born Dirie. As a young girl, Dirie undergoes a harrowing circumcision which leaves her psychologically scarred. Fleeing an arranged marriage to an old man, she goes to Mogadishu before she finds her way to London where she starts reconstructing her life by working as a house servant. She later enrolls in school and learns English before finding success and fame in a modelling career. Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *The Caged Virgin* upholds a negative view of Islam by relating events in the life of the author while her collection of essays in the same book explains why Islam is an "inherently evil" religion. Born to a religiously devout mother and an ever-absent father, Ayaan's family was forced to relocate to Kenya while she was still young. To avoid an arranged marriage to a cousin in Canada, Ayaan was compelled to flee to Holland where she quickly learnt the Dutch language and acquired higher education. She developed a strong hatred for Islam while in the Netherlands, more so after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York. Proclaiming herself

as a “fierce advocate” for human rights, Ali provides in her book a ten-point checklist on the things a Muslim woman should do before fleeing from their oppressive families. *The Caged Virgin* illustrates the ways Islam discriminates against women and her major concerns include lack of education, arranged marriages, female genital mutilation and sexual violence against Muslim women.

Given that Waris Dirie’s and Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s books are both autobiographical, the parallels between Dirie’s and Ayaan’s lives and that of the character of Salma in *My Name is Salma* shows that Faqir’s writing is relevant to the African situation. All the women who are the principal characters in these texts are born and raised in conservative Muslim environments where they undergo traumatic experiences that leave them psychologically traumatized before they escape to the West to start rebuilding their lives anew. While Salma is psychologically scarred by her experience of having a baby out of wedlock which makes her the target of “honour” killing, Dirie’s very painful circumcision in childhood leaves her psychologically traumatized long into her adulthood. Salma, Dirie and Ayaan in the same fashion are all forced to flee their homes for refuge in the West where they start life afresh and achieve relative success. Faqir’s novel may be a work of fiction but it greatly corresponds to actual events in the lives of many African women who are forced into exile in the West in order to escape the patriarchal values of some African societies that stifle the lives of women.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In *The History of Sexuality* (1988), Foucault’s postulation on identity as a formation of the individual is relevant to this research given that the protagonist of Faqir’s novel forms her subjectivity as a Muslim Middle Eastern woman after moving to England based on the new and unique experiences she encounters in her adopted country. In *Orientalism* (2003), Edward Said examines culture and identity between East and West. He notes that Orientalist scholars propagated

an image of the East as “irrational”, “depraved”, “childlike” and “different” (Said, 2003, p.40). In short, Orientalist discourse constructed the East and Islam as the antithesis of the West and Western civilization. For Muslim/Eastern postcolonial subjects like Salma who have immigrated to the West and are trying to form an identity based on a hybrid notion of home, accepting these Orientalist views would affect their perceptions. *Orientalism* is pertinent to this study given that Salma, a Muslim Oriental living in England, is the subject of Western prejudices much in line with Said’s assertions. Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (2004) notes that the West needs to shift towards a “performative” and “enunciatory present”. This he sees as a necessary basis for fewer violent interactions and a decreased desire to colonize people who are viewed as “Other”. Bhabha examines that “hybridity” challenges the set parameters of the postcolonial relationship that exists between dominant and dominated subjects. This research examines Salma, the novel’s central character, through Bhabha’s concept of “hybridity” as her identity formation is subject to both the Muslim/Oriental and Western cultural influences. In her 1983 essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asks whether the “subaltern” have a voice that can be heard by other people in the world, or whether that voice has been interpreted and appropriated by Western scholarship. As a result, the subaltern lacks a voice and cannot therefore speak. Spivak’s theory will be used to examine why Salma lacks agency in England. James Clifford in his book *Cultural Studies* (1992) argues that travel plays an important role in the formation of one’s concept of place and home. In studying the subject under Hall’s concept, this research will examine how English culture and society impacts Salma’s formation of subjectivity.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research began with a close and comparative reading and study of books and literature written by Fadia Faqir and works by other writers. The next step involved a study of works by scholars and

critics who have conducted research on postcolonial and Middle East literature, such works in the form of books, journals and Internet articles in order to obtain a basis for argumentation. Theoretical texts were also studied in order to identify the most relevant and appropriate literary approaches to this study. Finally, the key text under research, *My Name is Salma*, was studied. Homi K. Bhabha's, Edward Said's, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's and Stuart Hall's assertions on culture formed the basis for understanding and analyzing the issues in this novel, the novel's protagonist and the analysis of her character. This study relied on textual evidence as the basis for literary research. All conclusions were derived from an analysis of relevant texts and additional proof was applied merely to buttress evidence in the primary text.

ANALYSIS

This research then proceeded from these three assumptions: that among the issues Faqir explores in this novel include the *hijab* dilemma, "honour" killing and personal reinvention, that physical and cultural alienation leads to a quest for identity formation and finally, that the novel's protagonist attempts an identity formation based on the experience of movement between cultures and geographical regions and the consequent experience of adjustment due to the loss of her original home.

The Hijab Dilemma

Many countries across Europe and around the world have grappled with the issue of the Muslim veil in its diverse forms such as the *hijab*; which covers the head, the *Niqab*; which covers the face apart from the eyes and the *burqa* which covers the whole body. The *New York Times* reported in an article titled "France Moves to Clarify Rules on Full Veil" (2014) that the woman and her colleague opted to leave the performance instead of removing her veil. Increasingly, many countries in the West have had to enforce bans on the veil or enact

laws that permit the wearing of the veil in public places. Whereas secular countries like France and Turkey have moved to enact laws banning the wearing of the veil in public places in order to preserve the secular nature of the state, Muslim countries like Iran on the other hand have passed legislation that make it mandatory for women to always appear in public wearing the veil in line with conservative Muslim culture. Following the September 11th terrorist attacks in the US, Muslims have come under an increasing level of scrutiny especially in the West and in countries where they are a minority. In various parts of the world, Muslim women have reported instances of discrimination against them for wearing the *hijab* or even people trying to take off their *hijab*. The discourse on the veil encompasses secular traditions, religious freedom and even fears of terrorism. Fadia Faqir wades into this debate in her novel under study. This research examines the social factors that affect the protagonist's decision to wear the *hijab*, how her friends and the society react to this decision and the impact these have on her identity formation. Fadia Faqir was born and brought up a Muslim in Amman, Jordan. Having lived in both the East and West, her identity is multi-cultural as she is a product of both cultures. "Writing about the experiences of people in Britain and in the East is a way for Faqir to come to terms with her multicultural identity" (Hasan, 2012). "Given that the veil reveals the identity of the wearer as Muslim, one of the issues facing Muslims in the West is the question of whether to wear or not to wear the *hijab*" (Read and Bartkowski, 2000). In order to better understand the *hijab* question, it is important to explore Faqir's viewpoint on this issue. An article she wrote in *The Guardian* on Monday 22 October 2007 titled "As Soon as the Fresh Air Touched My Hair I Began to Cry", about the conflict with her father over the veil, is a portrayal of Islam in her personal life and how this experience shapes her view of Islam. In the article, Faqir writes: "My father imposed the veil on me three times and I took it off three times" (Faqir, 2007). This depicts a conflict between Faqir and her father, who stands for the social and conservative norms and values, and Faqir, who is representative of

all Muslim women in Muslim societies, with regard to the *hijab*, which represents Islam. In this article, Faqir does not link her conflict with her father over the veil to Islam but portrays it as a normal conflict that might occur between father and daughter without regard to religion.

Though associated with Islam, the *hijab* to Faqir is subject to debate like any issue in life and if forced upon her will be rejected; to her, wearing the *hijab* is not an Islamic injunction to be observed like praying but is a matter that is subject to discussion. In order to wear the veil, she must be convinced of the need to do so or else she will not. She asked, "Am I less important to you than religion?" (MNIS, p.132). However, Faqir still refuses to wear it, she says: "The veil had caused me so much suffering and had to take it off to keep a shred of self-respect" ((MNIS, p.137). This shows that Faqir detests Islam and the Muslims who practice it. According to her, Islam is forced upon female Muslims by conservative male Muslims who are dictators and are uncompromising.

"By portraying Islam negatively in her writing, Faqir appears to have aligned herself with Western secular feminism and with the feminists who blame Islam for the subordinate position of women in Arab and Muslim societies" (Majed, 2012).

Faqir does not believe in wearing the veil and her article shows that she also detests Islam. According to her writing, it can be argued that Islam, with regard to the veil, causes suffering to women and denies them their self-respect. Faqir's portrayal of the veil in *My Name is Salma* identifies with her personal feelings about this issue. Aboard the ship *Hellena* while on her way to Southampton, Miss Asher asks Salma (the protagonist of Faqir's novel *My Name is Salma*) why she has to wear the veil. Salma replies: "My hair is „aura. I must hide it. Just like my private parts" (MNIS, p.189). Salma refuses to take off her veil since that would contradict the conservative Muslim culture which she observes. For strict Muslims, it is inappropriate for a

woman's hair to be seen by members of the public therefore Salma, having left her home in the Muslim Levant only a few days ago, must always keep her hair veiled. At this point Islam still forms a strong component of Salma's identity so she resists Miss Asher's attempts to get her to discard her *hijab*. Keeping her hair veiled is however not a way of observing any Islamic injunction and that is why Salma does not mention her religion as the reason. She is simply obeying a social convention practiced by Muslims. When Miss Asher tries to convince her that it is alright to take off the veil, Salma is adamant and retorts: "I cannot take off the veil, Sister. My country, my language, my daughter. No piece of cloth. Feel naked me" (MNIS, p.189). Salma implies that she cannot take off the veil on her head because doing so would only make her feel naked as the veil is not an ordinary piece of clothing but one of profound significance that has a bearing on her identity with regard to her country, her language and her daughter. In short, the veil is part of what endows her with a Muslim identity which she is not willing to discard. Salma while in Cyprus, on her way to France when fleeing Hima, first notices that the veil marks her as different from others when they visit the Turkish castle. "The guard points at her veil and asks her whether she is Turkish before pointing out to her that the veil is prohibited inside the castle" (MNIS, p.116). Cyprus is a secular state like many of the countries in Europe and prohibits the wearing of the veil in public places in line with the Orientalist attitude toward Islam found in the West. The veil betrays Salma's Muslim identity at her first stop in Europe. Since she is different, she risks being discriminated against. In order to avoid imminent discrimination, Salma must discard the aspects of herself which openly identify her as a Muslim thus the beginning of her efforts to form a new identity for herself.

When in England, Salma's roommate Parvin advises her about the need to look for jobs and asks her about the headscarf she keeps wearing. Salma responds that "People look at me as if disease" (MNIS, p.123). The veil is an object of clothing that is viewed with scorn in England for it identifies its wearer as Muslim. Given that the

secular West detests Islam, Salma elicits repulsive stares from English society for wearing the veil which represents Islam.

“The veil marks her as “Other”, somebody who is different from the English people in terms of culture and ethnic origin so she encounters discrimination as a result. Parvin advises her that it will be much harder for her to get a job in England if she insists on wearing the veil” (MNIS, p.123).

Parvin’s advice shows that many employers in the West are unwilling to hire workers who openly appear Muslim for fear that they will repel customers who do not want any association with Islam. It is the dilemma of a Muslim immigrant in the West like Salma to either observe her culture and risk unemployment or obtain a job at the expense of discarding her culture of wearing the veil. It does not take long before Salma succumbs to the reality of life in modern England where earning a living exceeds the observance of religious edicts. Even though she finds it too difficult, she has little choice but to get rid of her veil in order to get a job and earn a living much like many Muslim women in the West are forced to do (MNIS, p.129). Discarding her veil implies that Salma has begun the step of moving away from her Islamic identity and is in the process of forming for herself a new identity. Salma finds life strange without the veil though. On the first day she walks out of the house without her *hijab*, she feels “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” (MNIS, p.129). This shows that Salma finds it difficult to efface the Muslim elements of her identity and that she cannot completely shake off her past. As a Muslim woman who had been used to wearing the veil daily in Hima prior to her emigration to England, she finds it difficult to discard the veil. Secular England compels her to abandon a tradition that she had practiced all her previous life making it possible for strange men to see her hair. Conservative Islamic culture prohibits that a woman should appear in public without her hair covered. This is unlike what Salma had

been used to in Hima hence she cries. Whereas Salma is Muslim in both Hima and England, the difference is that in Hima she covers her hair with a veil while in England she does not just like many women native to the West. This shows that Salma's identity has started to adopt aspects of Western culture thereby making Salma a hybrid.

"Honour" Killing

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" (Odeh, 1996). *My Name is Salma* portrays a number of "honour" killings; the first of which is reported during Aisha's wedding. Sabha, Salma's schoolmate, is shot by her brother making her mother shout: "Sabha was shot. Oh, my brother! Sabha was shot" (MNIS, p.106). For the women of Hima, life is a tragedy at the hands of men, their male relatives who are supposed to be their protectors have turned murderers. Another "honour" killing occurs on the night Salma gives birth to her child while in protective custody: "When I was two breaths away from death, I heard a shot in the distance. Another girl, who had been released by the prison authorities, was shot dead by her young brother" (MNIS, p.151). Salma's daughter, Layla, is also a victim of "honour" killing when her uncle Mahmoud drowns her in the Long Well. Mahmoud claims that Layla has also brought dishonour to the family's name just like her mother given that she is the product of Salma's sexual relations out of wedlock. In order to evade imminent death as a target of "honour" killing, Salma is forced to flee to Britain. "Honour" killing is important in the process of Salma's identity formation in that it is the cause of her flight from the Levant to Britain. After her arrival in Britain, Salma is still hounded by the ghosts of her past in Hima. She keeps imagining that her brother Mahmoud is out on the loose in Britain in an attempt to hunt her down and kill her, "Miss Asher imagines men with rifles follow her around Exeter" (MNIS, p.167). However, when she travels back to Hima many years later in search of her daughter, her brother shoots

her between the eyes, yet another victim of “honour” killing (MNIS, p.327). Faqir’s novel depicts Hima as a place where “honour” killing continues unabated, “They put us in prison, took away our children, killed us and we were supposed to say God was only testing his true believers” (MNIS, p.136). Salma has no option but to flee Hima for her own safety. Her flight from Hima takes her to England, in order to evade being hunted down and killed in her newly-adopted home, Salma must form for herself an identity of a native Western woman, one which is different from that of the traditional Arab Bedouin tribe she belongs to.

Personal Reinvention

The *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* of English defines “invent” as “to produce or design something that has not existed before” (Hornby, 2010: 791). To “reinvent” is “to produce for a subsequent time”. “Personal reinvention” therefore refers to making a success of one’s life and circumstances through deliberate and purposeful effort especially after suffering major setbacks. An analysis of Salma’s life shows that she reinvents herself and her life; in Hima she was ostracized and her life was in danger while after moving to Britain Salma works to reconstruct her life into a successful woman. Having been impregnated by her lover Hamdan against the norms of the conservative Muslim society of Hima, Salma faces death for having brought dishonour to her family’s name. Her brother Mahmoud and the men of the tribe are all too eager to kill her in order to sanitize the name of the family. Salma has no choice but to flee Hima in order to evade imminent death. Her flight to safety takes her to England where she seeks asylum. She settles in Exeter as an immigrant seeking to start life anew and reconstruct herself into a woman with a Western identity. She begins life in her adopted country as a subaltern. She reminisces:

"The Paki beggars are back, they used to say at the White Hare, and now she is getting married to Mr. Mark Parks, a handsome White English man." (MNIS, p.239)

At the beginning of her life in Britain, Salma is without shelter and food, a stark contrast to her later years after she has attained success. In an attempt to reconstruct her shattered life, Salma does two jobs – she works as a seamstress and also as a bartender collecting used glasses from tables in a bar in the evening. She is intent on breaking off from her past and beginning her life in England on a clean slate and on her own terms. While in Hima Salma's life was in danger, in England she becomes successful. Salma's escape from Hima to England is symbolically an act of running away from her dark past, she says: "Like a key witness in a Mafia crime case I changed my name, address, past and even changed countries to erase my footsteps" (MNIS, p.249). For having broken the social code of Hima by engaging in premarital sex with Hamdan, a grave crime in her Muslim society, Salma equates herself to a Mafia criminal. She flees Hima in order to save her life and changes her name and past in order not to be found out and killed. She is intent on starting her life over as a new person without the burden of her sinful past in Hima. Salma expects a good life to unfold for her after moving to England: "I expected to find milk and honey streaming down the streets, happiness lurking in every corner, surprise, surprise, a happy marriage and three children to delight my heart" (MNIS, p.172). She accomplishes the most important of these expectations when she gets married to Dr. Robson with whom she bears a son and attains a happy family life. Her life in England is not without challenges though, but it is much better than what she would have achieved in Hima. She begins her new life on the margins of society, living in a hostel and working menial jobs before later enrolling for a BA in English Literature at the university. Her marriage to the English tutor Robson transforms her identity. Salma, the Muslim Bedouin Arab, becomes Sally, a British woman, through marriage. For Salma, England means the freedom to build her life anew. She succeeds in reconstructing her

life and identity by reinventing herself into a new and successful person.

Findings

With regard to identity formation, Faqir has portrayed much about Salma who is the main character in her novel under study. However, she has written only a little about the identity of the other characters. Liz, Salma's landlady after she moves from the public hostel, has an identity which is historic and colonial. The fact that Salma refers to her as "Queen Elizabeth I, Her Highness" (MNIS, p.10) shows that Liz occupies a higher hierarchy of power with regard to their social relations and that Liz's superior place is granted upon her by the historic colonial past. However, Faqir overturns the Orientalist stereotype in her portrayal of Liz, a Western subject, compared to Salma, an Eastern subject. According to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (2003), Orientalist discourse constructed the East and Islam as the antithesis of the West and Western civilization. Liz is a dirty alcoholic, does not have a job and lacks family and friends unlike the clean and successful Salma who is married to an English gentleman, is employed and studies at the university. Salma represents what it is to be English in the modern sense unlike Liz whose concept of being British is tied to the colonial past. This representation of Salma and Liz is postcolonial. The semi-practicing Muslim identity is marked by a belief in Islam but having one's own way of practicing the religion. However, he prays five times a day as required by Islam and whenever Salma walks past his shop his prayer mat is always on the floor and he would be muttering verses from the Qur'an. Sadiq is willing to earn a living by selling alcohol even if it is forbidden by Islam. Salma's father, Haj Ibrahim, is another semi-practicing Muslim. That he holds the title "Haj" implies that he's taken the pilgrimage to Mecca which is a fulfilment of one of the key pillars of Islam. Even though he practices Islam, he does not pray regularly but only when he encounters a problem in his life, Salma says of him: "My

father Haj Ibrahim did not pray regularly. The prayer mat was out whenever a goat was stolen or we were having a long spell of drought" (MNIS, p.19). He insists on earning his money the right way as a Muslim even though he rarely prays to Allah.

Salma's prison friend Noura is a semi-practicing Muslim as she never prays. Only when her son is critically ill does she pray for the first time. However, Noura represents conservative Islam when she prays: "God of the universe, God of humans and jinn, God of earth and limitless skies, have mercy on this child and deliver him. Please God, if you cure him I will wear the veil, pray five times a day, fast, give the *zakat* to the poor and go to Mecca to do the pilgrimage" (MNIS, p.197). All the things Noura promises to do in her prayer if her son is cured represent conservative Islam. Noura's prayer includes all the five pillars of Islam. It begins with a declaration of faith in God and mentions praying five times a day, fasting, giving alms to the poor and going on a pilgrimage to Mecca which are all key pillars of Islam. "Other characters like John and Mark are nominal Muslims, they are Muslims by name only" (MNIS, p.290). They convert to Islam in order to get married to Muslim characters, Mark to Parvin and John to Salma. Their conversion to Islam is solely to attain the desired objective of marriage and they do not practise the religion at all. Parvin says of Mark: "Although he agreed to convert to Islam to put my mind at rest he is still a white English man" (MNIS, p.255). She adds: "Once a Christian, always a Christian" (MNIS, p.255). This shows that Mark's conversion to Islam is only to meet the Islamic requirement that Muslims can only get married to fellow Muslims and not to people who have faith in other religions. Mark therefore remains a Christian in practice but a Muslim by name only. With regard to John, Salma says: "He no believe in God, but it will be nominal" (MNIS, p.290). John is Muslim by name only given that he has no faith in Allah. Salma's identity formation by exploring the multiple identities she adopts in the course of her life. Salma's Islam identity in Hima is imposed upon her by the society while in England it is the product of her own free choice. Muslims in *My Name is Salma*

selectively deal with Islamic laws. They observe Islamic injunctions at their own convenience and for their personal purposes and not because these injunctions deserve following. From a conservative Muslim identity in Hima, Salma's identity in England evolves to a semi-practicing Muslim. As a result, the adoption of an Islam identity is dependent upon individual perspectives.

This research has analyzed the issues presented by Fadia Faqir in her novel *My Name is Salma* and how Salma, a Muslim Arab Bedouin woman from the Levant forms her identity as a postcolonial subject upon her migrating to England. The research has also proved that physical and cultural alienation leads to the formation of identity. This study began with a biographical analysis of Fadia Faqir in order to create awareness about the history of her life, her upbringing, education and how events in her life impacted her character formation in order to analyze some of these issues which also appear in her book under study. This research then proceeded from these three assumptions: that among the issues Faqir explores in this novel include the *hijab* dilemma, "honour" killing, personal reinvention and feminism, that physical and cultural alienation leads to a quest for identity formation and finally, that the novel's protagonist attempts an identity formation based on the experience of movement between cultures and geographical regions and the consequent experience of adjustment due to the loss of her original home. The protagonist's movement from East to West sets her on a quest to adjust her identity in order to fit into England, her new home. Salma's name socially and culturally contextualizes herself whether in its Arabic form „Salma“ or its English variants "Sally" or "Sal". Salma becoming Sally, though still Salma, is a painful transformation. Salma Ibrahim El-Musa is mother to Layla, her daughter who is grabbed from her immediately after birth while she is still in prison in Hima. Fleeing Hima for Exeter in England, Salma toils and becomes Sally, the English rose. She acquires success and a life in tune with the norm of British society: work, education, a husband and a baby. Throughout her life in

England, Salma inhabits a liminal space but in the end dies as Salma. She fails to successfully navigate the complexity of being true to both her multiple identities as a Bedouin Arab Muslim and a British wife. She cannot completely efface the Muslim and Arab elements of her identity. Even though she attains success as Sally, her inner self still considers this transition a failure. Her guilt forces her return to Hima where she meets her death. She remains Salma though disowned. Edward Said's ideas in *Orientalism* informed this study with the argument that a Middle Eastern native in the West will be subject to Orientalist prejudice, therefore, in order to fit in the new environment, such a subject must form for themselves a new identity. Such an attempt to form an identity in a new environment only leads to cultural "hybridity" as one cannot fully efface the elements of a previous identity. The findings of this research confirm that this study has succeeded in achieving the objectives it set out to pursue. The research has proved Faqir's pre-occupation with the issue of the veil, "honour" killing and the emancipation of the Muslim woman from the yoke of patriarchy. Faqir's novel also portrays that a subaltern Muslim woman could move to the West in order to attain a level of success not possible in her native land.

CONCLUSION

This research has explored identity formation, "Otherness", the colonial predicament and the sense of alienation of the character in the diaspora as reflected in Fadia Faqir's novel *My Name is Salma* through postcolonial cultural perspectives. *My Name is Salma* records the protagonist's exiled life and portrays the subject's attempt to come to an understanding of herself, her place in the world and her transition toward a multicultural identity. This research sets out to examine how identity is formed by a Muslim subject in a postcolonial Western context and to analyze the issues presented by the author's depiction of the novel's central character. In this study, Edward Said's assertions in *Orientalism* about the West's patronizing and fictional depictions of the "East" and "the third space" were applied to analyze

the identity-making process in Faqir's novel. This research began with a detailed study of *My Name is Salma*, which is the primary text, followed by a study of relevant secondary works in the form of books, journals and internet articles. The study concludes that a Muslim character living in the West will form for themselves a hybrid identity that encompasses both their Muslim heritage and that of the modern, secular culture of the West –like Salma does upon her moving to Britain. As Fadia Faqir is an upcoming author who has written only four novels, I would urge academics to carry out research on *My Name is Salma* and her other books because she represents the new generation of writers of Middle Eastern origin writing in the West whose works have come to define Middle East literature in the twenty first century.

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