



The Arabian Woman's Adaption of Western Values in Fadia Faqir's *The Cry of the Dove*

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Abstract

While the themes of identity and racism have occupied a wide area in the feminist studies in general, this study discusses in detail how Arabian immigrant woman cope with the Western culture. This article aims to examine how the female protagonist in Fadia Faqir's (2007) novel *The Cry of the Dove* adapts to the Western environment, and how Mohanty's (1984) theory illustrates the possible reason as to why the protagonist withholds her real identity. Although the Arabian immigrant female protagonist in Faqir's novel undergoes trials and tribulations in her host country, she makes an attempt to adjust to her new life in the receiving society. The study uses the thematic approach to analyze the selected novel. This article concludes that the protagonist mobilizes specific strategies to adapt to her new milieu. In addition to that, her hiding for her identity by adopting Western values caused by racial discrimination, which mirrors the Western colonial thinking about Arabian women for being from the under developed Third World countries. Nevertheless, her adaption makes her feel humiliated since she is forced to adopt the Other's culture.

Keywords: Feminist, identity, Arabian immigrant women, Western Colonial thinking, Third World women.

Introduction

The process of adopting the western values is a great challenge encountered by Arabian immigrant women, where there is a clear difference between the two cultures. The huge gaps between Western culture and Arab culture pose tremendous difficulties to immigrant Arabian women, particularly where language, education, social development, tradition and religion are concerned. These cultural ordeals are depicted clearly in Fadia Faqir's novel, *The Cry of the Dove*, which takes place mainly in Levant and England. In *The Cry of the Dove*, Salma, the protagonist, is portrayed as an uneducated village woman and her conflicts in England reflect the problems often faced by most Arabian immigrant women who opted to move to the West. Salma is uprooted from her homeland, Hima, to a new country that differs culturally and religiously from her home country. Salma suffers from apartheid and has to find ways to adopt and absorb the new, foreign culture in order to be accepted in her new country.

Despite being obsessed with her memories of her homeland, Salma has no choice but to re-create a new identity and learn to master the new language, which is English, in Exeter, England. The long cultural absorption process transforms her from Salma into Sally, and Salma makes this clear when she notes "A few years ago, I had tasted my first fish and chips, but my mountainous Arab stomach could not digest the fat, which floated in my tummy for days. Salina resisted, but Sally must adapt" by Faqir¹. This paper explores how the Arabian immigrant woman, in particular the main protagonist of Faqir's

The Cry of the Dove, adopts the Western culture, and attempts to show how Mohanty's (1984) theory supports the reason as to why the protagonist chooses to conceal her true identity as an Arabian woman.

Literature Review: The subject of Arabian immigrant women's identity is not new in scholarships on cultural identities. Brinda J. Mehta², study of Faïza Guène's *Kiffe kiffe demain*, for instance, probes the sorrows faced by Arabian women in France and their issue with distributed identity caused by their citizenship. Mehta² deals with several subjects of Arabian immigrant women, namely, social injustice, the citizenship of minority, and the cultural absorption which is related to Arabian immigrant women's renouncement of Arabian lifestyle and their embracement of Western values in order to be accepted by their Western counterparts. In the same context, Hind El-Hajj and Sirène Harb³ address the ill-treatment of Arabian American women at the hands of the American people in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz*. The persecution faced by the Arabian women in Abu-Jaber's novel has made the female characters in *Arabian Jazz* recalled their memories of their homelands. Inspired by their Arabic traditions, they became motivated and worked hard to resist against the suppression they faced in their host country. This act also allowed them to strengthen their association with their homelands.

The relocation of the novels of Anglophone Arabian female authors, who live in America or Britain, in anew classification which is suitable for their discourse, where their writings are considered part of minor literatures, is discussed by Dalal

Sarnou⁴. The narratives of these writers deal with religion, homeland, feminism and identity. Anglophone Arabian female authors are committed to their Arabian cultural identity, but they apply Western cultural principles because they exist within a different social environment. Their writings are dedicated to express the Arabian women's ideas, feelings and aspirations anywhere. Sarnou⁴ deals with the identity of these women novelists themselves as one of the aspects that she discusses to locate their writings in a new category, while this research focuses on the identity of average Arabian immigrant woman and how she affected by Western values.

In her analysis of Vance Bourjaily's *Confessions of a Spent Youth* (1960), William Peter Blatty's *Which Way to Mecca, Jack?* (1959), and Eugene Paul Nassar's *Wind of the Land* (1979), Evelyn Shakir⁵ addresses the Arabian women's oppression by their male-dominated societies. Despite the torments and adversities in their lives, Arabian women are strong enough to bear the pains. These women withstand the social persecution wisely, without provoking the wrath of their community. As mothers, these women are able to instill the Arabian cultural principles in their children's identities. Shakir⁵ investigates the identity of Arabian women within their Arabian societies, and she tackles briefly these women's identities as immigrants.

Several studies have been conducted on Faqir's *The Cry of the Dove* and they have dealt with the topics of identity and racial discrimination. The representation of Muslim immigrant female characters' identity by Muslim writers after the 9/11 terrorist attack on New York is investigated by Karine Ancellin⁶ in 15 novels. Muslim immigrant women are thought to be having both Islamic and secular qualities. Although these women are Muslims, they also adopt Western values in their lives to stave off assumption that they are terrorists. These women are depicted as being confused with their affiliation as they suffer from discrimination after the 9/11 disaster. Ancellin⁶ deals briefly with the Arabian immigrant woman's self and not on the identities of Muslim immigrant women in general. In addition to that, Ancellin⁶ examines the tropes which are used by Faqir, in *The Cry of the Dove*, to represent the identity of her Arabian immigrant heroine. Yousef Awad⁷ scrutinizes the depiction of immigrants in the Arabian British narrative through *The Cry of the Dove* and how this description enables the reader to understand the Arabian colonies' heterogeneity in Britain better. Fatima Felemban⁸ also discusses how Salma forms her identity as an Arabian immigrant by using certain linguistic strategies. Shaffira Gayatri⁹ illustrate show Salma's body is politicized in *The Cry of the Dove*, and how this politicization is influenced by her condition as an immigrant.

The previous researchers, particularly the studies that have been carried out on *The Cry of the Dove*, have treated the identity of Arabian immigrant woman, her suffering from racial discrimination, and adoption of Western values. However, as far as the researchers are aware, these scholars have tackled this

issue secondarily and in a very limited nature, while the current article attempts to explore this topic further. Further more, these studies did not utilize Mohanty's (1984) theory to analyze the reason behind the Arabian immigrant women's concealment of their identity; whereas the researchers believe that this theory allows some understanding as to what prompted the Arabian immigrant women to hide their real identity.

Methodology

This study is based on Fadia Faqir's novel *The Cry of the Dove*. The researcher utilizes the thematic approach in analyzing the chosen novel.

Results and Discussion

Chandra Mohanty's Reflection: As we high light Arabian immigrant women's identity and their adaption of western values, it becomes necessary to examine the possible motives behind their adoption of these values, and why these women hide their identity while they take pride in their Arabian cultural identity. First of all, we prefer to mention the key point of Chandra Mohanty's theory, specifically Mohanty's notion that demonstrates the Westerners' outlook on Arabian women, which may lead to the adoption of these women to western norms. Mohanty¹⁰, in her theory "*Under Western Eyes*", criticizes the description of Third World women, among them Arabian women, in western feminist writings that underestimate these women. Western feminists categorize all Third World women as a persecuted and weak group, while they represent the women in western societies as modern and liberated. Mohanty¹⁰ shows that western feminist writings tend to restore imperialism by enforcing the western feminist thinking on the feminist dialogue. Western feminists believe that Third World women are inferior and call them "The Other", who are unable to claim their rights.

Mohanty¹⁰ argues that Western feminist writings show that Third World women suffer from domination, since they are restricted in the social, financial, sexual, and cultural aspects of their lives. Whereas these writings describe Western women as intellectual, developed, have sexual liberty and independent, as Mohanty¹⁰ says: "average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being "third world" (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.)". Third World women are shown as victims for a number of systems for instance, domestic system, male violence, colonialism, economic growth, and Islamic dictates.

Mohanty¹⁰ argues that the prominent position of Arabian women within their families has been ignored by Western feminist dialogues which presume constantly that the Arabian family persecutes women. As Mohanty¹⁰ mentions:

Not only are all Arab and Muslim women seen to constitute a homogeneous oppressed group, but there is no discussion of the

specific practices within the family which constitute women as mothers, wives, sisters, etc. Arabs and Muslims it appears, don't change at all. Their patriarchal family is carried over from the times of the prophet Mohammed.

In general, Mohanty demonstrates that the Third World women have been marginalized and underestimated by Western feminists. Western women describe Third World women as being backward since they are from underdeveloped countries.

The conflict between Salma and Sally: The Arabian woman's name is an important part of her identity. Salma adheres to her name because of her need to preserve her collective identity. The name is an indication of the individual's belongingness to a certain community and Salma yearns to keep the attachment with her original society:

'Upon your head. All right. Let us fill in the form. Name? Sally Asher.' 'No. Salina Ibrahim El-Musa.' 'Is this what's written in your British passport? You need to be accurate or else you will pay a fortune as an overseas student,' she said and poised the pen over the line after name. 'No, but I want Arab name', written by Faqir¹.

As soon as Salma gives birth to her daughter, Layla, in prison, the latter is taken from her by force. Due to her out of wedlock pregnancy, Salma runs away from honor killing in her village Hima to Exeter. She lives with two names and each name represents a separate identity. Salma stands for the protagonist's Arabian identity while Sally stands for her British identity. Indeed, Salma finds it difficult to lead her new life with her new name. However, her strong personality enables her to adapt to the Western society, where she works, marries and gives birth to a boy. Despite her progress as Sally, she considers herself a failure and her identity is wounded due to her cultural transformation. She cannot continue living with her dual identity or ignore her Arabian and religious qualities. She decides to keep her identity as Salma and dies because of that: *"I was free, walking on the pavement like an innocent person. My face was black as if covered with soot, my hands were black and I had smeared the foreheads of my family with tar"* narrated by Faqir¹.

Due to the difficulty of pronouncing her Arabian name by the British, which reminds her of her foreignness, Salma changes her name into Sal or Sally to conceal her Arabian name and identity and to espouse Western culture. As Salma says *"Many names I. Salina and Sal and Sally" I said* recounted by Faqir¹.

The non-sequential events and the repeated flashbacks of the text reflect Salma's confused identity, where she frequently feels happy for being accepted and miserable for being expelled. She is obsessed by her past and is weakened by her unforgivable mistake: *"Not capable of love. Too tired, too much past," I said* written by Faqir¹. For Salma when treated harshly by others, she gets some comfort. Salma's two

identities, Arabian and British, feel comfortable at the hands of the aggressors since she feels guilty and wants to be punished for her fault. Salma is unable to forget her past, and cannot flee from the shame that follows her like a shadow:

I could handle angry words, but kindness I could not bear. Kindness I did not deserve. He should have shouted at me, called me a foreign tart, kicked me in the stomach until I blacked out. Kindness I did not deserve, narrated by Faqir¹.

Taking off the hijab: Salma is exposed to various difficulties in her new Western society and giving up the veil is one of them. Throughout the novel, several scenes reveal the objection to her headscarf, such as when the British doctor states once Salma enters his office: *"Your name is Miss Sally Asher? How preposterous!"* narrated by Faqir¹. Since there is a contradiction between her English name and her appearance as a veiled woman, he was shocked. Similarly, the main obstacle in Salma's way to get a job is the hijab. In addition to that, for being veiled, Salma exposes to harsh looks by the British in her daily life. All of these British attitudes towards Salma, stimulate her sense of inferiority and foreignness, as well as reflect the Western feminist thinking of Third World women which places these women as inferior. This shows what Mohanty¹⁰ defines as "first / third world balance of power" that is based on "the idea of the superiority of the West". I quoted, *"People look at me all time as if disease," I said. She sat down next to me on the bed and said, 'It will be much harder to get a job while you insist on wearing it'* written by Faqir¹.

By all odds, the veil has been used permanently as a major theme in the Western talk about the persecution of Muslim women, stated by Hoodfar¹¹. Unlike this Western thinking, Arabian Muslim women are proud of their own religious and cultural beliefs. Despite the great pressures faced by Salma, she attempts to conserve her hijab which indicates her adherence to her religion and culture:

'Do you have to wear this veil? God has made you perfect and he loves every part of you, including your hair.' 'My hair is 'aura. I must hide it. Just like my private parts.' 'I cannot take off veil, Sister. My country, my language, my daughter. No piece of cloth. Feel naked, me. Recounted by Faqir¹.

As the veil is a symbol of East and Islam, it has been rejected by the Westerners. The conflict between the inherited cultural and religious values and the secular practices against the veil has been experienced by Salma. Consequently, Salma has been forced to give up the veil to avoid apartheid and assimilate Western values. Having obliged to abandon the head scarf makes Salma collapse and feel weak for being an expatriate:

It felt as if 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. Narrated by Faqir¹.

The strip of the veil indicates Salma's willingness to adopt the foreign culture and adapt to the new society. However, renouncing the hijab has made her feel that she is forced to give up her cultural beliefs and there by abandon her identity as Salma. She has been treated as the Other in the western milieu since she is an Eastern Muslim individual.

Switching to Sally: In the new country, Salma has to change completely to be consistent with the ideas of the British about the woman. One of the difficulties that Salma faces to switch to her new identity as Sally is that the westerners concentrate on women's beauty and appearance. Due to the Western concepts about beauty, Salma believes that she is ugly and cannot be beautiful like Western women: "*How can I become a Sandy, a white beautiful doll? I am only a Shandy, a black doll, a black tart*" narrated by Faqir¹. Several characters draw Salma's attention to the importance of woman's beauty in the new environment such as her friend Parvin who urges her to care about her beauty when she refers that the current society differs from her own's, therefore its values are different as well, written by Faqir¹. In addition to that, Allan, her British director, who compels her to change her identity when he asks her to be personable. To win her director's satisfaction, Salma decides to be fully changed into Sally. Therefore, she attempts to beautify herself by using cosmetics, perfumes; skin and hair care products, and wearing modern clothes and high-heeled shoes. As she states:

I realized from the way Allan was following me with his eyes that I had stopped being an incomprehensible foreigner and had become a woman, a body neither white nor olive-skinned nor black. My colour had faded away and was replaced by curves, flesh and promises. Recounted by Faqir¹.

Switching to Sally, by adopting the Western values about beauty, is absolutely imperative otherwise Salma will be humiliated and assigned an inferior status among the locals. Subsequently, she feels what has been labeled by Halleh Ghorashi¹² as excluded and non-belonging to the British society (p.75).

Other pressures and their processing strategies: Other obstacles are encountered by Salma in her new life; however she manages to locate specific tactics to overcome them. The term 'peaceful coexistence' is used by Fathali Moghaddam and Elizabeth Solliday¹³ in their discussion on the immigrant's challenge of peaceful coexistence in pluralistic societies. This challenge is faced by Salma in the new society. She confronts problems in establishing her relationships with others as 'Salma', where they look at her as an inferior "other" for being an Arabian Muslim, therefore she has to hide her identity. This has been manifested in several scenes such as the British porter's comment on Salma when he has escorted Parvin to

reside in Salma's room. The British porter labels Salma with backwardness for being Arabian and Parvin rejects the accommodation she had to share with Salma for the same reason. This ensures the permanent oriental ideology of considering Arabian women as backward and ignorant. Hence, hiding under the sheet and pretending to be asleep is the strategy chosen by Salma to avoid confrontation. Faqir¹ writes:

Where does she come from?' 'Somewhere in the Middle East. Fucking A-rabic! She rode a camel all the way from Arabia to this dump in Exeter,' he said and laughed. 'I am not going to share the room with an Arab,' she spat. I pretended that I was asleep and that I could not hear a word.

In addition, "Where are you from?" is the damned recurring question which is faced by Salma everywhere in the foreign society. Salma abhors this question since it makes her feel as being exposed to racial discrimination. As she says: "*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?'*" written by Faqir¹. Therefore, she is forced to answer disingenuously such as "I am English" narrated by Faqir¹.

The other obstacle which is experienced by Salma in the new environment is speaking English. Inability to master English exposes her to ridicule, criticism, and marginalization by Western society. This is revealed through several characters such as British immigration officer who attempts to check Selma's loyalty to Britain by offering a Western meal to her, where he corrects her words reproachfully, as she mentions: "*Yumma! It delicious! 'Yummy!' he said rebuking me*" recounted by Faqir¹. In addition to her British landlady Liz's constant mockery of Salma's accent, which makes Salma feel alienated "*I must go now,' I said. She parroted my accent. 'I moost go noo,' she said and smiled*" written by Faqir¹. Their bossy attitudes towards Salma reflect the Western colonial thinking of Third World women which is based on "the idea of the superiority of the West" mentioned by Mohanty¹⁰. Salma's incapability to express her rejection of the pressures of Western culture and racial discrimination reinforces her sense of weakness, foreignness, and non-belonging to the new country.

How to use a computer is another challenge which is encountered by Salma in the receiving country. Salma's inability to use a computer hinders her education and reveals her backwardness in a Western developed society. Being humiliated and embarrassed by the natives, has made Salma feel inferior and different as an outsider. Consequently her sense of alienation increases in the new place. Salma, for instance, is insulted by her British university Professor John for her inability to access online research, where he orders her to go to the computer hall to learn how to use it. The tutor's reaction reminds us of Mohanty's¹⁰ discussion about the Western feminist thinking towards Third World women which considers these women backward since it is based on the idea of "The underdevelopment of Third World", I quoted:

'In the shower of abuse I just had, I noticed that he kept mentioning project Pallas..... 'what is project Pallas?' 'This way, miss,' he said and led me down a dark corridor then opened a big door leading to a large well-lit room full of flickering computer screens. 'Is that it?' I asked. 'That's it, madam.' 'That's it?' 'Yes, madam. You learn how to use a computer' written by Faqir¹.

Due to the pressures of racial discrimination, Salma's sense of alienation and non-belonging to the Western society increases more and more. However, she resorts to follow certain techniques so as not to provoke the sensitivity against her as an outsider and to espouse the new foreign culture. Lying to conceal the identity is one of the styles that are conducted by Salma to avoid confrontation. The term of the concealment of the identity has been addressed by Mobasher¹⁴ in his discussion of the Iranian immigrants' concealment of their cultural identity in America. An example of this is her claim of being Spanish when David, a British man, asks about her origins. Salma's reaction is caused by the knowledge that the British do not prefer Arabian Muslims, as she recounts: "If I told him that I was a Muslim Bedouin Arab woman from the desert on the run he would spit out his tea. 'I am originally Spanish,' I lied" written by Faqir¹. Furthermore, due to Salam's suffering from discrimination she applies the lying strategy to avert confrontation with British people for being an immigrant. Although Salma's arm is injured severely by Liz's whip, her landlady who was intoxicated, she does not reveal the truth even to Liz herself:

'What happened to your arm?' she asked. I looked at Liz's dishevelled hair, swollen eyes; her hand pressed to her forehead, her pointed nose and said, 'Nothing.' Standing there in the hall she looked tired, washed out. 'What is wrong with your arm Sal?' 'Nothing a minor accident,' I said. She genuinely couldn't remember last night. 'This late night job you're doing is dangerous,' she said. I knew what Liz was thinking: a lower class immigrant slut, hustling down the quay, must have been stabbed by her pimp. All that was written on her hangovered face. Written by Faqir¹.

Another technique that is carried out by Salma is pretending of impartiality and openness to integrate into the new society and adopt its culture. The new life requires her to ignore her cultural identity as Salma and show her switch to Sally, her new self, who pretends embracing western principles to adapt to the society in which she lives. The apple juice that Salma asks for in a pub is an example of this, because its colour seems as if a beer, as she reports: "The colour of apple juice looked like beer so whoever approached me would think that I was open-minded, not an inflexible Muslim immigrant" recounted by Faqir¹.

Learning English perfectly is the method which is adopted by Salma to be away from her foreignness as much as possible. The registration in an English literature course is the decision which is taken by Salma to master the English language and learn how

to behave like an English woman to be Sally her English self, I quoted: "Why literature?" "Because I need to know English. The English language." "You can study language without reading literature." "No, stories good. Teach you language and how to act like English Miss" Narrated by Faqir¹. In addition to that, imitating the British accent is a strategy used by Salma to hide her identity as an outsider and to get rid of the British's scolding for her accent, as she tells "Oh! How interesting!" I said, trying to imitate the accent of the Queen. Liz, my landlady, would be proud of me" written by Faqir¹.

The other method that is performed by Salma is learning to use a computer to adjust to the Western developed society. Her attempt to learn how to use a computer helps her to look developed thus gets rid of the British's outlook towards her as a backward woman from the Third World. Salma states: "After experimenting with an old computer Allan had in his office, I was slightly more confident about the whole business of learning" narrated by Faqir¹. Even though the new tactics have helped Salma to exist, they have made her feel humiliated since she is obliged to integrate into a community which she does not belong.

Conclusion

Many difficulties are confronted by Arabian immigrant women in Western societies. These women have a severe sense of alienation and non-belonging to the Western environment because of racial discrimination which they experience in the social, economic, cultural, and political aspects of their lives. The racial discrimination is the main reason of Arabian immigrant women's attempts to conceal their cultural identity. The treatment of these women on a racial basis reflects Western colonial thinking toward Arabian women, which is based on "the under development of the Third World", "the idea of the superiority of the West", and "first-third world balance of power". Consequently, the backwardness, ignorance, poverty and inferiority are the pillars of the base which is relied on by western society in dealing with these women. Arabian immigrant women implement several strategies to hide their real identity by pretending to adopt Western values and adapt to new society to avert the westerners' look against them as foreign with different culture and religion. These strategies are changing the name, taking off the veil, beautification, the evasive answers, lying, pretending to be asleep, pretending of openness and impartiality, learning English perfectly, imitating British accent, learning to behave as an English woman, and learning to use a computer. The pretense to integrate into the new environment helps the Arabian immigrant women to stay alive, but makes them feel frustrated simultaneously since they do so against their will.

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