



Thesis of the Doctoral Dissertation

**The Entanglement of Patriarchy, Colonialism, and Migration as
Intersecting Oppressions: The Case of Arab Women in Fadia Faqir's
Novels**

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1. Topic and Thesis Statement

This dissertation examines how patriarchy, colonialism, and migration function as intersecting sources of oppression in Fadia Faqir's four novels: *Nisanit* (1987), *Pillars of Salt* (1996), *My Name is Salma* (2007), and *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (2014). The study analyzes how these novels fundamentally imply critiques of the subordination of Arab women across different spatial and temporal contexts, tracing the evolution of Faqir's treatment of intersectional themes in the context of significant political and social transformation in the Middle East and diaspora communities. Remarkably, Faqir's works not only present women's subjugation and victimization but also portray the different forms of agency adopted by Arab women as they respond to these multifarious layers of oppression.

The analysis is grounded in Hisham Sharabi's notion of neopatriarchy, which conceptualizes modern Arab societies as being structurally dependent on traditional patriarchal authority, while also absorbing the superficial trappings of Western modernity. In this framework, Arab societies remain authoritarian and male-dominated even as they undergo modernization, resulting in a contradictory hybrid system that further entrenches gender inequality. This aligns with Faqir's observation that "Arab society in general [...] can be classified as 'neo-patriarchal', where power relations are not only influenced by gender, but also by class, clan and proximity to the regime" (67). Faqir's early novels, *Nisanit* and *Pillars of Salt*, explore how this form of neopatriarchy interacts with colonial rule to intensify the oppression of Arab women within national, familial, and institutional spheres. In contrast, her later novels, *My Name is Salma* and *Willow Trees Don't Weep*, shift focus to the diasporic experience, where Arab women confront a new set of racial, cultural, and gendered constraints in the West – which can be understood as a migration of patriarchal ideologies in tandem with new regimes of othering and exclusion.

Building on postcolonial feminist theory – particularly the critiques of Western feminism advanced by Chandra Mohanty and the Arab sociopolitical analysis of Sharabi – the study argues that Faqir’s female protagonists are caught in the web of overlapping structures: the neopatriarchal family and society, the authoritarian state, and the postcolonial or Western gaze. Faqir’s emphasis on the diversity of Arab women’s experiences aligns with postcolonial feminist discourse that challenges homogenous and simplistic representations of third-world women. Her protagonists come from diverse class positions, educational backgrounds, religious orientations, and geographical locations, each navigating patriarchal, colonial, and migratory pressures through distinct modes of resistance and accommodation. Yet these characters are not reducible to victims. Instead, they demonstrate various forms of resistance, ranging from psychological withdrawal and storytelling to physical migration and existential transformation.

Thus, the central thesis of this dissertation is that Faqir offers a distinctive and critically significant representation of Arab womanhood. By portraying patriarchy, colonialism, and migration as interconnected and context-dependent systems of oppression across her four novels, Faqir moves beyond simplistic depictions of Arab women. The oppression of Faqir’s female characters originates in the hierarchical institutions of traditional patriarchy, which have been reinvigorated rather than dismantled by modernization. This oppression is multiplied and transformed through the forces of colonial and postcolonial domination, especially in transnational contexts. Whether as female colonial subjects or diasporic migrants, Faqir’s protagonists experience gender-based subjugation through both indigenous and external systems of power. She critiques both indigenous traditional structures and Western discourses, not only by comparing diverse forms and degrees of subjugation but also by showing that genuine empowerment entails a radical reimagining of identity beyond colonial and patriarchal binaries. At the same time,

their acts of resistance – both subtle and overt – reveal the fluidity of their subjectivities and their potential to reimagine Arab womanhood beyond binary constructions of tradition versus modernity, or victimhood versus emancipation. Through this multi-layered critique, Faqir’s fiction demands a more nuanced understanding of how Arab women live, resist, and articulate selfhood under the weight of intertwined forms of domination while ultimately advocating for an acknowledgement of their distinct experiences and identities.

2. Theoretical Frameworks

This dissertation draws upon postcolonial feminism, postcolonial theory, and cosmopolitanism as its central theoretical frameworks. The postcolonial feminist paradigm of double colonization is applied primarily to *Pillars of Salt*, focusing on the intersection of colonialism and patriarchy as dual oppressive structures targeting indigenous Arab women in colonial Transjordan. This paradigm is also integrated with conceptualizations of liminality – particularly in the analysis of *My Name is Salma* – to examine the protagonist’s marginalization by both Eastern and Western patriarchal discourses. Salma’s condition of in-betweenness, shaped by her displacement from a conservative Bedouin village to England, is interpreted through theories of liminality, hybridity, and the third space.

Postcolonial feminism further informs the examination of female agency and resistance across the novels, emphasizing the diverse strategies employed by Arab women under varying socio-cultural conditions. This allows for a nuanced reading of how gendered oppression operates differently across contexts. In addition, postcolonial theory addressing colonizer–colonized relations is used to explore the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in *Nisanit*, with particular attention to structures of power, resistance, and occupation. Finally, cosmopolitan theories are applied in the analysis of *Willow Trees Don’t Weep*, where the protagonist’s cross-cultural encounters enable the formation of a cosmopolitan identity. This

approach highlights how engagement with diversity can become a source of empowerment and belonging for diasporic Arab women.

3. Chapter Description

Chapter One examines the three main narrative lines in *Nisanit*, particularly Eman's first-person point of view, to explore the dynamics of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. This chapter addresses the methods of subjugation employed by Israeli forces and the resistance strategies of Palestinian natives. Drawing on postcolonial criticism, the analysis connects the fictional narrative to historical, political, cultural, economic, and gendered dynamics. While it extends beyond a gender-centered focus by incorporating male perspectives, it remains rooted in exposing colonial oppression and its impact on women's social positions.

Chapter Two shifts focus to *Pillars of Salt*, applying the concept of double colonization to interrogate the intersection of patriarchy and colonialism in the abuse of colonized Arab women, Maha and Hannyeh. While the analysis highlights the heterogeneity of female experience by emphasizing how different responses to oppression reflect a broader feminist discourse, it also touches on Arab women's positions within the encounter between Arab traditionality and Western modernity.

Chapter Three integrates the concept of double colonization with Bhabha's theories of liminality, hybridity, and the third space to analyze Salma's experience in *My Name is Salma*. The chapter offers a nuanced view of Salma's double oppression and evolving hybrid identity. It addresses the gendered dimensions often overlooked in discussions of liminality and shows how double oppression contributes to the formation of liminal identities.

Chapter Four follows Najwa's personal and geographic journeys in *Willow Trees Don't Weep*, focusing on the development of her cosmopolitan subjectivity in response to cultural and religious prejudices. This chapter interprets how Najwa's transformation is

contrasted with her father's fundamentalist rigidity, illustrating how embracing diversity can empower women and provide a path to survival amid intersecting forms of discrimination.

4. Results

This dissertation has undertaken the first comprehensive monographic analysis of Fadia Faqir's four novels, exploring the overlapping systems of patriarchy, colonialism, and migration as experienced by her Arab female protagonists across various historical and geographical contexts. Through close textual analysis, it has illuminated the multiple forms of oppression these women endure and the distinct strategies of agency and resistance they adopt. These strategies shape their evolving subjectivities in both colonial and postcolonial settings, challenging reductive portrayals of Arab womanhood.

At the heart of the study is Sharabi's concept of neopatriarchy, which serves as a critical lens through which to understand the interaction between traditional patriarchal structures and the forces of colonialism and migration. This theoretical model, supported by postcolonial feminism – particularly the concept of double colonization – as well as theories of liminality and cosmopolitanism, has provided a flexible, contextually responsive framework. While each novel has been analyzed through its most relevant theoretical lens, a comparative methodology has been maintained to highlight both shared and unique experiences among the protagonists. This has enabled the dissertation to move beyond the simplistic victim–heroine binary and to foreground the complexity and diversity of Faqir's female characters.

The analysis has demonstrated that Faqir's protagonists suffer from layered and context-specific oppression. In *Nisanit*, Eman's trauma unfolds under the violence of Israeli settler-colonialism and the social exclusion of her own community following the 1967 war. *Pillars of Salt* presents Maha and Hannyeh as victims of both British colonial rule and indigenous patriarchy during the early years of the British Mandate in Transjordan. Their

confinement within a mental institution symbolizes the collusion of colonial and patriarchal power structures. In *My Name is Salma*, Salma's oppression is twofold: she first faces honor-based persecution within her conservative Bedouin culture and later endures marginalization and racism in the West, resulting in a state of cultural and psychological liminality. *Willow Trees Don't Weep* follows Najwa's transnational journey through Jordan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and England, where she confronts religious and cultural prejudice, ultimately developing a cosmopolitan identity that enables her to redefine herself in response to intersecting forms of discrimination.

Significantly, these narratives also reveal varying modes of resistance. Characters such as Maha and Eman reclaim agency through responsibility, resilience, education, and solidarity. Salma's empowerment emerges through education and labor, yet remains partial due to her unresolved identity crisis and liminal position. In contrast, Najwa achieves a more assertive transformation, embracing diversity and difference to construct a dynamic cosmopolitan subjectivity. This diverse range of responses demonstrates how Faqir resists homogenizing representations and portrays Arab women as complex figures whose agency is shaped by, but not reduced to, their oppressive circumstances.

In conclusion, this dissertation has shown that Faqir's fiction offers a critical intervention in postcolonial feminist discourse by rejecting essentialist narratives and presenting nuanced portrayals of Arab women's lives. Her protagonists are neither passive victims nor idealized heroines, but multidimensional individuals who actively negotiate their identities within oppressive frameworks. Through her critique of both indigenous patriarchy and Western imperialism, Faqir reimagines empowerment as the ability to redefine Arab womanhood beyond colonial and patriarchal binaries. This study thus contributes new insights to the field of Arab women's literature and broader debates on gender, identity, and

power in postcolonial and diasporic contexts, laying the groundwork for future scholarship in this important area of literary and cultural studies.

5. Conferences

- **“HUSSE 14”**, Hungarian Society for the Study of English. University of Pannonia, Hungary. December 4–6, 2019.
- **“Networks Conference”**, Partium Christian University, Romania. November 29, 2019.
- **“Over the Horizon: Comparative Perspectives on Literature”**, University of London, UK. March 28, 2020. (*Chair and Presenter*)
- **“Networks Conference”**, Partium Christian University, Romania. December 4, 2020.
- **“ESSE 15”**, The European Society for the Study of English. Lyon, France. August 30 – September 3, 2021.
- **“HUSSE 15”**, Hungarian Society for the Study of English. Károli Gáspár University, Hungary. January 27, 2022.



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List of publications related to the dissertation

Foreign language scientific articles in Hungarian journals (2)

1. **Abu Oruq, A. A. A.:** "The Question of Palestine": Power and Resistance in Fadia Faqir's Nisanit.
Eger j. Eng. stud. 24, 43-70, 2024. ISSN: 1786-5638.
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.33035/EgerJES.2024.24.43>
2. **Abu Oruq, A. A. A.:** Crossing the Borders of the East: Review on Petya Tsoneva Ivanova, Negotiating Borderlines in Four Contemporary Migrant Writers from the Middle East (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018).
Pro&Contra. 3 (1), 67-71, 2019. EISSN: 2630-8916.
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.33033/pc.2019.1.67>

Foreign language scientific articles in international journals (2)

3. **Abu Oruq, A. A. A.:** Challenging Stereotypes: The Cosmopolitan Arab Woman in Fadia Faqir's Willow Trees Don't Weep.
J. Eng Stud. "Accepted by Publisher", [1-35], 2025. ISSN: 1576-6357.
4. **Abu Oruq, A. A. A.:** A Double Colonization: The Case of the Arab Bedouin Woman in Fadia Faqir's Pillars of Salt.
Roman. J. Eng. Stu. 18 (1), 76-87, 2021. ISSN: 1584-3734.
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Foreign language abstracts (1)

5. **Abu Oruq, A. A. A.:** Law and the Transgressing Bedouin Woman in Fadia Faqir's My Name is Salma.
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The Candidate's publication data submitted to the Tudóstér have been validated by DEENK on the basis of the Journal Citation Report (Impact Factor) database.

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