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A DOUBLE COLONIZATION: THE CASE OF THE ARAB BEDOUIN WOMAN IN FADIA FAQIR'S *PILLARS OF SALT*

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Abstract: *This study scrutinizes Fadia Faqir's* Pillars of Salt *by analyzing the various forms of violence against the protagonists, Maha and Hannyeh, their heterogeneous representation and their conditions within the cultural encounter between modernity and traditionality. Applying postcolonial feminism, the analysis of Faqir's novel shows that colonization and patriarchy interact as double structures of oppression that produce cumulative forms of violence against the colonized women. It also shows that these women's responses to oppressions are divergent: while Maha adopts unique strategies of self-empowerment that help her resist subordination, Hannyeh espouses limited ones that intensify her disempowerment. As for the encounter between modernity and traditionality, the analysis indicates that imperial colonization and its modernity have destructive consequences on the colonized nation: they blur both its social formation and cultural identity.*
Keywords: *Arab patriarchy, double colonization, empowerment, modernity,* Pillars of Salt*, postcolonial feminism*

1. Introduction

In response to the colonial effect on the hierarchies of the Jordanian society, the anglophone Arab author Fadia Faqir's novel *Pillars of Salt* (1996) principally addresses the rule of British colonization and its damaging consequences on the political, cultural and, more significantly, social structures of the nation. Set during and right after the British Mandate over Transjordan (later the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan), Faqir's text deals with the transition of Jordan from colonization to independence, questioning the power structures of domination represented by colonial hegemony on the one hand, and the patriarchal system of the Bedouin society on the other hand, which collude with each other as parallel forces in imposing excessive injustice over the female colonial subjects, causing their subordination and subalternity to varying degrees. In this way, the Bedouin woman stands in opposition to twofold superior powers, occupying an inferior position on different social and political levels. Through the stories of the two female protagonists, Maha and Hannyeh (Um Saad), who share a room in a mental hospital in Amman, Faqir's text exhibits accumulated forms of physical, psychological, sexual and political violence that jointly work in the framework of an oppressive cycle over the indigenous women. They are practiced by both the Arab male figures whose supremacy is reinforced by the social conventions and cultural beliefs of the Bedouin society, and the authoritative control of colonization. Therefore, the Bedouin woman appears as a victim of an interlocking system of domination or, in other words, a double-faceted structure of intersecting oppressions.

2. The Colonization of Women

In general, the subordination of non-Western women created by an overlapping structure of multiple oppressions is a dominant concern within contemporary feminist paradigms that have, in turn, brought about an array of conceptual, methodological and analytical approaches to the representations of women in different cultures. Though they often address the conditions of a

particular category among the wide groups of women worldwide, a mutual feature of their discourses is, one can observe, the inclination to go beyond defining women by and attributing their experiences of subjugation to gender issues solely to incorporate other spheres of influence such as class, sexual preference, race, ethnicity, religion and nation. It is in this sense that these paradigms have decidedly made a considerable reconfiguration of the early basic formation of the mainstream feminist theory, which largely foregrounded the experiences of white and middle-class women, by broadening its scope and including the diverse experiences of other groups of women like black women, third world women, disenfranchised women, migrant women and other groups.

Not surprisingly, when analyzing the position and representation of the Arab women in Faqir's text, the postcolonial feminist model is a case in point, as it primarily focuses on the experiences of third world women, their socio-political positions and their sufferings from and struggles against several forms of inequality in colonial and postcolonial contexts in which they are, as John McLeod clarifies in reviewing the "double colonization" of women, "twice colonized – by colonialist realities and representations, and by patriarchal ones too" (McLeod 2000:175). McLeod adds that double colonization, a postcolonial feminist notion which was first introduced by Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford in their seminal book *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-colonial Women's Writing* (1988), refers to the ways in which third world women "have simultaneously experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy" in once-colonized locations where they "are subject to representation in colonial discourses in ways which collude with patriarchal values" (McLeod 2000:175). Thus, postcolonial feminism essentially adheres to how political, cultural, and economic aspects of imperialism overlap with the local masculine control as power structures of oppression that (re)shape the lives of the non-Western women in a postcolonial world.

Hence, the social status of these women as well as the construction of their identities are (re)produced within a complex framework that, as Ina Kerner notes, has necessarily "included the role of gender and sexuality with regard to colonialism, its legacies and re-actualizations" (Kerner 2016:10). In line with this, Anke Bartels et al. point out that postcolonial feminism

> is concerned with the position and representation of women and other marginalized groups in the discursive formations and power structures put into place by Western colonialism and their lingering effects. Thus, it explores the intersections of (neo)colonialism with gender, race, nation, class, and sexualities in the context of women's lives with the ultimate aim to change oppressive power structures enacted in the name of race, nation […] and empire. (Bartels et al. 2019:158)

Historically, postcolonial feminism appeared in the 1980s as a reaction to the universalizing trends of Western feminism and as a critique of its lack of acknowledging difference among the wide groups of women in the feminist scholarships. It would be, as Audre Lorde reminds us, a "difference of race, sexuality, class, and age", and, as she warns, "the absence of these considerations weakens any feminist discussion of the personal and the political" (Lorde 2007:110). For Lorde, the recognition and tolerance of differences in the feminist activities and critical practices is "a crucial strength" and a "force of change", since difference is, as she confirms, "that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged" (Lorde 2007:112). Thus, postcolonial feminism challenges the validity of the feminist notion of global sisterhood, retaining a critical and opposing stance towards the idealistic tendency of Western feminism to homogenize and universalize women's issues worldwide, which produces them as a monolithic and symmetrical subject without considering those realities of heterogeneity which can be connected, but not limited, to times, spaces, cultures and even women's individual experiences.

In her famous essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", Chandra Mohanty rejects "the assumption of women as a coherent group with identical interests and desires", explaining that "the discursively consensual homogeneity of

women as a group is mistaken for the historically specific material reality of groups of women" (Mohanty 1984:336, 338). Mohanty's explanation makes it clear that history is a constitutive element of the differences among women and, within this context, her argument remarkably goes against the idea of generalizations over women's situations, which reinforces Western hegemony and ethnocentric universality. Based on this assumption, Mohanty also criticizes the Western feminist scholarships on third world women by holding that

> Western feminist writings colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing and re-presenting a composite, singular "Third World Woman" – an image which appears arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourses. (Mohanty 1984:334-335)

In her groundbreaking essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), Gayatri Spivak, like Mohanty, problematizes the reductive representation of the marginalized women in the third world regions by Western intellectuals, for it establishes them as the non-white others. Her main question about who has the right to speak for the non-white subaltern women implies an obvious critique of this system of representation: as long as it is the role of Western intellectuals to represent and to make the voice of this group heard, the subaltern women's voices will remain muted and their words will not be interpreted properly. According to these views, postcolonial feminism is a stream of thought with a transnational vision that aims at rendering visible the varied identities and experiences of all women. By transcending the boundaries of difference, it ultimately calls for a feminist system of representation that considers the heterogeneity of gender groups as an aspect of agency and as a strategy for survival in the face of multiple structures of oppression in a male-dominated world. In line with this, I argue that Faqir's novel, as a fictional representation, breaks the conventional image of Arab Bedouin women as commonly dependent and powerless individuals by depicting how the difference in their social positions produces very different problems and responses that distinguish their identities, illuminating fundamental characteristics of their heterogeneity both on a local and a national level.

Though they are subject to manifold layers of oppression, the narrative reveals that these female characters differ in reacting to or resisting their complex subordination. Maha, the peasant woman from the village of Hamia and the daughter of Sheikh Nimer and Maliha, is depicted as a determined, self-reliant and free-spirited Bedouin woman. She does not take a passive role towards oppression but resists on all fronts in the same breath. She fights her tyrant brother Daffash, who plans to take over her legitimate inheritance, struggles in the face of the restrictive patriarchal society which prioritizes the male at the expense of his female counterpart, and resists the English colonizer that kills her beloved husband, Harb. Her empowerment stems from unique personal strategies she takes on to keep herself firm whenever her downfall seems inevitable. In contrast, Hannyeh, a Syrian migrant and a city woman, seems submissive, yielding and even fragile. She is an obedient domestic servant who accepts the multiple oppressions, exercised first by her conservative father, then by her husband, and she shows no reaction in resisting her oppression.

The difference in their resistance arises from their differing conditions, and apart from focusing on the individual women, Faqir's text also examines the conditions of women in general within the two groups forming the Jordanian society in the novel's timeframe: the Bedouins who live in the deserts or the villages with a tribal lifestyle (a manner of living in which the loyalty of an individual belongs to a group that is connected through a kinship system and shared traditional values and customs) and the city people who live a more modern lifestyle in the capital city Amman. As it appears in the novel, the relationship between the two groups is ambivalent as each side views the other as inferior. This becomes clear in the tension that characterizes the relationship between Maha, the best representative of the indigenous traditionalists, and her brother Daffash, the best representative of the urbanized people.

As this relationship reveals, the Bedouins look at the city dwellers as hybridized people who depart from their indigenous culture to pursue the values, beliefs and attitudes of the colonizer. In postcolonial thinking, this urbanized group greatly complies with what Homi Bhabha recognizes in defining mimicry as a reproduced version of the colonizer that is "almost the same but not quite" (1994:122). Being a method of appropriating the colonized culture, mimicry is, as Bhabha notes, "the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an imminent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers", and, at the same time, "the success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (Bhabha 1994:122-123). In Faqir's novel, the emergence of such copied hybridized social formation is impacted by a tangible adherence of its traditionalist and conservative counterpart to the already existing cultural standards, and hence, the outcome is a cultural conflict that substantially jeopardizes the coherence and authenticity of the cultural identity. The city people, in turn, view the indigenous Bedouins as backward people who are not open to any social progression, and like the colonizer, they (mis)represent them as uncivilized. Out of this ambivalence, what is important to note is that the woman, whether she is a Bedouin or an urbanized one, remains the most marginalized in society. On the one hand, the social conventions of the Bedouins normalize a dominant patriarchy; on the other hand, although the urbanized people have a modernized lifestyle, when it comes to issues of gender relations, women are also restricted to inferior positions.

In light of the above, the current study aims to explore three issues present in Faqir's *Pillars of Salt* as core thematic subjects: the various representations of violence against women, how these women respond to their multiple oppressions, and as a third aspect, their social status within the socio-cultural conflict characterized by the encounter between modernity brought by colonization and adopted by the city dwellers and traditionality comprised of the tribal beliefs and customs of the Bedouin society and preserved by the indigenous Bedouins. Applying postcolonial feminism as a methodological framework, I claim that the investigation of the subjects outlined above as delineated in Faqir's text can provide a meaningful interpretation of the construction of the Bedouin woman's identity in particular; furthermore, it can uncover certain pivotal features of Jordan's national identity not only in the novel's timeframe, but also in the present that still bears traces of the cultural conflict between imperialist modernity and indigenous traditionality in general.

3. Scattered Hegemonies and Intersecting Forms of Violence

Faqir's *Pillars* is a fictional account of two Arab women's experiences of different forms of violence due to multiple patterns of oppression. The narrative opens with a tragic scene in which Maha and Um Saad share a room in a mental institution run by the English. In a sense, this institution can be seen as a special space for their psychological persecution practiced by the colonial enterprise in complicity with their own society, or more specifically, with the patriarchs of their families. These aggressors place the two victimized women ruthlessly under permanent surveillance in an asylum, denying them their right to freedom. The only possible way through which the women could empower themselves over their agonizing past, miserable present and vague future is speech. This seems to be a strategy in the case of women in general and female characters in particular. As Ketu Katrak points out, facing the traps of both colonial and local prejudices, female protagonists in postcolonial literature make strategic use of "their bodies via speech, silence, starvation, or illness" as "often the only available avenue" to resist what she calls their "internalized exile" in an attempt to gain autonomy over their own colonized bodies (Katrak 2006:2-3). In the case of Faqir's protagonists, the most conspicuous mode of subjugation

is the suppression of their voice by the colonizer, making them literally the subalterns who cannot speak. Dr. Edwards, the English doctor who is responsible for observing these madwomen, forces them into silence on his visits to their room. At a certain point, he enters the room and when finding them immersed in speech, he angrily says, "you two never stop talking" and to punish them, he "will increase the dose" (Faqir 1996:118). Even though the English-speaking doctor might not comprehend the Arabic utterances of the women, he feels the urge to restrain this verbal form of relief-seeking which seems to go beyond ordinary human communication in its significance: it can be understood as a mode of challenging their inescapable and ongoing suppression.

In his exercise of power over the indigenous women, the English doctor resembles the colonial authority over Transjordan. He rarely appears in person, but at the same time, has a dominating influence over the women through the medical staff who carry out his orders not only in observing them, but also in violating them. The porter Kukash and the nurse Salam, following the doctor's order, punish Um Saad by cutting her hair and submitting her body to electric shocks, which indicates that the colonial doctor, like the mandate, has control over the native women through authorizing representatives who act on his behalf either by imposing a heavy surveillance or executing various kinds of physical and psychological punishments. Dr. Edward's characterization can be interpreted in correspondence with the patient-doctor relationship under colonialism which has been accounted for in many postcolonial studies. In his famous book, *A Dying Colonialism*, Frantz Fanon describes the colonial doctor figure in a way that discloses his distance from the intrinsic ethical sides of his medical duty as the person who "always appears as a link to the colonialist network, as a spokesman for the occupying power" (Fanon 1965:127). According to the novel, the English doctor intimately serves the occupying colonialist power and its imperial purposes in his contribution to splitting the indigenous women from their culture through exercising various modes of repressive power over them in the asylum, such as institutionalizing their alleged madness, limiting their social integration and violating their bodies and minds.

Prior to their incarceration in the madhouse, the women's experiences in their patriarchal society are fraught with violence as well. Maha's story implies that she is exposed to domestic abuse in the recurring confrontations with her tyrant brother Daffash, who – in her words – "digs out quarrels from under his fingernails", insulting and beating her "for everything: for where his dagger is, for where his breakfast is and for where his sandals are" (Faqir 1996:5). While Maha strives to be put on equal footing with her fierce brother, Daffash contrives any reason to uphold his masculine superiority over his sister by deliberately confining her to crippling householding roles that only satisfy his personal needs as a man. The characteristics surrounding this relation, constructed on privileging the male and marginalizing the female both in the private and public spheres, are the product of the Bedouin conventions which later help the trickster Daffash in his maneuvers of taking over Maha's share of the family orchard, the house and her newborn son Mubarak. After both Maha's husband and father pass away, Daffash plans to marry his sister off to the old man Sheikh Talib, so that he can get rid of her and achieve his goals. Maha, however, refuses to leave behind her devotion to Harb, her husband and the twin of her soul, and in order to avoid this unwilling relation, she escapes to the mountains because Daffash threatens to shoot her if she insists on keeping her decision.

Maha manages to escape Daffash's threat, but still suffers from the power of the Bedouin conventions. In a sense, she endures the pressure of the common traditional belief that the Bedouins prefer their widows getting married once more and continuing their lives with a male companion as a more secure alternative for them than staying under the care of their brothers in the family house. The reason why such a convention is restrictive against women is spelt out by Raj Kumar Mishra, who argues that in many cases "the postcolonial men re-colonized the bodies and minds of their women in the name of preserving their cultural values" (Mishra 2013:132). In

another sense, Maha is accused of tarnishing the honor code of the tribe by escaping on her own to the mountains. This becomes evident when Imam Rajab, seeing her marching to the dwelling of the tribe, calls for her to be stoned as a sinner. In this moment, Daffash seizes the opportunity to achieve what he seeks by pretending that his sister goes mad. He punches her abusively, throws her body onto the ground and finally takes her to the mental hospital with the help of his foreign friends. Daffash's decision to commit Maha to a mental hospital is interpreted by Nadine Sinno as the result of his personal vendetta against her, not an attempt to treat a mental illness. Sinno adds that, without the assistance of the Turkish pasha and the English medical team, Daffash would not be able to overpower his sister and usurp her legal rights (Sinno 2001:80), but his position is reinforced and empowered by the traditional beliefs of his male-privileging culture.

As for Hannyeh (Um Saad), her misery started in early childhood in Syria at the time the country was subject to the French mandate. Her story makes it clear that the family house symbolically functions as her private imprisonment where her conservative father controls her choices and imposes on her what she cannot bear. He treats her like an infant who is not permitted to go in public without a companion; this is why he forces her to quit the *Kutab* (the religious school) and stay at home with her mother. Like in any Arab conservative family, Hannyeh's father acts as the representative of power and authority, who decides everything for himself and for the other family members, including the females. Referring to these days and associating her suffering with the French occupation of her country, Hannyeh mentions that the atmosphere in her house was always fearful since her father, who used to rebel against the French, kept shouting and talking about blood, killing, corpses and explosives, thereby transferring the violence that the country experienced into the family house and against the female members of the household in particular.

She expresses her feeling towards the double aggression over her saying "I did not like my father, but I really hated the French who made him restless and dirty" (Faqir 1996:41). Escaping the violence of the French colonizer, Hannyeh's family moves to Amman where her marginalization does not come to an end but takes a more complicated form. When she gets older, she falls in love with Muhammad, a Circassian man who works in a shop near her house, but her father rejects his proposal and on the same night he marries her off to an old butcher against her will. The father lies to Muhammad, claiming that Hannyeh is already given to her cousin. The reason he gives for his rejection reveals not only how the father in such traditional conservative families decides to whom his daughter should be married, but also reflects the belief that the cousin is the first choice; still, in case it does not work for some reason, the father still has the right to choose for his daughter.

In Hannyeh's situation, her father chooses the old butcher for a financial reason. Furthermore, as an immigrant, she has no good opportunity to marry, for she does not belong to a known family or tribe. She lives in a society which considers the name of the family or tribe as a significant condition for a marriage's acceptance or rejection, the very same complexity which traps Hannyeh in her new imprisonment in the house of her husband, Abu Saad. Because she is not descended from a famous family, she must accept oppression in her husband's house. Abu Saad treats her as a servant who ought to satisfy his comfort day and night. As soon as he is back from work, Um Saad is expected to clean his feet in a bowl with water and soap and his boots from the dung of animals. At night, he views her as a mere sexual object for his own consumption. Um Saad gives birth to eight children, but Abu Saad later marries another younger girl, giving no value to the long years during which Um Saad has been faithful to him. Worse than that, he also compels her to sleep in the kitchen and brings the new wife to sleep in Um Saad's bedroom. However, Um Saad is still silent as she is aware that maintaining the relation with her cruel husband is indispensable because she needs a shelter, financial support and, above all, she is the mother of eight children.

4. Asymmetrical Representation of Arab Female Figures

In the representation of her major female figures, Maha and Hannyeh, Faqir notably draws asymmetrical images of controlled Arab women. A core feature of their characterization is that their oppression is informed by an intersectional framework. However, when it comes to resisting this complex system of oppression, they respond differently due to their contrasting personal qualities. For instance, Maha is depicted as an unusual Arab woman who has a private space of consciousness that provides her with an exceptional ability to respond to her subjection, and an invincible determination to gain the necessary agency, which prepare her to resist all kinds of aggression fearlessly. In this regard, Ketu Katrak asserts that some female protagonists of postcolonial literature are empowered depending on their special cases, but in general their "covert resistances are undertaken with self-consciousness and remarkable creativity". Such protagonists, Ketu elaborates, "take risks and confront domination selectively and strategically in the interest of self-preservation" (Katrak 2006:3), the very feature of Maha's situation. Contrastively, Hannyeh is depicted as a stereotypical Arab woman who has a persistent sense of helplessness, which increases her marginalization even in the domestic sphere. While Maha is given a rebellious voice that enables her to speak – and even act – against the multifaceted forms of injustice, Hannyeh is a subservient woman who accepts her subordinate roles as if she were a willing and collaborative participant in her victimization. Unlike Maha, Hannyeh faces her tribulations by taking on limited methods of self-empowerment such as contemplation and denial. When oppressed, whether within the social institution of the family as a daughter or within the social institution of marriage as a wife, she escapes for merely temporary moments to an imaginative space where she contemplates fairy tales in which the extraordinary heroes come to protect her, or, oblivious to her dilemmas, she finds it relieving that she can sleep for a few hours by the end of her long and exhausting day of servant-like duties.

Maha, in turn, refuses to occupy the role of a victim, crafting unique identities and innovative tactics of self-empowerment that sustain her unrelenting struggle against subjugation to great degrees. For instance, she takes advantage of the attitudes of love, support, care and compassion she exchanges with her kind parents as a source of latent agency. As a Bedouin woman, Maha is raised in a family where her parents treat her in a way that exceeds the conventional normativity of the familial relations in the traditional Bedouin culture. They do not only teach her precious virtues such as responsibility, independence, courage, dignity and honor, but they also feed her a sense of insistence on maintaining them at any cost. At a certain point, Maha keeps up the family honor by refusing to meet with Harb at night near the Dead Sea before marriage, for she realizes that accepting to go with him without the permission of her parents will cause her lover to look down upon her and even doubt her chastity; as a result of this refusal, he proposes to her on the next day unhesitatingly.

This is what Maha mentions she has learnt from her mother, who told her that "those women who risked honor were mere fools" and "men were birds of prey; they chased the quarry as long as it was alive and struggling, but when they had killed it and filled their stomach, they look around for another" (Faqir 1996:18). Maha always remembers her mother's words of wisdom: "men believe that we are angels who descend from the seventh sky. I was a Bedouin woman, free like a swallow and as courageous as my grandmother's Sabha" (Faqir 1996:15), which motivates her to protect her reputation even if she loves Harb and wants him as a lifelong husband. In making this rational decision, Maha does not fully disregard the normative conventions of her conservative culture, albeit against her desires, justifiably believing that this action would destroy her life. This is precisely what happens to her best friend Nasra, who, in turn, meets with Daffash, from a traditional viewpoint, on an illicit sexual affair that makes the tribesmen, including Maha's lustful brother, scorn her. Similarly, on her wedding night, Maha

plays the game and agrees to put her falsified bridal sheet on display even if in this case the lack of proof is not her own fault. Hence, in some sense, Maha is maneuvering within a framework, by both resisting it and, at the same time, taking it into account as a fateful matter.

Maha also remembers the motivational words of her father Sheikh Nimer, whose name means a tiger in Arabic, that "the daughter of the tiger of the desert must be a tigress" (Faqir 1996:13), by dint of which she is encouraged not to surrender especially to the unmerciful patriarchal society. Maha, in turn, seeks to compensate her father, who is disappointed with his only son Daffash. She points out that what lies behind her father's misery "was just one person, one word, Daffash. He wanted a good son. A peasant capable of digging his hands into the soil and transferring that piece of land into a green orchard. Allah gave him a womanizer and a city worshipper" (Faqir 1996:22). Therefore, Maha considers that she is assigned a dutiful daughter's responsibility to gratify her aging father who, besides being disappointed with his only son, is dejected after the death of his beloved wife. This responsibility drives her to do what her brother is supposed to do by going to visit her father regularly, looking after him, for example, bathing his body and also working in his field. In doing the latter, she goes beyond her gender boundaries with regard to the standard female roles dictated by the conventional norms of her Bedouin culture, even though she still abides by these norms as she is fully aware that she can only do that by asking for the permission of her husband, who is willing to give it to her. More apparently, in spite of the fact that Maha transcends her gender boundaries in some way, she nevertheless remains contained and is allowed to stretch these boundaries as long as she is surrounded by good-willing and relatively open-minded male family members like her father and husband.

Maha's love for her husband Harb also empowers her to face all the hardness that pervades her life. When she gets married to the man she loves, she starts seeing life from an optimistic angle and transcends her misery caused by Daffash. However, Maha's sense of delight is incomplete as she misses her husband, who usually joins the rebels in the mountains for days. What is worse than counting the moments of waiting for Harb's return is the harsh words addressed to her by the old women of the tribe, who criticize Maha for not carrying a baby in her belly shortly after her marriage to Harb. In their Bedouin culture, it seems that a woman is criticized to an extent that makes her probably suspect of her ability to give birth if she does not become pregnant very quickly. However, Maha is still powerful and when recollecting her delighting moments with her horseman, she surpasses both the sense of alienation and the pressure of the old women's severe criticism. In this regard, Yasmina Djafri argues that Maha turns to the spinning-wheel as the ultimate solution that can save her while her man is away. In taking a responsibility to finish the carpet her mother Maliha and her grandmother Sabha started before, she devises a self-inspiring power that recovers her strength and enables her to carry on her struggle against the misogynistic unfair laws of Hamia (Djafri 2016:538-539). Maha is also conscious that Harb's absence is for a crucial reason that unavoidably necessitates sacrifice and patience by the rebellious couple who fight – though each one in a different way – for their Arab Bedouin identity against the danger of the foreign aggressor: this is what one can observe in Harb's words: "we are free Bedouins, we never accepted foreign masters" (Faqir 1996:89).

Later, Maha's story reveals that her husband is murdered in one of the rebellions against the English. Maha feels devastated by this loss and mourns the death of the twin of her soul for a long time. Her hatred of the foreigners grows day after day and a desire to fight the colonizer starts to take hold of her psyche. Meanwhile, she becomes aware of her pregnancy, which turns out to be the motive that turns her despair into a glimpse of hope. Discussing motherhood as an aspect of empowerment in some contexts, Lorde (2007:111) points out that "only within a patriarchal structure is maternity the only social power open to women". Imagining that the twin of her soul lives in her womb and will soon come to reality, Maha starts to forget her loss. She motivates herself by contemplating that she must welcome baby Mubarak with a bright smile

and a healthy body. In the Bedouin culture, it is said the one who gives birth does not die, that is why Maha believes that part of Harb, a new soldier or a prospective protector of the tribe is coming soon. Maha is convinced that she can resist the colonizer by giving birth and raising a horseman who can take revenge on those who have made him an orphan.

She is also inspired by her sense of belonging to the land, which she endeavors to teach to Mubarak in his early days when she takes him and places his body on the soil of the family orchard, as a source of agency and a method of resistance in the face of the foreigners. She places Mubarak among the trees, plants, and flowers which, when their crops are grown after months of watering, beautify the scene in her eyes, making her feel that she cultivates something valuable that is tightly linked to her genuine Bedouin identity and to her truly beloved ones. Maha says "when sniffing the jasmine, I felt the warmth of my mother's hand through my robe, my father stroked my hair and Harb, the twin of my soul, kissed the back of my neck" (Faqir 1996:207). Therefore, Maha is eager to fight for her land and teach Mubarak the value it signifies, of which her brother is ignorant: the land, as Maha worries while in the asylum, is under Daffash's mercy and he may sell it to his English masters for a bundle of money.

5. Between Modernity and Traditionality: The Construction of Cultural Identity

Contextualized in Transjordan on the cusp of the British Mandate, a decisive period that marks a redefinition of the colonized nation's cultural identity and a fundamental transformation of its social structure, Faqir's narrative calls into question the effect of imperial colonization and the manifestations of Western modernity it brings on the colonized culture and its indigenous people. In one interpretation, the novel accentuates that the transmission of European modernity into the Bedouin milieu of Transjordan carries relatively invalid models among which there are specificities of sexual standards that pertain to the gender politics of the Western, liberated paradigm. These standards, to which some urbanized people submit themselves without questioning their efficacy, do not offer any progression or emancipation for the Bedouin women, but they increase their subordination which comes out primarily by force of the prevailing order of their patriarchal society. According to Hazel Carby, who reflects on circumstances that are identical to postcolonial Transjordan, the "contact with white societies has not generally led to a more progressive change in African and Asian sex/gender systems" (Carby 1982:121). In this way, along with challenging the cultural restrictiveness and social constraints that identify the conditions of these women within the local sphere and that institutionalize their inferiority, the novel is also critical of the blind allegiance to the Western model which in no way benefits the local women but uncovers how modernity-based sexual preferences converge with traditional patriarchy in fostering gender bias.

One instance that affirms how far modernity is from coming up with social merits for the native women, but partly collaborating in their mistreatment is the contradictory conceptions surrounding Daffash's multiple sexual relations with women of his tribal village. The Bedouin man who is obsessed with the liberated behavior of his foreign friends does not feel guilty for destroying Nasra's reputation by having an extramarital sexual relation with her, nor is he blamed by the people of the tribe for his misbehavior; that is why he is still thirsty to satisfy his sexual lust, seeking to have more illegitimate relations with other women like Salih's wife, whom he takes to a cave near their village in order to rape. Contrastively, the woman is exclusively burdened by an unconditional obedience to the social code of honor from a traditional perspective, being punished for any sexual deviation with a penalty that may extend to her death; therefore, she is prevented from assuming any unrestricted attitude which clearly reveals that this mode of emancipation in conduct is misogynist and limited to the man's choice. Hence, mimicry – as represented in this context – becomes gendered and it works with the

customary laws of the Bedouin society, such as the social code of honor, to produce an intensive mode of discrimination against women.

Not only does modernity constitute negative consequences for the most marginalized group in society, but at a broader level its manifestations invade the whole society, creating unfamiliar manners of urbanization that change the landscape of both the villages and the capital city Amman. Maha's story indicates that the lands of her village are occupied by English cars and tanks that exhale black smoke and poison the beautiful flowers, plants and trees of its plantations. As Um Saad indicates, Amman is also undergoing a sudden change that features the urbanization of the city's life as well: its streets are surrounded by glow lamps that lighten every spot in the city at night, its usual silence is replaced by the unstoppable vehicles' noise and its people, particularly women, take off their veils and appear half-naked in public. These aspects and practices, as the novel shows, are not popular in the traditional culture of the Bedouins, but they get to a certain extent normalized as a result of a particular group of urbanized people embracing cultural values and standards of the foreign colonizer. This can be interpreted, in McLeod's terms, as proof of the fact that "in many colonized countries British colonialism interrupted indigenous familial and community structures and imposed its own models instead" (McLeod 2000:175). As the novel reveals, these models are, however, rejected by a counter group of indigenous Bedouins, deeming them as outlandish manners that oppose the normative values and principles of their conventions.

This attitude of rejection manifests itself in Maha's reaction when she brings towels for the English women Daffash has invited to their house in Hamia, so as to cover their undressed legs. On this occasion, Maha makes the remark "city women, no shame or shyness" (Faqir 1996:38), since it surprises her that these women are painted, smoke cigarettes, and wear short skirts and uncovered heads. On another occasion which proves that some urbanized people follow the European liberated model, Um Saad says that the new wife of her husband, a young blonde girl, walks around in high heels, wearing a silk green dress that clings to her body like a smooth skin. The new bride spends the night playing cards with Abu Saad's young sons, they tell jokes, laugh in a loud voice, listen to English music and dance until dawn.

Moreover, Um Saad tells Maha that, while she sleeps in the kitchen, she hears clinks of the glasses of alcohol coming from the hotel nearby and screams of the drunk guys after finishing their night in the clubs that the English foreigners have built in Amman. Before colonization, night clubs never existed in Transjordan as the social principles, regulating the life of its people, were dominantly conservative, definitely not legitimizing the existence of such places. Asserting that nightlife is part of the colonial legacy, Faqir says in an interview conducted by Lindsey Moore that "when I was young, I lived next to an English club – a remnant of the British Mandate – that Jordanians were not allowed to enter. […] I remember that colonial exclusive space very clearly" (Moore 2011:1). In the novel, locals are excluded from accessing night clubs, as it becomes clear from the dialogue between Daffash's English guests about a night that they spend in one of them. In this dialogue, one of the women mentions that Daffash is exceptionally entitled to go with them because he is, as they view him, an open-minded Arab man, which discloses how the Westerners look at the Arab people with superior eyes, specifically at those who contradict the modernized man, i.e. the Arab traditionalist Bedouins.

By the same token, Daffash, the best representative of the urbanized group in the novel, shares the same stereotypical attitude of the foreigners in that he despises his Bedouin family, including Maha, treating them with contempt all the time. He is fascinated by the modernized life of the city; that is why he, as Maha recounts in sorrow, sells most of the pillows and mattresses of the family house to replace them with armchairs, and he also sells the family herd, the cow Halabeh, the dog Nashmi, the horse Mujahid and the two camels because he wants to modernize the land by building a villa and hiring Indians to work in the field. For Maha, Daffash

does not sell the traditional items of their house and the animals of their farm, but rather he sells his Bedouin identity and devalues its cultural heritage. She mourns the days and months that she, her mother and her grandmother have spent in weaving the items of the family house which symbolize the pertinence of these trueborn Bedouin women. In highlighting such conflict between Daffash and Maha (which is meant to represent the larger cultural encounter between city people and traditionalists), Faqir's text can be interpreted, one can conclude, as a literary critique of the devastating effect of Western colonization on the Arab culture in that its modernity does not bring a valid social progress for its native people, including women, but deforms both its social formation and cultural identity.

6. Conclusion

This study has investigated Faqir's *Pillars of Salt*, with a special focus on three thematic subjects: the various forms of violence against the central female Arab characters, the different representations of the female protagonists due to their empowering methods of resisting their intricate subordination, and, thirdly, their conditions within the cultural encounter between modernity brought by colonization and adopted by a group of urbanized people and traditionality comprised of the cultural beliefs and customs of the Arab Bedouin society and preserved by another group of indigenous Bedouins. Drawing upon postcolonial feminism, the analysis of Faqir's novel shows that the female protagonists, Maha and Hannyeh, are exposed to an intersectional structure of multiple oppressions that results from the interaction between colonization and patriarchy, and that produces accumulated forms of psychological, sexual, mental, physical and political violence against them. It also shows that apart from the fact that the structure of their oppression is complex, the two victimized Arab women's responses are completely divergent: while Maha adopts unique strategies of personal empowerment that help her resist fearlessly on all fronts, Hannyeh adopts inefficient and passive roles that essentially increase her state of continuing disempowerment. As for the cultural encounter between modernity and traditionality, the analysis indicates that imperial colonization and the manifestations of modernity it transfers into Transjordan create a cultural conflict between the urbanized people and the traditionalist Bedouins. This conflict is far from being unproblematic as it uncovers how colonial modernity – when faced with the traditionality of such an Arab Bedouin society – produces a new, deformed and even hybridized social formation that brings only slight benefits – if any – for its indigenous people, including the most marginalized group, the victimized women.

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