

**IDENTITY FORMATION IN FADIA FAQIR'S NOVEL *MY NAME IS***

***SALMA***

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## DECLARATION

This research project is my original work and has not been presented for the award of a degree in any other university.

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## **DEDICATION**

*To Stella.*

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## ABSTRACT

This research explores 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 analyse 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 Homi K. Bhabha’s theories of ambivalence, mimicry, ‘hybridity’ and ‘the third space’ were applied to analyse 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.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Background to the Study

The experience of the historical encounter between Islam and the West has played an integral part in the process of the formation of self-identity for many Muslims in the West. Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* (2003) says that the Western world dominated the Eastern world for more than 2,000 years since the imperial conflict between the Greek West and the Persian East: “The other feature of Oriental-European relations was that Europe was always in a position of strength, not to say domination. [...] But the essential relationship, on political, cultural, and even religious grounds, was seen –in the West to be one between a strong and a weak partner” (Said, 40). He adds that in the period of colonialism following Western military conquest, there followed an intellectual conquest of the East by the West. As a result of this intellectual conquest, Western scholars appropriated for themselves the interpretation and translation of Oriental languages, and the critical study of the cultures and histories of the Orient. In this way, Europeans wrote the history of Asia thereby inventing the “the inscrutable Orient” (ibid., 222) as a cultural representation of people considered inferior to the people of the West. According to Said:

Oriental or Arabs are shown to be gullible, “devoid of energy and initiative,” much given to “fulsome flattery,” intrigue, cunning, and unkindness to animals; Orientals cannot walk on either a road or a pavement (their disordered minds fail to understand what the clever European grasps immediately, that roads and pavements are made for walking); Orientals are inveterate liars, they are “lethargic and suspicious,” and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race. [...] The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, “different”; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, “normal.” [...] so far as the West was concerned during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, an assumption had been made that the Orient and everything in it was, if not patently inferior to, then in need of corrective study by the West (ibid., 38-41).



Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the USA and the ensuing war on terror in many parts of the world, Islam and Arab ethnicity has come under greater scrutiny in many discourses. This has made a number of Muslim writers to engage in their works a (re)definition of Arab/Muslim identity in this new context. A survey of literature written by and about Muslim women in the West demonstrates that Muslim women in North America and the United Kingdom have been concerned about the stereotypes regarding the religion of Islam and its teachings about the role of women (Al Maleh, 2009). Fadia Faqir, like other Muslim writers in the West, has engaged in combating this inaccurate portrayal of Muslim women and has attempted to create a place of equality and respect for Muslim women in Islamic culture as well as a space for them in the Western world (Canpolat, 2014). Her novel *My Name is Salma* belongs to postcolonial literature and portrays a Muslim Middle-Eastern native in the West and the experience she undergoes in an attempt to construct her subjectivity within the overpowering secularism of Western culture.

Colonisation and post-colonisation 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 globalised, mimicry, 'hybridity' and ambivalence have come to define the postcolonial African identity much like that of other colonised 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 coloniser. Faqir's *My Name is Salma* resonates with other African writings like Mariama Ba's novella *So Long a Letter* and the two autobiographical books, Waris Dirie's *Desert Flower* and Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *The Caged Virgin*.

Ba's novel describes the plight of a Muslim woman in a West African context. It recounts the bitter reminiscences of Senegalese school teacher Ramatoulaye to her old friend Aissatou about her emotional struggle for survival when her husband decides to marry a second wife. Although Islam permits polygamy, Modou's decision to take a second wife is a betrayal of Ramatoulaye's trust and a cruel rejection of their life together as marriage partners. *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 traumatised 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 traumatised 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.

Fadia Faqir was born in Amman, Jordan in 1956. She is a Jordanian/British writer, an independent scholar and activist in human rights. She gained her BA in English Literature at the University of Jordan, Amman, before undertaking an MA in Critical and Creative Writing at Lancaster, UK. She completed her PhD in Critical and Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia, England. Faqir edited and co-translated *In the House of Silence: Autobiographical Essays by Arab Women Writers* (1998). She is also a lecturer and coordinator for the *Project of Middle Eastern Women's Studies* at the Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, University of Durham, England. Her novels include *Nisanit* (1990), *Pillars of Salt* (1996), *My Name is Salma* (2007) and *Willow Trees Do not Weep* (2014). Faqir has also written a number of short stories and plays.

*My Name is Salma* is the story of a young unmarried Muslim Bedouin woman, a Jordanian who moves from her home in the Levant to live in England. 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 dishonour 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. She later delivers a baby girl who is immediately taken away from 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 who was taken away from her at birth. 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 colonised, indigenous, and marginalised 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 fuelling 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:

1. To analyse the issues presented by Fadia Faqir’s portrayal of Salma in the novel *My Name is Salma*.
2. To prove that physical and cultural alienation of the novel’s protagonist leads her to a quest for identity formation.
3. To analyse identity formation in *My Name is Salma*.

## **Hypotheses**

This study is guided by these assumptions:

1. Faqir's novel portrays the *hijab* dilemma, 'honour' killing, personal reinvention and feminism.
2. Physical and cultural alienation of the novel's protagonist leads her to a quest for identity formation.
3. Salma attempts an identity formation based on the experience of her movement between geographical regions and cultures, and the consequent experience of adjustment following the loss of her original home.

### **Rationale for 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, 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 localised 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 marginalisation 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 colonisation while many others still live under post-colonialism. It is therefore worthwhile to study the experience of post-colonisation and the diaspora in relation to identity formation.

## **Literature Review**

This research does not draw a line between personal and social identities. Personal identity may be the result of the interaction of the individual within a social realm. A person may feel the sense of belonging where one's both personal and social identities are given the due respect and importance; hence, personal and social identities in this research augment each other and are treated equally.

John Earl Joseph in *Language and Identity: National, Ethnic, Religious* (2004) believes that the answer to the question "Who are you?" is not simply your name but "Who are you really and who are you deep down?" (Joseph, 2004). According to Joseph, there are therefore, two basic aspects to people's identity; their name, which stresses first of all to single them out from other people, and then that deeper intangible something that constitutes who one really is. This argument informs this research's analysis of Salma's identity formation, the main character of Faqir's novel *My Name is Salma*.

Bonny Norton Pierce in "Social Identity, Investment, and Language Learning" (1995) acknowledges the role of society and social relations in defining identity. She defines identity as "a person's sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world" (ibid.). Pierce's 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 analysed from this perspective.

According to Thomas Fuchs in “Fragmented Selves: Temporality and Identity in Borderline Personality Disorder” (2007), “The difference between fragmentation and identity is one which makes the subject unable to hold and experience a stable sense of self, thus preventing social participation and agency. Fragmentation may be conceptualized as a lack of “narrative identity” which “implies a continuity of the personal past, present and future [and is] ... essentially based on the capacity of persons to integrate contradictory aspects and tendencies into a coherent, overarching sense and view of themselves” (Fuchs, 2007: 179). Fuchs’ argument is relevant to this study in the sense that it is the basis for studying Salma’s identity formation as a fragmented subject.

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. According to Bhabha, the space of the ‘in-between’ also gives the exile, the immigrant, the migrant and the colonial more chances to choose possibilities from their multi-cultural background. This means that their identity is not fixed and is not defined by the past. The exile inevitably negotiates between spaces as between cultures; one negotiates and creates or finds a

temporary 'place' for themselves between cultural spaces. Bhabha's arguments enrich this study because they enable an examination of how the character under study forms her identity.

On cultural identity, Stuart Hall in *Identity, Culture, Community and Difference* (1990) asserts that "as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather –since history has intervened –'what we have become'. Cultural identity is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture" (ibid., 225). Hall further adds: "Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (ibid., 223). Stuart Hall's arguments on cultural identity are important to this research as his assertions will be used to analyse and understand the transformation a subaltern subject undergoes in constructing an identity within the environment of a culturally dominant postcolonial experience.

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 character to construct and represent herself as an Arab Bedouin Muslim. 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.

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 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.

*The Black Album* (1996) by Hanif Kureishi is a novel about a student who is born in England of Pakistani extraction and after the death of his father moves to London to study in college and lead a new life. In London he encounters two new identities: the English and the Muslim. He

also discovers that it is difficult to align himself to one of these identities in a multicultural city like London. Having established connections to both a Muslim and British identity, he opts to abandon his Muslim friends in order to live with his English lover. In the process of embracing London and an English identity, he eventually separates himself from the community of his father, his friends, and their Pakistani and Muslim identities. *The Black Album*, like *My Name is Salma*, also focuses on the identity crisis that a young Asian-British Muslim encounters in multicultural Britain.

Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* is a novel about Muslims in Britain. It deals with identity and the question of being British by centering on Muslims in London. Brick Lane is a street in London teeming with Bangladeshi Muslim inhabitants. For the Bangladeshis, Brick Lane is an imaginary Bangladesh, their imaginary homeland, while for the native British, it is a community all but invisible to the rest of London. *Brick Lane* narrates the story of a Bangladeshi girl, Nazneen, who is taken to London to live her life as an "unspoilt" person, but who becomes "spoilt" by deciding for herself the type of life she wants to live. *Brick Lane* relates to *My Name is Salma* given that both novels describe the experiences of a female Muslim immigrant living in Britain.

*Nisanit*, Faqir's first novel portrays the Arab-Israeli conflict through Shadeed, the Palestinian guerrilla fighter, his girlfriend and his Israeli interrogator. Her second novel *Pillars of Salt* explores the lives of two Muslims as they struggle with their individual oppressions in Jordan during and after the British Mandate. Her latest novel *Willow Trees Do not Weep* is the story of a young woman's journey to find her father.

From this literature review, it is clear that a lot has been researched on with regard to identity in general. A literary void exists in terms of studying the formation of identity for a Muslim subject in a postcolonial environment as has not been carried out in Fadia Faqir's novel *My Name is Salma*.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Michelle Foucault brought the view that identity is a constructed entity rather than an essential and therefore unchanging description of the inborn characteristics of a person or culture. In *The History of Sexuality* (1988), Foucault observes the ways in which cultural practices and social institutions play an important role in identity formation. Thus, we are able to examine “the present time, and . . . what we are, in this very moment” in a way that tends to “dissipate what is familiar and accepted” and focus on the cause of the original formation of norms” (ibid., 265). 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’ (ibid., 40) while characterising the West, in contrast, as ‘rational’, ‘virtuous’, ‘mature’, and ‘normal’, the antithesis of all that is Oriental (ibid., 40). In short, Orientalist discourse constructed the East and Islam as the antithesis of the West and Western civilisation. 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, greatly interfering with the development of a true sense of home, homeland, identity, and belonging. *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 colonise people who are viewed as 'Other'. Bhabha examines 'hybridity' as a cause of ambivalence and anxiety in the people who are assumed to have power in the colonial relationship. Therefore, '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. Spivak argues that for the subaltern to be heard, they must adopt Western ways of knowing; because of this Westernization, the subaltern can never express their true ways of knowing but must conform their expression of their non-Western knowledge to Western ways of thought. 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. He talks of the need to rethink cultures as sites for dwelling and travelling. He equates 'travel' with 'displacement'. Travellers are at ease with more than one culture, so according to Clifford, the question is not 'Where are you from?' but 'Where are you between?' (ibid., 109). Clifford asserts that travellers are impacted by the physical locations they travel to; travelling and dwelling both affect and help to define one's identity. By this argument on travel, Salma's journey from Hima to England is her travelling towards her self-identity.

Stuart Hall in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" thinks of identity as "production within, not outside representation" (Hall, 1990: 222). He says that what should be examined is the formation of social and cultural identities incorporating the permanent coexistence of an individual self and a collective one. Hall's view examines the subject via a dual-layered cultural identity that he argues is "a sort of collective one true self" (ibid., 223). This implies that one's cultural identity is moulded by the shared cultural codes and common historical experiences. However, the second layer of cultural identity exceeds the points of similarity to those "critical points of deep difference which determine what we really are" (ibid., 225). According to Hall, the resulting identity is emphatic through the coexisting connection between the social and the private selves within a single person. In studying the subject under Hall's concept, this research will examine how English culture and society impacts Salma's formation of subjectivity.

## **Scope and Limitations**

This research focuses solely on identity formation in the novel *My Name is Salma* by Fadia Faqir. From the literature review, it is clear that of all of Faqir's novels, only *My Name is Salma*

portrays identity formation which is the subject of this research. This study therefore excludes all her other novels in order to achieve the objectives of the study.

## **Method of Study**

This research began with a close and comparative reading and study of books and literature written by Fadia Faqir and works by other writers from the Middle East living in the West in order to form an informed background to the study. 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 analysing 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.



## **Definition of Key Terms**

### **Ambivalence**

This term was first developed in psychoanalysis to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. It also refers to a simultaneous attraction towards and repulsion from an object, person or action (Young, 1995: 161). According to Homi K. Bhabha, ambivalence describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterises the relationship between coloniser and colonised. The relationship is ambivalent because the colonised subject is never simply and completely opposed to the coloniser (Bhabha, 2004: 13).

### **Hybridity**

‘Hybridity’ is the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation. Hybridization takes many forms: linguistic, cultural, political, racial et cetera. ‘Hybridity’ has frequently been used in postcolonial discourse to mean simply ‘cross-cultural’ exchange (Ashcroft, 2013: 135-136).

### **Mimicry**

According to Homi K. Bhabha, ‘mimicry’ is the process by which the colonized subject is reproduced as ‘almost the same, but not quite’ (Bhabha, 2004: 86). Mimicry has come to describe the ambivalent relationship between the coloniser and colonized. When colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to ‘mimic’ the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer’s cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a ‘blurred copy’ of the colonizer (ibid., 154-155).

## **‘Other’**

To characterise a person, group or institution as ‘Other’ is to place them outside the system of normality or convention to which one belongs oneself (Goring, 401). In general terms, the ‘Other’ is anyone who is separate from one’s self. The colonized subject is characterized as ‘Other’ as a means of establishing the binary separation of the colonizer and colonized and asserting the primacy of the colonizing culture and world view (Ashcroft, 2013: 186).

## **‘The Third Space’**

The concept of ‘the third space’ is what Bhabha calls ‘hybridity’, through which other, non-Western-centric positions may emerge to articulate and set up “new structures of authority, new political initiatives” (Bhabha, 2004). The process of ‘hybridity’ thus produces “something different, something new, and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (Bhabha, 2004).

## **Subaltern**

Subaltern, meaning ‘of inferior rank’, is a term adopted by Antonio Gramsci to refer to those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes. Subaltern classes may include peasants, workers and other groups denied access to ‘hegemonic’ power (Ashcroft, 2013: 244).

## **Identity**

This research uses Francis M. Deng’s definition of identity as “the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language and culture” (Deng, 1995: 1).

**Patriarchy**

Sylvia Walby defines patriarchy as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby, 1990).

**Alienation**

This research uses Melvin Seeman’s definition of ‘alienation’ which refers to the isolation and refers to the detachment of the individual from popular cultural standards. According to Seeman, alienation is the “apartness from the society” for an individual, (Seeman, 1959).

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Key Issues in *My Name is Salma***

This chapter examines the key issues presented by Fadia Faqir's portrayal of Salma in her novel. The issues that form part of this reading are: the *hijab* dilemma, 'honour' killing, personal reinvention and feminism.

### **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 French government was going to circulate guidelines for cultural institutions against wearing full veils in public places after a woman at a performance was asked to remove the face covering or be ejected. 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 11<sup>th</sup> 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 chapter 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. Arguably, Faqir's Islam has been influenced by her personal life experiences and the position of the woman in Muslim societies. 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" (ibid., 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 using the term 'impose', Faqir shows that Muslim women are forced to wear the veil as a form of oppression by the males. Her father 'imposed' the veil and she 'took it off' implies that she is opposed to wearing the veil. 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. This article shows that Faqir prioritises her freedom of thought over the religion of Islam into which she was born. In order to wear the veil, she must be convinced of the need to do so or else she will not. She appears cognisant that wearing the veil is an Islamic injunction because when talking to her father about it she asked, “Am I less important to you than religion?” (ibid.). 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” (ibid.). This shows that Faqir detests Islam and the Muslims who practise it. According to her, Islam is forced upon female Muslims by conservative male Muslims who are dictators and are uncompromising. Just like Salma resists her father’s imposition of the veil upon her, the Muslim woman suffering under the yoke of male tyrants should resist and continue doing so ceaselessly.

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. She tells Salma that God made her perfect and loves every part of her body including her hair to which Salma

replies: “My hair is ‘aura. I must hide it. Just like my private parts” (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 practised 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” (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 (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" (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 (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 (123, 129). Discarding her veil implies that Salma has began 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” (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. When a man walks by and looks at her hair, her scalp twitches, Salma holds her head with her hands and cries for hours. 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 practised 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” (106). At the report of her killing, an old woman of the tribe whispers: “Good riddance! We’ve cleansed our shame with her blood!” (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” (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 (110, 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 (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” (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 ostracised 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 sanitise 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: "Four years ago we were scavengers looking for leftovers in garbage bins and whenever we found a mouldy sandwich we would run to the park to eat it. '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" (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" (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” (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.

Salma understands that the world has changed and she moves to England with the aim of changing her life, she says: “I wanted to mend my life” (61). 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.

### **Feminism**

Charles Nnolim defines feminism as “an identity which rallies support for the claim of women for equal rights with men in the aspects of legal, political, economic, social and material matters giving them a source of self-worth as contributing members (Nnolim, 1994). As an active feminist writer, Faqir defies the patriarchal social norms that weaken the woman in the Muslim

and Arab world by writing about the woman question in particular. As a feminist activist, she aims at attaining total emancipation for women and opposes any system that oppresses and marginalizes them. In her book *In the House of Silence: Autobiographical Essays by Arab Women Writers* (1998), Faqir confirms the discriminatory cultural practices against Muslim women by saying:

Islam, or that particular interpretation of the *hadith* and Qu'ran, perceives a specific role for women which in practice places them at the bottom of the social hierarchy –men are superior to them by a degree. Islam identified women with chaos, anti-divine and anti-social forces. The unchecked rights of men, polygamy and divorce, were all strategies to subjugate women. A true Islamic Baghdadi house was a house where men provided for women, protected women and policed them (Faqir, 1998: 51).

The male dominance of Islamic men over women is obviously being challenged by Faqir. This opposition towards patriarchal dominance of women is conditioned by her orientation as a feminist. By saying that “Islam identified women with chaos”, Faqir aligns herself with the feminists who consider Islam the cause of women’s subordination to men in the Arab and Muslim world.

Feminist critic Elaine Showalter in her text *A Literature of Their Own* (1998) posits that during the ‘feminist’ phase, female writers helped dramatise the plight of the ‘slighted’ woman, portraying the painful treatment of female characters at the hands of their more powerful males. Faqir’s novel *My Name is Salma* fits into the ‘feminist’ phase of writing as defined by Showalter for it depicts the plight of Salma at the hands of oppressive men. Salma’s lover, Hamdan, who impregnates her before abandoning her is a man, so is her brother Mahmoud who wants to shoot her between the eyes and all the men of her tribe who run her out of her hometown threatening to kill her.

As a woman living in Muslim Hima, grown up Salma remains under the charge of her male relatives like her father and her brother Mahmoud. Even as an adult, she is not left to her own devices and if her brother Mahmoud were to find her talking to strange men, her life would be in danger: “If my brother Mahmoud sees me talking to strange men, he will tie each leg to a different horse and then get them to run in different directions” (29). Merely talking to strange men portends a life risk for Salma. The conservative culture of Hima places immense power in the males over the women that Mahmoud would not only get away with such a heinous crime but also would be considered a hero for restoring the family’s honour by murdering his sister. It is obvious that men in Hima are free agents and are not answerable to anyone but themselves, they can liberally interact with members of the opposite sex without fear of dire consequences. The women in Hima do not share the same privilege however. As a woman, Faqir is interested in highlighting the plight of women in Muslim societies, through Salma who represents all Muslim women, in order to liberate them from oppressive men.

Faqir also advances her feminist agenda by portraying a number of strong female characters who succeed at what they do even if it goes against the established patriarchal order of the society. One such woman is Shahla, Salma’s grandmother. As a liberal-minded woman, Shahla advises her granddaughter: “Follow your heart always, daughter of mine” (31). This amounts to planting a seed of defiance in Salma by advising her to choose a mate for herself in disregard of an arranged marriage which is the norm in their Muslim society. Shahla herself is an example of such rebellion when she elopes with a man from an enemy tribe which is constantly at war with her tribe. On being informed by her lover of the plans to kidnap her at night, complicit Shahla decides to sleep in the guests’ tent in order not to disturb her mother when her lover arrives at night to collect her (32).

On the night of her planned escape, Shahla pretends to be cleaning her brazier in the guests' tent until she hears her mother snoring and then sits up fully dressed waiting for her man. When he arrives, she gladly elopes with him in the thick of the night (32). The story of Shahla is empowering to Salma given that her grandmother personally determines her life partner in blatant disregard of societal norms. Later in her life, Salma thinks and acts independently with regard to her decision to get married to John, an English gentleman who hails from a culture much different from hers. Faqir wades into the debate of arranged marriages by portraying independent-minded women who reject such marriages. She seems to be telling women to resist arranged marriages as they are an infringement on their personal right to choose a mate for themselves. Faqir arguably approves of the love marriages as practised in the West as shown by Salma who moves to England and falls in love with John after which they have a successful marriage.

Whereas Salma is in love with Hamdan and thinks he shares the same feeling towards her, Hamdan seems to be in the relationship solely for his sexual gratification, he is clear when he declares: "...you are mine, my slave girl". [...] "My whore is still here" (36). That Hamdan refers to Salma as his "slave" and "whore" means that he considers her a sex object whose chief function is to quench his lustful desires much like a prostitute does to men who have no affection towards her. Salma's love for Hamdan is unrequited as Hamdan only considers her useful to the extent that she fulfils his desire for sex. When Salma informs Hamdan that she is pregnant by him, he becomes angry and refuses to take responsibility for the pregnancy. Instead, he blames Salma for having seduced him with the tunes of his pipe and the swaying of her hips. He threatens violence against Salma and tells her: "I've never laid a finger on you. I've never seen you ever before. Do you understand?" (203). Hamdan refuses to marry her and disappears. He

says that Salma is a “slut”, “cheap” and “damaged goods” (289). Salma having served to fulfil his need for sex, Hamdan sees no further use for her as he never loved her in the first place and is not interested in marrying her so he opts to dump her. This romantic relationship between Salma and Hamdan is shown to benefit the man at the expense of the woman. For her love of him, poor Salma is sexually abused and exploited by the man she loves.

Given the subordinate position of women in relation to men in Hima’s Muslim society, Salma having premarital sex with Hamdan is considered a transgression whereas Hamdan doing the same with her is acceptable. Hamdan is Salma’s accomplice in the act of premarital sex for which Salma is being hunted down in order to be killed. Hamdan on the other hand is not considered by the society to have erred, he is safe and nobody is hunting him down in order to kill him. Instead, Salma shoulders all the blame for the sex act which involved both of them and has to be hidden in protective police custody before being smuggled out of the country lest she is murdered by the men of Hima. Hima is a man’s world and a nightmare for Salma who has no option but to flee. Since the men in Hima are intent on killing her, Salma’s only hope is her fellow women. She finds help in her female teacher, Miss Nailah, who takes her to the police. In prison, it is also a female, warden Naima, who accepts to rescue her by taking her into protective custody. That no woman in Hima wants to kill Salma for having conceived a child out of wedlock but only the men frames this conflict as a case of male oppression of the female gender. Faqir portrays the plight of women in Muslim countries who meet their deaths at the hands of males in ‘honour’ killing.

As a condemned woman whom the society considers unfit to live in their midst, Salma finds kindness and Christian charity when she flees Hima and is taken in by the Lebanese nuns of the Ailiyya convent, her fellow women. When Salma feels unworthy of love, Minister Mahoney



comforts her by assuring her that she is worthy of love; when she tells him that she has done shameful things, he tells her that everyone has done shameful things and that doing shameful things is part of being human. Faqir's message is that women who engage in premarital sex like Salma need love and forgiveness just like all other sinners instead of being condemned to death because everyone is capable of reforming.

The author portrays many of the female characters in her novel as victims of the human condition and the patriarchal dominance of the societies in which they live. A number of female characters in *My Name is Salma* inhabit a prison –physically or metaphorically. Salma's first encounter with prison occurs when she is placed in protective custody to avoid getting killed for having engaged in premarital sex. Her next encounter with incarceration is the two months she spends at the port detention facility before being admitted into England. While in prison in Hima, Salma meets other women who have been imprisoned for various offenses. Later, Salma inhabits a metaphorical prison as her dark past is alive and lingering whereas her present life remains difficult to settle into. She describes herself as being stalked by ghosts: "The noise of the crowd, shunting and the whistles managed to frighten off the ghosts that stalked me" (158). These ghosts represent her painful past in Hima that she fled but has not been successful in shaking off as it keeps following her. She is haunted by images in the form of her daughter Layla whom she was forced to abandon; and a lone assassin, who is her brother Mahmoud, constantly hunting her down with the intention of killing her. One night in the hostel with Parvin, Salma imagines her brother Mahmoud has arrived in the room to kill her:

"Someone in the room after me", I said.

She got up, looked under the beds, behind the wardrobes and outside the door.

"Behind the curtains", I said.

She pulled the curtain open and there was nothing, no Mahmoud, no sandals and no rifle. "He must jump the window", I said (110).

Thoughts of her lost daughter Layla keep visiting her in England. Once when talking to Minister Mahoney, Salma cannot handle the strong emotions about her daughter with whom she was separated immediately after birth: "I left her behind. Deserve to die, not live, me" (40), she says and begins crying. Her "too much past" (123) overwhelms and incapacitates her present and future life.

Another victim of patriarchy is Madam Lamaa, Salma's friend in prison. Madam Lamaa resorts to prostitution when she is thrown out of her matrimonial home by her husband. A dutiful, loving wife to her husband, her problems begin at the onset of menopause when the physical changes her body undergoes make her husband fall out of love with her. Her husband marries a second wife and this drives her mad before she "...went to the storeroom, opened each sack and scattered the rice, the flour, the sugar, the lentils, the dry fruit all over the place" (182). She then stripped naked and walked out of the house: "They found me standing naked under the lamppost in the main street. They thought I was a prostitute" (180). The judge said her public nakedness was a lewd act and so she was sentenced to serve time in prison. Through the character of Madam Lamaa, Faqir depicts the power structure in Muslim societies that tilts towards men to the detriment of women.

Since the religion of Islam allows men to marry up to four women, Madam Lamaa's husband can take a second wife without any fear of reprisal from her jealous wife. He marries a second wife for the flimsy reason that his wife is undergoing menopause so he finds her unattractive. As a result of menopause, Madam Lamaa puts on weight and grows a tummy making her husband to stop fulfilling his conjugal duties towards her because she is "disgusting" (181). This is the

height of unbridled power men enjoy over their wives in Hima, a Muslim society. Faqir challenges this arrangement which is oppressive towards women.

The women of Hima cannot get a reprieve from the oppression at the hands of their male partners. Salma's grandmother, Shahla, dies of heartbreak when her husband marries a second wife and is thrown out of her house when her husband dies (210). The key characters in *My Name is Salma* are female; Salma, Shahla, Miss Nailah, Madam Lamaa, Naima, Sister Khairiyya, Sister Françoise, Miss Asher, Parvin and Liz. However, there exist male characters like Haj Ibrahim, Mahmoud, Hamdan, Sadiq, Jim, Max, Allan, Mark and John who all play peripheral roles. Many of Salma's friends are women, most of whom impact her life positively, they include: Miss Nailah, her teacher in Hima; Noura, her dearest friend whom she meets while in protective custody; Madam Lamaa, her fellow inmate; Sister Khairiyya, the nun who drives her to the border with Lebanon when she flees Hima; Sister Françoise, the young French nun; Miss Asher, one of the English sisters of the Ailiyya convent; Gwen, her retiree neighbourhood friend and Parvin, her hostel roommate.

Most of the male characters in the novel, however, have little positive impact on the life of Salma except Max and Allan who both offer her jobs and her husband John. Salma's father only influences her life by enforcing the strict conservative societal code, she says: "I looked again at the veil which my father had asked me to wear" (129), and "Damned is the carrier, buyer and drinker of alcohol, I heard my father's voice. My hand trembled carrying the forbidden drink to my lips" (265). However, Haj Ibrahim's influence on her daughter Salma wanes when Salma moves to Britain as she discards the veil which her father asked her to wear and drinks alcohol contrary to her father's advice. Hamdan on the one hand sexually exploits and impregnates Salma before dumping her while her brother Mahmoud on the other murders her. Salma's other

male acquaintances like Sadiq, only engage her in petty conversation once in a while because they are neighbours.

Parvin, Salma's hostel roommate, also suffers oppression at the hands of men. She ends up in a hostel with Salma when she runs away from a marriage arranged by her father to a man she describes as "an ignorant bastard from Pakistan" (102). She tried to plead with her father against the marriage but he was adamant, she either went ahead with his plans or he would disown her in the papers. Parvin fled and ended up in a refuge run by Pakistani women (102). Her life crumbled at the hands of her oppressive father, a man who tried to exercise undue control in her private life. Faqir depicts how the religion of Islam gives men too much power over women. In order for Parvin to escape the clutches of her domineering father, she had no option but to flee much like her friend Salma. Even in England where Islam is marginal, Parvin cannot find respite from its strictures that oppress women.

At work in the bar, Salma is one day summoned by her boss Allan into his office and lectured on her appearance: "Our customers want to be surrounded by beautiful women. You must try to look presentable like... like an air hostess. Whenever I take a flight, I get tucked in, taken care of by girls with lined eyes, tight skirts and full red lips" (178). Allan wants Salma to look chic and sexy, an object of sexual attraction for the bar's male customers. Regardless of Salma feeling uneasy about walking among drunk men while skimpily dressed, she has no option but to comply with her boss' demands if she is to continue holding her job at the bar.

On a day that she is dressed in a tight skirt, Salma notices Allan's leering eyes on her. She says that in the bar there were very few female customers but they all wore clothing that better covered their bodies compared to her. Salma feels exposed and isolated, believing that her

skimpy clothing is announcing to the bar patrons to “Come and have a look at my cleavage, at my round bottom, my long dark hair and thin ankles!” (182). Even her dark, frizzy hair sexually attracts the customers who ogle her “with their puffy eyes, wet their lips and smile” (182) when it almost falls into their drinks. She has to fend off the hand of an elderly man who tries to touch her backside (182). The formerly conservative Muslim Salma becomes in England a commodity, a sex object to gratify the lustful fantasies of drunk bar patrons. This, for Faqir, is another way of men oppressing women.

Faqir’s feminism is also portrayed in the literature that Salma studies at the university. It is interesting that instead of studying Shakespeare, the great male artist, Salma studies Shakespeare’s sister, the fictional character invented by feminist critic Virginia Woolf in her book *A Room of One’s Own* (1989) in order to argue that a woman as talented as Shakespeare would have been denied the same opportunity to develop her talent because in that period female writers were not given access to publishing like men. Salma says: “I’m reading about his sister for the women and culture module”, to which Allan responds, “Oh! Dear! So Shakespeare is not important any more!” (200). Salma wonders why she is asked to write about the fictional Judith when there’s so much that’s been said and written about Shakespeare. Faqir dispenses with Shakespeare and his literature to focus instead on the artist’s fictional sister, a female, in order to advance her feminist ideas. With regard to Arabian folklore, Salma argues:

“He must have had friends and women to help him. Nobody talks about the women. I remembered the stories of Abu-Zaid El-Hilali, the hero whose adventures were memorized by both the young and the old. Nobody ever mentions his wife, daughter or mother” (221).

Salma's essay posits that women have been marginalised by men even in folklore which features only the heroic deeds of men and do not describe any women. Faqir is concerned with the failure to acknowledge women's contribution in literature from the East and West alike. She argues that Shakespeare must have relied on the assistance of women to write his works. Likewise, the hero of Arabian folklore Abu-Zaid El-Hilali must also have had women in his life who deserve mention in his stories. According to Faqir, the failure to acknowledge women's contribution to literature disenfranchises women so she challenges this in her writing.

When reading Virginia Woolf, Salma notices how her female relatives have been oppressed by men in the past: "My mother had nothing of her own, her brother took her share of the farm; when her husband died Shahla was thrown out of her house so she came to live with us" (210). Salma's grandmother, her mother and herself have all fallen victims of the greedy and cruel men in the society. Her mother loses a share of the farm, her grandmother has a house taken from her while Salma is forced to forego all the houses and farms of Hima, her little daughter and even her life.

Having found Margaret Atwood's novel *Justine* "very, very difficult" (282), Salma comments that Dr. Robson should have recommended she study instead Atwood's other book titled *The Handmaid's Tale*, a novel which explores the issues of women in subjugation and the different ways through which they gain agency. The latter is a novel Salma can relate to as its themes are relevant to her past life in Hima as a woman dominated by the patriarchal society and as a subaltern in England trying to gain a foothold in the society. Faqir appropriates a Western feminist discourse in portraying the grievances of her female characters thereby marking a position similar to that of Western feminism in its early stages when women clamoured for essential rights such as social participation and full suffrage.

The depiction of wanton ‘honour’ killings in Hima also serves to advance Faqir’s feminist world view, she writes: (Sabha’s) “...brother shot her during the wedding” (115) and “it did not take long for her mother to follow her” in death (115). That a woman can be killed merely on a rumour like Sabha shows the height of men’s cruelty towards women in Hima: “Some whispers in the dark turned into a rumour and then turned into a bullet in the head” (106). Young Layla, the girl born of Salma’s illicit sexual relations with Hamdan, also is not spared the cruelty of males against women. Her uncle Hamdan drowns her in the well because he considers her to be tarnishing the name of the family just like her mother Salma. That Layla’s tender age and childhood innocence cannot protect her from male cruelty portrays the harsh reality that is life for women in conservative Muslim Hima. Even in death, Layla’s remains are unwelcome in the cemetery so her grandfather and a friend have to bury her there against the wishes of the men of the tribe. The murder of Sabha, Salma and her daughter Layla shows that ‘honour’ killing is part of life in Hima. The women of Hima are depicted as powerless against this menace of ‘honour’ killing. As a woman, Faqir depicts the ills of this practice in an effort to emancipate her fellow women from this inhumane act.

To prove that women in all Muslim societies are subordinated to the men and not only in Arab societies, Faqir provides Parvin, the Pakistani-British friend of Salma in England, as yet another example of a Muslim woman who is a victim of patriarchy over women. Parvin’s father tried to coerce her into an arranged marriage with a man she did not love for which she was forced to flee. Parvin, just like her hostel roommate Salma –the Pakistani and the Arab respectively, are women both oppressed by the patriarchal systems of the Muslim societies they inhabit.

According to the novel, love affairs in Hima present women as victims of the cultural systems of Muslim societies which discriminate against women. Salma, apparently, expects Hamdan to marry her, but after he impregnates her: “Hamdan refused to marry me and disappeared. He said that I was a slut, cheap, ‘damaged goods’ and a liar” (289). Madam Lamaa, Salma’s friend and fellow prisoner in Hima, is also exploited in a relationship much like Salma. After learning that her husband plans to take a second wife, she is driven mad and stands “...naked under the lamppost in the main street. They thought I was a prostitute. I am not a prostitute” (180). Salma’s best friend in prison, Noura, is driven into prostitution for economic reasons as a result of neglect by her husband. Noura’s husband takes a second wife and abandons her with their children. When one of her children became sick, she needed money for his treatment. After losing her job, she confesses: “I began taking off my clothes” (198) in order to earn money for her son’s treatment. Her husband then took the children to go and live with the second wife leaving Noura with no option but to continue with her prostitution. Faqir portrays all women in conservative Muslim societies as victims of male domination.

In Hima, while on hunger strike in prison, Salma thinks: “They put us in prison, took away our children, killed us and we were supposed to say God was only testing his true believers” (136). This shows that women are expected to suffer male oppression and accept this suffering as a divine test from God. Liz, Salma’s landlady in Exeter, is another victim of male cruelty at the hands of her father who prevents her from marrying the Indian man she fell in love with. The powerful class structure dictates her personal life by preventing her from actualizing her marital desires while her dark past continuously haunts her throughout the novel much like Salma’s.



Chapter Two has explored the issues portrayed by Faqir in her novel to include: the *hijab* dilemma, ‘honour’ killing, personal reinvention and feminism. These issues are integral in determining how Salma forms her identity after moving into exile in Britain. Whereas the veil was a permanent fixture of Salma’s life in Hima following her father’s orders to wear it, when she gets to modern, secular England where the veil is frowned upon and her father is not present, Salma has little option but to get rid of it. If she were to insist on wearing the veil in England, she would risk not getting a job and thereby not earning a living. Grudgingly, Salma lets go of the veil which has for a long time defined her as a Muslim woman. The veil represents Islam whereas in secular England Islam is marginal. In order to avoid being marginalised in her adopted country, Salma discards her veil.

The threat of ‘honour’ killing is the reason Salma flees her home in Hima. She has to preserve her life which is threatened by her brother Mahmoud who is intent on killing her in order to restore honour to the name of their family. Moving through Lebanon, on to Cyprus, then to France, she finally reaches her destination England. This journey from Hima in the East to Exeter in the West is a physical dislocation which results into Salma’s loss of both a home and homeland at the same time. Moving to England also presents for her an encounter with a new culture much different from the conservative Muslim culture she was born into and raised in while living in Hima. While Hima is conservative and Muslim, England is secular and Christian. Hima is patriarchal whereas men and women in England enjoy almost equal status. In order to succeed in her new country, Salma must adjust her identity to conform to the present society she inhabits. Her moving to England is an attempt to reconstruct her life from the outcast status she lived in Hima after having become pregnant out of wedlock. England provides Salma with a clean slate to begin her life away from the ostracism she suffered in Hima. She begins the task of

reconstructing her life by learning English, getting a job and later enrolling for a BA degree in English Literature at the university. To complete her transition into English society, she marries her university tutor with whom she gets a son.

Feminism is important because Faqir wants to accord Salma total liberation from the yoke of male oppression she suffered in Hima. In Hima, Salma is a gendered subaltern whose life is dictated upon by men. In England, however, Salma achieves full emancipation. She acquires agency and can determine her life. She does not have to wear the veil anymore and is no longer on the run from her brother. In her English husband John, Salma finds a loving, supportive and equal partner such as she would not have found in Hima's patriarchal society.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ***Alienation in My Name is Salma***

This chapter examines physical and cultural estrangement in the novel by arguing that Salma experiences cultural alienation in Hima and England alike whereas a physical alienation occurs when she travels from her homeland Hima to the new geographical region of England, her adopted home. This study examines cultural alienation through the notion of ‘Other’ that condemns the less privileged and the less powerful to a life on the margins of the society and how it impacts identity formation for a Muslim character in a Western context. The effects of physical alienation on identity formation will also be brought into focus.

Salma’s flight from Hima is a physical dislocation from home. Upon reaching Lebanon after leaving Hima, Salma looks out of her bedroom window for the first time and sees the strange surroundings, she asks: “Where was I? How far was I from my mother? How far was I from her?” (82). Later along the journey she asks: “Where are we? How far are we from my country?” (83), to which she is answered: “We are north of Beirut, on the coast of the Mediterranean. Your country is further south, almost south-east. A number of hours’ drive” (84). As soon as she learns that they are far from her home country, Salma immediately shows signs of nostalgia for home when she says, “I shall go back one day” (84). Being in new surroundings away from the familiarity of her native homeland, Salma experiences the feeling of losing home only a few hours after her departure. Later at night when the kerosene lamps in the valley in Lebanon are lit one by one, it reminds her of her village in Hima, her mother and her teacher Miss Nailah. From Lebanon Salma travels to Cyprus by boat, on to Marseilles, France, before reaching Southampton, England. She lives in Southampton for a short while with Minister Mahoney before moving to settle in Exeter.

Many years of life in England makes Salma miss her mother, she says of her: “I miss her horribly” (289). This movement from one geographical location to another, from the East to the West precisely, is a physical dislocation for Salma. She experiences a feeling of estrangement in her new surroundings which make her desire home. Salma’s journey from the Levant to England impacts the formation of her identity based on the new cultural experiences she undergoes and the new people she encounters as a result. Since her movement to England is permanent and England is her new home, Salma must adjust her identity in line with her new environment by discarding her veil in order to secure a job. Gone too are her loose clothes as she adapts to wearing skimpy clothing while working at a bar and also starts drinking alcohol. Contrary to what is expected of a Muslim, Salma goes to pray in cathedrals and churches while in England even though she is not a Christian (44).

Stuart Hall argues in *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies* (1996) that the transformation in modern societies is “fragmenting the cultural landscapes of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, and nationality which gave us firm location as social individuals. These transformations are also shifting our personal identities, undermining our sense of ourselves as integrated subjects. This loss of a stable “sense of self” is sometimes called the dislocation or de-centring of the subject” (Hall, 1996: 596-597). According to Hall, a modern society like postcolonial Britain where Salma moves to live is constantly undergoing change thereby impacting the identities of its inhabitants. This implies that a person’s identity formation process is impacted by the society and one’s identity cannot be fixed but undergoes transformation according to the environment one inhabits.

In her original home Hima, Salma is an outcast, while in her newly adopted home England, she considers herself an unwelcome outsider who does not belong. Salma does not understand that living in Muslim Hima, she has to fully cover herself in her clothes in order to conceal her body from men. Having failed to do this, her father prompts her: “Your breasts are like melons, cover them up!” (13). This incident shows that Salma has failed to identify with the dominant Islamic and conservative values of the society that require women to be fully covered in clothes in order to avoid attracting male attention. Lest she incurs the wrath of his brother Mahmoud, Salma begins hunching her back in order to hide her breasts. As a woman, she is powerless against the dominant male order of the society. To avoid upsetting the sensibilities of conservative Muslim Hima, Salma and her lover Hamdan can only meet in the vine bushes away from the prying eyes of the society. She risks death by the men of the tribe for her illicit sexual liaisons with Hamdan. Her brother Mahmoud would tie each of her legs to a different horse and get them to run in different directions if he were to find her talking to strange men. The threat from Mahmoud does not deter Salma who goes ahead to involve herself in sexual relations with her lover out of wedlock. Even though she calls Hima home, Salma does not fit in its society because of its conservatism and restrictions. It is clear that Salma experiences cultural alienation in Hima. Her life in Hima degenerates into a nightmare and eventually she is forced to flee her native country for Lebanon.

Salma’s cultural alienation outside Hima begins when she arrives at the convent in Lebanon and for the first time dresses up in clothes different from the loose clothing she has been used to wearing while in Hima. She feels different in her new clothes and says: “I put on pants and a bra, which I had never worn before. I put on the pair of blue jeans and the T-shirt Françoise had given me, tied my hair into a ponytail, tied my white veil around my head and walked out of the

bathroom: a new, clean, awkward woman, conscious of the tight elastic around her hips and breasts” (87). As a Muslim woman who has been used to the conservative style of dressing in loose pantaloons and wide dresses, Salma feels out of place in clothing which has tight elastic around her hips and breasts. Besides, as a Muslim woman, she is supposed to completely cover her hair whenever she goes out in public but for the first time she wears her hair in a ponytail in complete disregard of the Islamic injunction which requires all women to conceal their hair. Her encounter with the new secular culture of England is an experience which alienates her from the conservative culture of Hima that she has been used to. She considers herself to have acquired a new identity as a result of her new style of dressing and refers to herself as “new” because she has never dressed in this manner before and “awkward” because she feels strange in her new clothes which she is not used to. At meal times with the nuns, Salma eats quickly with her hands, which makes the nuns laugh at her, Françoise says: “Nobody is chasing you with a stick in his hand, eat slowly” (92). Salma practises her Eastern culture of eating with bare hands while the nuns, who are Arab like her but have adopted Christianity and Western culture, are used to eating with crockery. As a result, the nuns find it strange to see Salma eat food with her bare hands. Salma becomes the subject of laughter for practising her Arab culture.

Life in England as an alien is difficult for Salma, this is clear when she says: “No, it was not easy living here in England as an ‘alien’, which was how the immigration officer had described me” (37). Newly arrived in England from the Levant, Salma has trouble adapting to the new English cuisine, she says: “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. Salma resisted, but Sally must adapt” (9). Salma realises the importance of adapting to the new English food in order to have a successful life in her new country. Even though she finds the food unpalatable, she chews the still frozen

food with tears in her eyes saying to the young man who bought it for her: “Yumma! It’s delicious!” (10). The young man who has bought Salma the food is most probably English and Salma would not like to offend his feelings by openly showing him that she does not enjoy the food. In order not to alienate herself from her male friend, Salma hides her true feeling, which is that she does not fancy English food, by portraying a false outward appearance which purports to enjoy the food.

Even though the smell of sage in Exeter reminds Salma of the long afternoons she spent in Hima when she used to drink sage tea and spin and weave, the difference is that now: “Instead of walking up the mountains looking for sage bushes, picking the soft green leaves, washing them then drying them, there they were: cut, squeezed and stored into little dark blue bottles for ma lady’s convenience” (12). She marvels at the conveniences modern England offers as compared to the difficult life she lived in Hima but blames herself for being so foreign when she tries to open a carton of milk and ends up spilling the milk all over the kitchen worktop. She says, “In Hima, whenever you needed milk, you would take a bowl and put it under a cow then pull its teats until your hands were sprayed with fresh warm milk” (49).

The cultural change Salma has encountered since moving to Exeter is manifest when she says: “The painful and sticky sugaring belonged to the past, together with marriage, my black Bedouin *madraqa* robe, money hats, all shelved there at the end of the horizon, overseas” (12). All the items she mentions symbolise the conservative life she lived in Hima which she has quickly been forced to discard for the modern, secular life of England. This is culture shock as Salma is yet to get used to life in her new country.

One afternoon while at the backpacker's hostel, the porter enters Salma's room accompanied by Miss Parvin who inquires about where Salma comes from to which the porter responds: "Somewhere in the Middle East. Fucking A-rabic! She rode a camel all the way from Arabia to this dump in Exeter" (15). This racist incident is a chilling reminder to Salma that being Arab, she will be subject to racist stereotyping and discrimination in her adopted country. Salma can only pretend to be asleep and not to have heard when her would-be roommate Parvin says: "I am not going to share a room with an Arab" (15). This racism is a harsh way of reminding Salma that she does not belong to English society and that she is 'Other'. Further isolation confronts her when she inspects the newspapers for job openings: "*A sales girl required. Presentable with good command of English...* I looked up 'presentable' and 'command' in the dictionary. I was neither presentable nor able to speak English well. Nothing that would suit a woman like me with no looks, no education, no experience and no letters of recommendation" (17). Having just arrived in England, Salma is yet to grasp the English language, the imperial language which is a necessary evil she must learn in order to successfully navigate through life in England. Being Arab, Salma is not considered 'presentable' in a society that upholds Western standards of beauty.

Salma's Arab features do not endear her to the perfume sales girl who dismisses her by telling her that they do not have samples for the perfume called 'Beautiful' whereas Salma can clearly see the sample-size bottles of the perfume shining on the glass shelf. The perfume named 'Beautiful' is meant for those who are beautiful but since Salma is not considered beautiful by English standards, the implication is that she cannot purchase the perfume and that is why the sales girl dismisses her.



Salma also grapples with invisibility in Britain due to her Arab identity as portrayed when she first meets Jim at the bar, he has trouble guessing her country of origin:

“Where do you come from?”

“Guess?”

The list as usual, included every country on earth except my own. “Nicaragua? France? Portugal? Greece? Surely Russia?” (68).

That Jim mentions many countries yet still fails to correctly identify Salma’s country of origin points to Salma’s invisibility. Her friend Parvin says: “You know, Salma, we are like shingles. Invisible, snakelike” (28). Salma’s invisibility in England is also alluded to when she says: “In a cloud of smoke, and among the clink and clank of glasses and clatter, I became invisible to the customers” (164). As an Arab immigrant in England, Salma is a subaltern who has been condemned by the society to a life on the fringes. Mainstream English society does not care about her, cannot see her and is therefore oblivious of her presence. For them, she does not exist. This is aptly depicted when Salma writes her university essay for Dr. Robson; her conclusion is about her experience as an alien in England: “They, and I, think I do not live here, but I do, just like all the women who were ignored in those tales” (221). As Salma is alien, English society does not care about her and so she is ignored.

When Salma meets an English man who inquires about her origin, she says: “If I told him that I was a Muslim Bedouin Arab woman from the desert on the run he would spit out his tea” (30). To conceal her true identity, Salma lies: “I am originally Spanish” (30). In order to fit into British society, she has to hide her Arab origin: “Had I told him I was Arab he probably would have run faster” (249). The English man obviously views Arabs through an Orientalist perspective in which people from the East are considered inferior to the people from the West.

Salma hides her Arab origin from him in order to avoid being the subject of this racist stereotyping.

Salma objects to being called 'girl' by the postman, she would like to be called by the pet name 'chuck' as used by the postman to call her next door neighbour Bev, she says: "Every morning I was reminded of my alienness. Every morning, while mist was still enveloping us, Jack, the postman, would wave to me and call, 'Hello, girl!' I would get upset, I wanted to be chuck like Bev next door" (37). The postman and Bev are most probably English so when Jack calls Bev by the pet name 'Chuck', it is a marker of their common identity as British while referring to Salma as 'girl' by Jack marks Salma as 'Other', a person different from himself who therefore does not belong. In order to fit into the society of her new country and avoid 'Othering', Salma must construct for herself a British identity.

As a Muslim woman obsessed with cleanliness, Salma describes herself: "I was a goddamn Muslim and had to be pure and clean" (18). She does not understand why Liz cannot let her wash her wooden cutlery and crockery. Living in Liz's dirty house is a strange experience for Salma and she would therefore like to clean up everything in Liz's house: "...as soon as I arrived in her dirty house I wanted to boil some water, put it in a bucket, add some washing-up liquid and walk around scrubbing clean every glass, every piece of china, every utensil. I also wanted to wash the floor, the walls, the ceiling and above all the toilet seat, which had some dry excrement stuck to the wood" (18).

After using a piece of cloth to wipe spilt milk on the kitchen worktop, Salma has to wash her hands with soap and water as she considers the piece of cloth "impure" (49) because Liz uses the piece of cloth for wiping all surfaces including the floor. Using the toilet also poses a new

problem for Salma as she says that her bum is not supposed to come into contact with urine which Islam considers impure. So she either pulls up the toilet seat and squats but makes sure not to have any contact with the toilet or washes her lower part in the tub with freezing water as hot water is only available on weekdays between seven and eight. Therefore, most days she walks to work with her private parts frozen (18). As a Muslim woman obsessed with cleanliness, it is obvious that Salma does not belong to Liz's dirty house.

When Salma invites her first guest, the postman, home for a hot cup of coffee, it is more than she bargained for as the man tries to kiss her. Her date cannot understand why Salma rejects his advances yet she is the one who invited him over. The implication, according to the man, is that in England, when a woman invites a man for coffee at her place, kissing is part of the bill, that's why he says:

“What do you mean “no”? You asked me to come”

‘No, sorry’, I said, hugging myself.

‘What do you mean sorry?’ (24)

This is a weird encounter for Salma who apologises but the postman cannot understand the reason for her feeling sorry for the incident. Being her first guest, this is culture shock to Salma who still has not learnt the ropes with regard to dating in English society. Her unlucky date leaves her house in exasperation, slamming the door behind him (25).

Likewise, Salma's lack of engagement with the British political system is a form of cultural alienation, she describes herself: “My knowledge of British politics began and ended with *Spitting Image*, where I could not tell which dummy was who in real life” (26). While watching television with Liz, it is astonishing that Salma cannot even identify the British Prime Minister. Her inability to recognise the most popular political figure in her country shows her

disengagement to British politics as an outsider. In her attempt to understand British politics, Liz does not assist her but rather, she pushes her further to the margins of society:

“Foreigners! Aliens like you”, she said and smiled.

“Like me?” I asked.

“Yes, illegal immigrants”, she said. (26)

To Liz, immigrants like Salma are unwelcome in England. Liz’s racist attitude towards Salma is apparent when she tells her: “Slaves must not breathe English air” (211).

In Muslim Hima, females are prohibited from associating with males who are not close family members and are only allowed to mingle with fellow women but in England, Salma says only men speak to her. While in the café with her date David, Salma cannot own up to her Muslim Bedouin Arab heritage, she lies that she is originally Spanish lest her date loses interest in her. She must conceal her true identity because revealing it would only result in social rejection. Salma also encounters social isolation and meaninglessness in her new country. Walking the streets after her date with David, Salma smells and likes the aroma of cooking food which reminds her of home in Hima but this pleasant experience is ruined when the old man cooking the food on the streets mistakes her for an MI5 agent: “You come eavesdrop on us. Are you a spy or something?” (35). Given that Salma is in her newly adopted country, she is baffled as to how to react to this awkward encounter. Were she in her native home Hima, she would obviously know how to react appropriately with respect towards the old man from the East, she explains: “In the old country of the Levant I would have stood up, held his right hand, kissed it, called him *jiddu*, and introduced myself, ‘Welcome! Welcome! I am Salma Ibrahim El-Musa’, but I am in the new country now, a fugitive with a record, so I remained seated on the wooden bench pretending not to understand” (35). Eventually she walks away from the scene feeling like a

“rootless, wind-blown desert weed” (35). Salma is “rootless” in England because she has no family members in her new country, she left all of them in her home country in the Levant. As she is “desert weed”, no one wants anything to do with her.

Having grown up seeing mosque domes and *minarets* in Hima, Salma feels out of place in the cathedrals and churches in Exeter, she says: “Whenever I entered a cathedral or a church I would feel cold as if they had their own hidden air-cooling system circulating the smell of mould clinging to the old stones. They were always dark, hushed and lonely places” (44). This description shows that Salma detests the experience of going to church. She does not understand why people would voluntarily go to church without coercion as she finds the churches very unwelcoming.

When her friend Parvin advises her to groom herself, Salma discovers that it is difficult to find hair colour that matches the original black colour of her hair as “Most hair colour was designed for blondes” (51). Makers of beauty products in England cater to the mainstream white woman and an Arab woman like Salma has little luck in finding products manufactured for her Arab features. Since white is considered beautiful in England, a blonde character overwhelmingly appears in the adverts for toothpaste, hairdryer and yoghurt. However, a black person like Salma is considered unattractive and capable of evil: “My hair was dark, my hands were dark and I was capable of committing dark deeds” (51).

As a Muslim Bedouin Arab, she is named Salma Ibrahim El-Musa in line with Islamic naming traditions. However, upon her adoption by Miss Asher, one of the Little Sisters from Lebanon, Salma is rechristened ‘Sally Asher’ according to Western naming tradition which is an abnegation of her Muslim identity. People in England call her ‘Sal’, a shortened form of ‘Sally’,

which she resents: “I did not like being called ‘Sal’ which sounded like a man’s name in my native language” (83). When her university tutor calls her ‘Sally’, Salma does not respond, she says: “I did not answer. My name was not Sally” (197). She also hates the name ‘Sal’ because it estranges her from her female identity and reminds her of a man’s name in her Bedouin language. Losing her name ‘Salma’ means losing her identity because her name constitutes an important part of herself including her history and Islamic heritage, a prospect Salma cannot accept. This proves John Earl Joseph’s (2004) argument that a person’s name forms an integral part of their identity.

In Hima, Salma was a farmer and shepherdess, occupations which made her live close to nature which she loves. However, upon relocating to England, she cannot continue practising these vocations which she enjoys and is accustomed to. Her only contact with farming is the pots of African violets and wandering Jews because a garden is not permitted on the street she lives as there are too many garages and a railway line. In England, she can only admire the beauty of nature from a distance by looking outside her window. She compares her life in England to that of a “fish out of water” (288) because it has estranged her from the nature she lived close to in Hima.

As Salma fills her donor card, she is cognisant of her alien status in England, which implies that she has no family with her in her new land, she says: “My family did not know my whereabouts and I did not know the whereabouts of my daughter” (94). She counts all the people she knows in England and they’re only six: Parvin, Miss Asher, Liz, Minister Mahoney, her boss Max and her friend Gwen Clayton. Having arrived in England recently, Salma still has not had the chance to meet many people and make friendships and acquaintances. When she tries to apply for membership at the library, the librarian first rejects her: “You are an alien, we have no national

insurance number for you; you cannot get in” (98). That she is initially denied membership without any concrete reason implies that the librarian is stereotypic and discriminative against Salma on the basis of her Arab appearance. It is only later when the librarian learns that Salma is a British citizen that she is allowed to enrol for membership at the library.

While in a café, Salma notices that she is sitting there alone “...without family, past or children much like a tree without roots” (111). She is living England solely without any member of her family because she was forced to leave all of them behind in her native country in the Levant when she fled to safety in Britain. She feels as if she has no child because her only child whom she gave birth to while in protective custody in Hima was taken from her immediately after birth long before she fled to Lebanon. Having changed countries and started a new life for herself in her adopted country, Salma feels like “a tree without roots” given that she has left behind her familial connections and history in her native homeland of Hima.

When Salma is taken ill and visits Dr. Spencer for treatment, the doctor is annoyed at the fact that Salma goes by the name ‘Miss Sally Asher’, which he considers as very “preposterous” (113). Dr. Spencer is surprised that a woman with an obviously Arab appearance and wears a veil has an English name including the English title ‘Miss’. He considers her a fraud, an illegal immigrant who has come to England to benefit herself at the English tax-payers’ expense. He refuses to treat her even though Salma appears to be genuinely sick. This is Salma experiencing racism in England because of being Arab and different from the native English people.

In Cyprus with Miss Asher when they go to visit the Turkish castle, Salma’s veil marks her out as different. The guard at the castle points at her veil and asks whether she is Turkish to which Miss Asher responds in the affirmative. The guard then informs Salma that the veil is

unacceptable in the castle but Miss Asher intervenes on her behalf (116). Even though the guard lets Salma enter the castle wearing her veil, she notices that the guard is unhappy as a result. In Britain, Salma elicits stares from members of the public because she wears a veil. Her wearing the veil marks her as foreign and 'Other' by portraying her as a Muslim in a country that is predominantly Christian. With regard to wearing the veil, Salma says: "People look at me all time as if I disease" (123) to which her friend Parvin advises: "It will be much harder to get a job while you insist on wearing it" (123). Parvin's advice to Salma is that if she insists on openly displaying her Arab heritage and her connection to the religion of Islam in England by wearing the veil then she can only expect ostracism and further marginalisation from English society as a consequence. In order to gain acceptance by the society and integrate into it, Salma has no option but to get rid of her veil.

Aboard the ship *Hellena* from Cyprus on her way to England, Salma learns English manners and the English language from her acquaintance Rebecca whom she meets on the ship:

This was the small bread plate, this was the main course knife and fork, this was the soup spoon and this was the dessert spoon. I had learnt how to corner the green lettuce, cut it into pieces, shove it in my mouth and eat it unwillingly as if I were full. I had learnt how to butter a piece of bread, hold it with two fingers and eat it with the soup. I had learnt how to be patient and wait for others to start eating and then start after them. I had learnt how to wait for others to stop speaking before I started talking. I had learnt how to start each conversation with a comment about the weather (124).

Learning the English language and English mannerisms implies that Salma's cultural identity is changing since this is done at the expense of her native culture.

Salma's journey from the Levant to England is symbolic of the cultural transformation she undergoes once she gets to England in her quest to start a new life for herself away from the nightmare that was her life in Hima. On the ship to England, learning English culture serves to alienate Salma from her Islamic culture which she has hitherto practised. When Miss Asher



invites her to drink wine on board the *Hellena*, Salma declines citing her Islamic faith. She also refuses to eat pork and potatoes cooked in pork since Islam prohibits Muslims from eating pork. On being informed that there is no other food available besides what she has already been offered, Salma responds: “Can’t eat, miss home” (188). Being asked to eat pork and drink alcohol is clearly a new experience for her, something she has not previously encountered having been living in Muslim Hima. This awkward encounter makes her yearn for the familiarity of home with its *halal* food.

When Salma greets her friend Sadiq and follows the greeting with comments that the weather on that day is lovely, Sadiq comments that Salma has changed, he says: “Soon you will be English also” (125). Sadiq also comments that she has even forgotten to pray to Allah. Salma has started adopting English mannerisms by starting small talk with comments about the weather and is drifting away from her religion by not praying five times a day as required by Islam. She is drifting further away from her Muslim Bedouin Arab roots.

Even the mundane task of purchasing bread is an experience Salma finds difficult to accomplish because of her Arab identity. When Liz sends her to buy granary bread, Salma is too embarrassed to reject the brown loaf of bread offered to her as granary bread by the sales girl. She feels out of place in the queue and imagines that her foreignness can be noticed from the way she pronounces her ‘o’s, the way she handles money and her manner of dressing. Feeling that her thin ankles will give away the fact of her being alien, Salma quickly moves out of the queue before putting the change back in her purse. She would rather leave the shop in a hurry and knowingly take back home to Elizabeth brown bread and not the granary bread she has sent her to buy than withstand the estranging feeling of being in the shop amid other English customers.

When Salma attempts to find a job as a tailor, she is initially rejected on the grounds of being Arab. Her friend Parvin gives the reason for Salma not getting hired: “It’s because we are black, is not it? Because she is not an English rose” (147). For Salma, racism is the reality of life in England.

Since Salma is Arab, she cannot be admitted into England by the immigration authorities whereas other passengers are freely let through with smiles on the faces of the immigration officers. The passengers freely admitted into England with smiles are most probably white British citizens who are native to the country and are therefore permitted unfettered access unlike foreign Salma who must first prove that she has permission to enter England before she can be let through. Even though her adoption papers are perfectly in order, the immigration authorities doubt their integrity and Salma is forced to spend two months in the port prison before she is cleared by the authorities to enter England. This is a form of racist profiling by British immigration to keep out the unwanted Muslim Arab out of the English shores.

After securing a job at the Royal Hotel, Salma has to act as English as possible in order for the customers not to discover her foreign origin which would make them stop patronising the establishment: “I would wear my classiest dress, keep my mouth shut, put little make-up on, tie my frizzy hair tight, and if I spoke I would speak slowly and carefully in order to sound as English as possible” (156). Salma has to suppress her Arab culture in favour of English culture in order to successfully perform her job at the hotel. Life in England compels her to abandon the conservative culture of Islam she was used to in Hima in order to earn a living in secular Exeter. Gone are the loose pantaloons, wide blouses and the veil, in is make-up and classy Western dresses. Salma little by little gets alienated from her original culture as she acquires a new Western identity.

Due to her constantly yearning for her home in the Levant, the view of the sun shining on the green hills outside Salma's window in Exeter reminds her of the hills of Hima, she says: "I used to fondle the soil every day, but now sealed in an air bubble I lived away from the land and the trees" (190). In Hima, Salma was living close to nature unlike in England where she can only admire nature from a distance, an experience she compares to living in an air bubble.

Sensing her failure to integrate into mainstream British society as an immigrant, Salma says: "This country was right in resisting me; it was refusing to embrace me because something in me was resisting it, and would never belong to it" (170). She is angry at her relationship with her new country and says: "I should forgive Britain for turning me into moss that grows in cracks, for giving me the freedom to roam its cities between five and seven in the evening, for confining me to the space between the sole and the heel" (171). Like unwanted moss growing in cracks on a wall or pavement, she is unwanted in Britain. Britain resists Salma, preventing her from fully assimilating into its society because of her Muslim Bedouin Arab heritage which is unwelcome in England. Feeling the constant marginalisation, she compares her life in England to that of moss growing in cracks and to being confined in the space between the sole and the heel because she of the difficulty of settling into mainstream English society. Ever conscious of her lingering outsider status, Salma says:

I 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?' Sometimes even the cows on the hills would line up, kick their legs in unison and sing, 'Where do you come from, you? Go home!'" (191)

To survive the awful experience of exclusion, Salma and other immigrants form alliances in order to flourish in Britain: "In the early evening the city belonged to us, the homeless, drug addicts, alcoholics and immigrants, to those who were either without family or were trying to

blot out that history. In this space between five and seven we would spread and conquer like moss that grows between cracks in the pavement” (28). Life in England for immigrant Salma remains a constant reminder that she is a foreigner who does not belong.

The doctor who declines to treat Salma because she is an immigrant is an apt example of the discrimination she has to put up with in Britain. The cleaner at her hostel says that immigrants are living off the country and the doctor says that Salma wastes the NHS’ money since she is a foreigner. Because she is an Arab immigrant, Salma cannot get a decent nine to five job like the mainstream English society. As a foreigner living on the fringes of the society, she can only secure a menial, five to seven, evening job that involves collecting dirty, used glasses from tables in a bar. This feeling of exclusion in England leaves Salma with no choice but to support Italy in the World Cup tournament at the expense of her adopted country since she feels Italy is geographically closer to her country of origin in the Levant.

Salma finds her first days at the university alienating and she therefore does not go to the institution very often. Her words point to her feeling of being an outsider in England: “What was it like to be a student? What did they teach them here in England?” (41-42). She also observes that “...they had read books I could not understand, they spoke a language I could not speak and they looked down upon me because my English was bad” (195). From the outside, Salma queries the details of the university experience for a foreign student like herself. Awestruck, she feels small against the old, large building with towers and high ceilings and trembles once she enters it. Using the university library also elicits the same feeling in her, she finds the library’s classification system too complicated and the sight of so many books reminds Salma of her ignorance and backwardness. Having been a shepherdess and farmer in Hima, higher education presents a totally new and odd experience to her.

Being a product of the conservative culture of Islam, Salma is offended by the liberal English culture she encounters inside the club: “The sight of a man and a woman French kissing, who were, up to a few minutes ago, complete strangers, was nauseating” (251). During a debate about the photos of the British princess in a bikini, Max is quick to remind Salma of the fact that she does not belong to Britain when he tells her: “Sal, you do not know anything about us, the British, do you?” (275). Salma being an Arab immigrant, and Max a native English, he feels that she cannot know what the British feel when they see their princess in a bikini in the newspaper as Salma is not British. When Salma gives in to his reasoning merely to please him, Max adds: “I do not blame you, being foreign and all” (276). Max’s conversation pushes Salma to the margins of English society as she is not English like him, she is ‘Other’. After having lived many years in England, Salma still feels like a “fish out of water” (288) for she is yet to experience a sense of belonging with regard to England. Seeing a British National Party leaflet on the floor next to Max’s chair serves to remind Salma of her outsider status in England. She imagines that maybe Max’s brother-in-law, who believes “that all foreigners must be loaded in ships and dumped ‘like the bananas they are’ on the shores of Africa” (279) could have given it to him.

Even after her marriage to British John and having acquired British citizenship, Salma still remains a Muslim Bedouin Arab in the eyes of the average English person, a fact Parvin does not hesitate to remind her of when Salma imagines the British will protect her should she come into harm’s way on her return to Hima. Parvin tells her: “Look at the colour of your skin. You are a second-class citizen. They will not protect you” (311). Parvin advises Salma that being a black person, she will always be considered a second-class citizen in England unlike the white Anglo-Saxon natives of England who are entitled to full citizenship and rights on the basis of their white race.

Having lived in England for many years without any contact with her family back in Hima, Salma grows nostalgic about home: “I just want to be with my family, I said like a child” (225). Salma’s landlady, Liz, represents the awful racism in England. Liz hates Salma and considers her one of the “foreigners” (26), “aliens” (26) and “illegal immigrants” (26). Also, she speaks to Salma as if Salma “were her servant in India” (48) and does not hesitate to tell her that “Slaves must never breathe English air” (211). Salma’s relationship with her boss Max is also racist as Salma says of Max: “He kept me in the background and never called me to the front of the shop while he had customers around” (277). This is Max heeding the racist stereotype of his society; he believes that he might lose business should the white customers see Arab Salma in his shop.

Parvin, just like Salma, is also alienated from her family. She finds herself a roommate of Salma’s at the hostel after fleeing from her father who wanted to force her into getting married to an “ignorant bastard” (102) from Pakistan: “She tried to dissuade him, pleaded with her mother, but no, she either went ahead with it or he would disown her in the papers” (102). Parvin runs away and ends up in a refuge run by Pakistani women but is advised by the women there to move down south for fear of being kidnapped. As a woman fleeing male oppression, Parvin finds company in Salma who has also fled male oppression from her native country.

Chapter Three has discussed the physical and cultural alienation that Salma experiences in both Hima and Exeter. Her moving from Hima to Exeter is a journey from one geographical location to another, from the East to West, and it represents a loss of both a home and homeland for Salma. Moving across disparate geographical regions: Lebanon, Cyprus, France and then to England, Salma feels lost amid the constantly changing physical and social environment. Having moved to England, she encounters a new culture greatly different from the conservative Muslim culture of Hima where she hails from.

In England, many aspects of Salma's life are transformed including food, clothes, weather and the physical environment. She has to learn a new language –English, in order to communicate and make a success of her life in England. Even though Salma has more liberty and rights in England than in Hima, life is not without its downsides and she has to contend with the racism and marginalisation she encounters. Beginning life at the bottom, Salma works her way up the social ladder. Physical dislocation from home in Hima presents many complications for her and she has to readjust her life and identity in order to adapt to the changed circumstances. The cultural alienation she encounters prompts her to construct for herself an identity that fits with life in England in order to have a successful and meaningful life. Shortly after moving to England, Salma discards some aspects of Islamic identity like wearing the veil and loose clothing, praying five times a day and abstaining from alcohol. This implies that her identity is evolving from that of a conservative Muslim into that of a semi-practising Muslim. For Salma, England accords her the many freedoms she lacked in Hima. Embracing these freedoms inevitably leads to a change in her identity. It is no longer mandatory for her to cover her hair, she can drink alcohol, go to discos, freely talk to strange men and even have sex with them without the fear of dire consequences even though she still retains her Muslim religion. The physical and cultural alienation Salma encounters upon moving to England impacts her identity formation given that she is forced to form for herself a new identity in order to succeed in her adopted country. In Hima where Islam is central, Salma must observe the strict Islamic injunctions whereas in England where Islam is marginal, Salma has little option but to conform to the Western secularism of her new country in order to succeed. From the conservative Muslim she was in Hima, Salma's identity in England evolves into a semi-practising Muslim who

discards many aspects of conservative Islam and her Arab culture for the modern secularism of the West.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Identity formation in *My Name is Salma***

This chapter examines identity formation by the protagonist of the novel through postcolonial cultural perspectives. Homi K. Bhabha's notions of cultural 'hybridity', ambivalence and mimicry will be used to analyse how religion, gender, class and race influence Salma's migrant identity formation. In the novel, Salma is portrayed as drifting without a fixed identity, her identity is multicultural and changing. She cannot achieve a single, fixed identity because of her multicultural background. Also explored is how Salma's 'Otherness', reflected through her contact with British characters and foreign culture, results into the coexistence of dual conflicting selves within her as a character in an attempt to establish how the experience of movement between geographical regions influences her construction of a hybrid identity.

Salma's story develops through the portrayal of events in her daily life and through her meeting and interacting with characters from ethnic backgrounds different from hers. Her encounter with Miss Asher, the Little Sister she meets in Ailiyya convent in Lebanon, enables her to journey to Britain as an immigrant. Salma's life in the hostel with Parvin, a second-generation Asian British who has fled an arranged marriage greatly impacts Salma's life as an immigrant in Britain. The process of her integration into British society begins when she is hired as a seamstress at a local tailoring shop. Salma's encounter with Liz, the daughter of a former imperialist family turned alcoholic, with whom she shares a house when she leaves the hostel, presents the harsh reality of life in England for the Arab migrant. Finally, Salma accepting her tutor's marriage proposal marks her complete assimilation into mainstream British society since it implies her acquisition of a British identity through marriage.

In *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Stuart Hall argues that: “Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall, 1990: 222). In *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies* (1996), Hall further posits that: “The subject previously experienced as having a unified and stable identity, is becoming fragmented; composed, not of a single, but of several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities” (Hall, 1996: 598). Hall’s argument implies that an individual’s identity is never complete but is a continuous work in process and is impacted by one’s physical and cultural environments. According to Hall, modern societies have made the postcolonial subject to hold an identity that embodies a multiplicity of identities, identities which are sometimes in conflict leading to a “crisis of identity” for the subject.

Salma’s identity, studied through this framework, is considered to be under formation from the time she is living in the Middle East till the end of the novel many years after she has moved to live in Britain. Her identity is not considered fixed at any one point in time but is subject to transformation depending on the physical and cultural environments she inhabits. This chapter examines how the physical and cultural environments around Salma impact her identity making process.

According to R.H. Latha: “Women’s identities in postcolonial societies are characterised by hybridity” (Latha, 2004). Salma’s identity as a woman from the Middle East living in postcolonial Britain is therefore subject to ‘hybridity’ since it contains aspects of both Arab and Western cultures. Salma’s initial identity is that of a Muslim Bedouin Arab but she later acquires a hybrid identity containing aspects of Western culture after living in England for many years.

### **Salma's Swaying Identity**

Salma's identity evolves with the geographical places she lives in. While in Hima, Salma appears to be a conservative Muslim, a short while after moving to England she adopts a semi-practising Muslim identity which she retains for the rest of her life in England. In Hima, even though Salma's conservative dressing in clothes which cover all her body may make her appear as a strict Muslim, she nevertheless transgresses against Islam. After having sex with her lover, she prays: "Forgive me, Allah, for I have sinned. The heat of passion had made me bend" (8). In line with Islamic injunction on women's dressing, Salma wears a veil on her head and loose clothing such as her *madraqa* robe but exhibits traits of rebellion by wearing red to be noticed and black for anger (8). Salma portrays an outward appearance which conforms to the requirements of the Islamic society while inwardly she remains rebellious.

When travelling to England on board the ship *Hellena*, Salma's conservatism is portrayed when just like strict Muslims should, she declines to drink alcohol and to eat pork. When Miss Asher pours her some wine and tells her that she must try it since it is good wine, Salma refuses the offer saying: "It forbidden in Islam. You lose control and make all kinds of sins" (188). When Miss Asher adamantly tells her that she does not commit any sins despite drinking alcohol, Salma insists: "No, but I different. I Muslim. I go crazy. Allah says so" (188). Similarly, when offered pork, Salma declines saying: "Do not eat pork. Filthy animals" (188). She adds: "Cannot eat meat, I Muslim. I eat *halal* meat only. Slaughtered the Islamic way" (188). This shows that Salma cannot reconcile her Islamic faith to drinking alcohol and eating pork, both of which Islam forbids. When presented with alcohol and pork, her obedience to Islamic injunction prevents her from consuming both. So strong is her faith in Islam at this point in time that Salma fears contact

with a bible: “I took the Gospel and put it on the table quickly, afraid of the contact with the Christian text” (189).

In line with Islamic injunction, Salma insists on wearing her veil. When Miss Asher enquires whether she has to wear it, Salma answers: “My hair is *‘aura*. I must hide it. Just like my private parts” (189). Adamant in not taking off her veil, she adds: “I cannot take off veil, Sister. My country, my language, my daughter. No piece of cloth. Feel naked, me” (189). As a woman newly out of the Levant and still committed to her Islamic faith, Salma harbours a strong attachment to the veil and that is why she cannot contemplate getting rid of it. The veil is an important piece of clothing to her and not just a “piece of cloth”, without it she would feel “naked”. With regard to her country, language and daughter, Salma is reluctant to unveil. This implies that the veil is an integral part of her identity which she is unwilling to part with at all costs. So strong is her relationship with the veil shortly after leaving her native country, however, this attachment wanes after she has lived in England for some time.

The trip to England on the ship accords Salma her first contact with English culture. She learns the English language through Miss Asher who teaches her English lessons on the ship. Rebecca who is also travelling on the same ship also teaches Salma the English language and English table manners, Salma says of her: “From then on, she started teaching me table manners and English while her daughters giggled in the background” (122). From Rebecca, Salma learns English cutlery like the small bread plate, main knife and fork, soup spoon, dessert spoon and a lot about English table manners:

I had learnt how to corner the green lettuce, cut it into pieces, shove it in my mouth and eat unwillingly as if I were full. I had learnt how to butter a piece of bread, hold it with two fingers and eat it with the soup. I had learnt how to be patient and wait for others to start eating and then start after them. I had learnt how to wait for others to stop speaking

before I started talking. I had learnt how to start a conversation with a comment about the weather. (124)

Learning all these is important because Salma is moving to England where the culture and cuisine is much different from that of the Levant where she was born and raised. The British cuisine, table manners and culture that Salma learns implies that her identity is changing from that of an original Muslim Bedouin Arab to something akin to British.

A short while after moving to England, Salma is no longer one of the village girls of Hima but a sophisticated modern woman, she says: “I stuck a liner to my pants, pulled them up my shaved and oiled legs and realized that I was free at last. Gone were the days when I used to chase hens around in wide pantaloons and loose flowery dresses in the bright colours of my village: red to be noticed, black for anger” (8). From a provincial girl, Salma must change and adapt her identity in order to fit into modern England. Life in England gives her the freedom she could not have in Hima and she can go about without veiling her hair, she says: “...tossed my no longer braided and veiled hair on my shoulders, pulled my tummy in, straightened my posture and walked out of Swan Cottage” (8). Following her adoption, Miss Asher, the English Little Sister, changes Salma’s name to ‘Sally Asher’. That Salma takes up an English name before moving to England symbolises the beginning of the process of her acquiring an English identity.

It is Salma’s aim to turn into Sally, an English rose who is white, confident with an elegant English accent and a pony. This intention is the reason Salma decides to study literature, she tells her disapproving friend Parvin: “No, stories good. Teach you language and how to act like English miss” (184). Salma does not only want to learn the English language but also how to act like a young English woman. Not ‘Salma Ibrahim El-Musa’ anymore, she signs her name as ‘Sally Asher’ when the postman delivers a parcel for her landlady Liz. This change in identity is

also portrayed when she discards her Islamic name for her English name when filling the university application forms (184). No longer does Salma wear her loose *madraqa* robe which she has since forgotten and tucked away in a suitcase on top of her wardrobe (12). Because Muslims are obsessed with cleanliness, Salma wants to sanitise everything in Liz's dirty house as soon as she arrives in it, she says: "I was a goddamn Muslim and had to be pure and clean" (18). Using Liz's dirty toilet also presents a big problem for Salma as her backside is not supposed to have any contact with urine which is considered *najas* (impure) by Islam so she has to pull the toilet seat up and squat while making sure not to have any contact with the toilet (18).

While Salma has no problem going to a bar where alcohol is served, as a Muslim she is not willing to drink alcohol at all, she says: "What he did not know was that alcohol had never passed my lips ever. I was a goddamn Muslim" (258). However, she does not want it known that she is an inflexible Muslim by not taking alcohol so she orders apple juice which looks like beer ostensibly for the people in the bar to think that she is drinking alcohol which would make her an open-minded and not an inflexible Muslim immigrant. On the surface, Salma is "an open-minded Muslim" (66) as she is willing to appear to be drinking alcohol while inwardly she remains "an inflexible Muslim" (66) as she is not willing to compromise her faith in Islam by drinking alcohol which her religion forbids.

In Hima, Salma feels guilty after her premarital sexual encounters with Hamdan but in England she feels no guilt after a night of sex with Jim, the stranger she meets in a pub. In Hima, after illicit sex with Hamdan, Salma does her ablutions and prays asking for forgiveness but in England she is content with no prayer for forgiveness, she says: "You would smile because it was supposed to be the morning after the beautiful night before" (80). England has changed Salma so she no longer has any qualms about having casual sex with a stranger on the same day

she meets him. Even though Salma used to have casual sex in Hima, it was not with a stranger but with her lover Hamdan, somebody she grew up knowing but she still felt guilty while in England she finds sex with a stranger acceptable.

While in Lebanon, the Christian life of the convent with the Sisters accords Salma the opportunity to wear trousers and a bra which she says she had never worn before. Living with the Christians makes Salma start to lose touch with the conservative dress code required for women who practise Islam. However, she feels conscious of the tight elastic around her hips and breasts since she is not used to putting on tight clothes (87). Salma's tight clothes show that the Islamic influence of Hima on her is loosening and she is beginning to liberate herself from its strictures.

Sadiq notices that Salma's identity since moving to England is changing and comments: "Salma, Salma, you are becoming a memsahib, soon you will be English also" (125). Sadiq says this because he notices that Salma has started adopting English mannerisms like starting small talk with comments about the weather when Salma tells him: "Good morning, Sadiq. The weather is lovely today" (125). Sadiq also notices that even though Salma is a Muslim, she does not pray to Allah, he tells her: "Well, you have even forgotten how to pray to Allah" (125). Living in England has made Salma turn into a semi-practising Muslim who professes the Islamic faith but does not fulfil the requirement of prayer which is a key pillar of her religion. Salma notices that Sadiq too fails to observe a Muslim injunction when she retorts: "What about you? Praying all the time and selling alcohol to infidels!" (125).

This points to Sadiq's identity as a semi-practising Muslim much like Salma. While Sadiq is keen to fulfil the Islamic requirement of praying five times a day, he is unwilling to miss out on earning a living by not selling alcohol in line with Islamic injunction. His answer to her is:

“Business is business also” (125). The implication is that to Sadiq, matters of faith and his business do not mix. If he has to transgress against an Islamic injunction in order to make money then so be it. Salma’s understanding of what it means to be Muslim is further revealed in another conversation with Sadiq:

“I do not have an English boyfriend. I am a Muslim”. I said and smiled.

“All coconuts have English boyfriends. Muslims by name only”, he said.

“There are Muslims and Muslims”, I said.

“There are one Islamic”, he said.

I crossed the street and stood by him on the pavement of his shop. “What do you want me to do to prove to you that I am a Muslim? Pray five times on your door step?” I said (261).

This dialogue reveals that for Salma, there are true Muslims and nominal Muslims. Salma considers herself to be a real Muslim who is truly practising Islam because she says that she does not have an English boyfriend because she is Muslim. She does not have to prove this fact to anybody and neither does she consider praying five times a day proof of being Muslim. By claiming to be Muslim yet she does not observe a key pillar of Islam by praying five times daily shows that Salma’s identity has transformed into a semi-practising Muslim.

England portrays Salma’s second relationship with the veil. Shortly after moving to England, Salma realises that she has to get rid of her veil if she is to succeed in getting a job. Her roommate Parvin advises her that it will be very difficult for her to get a job if she insists on wearing it (123). Wearing the veil in England also makes Salma the object of unwanted stares from the society: “People look at me all time as if disease” (123). A short while after arriving in England, Salma decides to get rid of her veil: “I looked again at my reflection then slowly began untying the knot of my white veil. I slid it off, folded it and placed it on the bed. I pulled my hair



out of the elastic band and tossed it out” (129). From then on she wears her hair uncovered in public which makes it visible to everyone including men which is against the dictates of Islam. Getting rid of the *hijab* is a key point in the transformation of Salma’s identity. The veil represents her past in Hima, which she has run away from. After discarding the veil, Salma symbolically lets her hair loosely fall down, it means that henceforth she is going to live a life free of the restrictions she faced in Hima. Discarding the veil after arriving in England implies that she is starting her life on a clean slate devoid of the restrictions of her dark past. In Hima she was an outcast and a fugitive fleeing from imminent death but England gives her the chance to start a new life with a new identity for herself.

Another moment when England impacts Salma’s identity formation is the time she starts working at the Royal Hotel. In order to successfully perform her job, she has to learn English manners. Salma’s friend Gwen advises her on the dos and do nots in order not to hurt English sensibilities while working at the bar. Salma describes herself at her place of work: “I would wear my classiest dress, keep my mouth shut, put little make-up on, tie my frizzy hair tight, and if I spoke I would speak slowly and carefully in order to sound as English as possible” (156). This shows that Salma is trying as much as possible to pass for an English woman in order to be accepted by the bar’s clientele. In her attempt to appear English, she has to suppress her Arab features. She cannot wear her veil and has to effect an English accent while speaking to customers in order not to betray her foreign roots. When offered alcohol by her boss Allan one night after all customers have left the bar, Salma asks for a soft drink instead. When Allan asks her whether she does not drink Salma says: “I am tired, that’s all” (169). Given that Salma works in a bar, it would appear odd that she is a teetotaler. In order to balance her religion and her place of work, she conceals the fact that she does not drink by saying she is tired. Salma rejects

the alcohol offered her because she is Muslim but she is willing to conceal this part of her inner identity by effecting an outward identity that is open to drinking alcohol by not declaring outright that she will take a soft drink and not alcohol because she is Muslim.

However, after having lived many years in England, Salma drinks alcohol for the first time during her friend Parvin's wedding: "I sat on the stairs for a long time until it was pitch black then drank my first champagne ever" (265). As a semi-practising Muslim, she is riddled with guilt after having drunk alcohol, she hears her father's disapproving voice as her hand trembles while she carries the drink to her mouth: "Damned is the carrier, buyer and drinker of alcohol" (265).

So profound is the effect of living in England for many years on Salma's identity that she considers herself to have changed and become British so that when the university tutor asks her where she is from Salma answers: "I am English" (191). After the death of her landlady Elizabeth, Salma inherits her Swan Cottage and her other personal effects including her bed and journal. The first space Salma owns embodies Liz's heritage as she claims that she "...slept soundly as if Elizabeth's bed was a thick handmade mattress, stuffed with sheep wool combed with a Bedouin card, and covered with colourful handloom wool rugs made by the women of Hima in the dusk" (302-303). As a Muslim Bedouin Arab who has severed all her familial ties by immigrating to England, Salma uses the language of inheritance and stakes a legal and familial claim by placing herself at the end of Liz's long family line. Having firmly established herself in Britain, her new space of living accords her 'hybridity' –the ability to be both Bedouin and British as one whose identity contains aspects of both these two cultures. Salma's success in acquiring a domestic space for herself brings to mind Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1989) –which is Salma's main goal upon arriving in England.

Salma forms for herself an identity that is split between two different religions, two different nationalities and two different languages. Newly arrived in England, Salma, the village Muslim Bedouin Arab woman is on a quest to become the sophisticated English Sally. However, her personality after living many years in England shows feelings of ambivalence. Even though outwardly Salma appears to have reinvented herself by embracing the freedoms offered to women by Western society, inwardly, she is torn by the contradictions between the Western and Muslim/Arab cultures which have come to define her identity.

Salma insists on being called using her Arab name 'Salma Ibrahim El-Musa', declaring: "No, but I want Arab name" (184). However, when she is warned that she will be charged a fortune in university fees as a foreign student for not using her English name 'Sally Asher' and that she also risks deportation from England if she insists on using her Arab name, she does accept to use her English name. 'Salma Ibrahim El-Musa' is not only a name but also denotes a Muslim identity, belonging and a sense of understanding of self for Salma. The English 'Sally' is dismayed at the unwillingness of English society to embrace her as part of itself when she declares her Englishness by saying: "I am English" (191). However, Salma's identity is multi-cultural; she is Salma, the Muslim Bedouin Arab as much as she is Sally, the English rose she becomes upon immigrating to England. Her ambivalence is clear when she says: "I begged myself to follow him, but Salma and Sally refused to budge" (251). This implies that she holds a hybrid identity which she personally acknowledges and articulates. Salma cannot authentically feel truly at home in any one place (Hima or Exeter); therefore, all of her 'homes' constitute her hybrid identities.

Salma's fictional recreation of herself is an escape from the unbearable realities of life she underwent in Hima, she says: "Like a key witness from a Mafia crime case I changed my name, address, past and even changed countries to erase my footsteps" (249). Her fictional, make-believe identity is her performance which portrays Homi K. Bhabha's so-called 'third space'. While in England, Salma forms an understanding of herself and her place in the world by learning to create her identity.

### **Identities of Other Characters in the Novel**

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" (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 civilisation. 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-practising Muslim identity is marked by a belief in Islam but having one's own way of practising the religion. Sadiq, the owner of Omar Khayyam off-license liquor store is a Muslim but he sells alcohol. 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-practising 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 practises 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" (19). Haj Ibrahim cannot sell his olives before getting a *fatwa* from the imam so his boxes of olives rot in the store. 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-practising Muslim as she never prays. Only when her son is critically ill does she pray for the first time (197). 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" (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.

Noura has no problem with practising Islam and working in a brothel at the same time: “...instead of wearing the veil as I vowed I began taking off my clothes” (198). All the promises she makes to Allah in her prayer she breaks. Noura’s portrayal shows that one can fail to practise all of the key pillars of Islam yet still claim to be Muslim. For Noura and Haj Ibrahim, Islam only becomes important whenever they are faced with a problem in their lives.

Other characters like John and Mark are nominal Muslims –they are Muslims by name only (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” (255). She adds: “Once a Christian, always a Christian” (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” (290). John is Muslim by name only given that he has no faith in Allah.

Chapter Four has analysed 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. Outwardly, she appears conservative in Hima wearing the veil and loose clothes but inwardly, she does not see the need to dress in this manner. She has sex with her boyfriend Hamdan many times in Hima but in England she says she cannot have a boyfriend because she is Muslim yet she is Muslim in both places.

Salma's first few months in England are quite difficult but she later successfully adapts to the complications and problems posed by her new country. Faced with the centrality of Islam in Hima, Salma's life was under threat but when Islam is marginal in England, she achieves success. The secular English society accords Salma the freedom to make her own decisions unlike in conservative Muslim Hima where everything is imposed upon the individual. This enables her to reconstruct her life and her identity to her liking.

After her marriage to John, Salma acquires a family in England unlike before when she was drifting without roots. Through this marriage she becomes British, however, Salma is not fully English as her Englishness is moderated by her Muslim Bedouin Arab heritage. Her identity is the product of her multicultural heritage which makes her a 'hybrid'. Her performance at creating her identity embodying both East/Muslim and Western cultures portrays Homi K. Bhaba's concept of 'the third space' while her attempt to reconstruct her life in a chaotic environment ends up in 'mimicry' as we can see the gap between her and the native British. Salma's Western name 'Sally' or its contraction 'Sal' is hollow because one cannot attain a Western identity simply by possessing a Western name. In contrast, adopting a Western name and discarding her Arab name only symbolizes the loss of her original culture because her position in England is still marginal as she remains excluded from Western 'space'.

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. Each person's level of belonging to Islam depends on the benefits or disadvantages they stand to gain in return, hence, if following Islam brings some advantages, they follow it while they reject it if it takes away some benefits. From a conservative Muslim identity in Hima, Salma's identity in England evolves to a semi-practising Muslim. For Faqir, a

‘Muslim’ identity has a broad meaning. A Muslim could be conservative, semi-practising or nominal. The semi-practising Muslim could observe Islamic teaching in one regard but ignore it in another. The novel portrays Islam in certain respects as a personal issue as Salma and other Muslim characters have their own way of practising Islam and do not have to prove their being Muslim to other people. As a result, the adoption of an Islam identity is dependent upon individual perspectives.



## Conclusion

This research has analysed 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 analyse 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 her novel *My Name is Salma* 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 contextualises her self 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 my hypotheses, therefore 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.

I would recommend for further study autobiographics in Faqir's novel since this research has established that there's a connection between Faqir's narration and her life.

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