

An Overview of Arab Women's Experiences in the Novel Ismi Salma Fadia Faqir's Work: A Gynocritical Study

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Abstract

Fadia Faqir's novel Ismi Salma presents a complex narrative about the experience of Arab women who live in exile and identity disconnection in the midst of cultural clashes between East and West. Through the character of Salma, Faqir depicts women's struggles in dealing with trauma, patriarchy, and weistence in a foreign land that does not fully accept her existence. Although this novel has been widely studied from the perspective of diaspora, identity, and trauma, Blaine Showalter's gynocritical approach has never been applied to analyze it. This study was conducted to examine the representation of Arab women's experiences in Ismi Salma's novel and explore the influence of Fadia Faqir's background as a female writer in the construction of female characters and narratives in it. The method used is descriptive qualitative analysis with a gynocritical approach that includes four main models: biology, language, psychology, and female culture. The results show that Fadia Faqir consciously write from a female perspective, raising bodily experiences, psychological trauma, social alienation, and resistance to patriarchal culture. The character of Salma comes as a female witness who represents the voice of Arab diasporic women who are marginalized but still trying to redefine home, identity, and freedom. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of the gynocritical approach in revealing women's narratives from the perspective of women themselves, as well as enriching the study of feminism in Arab diasporic literary works.

Keywords: *Gynocriticism, Fadia Faqir, Arab women, Ismi Salma*

INTRODUCTION

The September 11, 2001 (9/11) terrorist attack on the World Trade Center (WTC) in New York, USA, was a turning point in the history of relations between the Western world and the global Muslim community. These attacks, which killed nearly 3,000 people and injured thousands more (Zaenuddin, 2024), not only impacted the national security policies of the United States, but also had widespread psychological and social effects. In the post-9/11 global narrative, Islam is often wrongly equated with terrorism, giving rise to a wave of

fear, suspicion and hatred towards Muslims, a phenomenon known as Islamophobia (Rafidah, 2021). Discrimination against Muslims has increased sharply in Western countries, reinforced by biased mass media coverage and political policies that position Muslims as a threat to national security (Agustari and Ulinnuha, 2023; Nurul Asqi and Febriani, 2021).

In this context, literature is present as a symbolic space that accommodates and expresses the experiences of marginalized groups, including Muslim women who are victims of global stereotypes. The voices of diasporic women become increasingly important in describing the struggle for identity that is sandwiched between the patriarchal culture of the land of origin and collective prejudice in a foreign land. Through literary works written by diasporic women, various forms of trauma, alienation, and injustice are told from an intimate and reflective perspective. In these narratives, Muslim women are not only portrayed as victims, but also as resilient figures who continue to fight, even when they have to face great challenges such as Islamophobia (Yuliani & Meliasanti, 2022).

In addition, Arab societies are often confined to conservative customs that limit their space and freedom. When perceived as violating the norms of chastity or family honor, women can be subject to severe social punishment, even up to the threat of death. This reality is strongly depicted in Fadia Faqir's *Ismi Salma*. This novel tells the story of how a woman must keep returning to a violent past to understand the present and face an uncertain future, especially in relation to the homeland and place of origin that has been left behind. The narrative also addresses the relationship between migration and psychological distress, as well as the role of memory in shaping consciousness after violent events (Hussein, 2019).

Furthermore, Fadia Faqir's novel shows how trauma, imagination, stream of consciousness, and unconsciousness combine in the process of reviving the past, thus giving new meaning to traumatic experiences (Saltik, 2024). Fadia Faqir, through the character Salma, defines the concept of "home" not only as a physical residence, but also as a symbol of the search for Arab women's identity in the context of diaspora. Home in this novel is a search object full of meaning, which is closely related to the representation of the state, the experience of exile, and the repression of patriarchal culture.

The main issue raised in this novel is how diasporic writers like Fadia Faqir give voice to the fragmented female subject. She re-presents the in-between spaces inhabited by alienation, uncertainty and disconnected identities and reconstructs the meaning of home in

the diasporic landscape. In this case, Salma symbolizes a female witness who gives written testimony to the various forms of oppression she has experienced. The testimony reflects the author's own experience, who through this novel seeks to represent the voices of women marginalized by the patriarchal cultural system and a prejudiced global society (Awajan & Zuraikat, 2024).

The novel *Ismi Salma* narratively centers on the character Salma, a Bedouin girl from Jordan who becomes pregnant out of wedlock and is threatened with death by her family in order to maintain family honor. She is imprisoned, separated from her child, and eventually sent to Lebanon before migrating to England. In a foreign land, Salma is forced to change her name to Sally and live as a marginalized minority Muslim immigrant. This narrative depicts not only physical escape, but also escape from her own past, body, and cultural identity. However, Salma's character is never really able to let go of her past. She continues to be haunted by trauma, guilt, and loss, all of which are manifested in memories and streams of consciousness that form the narrative structure of this novel.

Based on a review of previous research, the content of Fadia Faqir's *Ismi Salma* mostly reveals an exploration of various cultural, socio-economic, and feminist themes about Arab women, with a special emphasis on Bedouin culture. As in two studies Samou investigates the analysis of various themes about Arab women, including alienation, invisibility, marginalization, oppression, and lack of agency (Sarnou, 2016, 2017). In addition, there is research exploring the concepts of identity and diaspora in the Arab context as well as the interaction between identity and modernity (Aziz, 2018). Ghasemi et al (2021) have also examined the theme of post-traumatic stress disorder (Ghasemi and Peyma, Shoostari, 2021). An analysis of Salma's form of distress and her struggle to navigate the conflicting forces of her past and present circumstances has also been conducted by Hossein (2019). Salma attempts to free herself from the prevailing customs of her surroundings, showing little assimilation into British culture and enduring a marginalized existence as a citizen of secondary status.

From the author's search for studies on the novel *Ismi Salma* by Fadia Faqir, the author has not found a single researcher who discusses this novel using Showalter's Gynocriticism literary criticism study. Therefore, this study uses the method of feminist literary criticism, through Showalter's theory of Gynocriticism, to reveal the image of Arab women and the

background of the author's depiction of women in Fadia Faqir's novel *Ismi Salma*. So far, there have been many studies on feminism in literature using various theories and approaches, Some studies discuss recognizing the representation of female characters with symbols of courage and patriarchal resistance expressed in literary works (Alzoubi et al., 2025; Gea & Hutagalung, 2023; Yuliani & Meliasanti, 2022). Other studies usually highlight aspects such as theme, language style, and narrative structure reflect the unique experiences of women as writers (Armalina and Hayati, 2022; Nizar, Mohammad;Asih, 2023; Purnamasari and Wardarita, 2020; Sofiatin et al., 2022; Wulandari and Amir, 2023). Such studies usually highlight aspects such as theme, language style and narrative structure that are different compared to literary works written by men. This is because gynocritical theory is used to understand how women's personal experiences influence their literary works.

Gynocriticism, as developed by Showalter, offers an analytical framework that focuses on four main approaches, namely women's writing and biology, language, psychology, and culture. By using this approach, researchers can reveal how women's experiences are not only represented through the content of the narrative, but also through the way of writing, language style, and character construction shaped by women's life experiences as authors (Sofiatin et al., 2022). Showalter believes that women write based on authentic experiences that are different from men, and therefore require their own analytical space that is not trapped within the framework of patriarchal literary criticism.

This study aims to represent Arab women's experiences in Fadia Faqir's *Imi Salma* using Showalter's gynocritical approach. This research not only analyzes the content of the narrative, but also explores how Fadia Faqir's social, cultural, and psychological background as a diasporic Arab female writer affects the formation of Salma's character and narrative structure. This research also enriches the study of Arab literary feminism by presenting the perspective of women's literary criticism which is still rarely used in the study of diasporic literary works

In this context, the gynocritical approach becomes very relevant, because it is able to dismantle the dominant structure that has been obscuring women's voices and experiences in literature. Through this research, it is hoped that a more complete understanding of how Arab women in the diaspora are represented not only as objects of narration, but as subjects

who are active in creating, composing, and voicing their own reality, especially in the realm of literature, will emerge.

DISCUSSION

Fadia Faqir's novel *Ismi Salma* describes the struggle of an Arab woman named Salma who lives as a diaspora in the UK. The protagonist is a representation of a woman trapped in an oppressive social and cultural system, both in her patriarchal homeland and in a foreign country that is linguistically and culturally alien. In the context of Elaine Showalter's gynocriticism, Salma's experience reflects a body controlled, a language alienated, and a history of women marginalized by the dominant literary system. From the results of the analysis conducted on *Ismi Salma's* novel, eight forms of oppression experienced by the main character were found. These eight forms are categorized based on narrative excerpts from the novel spread across several important chapters, which are then analyzed using three gynocritical focuses: (1) the position of the character as a female narrative subject, (2) how women's experiences are displayed. The following is the explanation:

Arab Women's Experience

Psychological Trauma

According to Iin Tri Rahayu, “*trauma is defined as an experience that destroys one's sense of safety, sense of capability, and self-esteem, thereby causing psychological wounds that are difficult to heal fully*” (Rahayu, 2009). When a person experiences a traumatic event, recovering from it requires a very long time. Moreover, that person's way of perceiving the world will never fully return to how it was before. It is like shattered glass, which cannot be restored to its original form. The trauma experienced by men and women is significantly different, as men tend to have higher resilience than women, while women generally have lower levels of resilience (Sambu & Mhongo, 2019).

This difference causes women to be more vulnerable to prolonged emotional attachment to traumatic events, as seen in the experience of the character in the novel, namely Salma, who remains trapped in visual and symbolic memories of her past. Salma recalls her dark past in a highly visual manner, vividly describing the detention room where she once lived. It is a space that restricted her freedom as a human being. The physical atmosphere of

the prison becomes a reflection of the psychological imprisonment she continues to experience. This is illustrated in the following quotation:

السُّورَ شامخًا، تعلوه الأسلاكُ الشائكةُ، وتُطلُّ منه نافذةٌ ضيقةٌ مُحاطةٌ بالقضبانِ الحديديةِ. وأدركتُ، في تلكَ اللحظةِ، أنني أقفُ على الجانبِ الآخرِ من البابِ الحديديِّ الأسودِ، رغمَ ما اقترفتُهُ من آثامٍ، ورغمَ ماضٍ حالكٍ مُثقلٍ بالظلماتِ. لكنني الآنَ حُرّةٌ، أخطو فوقَ الرصيفِ كأنني لم أدنِسْ يديَّ بخطيئةٍ قطُّ، كأنني بريئةٌ لا تشوبني شائبةٌ لقد انقضى زماني منذُ أمدٍ بعيدٍ، ولكن، لا أدري لِمَ لا أزالُ أنتنفسُ الحياةَ.

Meaning:

"The wall stood erect, topped with barbed wire, and from there appeared a narrow window surrounded by iron bars. At that moment, I realized that I was standing behind that black iron door, detached from the sins I had committed, and detached from a dark past burdened with darkness. Yet now I was free, walking on the sidewalk as if I had never stained my hands with sin, as if I was innocent and blameless. My time had run out long ago, but somehow I still breathed life" (Salma 2007, p.3).

The data quotation above is a form of inner monologue of the main character, Salma, who is reminiscing about her past when passing a place that once held her captive. She observes that the high fence, barbed wire, and barred windows all symbolize the experience of being imprisoned, both physically and mentally. Although she is now physically free, she feels psychologically confined, trapped in the memories of a traumatic past. The phrase "my time is up" reflects the feeling of emptiness and loss of meaning in life, as a result of deep emotional wounds.

In the gynocritical perspective proposed by Elaine Showalter, the character Salma in novel is positioned as an active narrative subject. She is not just a character who is told by others, but a woman who tells her own life experiences, including the wounds and trauma she has experienced. This position makes the woman's voice as the center of the narrative not as a complement to the story, but as the core of the experience conveyed directly and personally. The trauma presented is not just physical suffering, but hidden inner wounds, which are not always visible but continue to affect her entire existence. Salma's narrative shows how a sense of alienation, loss of children, and erasure of identity are part of the deep trauma that is lived continuously. This is in line with research conducted (Intisar Rashid Khaleel, 2024) which confirms that the social trauma experienced by Salma stems from systemic marginalization stemming from a culture of honor and dominance of masculinity.

In this context, Salma is not only a victim, but also a witness to the social trauma experienced by many women in a system that does not provide a safe space for their existence.

Her childhood memories

Childhood memories do not emerge as neutral recollections, but rather as an inner space in which early experiences shape identity and the way individuals interpret their lives. Childhood is a fundamental phase during which relationships with family, the social environment, and cultural expectations begin to be internalized and embedded in memory (Amoer & Surur, 2025). Therefore, memories of childhood often emerge in the form of reflection or flashbacks when individuals encounter new situations, especially when they are confronted with social and cultural changes that require adaptation. Salma's childhood memories of her hometown appear as flashbacks that highlight the contrast between her past and present life. She recalls her life as a simple village girl marked by hardship. This is illustrated in the following quotation:

في "هيما"، كانت أمي كثيرًا ما توبخني: "سلمى، هل أطعمت البقرة؟ هل نظفت الحظيرة؟ لماذا لم تُحلب الماعز بعد؟" كل صباح، كنت أركض إلى الحقل، أدخل طرف ثوبي القروي الفضفاض في سروالي الواسع. أمسك بيدي اليسرى سنبله قمح ذهبية، وباليد الأخرى منجلًا. كنت أضرب به السنبله بقوة، فتصيب يدي بقايا الساق وحبوب القمح، وتلتصق الأوساخ بين أظفري. كانت يداي خشنيتين ومتسختين.

أما الآن، فأقف وأهز رأسي، ألمس خاتمًا بحجر أصفر مزيف بيدٍ ناعمة تُدهن دائمًا بكريم الشوكولاتة، وأنتهد اختفى زمن الطفولة كراعية في القرية. أصبحت الآن مساعدة خياطة في متجر صغير بمدينة "إكسيتير"، التي اختيرت قبل سنوات كأجمل مدينة في إنجلترا. سلمى ذات العينين السوداوين من "هيما" تحاول الآن أن تكون "سالي": فتاة إنجليزية بيضاء، واثقة بنفسها، ولكنها أنيقة وغيرة تغطي جبهتها

Meaning:

In "Hima", my mother often reprimanded me: "Salma, have you fed the cows? Have you cleaned the barn? Why hasn't the goat been milked yet?" Every morning, I ran to the fields, tucking the loose ends of my village skirt into my wide pants. With my left hand, I held a golden ear of wheat, and with the other, I held a sickle. I struck the grain hard, so that my hands were covered in stalk residue and kernels, and dirt stuck under my nails. My hands were rough and dirty. But now, I stood and shook my head, touched the ring with the fake yellow stone with soft hands that were always smeared with chocolate cream, and sighed that the childhood as a shepherd in the village was gone. Now I am a

taylor's assistant in a small shop in the city of "Exeter", which was voted a few years ago as the most beautiful city in England. The black-eyed Salma from "Hima" is now trying to become "Sally" a fair skinned English girl, confalernt, with a graceful accent and bangs covering her forehead. (Salma 2007, p.4)

The quote above represents the process of social transformation and identity crisis experience by the main character, Salma From a village girl who lives a life of hard work and domestic demands, she turns into a woman who tries to conform to the beauty standards and culture of Western society. Although she is now physically in a new environment and living a seemingly more settled life, the narrative shows that this change does not completely free her from the past.

In the gynocritical approach, the writing and biology of women is very clear in the narrative sentence "Salma with the black eyes of "Hima" is now trying to become "Sally": a fair-skinned English girl, confident, with a graceful accent and bangs covering her forehead". The shows how women themselves become narrative subjects who narrate their own inner conflicts, between a violent past and a new identity that they do not fully own. Elaine Showalter emphasizes that this kind of experience is at the core of women's narratives of struggling to form identities under social and cultural pressures that occur in Salma's character. According to Azzoubi in his research, Salma's memories of her family, especially her mother, are part of the doresting female voice, a female voice that not only rebels against external structures, but also against internal trauma inherited from childhood. Memories of her childhood both about her first love Hamdan, her mother, and her village always appear in the form of flushbacka to her life experiences (Alzoubi et al., 2025).

Social Discrimination

Social discrimination refers to unfair treatment, prejudice, or rejection directed at individuals or groups based on their social characteristics, such as economic status, social class, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. It involves harmful attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that often result in social exclusion, unequal access to resources, and negative impacts on the well-being of certain individuals or groups. Social discrimination can occur at the individual (interpersonal), institutional, or cultural levels, and it often reinforces structural inequalities within society (Huy Le & Lyn Rew, 2025).

As illustrated in another novel, the representation of women's trauma is also portrayed through the character Firdaus in *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi, who experiences

violence and oppression that are similar, though not identical. She suffers physical and sexual violence from her father, accompanied by neglect and rejection from the surrounding society (Supratno & Subandiyah, 2024). This is also depicted in the novel *Ismi Salma*, when Salma stays at a hostel in Exeter and experiences racist treatment from other guests. She becomes the target of insults because of her Arab identity, as illustrated in the following quotation:

من اين هي؟-
في مكانٍ ما في الشرق الأوسط.
" العرب ملاعين! جاء على ظهر الجمل من بلاده البعيدة ليسكن في هذا الحيّ القذر في إكسيتير"،
قالها وهو يضحك.
تظاهرتُ بالنوم وكأنني لم أسمع شيئاً.

Meaning:

Where is she from? Somewhere in the Middle East. Arab asshole! She rode a camel all the way from Arabia to live in this shithole in Exeter," she says with a laugh. "I don't want to share a room with an Arab," he cursed.)I pretended to be a sleep and heard nothing (Salma 2007, p. 9).

In the excerpt above, when Salma was staying at the hostel, a hotel maid knocked on the door to let the other visitors in the same room as her. Because she won the hostel she stayed in, one room contained two people. And indirectly the visitor's words "I don't want to share a room with an Arab", illustrate the social discrimination experienced by Salma as an Arab woman in a western environment. So that she is considered unfit to live in the same room with them.

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This finding is in line with research (Saltik, 2024) which shows that the social discrimination Salma experienced became a tool to erase her diasporic identity. She not only lost her name, but also the meaning of her origins. Meanwhile, khalel's research confirms that the process of changing and eliminating identity actually exacerbates inner alienation and triggers long-term trauma (Intisar Rashid Khaleel, 2024). Thus, Salma's voice in this novel

is a form of women's resistance narrative that voices her existence in the midst of two value systems that both suppress her.

Language alienation

Language functions as a tool of communication that allows humans to convey ideas, feelings, and experiences to others in a systematic and meaningful way. Language varies depending on geographical location. For someone living far from their homeland, language can become a source of anxiety. Words that sound ordinary to native speakers may feel foreign, heavy, or even oppressive to those who have not yet fully mastered the language. In such situations, language not only separates individuals in communication but also creates an emotional distance that makes a person feel belittled and not fully accepted.

For migrant women, the experience of linguistic alienation often feels more personal because it touches their self-confidence and self-esteem. Efforts to mimic accents, carefully choose words, and manage bodily tension become part of the daily struggle to adapt. These seemingly small details are often overlooked, yet they are where subtle psychological pressures operate. The experience is not merely about mispronunciations or misunderstanding meanings, but about striving to maintain dignity and personal identity in a new environment, as experienced by the character Salma in her brief interaction on the hostel roof. This is illustrated in the following quotation:

Yes, yes. Do you want company?
"كومبني؟" قالها بلكنة إنجليزية ثقيلة.
"كومبني"، قلتُ مقلدًا إياه، وأنا أشدّ عضلات فكي-

Meaning :

"Do you want company?"

"Company?" he said with a thick British accent.

"Company," I mimicked her as I tightened my jaw muscles (Salma 2007 p 40)

In the quote above, Salma has a brief interaction with a strange man while on the balcony of the hostel. She greets him with the phrase, "Yes, yes. Do you want company?" A question that sounds familiar, but is foreign to Salma because she does not understand its meaning, so she has to repeat the word with her Arabic accent, making it hard for her to pronounce by tightening her jaw muscles to match the original speaker.

In Elaine Showalter's gynocritical perspective, Salma appears as a narrative subject who gives voice to her own anxieties and experiences. She describes her interactions in personal terms, including physical responses such as clenching her jaw when mimicking the word "company", a sign of inner distress due to language alienation. This experience reflects the reality of migrant women living between their original identity and the demands of a new culture, where language becomes a symbol of social power. According to Showalter, this kind of experience, although seemingly trivial, reveals women's struggle to maintain dignity and identity amidst oppressive structures. Salma's character, in this case, not only shows alienation, but also presents women's voices as the center of a narrative that exposes social inequality.

Longing and guilt as a mother

Longing and guilt often become the quietest emotional burdens for a mother. These feelings do not always manifest as tears or complaints that must be heard; rather, they grow slowly in silence, in the moments spent apart from her child. When a mother is in circumstances that force her away from her maternal role, longing no longer remains a mere desire to meet, but transforms into regret, anxiety, and recurring questions about the role left behind.

It is within this inner space that guilt develops, intertwined with a love that never truly departs. Such emotional experiences are also reflected in Salma, a female character who must endure forced separation from her child. The guilt and longing for her child become Salma's greatest emotional burden. In her solitude, she channels her longing through the activity of sewing baby dresses. This symbolic act is filled with hope and deferred love, as illustrated in the following quotation:

أمضيتُ ساعاتٍ في صنع فستانِ الطفلِ أمضيتُ ساعاتٍ وأنا أتخيل زنبق الأبيض يطفو على المياه الصافية في منتصف ليلة صافية: ليلي. حاولتُ أن أشكل الفستان ليشبه الزنبق. أردت من ارتدته أن يكون أكثر سعادة وأبيض أكثر مني. حاشية الفستان المتعرجة ، والجيوب الصغيرة على شكل ورود، والأكمام الصغيرة والأزهار ، والحزام الساتان، واللآلئ المتلألئة حول الياقة.

Meaning:

I spent hours making baby dresses while imagining white lilies floating on clear water in the middle of a clear night: Lily. I tried to shape the dress to resemble a lily. I wanted the wearer to be happier and

whiter than me. The scalloped hem of the dress, the little rose-shaped pockets, the sleeves and little flowers, the satin belt, the pearls glittering around the collar (Salma, 2007, p. 47)

In the data excerpt above, it tells about how Salma is a Bedouin woman from Jordan who is imprisoned for being pregnant out of wedlock, a great disgrace in a patriarchal culture. To save herself from the death penalty, she fled to England and was forced to leave behind her baby daughter, Leila. Thus, guilt always surrounds Salma. From a gynocritical perspective, Salma is the subject of the narrative who emphasizes herself as a mother who misses her biological child. She had to be separated from her daughter because she left her daughter in Hima. Meanwhile, she escaped to Exeter.

Downturn in prison

Adversity is a condition in which a person experiences a decline mentally, emotionally, or socially, feeling weak, powerless, hopeless, and finding it difficult to recover from a pressing situation (Syukur, 2025). This is often experienced by prisoners, as reflected in the realities of penitentiaries. For instance, the experience of incarceration not only presents physical walls that limit movement, but also psychological barriers that obscure one's sense of self and hope (Amelia & Mahmudi, 2025). Similarly, this is depicted in the novel through Salma, who experiences a decline both physically and psychologically. The damp, confined, and oppressive conditions of her cell exacerbate her inner suffering. The suffocating atmosphere of the prison is vividly illustrated in the following quotation:

في كوخ البجعة، استلقيت على السرير وأنا أنظر إلى جص السقف الذي كان يتقشر ويتساقط على الأرضية. كانت الغرفة رطبةً مثل زنزانة السجن التي أمضيتُ فيها خمسة أشهر. "الحبس الانفرادي"، كنت أحاكي قول السجان .

Meaning:

At Swan Cottage, I lay on the bed looking at the ceiling plaster peeling off and falling to the floor. The room was as humid as the prison cell I'd spent five months in. "Isolation room," I said, imitating the warden's words (Salma 2007, p.47).

The above data describes the time when the conditions surrounding Salma during her imprisonment, especially in the isolation room, through the atmosphere in Swan Cottage. The depiction of the damp room conditions, the peeling plaster ceiling, and the direct association with the prison cell show that the trauma is still imprinted in the memory of her

body and mind. The domestic space (Swan Cottage) becomes a space that is not neutral, even resembling the space of repression that has been experienced.

In Elaine Showalter's gynocritical perspective, there is an important phase in the history of women's writing, namely the phase when women begin to write and narrate their own experiences. In this phase, women's voices are no longer determined by male perspectives of the dominant system, but emerge from the awareness of wounds, bodily experiences, and inner spaces that have been silenced. Salma's character in the novel *Lumi Salma* illustrates this phase through her dark memories in the isolation room of prison, when she is forced to face the inner wounds that have been kept a sense of loss, loneliness, and discouragement as a woman imprisoned by the honor system and social stigma.

The alienation and emotional downturn experienced by Salma in this novel is corroborated by research (Saltik, 2024), which shows that Salma experiences a double alienation from her cultural roots, but is also not accepted in her new environment. In addition, Salma's inner wounds are the result of accumulated structural trauma due to patriarchal cultural repression (Intisar Rashid Khaleel, 2024).

Racism of Muslim women

Racism that occurs within society often arises, among other reasons, from individuals who discriminate against others based on skin color, ethnicity, or nationality (Azmarini Zulfa et al., 2024). Racist behavior carries harmful consequences, not only for the individuals who are the targets of discrimination, but also negatively affecting the perpetrators themselves. Racial groups subjected to racist treatment face significant risks, both psychologically and physically.

The phenomenon of racism is often experienced by Muslim immigrants in Western countries. Their presence is frequently viewed through the lens of prejudice and erroneous stereotypes, so that Islam is not seen merely as a religious identity, but is associated with an image of threat. This perception intensified particularly after the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks, when Islam came to be regarded as a problematic religion (Rafidah, 2021). In the novel, this is depicted when Salma tries to find work to make a living in Exeter, but instead faces discriminatory treatment that undermines her identity and abilities. This is illustrated in the following quotation:

قال: "إدًا، أنتِ لم تأتِ إلى هنا من أجل التسوق"، ثم دفع نظارته التي انزلت على أنفه إلى الأعلى .
أجبتة مبتسمة: "لا، لكنني أجيد عملي". صرخ قائلاً: "إنها لا تتحدث الإنجليزية!" إقالت بارفين
بهدهوء وهي تُخرج قميصًا أبيض من حقيبتها وتضعه على طاولة الاستقبال: قدرتها اللغوية ليست
مهمة. هي ستقوم بخياطة الملابس، وتعديلها، وتحسينها". أخذ القميص بكلتا يديه، أنزل نظارته
قليلاً، نظر إلى الجيب وأكمام القميص بعناية، ثم أعاده مكانه وقال بنبرة قاطعة: لا توجد وظائف
شاغرة.

Meaning:

"So. You're not here to shop," he said and pushed his slumped glasses up his nose.

"No, but I do good work," I said and smiled.

"He can't speak English!" she said. "Her language skills are irrelevant. She'll be making, altering and repairing clothes," Parvin said as he took out a white shirt from his bag, placing it on the reception desk.

He held the shirt with both hands, lowered his glasses, examined the pockets and sleeves, and handed it back. "There are no vacancies" (Salma 2007, p. 137).

The above data shows the discriminatory situation experienced by the Muslim female character, when she is denied a job simply because she cannot speak English. Although she confidently states that she has good work skills, the shopkeeper's direct and cynical assessment ("She can't speak English!") shows how language ability is used as a reason for exclusion. The rejection, although couched in the short phrase "There are no vacancies," is actually a racist and demeaning rejection. Parvin tries to defend himself by stating that language skills are irrelevant because he can sew and repair clothes. However, the defense is ignored, making it clear how the social system subtly excludes Muslim women from decent work spaces.

In Elaine Showalter's gynocritical perspective, this narrative illustrates how women write and voice their experiences directly, especially those related to social injustice and marginalized identities. The female characters are not just objects of an oppressive system, but appear as subjects who are aware of their abilities, even though they are still limited by racist and patriarchal social structures. The rejection experienced by the characters becomes a form of repression that is not only based on gender, but also cultural identity and language. Through this paper, the experiences of immigrant Muslim women are raised as a form of critique of the dominance of the majority culture, and a means of reclaiming women's voices and representation in literary texts

Fadia Faqir's Background on the Picture of Arab Women in the Novel Ismi Salma

Fadia Faqir is a Jordanian writer, academic, and women's activist who was born in Amman in 1956. She is known as one of the most prolific Arab diasporic women writers

who has a strong vision in voicing issues of identity, gender, and migration (Encyclopedia, 2025). She did her undergraduate studies in English Literature at the University of Jordan, then went on to study in the UK, where she earned an MA in Creative Writing from Lancaster University and a PhD in Creative and Critical Writing from the University of East Anglia making her the first Arab woman to earn a doctorate in the field. During her academic career, she has taught at the University of Exeter and Durham University, and has been active in international literary activities and women's rights advocacy.

As an Arab woman living in the UK, Fadia Faqir's personal experiences have colored her work. One example is the novel *Ismi Salma* (2007), which tells the story of the main character Salma, a Bedouin woman from Jordan who flees to England after being imprisoned for being pregnant out of wedlock. In this novel, Faqir describes the harsh realities that Arab women face when they are confronted with a patriarchal honor system and oppressive tribal values. Salma's character represents a woman who is punished for violating social norms that do not give space to her own body and will. This is in line with Faqir's background as a vocal critic of Arab patriarchal culture that often sacrifices women to maintain the "good name" of the family or community (Alhussein, 2025).

Salma's experience as a woman uprooted from her cultural roots reflects a deep conflict of identity theme that also reflects the reality of Faqir's own diaspora. In the novel, Salma experiences intense alienation: she tries to conform to British culture, even changing her name to "Sally," but still feels not fully accepted. She expresses this feeling of disconnection from her origins by referring to herself as a "ghost," a symbol of loss of direction and identity. This shows how Salma's character is shaped by Faqir's deep understanding of the lives of women who live between two worlds: the oppressive world of origin and the strange new world. The English language Faqir uses in writing her novel is also laden with nuances of Arabic idioms and metaphors, creating a cultural bridge that reflects the complexity of migrant women's experiences.

As an activist, Faqir not only raises women's issues through her literary works, but also through her contributions to public discussions and international forums, including at the UN and world literature festivals. She established the Banipal Visiting Writer Fellowship to support Arab writers living in exile, and edited important anthologies such as *In the House of Silence: Autobiographical Essays by Arab Women Writers*. Her struggle to elevate the voices of Arab women is evident in her portrayal of Salma, who is not only portrayed as a

victim, but also as a woman who dares to escape, endures isolation, and ultimately chooses to face her past in order to save her child. In this case, Faqir succeeds in presenting women as full subjects, not just objects of suffering, but as characters who have inner conflicts, fighting power, and a strong sense of identity.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the novel *Ismi Salma* by Fadia Faqir using Elaine Showalter's gynocriticism approach, it can be concluded that the novel represents the discourse on the experiences of Arab women living under the pressures of patriarchal culture and cultural alienation as part of the diaspora. The novel addresses women's issues such as psychological trauma, social discrimination, and loss of identity resulting from displacement across spaces and cultures. The protagonist, Salma, is portrayed as a narrative subject who articulates her inner experiences, both emotional and physical, reflected through various conflicts in the story's structure from her flight due to the honor system, linguistic alienation, to her search for self-identity in a foreign land.

Through the gynocritical approach, it is found that the distinctive experiences of Arab diaspora women are strongly presented in the text, including inner struggles, pressures on the body and social roles, and symbolic oppression through language and social structures. Salma is not merely depicted as an object of suffering but is portrayed as a woman with a sense of identity and agency, aligning with Showalter's primary focus on placing women at the center of narrative. From a social perspective, the author's background as an Arab diaspora woman writing in English adds depth to the formation of Salma's character. Fadia Faqir's personal experiences as an immigrant and women's rights activist are reflected in the narrative, addressing issues of injustice toward women in both Eastern and Western contexts.

More broadly, the findings of this study have important implications for diaspora literary studies, particularly in understanding how the experiences of non-Western women are negotiated through language, identity, and layered cultural spaces. *Ismi Salma* enriches diaspora literature by demonstrating that women's diaspora experiences are not only related to geographical displacement but also involve ongoing ideological, psychological, and cultural struggles. Furthermore, applying Showalter's gynocriticism to non-Western authors like Fadia Faqir shows that Western feminist theory can be expanded and enriched when

confronted with different cultural contexts, while also opening space for critique of the universal assumptions within the theory.

This study opens opportunities for further research, especially in exploring the dialogue between Western feminist theory and the experiences of women from non-Western cultures, as well as comparing representations of diaspora women in works by other Arab women writers. Thus, *Ismi Salma* serves not only as a medium of literary expression but also as a space for reflection and as a representation and resistance of women living between two worlds. The novel can also serve as a mirror for readers to understand women's struggles to maintain their identity, dignity, and freedom.

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