

**RESEARCH TITLE**

**The Voice of Resistance and the Representation of Arab Women in  
Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma* and Hanan al-Shaykh's *The Story of  
Zahra***

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**Abstract**

One could consider literature to be a reflection of society. It is a reflection of reality, and regardless of personal opinions, it reflects societal values. Individuals constantly raise their voices in opposition to anything that seems derogatory or limits their freedom. If people are uncomfortable, they censure and disapprove. Resistance is the label given to this rejection and disapproval of individuals. Women raise their voices for liberty, identity, and justice. They deal with aggression, animosity, racism, misogyny, and discrimination. Middle Eastern women fight against oppression such as conflict, brutality, inequality, and colonial and imperialist economic blockades. Arab women writers have taken charge of the voicing of Arab women. This study attempts to identify the different aspects of women's resistance in the novel *My Name is Salma* (2007) by the Anglo-Arab woman writer Fadia Faqir and *Hikāyat Zahra* or *The Story of Zahra* (1980) by Hanan al-Shaykh. It also tries to represent to which extent women's resistance is depicted in the female protagonists in these novels.

**Key Words:** Resistance, women , freedom, violence, feminism and woman abuse.

## صوت المقاومة وتصوير النساء العربيات في رواية "اسمي سلمى" للكاتبة فادية فقير "ورواية حكاية زهرة" للكاتبة حنان الشيخ

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### المستخلص

يُعتبر الأدب انعكاساً للمجتمع. وبغض النظر عن الآراء الشخصية، فإنه يعد انعكاساً للواقع والقيم المجتمعية. حيث يرفع الأفراد أصواتهم باستمرار استنكاراً واحتجاجاً ضد أي امر يبدو مهيناً لهم أو يحد من حريتهم. فإذا كان الافراد غير مرتاحين في مجتمعهم، فإنهم بالتأكيد سينتقدون ويرفضون واقعهم. وتطلق تسمية المقاومة على هذا الرفض والاستنكار للأفراد.

وللنساء دورا بارزا في هذه المقاومة حيث يرفعن أصواتهن مطالبات بالحرية والهوية والعدالة، كما يستنكرن العداوة والعنصرية وكره النساء والتمييز الذكوري. وبذلك تحارب نساء الشرق الأوسط الاضطهاد بكافة انواعه المتمثلة بالصراع والوحشية وعدم المساواة والحصار الاقتصادي الاستعماري والإمبريالي.

ونتيجة للظلم والاضطهاد الذي تتعرض له المرأة، تولت الكاتبات العربيات مسؤولية التعبير عن النساء العربيات من خلال مؤلفاتهن واعمالهن الادبية. حيث تركز هذه الدراسة على الجوانب المختلفة لمقاومة المرأة في الرواية الانكليزية "اسمي سلمى" (2007) للكاتبة العربية فادية فقير ورواية "حكاية زهرة" أو "قصة زهرة" (1980) للكاتبة العربية حنان الشيخ. حيث توضح الدراسة مدى مقاومة المرأة ورفضها وتمرداها من خلال الشخصيات النسوية الرئيسية في هاتين الروايتين والمتمثلة بشخصيتي سلمى و زهرة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** المقاومة ، المرأة ، الحرية ، العنف ، الحركة النسوية ، الإساءة للمرأة.

## 1. Introduction

Humans are inclined to object whenever anything appears to be out of place. People always speak out in opposition to anything that seems to belittle them or limit their freedom. If individuals experience discomfort, they censure and reject. This criticism of society's ideas and norms is referred to as "resistance."

According to *Cambridge English Dictionary*, resistance can be defined as "the act of fighting something that is attacking you, or refusing to accept something" or as "a force that acts to stop the progress of something or make it slower". Therefore, resistance conveys disapproval and disillusionment in a number of ways. It criticizes all tactics and methods that seem out of place in a social setting. So, making some new adjustments to the current social structure causes a sense of satisfaction. Individuals therefore always have a tendency to oppose and fight anything that does not suit them. They speak up and demand better improvements by criticizing society's ingrained norms.

*Merriam-Webster Dictionary* provides four definitions for 'resistance'. It is defined as "an act or instance of resisting : OPPOSITION.", "the power or capacity to resist", "an opposing or retarding force" and "an underground organization of a conquered or nearly conquered country engaging in sabotage and secret operations against occupation forces and collaborators". The first of these four definitions describes resistance as an action of withstanding force and a behavioral effect. The other three relate to resistance as a force or an oppositional power, which are more motivating characteristics of resistance.

The definitions in dictionaries make it very evident that rejection and rebellion play a significant role in resistance. It questions social norms and hierarchical structures, hopes for important changes, but also fights to protect unexpected ones. Singh (2020) defines resistance as a propensity to battle against something that appears antagonistic and demeaning to people and society. It is a form of defiance and resistance to the established order that bears a social condition marked by conflicting viewpoints and values over how to live.

It is possible to view literature as a reflection of life and society. Regardless of one's personal ideas, it reflects society's ideals and reflects our reality. Women battle for justice, freedom, and identity. Aggression, hostility, racism, misogyny, and prejudice are all issues they address. According to Bhat (2019), numerous writers and authors occasionally use their writing to present their concerns to the public. Either they directly satirize their society or they bring their problems before the community or the government. Either they rebel against the system or they are dissatisfied with it.

Women in the Middle East fight against oppression, including that brought on by war, violence, inequality, and colonial and imperialist economic blockades. Women writers have drawn inspiration from the issues that women face in their daily lives to produce works that accurately depict these issues. The representations of Arab women in writing are now in the hands of Arab women writers.

1956 saw the birth of Fadia Faqir in Amman, Jordan. She is a British-Jordanian author, independent academic, and human rights campaigner. She completed a BA in English Literature at the University of Jordan in Amman before moving on to Lancaster, UK, to pursue an MA in Critical and Creative Writing. In England, at the University of East Anglia, she earned a Ph.D. in Critical and Creative Writing. Also, she coordinates and lectures on the

Project of Middle Eastern Women's Studies at the Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at Durham University in England. She wrote many novels including *Willow Trees Do Not Weep* (2014), *My Name Is Salma* (2007), *Nisanit* (1990), *Pillars of Salt* (1996). Moreover, she has written a number of plays and short stories (Life, 2017).

Hanan al-Shaykh is award-winning reporter, author, playwright, and one of the most well-known authors in the Arab world today. She was born in 1944 and was raised in Ras al-naba, a conservative neighborhood in Beirut, where she attended a typical Muslim primary school for females before traveling to Cairo to attend American College. She is one of the most well-known and distinguished award-winning Arab authors today, and her work has been published all over the world in 21 different languages. *The Story of Zahra* is one of her eight published novels (Geressi, 2018).

## 2. Literature Review

Much research on resistance in general and women's resistance, in particular, has been conducted. The first example Bhat (2019) research examines Charles Dickens' writings as a literary forerunner of resistance, paying particular attention to *Little Dorrit* and *Hard Times*. Dickens made a significant contribution to the reformation of society in his time; it can be inferred from the study of his works. He had demonstrated to the authorities—directly or indirectly—that women and children are society's assets in which their rights should be protected and their obligations should be fulfilled. They ought to provide them with chances in all areas so that they can improve their future. So, it is possible to claim that Dickens was a revolutionary writer who, through his writing, resisted and altered Victorian society.

Martha et al. (2018) study "Women's Opposition to the Patriarchal Culture System in Abidah EL Khalieqy's *Geni Jora Novel* and N.H.Dini's *Jalan Bandungan*". This study sets out to identify the many ways that women in the novels respond to the patriarchal culture. According to data research, the opposition can be perceived in a variety of ways, including the fight for equal rights in economic and educational spheres, the fight for freedom to engage in activities or express beliefs that are forbidden for women, and the struggle for the ability to make decisions.

Furthermore, Hakim and Asri (2019) conduct a study that is carried out to assess and depict the portrayal of females' opposition to hierarchical tradition in Laksmi Pamuntjak's work *Amba*. According to the findings of this study, the forms of resistance depicted in *Amba* include choosing to prioritize education over marriage and working in the public sector. There is no doubting the completeness of the picture of women's resistance, which is caused by the fact that women are still burdened, making decisions for them tough. The pressure from the family is the root of this issue. The means of resistance in the novel are mainly verbal in nature, according to Pamuntjak.

Prasetyo and Suryaman(2020) conduct a study to describe how the four female protagonists resist patriarchal dominance in Sanie B. Kuncoro's work *Garis Perempuan*. This study makes use of feminist literary criticism theory to accomplish its objective. It demonstrates how the four female protagonists can protect their virginity and themselves from the imminent danger of a male-dominated society that is diametrically opposed to their own. They may express a perspective and stand by it despite their individuality as a sign of respect for themselves as women.

From Dickens' time, resistance has been portrayed in a variety of literary works. Several novels discuss the issues which women usually confront and how they resist to achieve freedom and justice. The studies mentioned above from many parts of the world indicate that women are still seen as being beneath males. Through the decades, their own family has passed down these variations in discrimination against women.

### 3. Research Objectives

Specifically, this study aims to identify the different aspects of women's resistance in *My Name is Salma* by the Anglo-Arab woman writer Faqir and *Hikāyat Zahra* by al-Shaykh. It also tries to represent to which extent women's resistance is depicted in the female protagonists in these novels. The findings of this study are anticipated to be useful to readers, particularly students, instructors, and researchers as a way to better understand how some women are treated unfairly in Arab societies. Also, this study is anticipated to advance feminism studies in the Arab world.

### 4. Research Methodology

The two novels used in this study are *My Name is Salma* by the Anglo-Arab author Faqir and *Hikyat Zahra* by al-Shaykh. The quantitative approach is not considered; this study's methodology is entirely qualitative. Primary texts and secondary texts have both been explored in-depth, as well as the novels themselves. Sentences, and dialogues, from the two novels that express women's resistance, served as the research's source of data.

### 5. Discussion and Finding

Certain elements of female resistance may be found in the stories of Salma in *My Name is Salma* and Zahra in the novel *Hikyat Zahra*. The representation of the main character as a woman who makes multiple attempts to escape patriarchal society serves as evidence of this. The writers of the under consideration novels portray women as oppressed by patriarchy and subject to various forms of abuse. The masculine figures that surround the protagonists devalue them from the beginning to the end.

#### The Representation of Resistance in Fadia Faqir's *My Name Is Salma*

*My Name is Salma* is authored by the British –Jordanian writer, Fadia Faqir. Salma, a Bedouin girl who becomes pregnant without marriage, is the main character of this novel. Because of this, her tribe chooses to murder her and share her blood with everyone else. To save her life, her mother and her teacher Miss Naila send her to protective custody with the aid. She leaves Jordan with the aid of a civil nun named Khairiyah after giving birth to Layla, who is taken away right away. After traveling to Lebanon, where she spends a brief period in peace, the sisters advise her to leave for England because her brother Mahmoud has discovered where she is staying. Also, Miss Asher adopts her and grants her British citizenship, allowing her to begin her journey in England.

In London, She gets to know Parvin, a Pakistani girl who has fled an arranged

marriage. She begins to embrace the Western culture as a result in order to get a job and blend in with British society. After leaving her room with Parvin, Salma picks up the English language and finds a new home with an English woman named Liz. She enrolls in a university to learn the English language and literature while beginning a job as a seamstress. She meets an English professor at the university, they get married, and Salma gives birth to their son, Imran. Salma's recollection of Layla is troubled since she can still hear her pleading for assistance. Salma, however, departs from London and heads back to Jordan, where she learns that her brother has killed her child. Salma's mother pleads with Mahmoud to spare her daughter's life at the novel's ending, but instead of saving her, he shoots Salma between her eyes next to her daughter's grave.

Certain elements of female resistance can be found in the story of Salma. This is first implied by the portrayal of the main heroine as a woman who makes several attempts to rebel against the male-dominated culture. According to Walby (1990), patriarchy is a set of societal rules and customs whereby males rule over, subjugate, and profit from women. Each individual woman is in a constrained, subservient position, while each individual man is in a dominant one. So it is a feminist idea pertaining to the man's duty as a parent, partner, brother, or even a close relative. This social rule states that the ideology of the patriarchy determines the concerns or interests of women.

In Faqir's work, Arab women are portrayed as meek, abused, docile, quiet, dependent, and even murdered by males in their lives. The novelist describes Arab women as subjugated by patriarchy.. From this viewpoint, Salma, the novel's protagonist, resists this society by falling in love with Hamden and having a child without getting married, despite the fact that she is aware that these actions could result in her death. This is clearly stated by Salma saying "[w]e were like an open wound exposed to the elements. They imprisoned us, stole our children, and murdered us. ..." (Faqir 2007, p. 120). Salma the naive shepherdess Bedouin girl resists society's norms and falls in love with Hamden and ends up becoming pregnant out of wedlock. After her mother find out she says "If your father or brother discovers this, they will murder you" (Faqir 2007, p. 42).

Salma resists her society and consents to Hamdan taking advantage of her sexually since she thinks he cares for her. She even embraces being called to in derogatory ways by him like "Salma, you've grown into a young woman... you're my own, my slave girl." (Faqir 2002, p.25).

Another small act of resistance is presented when Hajjeh Amina, Salma's mother lets her daughter go swimming:

ˆ The water is chilly, Mother. 'May I swim?'

'They will murder me if they see you. Only a free lady takes off her clothes and swims in public. 'Men could see you,' she whispered as she drew up her black face mask, paused, and added, 'Be fast!'" (Faqir ,2007, p. 198)

Her mother's decision is a rejection of patriarchal rules. Salma knew her mother had made a huge gamble, so she states, "She should have said no, but she said yes" (Faqir 2007, p. 199).

Even after relocating to England, the main protagonist resists and oscillates between her old Islamic Bedouin society and her new Western civilization between her past and present. Salma's phobic consequences are still clearly visible in her mind. When a man approached her in London, she remembered her terrifying brother and uttered the following phrase in terror: " If my brother Mahmoud notices me conversing with others, he will tie each leg to a separate horse and command them to flee in opposite directions" (Faqir, 2007, p.19).

Salma also showed resistance to self-maintenance even before she arrived in England. Mrs. Asher, Salma's traveling companion, starts teaching her English on the ship and invites her to consume beer and meat. Yet, Salma categorically opposes them and suggests that they are prohibited in Islam by saying, "It is prohibited in Islam. You lose control and commit a variety of sins" (Faqir, 2007, p.129). By abiding by the dos and don'ts of her religion, Salma first exhibits unwavering discernment regarding Western seduction and sacred fidelity. Her rejection discreetly highlights the struggle for survival between two disparate civilizations.

Salma's inner self is in a conflict in England. She makes an effort to keep her mother's culture while bucking the trend of the West. Mrs. Asher legally adopts Salma and gives her the name Sally Asher. This encourages the main character to think about outwardly forging a new identity and integrating into society in new ways. In doing so, she readily accepts the offer of an evening employment at the bar, and she partially succeeds in learning English table manners and techniques to engage the customers without offending their sensitivities. She says, "I would put on my most elegant gown, keep my lips shut, apply little make-up, knot my frizzy hair tightly, and talk slowly and deliberately in order to sound as English as possible." (Faqir, 2007,106).

Furthermore, even after Salam has accepted the Western lifestyle, her mentality is in conflict. This is clearly stated in "... I slipped off my white veil, folded it, and laid it on the bed. My head felt like it was covered in open wounds, and I had removed the bandages. I felt like a whore." (Faqir, 2007,88). It is obvious that Salma has found the process to be traumatizing and difficult, which further heightened her sense of guilt.

Despite the fact that this novel is established in two distinct societies, the protagonist still experiences oppression from both her Bedouin culture, where she attempts to resist the patriarchal culture that opposes her because she is a woman, as well as from Western culture, where she attempts to resist to maintain her identity as an Arab Muslim woman.

### **The Representation of Resistance in Hanan al-Shaykh's *Hikyat Zahra***

*Hikyat Zahra* or (*The Story of Zahra*) portrays the abuse a Lebanese girl endures at the hands of her family and patriarchal culture. Zahra, a Muslim who is originally from a tiny town in the south, is introduced to the reader before the Lebanese civil war began in 1975 while she is living in Beirut. There are many paradoxes in Zahra's life: She resides in the city yet holds rural principles and ideals. She is expected to uphold her traditional upbringing despite witnessing her mother having an affair with another man. She despises her mother for lying but steps in to protect her when her father severely beats them both as a result of discovering her mother's affair.

After being raped by her brother's friend, Zahra had two miscarriages and a mental

collapse. She goes around in quiet, constantly picking at her zits, and seeks solace in the restroom. Zahra joins her uncle in Africa after leaving her family in an effort to leave her immediate surroundings, where she marries Majed, his buddy. The union is a total failure. After getting divorced, Zahra goes back to Beirut, where a civil war has erupted. Ironically, Zahra discovers freedom in the chaos of the conflict. She goes to a sniper believing she may divert him and save lives, but he rapes her on their first encounter, and they fall in love. After telling her lover, the sniper, about her plans, he ultimately kills her.

*Hikyat Zahra* has a few components of female resistance. The representation of the main heroine as a woman who makes multiple attempts to resist and escapes patriarchal family and war serves as examples of this. For instance, Zahra and her mother Fatme portray her father as a patriarchal tyrant who terrorizes the family: "(a)ll I knew was that I was scared of my father, as afraid of the blows he dealt her as I was of those he dealt to me; while she continued to shake and wail in his grip." (Al-Shaykh, 1995, p.15).

Zahra's mother, who treats Zahra horribly and prefers her son above her daughter, exemplifies the ruthless patriarchal culture. Zahra emphasizes this particular treatment early in the novel. "I didn't dare to reach for the chicken pieces because I had just had a meal that included melokhia but no chicken meat. Every night was the same. My mum never once offered me a bit of meat. She usually kept it for Ahmad and, occasionally for my father." (al-Shaykh, 1995, p.11).

Zahra's mother not only treats her son differently, but she constantly lies all the time to keep him safe. "If Ahmad was running late, my mother would ultimately rumple his sheets and tuck a pillow beneath his bedsheets. If my dad questioned her, she would reply, 'Ahmad is asleep.'" (Al-Shaykh, 1995 p.25).

For these reasons, Zahra keeps hiding in silence in order to resist the repressive patriarchal system. She has a habit of locking herself in the bathroom. In other terms, Zahra opposes the repressive patriarchal system through her passive rejection. She states "I just shut the bathroom door and remained a prisoner, just like I used to seek sanctuary in the bathroom when I was scared of my father's probing gaze back home in Beirut." (al-Shaykh, 1995, p.24).

It is evident from the aforementioned quotations that Zahra suffers violent victimization at the hands of the masculine culture in all of its ugliest forms. She says, "Right now, I am in Africa because I would like to be away from Beirut." (al-Shaykh, 1995, p.29). Zahra relocates to Africa to live with her uncle Hashem in an effort to resist and escape this reality, where she marries Majed, who is Hashem's friend. Yet, this effort is useless.

Zahra described her life with her husband "I remained convinced that I had given up hope. Even if I tried to be nothing but myself and stopped acting and speaking like any other regular woman who puts on clothes and laughs, he would still find fault with me, as would they all." (al-Shaykh, 1995, p.96). Zahra thought that Africa might serve as her place of refuge. Yet when she got married to Majed, she regrettably has to confront the terrible reality once more.

Finally, Zahra tries to resist the War by attempting to distract the sniper from his fatal job. Her resistance this time is not silent and passive. She feels it is her ethical mission to



communicate with the shooter and get involved in physical and emotional contact with him in the hopes that doing so may help the wounds heal and reduce some of the horrific realities of war. Zahra states that "So, for hours, I just sat, addicted to the window. Day passed in this way. What might possible take the sniper's attention away from his gun and cause him to open his lips instead?" (al- Shaykh ,1995,p.157).

At the end of the novel, the sniper killed Zahra after she tells him that she is pregnant which destroys all her hopes and dreams to live normally as a human. "He murders me. He murders me with gunshots that landed at his elbow when he was making love to me. He murders me, and the white sheets that I was wearing are still wrinkled from my presence. Is he going to kill me since I'm pregnant? Or was it because I inquired whether he was a sniper? Someone is tugging at my limbs. Should I call out again, please help." ( al-Shaykh ,1995,p.214). Zahra is a prisoner of both patriarchal norms and conflict. Her tragic and pitiful passing shows that any endeavor to resist patriarchy will be pitiful without destroying patriarchy and its horrible manifestations.

## Conclusion

Literature is the mirror of society, something that is obvious to all. In order to help people see their errors and make reparations, literature serves a corrective function by reflecting societal issues. It also acts as a societal projection of virtues or excellent attributes that others might emulate. Women's issues have served as a source of inspiration for female writers to create works that faithfully portray these issues. The representations of Arab women in writing are now in the hands of Arab women writers.

Resistance is a major issue addressed by Anglo-Arab women authors. In *My Name is Salma* by the Anglo-Arab woman writer Faqir and *Hikāyat Zahra* by al-Shaykh, the two writers try to identify the different aspects of women's resistance. They also try to represent to which extent women's resistance is depicted in the female protagonists of these novels.

Certain elements of female resistance can be found in the two novels. In *My Name is Salma*, the protagonist experiences oppression from both her Bedouin culture, where she attempts to resist the patriarchal culture that opposes her because she is a woman, as well as from Western culture, where she attempts to resist to maintain her identity as an Arab Muslim woman.

The protagonist of *Hikāya Zahra*, on the other hand, went through both war and a patriarchal family. She barricaded herself in the bathroom where she sought comfort in an effort to stoically resist her patriarchal family. In order to escape this world, she marries Majed. Then, She made an effort to resist war by making emotional and physical contact with the sniper in the hopes that doing so may hasten the healing of the wounds and lessen some of the horrible realities of war.

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