

Performing Identity and Negotiating Displacement: Intersectionality and Gender in My Name Is Salma

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Abstract

Through the combined lenses of gender performativity and intersectionality, this study explores the mechanics of resistance and the production of identity in Fadia Faqir's *My Name Is Salma*. The article examines how identity is constantly contested under changing cultural and sociopolitical situations. Mainly, it focuses on the protagonist's metamorphosis from Salma to "Sally." The analysis shows how Salma's adoption of new linguistic, cultural, and behavioral patterns indicate a purposeful performance influenced by the necessities of survival in a diasporic setting, drawing on Judith Butler's concept of performativity. The limitations of self-reconstruction under inflexible social frameworks are revealed by the performative adaptation's failure to result in complete integration. In order to show how Salma's experiences of marginalization are created by the intersection of gender, race, class, and migration, the researcher of this article uses an intersectional method. Her vulnerability is increased by her relocation from Jordan to Britain, where she is positioned among intersecting oppressive structures that limit her access to agency, visibility, and voice, as her struggle is a mirror of larger structural injustices that control diasporic existence rather than just a personal one.

Keywords: Intersectionality, Gender Performativity, My Name is Salma, Arab Women's fiction, cultural identity, Arab Diaspora.

Introduction

My Name Is Salma is about the intricate relationships between displacement, gender, and culture in the context of exile and migration; the text, which was published in 2007, tells the story of Salma, a young Bedouin woman who was forced to leave her country after becoming pregnant without being married, putting her in danger within the context of honor-based violence. Salma witnesses a broken life characterized by cultural dislocation, social isolation, and ongoing psychological trauma after moving to England under a false identity, an identity that enabled her to escape the dangers of being killed.

The novel focuses on the long-lasting effects of patriarchal systems that transcend physical bounds through its shifting temporalities and non-linear narrative, showing that women's life are

nevertheless structured even in diasporic environments; as a consequence, the literature offers a rich environment for scrutinizing the ways in which gendered oppression operates both globally and locally. In order to examine how Salma's identity is challenged and formed across changing social circumstances, the current article explores *My Name Is Salma* employing a feminist hypothetical framework that integrates, gender performativity, and intersectionality. Butler's theory will be used to show how gender is constituted in the novel. Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality, on the other hand, offers a criteria through which one can view how Salma's experiences are influenced not only by her gender but also by her status as a cultural outsider, a migrant, and a victim of honor-based stigma.; when combined, these frameworks allow for a

complicated inspection of the novel's negotiation and imposition of identity.

The researcher of the current article brings the argument that Salma's trajectory is shaped' by the continuing negotiation between self-constructed forms of imposed identities and agency, her later experience in exile demonstrates that such regulatory principles do not vanish, but are' reconfigured within different cultural and social frameworks, in spite of the patriarchal systems' that rule her early existence endeavoring to define her through obedience, and honor. Salma's' identity is continually formed by acts of adaptation, performance, and resistance instead of being' cohesive and stable; her efforts to blend in with Western culture, takes on new social responsibilities, and represses features of her history serves as a reminder of both the cultural memory of enduring power and the fragility of identity. The restrictions of these compulsory performance is also exposed by periods of memory, pause, and emotional breakdown, which shows how resistance occurs throughout the very mechanisms anticipated to control her. So, one would argue that Salma's biography demonstrates a continuous battle in which agency stays limited, contested, and intricately linked to power institutions rather than a straight line toward emancipation.

Gender Performativity and the Reconstruction of Identity:

The reader of Faqir's novel would understand that the best way to understand the character of Salma and her identity regulation is through the prospect of gender performativity, which has been illuminated earlier as viewing gender as a set of repeated behaviors influenced by societal norms and expectations rather than as fixed or an intrinsic characteristic. As a child, Salma is forced to obey the concept of femininity that is symbolized by modesty, silence, and obedience.

Salma's early declaration about gender is related to her pregnancy and how her body' becomes a site of control: "I have brought shame on my family" (Faqir 2007: 12). This' declaration'

vividly illustrates her gender regulation. At this point, Salma's identity alters from' that of an' individual subject to that of a carrier of communal honor. Her femininity in this stage' determined' by the expectations of the group rather than by her own. Her speech indicates how gender functions as a performative construct. However, the female body is given significance by' recurring social conformity and standards and this is enforced by the prospect of punishment. As' Butler has stated, gender can be considered as a regulatory practice that are maintained by repetition, wherein a person who deviates from arranged role faces violence and social exclusion' (Butler 1993: 26). Salma's internalizations of shame can be considered as an example of how these standards are not imposed from the outside, but also become entrenched in the' subject's mind, preserving the idea that these demands are unavoidable. Salma's imprisonment within recognized space, where her pregnancy is hidden and controlled in order to uphold' societal order, further strengthens the performative nature of womanhood; her forced stay at the' convent serves as an example of how controlled environment that require conformity and silence are used to manage gender standards.

Salma was enforced to mimic a kind of femininity that suggests submission by embracing mannerisms that conform to ideals of humility and repentance. This' forced change show that gender association is a reaction to outside powers that identify appropriate conduct instead of a' reflection of inner reality; performativity functions by habitual acts that increasingly ascertain the illusion of stability and coherence, even as the subject remains internally split. This is verified by the repetition of lowered gaze, silence, and constrained speech, which becomes a survival strategy for Salma, who appears to show no intention to overt strategies of resistance to defend herself.

Salma's attempt to adopt a new identity as "Sally" during her move to England has highlighted the volatility of the forced femininity and the frailty of gender as a cohesive' construct, which supposed to be the main aspects of gender. So, instead of being free from' restrictions, her

deliberate attempt to speak, look, and conduct to conform to Western standards' are indicative of a continuing process of performative adaptations. Her new identity thus seems to be fractured as she negotiates strange social expectations, revealing the gap between actual' experience and assigned positions; a process that indicates the fact that identity is formed by recurrent orientations toward social norms that specify what bodies may and cannot do in certain cultural contexts (Ahmed 56). Thus, one can figure that Salma's fluctuating performances draw attention to the ongoing effort needed to maintain the appearance of belonging, signifying that gendered identity is unstable, contingent, and susceptible to disruption, and her Western name' (Sally) is actually increasing the fragmentation of her identity, thus the changing of her identity in this case leads to a fractured gender.

The inconsistency between real experiences and the imposed role has been shown when throughout the repeated fails to establish consistency, which highlights the instability of performative identity; when Salma says "My daughter... I left her behind" one can see the recurring intrusion of memory especially when she tries to remember actual experiences (Faqr 2007: 78). This case actually highlights the boundaries of assimilation and breaks the continuity of an adopted identity.

Gender construction can be affected by interior disruptions which show that identity cannot be completely fixed by performance alone. Thus, even when external behaviors may conform to prevailing societal norms, gender is impossible to be fixed. According to Judith Butler (1990), performativity produces a sequence of repetitions that are susceptible to failure and contradiction rather than securing a fixed identity; because normative frameworks are unable to totally control subjectivity, memory persistence in this case serves as a site of resistance in this environment, revealing the situational and brittle nature of gendered identity. (Butler: 145).

It is important to mention that when cultural displacements introduce opposing

normative framework that the subject must concurrently traverse, the performances of femininity become even more complex. The effort to embrace Western behaviors is where this tension is most noticeable, the unease that accompanies social contacts is a reflection of this struggle, particularly when engaging in routine activities like casual conversation or public visibility feels forced and unnatural, indicating a disconnect between embodied experience and acted identity (Faqr 2007: 113). According to Deniz Kandiyoti women frequently negotiate patriarchal restraints through adaptive methods that incorporate both compliance and subtle kinds of resistance, which is consistent with this contradiction (Kandiyoti 1998: 280). So, one may understand that adopting new gendered behaviors does not represent emancipation, but rather a reconfiguration of limitation, where performance turns into a strategy for surviving in dynamic power structures; as a result, the resulting identity is contradictory, complex, and maintained by ongoing negotiation rather than unified.

The wish of belonging to maintain a stable identity eventually fails. This is most vividly seen when Salma considers her enduring sense of alienation and acknowledges, "I don't belong here, I am neither this nor that, suspended between two worlds" (Faqr 2007: 157). Salma changes her appearance, the language she uses, and her behaviors to conform to the external markers of Western femininity, but these actions reveal the gap between performance and internal feeling rather than creating a cohesive sense of self, as Butler has asserted that performativity depends on repetition to produce the appearance of identity, but that this repetition is never finished and is constantly susceptible to interruption (1990: 193). This instability lends credence to this assertion, Salma's struggle to completely identify the roles she plays does not indicate weakness, and it draws attention to the restrictions of normative frameworks, where the incapacity to completely inhabit prescribed identities becomes a subtle, but important form of resistance. When the story progresses the feeling of fractured identity increases with Salma: "Who am

I? Am I Salma or Sally? I feel like I am neither... I don't belong' here and I no longer belong there" (2007: 180). This extract indicates exactly how she feels, the clothing, vocabulary, and behaviors she has adopted do not actually gain her a new1 constant identity.

Because each repetition holds the potential for disruption and variation, this dynamic lends credence to Judith Butler's claim that identity is formed through repetition. This brings into line the view of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, who has stressed that reality and identity are constantly created through institutional reinforcement and social contact (Berger & Luckmann 1996: 61). On the other hand, one could bring to argument Judith Lorber's (1994) view that gender functions as a continuous social process that arranges behavior while allowing1 for resistance when people don't completely fit its expectations (54). Salma's feeling of' estrangement thus highlights the unstable and manufactured nature of identity itself, as the1 incapability to fit in becomes a crucial site of exposure for the boundaries of gender norms instead of only reflecting marginalization, which is also another factor to prevent the stability of one's identity. When language itself serves as a site of regulation, disclosing how linguistic norms mediate belonging, the volatility of performative identity becomes even more apparent, this is clear in the case of Salma when she considers the animosity that permeates daily' interactions: "I could hear it sung everywhere..... Where do you come from? "Go home!" (167). Regardless of her efforts to assimilate, the question's repetition turns language into a disciplinary tool that consistently casts her as an outsider. In this situation, language maintains borders of1 belonging instead of acting as a neutral medium of communication, forcing Salma to repeatedly1 enact an identity that is never entirely accepted.

As she considers this forced identity: "They call me Sally now" (Faqr 2007: 81), in this' case, naming turns into a tool of power that reconstitutes the self. One can aligns this situation1 with Judith Butler's claim that identity is created

through discursive practices, where the subject is brought into being within normative contexts by repeated naming and recognition (Butler 1997: 2). Still, the topic cannot be completely changed through language alone, the original' name's continued existence behind this imposed label indicates the limitations of such1 performative activities as she feels that she has two identities in this case, a real identity and a' fake one. Therefore, one may indicate that Salma's dual naming reveals that performativity has1 always been unfinished and vulnerable to opposition, exposing the instability of identity when the attempt to impose coherence instead creates division.

Intersectionality and Layered Oppression:

Since Salma's experience is affected by the convergence of many power systems that work at the same time across social and cultural settings, gender alone cannot completely clarify' how Salma's identity is regulated, the situation seems to be more intersected than that. Her' marginalization arises from the confluences of gender, honor codes, and displacement. These' factors together create a system of limitation or subjection. such process becomes vivid when' one notices the circumstances that lead to her banishment, as the culture logic of honor' exacerbates the effects of her pregnancy, making her a socially and gendered object; such an experience reflects what Kimberlé Crenshaw conceptualizes as intersectionality, a framework that highlights how individual located at the intersection of multiple identities are exposed to overlapping forms of oppression that cannot be reduced to a single category (1989: 140). The' combination of these factors in Salma's condition forms a vulnerability that goes beyond' gendered subordination, revealing the ways in which power functions through interrelated' structures that shape both her marginalization and her constrained options for actions, which means her fate is actually not at her hands, since she is surrounded by different aspects of oppression.

According to Crenshaw (1989), power structures like patriarchy, racism, and the' inequality of class interact to create certain types of

relegation that are difficult to pin down to a 'single axis, a theoretical framework that is especially relevant to Faqir's text, which follows an 'identity of a woman that is concurrently sculpted by racialized exclusion in a Western setting, tribal rules of honor, gendered violence, and socioeconomic deprivation. From the beginning, Salma's story shows how these interlocking systems limit her life to a strict patriarchal system in which her body is a contested site of control and punishment. The way in which Faqir decides to 'start with in My Name Is Salma about how Salma feels is not only personal; it is ingrained in a 'gendered system of honor that controls and punishes the female body. Salma's sexuality, which is portrayed as a site of social shame and masculine power, is directly linked to her "crime," as she describes it, she continues: "I brought shame on my family... I deserved to die", which indicates the degree to which patriarchal ideology has been ingrained in her consciousness is reflected in this internalization of shame (Faqir 2007: 9). The reader of Faqir's text can indicate that Salma is not only a victim of patriarchy; by acknowledging the validity of her own 'punishment, she is enforced to contribute to its reasoning, which aligns with Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectional theory, in which she shows how gender discrimination is inextricably linked to cultural and tribal institutions, where integrity functions as a mechanism that ties personal identity to group reputation. That is why, Salma's body becomes a contested area that concurrently enacts societal, patriarchal, and familial control mechanisms.

Salma's incarceration demonstrates how state institutions interact with patriarchal and 'cultural forces to perpetuate Salma's marginalization. "Protective custody" is depicted in My Name Is Salma as a legal tool meant to protect women from honor-based violence, but it limits their freedom and movement, it really perpetuates the same systems of control, as Salma 'describes it "They locked me up to protect me, but I felt like a criminal" (Faqir 2007: 13). The 'paradox at the core of institutional action, where punishment and protection are indistinguishable, is

captured in this remark, because by showing how systems like culture, law, and gender hierarchy interact rather than operate independently is actually a complex situation for Salma. Salma is not just oppressed as a woman; she has been situated within a particular socio-cultural and legal framework that simultaneously makes her an offender and a victim. Such intersection actually strengthens the ties of patriarchy, as Nadjé Al-Ali's (2000) asserts that "state practices often mirror and reinforce patriarchal norms rather than challenge them" (45). In this way, Faqir demonstrates the intersectional nature of oppression, wherein several systems come together to punish and control the female subject.

Salma's escape to England embodies a reconfiguration of oppression rather than a 'seepage from it, as new axes of marginalization, such as class, race, and immigration status' emerge, and this change exhibits how power structures are rearticulated across many socio-political contexts rather than being limited by geography. Salma's effort at assimilation is 'demonstrated in the story when she changes her name to "Sally," yet this does not fully accept' her in British society, as she says "I became Sally, but inside I was still Salma," which indicates' that she is still fractured inside, and this fracture has raised from managing the intertwining pressures of cultural erasure and racialization (Faqir 2007: 58). Salma's experiences in this case cannot be restricted to that of a migrant alone, but her marginalization is created by the confluence of her gender, race, religion, and socioeconomic position within a Western environment, thus all these factors intersect to form an oppressed woman who fails to gain a stable identity. Salma's conflicted sense of self connects closely with Brah's assertion that diasporic people frequently live in "a contested space where identities are continually reconstituted through difference", As a result, Faqir has demonstrated the idea that migration does not eliminate dominance systems, but rather shifts them, creating new kinds of marginalization that coexist with previous oppressive practices rather than taking their place (Brah 1996: 191).

Kimberlé Crenshaw's definition of intersectionality as a state in which several axes of identification converge to produce numerous types of marginalization that may not be reduced to a single category, provides an accurate understanding of Salma's shattered identity in England. Crenshaw's assertion that "the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism" strikes a deep chord with Salma's battle to reconcile her past and present identities that in most of the part of the text seem to be undistinguished to a degree that sometimes she does not know whether to act like Sally or Salma (Crenshaw 1989: 140). This tension becomes evident in her persistent sense of unbelonging, as she confesses, "I don't belong here or there" (Faqr 2007: 72). This statement actually also exhibits her position at the intersection of several identities, Muslim, Arab, female, and immigrant, none of which can be completely accommodated within the fundamental structures of British society. Benefiting from Crenshaw's theory, one would argue that Salma's estrangement is not just psychological but structurally created, as she negotiates conflicting systems of exclusion that concurrently demands integration and enforce difference. People in diasporic situations frequently encounter "multiple and shifting locations of identity and belonging" (Anthias 2002: 124).

Salma's integration into exploitative labor associations, where class becomes an additional axis interrelating with race, gender, and immigration status, further shapes her marginal position in England as an Arab immigrant woman who fails to obtain an identity. Intersectionality highlights how "various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other," a dynamic that is evident in Salma's professional life (Crenshaw 139). When she talks about herself, Salma always gives the reader the impression that she is depressed and have a low status feeling of herself. For instance, she states, "I cleaned other people's houses while my own life was falling apart," (Faqr 2007: 101). Her low-status service occupations highlight her socioeconomic fragility.

This example demonstrate how dignity and labor are at odds, with economic existence requiring submitting to subpar circumstances. Salma is a colored migrant woman whose labor is undervalued in a capitalist and socially stratified system, not just a worker, and this aligns with Crenshaw's perspective that her exploitation results from the junction of several hierarchies that keep her on the outside of social and economic life rather than being explained solely by class. Nira Yuval-Davis argues, "belonging is always tied to social location and access to resources", a claim that resonates with Salma's inability to achieve constancy in spite of her efforts to assimilate; thus, one would argue that the novel exposes how economic marginalization operates intersectionally, reinforcing Salma's exclusion and limiting her capacity for autonomy within her host society (Yuval-Davis 1997: 89).

Salma's experience as a mother demonstrates how intersectional forces control not only her body, but also her emotional and familial life. This highlights the degree to which intersecting power structure influence interpersonal connections, as Crenshaw says that intersectionality reveals how systemic injustices result in "specific experiences of subordination" that are difficult to comprehend separately (Crenshaw 1989: 141). Salma's compulsory separation from her daughter is another traumatic event that strengthen her misery: "They took my baby away from me" (Faqr 2007: 24). This loss is a direct consequence of intersecting legal, patriarchal, and cultural influences that weakens her opportunity to become a mother. It is not just a personal grief. That is why, the same systems that marginalize her sexuality and control her mobility also shatter her parental identity. Thus, one can understand that Salma's suffering results from the combinations of societal shame, state involvement, and gender norms that make her unsuitable for motherhood in her cultural setting, as she has given birth to her baby outside marriage, and in Arab/Muslims societies, this act is not only a sin, but also it brings shame to her family, especially the male members of the family, and her tribe,

including her uncles, aunts and cousins. However, she does not seem to care about these traditional costumes, her main loss is her baby. According to Marianne Hirsch, “structures of displacement and loss that exceed individual control” are often shape motherhood in these narratives (Hirsch 1989: 32). This claim supports the notion that Salma's experience is structurally formed rather than individually determined, the text in this case has emphasized how intersectionality functions at the level of intimate life, turning motherhood into another site of control, exclusion, and long-lasting sadness, displaying it as the most traumatic experience for any woman, more than losing an identity, losing a family, or a country.

At the end of the story Salma decides to return to Jordan. This act actually proves that intersectional oppression is a system that endures over time and space rather than something she can overcome. Despite Crenshaw's geographical dislocation, Salma's return underlines how intersecting systems of culture, gender, and power remain intact. Salma's last encounter with her past clearly exemplifies Crenshaw's explanation that “intersectionality is a lens through which one can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects” which means that she actually does not escape from the factors that marginalize her, but she just changes her place and she is still oppressed (Crenshaw 1989: 138).

Salma's continued sense of danger is actually another factor that makes her feel afraid all the time: “I knew they would find me one day” (Faqr 2007: 293). This instance exemplifies the pervasiveness of patriarchal powers, which nevertheless regulates her destiny despite her efforts to rebuild her identity overseas, she is still afraid that the males of her family or tribe would find her one day and they would kill her. The same intersecting forces like honor, gendered violence, and communal control that first drove her into exile are reawakened by her homecoming rather than providing resolution. Discussions about shame and honor, as Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) argues, serve as “mechanism for the regulation of women's bodies and lives within tightly controlled social systems”

(112). A dynamic that ultimately leads to Salma's untimely demise. As a result, the text shows how intersectionality is both spatially and temporally persistent, influencing Salma's life path from start to finish and highlighting the unavoidability of the systems that control her, forcing her to escape, leaving her daughter behind, living without a stable identity, and making her live in a continual fear of being killed.

Conclusion

This study has shown that identity in *My Name Is Salma* is intersectional and performative. This identity has been formed by the interaction of systemic power and individual agency. The research has shown that Salma's experience of displacement is a mirror of larger societal and institutional injustices rather than just a personal journey through the integration of Butler's and Crenshaw's ideas. The novel offers a detailed depiction of how marginalized people negotiate complicated and frequently contradicting circumstances, challenging oversimplified ideas of identity and resistance. By emphasizing the significance of context, intersectionality, and narrative voice in comprehending women's experiences in a globalized society, *My Name Is Salma* advances feminist literary debate, in which it highlights the significance of context, intersectionality, and narrative voices in comprehending women's experiences in a globalized world; while also revealing the enduring conflicts between visibility and erasure, belonging and alienation, resistance and constraint that mold the lives of displaced women, contributing to feminist literary discourse.

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