A Psychoanalytic View Of Cultural Marginalization In Fadia Faqir’s Pillars Of Salt

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Abstract

This essay examines the cultural marginalization in Fadia Faqir's novel Pillars of Salt. The study demonstrates how culturally excluded people are compelled to submit to the authority of social structures and organizations. All of these social structures and institutions contribute to the repression, suppression, and marginalization of society's weak and disadvantaged members. Individuals who are disadvantaged and oppressed must thus suffer the weight of this web of social structures and institutions. The tale is explored using Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic viewpoint. In the process of signification, according to Kristeva, persons are shaped by placing them in a frame or mold of traditions and practices. Individuals are mentally repressed and subjectified by the devices employed to integrate all established standards and mores into their mind. Using various social structures and organizations as tools and weapons, violence is performed against vulnerable and oppressed persons, and this violence is sanctioned and internalized inside the psyches of the members of a society. One may say that all societal structures and institutions serve as a tool in the formation of an individual's unconscious.

Keywords: Unconscious, Subjectification, Cultural Marginalization, Social Structures

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to investigate the many factors that contribute to the subjection and subjugation of oppressed persons. People who are ostracized due to their culture are more likely to experience trauma since they are forced to endure both physical and mental suffering in silence. They are relegated to a subservient role and transformed into items that may be owned. The story focused on two different ladies and how they struggled in a patriarchal culture due to the fact that they were women. In a culture that is dominated by men, they are permitted to play secondary roles and hold secondary positions. Their uniqueness and originality are stifled and squelched.
In Pillars of Salt, two women are abused by men because they live in a patriarchal society. In the novel, the character of the storyteller tells a twisted version of the main character's story that has nothing to do with the truth. The story is told by different people from their own points of view. This story is told by Maha, Um Saad, and the storyteller Sami Al Adjanabi. Maha, the story's main character, is from the Bedouin tribe Hamia in Transjordan. Most of the women in her tribe are not like her, and she is different from them. In other words, she has a rebellious spirit and didn't want to follow the unfair rules that the men of her tribe made for women to keep them in their place. Maha gets married to Harb, who is fighting against the English colonists. Daffash, Maha's brother, took her share of the property and her son, Mubarak. In a patriarchal society, all of the oppressive rules and traditions are deeply ingrained in men's minds, who see women as less important and less powerful.

The other main character is Um Saad. She was born in Syria, but now she lives in Amman. She shares a room with Maha in Fuhais mental hospital. She tells and talks about how she lost her power with her roommate Maha. She is on the outside, and the harsh rules of a patriarchal society hurt her. Abu Saad, who was a butcher, forced her to get married. Um Saad was like a maid to her family, and she gave her husband eight sons. But her hard work paid off when her husband took a young woman named Yusra as his second wife. It hurt her feelings, broke her heart, and scared her for life. At the end of the story, fate sent her to Fuhais' mental hospital, where she was locked up in Maha's room. In this way, it's possible to say that self-claiming and rejecting are always punished by being put in a separate place and not being accepted by the rest of society. This is true in both urban and Bedouin societies. In 2011, Nadine Sinno wrote, "The novel's female protagonists take over and change the prison and mental asylum into vehicles for social critique, sites for female solidarity, and forums for creativity and self-expression through storytelling, claiming that art has the power to change everyday life." (Sinno,2011, p.68) In this story, it's clear that female characters are hurt and pushed to the side not just because of their male counterparts, but also because of all the social structures and systems that teach male characters the rules and norms of a society, which they then use to hurt female characters.

Barry (2002) says that patriarchy is "the cultural way of thinking that keeps men and women from having the same sexual rights." Gender-based power structures are so ingrained in the characters' minds that they act out those structures without even thinking about it. So, Julia Kristeva's "process of signification" would be used to look at this story to show how social structures and systems play a role in how ideas and traditions are passed down and made. Semiotics and the symbolic are two parts of this process. Both have a place in life at different points. Semiotics is about how people react instinctively when they are free from all social and cultural pressures. People learn how to use language over time, which makes them subjects who can speak. When a person learns a language, it helps him or her figure out who he or she is. This part of language is called the "symbolic." This means that language makes everyone a subject. In the process of signification, the part that is seen as female is the semiotic part, while the part that is seen as male is the symbolic part. The other part, called semiotic, is controlled by symbolic, which is about the grammar and
syntax of a language. People use language to help shape who they are as people. Language is used
to teach people what a society thinks and how it works. This makes it easier for people to
understand these ideas, which helps keep things the same. Some traditions and customs in a society
allow a few people to be in the middle while pushing others to the edges. People are made to feel
like they don't belong and their freedom is limited by all of these things. All social systems and
institutions pass on traditions and customs.

There are two parts to the process of signification: semiotics and the symbolic. Lacan's writings
are where the idea of "symbolic mode of communication" comes from. Symbolic communication
is tied to language, and this language is the language of conformity and following social norms
and mores. It's possible to say that this time in a person's life is when they learn to accept the
authority of others over them. The symbolic phase is not something that is hidden, but something
that is clear and shows up in different ways. When you learn a language, you have to accept the
authority of social norms and mores and bow down to social traditions and customs. So, the
symbolic part is giving up control. The other side of the coin is semiotics, which is a language of
rhythm and incoherence that comes before a person learns to speak. It is seen as a natural and
irrational way to communicate, while the symbolic is seen as a way to communicate with reason
and authority. In the process of signification, the symbolic mode gets in the way of semiotics.

Kristeva explains “These two modalities , the symbolic and the semiotics are inseparable within
the signifying process that constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the
type of discourse (narrative, metalanguage, theory, poetry etc) involved, in other words, so called
‘natural’ language allows for different modes of articulation of the semiotic and the symbolic.”(Kristeva,1984,p.24) Semiotic is a term for something that is based on gestures, nonverbal signs,
and spontaneity. Kristeva's main focus is on the subject of her speech. There are different ways to
look at the subject of speaking. It's not something that stays the same and never changes. Instead,
it's something that grows and changes all the time.

Society is a big part of how the unconscious is made. By putting people in a mold, society wants
to make people who fit certain stereotypes. It doesn't let anyone disobey or go against its rules and
norms. It wants to have complete control over the lives of its people. It forces people to act in a
certain way, and if they don't, they are severely punished. "Marginalization" is defined by the
International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences as "the process by which people and groups are
ignored and pushed to the margins of political debate, social negotiation, and economic bargaining
and kept there." (ibid p.64) People's identities change over time and depend on how they act in
certain roles. Two kinds of identities exist. One is social identity, which has to do with what other
people think of us and how they see us as people. The other is self-image, which is linked to self-
identity. People who try to speak out against set social traditions and customs are not accepted into
that group. These people are made weak and helpless. People who follow social norms and
traditions have it drilled into their heads that they have to follow the rules.

Analysis
The narrative contains repeated references to post-colonialism, feminism, marginalization, and subjugation of underprivileged social strata. The story paints a picture of Arab society in which male counterparts mistreat and marginalize the female members of society. The narrative illustrates the Arab society, in which women are perpetually kept in subjection to their male counterparts in all life decisions. Constant subjugation is imposed upon them. A patriarchal society is characterized by gender-based marginalization.

The story's main character, Maha, is the daughter of Sheikh Nimer and Maliha. She is a Bedouin. She is different from the other women in her tribe because she is not like them. Um Saad was born in Syria and lives in a city. Because the French were there, her father and his family had to leave Syria. Sami al Adjnabi is a storyteller who tells the story from both an eastern and a colonial point of view. He can make up stories and lie about the main characters in those stories. Harb is a brave and patriotic fighter who is fighting bravely against the British Mandate over Transjordan. He loves Maha, and that's why he marries her. He fought against foreign control of his country and gave his life for it. Hamia, Maha is different from the other women in her tribe. She is against all the traditions and customs that make it harder for women and other people on the outside to be free. Culture can be pushed to the side in different parts of society.

Maha and Um Saad, who come from different social circles, are being held and locked up in Fuhais, a mental asylum. Both of them tell their sad and tragic stories while they are in prison. In patriarchal societies, both men and women work hard. Faqir not only challenges the roles that women are expected to play in the shackled Arab society, but she also goes against the false idea that women are objects. Both of the female characters are constantly put down. In a patriarchal society, women are pushed to the side because of their gender.

Both Maha and Um Saad want to tell their stories in the asylum. Both want to be listened to and given comfort. But they don't have a say. The English doctor, Dr. Edwards, gives them electric shocks and doesn't like it when they talk. “You two never stop talking. I will increase the dose” (p.118). As Moore (2008) points out “The inclusion of a British doctor who ‘rules us like a king’ consolidates an alignment of two contiguous frames of dominance, and containment: local patriarchy and neo- (colonialism)” (p.107). There are many distinct layers of society that are affected by cultural marginalization. There is a distinction in treatment between various social grades and groups. They have been the targets of violent acts. When Maha visits Samir Pasha's mansion, she encounters Esrur, who works in the garden. She asks, “You have green fingers, uncle.” He answers “Since they bought me I haven’t stopped working in this garden.” She asks, “You are not free?” “No, my daughter” (p.166). In the same way, immigrants are not treated the same as other Jordanians because the Jordanians don't know where their ancestors came from. "People think I come out of a wall because my parents were immigrants. No history or family tree. So, no one would ask immigrants to marry them. Abu Saad and me. The dropouts for the outcasts” (p.131). All of them are on the outside in some way. People at the bottom of society are forced to work as slaves their whole lives. They have to work for people who are rich and powerful. People in lower classes aren't treated like people; they are treated like animals. People who live in cities
think that other places are worse and less civilized. When Umm Saad was locked up in the mental
hospital, Maha looked at her with disgust and anger and said, "What? A Bedouin woman who was
dirty. You can't smell the stench of dung, can you? You sleep with your sheep? .... I am urban
woman from Amman. I refuse to share the room with grinning Bedouin" (p. 7). This is how people
who live in cities think they are better and more civilized. Both groups have false ideas about the
other and try to keep their distance from each other.

Cultural marginalization can be seen in the low social strata of society in the oppressive
society of Jordan. Women are victims of patriarchy. Sylvia Walby defines patriarchy in these
words "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit
women" (Walby, 1990, p.97). The society considers girls a burden for family because they are
dependent socially, financially, emotionally, physically. They are always kept at the disposal of
their male members. “Girls are a worry until you are in the grave” (p.137). Haniyyeh’s mother
wanted a son instead of daughter. “She wanted my neck to be broken because I, the first born, was
a girl and not a boy she longed for” (p.103). It is intentionally done because if they become
independent, they can raise their voices for the injustice and violence committed against them.
This isn’t the mindset of only Jordanian society but Asian and African societies are also victim of
this mindset. Women are not only physically left out, but also emotionally. They are taught to hide
their feelings because showing emotions is against the law. When Umm Saad meets Mohammad
again after many years, she realizes she has wasted her life.

Women are marginalized not only physically but emotionally also. They are taught to
repress their emotions because it is considered prohibited to show one’s emotions. Umm Saad,
when meets Mohammad after years, realizes that she had wasted her life. “I realized then that my
youth has passed silently. I had never had a day of real happiness” (p.160) They waste their lives
to please their masters and head of families but always feel that they can’t make them happy at all.
“For Abu Saad, I had been and would be a container into which he could get rid of his frustration”
(p.160) Um Saad says “Allah and His creatures are against us. Since I opened my eyes, I have not
seen anything except misery and pain” (p.40) From their childhood, they are taught to obey their
male heads.

They are abused and tortured not only verbally but also physically. Umm Saad was upset
when she learned that her husband had remarried without her consent for the second time. Abu
Saad starts beating her. “He smashed one of the chairs, picked up the legs then broke them one
after the other on my sides.” Um Saad shouted, “Beating me. Have you no respect for my grey
hair?” He said that he got married to a second wife because of my grey hair. “My grey hair was
responsible” (p.192). Physical and verbal violence destroy their self-image. Umm Saad was beaten
by her father. “I waited, eyes closed, for metal buckles, splintered glass and piercing words” (p.52).
“Without uttering a word, without opening my mouth, I ate about a hundred lashes. My father’s
belt reduced me to a heap of flayed meat” (p.108). Maha was also beaten by her brother, Daffash
because of disobedience. “Daffash snapped the stick and started beating me all over my body”
(p.174). It is forbidden for the women to speak. They are not permitted to make choices that affect
the course of their lives. The male chiefs of their households make all of the decisions that affect them throughout their lives. They are treated as animals and beaten.

Honor is related with the actions of female members of society, males are allowed to do what they want to. “For a girl to be out at night is a crime of honor. They will shoot me between the eyes” (p.10). The blood of girl is required to remove the stain of dishonor from the family name. Maha says on one occasion, “My mother, told me that men were birds of prey; they chased the quarry as long as it was alive and struggling, but when they had killed it and filled their stomachs, they look around for another” (p.18). Maha describes the scene of beating by her brother Daffash. “He yanked my hair. Filthy rat, ugliest woman on earth. Do what I tell you. All that would check the flow of insults and slaps was my father’s long wooden stick” (p.23). This serves as a glaring illustration of both verbal and physical aggression towards women. In this passage, Maha talks about the women of her clan. “All their lives, they sweat and dig the soil to build nests for their men and children and at the end they die and are forgotten. Ants without names, past or future” (p.154).

Marginalized communities are deprived of identities but they wanted to have their identity. They know that they won’t be allowed to have their own separate identity. Deng defines identity as “the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language and culture” (Deng, 1995, p.1). Um Saad says “my life is like candy-floss: fluffy and full from the outside, empty like this damned hospital room from inside” (p.20). Um Saad wants to cast off her identity because she is unhappy with her identity. “Can you cast off your identity like dirty underwear?” (p.86). She is constantly wishing to assume a different identity. She frequently requests that al-Shater Hasan bring her the vanishing cap; after wearing it, she wishes to change her identity. She wished to take on another name and inhabit another stunning body. She enjoyed peering through the gaps at the Father of Light.

According to Thomas Fuchs in “Fragmented Selves: Temporality and Identity in Borderline Personality Disorder” (2007), “The difference between fragmentation and identity is one which makes the subject unable to hold and experience a stable sense of self, thus preventing social participation and agency. Fragmentation may be conceptualized as a lack of “narrative identity.....” (Fuchs, 2007, p.179). And this power of the person to integrate seemingly contradictory characteristics and tendencies into a coherent sense and image of themselves is the foundation of this narrative identity.

People in marginalized groups aren't allowed to make decisions about their lives. This right is taken away from them, and it is given to their fathers, brothers, and husbands. Maha is brave enough to go against all the rules and norms of society. Um Saad reveals it that “Um Gharib, may Allah reward her, used to say that we are just vessels. That is how men see us. That is what men care about” (p.169). Men are just concerned with their own physical wants and requirements. They don't give a damn about what their competitors require. For them, their needs come before others' needs or desires, and they are willing to wreck someone's life in order to achieve this, much as Daffash did with Nasra, who had unrequited love for him. Women desire to be themselves. People who are marginalized must suffer in quiet.
Bertens, in Literary Theory: The Basics (2001) states that: "Literary representations of women repeated familiar cultural stereotypes" (p.97). These literary representations help in the construction of image in society. “Such stereotypes included the woman as an immoral and dangerous seductress, the woman as eternally dissatisfied shrew, the woman as cute but essentially helpless, the woman as unworldly, self-sacrificing angel, and so on” (p.97). All of these literary representations contribute to society’s stereotypical view of women. It is imperative to challenge existing stereotypical ideas of women if one wishes to shift the social mindset that currently prevails. Women are unique persons in their own right. It is time to reframe their place in society. This depiction is crucial for the social creation of one's identity. Muslims are suffering greatly as a result of the mutilation and misrepresentation of Muslims in Western literature. Faqir’s views towards Western misrepresentations of Arabs are expressed in these words: “When you fail to recognize the truth of your experience in the Western perception and representation of it, when you realize that you are—after all years of living in exile—still dark, incomprehensible, and completely surrounded by high white walls […] you become so anguished over seeing yourself mutilated every day on [TV] screen. (Faqir&Eber, 1998, p.59)

Through text analysis, it can be seen that violence—both physical and verbal—is employed to undermine people's self-perceptions. The text, which is a representation of Jordanian society, contains instances of verbal, physical, and psychological violence. Violence harms people's sense of self and social identity. People are restrained, rendered impotent, and powerless. In order to prevent them from speaking out against society norms and practices. Unfulfilled desires cause the unconscious to boil over. Both of the main characters made an effort to oppose and respond to social injustices, but they ultimately met with detention and incarceration as punishment. They require praise, approval, and acknowledgment from their male counterparts for the growth of their self-image yet are rejected.

Conclusion

The story is a response to all of the oppressive hegemonic paradigms in a society that is being oppressed. The story is told from different points of view that overlap, so it can be looked at through different lenses. The society shown in this text is dominated by men and hard on those on the outside. In this article, the role that social structures and institutions play in making people feel bad about themselves is looked at. All of these social institutions work well and are very important in making sure that all traditions and customs are taught and learned. The story tries to show how people can stand up to an oppressive society. Both of the main characters made an effort to oppose and respond to the wrongs that have been done to them. When Maha and Umm Saad are locked up together, the room they are in becomes a small world. Faqir wants Maha and Umm Saad to stand for all the women in a society where men are in charge. Faqir shows how dangerous the world is for women through these characters.

Women are culturally, socially, physically, and psychologically marginalized. They must be strong enough to battle on multiple fronts in their lives. All people in positions of power
conspire against them, forcing them to face serious confrontation in their lives. They are made to be submissive and subdued. They are trained to be conscientious and patient in the face of adversity. They have been taught since childhood that they cannot raise their voices and be patient. They must submit to the power of institutions because they have been made weak. All of these efforts are deliberate and conscious. Women are kept financially, physically, and psychologically reliant.

Such incidents abound in the story, which tries to expose all of the powerful people's hidden motives. The protagonists' heartbreaking stories show the anguish that patriarchal forces in a repressive society caused them. It demonstrates how all the powers united to oppress women and work together to thwart the underprivileged groups. Instead of attempting to oppose such actions, all societal traditions and practices simply maintain the existing quo. All of these elements combine to make the situation worse and obstruct their path to escape. The struggles and resistance of Um Saad and Maha serve as an example for all the women in oppressed societies that they should abide by social norms in order to live in harmony. The only way to improve the situation is for women to be aware of their obligations and rights. Nobody would speak out in favor of women's rights. They would not be roused from their sound sleep by anyone. They must handle it on their own. They are left to deal with the current circumstances by themselves. They must speak on their own behalf.

This oppression and marginalization devastated the lives of so many individuals, who remained victim of these injustices. All these factors defaced and mutilated their personal and social identity. Sinno, in her article, From Confinement to Creativity: Women’s Reconfiguration of the Prison and Mental Asylum in Salwa Bakr’s the Golden Chariot and Fadia Faqir’s Pillars of Salt (2011) compares colonialism to patriarchy and their results are close to those which emerge from the hegemony of patriarchy. She writes, “The damage inflicted by colonialism and patriarchy on Jordanian society in Faqir's novel is evident through the personal losses suffered by many, as well as through Jordan's public losses during and after the British mandate period” (p.77).

The preceding explanation leads to the conclusion that all social structures and institutions support all injustices and inequities against individuals on the periphery of society. Faqir wants her characters to empower women. She wishes to educate them on their legal rights. In Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others (2006) Sara Ahmed declares that “Bodies take the shape of norms that are repeated over time with force” (p.91). “Through repeating some gestures and not others, or through being oriented in some directions and not others, bodies become contorted” ( p.91). They will not be found in their original shape and form. “They get twisted into shapes that enable some action only insofar as they restrict the capacity for other kinds of action” ( p.91).

The story is an attempt to show how phallocentric forces contribute to the loss of identity of people who are culturally on the outside. It tries to show how society robs people of their identities. All the institutions and social structures work together against them and take away their individuality in a way that can't be fixed. When they try to get freedom and rights for themselves, they make
things hard for themselves. Through her characters, Faqir gave a voice to everyone on the outside of society. She fought back against all of society's rules and mores. She thinks that this image of women as weak should be thrown out and that the image of women should be changed. They should have enough strength to fight back. Change needs to come from the bottom up. To free the social institutions from slavery, there needs to be a social reconstruction.

References


