



# Diaspora and Identity: A Study in Fadia Faqir's My Name is Salma

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## Abstract

*The article examines Diaspora and identity. It aims to study Diaspora and its relation with the individual's identity in Faqir's My name is Salma (2007), and how the characters deal with the influences of Diaspora on identity formation. It further sheds light on the sufferings and challenges of the protagonist, Salma, during her journeys in the West and the East, escaping the honor killing. Furthermore, it aims to investigate the issues that occur due to the Diaspora, such as loss of identity, nostalgia, etc. and how diasporas deal with them.*

**Keywords:** Diaspora, Nostalgia, Honor killing, Identity formation.

## Introduction

The present paper examines the questions of Diaspora and identity. These terms are related terms. The term diaspora has a big effect on the identity, and thus leading to the identity crises. Diaspora is one of the dominant themes in Arab Anglophone literature. Most writers and characters are immigrants, so writers' experiences are reflected in their textual that appear through their characters. The writers are diaspora writers or they belong to the transmissions of diaspora writers, so the impact of diaspora reflects on their writings.

Diaspora is a historical phenomenon used to describe the dispersion of Jews in the beginning. The term comes from the Greek verb *diaspeirein* that means “to scatter or spread”. It is divided into two parts *dia* and *speirein*: the first part *dia* means through, between or cross, and the latter means to scatter. It is used to refer to the dispersal of the Judaic elite after the destroying of the Solomon temple in 586BCE. Later it is used to describe different kinds of dispersion that happen voluntary or involuntary. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is extended to describe the refugees, exiles, expatriates, and so on,

Diaspora is defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as “a group of people who live outside the area in which they had lived for a long time or their ancestors lived”. Further, it is explained by Baubock and Faist “the concepts of diaspora deal with dispersal, whether traumatic, or not, and the resulting emergence and reproduction of some sort of collective identity with varying intensities of their ties to the country of emigration and the countries of immigration (21)”. Whereas Ashcroft et al argue that diaspora refers to “voluntary or forcible movement of the people from their homeland into new regions (68)”.

On the other hand, identity is a term coined by Erikson and gets its high importance from its relation with all fields not only psychological one. This means that identity is the interest of political scientists, economists, sociologists, etc. not only the Psychologists. It starts when the quires come to the individual’s mind asking him who is he. Where does he come from? According to Hall identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a “production,” which is never complete, always in the process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. (222)

Identity is also explained by Oyserman and et al. “Self and identity remain topics of high interest not only for psychologists, but also across the social sciences-psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, and even economists make reference to self and identity” (70). Identity is also defined by Yep as “a person’s conception of self within a particular, cultural and political context (79)”. Identity has been well-defined in the online Collins Dictionary “the identity of person or place in the characteristics they have that distinguish them from others”. Gadamer argues “everyone knows that identity would have no meaning by itself if implied in it. Identity without difference would be absolutely nothing” (180).

Diaspora is a phenomenon that can happen due to the patriarchal system. It is an international issue almost increases due to an unstable situation. Thus, displaced people dislocate to overseas for seeking better condition, but they long for the past that emerges after their dispersion to a new land. This nostalgia is very significant for them. It helps them to keep their identity and it shares in forming new identity that may replace the homeland identity or mix it with the hostland identity.

Diaspora can be voluntary or by force. Displaced people are immigrants, no matter they are displaced by their desires or not. These immigrants are different from diasporas because all diasporas are immigrants but not vice versa. In other words, the immigrants have to shift from one place to another but the diasporas, according to Cohen's and Saffran's characteristics of diaspora, also have to keep in touch with homeland and longing for returning to homeland.

Immigrants, especially Arab immigrants immigrated to the west for many reasons: to live in a comfort, escaping from war or they were displaced by the dictatorial regime. According to Al-Maleh, the first wave of Arab immigrants was illiterate people. They scattered due to the unstable condition in the Middle East. Therefore, they decided to shift from one place to another, hoping to get a stable life. Due to the bad situation in their original country they immigrated seeking a better life but they, especially the first immigrant generation, faced many troubles. The first thing is dispersion and identity crises even though these are not the only trouble but they are the permanent ones that are faced by them. Really, there are many troubles, such as racial, religious, cultural discrimination and so on.

Dispersion affects the immigrants psychologically, so it is reflected on the identity of the individuals. Thus, they physically and psychologically suffer from scattering. It is not only suffering in terms of moving from a place to another; it is a geographical and cultural change. In other words, when a situation is geographically and culturally changed, the individual face psychological change because he/she is used to that condition. Hence, the immigrants try to fit in a new situation in order to live or again they will be displaced. They immigrate to a land where they do not know much more about it. They think this immigration will solve what they have escaped from in the homeland, but they still suffer; and suffer more and more. Their sufferings are physical and psychological.

## Diaspora and Identity in the Novel

The protagonist of the novel is called Salma Ibrahim Al-Musa. She is a Bedouin girl from Hima. She has been displaced due to her pregnancy. Because her brother wants to kill her according to the Bedouin rules that say she has to be killed to honor the name of the family. According to the traditions of her society, she should be killed and as a matter of fact, she has no other option to fall prey at the hands of society. They see that purity of the family will not be purified without the bloodshed. Thus, to save herself from honor killing, she flees to her teacher to help her, so her teacher takes her to the prison to be away from her brother's eyes. She stays there unless and until she delivers the baby girl, Layla. "My tribe had decided to kill me, they had spilt my blood among them and all the young men were sniffing the earth. 'We are trying to save your life', said the warden (53)".

After giving birth to a baby girl, she starts her new journey out of the boundaries to protect herself from violence and killing. She runs away from one place to another till she reaches England where she keeps her fingers crossed. Unfortunately, she, like other immigrants, does not find what she is looking for. Thus, she faces many problems as a woman and as an immigrant. Because her escaping from Hima to Exeter is not enough, she changes her name from Salma to Sally or Sal, an English Miss, to be accepted as a citizen and get a job. "My names I. Salma and Sal and Sally I said (103)". She suffers from loss of identity due to dispersion. She is confused about her identity.

Salma's Dispersion journey continues in English but this dispersion is a psychological one. She displaces to a new country but she still keeps her memories from her past. Thus, she has to adapt to this situation and maintain her original identity but that puts her in a real trouble. She does not agree to change her name in the school, in the beginning, she says "No Salma Ibrahim El-Musa" (184). This answer emphasizes her real identity even though she, later, changes her name but she keeps her identity. In Salma's story, the dispersion is like killing, she flees to save herself from honor killing but she faces many issues, such as loss of identity, confusion, longing for the homeland, etc. She wants to be Salma, but she knew she will not be accepted therefore, changes her name but internally, she is not satisfied with this. To be Salma, she will be discriminated, so she will not be able to get a job. "We have to look for jobs," said Parvin, "but first I must ask you about this scarf you keep wearing." "People look at me all time as if disease," I said" (123). This scattering is a kind of



suffering and struggle. To be Sally is not only changing the name but it means to ignore her real identity, culture, language, etc. thus she joins a course in English literature because she wants to know more than English language.

I had a long chat with the ambassador, who is a secular fundamentalist, and told him that you had lost all members of your family in South Lebanon and all your documents, and that you are suffering from a severe psychological disorder. Jesus will take care of her and we will give her a family,' she crossed herself and added, 'I will show her the way of the Lord and teach her English' (98-99).

### **Diaspora and Nostalgia**

This paper focuses on the struggle of the protagonist, Salma in homeland and hostland, and how she adapts into the mainstream culture while she also tries to keep original identity alive in the hostland through practicing homeland's traditions and culture. Davis argues nostalgia "always occurs in the context of present fears discontents, anxieties, or uncertainties" (34). M. Milligan points out nostalgia and its relation with identity is interconnected "nostalgia creates "generations" by instilling a sense of identity among individual based on their awareness of shared past experiences" (384).

Immigrants move from the original country looking for other opportunities to live a good situation that will provide them a better life. Due to the increase of refugees, the organizations categorize them as a universal phenomenon that has to be taken into consideration. As a matter of fact, Diaspora leads many immigrants to confusion due to their past and present; they aim to adapt in new situation and maintain their past through nostalgia for the past. This nostalgia provides them with the ability to keep identity. Due to nostalgia, diasporas try to manage and maintain their culture, traditions, etc. and assimilate a new culture and still keep their memories of the homeland.

Escaping from trouble to what is worse than a trouble; Salma flees from death in one time to be killed many times in a day. Salma aims to adapt to the new environment, so she accepts to convert her name to an English name. Later, she marries a professor and she gives him a baby son. Although she has a new baby, she still thinks about her daughter in Hima. She is not satisfied to live in the new country where she may lose her identity. She is nostalgic for the homeland when she says "I shall go back one day" (84). Thus, she decides to come back to her village, where the death is waiting for her. Although she knows that her brother will kill her immediately, she prefers death

from dispersion that makes her suffering from a loss of identity. She runs off to protect herself, but later she sees death is easier than scatterings. Therefore, she decides to return back to her homeland to face her fate after facing her destiny in England. In Hima, she is killed by her brother when he shoots her between her eyes. “kill me instead’, I screamed at Mahmoud’s shadow by the steel railway (320)”. Thus, coming back to the homeland reveals her sufferings in the west. She faces all the physical and psychological anguishes. She struggles to overcome such problems but she comes to face death that is similar to dispersion. To sum up, her sufferings, struggles and escape are not enough to protect her from killing of honor.

## Conclusion

The dispersion of immigrants becomes an international phenomenon, so the debate is increased by the activists. It has a great impact on the immigrants’ identity formation. Salma as a displaced person suffers from the impact of diaspora thus she changes her personality to be unrecognized as an immigrant. Due to its relation to all fields, diaspora becomes the interest of sociologists, economists, psychologists, etc.

Because of the diaspora and its impact on identity formation, Salma suffers and struggles to redefine herself as an Arab woman. In England, she reforms her identity to fit into the new and old environment. Although she has got a new family, she is longing for the homeland where she has been killed by her brother. Hence, all pains and struggles that happen for Salma are because of the scattering that comes to existence due to the honor killing. The writer tries to show how the society treats the women differently. Women have to be killed to honor the fame of the family but men are living in a peace. This sentence can be applied on the women only because men see women as shame. On the other hand, men can do anything without any fear from the society because they have the power and they are the authorized people on the land who have the power to decide. Thus diaspora and identity can be seen as one of the dominant themes in Fadia Faqir’s ‘*My Name is Salma*’.

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