

The Influence of Absent/Present Mothers on Daughters in Fadia Faqir's *My Name Is Salma* and *Willow Trees Don't Weep*

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ABSTRACT

This study demonstrates the influence of absent/present mothers on their daughters in Jordanian-British Fadia Faqir's novels *My Name Is Salma* (2007) and *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (2014). It manifests the difference between the positive and negative impacts of the mothers of Salma and Najwa, the two heroines in the two novels under discussion, respectively. The study also exposes the difference between Salma and Najwa based on their fragmentation and its intricate interconnection with their mothers, the way they deal with their mothers' belongings, and the effect of the memories of their mothers on their self-formation. As it does so, the study highlights how each one of these heroines utilizes her mother's influence on her to achieve self-formation in her own way as she crosses borders. Through its focus on the mother-daughter bond in both novels, the study concludes that despite the mother's physical absence, her evident presence turns out to be inescapable; the positive influence of Salma's absent mother helps Salma recollect herself, and the negative influence of Najwa's absent mother helps Najwa shape her new identity.

Life can be harsh sometimes, for it can deprive us of some precious people with whom we have always shared special bonds and whom we never thought would be gone. The deep pain caused by death, the cruelest departure ever, can only be eased by falling back on the bitter/sweet memories of those unrepeatably people. Only then, those memories become a refuge, and those physically absent people become present.

This paper was written in memory of my dear professor and friend Rula Quawas (1960-2017), who introduced me to feminism and who has always been my everlasting fountain of inspiration. She has been around in every single thought that came to my mind while reading and analyzing the nov-els under discussion. She has also been present in every sin-gle word I wrote in this paper. May her unique and absent/present soul rest in eternal tranquility and peace.

Amal Adnan Al-Khayyat

INTRODUCTION

The cathexis between mother and daughter – essential, distorted, misused, is the great unwritten story.

Adrienne Rich. *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. 225

The mother-daughter bond has always been the core of many studies in the fields of psychology, literature, and others. As implied by Adrienne Rich's quotation above, this relationship causes a flow of energy between the mother and her daughter that is always present, and while this flow can sometimes be constructive, it can some other times be mis-employed, which makes it harmful and destructive instead. Some theorists consider the influence of this relationship to be highly significant and substantial in shaping the life of the daughter. Hence, they do not call for the daughter's need for detachment from her mother. On the other hand, some other theorists consider it to be confining and immobilizing, and therefore, they demand the daughter's separation and freedom from the bond. This makes the issue of the influence of the mother-daughter relationship a highly controversial one.

This study is mainly about Rich's "cathexis" from a mother to her daughter. The focus of this study is on the

influence of the absent/present mother figure on her daughter in two of Jordanian-British Fadia Faqir (b.1956 -)'s novels, which are *My Name Is Salma* (2007) and *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (2014). The study shows the difference between the mother figures' influences on their daughters in the two novels. It reveals how the daughters, Salma and Najwa, achieve self-formation as they cross borders. It also highlights the evident presence of the physically absent mother in both novels.

This thought-to-be highly influential relationship between a mother and her daughter is highlighted by the Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud, who argues in his "Three Essays On The Theory of Sexuality" that "libidinal attachments to persons of the same sex play no less a part as factors in normal mental life, and a greater part as a motive force for illness, than do similar attachments to the opposite sex." (Freud 1905: 1481). Similarly, the American sociologist Nancy Chodorow points out that "women are more likely than men to keep certain portions of their primary relationship with their mother. The reason behind this strong relationship, according to Chodorow, is that the mother is the early caregiver and main source of identification." (qtd. in Boyd 1989: 292).

Nothing ends a daughter's tie with her mother, for the impact of a mother can be traced throughout the daughter's whole living. This is stressed in Marianne Hirsch's 'Mothers and Daughters,' where she concludes that "Freud emphasizes that the preoedipal attachment to the mother is never totally superseded by the desire for the father, neither is the oedipal rejection of the mother overcome" (Hirsch 1981: 206). She also points out that "this ambivalent relationship dominates a woman's entire life" (Hirsch 1981: 206). In one way or another, both Freud and Hirsch's remarks stress the inescapability of the mother-daughter relationship as well as its inevitable influence on a daughter's being.

As mentioned earlier, some theorists and researchers dwell on the positive influence of a mother on her daughter. Among the features that distinguish the mother-daughter tie are "its closeness and emotional context" (Lefkowitz and Fingerman 2003: 607) as explained by Eva S. Lefkowitz and Karen L. Fingerman in "Positive and Negative Emotional Feelings and Behaviors in Mother-Daughter Ties in Late Life." Moreover, the Austrian American psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut reinforces the positive role which a mother plays in shaping her daughters' and sons' lives by stating that the mother does the mirroring for both sexes. She mirrors the child by reflecting, echoing, approving, and confirming his or her innate sense of greatness (qtd. in Ryckman 2012: 154). Similarly, in "Mother-Daughter Relationship and Daughter's Self Esteem," Selin Onayli and Ozgur Erdur-Baker focus on the good role a mother can play in developing her daughter's psychological well-being and self-esteem. They refer to J. M. Joseph's definition of the term self-esteem as "the individuals' attitude about themselves and their belief about how capable, worthwhile, and successful they are as a person" (qtd. in Onayli and Baker 2013: 328). Moreover, the researchers present M. Rastogi's three different levels of mother-daughter relationships, which are *connectedness*, *interdependency*, and *trust in the hierarchy* (qtd. in Onayli and Baker 2013: 328). In

another study conducted by the same two researchers entitled "Mother-Daughter Relationship's Links to Daughter's Self-Esteem and Life Satisfaction," they point out that "connectedness has the strongest relationship with both life-satisfaction and self-esteem" (Onayli and Baker 2013: 167). The term connectedness is defined by Rastogi as daughters' "ability to share their feelings and ideas" (qtd. in Onayli and Baker 2013: 328). They also add that the term "represents an effective attachment to the relationship" (qtd. in Onayli and Baker 2013: 328). Hence, to a certain extent, and taking into consideration that the mother figure allows her daughter to have her own feelings and ideas, the mother-daughter relationship can be effectively positive.

On the other hand, some researchers insist that strong mother-daughter relationships have negative consequences on the development of daughters. Some of them, such as the American feminist author Nancy Friday in *My Mother/My Self: The Daughter's Search for Identity*, link motherhood to the domination of women by men. She argues that mothers should allow their children "to be as individuated and separated as possible" (Friday 1997). She adds that the mother should overcome her desire to remain at the side of her developing child (Friday 1997).

Similarly, in "And The One Doesn't Stir without the Other," Luce Irigaray stresses the need for separation between a mother and her daughter. Her essay embodies a letter written by a daughter to her mother in which she demands freedom from her mother and voices her need to possess her own space and vision:

You've prepared something to eat. You bring it to me. You feed me/ yourself. But you feed me/yourself too much, as if you wanted to feed me up completely with your offering. You put yourself in my mouth. Put yourself less in me, and let me look at you. I'd like to see you while you nurse me; not lose my/your eyes when I open my mouth for you; have you stay near me while I drink you. I'd like you to remain outside, too. Keep yourself/me outside (1981: 61).

Despite their different findings, what these theorists have agreed on is that the mother-daughter relationship does, inevitably, affect the daughter's life. Based on this, this paper reveals the positive and negative inescapable influence of the absent mother on her daughter in Faqir's *My Name Is Salma* and *Willow Trees Don't Weep*.

DISCUSSION

As stated earlier in this study, the influence of the mother on her daughter can sometimes be positive and can some other times be negative. The paper manifests the difference between Salma and Najwa based on their fragmentation and its relationship with their mothers, the way they deal with their mothers' belongings, and the effect of the memories of their mothers on their self-formation. In *My Name Is Salma*, Salma's mother, Hajjih Amineh, helps her recollect her fragmented self. On the other hand, in *Willow Trees Don't Weep*, Najwa's mother is the main source of her daughter's mental and emotional fragmentation. Najwa uses her mother's belongings to detach herself from her. By doing so, she

tries hard to have some space as she figures out that she has always been constrained by her mother.

Fragmentation

In *My Name Is Salma*, Salma is a young Arab Muslim lady who becomes pregnant out of wedlock. Having been threatened to be killed by her brother, Mahmoud, for having polluted the family's name, she is put in prison for protective custody in her country. While in jail, she gives birth to her baby girl, Layla. With the help of nuns, she flees to England, where she suffers from discrimination. Commenting on the importance of presenting Salma's harsh experience in England, Yousef Awad points out in *The Arab Atlantic: Resistance, Diaspora, and Trans-cultural Dialogue in the Works of Arab British and Arab American Women Writers* that "the novel is foregrounding the dilemma of Arab refugees who are rendered invisible by virtue of their ethnicity and their social status" (Awad 2012: 53). The dilemma referred to by Awad forms a serious fragmentation in Salma's identity, and this fragmentation is highly enhanced by her separation from her mother. On her way to Lebanon, she is deeply concerned about the distance between her and her mother. She starts wondering, "Where was I? How far was I from my mother? How far was I from her?" (Faqr 2007: 73). In Exeter, Salma finds herself split into two extremely different identities: Salma and Sally. She expresses her disintegration as she recounts the difference between the person she was in her original country and the person she has to become in the new country when she states, "I might stop being Salma and become someone else" (Faqr 2007: 52). She also points out that "Salma resisted, but Sally must adapt" (Faqr 2007: 9). Later, she narrates:

Gone were the days when I was a farmer, a shepherdess, a peasant girl. I am now a seamstress, an assistant tailor in a shop in Exeter, which a few years ago was voted the most beautiful city in Britain. Now Salma the dark black iris of Hima must try to turn into a Sally, an English rose, white, confident, with an elegant English accent, and a pony (Faqr 2007: 73).

Salma's fragmentation is strongly caused by the discrimination she suffers from in Britain due to her origin, religion, and color. One day, as she is lying on her bed in the backpackers' hostel in Exeter, the porter gets into her room with a woman who refuses to share the room with "an Arab" (Faqr 2007: 14). Salma is deeply torn as she is required to change into another person in order to fit into this society. She is treated as a misfit, for she is described as "an alien" by the immigration officer (Faqr 2007: 34) and is considered one of the "foreigners" (Faqr 2007: 23) and "aliens" (Faqr 2007: 23) by the lady who refused to share the room with her. Later, Salma finds it hard to find a job in Britain because of the headscarf she wears and because of her color. Her Pakistani friend, Parvin, draws her attention to this as she tells her, "It will be much harder to get a job while you insist on wearing it" (Faqr 2007: 109), so she takes it off. Moreover, her color makes it even harder for her to be hired. Her friend, Parvin, accuses the owner of the job to which Salma applies and who does not approve to hire her of being a racist (Faqr 2007: 129). Parvin illustrates her accusation of him by saying, "It's

because we are black, isn't it? Because she is not an English rose" (Faqr 2007: 129).

In "The Crisis of Identity in *My Name is Salma*," Nayera El-Miniawi reinforces that "Salma is torn between two worlds, torn between two different nationalities, languages, religions and identities" (2016: 41). Commenting on Salma's identity crisis, El-Miniawi writes that Salma "is trying hard to assimilate and combine two different worlds together: East, into which she was born, and West, into which she lives" (2016: 43). Turning into another person in order to cope with the country she is in is not an easy task, for Salma points out later that "the roots hold you tightly to the ground" (Faqr 2007: 217). Thus, Salma starts as and ends up being a stranger in Britain.

The fragmentation of Salma is also related to her separation from her daughter. Not only is her mother an absent mother for her, but also she herself is an absent mother for her daughter, Layla. She feels responsible towards her as she wishes to give her the same care and love her mother used to give to her:

A three-year-old Layla would be chasing the hens and I would run towards her, hold her in my arms and kiss her. Layla would be crying, afraid to go to school for the first time; I would hold her, wipe her tears with my veil and kiss her. Then Layla, a teenage girl, would be telling me about a boy, like Hamdan, she had met on the way to school; I would rub her back then kiss her (Faqr 2007: 109).

The fact that Salma has herself given birth to her daughter, Layla, and become a mother is the reason behind her seeking attachment with her mother. Carol J. Boyd refers to Signe Hammer's remark that "a mother, through her daughter lives both her own childhood and her own mother's identity; by identifying with her daughter, she becomes her own mother and her own child" (qtd. In Boyd 1989: 292). Having become a mother, in that sense, unites Salma with her mother. Additionally, Boyd refers to Lucy Fischer's notion of "mutual mothering", which is the most common pattern in the adult mother-daughter relationship, for it creates "a sense of mutual responsibility and protectiveness" (qtd. In Boyd 1989: 297).

Unlike Salma, who is torn in and by the absence of her mother, Najwa is torn in and by the presence of her mother. She is the daughter of a secular mother whose secularism has resulted from having been jilted by Omar, Najwa's father, who prioritized religion over family and joined Taliban when his daughter was only three years old. Najwa illustrates that as a response to what her father did to her mother, had her mother been alive and heard her grandmother saying "'In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful,' she would have gouged out her eyes" (Faqr 2014: 3).

Najwa asserts the overarching domination of her mother, Raneen, which has always made her different from the other children nearly at her age and fragmented her from within. As a child, her mother has allowed her to wear neither a headscarf nor "a long school uniform or trousers" (Faqr 2014: 9). Not only this, but the mother also forbids her child from "recit[ing] the Qur'an, participat[ing] in the Ramadan procession or wear[ing] prayer clothes and go[ing] to the

mosque in the evening with the other children, who carried lanterns" (Faqir 2014: 9). Najwa also points out that "no religious words, deeds, texts, symbols, jewellery [sic] or dress" (Faqir 2014: 9) were permitted in their secular house. Her mother "prohibited religion and all its manifestations" (Faqir 2014: 55). Najwa also recalls that she has been deprived of her right to choose what to study at the university. She says, "My mother wanted me to study French at college, 'because it's the most secular country on earth'" (Faqir 2014: 9). Thus, Najwa's fragmentation is caused by the fact that her mother wanted her to be a replica of her. She has always deprived her of her right to think, to feel, and to express herself the way she wants, not only as a child, but also as a grown-up. To quote Irigaray, who describes the daughter in this confining relationship as "already full-grown and still in the cradle" (1981: 60), Najwa's mother tries to impose not only her secularism on her daughter, but also her own hatred towards the father. Commenting on her mother's impact, the daughter expresses that what she has mostly been deprived of is her right to possess a voice and to articulate what she personally wishes:

I could not tell her what I really thought, afraid that she might flip and trash the kitchen the way she did a few years ago. I saw myself as different from what she had planned or envisaged for me, but I was her only child, what was left for her, so I kept my mouth shut (Faqir 2014: 10).

The death of the mother turns out to be Najwa's moment of epiphany. Following her mother's death, Najwa dares to "cross the borders" her mother has enclosed her by. Immediately after her mother's funeral, while walking with her grandmother under the warm midday sun, Najwa hears the children in a nearby kindergarten singing, "I am a bird, I could fly, I could also say goodbye" (Faqir 2014: 5). Later, in an intimate conversation with her grandmother, she expresses her desire "to soar solo" (Faqir 2014: 34), like the kindergarten kids singing that song of the free bird. The prison Najwa hints to is similar to the prison in Irigaray's essay:

And I can no longer race toward what I love. And the more I love, the more I become captive, held back by a weightiness that immobilizes me. And I grow angry, I struggle, I scream – I want out of this prison. But what prison? Where am I cloistered? I see nothing confining me. The prison is within myself, and it is me who am its captive (1981: 60).

The daughter comes to realize that she "was not a bird and could neither fly nor say goodbye" (Faqir 2014: 5). She illustrates, "Although I was free to breathe, walk, work, I felt like a prisoner, condemned to my life" (Faqir 2014: 5). She awakens to the fact that she has always been imprisoned by her mother, who has continuously dictated her what to wear and what to do. Responding to this, her grandmother advises her to start searching for her absent father. Thus, Najwa manages, with the help of her grandmother, to get out of her prison and to grow wings.

Najwa's fragmentation takes two forms. Her mother tears her between what she, Najwa, wants and what she, the mother, wants. Moreover, she splits her into two Najwas:

the outer silent Najwa who conforms and keeps her mouth "shut" in the presence of her mother, and the inner resistant Najwa who questions her relationship with her mother and who remains a captive of her mother's prison until she departs.

Having lived her life entirely dependent on her mother makes it difficult for Najwa to rely on herself and to take somber steps on her own for the first time in her life. In the airport, Najwa shows hesitation to continue her journey. However, she recognizes that "a line in the sand dividing the world into two had been drawn" (Faqir 2014: 69). This division is the cutting line between the outer silent Najwa who always lived in her mother's cloak and the inner resistant one who has started questioning this mother-daughter relationship following her mother's absence. The resistant Najwa makes up her mind to move from the inner sphere to the outer one. Referring to the dividing line, she states, "I crossed it towards the aeroplane" (Faqir 2014: 69). She decides to break away from her mother's imposed constraints. Seeking freedom from her mother becomes her ultimate choice. The daughter starts resisting her late mother's imposed secularism and doing what her mother wouldn't allow her to do were she alive.

Salma's mother helps her defragment herself while Najwa's mother proves to be the reason behind her daughter's fragmentation. In response to this, each of the two heroines resorts to her mother's belongings and memories to handle her fragmentation and to reform herself.

Belongings

Salma and Najwa's ties with their mothers are symbolized by the possessions they pass on to them. Those ties also include the memories of remarkable moments carved in their minds and souls.

Despite the fact that Salma's mother is negatively presented as a mother who does not try to protect her daughter from her irrational brother and that Salma is kept in prison to be protected from her own family (Awajan, Al-Shetawi, and Awad 2019: 49) and in spite of the great distance that separates her from her mother, Salma struggles to "cross borders" and to feel the closeness of her mother, which helps her overcome her nostalgia. She, unconsciously, seeks protection and warmth in her mother's belongings; the mother's letter and shawl ease Salma's pain and put the torn pieces of herself back together.

Upon telling the headmistress, Miss Nailah, about her illegitimate pregnancy, Salma is advised by her to leave her country immediately (Faqir 2007: 60). The first thing Salma gets worried about in case she leaves the place is her goats. She voices her worries to the headmistress, who tells her, "Never mind your goats. It's your neck we are trying to save here" (Faqir 2007: 60). During the protective custody period which Salma spends in prison in her county, she only receives one letter from her mother, and this letter becomes her most precious property. She keeps reciting it several times to feel better in prison. She explains:

Whenever I was about to have an attack, I would look at the barred window and recite my mother's letter several

times until my heart stopped beating and the sweat on my forehead dried up (Faqir 2007: 56).

In an attempt to keep her mother with her all the time, Salma stitches her mother's letter along with her daughter's soft and shiny lock of hair which she has managed to cut at her daughter's birth inside a leather pocket and wears them around her neck as a necklace. When she is asked to pack her things in order to be released to Lebanon with the help of nuns, she remarks, "The most important possession I had was already packed and hanging around my neck like an amulet: my mother's letter and her lock of hair" (Faqir 2007: 60).

Salma locates her precious leather pocket around her threatened "neck" which Miss Nailah has referred to. This indicates that her mother's letter means much more than simply a message. It is similar to a cloak that Salma frequently puts on to feel warm. Besides working as a seamstress with a low wage in this foreign country, Salma takes another job in which she collects and washes glasses in a pub at a hotel, which wears her out. Nevertheless, it seems that her mother's letter supplies her with the strength and determination she needs to go on as she recalls, "I would hug my breasts and rock myself, reciting my mother's letter until panic loosened its grip on my insides, until some fresh air rushed into the room, until I surfaced and began to breathe" (Faqir 2007: 148).

Other than the letter, Salma keeps tightening and wrapping her mother's shawl around her shoulders and neck. She describes the night they drove out of the country as "very cold, a cold that penetrated the spine and froze the breath" (Faqir 2007: 65). To overcome that severe coldness, she explains, "I wrapped my shoulders with my mother's black shawl and looked through the window" (Faqir 2007: 65). In the cold city of Exeter, where she suffers from discrimination and goes through a lot, she is always aware to wrap herself up with her mother's shawl. She illustrates, "Wrapped up tight in my Bedouin mother's black shawl in the middle of Exeter I flew over lands, rivers and seas to dry black mountains" (Faqir 2007: 31). The shawl, in that sense, helps her pass through the different ups and downs in the new country by keeping her warm and protected.

Moreover, in Exeter, Salma starts frequenting pubs. One time, an Italian man waves and winks to her, urging her to follow him. Despite her inner struggle and her need for a refuge, she remarks that "Salma and Sally refused to budge, to run after him, to seek refuge" (Faqir 2007: 219). Instead of following him, Salma finds refuge in her mother's shawl. She explains, "I sucked the ice cubes, wrapped myself with my mother's black shawl and walked out of the cloud of smoke" (Faqir 2007: 219).

Apparently, Salma tries hard to stick to her mother's belongings in order to overcome her negative feelings and circumstances. Her mother's letter and shawl seem to help her recollect herself by embracing her mother and feeling her beingness. They become the shelter she needs most in the thickest situations she goes through in the unwelcoming country she has departed to.

Memories of Salma's mother effectively nourish and empower her. Salma resorts to the powerful and healing memories of her mother to feel better about herself. She

remembers her mother calling her a "princess" (Faqir 2007: 95) after having been beaten by her brother Mahmoud:

Whenever I was beaten by Mahmoud, my brother, Mother used to stroke my head to calm me down. 'It's all right, child. It's alright, princess.' She would undo my braids, rub my head with olive oil, run her fingers through my hair, stroke my face with her rough fingers, fondle my ears, massage my hands (Faqir 2007: 95).

Salma also remembers her mother taking good care of her, pushing her forward, and advising her to learn:

She held my body firmly between her legs, massaged my head with olive oil, combed my hair, wove it into two braids, then patted me on the shoulder and said, "Put on your madraqa and run to school! I don't want you to be illiterate like me" (Faqir 2007: 76).

Moreover, as Salma starts learning English, she articulates her wish to be heard by her mother as she states, "If only you could hear me, Mother, reading English" (Faqir 2007: 76). Her mother has always wanted her to be an educated person. To follow her mother's advice, Salma at a later stage enrolls in a university in Britain and majors in English Literature. Hence, the powerful words of her mother that reside in her memory keep inspiring her and pushing her forward to bring the best out of her and to excel instead of quitting.

After getting married to her English professor, Salma recalls herself asking her mother if she can swim in the cold spring they once sat by eating watermelon and chewing at the small black seeds. She remembers her mother telling her, "If they see you they will kill me. Only a loose woman takes off her clothes and swims in public. Men might see you" (Faqir 2007: 251). Nevertheless, her mother allows her to swim and asks her to be quick. On that, Salma comments, "I plunged my head into the water right above the glistening pebbles and swam towards rays of light" (Faqir 2007: 251). This incident manifests the positive influence of Salma's mother on her as she has not only allowed her to swim, but has also helped her move towards light at the darkest moments of her life, when out of her country and away from her mother, she felt "like a fish out of water" (Faqir 2007: 252). Hence, the act of remembering her mother resembles that of swimming towards rays of light, for they both enlighten Salma's darkest roads and help her reform herself. Salma's outrageous desire to swim brings to mind Kate Chopin's Edna in *The Awakening* (1899), whose swimming is her first step towards self-realization and formation. Hence, Salma's recalling of her memories with her mother enables her to move forward and helps her recollect herself at the gloomy times when she is in need to be recollected and enlightened.

On the other hand, as Najwa departs from her mother, she goes through a journey which allows her to have her own vision and to direct her feelings the way she wants. Following her mother's death, Najwa starts to consider the possibility of having been blinded by her mother as she tells her grandmother, "Maybe my dad has eyes, but I couldn't see them" (Faqir 2014: 108). In order for Najwa to envision her father in her own way, she shows determination to search for him. She carries with her the belongings of her mother, which

include her secular thoughts, her empty bottles of perfume, and her thoughts and feelings towards Najwa's father.

Despite having been raised in a house where "the ninety-nine names of Allah" (Faqir 2014: 108) were prohibited by her mother, Najwa starts referring to God imitating the people of Pakistan she meets in her journey. She asserts this by saying, "I said what I had been cautioned against saying, 'Inshallah! Allah willing!'" (Faqir 2014: 173), and by remarking to her grandmother later, "Inshallah we shall be united soon if not in this life then the next" (Faqir 2014: 254) and at an advanced stage of the novel, "We shall meet, Grandma, Allah willing" (Faqir 2014: 262).

Additionally, Najwa starts thinking thoroughly of the healing power of Qur'an. Referring to her mother, she comments, "If only she had read this verse from the Qur'an, she would have realized that each trial carried the seeds of healing within it" (Faqir 2014: 79). When Edward, one of her father's acquaintances, reads surat *al-Inshirah* for her, she considers thinking about the surat's words, realizing that "suddenly there was a higher force called Allah I could lean on. A companion, who'd travel with me this road less trodden" (Faqir 2014: 223). Her thoughts at this stage mark her gradual deviation from her mother's imposed secularism.

Najwa takes her mother's "empty perfume bottles" (Faqir 2014: 65) with her in her journey. When finding these bottles, she wonders why "an old can full of empty perfume bottles was hidden at the back" of the cupboard (Faqir 2014: 65). She puts a few inside her suitcase and places them between her clothes. The emptiness of these bottles could represent the empty space which her mother made her believe that her father occupied in her life. With her mother's death, she starts questioning who her father was: "Who was Omar Rahman? A murderer? A baby-abandoner? A wife-jilter? Or a revolutionary? A chaser of dreams and wider horizons?" (Faqir 2014: 66).

The daughter goes to see her imprisoned father carrying her mother's empty perfume bottles, for she aims not only to see him, but also to experience hearing his voice and smelling his fragrance and, accordingly, to direct her thoughts and feelings towards him. She illustrates, "I pricked up my ears for the sound of your voice and sniffed the air searching for your smell" (Faqir 2014: 237). When she first sees him, Najwa thinks of her father as "the betrayer, deserter, heartbreaker, absconder, traitor" (Faqir 2014: 244). When he embraces her, she comments, "His scent, unpleasant and familiar, reminded me of my mother" (Faqir 2014: 244). This unpleasant smell is a reflection of her mother's unpleasant thoughts and feelings towards her father. What unites Najwa's father and mother at this stage of Najwa's journey is her feeling of "resentment" (Faqir 2014: 245) for both of them: the cruel jilting father who abandoned his daughter and the controlling mother who has dictated her how to think of and to feel towards her father.

Following her first visit to her father, Najwa knows from her grandmother that she has forgotten to take the box which her grandmother wanted her to open only when she was about to meet her father. The box includes all the "letters, photos and cards" (Faqir 2014: 258) which her father

previously sent her and her grandmother hid for her from her mother. When the grandmother sends the box, a vivid deviation is witnessed in Najwa's attitudes towards her father. The box allows Najwa to face the reality which her dominant mother always concealed from her. She gets to know that her father has always loved her and cared about her and that she has always been in his mind. Facing this reality, she herself becomes real. She recounts, "Here and now, I – the skin, gristle, bone and blood of me – seemed real" (Faqir 2014: 261). The inner resistant Najwa starts to see her father with her real eyes, not with her mother's.

Najwa remembers her mother as "the imposer of rules and regulations" (Faqir 2014: 34) and "the enforcer of secularism" (Faqir 2014: 144). She says, "It was she who drove my father away, not religion" (Faqir 2014: 64). Imagining herself conversing with her father, she says, "I had held my mother responsible for your departure, had hated her and hadn't even cried at her funeral" (Faqir 2014: 251). Her thoughts of her mother do contribute to detaching her emotionally from her absent mother in that they aid her in forging her own path. Nevertheless, Najwa's detachment proves to be a negative form of attachment as indicated by Nancy Friday, who illustrates that "blaming mother is just a negative way of clinging to her still" (Friday 1977: 61). In other words, it is true that Najwa's memories of her mother help her realize the fragmentation she has within and allow her to heal herself by exemplifying what to detach from, but the question that raises itself in the end is: does Najwa entirely detach herself from her absent mother?

Accordingly, Najwa works on meeting her father one more time, and for her second visit, she once again fills her bag with her mother's "empty perfume bottles" (Faqir 2014: 265). She holds his right arm, places her lips on its protruding veins, kisses it, and surprisingly enough, smells the fragrant smells of "soap, jasmine essential oil" (Faqir 2014: 266) in addition to the smell of her mother. What unites the father and the mother this time is Najwa's ability to reconcile with both of them. She has "wavered between love and hate" (Faqir 2014: 267) for both, but ultimately, she has chosen to forgive, and this is what allows her to reform herself the way she wants.

Najwa's journey seems to be directed towards self-formation. Having deviated from her mother's desired image and gone through her own journey allows her to become herself. She plans to be back one day to visit her father again. Having got rid of her mother's secular beliefs and negative emotions and thoughts towards her father, and having filled the empty bottles with the fragrances she has personally smelled, Najwa ends up showering her mother with the prayers she would not have approved to be showered by, "'Peace be upon you, wherever you are!'" (Faqir 2014: 276) and planning to go back to her country to sweep her mother's grave, which is a form of respect and piety the Chinese people do "to celebrate and honour their ancestors" (Faqir 2014: 252). Thus, Najwa's self-formation makes of her a forgiving person and enables her to think and to feel on her own, and her journey turns out to be both physical and spiritual. Not only does she cross the actual borders of her country, but also the figurative borders of her mother's confining body.

It is true that Najwa's mother has overprotected her daughter by captivating her thoughts and freezing her emotions towards her father. Nevertheless, through reconciling with her father and mother in the end, Najwa utilizes her absent mother's negative influence to shape her new self. This way, both Salma and Najwa end up being attached to their absent mothers, each in her own way.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the influence of absent/present mothers on their daughters. In the works under discussion, both Salma and Najwa are deeply torn and fragmented. Salma's fragmentation is highly related to her separation from her mother. Hence, she seeks attachment with her absent mother to defragment as well as to recollect herself. On the other hand, Najwa's fragmentation is mainly caused by her controlling mother, which explains why she seeks detachment from her. This makes the influence of Salma's mother on her daughter a positive one and the influence of Najwa's mother on her daughter a negative one. Yet, what unites Salma and Najwa is that they both resort to their mothers' belongings to attach/detach themselves with/from their mothers, respectively. The influence of their mothers turns out to be inescapable, and the journeys they go through prove to be ones of self-formation.

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